

REFLECTIONS ON THE FUTURE

K. Patricia Cross
University of California, Berkeley

I am pleased to be here today to help dedicate this Learning Resource Center, which ties together in important and visible ways the past and the future. Your combination of the old and the new in this setting is symbolic of most change. The march into the future usually has its roots in the past, and this complex, with its lovely historic building and the addition of a modern functional learning center is symbolic of our best efforts to build upon the past to create the future.

This occasion seems an appropriate time to talk about the blending of past and future in the history of community colleges. Community colleges are ~~the only~~ distinctively American institutions of higher education, and they don't have a very long history. Lewis and Clark's 18 years of existence as a community college is typical.

Few people realize, I think, how big and important community colleges have become in their relatively short history. You are part of the largest segment of higher education in America. The next largest segment, state colleges and universities, has only half as many institutions nationwide. There are now more than 1200 accredited community colleges in this country, enrolling a majority of all college freshmen and 43 percent of all college students. That means that most people entering college today enter through the open doors of their local community college. But the modern comprehensive community college reaches beyond the five million students taking courses for college credit to include four million more non-credit and continuing education students. In short, community colleges reach more people, with a broader curriculum, over a longer span of their lives, than any other segment of higher education.

One historical analysis (Deegan and Tillery, 1985) contends that community colleges have passed through four generations in their relatively brief history. The fourth generation, which is our

generation and started around 1970, has been known as the era of the comprehensive community college. No one knows, of course, what the fifth generation, which is emerging now, will look like, but if the fourth generation embraces comprehensiveness and tries to provide almost any service for almost any person, we might well wonder what is left for the fifth generation to accomplish.

Clearly, the future of the community college does not lie in further expansion. Yes, community colleges in certain regions of the country will continue to grow, but they will grow because the population in their service area is growing, not because the community college is expanding its mission. There are many people who contend that the mission of community colleges is already too broad and that community colleges might do well to decide where their resources are best spent and concentrate on doing less but doing it better. Certainly the pressures in the present social climate clamor for quality and accountability in education. The pursuit of excellence has become a popular, if somewhat elusive, goal in all sorts of endeavors, from making automobiles to educating students.

Would community colleges necessarily have to do less in order to do it better? Is the comprehensive mission too broad to meet today's demands for excellence?

That is one of the questions that faced the blue-ribbon Commission on the Future of Community Colleges that was appointed recently by the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges to hold hearings, deliberate alternatives, and make recommendations about what the future of community colleges should look like. That Commission has been meeting over the past 18 months and recently released its report at the national convention of the AACJC to a standing ovation from more than 3000 community college leaders present.

Basically the Commission took the position that community colleges can be comprehensive and excellent too. They can preserve the open access to higher education that has been the distinctive mark of community colleges, while also assuring success for each student willing to work at the task of learning. I have sometimes used the phrase, education for all and education for each. Your new

learning center symbolizes that mission -- an educational facility open to all but dedicated to finding individualized approaches that work for each. You could not have built a facility on this campus that would be more consistent with what I see as the emerging identity of the community college. The quality of learning is the central issue of the 1980s educational reform movement, and community colleges will be profoundly affected by the emphasis on quality, accountability, assessment, and the demonstration of excellence in teaching and learning.

Because I expect the report of the Commission to have a significant impact on Twenty-first Century community colleges, I'd like to spend a little time this morning reflecting on what took place in our meetings. While I'd like to give you some sense of the recommendations, I do not plan to either summarize 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 in the report just released under the title, Building Communities: A Vision For A New Century.

What I would like to do is to reflect on the work of the commission, interpreting this work in the context of the recent past in higher education. Although the discussions in the Commission meetings undoubtedly sowed some seeds in my head, there to sprout into weeds or flowers, these remarks are my own garden of interpretation -- surely in need of further cultivation, some judicious pruning, and no doubt some vigorous weeding here and there.

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 appropriate 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. 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. Arthur Cohen (1982), long-time professor of community college education at UCLA, weighed in on the side of collegiate education, maintaining that if ever community colleges were to achieve academic respectability, they would have to give more attention to collegiate and transfer functions. Breneman and Nelson (1985), economists at the Brookings Institution, took 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).

As I reflect on the positions taken in this debate over the past decade, I conclude that we were all asking the wrong question. The question of making choices in the comprehensive mission is basically divisive and competitive. It pits the advocates of transfer education against those working in career and community education; it asks how long we can continue to provide remedial education and pits community colleges against high schools; it brings angry four-year colleges into the debate, wondering what has happened to the "feeder" transfer function of community colleges.

The genius of the Commission report is that we spent no time debating what should be deleted from the comprehensive mission. Looking back on it, I'm not sure how we changed the question and avoided the divisive debates about what to eliminate. The comprehensive mission of the modern community college was accepted from the beginning as legitimate and necessary if community colleges are to serve their communities in the manner that was intended by their founders.

The theme that was finally settled upon by the Commission, "Building Communities" is healing and uniting rather than divisive. Starting with the notion of college as community, the recommendations moved to establish connections that would strengthen each of the traditional functions -- connections between those working with transfer programs and four-year colleges, between career preparation and employers, between community education and the citizens of the community, between community colleges and high schools for a number of articulation activities.

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.

The shift from competition to collaboration is not an easy one to make in this society. Competition has deep roots in America's free-enterprise system, and there is not much doubt that competition has led to enormous corporate and personal accomplishment. The merits of competition go back to Darwin and the survival of the fittest. But we are now facing enormous social problems of what to do about those who are unfit to make their way and their contributions to this society -- those without homes, without jobs, without health, without basic skills of literacy. Education is one route to making people more fit and better able to compete. But education should do more than prepare people to compete for the financial and prestige rewards which have become the modern equivalent of Darwin's survival. Preparing people for competition inevitably produces winners and losers, and we can't afford to have losers in this society.

Competition in education is perhaps at an all-time high right now. Institutions compete with one another for students, for faculty stars, for funds, and for academic reputations. Departments compete with one another for money, students, space and sometimes even for

survival. Faculty in the major and even minor universities compete fiercely with one another for publications, visibility, tenure, and promotion. Students compete with one another for grades, as they always have, but an analysis of the changes in student attitudes show us how pervasive competition has become in modern society.

Every year for the past 20 years, the American Council on Education has conducted a survey of the attitudes and characteristics of entering college freshmen in the United States. The item that shows the most dramatic rise in student endorsement is "being very well off financially." Whereas 40 percent of the freshmen were very interested in material gain ten years ago, 70 percent of today's freshmen endorse it as a major life value. In sharp contrast is the value showing the greatest decline in student values. "Developing a meaningful philosophy of life" plunged from an 80 percent endorsement in 1967 to 43 percent in 1985 (Astin and Green, 1988). Students not only reflect the values of society; they create the values a society lives by.

Professor Alexander Astin, who was not a member of the Commission, but who is an influential scholar in American higher education, has written persuasively that it is time to rid ourselves of competition among the institutions and segments of higher education in favor of fostering the cooperative notion that all segments of education must share in the responsibility for the development of talent in both students and faculty. (1987). The goal of talent development requires a cooperative view of education. No one loses when each institution does the best job that it can in developing the talents of its constituencies.

Astin observes that the reputations of institutions today are measured largely in competitive terms -- which colleges have the most grants, the largest endowments, the most visible faculty, the highest test scores for entering students? While community colleges have avoided most of this competition, they are affected by the competitive mind-set because they come out on the bottom of the higher education hierarchy on these measures of prestige.

John Naisbitt, in his book Megatrends, (1985) says that the question for the 1980's is "What business are you really in?"

Educators, in their competitive struggle for survival and recognition, have lost sight of the fact that we are really in the business of educating students. And if that is our business, cooperation and sharing resources may be more effective than competing for limited resources.

Education has received a great deal of public attention 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 professional 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 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.

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 running our 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. I hope this new Learning Resource Center was efficiently planned and constructed, but I hope even more that it has been designed to accomplish its purpose -- educating students. I hope you did things right, but I hope even more that you did the right thing.

Community colleges, I believe, are on the forefront of the changing role of education in society. For one thing, community colleges have always faced the major challenge of educating students. More selective institutions can choose those who are most likely to succeed in their college, but community colleges have the far more difficult task of making successful those who walk through the open doors. Community colleges have also been blessedly free of the competitive and debilitating struggle for national reputations. There isn't much for a community college to gain in fighting the reputation wars of publications, faculty stars, and National Merit Scholars. And finally, the historical egalitarian traditions of the community college are based more on everyone sharing the pie than on competition for the largest slice.

Thus, I conclude upon reflection, that the Commission was wise in calling for collaboration in "Building Communities." Community Colleges have nothing to gain and plenty to lose by entering into win/lose battles either among divisions within the institution or external to it. The question for Fifth Generation community colleges is not whether they can manage the comprehensive mission with excellence on their own, but whether they can marshal the cooperative forces for sharing the responsibility in accomplishing their traditional mission of providing the best possible education for America's most diverse student populations.

As important as the call for a shift from competition for excellence to collaboration for excellence is, it is only part of what I now see as a major turning point for community colleges. The second and equally important contribution of the Futures report is the Commission's decision to return to community colleges some of the

zeal and idealism that infused the early community colleges with their egalitarian drive to improve access to higher education.

Early in this decade, I did some research on the missions of community colleges. As part of that study, I analyzed the responses of faculty, administrators, students, trustees, and citizens of the community to the Community College Goals Inventory. We asked respondents what was really important to the community college and how well they thought their college was accomplishing those goals. After analyzing some fairly uninspiring results, I wrote these words, "The late 1970s and early 1980s represent a plateau between two periods of high energy and a sense of mission in the community colleges. The old ideals that sparked enthusiasm and the sense of common purpose in community colleges have receded, and new ideals have not yet emerged to take their place." (Cross, 1981, p. 113).

As I see it, a major value of the Commission's report is that it promotes a new idealism. The missionary zeal for access and equal opportunity that characterized community colleges in the 1950s and '60s was replaced in the 1970s by what I shall call managerial pragmatism. The excitement of building new campuses and programs was gone, and the hard work of serving the new clientele was at hand. Important, to be sure, but a hard, slogging kind of work. What the Commission report has done is to return idealism and energy to the community college movement. The very language of the report is revealing. They call for a "new rallying point" and observe that "The term *community* should be defined not only as a region to be served, but also as a climate to be created." (p. 7). They speak of "inspired partnerships" and "shared values." And they caution that "*Building community must, of course, 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.)

There is energy 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 report of the Commission states unequivocally that teaching lies at the center of "building community." "Teaching," says the report, "is the heartbeat of the educational enterprise, and when it is successful, energy is pumped into the community, continuously renewing and revitalizing the institution." (p. 7-8).

That sort of energy is needed now, and it 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. The 1990s will have to marshall the energy of the teaching faculty if it is to accomplish its purpose of improving the quality of learning.

The massive significance of that change should be lost on no one. Administrators, by themselves, can't do much to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Yes, they can provide opportunities for professional development, insist upon recognition for good teaching, and they can help create climates that value quality in teaching and learning. But the scene of the action for Fifth Generation community colleges is shifting to individual teachers in their classrooms.

The Commission contends that "The community college should be the nation's premier teaching institution. Quality instruction should be the hallmark of the movement." "Indeed" they say, "it is the conviction of the Commission that the theme *Building Communities* is applied most appropriately to the classroom, where both intellectual and social relationships are strengthened and where

teachers and students can be active partners in the learning process." (p. 25)

As a society, we have much to learn about the learning process. I have contended that college teachers should be doing their own classroom research on teaching and learning as it takes place everyday in their own classrooms. I am not suggesting that community college teachers become educational researchers with all that that implies in the way of sophisticated research design, fancy statistics and long hours spent analyzing data. Rather I am urging teachers to direct systematic attention to the continuous assessment of how their teaching is affecting the learning of the students in their classrooms. The Commission has endorsed this role in their recommendation that, " Community colleges should define the role of their faculty members as classroom researchers -- focusing evaluation on instruction and making a clear connection between what teachers teach and how students learn." (p. 27)

From yellow Community college teachers are in an especially good position, not only to add to our knowledge about learning in the classroom, but also to implement those practices that have been shown effective. I have urged community colleges to take the lead, among all institutions of higher education, in developing both the scholarly and practical dimensions of expertise in college-level teaching for a number of reasons:

First, community colleges are teaching institutions. Their faculties are hired on the premise that they are first and foremost teachers. Thus they are, and should be, curious about learning and the impact they make as teachers on students' learning. If community colleges are to make their mark as premier teaching institutions, then we must offer faculty the opportunity to establish themselves as authorities on teaching and learning -- as seekers after knowledge as well as practitioners in the art and science of teaching.

INSERTED - to Martin v
~~Third~~ **Second**, community colleges are rich and potentially productive laboratories for gaining knowledge about learning. No other type of institution offers such a wide range of learning experiences for study. The curricular mix of the community college, consisting of vocational,

academic, remedial, adult education, offers one of the richest resources available for study.] to 13 Marlin

^{Fourth} Third, the practical orientation of community college teachers assures that the problems for study are real problems that affect college teachers in their classrooms. Moreover, community college classes tend to be smaller; personal attention is frequently expected and given, and teachers have an opportunity to observe learning in process with its variety of stumbles and triumphs.

And finally, one of the most fruitful ways of learning about anything, from mechanics to education, is to look at examples of what goes wrong when things are not working well. The bright side of the concentration of students with learning problems in community colleges is that we can look at the "errors" of education and experiment with treatments to correct or alleviate them. In summary, the curriculum, the students, and the faculty of community colleges make them ideal laboratories for the study of teaching and learning.

These then are the reflections of one commissioner as I try to sort out for myself what the work of the Commission accomplished. Upon reflection, I think that it has offered the community colleges of this nation a vision and a practical plan of action.

You at Lewis and Clark are already embarked upon the mission that I envision for the Twenty-First Century. You may take justifiable pride in the dedication of this building today, which stands in the very center of this campus, a visible commitment to the improvement of student learning.

REFERENCES

- Astin, Alexander. "Competition or Cooperation?" Change. Sept/Oct. 1987.
- Astin, Alexander and Green, Kenneth C. "The American Freshman: Twenty Year Trends, 1966-1985." ACE/UCLA, 1988.
- Breneman, David W. and Nelson, Susan C. Financing Community Colleges: An Economic Perspective. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1981.
- Cohen, Arthur M. and Brawer, Florence B. The American Community College. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1982.
- Commission on the Future of Community Colleges. Building Communities: A Vision For A New Century. Washington, D.C.: AACJC.
- Cross, K. Patricia. "Community Colleges on the Plateau." Journal of Higher Education, 1981, Vol. 52, No. 2. 113-123.
- Cross, K. Patricia. "Determining Missions and Priorities for the Fifth Generation." In Deegan, W. and Tillery, D. (Eds.) Renewing the American Community College. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1985.
- Deegan, William L. and Tillery, Dale. Renewing the American Community College. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1985.
- Gleazer, Edmund J. Jr. The Community College: Values, Vision, and Vitality. Washington, D.C.: AACJC, 1980.
- Naisbitt, John. Megatrends. New York: Warner Books, 1985.