

FOOTHILL

For all its idealism and vision, Building Communities has two feet firmly planted in reality.

The report has a dual theme. It calls first for building communities, and second, for strengthening community colleges as educational institutions. The commissioners put it succinctly 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 experience and performance. It has about it a mood of assurance and comfortable confidence. 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 compliment and reinforce one another as they weave in complimentary strands throughout the report. They offer community colleges the dual advantages of familiar connections to the past and inspiring visions of the future.

Let me say a few words about each of these themes.

The first theme, Building Communities, re-establishes the community college's self confidence in the comprehensive mission. It reaffirms the commitment to the "community" in community college. Why is that important?

Because for about a decade now, there has been some unease that community colleges may have bitten off more than they could chew, that community colleges cannot be all things to all people, that, especially in times of limited resources, the community college leadership must make the tough decisions about what to leave to others.

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The Commission report does not question the comprehensive mission. It accepts it as a given. Instead of assuming limited resources and urging limited functions, it comes out strongly confident that the route to the future lies in expanding resources through joining with others in the community to offer comprehensive educational services. It ~~averts~~ ^{confirms} that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. People working together can accomplish things that are impossible for persons working alone.

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In ~~sharp~~ contrast to recent talk about "retrenchment" and "survival," the theme of community is expansive rather than restrictive, cooperative rather than competitive, reaching out rather than pulling back. ~~It is also familiar to community colleges, based in the history and missions of community colleges.~~ Building community is something that community colleges know how to do. They enter the 21st century as centers of their communities, and I believe that the Commission report reaffirms the centrality of community on campus and off.

The second theme is introduced in these ^{possibly} somewhat immodest words: "The community college should be the nation's premier teaching institution." (p. 25). That is 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).

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

The missionary zeal that energized the community colleges in the 1960s came from the common cause of providing access and equal opportunity ^{to neglected populations.} ~~That zeal faded in the 1970s and '80s as community college teachers faced the enormous student diversity that access brought into their--~~

while the C is clear that that goal must be relentlessly pursued,

classrooms. Community colleges need a new uniting purpose, and I believe the Commission has articulated ^{a new energizing} that purpose in urging community colleges to fulfill the promise of access by providing excellence in education.

^{Theme} The goal of becoming the nation's premier teaching institutions suggests what to do; the goal of building communities suggests how to do it.

Those are the two things going across the line. The T194 & L194. That makes access. wov Thuhide.