

# Closing the Door, Increasing the Gap:

Who's not going to  
(community) college?



**Gary Rhoades**

Center for the Future of Higher  
Education\*

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\*The Center for the Future of Higher Education is the virtual think tank of the Campaign for the Future of Higher Education (CFHE), directed by Gary Rhoades, Professor, Center for the Study of Higher Education, University of Arizona. It seeks to influence public policy and practice in higher education, in furtherance of the seven principles of the Campaign (<http://futureofhighered.org>).



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## Executive Summary

Across our nation, community colleges are closing their doors, deferring the dreams of more than 400,000 prospective students. It is a retreat from America's commitment to expand college access and success happening, ironically, at the very moment that our nation's leaders say we need more, not fewer, people with post-secondary education. It is a retreat that threatens our nation's future.

This report, the first by The Center for the Future of Higher Education, analyzes recent problematic enrollment and policy trends at the nation's community colleges. It uncovers trends toward expanding caps on community college enrollment and narrowing the educational programs available for students, denying access to higher education for large numbers of lower-income students and students of color.

Enrollment in community colleges across the country is plateauing and declining despite rising student demand. Insufficient funding and institutional capacity are largely to blame. Already "doing more with less" by employing part-time faculty and investing heavily in online technology and distance learning, community colleges still find student demand outstripping institutional capacity. Our "open door colleges" are closing their doors due to insufficient public investment.

In a complicated "cascade effect," higher tuition and enrollment limitations at four-year institutions have pushed middle-class and upper middle-class students toward community colleges. This, in turn, increases competition for seats in community college classrooms at a time when funding for community colleges is being slashed and fees are increasing. As community colleges draw more affluent students, opportunity is being rationed and lower-income students (many of whom are students of color) are being denied access to higher education.

For those who do gain entry, community colleges are "rebooting" their curriculums to put more emphasis on narrow job training and "workforce development" and less on a broad liberal arts and sciences education necessary for continuing on for a Bachelor's degree. By focusing on providing short-term certificates in response to the immediate needs of the corporate private sector rather than on educating students for transfer to a four-year school, community colleges are seriously narrowing their educational purpose.

Traditionally, our community colleges have been critical portals of entry to higher education for underserved students. They enroll high proportions of Latino/a, African-American, and Native-American students and high proportions of students from lower-income and working class families. It is these

students whose futures are being compromised by recent enrollment and curricular trends that are refocusing community colleges on a narrower range of students and educational goals.

The report's conclusion offers practical suggestions for publicizing the number of students not served, for tracking rationing by class and race/ethnicity, and for doing a rebooting scan of colleges. The aim is to provide faculty, professionals, and students the tools to support a new course for our community colleges that is based on three of the founding principles of The Campaign for the Future of Higher Education (CFHE).

- **Quality higher education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will require substantially more public investment over current levels.** The nation cannot afford to close the doors of community colleges at a time of rising student demand. The false economy of not serving students by restricting access and narrowing curriculum will not expand higher education attainment. We must reinvest in community colleges as our most used and most democratic institutions of higher education.
- **Higher education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century must be inclusive; it should be available and affordable for all who can benefit from and want a college education.** The nation must ensure that students are not being squeezed out of community colleges disproportionately in terms of race, ethnicity, or social class. We call on faculty groups and their student, community, and union allies to ensure that institutions of higher education document who is being denied real educational opportunity by current policies and develop practices that prevent the rationing of higher education by race, ethnicity, or social class.
- **The curriculum for quality 21<sup>st</sup> century higher education must be broad and diverse.** A democratic nation requires a broadly educated citizenry developed by a system of quality higher education for all who desire it and can benefit from it. It does not serve our country well to push already underserved students into terminal programs for workforce development and job training.

By capping community college enrollments and narrowing community college curriculums, we are betraying a generation and renege on our country's promise. Instead, national, state, and local educational policy should recognize, support, and invest in community colleges as institutions that ensure open access to and success in quality higher education without regard to race, ethnicity, or social class.

CFHE calls on faculty, students, unions, and community groups as well as policymakers and college administrators to work together to ensure that we respond to rising student demands by constructing a system of higher education that is consistent with the basic principles of our country as expressed in the founding statement of the Campaign for the Future of Higher Education.

Learn more about CFHE and see the campaign's Principles of Quality Higher Education at <http://futureofhighered.org>

*Gary Rhoades is Professor of Higher Education at the University of Arizona's Center for the Study of Higher Education, which he directed from 1997-2009, before he served as General Secretary of the American Association of University Professors from January 2009 to June 2011. Rhoades' research is on the restructuring of academic institutions and professions, published in numerous academic journals and in two books, Managed Professionals: Unionized Faculty and Restructuring Academic Labor (SUNY Press, 1998) and (with Sheila Slaughter) Academic Capitalism and the New Economy (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).*

## I. Introduction

**T**he current, problematic course. Recent developments in community colleges do not bode well for the United States. First, large enrollment reductions in the colleges that serve nearly half of the country's students do not help the nation achieve the President's goal of increasing the number of college graduates by 50 percent in the next eight years. Student demand continues to increase, but community colleges are closing their doors because of insufficient capacity.

Second, when enrollment is capped an obvious next the question should be, who is *not* going to college? We are living in a time of growing gaps between the rich and the rest – gaps that have not been seen since the Great Depression. Since the largest growth in traditional age students is among lower-income, first-generation, students of color, and immigrants, they will be impacted the most. Rationing college by social class and ethnicity results in a higher education system that will increase the gap between the 1% and the rest in ever more extreme ways.

Third, amidst high unemployment and a sluggish economic recovery, policymakers are narrowing the focus of community colleges to fulfilling a short-term workforce development role that prepares workers for relatively low-wage jobs rather than Bachelor's degree programs into which students could transfer. The middle class is being hollowed out in the transition to a service and knowledge-based economy. This rebooting and narrowing the community college mission to the lower rungs of that economy works against expansion of the middle class and building a strong economy that, in the President's words, is "built to last."

**This report.** "Closing the door, increasing the gap: Who's not going to (community) college?" addresses several of the principles around which the Campaign for the Future of Higher Education (CFHE) is organized (see box). The report reviews the purposeful reduction in community college enrollments around the country, explores who is getting squeezed out, and shows how capping access to college in this way can result in rationing opportunity, a practice that would increase societal inequities.

### Campaign for the Future of Higher Education: Principles

- Higher Education in the 21st Century must be inclusive; it should be available to and affordable for all who can benefit from and want a college education.
- Quality higher education in the 21st Century will require substantially more public investment over current levels.
- The curriculum for a quality 21<sup>st</sup> Century higher education must be broad and diverse.

See all 7 Campaign principles at <http://futureofhighered.org>

Examining how policymakers are "rebooting" community colleges' mission, the report also addresses how such efforts limit opportunities, especially for lower-income students and students of color, and fail to ensure a broadly educated citizenry.

**Changing course.** In closing, the report offers proposals for changing course and riding the wave of student demand. Faculty must work collectively with students, community groups, unions, and others to develop a progressive agenda to ride this wave. The agenda must not allow doors to be closed on this generation of college students. We must resist the rationing of access and bachelor degree success by race, ethnicity, and class, and should expand, not restrict opportunities in ways that are consistent with the principles of Campaign for the Future of Higher Education.

## II. The capping and decline of community college enrollments

During the last six months, two major reports have pointed to a troubling pattern: community college enrollments have declined in the last two years, though they remain higher than before the recession (Mullin and Phillippe, 2011; NSC, 2011). In percentage terms the declines are relatively small; but in absolute numbers and in human terms, they are profoundly significant. Hundreds of thousands of prospective students are knocking on the doors of community colleges and are being denied access because the colleges have insufficient capacity to serve them.

The words of the California Community College system's Chancellor put in perspective what is a national phenomenon: "Our enrollment is not dropping due to a lack of demand." (Chen, 2010) Chancellor Scott is further quoted as estimating that there has been a 5% statewide reduction in course offerings, and that in some districts half of new students were unable to get into classes.

**California is the most extreme** example of the situation. In early February 2011, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that "more than 140,000 students had been turned away from community colleges in California during the last academic year." (Chen, 2011a; Skelton, 2011). A recent report of the California Community Colleges (2012) indicated that 133,000 first time students had been unable to enroll even in a single course in the 2009-2010 academic year (p.33). Last year, a community college advocate estimated that 350,000 students would be turned away in the coming year, and the president of the California Community College League, Scott Lay, said, "We expect to see a decline of nearly 250,000 students enrolled this year." (Chen, 2011a; Skelton, 2011).

The demand is strong, for both seats and graduates. For example, a survey of allied health deans in California found that graduates generally found jobs right out of college (according to 97% of deans) (Perez,

2011). At the same time, students are being turned away from classes. A mere 6 percent of deans reported accepting all qualified students in health-related fields in recent years. Over three-quarters blamed lack of funding (with 75% citing insufficient funds for hiring faculty as a key reason). That reflects the larger pattern in colleges.

California may be the most noteworthy case. Yet enrollments are being capped and limited in many other states as well.

*Nationally, hundreds of thousands of students standing in real and virtual lines wanting classes and a community college education are being turned away. Community colleges, which have historically been Open Door colleges, are now closing their doors, denying access. The problem is insufficient public investment in these colleges, not their failure to reduce spending and increase productivity. And an important question that is raised by their closing doors is, who is getting squeezed or blocked out?*

**The national pattern: A cresting wave.** After an enrollment surge from 2006 to 2009, enrollments of first-time, traditional age students in community colleges declined by 5.1 percent from 2009 to 2010 (NSC, 2011). Enrollments remained higher than in 2006, in a pattern a National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) report described as a "cresting wave." As indicated in the report, institutional capacity continues to be "strained" by the enrollment surge, and there

continues to be strong student demand, despite the enrollment decline.

[M]any institutions lack the structural capacity to meet these large increases in enrollments. Community colleges from California to Florida threatened and in some cases actually did limit admissions in 2009 amid peak surges in enrollment. The small enrollment decline within this sector in 2010—returning to levels similar to those seen in 2008—may in part reflect some of these drastic measures. Nevertheless, even where implementing selective admissions was not discussed, courses reached capacity enrollments, and many students matriculated at institutions whose classes were too full to accept them. (p.46)

These are drastic measures indeed: **closing the doors to over 400,000 students nationally.**

More recently, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) released a report that suggests the cresting wave phenomena is continuing. Based on a collaborative analysis with the NSC, the report estimates "an enrollment decrease of almost 1%



from Fall 2010 to Fall 2011.” (Mullin and Phillippe, 2011, p.1)\*

The AACC report also provides insight into Pell Grant trends, which speak to student demand. Pell Grant recipients in community colleges increased by 17% in the 2010-2011 academic year. When financial aid for attending college is made available, students respond with increased demand.

**It's not just California.** Though California accounts for a considerable share of the decline in community college enrollments, with nearly one-quarter of such enrollment nationally, California is more bellwether than outlier. The NSC report documented enrollment declines in community colleges in each region of the country: 1.6% in the Northeast and Midwest (which also experienced a 4.1% decrease two years earlier), 4.9% in the West, and 9.1% in the South.

In numerous states, demand is outstripping supply. A national survey of state community college directors found “de facto” enrollment caps as a result of limited class offerings in sixteen states. (Fain, 2011; Katsinas et al, 2011) Included were states from each region of the country—California, Connecticut, Illinois, Nevada, North Carolina, Utah and Wisconsin.

A case in point is provided by a headline about community college enrollments in **Michigan** (which has the eighth largest enrollment nationally—see Community College Review): “Michigan community colleges see enrollment dip after years of growth.” (Mack, 2011) The article quotes Mike Hansen, President of the Michigan Community College Association, announcing a 3 to 5 percent decrease in community college enrollment in the state. A January 2012 “Community College Weekly Report” of the Michigan Association of Collegiate Registrars and Officers (MACRO) indicates a continuation of that pattern, with declining credit hours and head count statewide—only one college (Kellogg) had an enrollment increase (of .07%). Among the largest colleges, there were declines of 9.9% (Wayne County), 9.3% (Lansing), 3.8% (Grand

## Enrollment Cuts

### MICHIGAN

Wayne County: -10%

Lansing: -9%

Grand Rapids: -4%

Statewide: -3 to -5%

### ILLINOIS

After years of record-setting, enrollment decreases range from -2% to -7%

### FLORIDA

Miami-Dade College unable to serve needs of 30,000 students

Rapids), 3.6% (Macomb), 1.86% (Henry Ford), and 1.21% (Oakland). The archives of MACRO reveal a cresting wave pattern like the national one: double-digit enrollment growth followed by drops in enrollment.

Similarly, in **Illinois** (the sixth highest community college population) enrollments are down, though they remain higher than five years ago. A story on the pattern opened with, “After years of record-setting enrollment, many Illinois community colleges this Fall have fewer students for the second year in a row.” (Cohen, 2011) Drops ranging from 2.3% to 5.7% are cited for several colleges. Another report identifies some of the larger drops in the state of 7%, at John A. Logan College and Shawnee Community College, and refers to others at 6 and 5%.

(Chen, 2011b)

The cresting wave pattern is evident even in a state like **Florida** (with the third largest community college population), which did not experience overall declines in enrollment. The Factbook of the Florida Community College System reveals continued growth. But for 2010-11, the growth decelerated and flattened to 2% (from previous years of 9% and 7%). More importantly, as with the NSC national study, Florida community colleges experienced a slight (.6%) decline in first-time, first year enrollments, after three previous years of 10%, 5%, and 10% growth.

The experience of one of Florida and the country's largest and most prominent community colleges, in a large and growing metropolitan area, further highlights the pervasiveness of the cresting wave pattern. Miami-Dade College announced in the late Spring of 2009 that it would not be able to accommodate the class needs of nearly 30,000 students and would not be able to provide any classes for 5,000 students in the Fall. (Katsinas et al, 2011).

One of the country's most prominent community college districts, the Maricopa Community College District in **Arizona** (with the ninth largest community college population), has also experienced the general pattern. After significant growth in previous years, headcount declined by 1.2% from Fall 2010 to Fall 2011 (though full-time student equivalent numbers

\* In contrast to the Fall NSC report, the AACC report is of enrollment, not unduplicated headcount.

increased by .9%). And this is in a growth population state, in one of the largest cities in the country.

Even in **Texas** (second largest community college population), where enrollments have increased overall (see Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board tables), some districts have experienced cresting and decline. The Alamo Colleges, the second largest district in the state, adopted a budget in the summer 2011 that limited enrollments and meant serving 2,100 fewer students the next year.” (Ludwig, 2011) In regard to the impending situation at Alamo, Steve Johnson, a spokesman for the Texas Association of Community Colleges stated, “Personally, I have a problem with not offering opportunity to people to change their economic situation through education.” (Chen, 2011c)

### ***Doing more with less is not enough.***

The policy mantra of the day is that higher education needs to do more with less. A corollary is the call for greater productivity through innovations in the way students are educated.

In that context, it is ironic that community colleges cannot accommodate current student demand with current levels of staffing. More than any other sector of not-for-profit higher education, these colleges have employed very high numbers of contingent faculty, particularly faculty in part-time positions. In general terms, the higher education system has changed dramatically in this regard; over the last thirty years there has been significantly reduced commitment to tenure-stream faculty. Full-time tenured and tenure-track professors comprised 45% of instructional staff in 1975 but only 25% in 2009 (AAUP, 2011—these figures include graduate employees as part of the instructional staff). In community colleges, the reliance on part-time faculty is even greater. The latest data (2009) available from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) indicate 7 out of 10 faculty members in public two-year colleges have part-time appointments. By contrast, only 3 out of 10 faculty members at public four-year institutions are part-time and just under half at private non-profit institutions are part-time.

The trend in staffing continues. The number of full-time faculty in public community colleges is down

from 36.5% in 2003. The change reflects both a substantial reduction (18.4%) in the numbers of full-time faculty and a substantial increase (8.5%) in part-time faculty (see IPEDS reports). When community college enrollments were mushrooming, these institutions were educating students with far fewer tenure-stream faculty and with smaller increases in part-time faculty than in student numbers.

***Technology will not keep the doors open.*** Community colleges have taken the lead in adopting online technology and other distance education to provide instruction to greater numbers of students. A National

Center for Education Statistics report (2003) found that the largest share of distance education enrollments (48%) was in community colleges.

Community colleges continue to aggressively pursue distance education and amidst the recession distance education enrollments in community colleges increased 22%, up from 11% the previous year. (Miller, 2010)

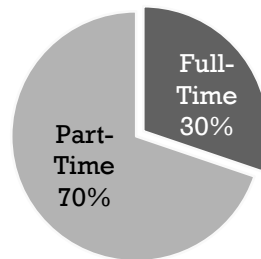
A 2011 survey of community college presidents also found many community colleges had increased their offerings in online courses with four out of five reporting increases in enrollment in online courses. Almost half (46%) indicated higher enrollments in online degree programs and online certificate programs (39%) as well.

Kenneth C. Green, founding director of The Campus Computing Project (which administered the survey), explains the increases are largely a response to higher demand for courses:

Student demand rather than efforts to reduce instructional costs clearly drives the gains in online enrollments in community colleges... The numbers are clear: 89 percent of presidents cite demand as the driver for more on-line education at their institutions, vs. 46 percent who view online education as a way to reduce instructional costs. (Campus Computing Project, 2011).

As a sector community colleges have introduced substantial changes in delivering instruction. They have done more than their part in introducing “innovation.”

**Community College Faculty Appointments**





But they still lack the capacity to accommodate student demand.

The situation will get worse, as large numbers of faculty are approaching retirement. In the case of health sciences in California, referred to earlier, a community college administrator indicated, "We're looking at an avalanche of retirements in the next few years. The system is going to be overloaded by demand, and there's not enough supply to meet that demand." (Perez, 2011) That is true for colleges nationally, which face the impending retirement of baby boomers in the professoriate.

**Cuts to investment in community college education.** The insufficient public investment in community colleges is shown clearly in data reported for spending per student. As the Delta Project has documented, spending per student in community colleges is less than any other sector of not-for-profit higher education, and is less than one-third that of private research universities. A recent report, "Trends in college spending, 1999-2009," details how community colleges realized greater enrollment increases than any other sector but have received greater cuts from state and local sources and the biggest decline in spending per student: "These institutions serve the majority of students who require additional academic supports and financial aid to succeed, yet they are experiencing the deepest budget cuts, on spending levels already well below others in higher education. (Delta Project, 2011, p.2)

**Summary.** Nationally, hundreds of thousands of students standing in real and virtual lines wanting classes and a community college education are being turned away. Open door colleges, as community colleges have historically been titled (Clark, 1960), are closing their doors to access. The problem is insufficient public investment in these colleges, not their failure to reduce spending and increase productivity. And an important question that is raised by their closing doors is, who is getting squeezed or blocked out?

### III. Who is getting squeezed out?

Some press coverage about community colleges focuses on how they are getting squeezed by budget cuts amidst enrollment pressure. The sense is that reduced enrollments will give colleges breathing room after years of rapid growth. But who is getting squeezed out? That question cuts to the core of these open access colleges.

The community college is a quintessentially American creation. It affords opportunity to those (including very academically-able students) who cannot afford other types of colleges, to those who are not qualified for more selective institutions, and to those who want a second chance at college. Within each of these segments of potential students, there is burgeoning demand; growing student markets are not being served.

Community colleges are "Democracy's open door" (Griffith and Connor, 1994), postsecondary education's Statue of Liberty, an entrée to pursuing the American dream regardless of one's life circumstances. They are an expression of America's promise that money and background will not *determine* one's life chances (though they do affect those chances). All the more important, then, to consider patterns in who is being denied access to community colleges, in whose dreams are being deferred.

One way to consider whether there are patterns in whose college opportunities are being closed out is to ask whether disproportionate numbers of students in a particular ethnic, class, or age category are being denied access. Answering this question requires more than monitoring changes in numbers of lower-income students and students of color from one year to the next, for such changes might be caused by demographic changes, or by changes in applicant pools, independently of who is being turned away.

*As President of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education stated, "Higher education is more stratified than it's ever been." (Lewin, 2011) Our current policy path, of continued cuts in state support and continued increases in tuition, will further heighten that stratification in the future. That is particularly true when one considers the growth demographic in elementary and secondary schools of lower income students and students of color.*

**Rationing Access to Higher Education.** Different metaphors may be used to describe rationing access to colleges. Some seem more innocuous than others:

The big story is the number of first-time students—the recent high school graduates—who are being squeezed out, says Paul Steenhausen, community college expert for the Legislative Analyst's Office. "I liken it to an unfortunate game of musical chairs where there's not enough chairs for participants and when the music stops, it's the new guy every time who winds up without a seat." (Skelton, 2011)

The above analogy frames the situation as one of random chance, of new, young applicants losing out, without reference to the economic or ethnic background of these youth. Policy makers are increasingly adopting this framing.

Other metaphors point to a pattern that is deeply problematic in a democracy. The headline, "Class rationing coming to California?" (Chen 2012) conveys a double entendre and harsh reality about what is happening in community colleges—we are rationing classes; and we are sorting students by social class. The article notes:

California community colleges are supposed to be an affordable way for state residents to get a higher education... [They] have long been touted as a way to break the poverty cycle, allowing first-generation college students to find good jobs and income once their college education is completed. (Chen, 2012)

Given the history of community colleges, and the future growth demographic in students, rationing that reduces lower-income students' access is a substantial, problematic shift.

Two decades ago, two community college professionals (Griffith and Connor, 1994) wrote of three key factors that were leading "Democracy's colleges" to close their doors at that time. One was enrollment, now in evidence, particularly in a "cascade effect" that has increased enrollment pressure on colleges. Rising tuition was a second factor, again in evidence today. The third was mandates for outcomes standards that were inappropriate to the colleges, now also evident in policy demands for increased productivity and efficiency.

**The cascade effect, and community colleges.** The National Student Clearinghouse's (NSC) August 2011 report on enrollments points to a "cascade effect" that is affecting who is enrolling in community colleges.

The shift in traditional age student enrollments toward the public two-year sector during the recession suggests, furthermore, that some students may have enrolled in community colleges as a means of saving money. In addition to seeing general increases in their enrollments, community colleges saw increases in their full-time enrollments—suggesting the possibility that students who might otherwise have attended four-year institutions full-time were instead enrolling in greater numbers at community colleges..." (NSC, 2011, p.46)

Larger proportions of full-time students and of students in four-year colleges are middle- and upper-middle class, whereas larger proportions of students in community colleges are part-time and working class. There may be a social class dimension to the cascade effect stemming from large tuition increases in four-year institutions. Unfortunately, the NSC does not gather data on students' household income or on their race/ethnicity.

As tuition continues to escalate, particularly in public universities, the pressure on community colleges increases. Tuition spikes in public four-year institutions are associated with enrollment declines in subsequent years. (Hemelt and Marcotte, 2011) Thus, it is likely that students who formerly would have enrolled in a four-year institution are now competing with students for whom community college is really the only choice.

At the state level, the March 2011 Newsletter of the Florida College System (of community colleges) speaks to precisely such a cascade pattern:

The current economic state of Florida has impacted the state's public higher education systems, which is in turn changing the demographics of students in The Florida College System. The FCS is now absorbing enrollments of many traditional college students whose resources are becoming more limited in this economy. The FCS provides quality education at low cost to students—the practicality of not having to pay added costs of living in another city is eliminated as many students are able to stay home and attend school. Also,

baccalaureates offered through the FCS provide a viable baccalaureate option for working adults, attracting more students of different backgrounds. (Zoom, 2011, p.14)

The last sentence points to another pattern that could squeeze out some community college students—the trend of community colleges offering four-year degrees.

In the above, data on a cascade effect that squeezes out lower-income students are “circumstantial.” The inferences make sense, but institutions, systems, and states are not gathering and monitoring data as to which students are getting squeezed out. As in most systems, California community college enrollment can be tracked over time by race/ethnicity and by age, but not by household income (and there is no tracking by any measure of who is turned away).

An alternative data source in this regard is the Sallie Mae survey of “How Americans pay for college” (2011). It reveals a substantial shift in the percentages of middle- and upper-income students who are attending community colleges. From 2009-2010 to 2010-2011, the percentage of middle-income students in community colleges increased from 24% to 29%; for upper-income students the increases were from 12% to 22%. As the headline featuring the report read, “Two-year colleges draw more affluent students” (de Vise, 2011). The question remains, though: who is getting squeezed out?

Data on Pell Grant recipients is the most commonly available institutional data that is a proxy for household income. But because shifts in numbers of Pell Grant recipients can be caused by policy changes, such data are an imperfect measure for gauging the extent to which there is a class-based cascade effect.

***Rising tuition in community colleges.*** Another dimension of the cresting wave phenomenon is that students are getting squeezed by higher tuition as colleges are getting squeezed by cuts in public funding. A survey of state community college directors yielded a median prediction of 5.6% tuition increases at community colleges for FY2012: the previous year, 86% of the respondents reported tuition increases, yielding a national average of a 5.8% (Katsinas et al, 2011; Katsinas

et al., 2012). That is on top of a 3.6% tuition increase (\$113) in 2008-2009 (The Delta Project). That same year, state and local appropriations to community colleges fell, on average, \$448 per student. The tuition increases are not keeping pace with decreased public funding.

Such tuition increases may seem relatively small but the increases are more than double the inflation rate of the Higher Education Price Index and other measures of inflation. The significance of such increases, and of Pell Grants to counter them, is highlighted by a recent national report (Katsinas et al., 2012).

In April 2010, the Obama administration expanded the eligibility for Pell Grants, allowing students who had received a Pell for the normal school semesters to get another Pell Grant for the summer. Student response was tremendous, translating into 400,000 new recipients in just 205 colleges that were studied (Katsinas et al., 2012). The growth in that one year was half of the growth the Obama administration had anticipated over eight years. It contributed to a further surge in community college enrollments, in credit hours taken, and in full-time enrollment. Yet in the next, budget-cutting year, such eligibility was eliminated, and enrollments declined. A survey of state community college directors asking them if “Changes in tuition and a flat maximum Pell Grant next year of \$5,500, the same as last year, will limit community college access for low-income students in my state,” yielded twenty-six respondents who agreed or strongly agreed.

The price sensitivity of many community college students has an impact on levels of student debt in this sector. Speculation that a low level of student debt in community colleges means cost is not a problem misses the point. (Jacobs, 2011) Relatively low percentages of community college students in debt (13%) reflects not just lower tuition costs, but also the fact that rather than going into debt to pay higher tuition, many students simply do not attend, or drop out. They do not so much go into debt as they just don’t go.

***In closing the sector, who gets squeezed out?*** Up to this point, this report has explored possible disparate impacts on who gets turned away from or is not applying to community colleges. But there is another way to gauge who is getting squeezed out when doors are

**Higher Ed institutions, systems, and states are not gathering and monitoring data as to which students are getting squeezed out.**

closed. Consider the patterns in who goes to community colleges, and from that infer the collective effects on access of closing the open door.

The opening line of a recent study of low-income students' access to higher education puts the matter starkly: "College choice in the United States is stratified by family income. Students with the lowest family incomes are relatively concentrated in private, for-profit institutions and public two-year colleges." (Perna et al., 2011, p.72) In 2003-2004, at community colleges, 16% of the dependent students had household incomes less than \$20,000 compared to 10% each in public and private universities (Perna et al., 2011). Focusing on income quartiles, the numbers are even more disparate.

For students in the first SES [socioeconomic status] quartile, the increase over time in postsecondary attendance is concentrated within the two-year public sector, which increased from 14.2% in 1972 to 31.5% in 2004. (Bastedo and Jaquette, 2011, p.326)

Those figures, of lower-income students becoming far more highly concentrated in public community colleges, reveals a heightened social stratification over the past thirty years.

Higher education enrollments are also stratified by race/ethnicity. In 2008, 40% of African American students, 52% of Latino/a's, and 45% of Native American students were enrolled in community colleges (Kim, 2011). Moreover, 60% of Latino/a students begin their postsecondary education at a community college (Gandara and Contreras, 2009). These colleges are a critical portal of entry for underserved students.

Racial stratification of enrollments in higher education exists not only among different types of colleges, but also among community colleges. Recent reports by the UCLA Civil Rights Project (CRP, 2012) reveals that although "nearly three-quarters of Latinos and two-thirds of African-American high school students who pursue higher education in California start at a community college; in 2010 only 20% of students transferring to four-year institutions were Latino or Black." Community colleges that transferred the largest proportions of students had the lowest concentration of students from underrepresented populations, whereas those with the highest concentrations had the lowest transfer rates.

**Summary.** In the words of Patrick M. Callan, President of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, "Higher education is more stratified than it's ever been." (Lewin, 2011) Our current policy path, of continued cuts in state support and continued increases in tuition, will only increase that stratification in the future. That is particularly true when one considers the growth demographic in elementary and secondary schools of lower-income students and students of color.

- **In California, nearly 3 out of 4 Latinos and 2 out of 3 of African-American high school students who pursue higher education start at a community college.**
- **In 2010 only 20% of students transferring to four-year institutions in CA were Latino or Black.**

## IV. Rebooting community colleges & narrowing the mission

More is at issue than who is getting denied access to community colleges. In the last three years policymakers at the national, state, and institutional level have reframed community colleges' role. What was once characterized as "democracy's college" is now being framed largely in economic terms of its contribution to workforce development.

The rebooting of community colleges involves these institutions focusing on a narrower range of students and functions. It is not unlike rebooting a computer in "safe mode," which means having access to a restricted range of activities. In community colleges, the current situation is framed in terms of a perceived challenge and threat of no longer being able to do it all in the face of increased numbers of students, most of whom require remedial course work to become "college ready."

The discourse is remarkably reminiscent of public policy discussions at the turn of the last century regarding the construction of public high schools. On the one hand were those who believed that most students were not college-ready and should be tracked into vocational high schools appropriate to their station. On the other hand were those who believed that all students had a right to a comprehensive high school education that would serve as a foundation and keep the door open for college.

This section of the report examines current policy at national, state, and institutional levels. In addition, the implications for community colleges of the national productivity agenda are explored. It concludes with a review of recent examples of system level rebooting of community colleges in ways that narrow the student body and mission.

***The federal government: What is the role of community colleges?*** From the first days of the Obama administration, there has been a historically distinct concentration on community colleges. In the first year, that included a push to dramatically increase funding for community colleges, to the tune of \$12 billion. In a July 14, 2009 speech at Macomb Community College in Michigan, the President called for five million more community college degrees and certificates by 2020 to regain the country's preeminence in the proportion of its population who are college graduates. From the start, the rationales were competitiveness in the global economy and jobs for economic recovery in a new, knowledge-based domestic economy. That focus was dramatized when the pared down funding (\$2 billion) was shifted from the Department of Education to the Department of Labor and was focused on workforce development.

Fast forwarding to the present, the President's budget proposal for fiscal year 2013 includes \$8 billion for a "Community College to Career Fund." The monies will support business partnerships with colleges to train workers. Secretary of Labor, Hilda Solis, will feature

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*It is that there is a systematic policy push to reboot and refocus community colleges on a narrower range of students and functions.*

*The narrowing of these colleges' mission constitutes a planned, narrowing of opportunity, particularly for lower-income students.*

successful models, again underscoring the focus. (Field, 2012)

Similar chords were struck at the October 2010 White House Community College Summit. Corporate leaders and philanthropists were prominent among the attendees; and until nearly the last minute, with the exception of Jill Biden, faculty were not even among the invited. Indeed, the day before the summit, the President announced a job training partnership program between community colleges and

corporations like the Gap and McDonalds. (College, 2010)

Consistently, then, the Obama administration has emphasized the workforce development function of community colleges, in service to the corporate private sector as a means of enhancing the country's shift to a knowledge-based economy. That is a substantial narrowing of our national understanding and the local functions

of these colleges, even in terms of what employers are served.\*

***The counterproductive pressures of the national completion agenda.*** At the national level, an additional ironic twist lies in a nationwide "completion" agenda that is reducing access to community colleges as they become more focused on student success. Across the country, states, systems, and institutions are focusing on student success in terms of completion. The productivity agenda is being fueled and promoted by various groups nationally. In 2010-2011, the National Governors Association initiated a bi-partisan "Complete to Compete" agenda that has become part of state agendas

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\* It is also a problematic, even ironic, claim to make in light of the fact that three-quarters of the faculty in community college are part-time faculty, many with very low wages and limited to no health care. The institution that is supposed to be the path to the middle class in a knowledge economy hires the vast majority of its faculty, who have advanced education, in positions that fall far short of middle class and professional employment.

across the country. The Lumina Foundation has a project to increase productivity, with funded pilots in a number of states. Although attention is increasingly being paid to other measures of “progress,” the dominant metric with teeth is graduation (rate).

In the name of increasing those rates, access is being decreased in several ways. One immediate adaptation is to change the denominator in the calculation of graduation rate by changing who is admitted or who is counted as a student. With the productivity agenda, there is an incentive to move away from serving certain student populations.

Another cascade effect is at work here, as four-year institutions push the responsibility for remedial education to community colleges. In some cases, there is an explicit policy push to reduce public support for remedial education. Over twelve states are restricting funding for remedial education, meaning increased numbers of such students are going to be applying to community colleges. (Jacobs, 2012)

The numbers are daunting, as many colleges have entering classes with over 50% of the students needing remediation, a large proportion of whom are lower income and minority. The policy reduces funding for the growth demographic of traditional age students. In the name of student success, the policy reduces access. Or, in the words of Hunter Boylan, Director of the National Center for Remedial Education at Appalachian State University, it could represent “the 21<sup>st</sup> century version of separate but equal.” (Jacobs, 2012)

In response, and because they, too, may be experiencing reduced funding for remedial students, community colleges are developing new policies around remediation. One example is to require students who need remediation to take coursework at an extra charge before they can enroll in courses for college credit. At Pima Community College in Arizona, for example, a new policy eliminates the lowest level of remedial classes and tracks students into a “pathways” program for which they pay an additional charge before starting college credit classes. The fee is small in absolute terms (\$38) but significant in both symbolic and human terms for a price sensitive

population. In the face of a state policy agenda that emphasizes and funds “productivity,” the policy makes sense. Yet in the face of a growth population of traditional age students, it closes the open door.

In addition to tracking remediation outside the college’s walls, narrowing its responsibility to take students where they are, another form of tracking in community colleges is promoted by the productivity agenda. Given the quite low rates of attainment of Associate Degrees in community colleges, there is a renewed emphasis on short-term certificates. That emphasis is further enhanced by the policy emphasis on workforce development and means, essentially, that “success” is being redefined.

There are at least two problems with this shift. First, many community college students transfer to four-year institutions without getting an Associate Degree. Indeed, in some situations and states that is the most efficient and preferred path of transfer. Second, to the extent that certificates are terminal, community colleges, which already serve a large proportion of the lower-income, minority population are tracking students into dead-end paths that afford no opportunity for later pursuing a bachelor’s degree. In the name of short-term success, students are being tracked out of access to the gold standard of college degrees. To the extent that such tracking is disproportionately for students of color and lower-income students, current policy is even further rationing higher education by race/ethnicity and social class background.

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The productivity policy push is leading community colleges to focus on those students who are most likely to succeed. That makes for quite a shift from the historic, Statue of Liberty type mission of these colleges. In the name of “we can’t do everything” colleges are engaged in an exercise in probability. But since we know it is middle- and upper middle-income Anglo students who are most likely to succeed in community colleges (Dougherty,

1992), it is actually an exercise in privileging the already advantaged. To move in this direction is to defeat the purpose and give up on the fundamental mission of these colleges. Yet in the name of being “realistic,” that is what colleges, and state systems are doing.



***The Little Hoover agenda at the state, system, and institutional level.*** As it has historically, California is again leading the way in systemically reshaping community colleges. The most recent statewide report on California community colleges is from the so-called “Little Hoover” Commission, an independent state oversight committee. Its recommendations, in “Serving Students, Serving California” (2012), in many ways are consistent with and echo the recommendations of the Community College System’s Task Force on Student Success, published in January 2012. Both reports urge a greater focus in community colleges, in terms of students served and in programs supported.

The Little Hoover Commission, a body of five public members appointed by the Governor, four by the legislature, two Senators, and two Assembly members, framed its recommendations in terms of “updating” the system to “meet evolving demands.” But those demands are not the demands of students knocking at community colleges’ doors. The report argues that “As currently structured and funded, the community colleges cannot ensure both access and success.” (p.26) But instead of speaking to the need for more funding, it accepts current fiscal realities. This despite the fact that in California, community colleges have an unusually high proportion of higher education enrollments and thus are even more central to expanding the number of college graduates.

Remarkably, the executive summary of the Little Hoover report targets the problem as inefficient over-spending: “California spends more than other states for each community college degree awarded and each student completion.” (pp.i-ii) Even more remarkably, the report states that too much money is spent on instruction: “State funding policies that prioritize the proportion of money spent in the classrooms leaves other parts of the districts’ budgets vulnerable when funding is reduced, such as investments in counselors, tutors and other student support that has been shown to help students persist and progress.” (p.26)

Reference in the above passage is to the so-called 50% rule of Proposition 98, regarding expenditures on instruction. Apparently, devoting half of the institution’s expenditures to instruction is too much, in a sector that invests less than any other in full-time and tenure track faculty. Notably, the commission refers to the “known benefits” of investing in counselors, ignoring the overwhelming evidence that high

proportions of part-time faculty are inversely related to student success, because of the employment conditions of adjuncts. (e.g., see Eagan and Jaeger, 2009; Jacoby, 2006; Jaeger and Eagan, 2009—other research points to similar adverse effects in four-year institutions as well).

One of the solutions offered by the Little Hoover Commission is to “ration rationally,” partly through increased centralization of the system, modeling it after the system offices of the University of California and the California State University System (which, it should be said, have been targets of criticism for their inefficiency). The chair’s letter to the Governor and members of the Legislature indicates, “The reality is that California is rationing access to community colleges, but not in a rational way, rather in 112 different ways as each campus struggles to accommodate students for whom they have no room.” The commission calls for greater centralization of system control in the Chancellor’s office, and a greater focus on student success rather than enrollment. It also calls for performance-based funding to incentivize student success.

The orientation of the Little Hoover Commission is characteristic of the political leadership in most states. Even in the midst of huge reductions in state support, cuts (by more than one-third in the last five years) and huge demand from a growing population, the problem is identified as inefficiency, insufficient central managerial control, and the baseline assumption that in hard times government should cut spending rather than strategically intervene to invest in and stimulate key societal sectors. Coupled with this is a focus on increasing fees, which are very low compared to those in other states. No real consideration—or concern—is given to rationing by race/ethnicity and social class, despite the work of the UCLA Civil Rights Project.

Many, though far from all, of the proposals of the little Hoover Commission were made by the California Community Colleges Task Force on Student Success (the task force, for instance, did not promote outcomes-based funding). The task force was created by the California Community College Board of Governors as a result of a Senate Bill (1143) and was a bi-partisan group consisting of 20 members from various educational, external, and political constituencies. Most importantly, the task force similarly called for a reorienting of colleges to student success, as well as to career technical, basic skills, and programs preparing for transfer to four-year college.

A September 30, 2011 draft of the report offered recommendations to “reboot the California Community College system toward the success of its students.” (p.7) It promoted a focusing on and prioritization of students who are more prepared, successful, and are making progress as a rational concentration of resources on students most likely to succeed. The picture on the cover of that draft is telling: a graduation picture of six students, four of whom are white, with the featured student being a blonde female.

In response to much criticism for overlooking key dimensions of community colleges’ work, numerous changes were made in the subsequent version of the report. The “rebooting” sentence was changed to read: “strengthen the community college system by expanding those structures and programs that work and realigning our resources with what matters most: student achievement.” (p.6) The picture on the front cover of the report changed, to that of a young Latino, studying at a table.

For all the changes, though, the basic message remained: concentrate resources on a traditional age population that is most likely to succeed. Such a narrowed rebooting is a curious choice at a time when there are so many adult students, returning students, returning vets, people thrown out of work in the economy, and students going part-time for financial and other reasons. Curious as well because the traditional age student is no longer the “traditional” student that task force members seem to have in mind. Of first-year students in credit-bearing classes, “38% are 24 or older... 47% are financially independent, and half of those have financial dependents of their own.” (Deil-Amen, 2011, p.4) The increased focus on young students is entirely at odds with providing access and re-entry into civilian society for hundreds of thousands of veterans, half a million of whom are in college and are growing in number in community colleges. (Sander, 2012)

**Summary.** In short, it is not just that community colleges are closing their doors on student demand. It is not just that there is a rationing of opportunity in community colleges, possibly by class and race/ethnicity. It is that there is a systematic policy push to reboot and refocus

community colleges on a narrower range of students and functions. The process is not unlike that documented in Brint and Karabel’s classic book, *The Diverted Dream* (1989), which traced policy efforts from national foundations and associations to community college leaders to vocationalize community colleges, a push that realized considerable success in the 1970s. Their argument was that the increased narrowing of these colleges’ mission constituted a planned, narrowing of opportunity, particularly for lower income students.

## V. Conclusions: Charting a new course and riding the wave

***From publicizing the numbers of students being denied access, to promoting a tracking system of race/ethnicity and class based rationing, to running “reboot scans” and circulating reports accordingly, faculty can advance principles of democracy and accountability to change the (dis)course and practice in community colleges.***

The choice before the country is whether to continue on a course that restricts, rations, and tracks community college opportunities by social class and race/ethnicity or to chart a course that inclusively rides the wave of student demand. The nation is at critical political and demographic junctures that speak to the promise of American higher education and to the American dream. The demographic juncture is inescapable. There is

continued growth among young adults (18-24 and 25-34 year olds) who are knocking on higher education’s doors, expecting the system and nation to fulfill their promise, and in the process to more fully realize the future promise of the country. As Katsinas and Friedel argue:

The twin demographic realities of all-time record graduation classes from high school of traditional aged students occurs alongside record growth of older students returning for retraining. This “tidal wave” of students knocking at the door for access to postsecondary education programs and services will occur whether or not public postsecondary education institutions are funded to serve them. (Katsinas and Friedel, 2010, p.vi)

The political juncture hinges on whether we respond to that rising tide as a problem and threat, or as an opportunity. At present, we are succumbing to the former view. The current course retreats from our nation’s commitment to expand college access and

success, for the first time in our history closing the door and turning our backs on demand for more education. It reneges on our promise to each new generation. It compromises our future promise as a nation.

Alternatively, we could view rising demand as an opportunity and a key to the nation's vitality socially, culturally, economically, and politically. That would involve embracing the demographic shift and student demand as emblematic of our history as a country of diverse peoples and immigrants committed to the principle of life chances being shaped by work, not by family or national origin. It would recognize that our best past and future lie in who we open the door to and accept, not in who we turn away.

The current situation is akin to the post-World War II wave

of student demand, from traditional age students and returning veterans. The response to this demand at the federal level was a G.I. Bill that invested in expanded educational opportunities. At the state level the response was to invest in access-oriented community colleges and universities to expand opportunity regardless of background. Rather than build walls to divert the rising tide, we built to encourage the flow of more and different students.

Once again, community colleges are at the center of our response and answer to the rising tide of student demand. They are central because they educate the most college students: 57% of first-year students and 44.5% of undergraduates are in community colleges (versus 26.4% and 43.1% who are in either public or private not-for-profit four-year institutions). (Deil-Amen, 2011) Moreover, they have disproportionately large numbers of traditional age low-income students and students of color, as well as large proportions of older, part-time, returning students.

The question again is: what will our answer be? In the two decades after World War II, the answer was to a considerable degree a democratic one. Not so currently, when our answer has been to close the door, ration access by class and race/ethnicity, and reboot colleges to serve a narrower set of students and functions. The last section of this report provides

proposals for challenging those answers and changing course, based on three principles of the Campaign for the Future of Higher Education (CFHE).

***Access Denied: Documenting un(der)served demand and adverse impact.*** The actual number of students being turned away by community colleges, locally, statewide, and nationally, is invisible. The number is ignored in coverage of enrollment patterns (cresting, leveling off, receding) and institutional pressures of coping even with current numbers of students.

Not only is the number of students not served absent, so is any consideration of the costs. Indeed, without knowing the number, how can costs be calculated? Some costs are human and economic, for the would-be students as well as for the communities in which they are situated. Others are statewide and national: for example, one easily calculated cost is in

the ability of states and the country to meet their growth goals of a more educated citizenry. A student not served is one more step backwards in reaching the goal of some college education for a larger proportion of the age group.

In community colleges we confront not just insufficient human capacity at the moment, but insufficient planning to meet demand that has been entirely predictable. Part of the failure lies in ongoing and increased investment in non-educational facilities and expenditures, even as a Little Hoover Commission criticizes the overinvestment in instruction. Part of the failure lies in four-year institutions contributing to a cascade effect, and at the same time restricting transfers, as is now happening in California.

Both of the above patterns would have Clark Kerr turning in his grave. The architect of the California Master Plan understood the stake that public research and comprehensive four-year universities had in building out community colleges. To excel at what the universities do, and to fulfill their public mission of access regardless of financial means (e.g., through transfers), Kerr understood the value of investing in the growth of community colleges.

What can be done to change the conversation, public policy, and professional practice? No college is going to post a "tens of thousands not served this

**The choice before the country is whether to continue on a course that restricts, rations, and tracks community college opportunities by social class and race/ethnicity or change to a course that inclusively rides the wave of student demand.**

semester” sign on its campus or home page. But a faculty group could publicize the number, as could student or community groups. **It is time to make public and put on the agenda the number of students denied service.**

At the same time, it would be possible to calculate the progress or regression of an institution, district, or state system from the national goal of realizing a 50% increase in college graduates.

Finally, it would similarly be possible to develop estimates of what it would cost to educate more college graduates, at current staffing levels, with three-quarters of the faculty being part-time. To change course, it will be necessary to put these realities in the public eye, and to negotiate a new path from there.

***Tracking rationing by class and***

***race/ethnicity.*** At present, it is not clear exactly what populations of students in what proportions are being denied access. To what extent is access systematically and disproportionately being reduced for first-generation students, or for students of color? We do not know. And that is a problem, particularly given what we know about tracking in higher education, into, within (by programs), and among (see the UCLA Civil Rights Project papers) community colleges.

What is clear is that the doors to community colleges are being closed at precisely the time that there are rising demographic waves of traditional and returning students seeking access to educational opportunity. Those waves are disproportionately lower income, of color, the first in their family to go to college, and immigrant. There are social, economic, and democratic costs associated with denying these populations a chance to improve their quality of life. If we are to calculate and make informed public policy decisions about incurring or preventing those costs, we need reliable data about who is getting denied access to community colleges.

If we do not know for sure who is getting turned away as the cascade effect further impacts community colleges, we nevertheless have a pretty clear idea. In difficult financial times, community colleges, like other public institutions of higher education, are charging higher tuition, and searching for more students (out of

state, out of country, or outside of lower income neighborhoods) who can pay higher tuition and who require less financial aid. Public disinvestment in public higher education is leading colleges to require greater student financial investment in their education, disadvantaging and closing the door on some lower income students and students of color. And both states and colleges seem less interested in supporting lower-income students, as evidenced by recent legislative efforts to limit the amount of tuition revenue that can be used for need-based aid. Capping aid, or requiring all students to pay a particular minimum tuition (\$2,000, as is being proposed in Arizona), signals a course that reduces access for lower income students. (Kiley, 2012)

Advocates and policymakers who have fought tirelessly over the decades for fairness, equity, and access to higher education should be alarmed by the

**Advocates and policymakers who have fought tirelessly over the decades for fairness, equity, and access to higher education should be alarmed by the rationing of opportunity to education that is occurring today.**

rationing of opportunity to education that is occurring today. Tracking systems to monitor the extent to which

there is rationing of community college education are needed as a foundation for intervening to counter those inequitable patterns.

California’s Task Force on Student Success similarly calls for a system of monitoring student progress and success, in ways that disaggregate by subgroup, such as by race/ethnicity. The principal purpose of the Task Force recommendation is to focus on progress and success, to hold students and institutions accountable for such progress. The accountability being proposed by this report, however, has do with equity, with tracking the extent to which students are getting squeezed out disproportionately in terms of race/ethnicity and social class. It is an accountability exercised by the faculty (where possible, in coalition with students and community groups) working to get institutions to adopt such tracking systems, and where the data indicates race and/or class based rationing is taking place, to counter that.

***Rebooting.*** Beyond the reactive practices that are rationing access to community colleges, there is an intentional policy push that is rebooting these institutions, making them narrower in the functions that

are prioritized and the students who are served. It is as yet unclear the extent to which there is a conscious tracking of students into narrower, terminal curricula by race/ethnicity or social class, but historically that certainly has been a problematic feature of community colleges, “cooling out” certain categories of students.

And yet, rebooting’s effects are already clear. Community college enrollment patterns reveal a trend away from older students to having more and giving priority to new, full-time, younger students. There is, as a recent article suggests, a pursuit of the “Fountain of youth.” (Fain, 2012) The article speaks to the larger numbers of younger, wealthier students at community colleges. The article glosses over considerations of race/ethnicity, or the fact that there are already lots of lower-income youth at community colleges, who also have expectations. Like the first draft of the California Task Force report, the picture inset in the article features a young white female student (though not blonde). The article speaks to student expectations and institutional investments in athletics and leisure facilities (fitness center, cafeteria, and other non-educational amenities) to attract these students.

A not so attractive, not so democratic, pattern is emerging. It involves colleges focusing academic degree programs on students most likely to succeed in transferring to four colleges, a middle and upper-middle class, White population, while tracking students of color and lower-income students into short-cycle certificate and terminal workforce development programs.

Over sixty years ago, President Truman appointed the Zook Commission on Higher Education, which issued a six-volume report, *Higher Education for American Democracy* (1948). The language and the social commitment are powerful:

It is the responsibility of the community, at the local, State, and National levels, to guarantee that financial barriers do not prevent any able and otherwise qualified young person from receiving the opportunity for higher education. There must be developed in this country the widespread realization that money expended for education is the wisest and soundest of investments in the national interest. The democratic community cannot tolerate a society based upon education for the well-to-do alone. If college opportunities are restricted to those in the higher income brackets, the way is open to

the creation and perpetuation of a class society which has no place in the American way of life (Vol. II, p. 23).

Current discourse reads like a retreat, in the name of realism, from the ideals that have defined the possibilities if not always the practices of U.S. higher education. And the current narrowing of mission for community colleges and reframing of them as sites of workforce development is a retreat as well from the purpose of developing a well-educated citizenry.

***Refocusing the vision for community colleges.*** Rather than rebooting in a more restrictive “safe-mode,” a rebooting scan that assesses how the newly configured system and metrics are operating is urgently needed.

- Are lower-income students and students of color disproportionately present in terminal tracks (and why is that)?
- Do career and technical programs and certificates yield the employment outcomes that they and policymakers promise?
- Are colleges restricting or eliminating community-focused enrichment and lifelong learning programs?
- Are colleges recruiting higher income, out-of-state, and international students; and what are the effects of this on lower income, in-state, domestic students?
- Is the age profile of the college getting younger, and what are the effects on serving returning vets and students seeking retraining?
- Does the rebooting of community colleges continue or accelerate the share of expenditures on non-educational facilities, personnel, and programs versus on instructional ones?

In short, then, what is needed is a rebooting scan that reveals the effects of shutting down access to the system. Until institutions themselves begin to do this important reporting themselves, faculty, student, and community groups can and should be doing this monitoring. This work is needed to determine the extent to which rebooting is having any number of adverse effects, and to ensure it is not class and race/ethnicity-based rationing of higher education in disguise. Faculty and others concerned for the future of higher education can and should provide reports to ensure feedback

about and public accountability for the effects of public policy, as well as ensure an evidence-based foundation for undertaking efforts to reverse any problematic patterns that are uncovered.

**Summary.** In sum, there are various actions that faculty, working in concert with other groups, can take to challenge and change the course of policy and practice in community colleges. From publicizing the numbers of students being denied access, to promoting a tracking system of race/ethnicity and class-based rationing, to running reboot scans and circulating reports accordingly, faculty can advance principles of democracy and accountability to change the (dis)course and practice in community colleges.

Apropos of a virtual think tank, the report has not only drawn on various virtual resources, the actions it promotes involve the use of on-line data, surveys, publicity and social media, that make possible concerted action with less material investment than would otherwise be required. At the same time, the greatest potential for impact lies in combining these various virtual tools with real groups and coalitions of faculty that organize to challenge the closed door, the increased ethnic/class gap, and the narrowed mission practices that currently define public policy about community colleges.

Faculty must work collectively with students, community groups, unions, and others to convey a progressive agenda. That agenda is not simply a “system restore,” to restore the past, which itself has been problematic. Rather, the agenda is to ride the wave of student demand to expand our future, and to do so in ways consistent with the basic principles of our country, expressed in the Campaign for the Future of Higher Education.

To a considerable extent, as community colleges go, so goes our country’s future. And that future is not looking bright, unless we act to reverse current trends. In capping community college enrollments, rationing access, and narrowly rebooting community colleges, we are betraying a generation and renegeing on our country’s promise to an entire generation. The CFHE encourages policymakers to recognize, support, and invest in the fundamental role of community colleges in ensuring open access AND success, in providing opportunity fairly without regard to race/ethnicity and social class background, and in offering the full range of

the valuable functions that they perform for various students, for communities, and for the nation.

As we emerge from the Great Recession, it is worth remembering the words of FDR, in his January 20, 1937 Second Inaugural address, words that are inscribed in stone on the wall of the Washington D.C. FDR memorial: “The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little.” We are currently failing that test. Community colleges, given the students they have historically served, are a key to our passing that test and realizing a better future. ■



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