Chapter 15

Community College Leadership and Technology

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ABSTRACT

Community colleges serve an important role in local communities across the United States. These institutions, based on their mission, seek to fulfill a social contract as partner in community development in the 21st century. Their function in local and the wider US community is undeniably important; more than half of the college students enrolled in the United States attend community, technical, and junior colleges (Pew Research Center, 2009). Community college leaders face especially challenging times given the economic, social, political, and technological contexts within which these institutions operate. This chapter brings focus to the various nuances of community college educational leadership with specific focus on technology in this new virtual age.

INTRODUCTION

The community college is an institution which, for many years, was undervalued within American higher education, and stood in the shadow of its large public university and prestigious private college counterparts. However, these community, technical, and junior colleges currently enroll more than 10 million students (Pew Research Center, 2009), accounting for more than half of the college students enrolled in the United States (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Community colleges have become a mainstay in higher education. They have played...
a pivotal role by extending access to educational opportunities for under-represented populations, and laid the foundation for many professions since the inception of Joliet College in 1901. No longer are these institutions only perceived as feeders to the larger, better recognized universities; they are entities within themselves that provide a wide array of educational, professional and service opportunities.

To perceive community colleges as homogenous would be erroneous; so too would be the inclination to characterize its leadership likewise. These institutions differ in size, mission, resources, relationships with local businesses and governments, and student populations. As such, community college leadership is unique and not easily transferrable from one college to another. With the rugged community college landscape, leaders must have clear vision, deep commitment to the field, and a true sense of purpose to the meaning and value that community colleges bring to the American educational scene. They must be acutely attuned to the specific needs, history, perceptions, populations, markets and structure of the community college while remaining flexible to adapt to changes in the environments where they operate. This flexibility, especially because of the increasing dynamism of technology, is crucial as these colleges seek to fulfill a social contract as partner in the development of American communities in the 21st century.

This complexity augments the discussion related to community college leadership. The purpose of this chapter is to frame the challenges and opportunities related to educational leadership in context of the role of community colleges in the United States. An exploration of the history of the institution, the strides made over the past century, and contemporary leadership will be addressed. Coupled with these strides, are significant challenges, such as diminishing sources of funding, societal changes, the ever increasing demand for education, and political pressure from its stakeholders. Importantly, the chapter contextualizes the issue of community college leadership bringing focus to these nuances, while emphasizing the relationship between technology and educational leadership in this new virtual age.

HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY ROLES OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES IN AMERICA

Community colleges have been referred to as a uniquely American invention (Diener, 1986; The-lin, 2004) because they provide training and education that are as critical to the economic strength of our country as they are egalitarian in providing for the needs of the traditionally under-educated. Community colleges have typically served three major purposes. First, these institutions have met the local needs of their community by delivering adult education programs, education outreach services, vital vocational training for specific occupations, and general education courses and developmental preparation necessary for students to transfer to four-year universities (Rhoads & Valadez, 1996). Beyond these primary roles, the American community college has evolved to incorporate the unrestricted duty to expand access to higher education for underrepresented populations and to make college attendance a real possibility for those who may otherwise have gone un-served (Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

Community Education

According to Cohen and Brawer (2008), junior colleges in 1920s America filled the void by offering educational opportunity for populations that were not being served by the traditional universities of the day and by equipping individuals for a rapidly evolving technological society of the time. Early two-year colleges became cultural centers in rural environments and morphed into institutions that attended to the needs of the local population. From these early beginnings, junior colleges grew into
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