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IMPLICATIONS OF *BUILDING COMMUNITIES* FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEADERS*

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One of every ten Americans lives in California. With the highest rate of participation in the nation, California community colleges account for more than 25 percent of the community college enrollment in the United States. Thus the leadership of California Community Colleges is important to the community college movement nationally as well as to Californians.

My colleague, Norton Grubb, and I have been thinking hard about how to prepare the rising generation of community college leaders. This fall, when we started our first class of students through the new doctoral program in higher education at the University of California, Berkeley, we wanted to offer a program of studies and experiences that would prepare them for leadership roles in the coming decade. What will be the demands on community college leaders? Even more important what will be the opportunities to shape the direction of community colleges?

One way to think about the future of California community colleges is to study them in the national context of higher education. Fortunately, I had an opportunity to debate issues and think creatively about the future of community colleges when I was

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appointed to the national Commission on the Future of Community Colleges two years ago. A very diverse group of 19 educators was appointed by the Board of Directors of the AACJC to give the first hard look since the 1947 Truman Commission at the mission, accomplishments, and probable futures of America's community colleges. The commission was chaired by Ernest Boyer, perhaps the best known leader in higher education today, and it counted among its members legislators, community college presidents, trustees, and faculty members, and several university professors.

After 18 months of public hearings, and campus visits, and more than 100 hours of intensive debate among commissioners, the commission reported its findings to a standing ovation at this Spring's annual meeting of the AACJC. Many, if not most of you, have seen the report entitled Building Communities: A Vision for A New Century.

Because I expect the report to have a significant impact on 21st century community colleges, I would like to reflect on its implications for leaders. Professor Grubb will then talk about the application of the Commission's report to the in-service and pre-service training of community college administrators.

While I would like to give you some sense of the overall flavor and priorities of the report, I do not plan to either summarize the 63 separate recommendations or challenge the Commission's view of the future. I choose not to challenge it because I endorse it with enthusiasm, and I choose not to summarize it because you can -- and should -- read it for yourselves.

I should probably make the disclaimer that my report to you this morning is made after some six months away from the intensive and involved debates within the Commission. It consists of my personal reflections and interpretation. I can't guarantee that my fellow commissioners would emphasize the same points or make the same interpretations -- although there was remarkable consensus on the nature of the report itself.

The report has a dual theme. It calls first for building communities and second for strengthening community colleges as **educational** institutions. The Commissioners merged the two themes neatly when they wrote, "Building Community through dedicated teaching is the vision and inspiration of this report." (p.8)

The dual themes of the report provide community colleges with the two things that they need most if they are to enter the future as strong and vigorous institutions -- self-confidence and vitality.

Self confidence comes from successful experience and performance. It has about it a mood of assurance and comfortable confidence in doing familiar tasks well. Vitality is something else. It has about it the mood of vigor and excitement. It comes from accomplishing something that is new and challenging. The two moods complement and reinforce one another as they weave in complementary strands throughout the report. They offer community colleges the dual advantages of familiar connections to the past and inspiring visions of the future.

The first theme, building communities, re-establishes the community college's self-confidence in the comprehensive mission. The mission of the comprehensive community college is usually seen

in terms of its six traditional functions -- transfer, career, community, general, and remedial education, plus guidance. Most of the debates about mission in recent years have raised the question of whether the community college can afford to continue its comprehensive mission, accomplishing all six functions with excellence, under conditions of a declining student population and limited resources.

Questioning the comprehensive mission has sparked lively debate among scholars and advocates of community colleges. The California Postsecondary Education Commission noted in 1981, for example, that "Unless the colleges make programatic choices and set budget priorities, they will probably do many things less well and somethings unsatisfactorily in the future." (California Postsecondary Education Commission, 1981 preface). Ed Gleazer (1980) past president of AACJC, came down on the side of community education as the major mission of community colleges. It was his vision that the community college should serve as the hub of lifelong learning in the community and that the work of the college should consist, not so much of offering degrees and credentials, as serving the lifelong learning needs of adults and helping people build a better community. Breneman and Nelson (1985), economists at the Brookings Institution, roused the ire of community college leaders by taking what was to them the dispassionate economist's position favoring a distribution of labor-- return the transfer function to the four-year colleges and encourage the community colleges to build dominance in other areas. I contributed my fair share of commentary to this debate by analyzing the tradeoffs when a college

made decisions about which of the six traditional functions to emphasize (Cross, 1985).

Although in most states, the debates continue over whether community colleges can be all things to all people, California has decided to maintain the comprehensive mission, but to establish priorities, with transfer and vocational education considered "primary," remedial education considered "important," and community education "authorized," but self-supporting (Condren, 1988).

The Commission never really questioned, the comprehensive mission, thus avoiding divisive debates about which of the traditional functions of the comprehensive mission to de-emphasize or eliminate. They chose instead to concentrate on forming partnerships with others in the community to provide a variety programs to meet the wide diversity of students' interests and needs.

The theme of community runs consistently throughout the report, reflecting the national distress with the growing fragmentation of society, the breakdown of the communities of family and neighborhoods, accompanied by the rise of what has been described as "atomistic individualism" and self-indulgence. "As never before, " wrote the Commissioners, "the nation needs institutions that recognize not only the dignity of the individual but also the interests of the community." (p. 6) While the commissioners noted that serving individual needs is and should remain the top priority of community colleges, *Building Community* was seen as an appropriate objective for the comprehensive missions of community colleges.

Starting with the notion of college as community, the recommendations moved to establish connections that would strengthen each of the traditional functions -- partnerships between transfer programs and four-year colleges, between career preparation and employers, between community education and the citizens of the community, between remedial education and the high schools.

The underlying premise of the Commission is that community colleges can be comprehensive and excellent too. But the route to that goal lies in **sharing** resources rather than **competing** for them. That, it seems to me, is a profound and important insight. We are rapidly reaching the point where the lifelong education of our citizens must be a shared responsibility. Traditional institutions of education can't do it all, and we certainly can't do it if we are in constant competition with each other for funds, students, and prestige.

Community colleges have a long tradition of forming collaborative partnerships with others in the community -- employers, community agencies, high schools, and four-year colleges. To their credit, community colleges have never entered into the competition that characterizes four-year colleges -- for academic prestige in the national ratings game, for students with the highest test scores, and faculty with the most publications.

Unfortunately, perhaps, community colleges seem to have displaced their competitive instincts to internal relationships, such as competition between proponents of vocational, transfer, and community education and competition between faculty and

administration for power and authority. Thus the Commission's definition of community has special significance for community colleges. "We define the term 'community'," they write, "not only as a region to be served but also as a climate to be created" (p.7).

They go on to say that "Building community must begin at home. If the college itself is not held together by a larger vision, if trustees, administrators, faculty, and students are not inspired by purposes that go beyond credits and credentials, the community college will be unable to build effective networks of collaboration beyond the campus. If the college itself is not a model community, it cannot advocate community to others." (p.7).

Although some community college presidents have been able to build strong feelings of community within their colleges, administrators themselves recognize a need for attention to the challenge of building communities on their campuses. When I analyzed data from the Community College Goals Inventory in 1979 and again in 1985 (Cross, 1981; Cross and Fideler, in press), the greatest discrepancy between what administrators thought was desirable and what they saw on their own campuses occurred on the dimension of "college community" which consisted of items about open communication, commitment, trust, and respect on campus.

Most books and courses on leadership emphasize the interpersonal and organizational skills involved in building high morale and camaraderie in organizations. The Commission, however, perceives morale as an outcome of shared vision rather than a goal in itself. The subtitle of the chapter on "College as Community" for example, is "A Vision Shared," and the Commission observes that,

"Community colleges have begun to lose their vitality precisely because there is no vision widely shared." (p. 29). The college must be held together, says the Commission, by a larger vision that pulls people together, united in a common task. That common task, of course, is the best possible education for students.

Education has received a great deal of criticism recently for failing to produce students who can read, write, and compute, who possess the basic tools to learn new skills and concepts, and who have sufficient appreciation of learning that they can use it throughout their lives to make life richer and more productive. Literally hundreds of task forces have been appointed in the past five years by education associations and state legislatures to make recommendations about how educational institutions can become more accountable for the education of students.

I suppose one could be amazed that so much is being made these days of the apparently obvious conclusion that the purpose of educational institutions is to produce educated students. But by and large, educating students isn't what we have been talking about in education for the past couple of decades. For about a quarter of a century, we have been largely concerned with the expansion and contraction of higher education, i.e. with quantitative and largely administrative matters, as opposed to the qualitative and educational issues that are making their way to the forefront today.

In the 1960s, we were dealing with enormous growth, and administrators directed their energies to the building of buildings, the recruitment of faculty, and the development of new programs and procedures. The late 1970s found us still dealing with numbers,

but this time it was with decline or the threat of decline. Harder than the satisfying work of building was the frustrating task of retrenchment, the deferred maintenance of buildings, and the contraction of programs. Thus many of today's community college leaders have spent their entire professional lifetime dealing with the expansion and contraction of facilities and services.

Some of you may be familiar with Peter Drucker's classic distinction between efficiency and effectiveness. Efficiency consists of doing things right, whereas effectiveness consists of doing the right things. Ideally we would combine efficiency with effectiveness by doing the right things right. But by and large, we in education have been concentrating more on managing colleges efficiently than on making them effective, i. e. we have been paying more attention to doing things right than to doing the right things. While the Commission is calling for both efficiency and effectiveness in community college leadership, they treat efficient management as a process goal on the way to providing quality in education.

Although the report is entitled "Building Communities", I now see that theme, not so much an end in itself, as a necessary condition for providing quality education to the diverse population of students in community colleges.

The second theme of the futures report sets forth the vision that directs the energies of a cohesive community. That vision is set forth in these words: "The community college should be the nation's premier teaching institution. Quality instruction should be the hallmark of the movement." (p. 25). That is the ultimate goal and the challenge; it gets the juices flowing. While community colleges have

always been teaching institutions, this report challenges them to be the best of those. "Teaching," say the Commissioners, "is the heartbeat of the educational enterprise and, when it is successful, energy is pumped into the community, continuously renewing and revitalizing the institution. Therefore excellence in teaching is the means by which the vitality of the college is extended and a network of intellectual enrichment and cultural understanding is built" (p. 7-8).

While standing out front as "the premier teaching institution," may not always be comfortable, it is energizing and I think it is the right goal at the right time.

The near-missionary zeal that energized community colleges in the 1960's came from the common cause of providing access and educational opportunity to neglected populations. While the Commission is clear that that goal must be relentlessly pursued, the Commission has called for a new energizing purpose in urging community colleges to fulfill the promise of access by providing excellence in teaching and learning.

There is vitality in the notion that everyone associated with the community college should dedicate themselves to the cause of improving student learning. It is an energy that should be the equal of that garnered earlier for the improvement of access for underserved populations. But providing the climate, the facilities, and the expertise for improving the quality of learning is even more difficult than providing the campuses, buildings, and financial aid necessary for improving access.

The energy to pursue dedicated teaching must come from the teaching faculty. The earlier energy of the community college movement for improving access came more from the college administrators than from teaching faculty. It was largely administrators who raised money, built buildings, lobbied for funds, and marketed the opportunities available. In the 1990s leaders will have to marshal the energy of the teaching faculty if community colleges are to dedicate themselves to improvement in the quality of learning. That goal changes the emphasis from competent administration to inspired leadership.

The massive significance of that change should be lost on no one. And apparently, the message is heard and endorsed by the current community college leadership. When 150 prominent community college leaders were asked to rate the relative importance of the 63 recommendations in the Commission report, the top-ranked recommendation in the leadership category was "See the president as the foremost advocate for teaching and learning at the college." That goal was ranked much higher, for example, than this more traditional leadership role: "Strengthen governance by relying on a wide range of decision-making processes that include collective bargaining, faculty senates, effective committee structures, or other mechanisms."

Community college presidents of the past have often been seen more as executives and managers of complex organizations than as educators. I don't think for a moment that the successful leader of the future will be able to slight managerial responsibilities. But the Commission seems to me to be calling for leadership to go beyond

building a strong organization to effectively utilizing that organization in accomplishing the educational mission.

I suspect that one of the reasons Miami-Dade Community College has achieved such high national prominence and visibility in these times is that they have consistently tackled a variety of problems that involve the **education** of students. And they have engaged the energies of faculty, administration, and staff in the common effort of developing Miami-Dade as a **teaching** institution.

Improving the quality of undergraduate education is, of course, what the national reform movement of the 1980s is all about, and that message has clearly been heard, not only by the Commission, but by the current generation of community college leaders. The 150 community college leaders who rated the priorities of the recommendations ranked, at the very top of the 63 recommendations, these two recommendations: (1) "Insist that good teaching be the hallmark of the community college movement, with students encouraged to be active, cooperative learners," and (2) "Make a commitment to the recruitment and retention of top quality faculty and to the professional development of these colleagues."

With nearly half of the full-time community college faculty in California reaching the average retirement age of 62 by the year 2000, the "window of opportunity" is wide open for an emphasis on the recruitment and development of first-rate college teachers. The big question, of course, is are community colleges prepared with the recruitment procedures, selection criteria, reward structures, and professional development programs to make community colleges the nation's premier teaching institutions?

Teaching usually occurs out of sight of administrators, and there is a widespread myth that it is difficult to identify and therefore difficult to reward outstanding teachers. But researchers have discovered that they can walk onto a campus and, in a very short period of time, get high agreement from students, administrators, and faculty peers about who the good teachers are. Most people know a good teacher when they see one. Nevertheless, teaching is a highly personal activity, and if a college is to become excellent in teaching, clear signals need to be sent and outstanding performance recognized. Once teachers retreat into their classrooms, how can even the most sincere and dedicated leaders assure that "quality instruction will be the hallmark of the movement?"

No one needs to tell community college teachers that they have the toughest and most exhausting teaching assignments in all education. There is a rule of thumb that says that the range of academic ability in any given classroom is equal to the grade level at which the estimate is made. Thus the most likely spread in the third grade is three grade levels. While most students will be reading at the third grade level, some will be at the second grade level and some at the fourth. By the time students reach the community college, a likely range is 13 grade levels, with some students performing at the third grade level and others at the level of college graduates. Selective colleges can cut off the bottom of the range, and elementary schools haven't reached the top of the range, but community colleges deal with the entire range of human ability. Diversity is hard to handle in an educational system basically designed for relatively homogeneous group instruction.

Teaching motivation and skill are premium qualities in community college faculties, and leaders will be charged with providing appropriate forms of recognition and opportunities for continuous professional development. How to train leaders to do that is, happily on this occasion, Professor Grubb's question.

The Commissioners didn't wrestle much with how presidents might lead community colleges to recognition as the nation's "premiere teaching institutions," or even how to serve as the "foremost advocate for teaching and learning." They did, however, provide one clue to continuous self-renewal and professional development. They recommend that, "Community colleges should define the role of the faculty member as classroom researcher -- focusing on evaluation of instruction and making a clear connection between what the teacher teaches and how students learn." (p. 27).

Since I suspect that I may have been in part responsible for encouraging my colleagues on the Commission to look at the role of teachers as classroom researchers, let me say a few words about the concept. Classroom research involves college teachers in the study of the learning process as it occurs in their classrooms day by day. It attempts to answer the very specific question, What are **my** students learning in **my** classroom as a result of **my** efforts? It is not a search for generalities or theories. It does not require complicated experimental designs, "representative samples," sophisticated statistics, or intricate analysis of data. Rather, it calls for, knowledge of a particular field of study, and systematic, sensitive observation of the problems encountered by students as they attempt to learn what the teacher is trying to teach.

The purpose of classroom research is to help teachers assess the effectiveness of their own teaching. In that sense, it is a self-renewing, intellectually challenging professional activity that offers community college faculty members the opportunity to establish themselves as authorities on teaching and learning -- as seekers after knowledge as well as practioners in the art and science of teaching.

Learning -- rather than teaching -- is the object of study in classroom research. This represents an important reversal of the usual approach to the improvement of teaching in which we are asking teachers to concentrate on their own behavior. It is not only quite difficult to observe oneself in action, but if students are not responding, it makes no difference how perfectly the teacher is teaching.

The premise of classroom research is that as teachers become aware of the impact of their teaching on students' learning, they can make the appropriate modifications while class is still in progress. It places the responsibility for excellence in teaching in the hands of the faculty, which is where it has to be.

CONCLUSION TO COME

(Not more than a page)

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To sum up, the Commission's report on the future has a dual theme which, as I reflect on it, merges into a single theme -- building communities **in order to** improve education for community college students.

That message is uniting rather than divisive; it says loud and clear that the mission of community colleges is education. Excellence in teaching should occur wherever teachers meet students, be it in remedial, adult, transfer, career, or general education classes, or through all-college efforts such as those found in student development and guidance programs.

If community college leaders are to become the "foremost advocates of teaching and learning," they are going to have to know something about education and how colleges perform that age-old ritual efficiently and effectively. And they are going to have to know how to lead their faculties toward establishing community colleges as the "nation's premier teaching institutions."

That is not an easy task, and preparing community college leaders for that future is as much a challenge to those of us in the universities as to those of you in community colleges.