

CONSIDER THE POSSIBILITIES

K. Patricia Cross

Harvard Graduate School of Education

I've entitled my remarks this evening "Consider the Possibilities." I chose that theme after reading a draft of the Long-Range Plan for Public Higher Education in Massachusetts (April, 1982), which places heavy responsibility on local leadership for vision and imagination in defining and implementing college missions. Thus the Long-Range Plan presents both an opportunity and a challenge for local community college leadership. The role I would like to play this evening is to try to challenge you to think broadly about the possibilities that are open to community college development over the next decade.

It is not easy to define the missions of community colleges today -- not nearly as easy as it was in the 1960s when community colleges universally accepted responsibility for the national mission of opening the doors of higher education to previously

Prepared for the Massachusetts Community College Association,
Worcester, Massachusetts, September 30, 1982.

unserved segments of the population. Once the doors have been opened and previously unserved students are in attendance, what is the goal? Is it, for example, to retain students until they have completed some defined set of learning experiences that constitutes a "program" of study? Or is it to provide them with whatever educational experiences seem to serve their needs at the time? How important is retention, and what constitutes "reasonable progress" in a community college? Are community colleges failing in their task when up to 40 percent of the students in California community colleges complete fewer than two courses in two years? (Hunter and Sheldon, 1981). How important is the transfer function? Should community colleges be distressed that studies show that very few students transfer to a four-year institution? Community colleges are being judged on these traditional and historical criteria. How appropriate are the criteria?

The answers to these questions depend heavily on what community colleges are trying to do. The easy way out of the goals problem is one that was used with reasonable success by most community colleges in the 1960s and 70s -- to embrace comprehensiveness. The problem with the comprehensive mission is that all five of the basic functions that constitute the comprehensive community college must be done well. The transfer program must prepare students just as well as the university does for upper division work. Vocational programs must prepare students for entry-level jobs

as well as for advancement in their chosen occupations. Remedial programs must actually ameliorate past educational inequities and prepare students for college-level work. General education programs must integrate students' learning experiences and prepare them for citizenship, family life, cultural and aesthetic appreciations, and respect for education and lifelong learning. Community education must respond appropriately to the educational needs of a wide range of people and organizations.

Can any college perform all of those functions well -- or even acceptably -- in today's climate of scarce resources and heavy competition for students? Some people think not, and friends as well as critics of the community colleges are wondering aloud if community colleges can be all things to all people. Are there some functions that should not be provided and some people who should not be served -- at least not by a given community college?

The difficulty of the questions and the rising confusion about institutional purpose has college presidents worried. In a recent survey, college presidents were asked to name the most critical issues facing their college over the next decade. Out of some twenty critical issues listed, the "changing mission and purpose" of their institution was ranked second in importance by presidents of public colleges and universities. Only "inflation and financial concerns" ranked higher (Duea, 1981).

Fortunately, the question of mission for community colleges has stimulated a growing number of thoughtful articles in the literature. While none will answer the questions for any given college, they should spark discussion and illuminate the options available. Basically, there are five major themes or foci running through the current community college mission debate. They are 1) the comprehensive focus, 2) the vertical focus, 3) the horizontal focus, 4) the integrated focus, and 5) the remedial focus.

It is unnecessary to dwell at length on further analysis of the comprehensive focus because it is familiar to all of you. One great strength of the comprehensive mission is that it has strong roots in the historical arguments for equal access to educational opportunity, namely that all potential students should be within commuting distance of the type of education that serves their needs. But the comprehensive mission has some other advantages. Despite its complexity, it is easy to administer. Faculty will grumble but will understand a leader who allocates scarce resources with an even hand as long as every department is equally deprived. What they are less likely to understand is an out-and-out statement that vocational education or community education or transfer programs or whatever are going to get more money because they are the wave of the future for the college. There are community colleges that have enunciated clear priorities quite successfully, but the battle is never easy if it means giving up some function

that already has incumbents. The comprehensive mission is enormously powerful; it is attractive to most community college educators; it avoids the controversy of setting priorities, and it has become part of the community college tradition. It is mostly outside researchers and analysts who are warning that in the long run, community colleges will have to set priorities in order to use scarce resources where they will do the most good. In the controversial and much-discussed Brookings study of last year, the authors labeled the comprehensive mission a gamble, observing that "the greatest risk of an unflinching commitment to the comprehensive mission is that sufficient financial support will not materialize, and the college will suffer across the board, becoming less competitive and less distinctive in all program areas" (Breneman and Nelson, 1981, p. 213).

The vertical focus is generally conceded to be the most prestigious and most easily understood model. Firmly anchored in traditional concepts of what a college should be, it places the community college between the high school and four-year college as students move through the formal educational system. Basically, the vertical focus calls for establishing relationships with high schools to assure that recent high school graduates are prepared for college-level work and for articulating with four-year institutions their requirements for transfers.

In the Massachusetts Long-Range Plan, the assumptions supporting a vertical focus seem to me to predominate, and across

the nation, some of the most powerful voices in higher education are encouraging more emphasis on the vertical focus. At the level of conceptualization, there is the prestigious Carnegie Foundation, deploring the discontinuity of American education and calling for "an effective progression from elementary school through high school through college" (Hechinger, 1981, p. 128). Derek Bok (1982), President of Harvard, has just come down heavily on the side of continuity in education by suggesting that financial aid should be based on the likelihood of the student's completing college. The University of California task group studying retention and transfer is urging more articulation and communication with community colleges in the hope of greater continuity through the system (Kissler, 1980). I could cite dozens of examples of concern in high places for the breakdown in the vertical transition of students through the formal school system. One widespread conclusion is that better articulation between high schools and colleges is a high priority and that community colleges have a major obligation to establish smooth connections to enhance the flow of more students through the system.

The most effective implementation of the vertical function is underway at Miami-Dade Community College. What has become known as the "Miami-Dade system" is spreading rapidly throughout

the country. Miami-Dade has many arrows to its bow, and without question they are a comprehensive community college. Nevertheless, the current priorities of Miami-Dade are clearly cast in the direction of traditional academic values and standards while preserving the concept of the open door (McCabe, 1981). The gems in their computerized crown involve an individualized monitoring system for making sure that students are making satisfactory progress in their courses of study (Anandam, 1981; Kelly, 1981), a system for articulating transfer requirements with each of the four-year institutions in Florida (Harper, Herrig, Kelly, and Schinoff, 1981), a special program for academically superior students (Robertson and Thomas, 1981), and most recently a program of research and conversations with Dade County high schools to improve student preparation prior to their entry into postsecondary education (Losak, Schwartz, and Morris, 1982).

I doubt if in the history of the community college movement there has ever been as much attention given to traditional academic standards as there has been in the last four or five years. Attention, of course, almost always goes to areas perceived as neglected, and there is widespread agreement throughout the nation that traditional academic values have been neglected. The point is that the vertical position of the community colleges between the high schools and four-year institutions is being vigorously reasserted, and it constitutes one major focus for the community college of the 1980s.

There is, however, another focus with strong roots in the community college movement. That is the horizontal focus which is reaching out to develop linkages with the community rather than building linkages within the formal educational establishment. This focus is most vigorously articulated by the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges. Although Ed Gleazer, the former president, and Dale Parnell, the current president, would establish their linkages in somewhat different places, the leadership of both men is concerned with reaching out to embrace new partners in education. Ed Gleazer (1980) has the most sweeping vision of the community college of the future. He sees community colleges as the hub of all education going on in the community, serving people of all ages throughout their lifetime and helping the community solve problems and build a better community through education. He urges community colleges to provide the leadership for assessing community needs and for convening and coordinating educational services for the community.

Gleazer upset many in the community college movement by making a choice between horizontal and vertical emphases. In his book, Values, Vision, and Vitality (1980), he raised the question of whether it might not be time for the community colleges to de-emphasize their identification with higher education and even to reconsider their use of the term "college." "It may get in the way of what really needs to be done in the community" (p.5), he said.

Although many regard Gleazer's horizontal focus as idealistic, given current funding restrictions, and too radical for implementation in the 1980s, I suggest that it should not be dismissed too quickly. As soon as the current crisis on academic quality is resolved -- which will be within the next few years -- community colleges will be faced with even harder decisions with respect to the viability of the comprehensive mission and will be asking whether their future lies more in the concept of the junior or transfer college or in some other direction. I predict that the horizontal focus will challenge the vertical for predominance before the end of the decade. That seems to me a likely scenario for two reasons: first, as every educator knows only too well, the pool of traditional college students has just started its downward slide, and traditional students will be increasingly scarce for the rest of the decade. This means that traditional four-year colleges, that were once content to leave low-achieving students to the community colleges, are going to reassert their "right" to go after any student who is able to spend full time in residence on the campuses that many four-year colleges must maintain. Unless community colleges can establish a competitive transfer program and can keep costs significantly below those of four-year institutions, they will probably ultimately lose the fight for the traditional market of baccalaureate-bound students. That fight seems especially hard-fought in Massachusetts where the frustrations of higher education seem to occur in exaggerated

form. The decline of 18 year-olds is steeper here than elsewhere, the competition for the traditional student market is far greater, and the cost differential between two- and four-year public colleges is not great enough to give full-time students a compelling reason for attending a community college.

The second reason the horizontal focus will emerge stronger than ever after about 1985 is that community colleges are far ahead of traditional four-year colleges in capitalizing on the rich and only partially tapped adult part-time market. Community colleges are ideally suited, philosophically and geographically, to serve lifelong learners with jobs, families, and roots in the local communities. Furthermore, the less cumbersome faculty committee system of community colleges makes them able to respond quickly and appropriately to cooperative educational ventures with other providers of education. The rising interest of business and industry in human resource development makes corporate education the most actively growing educational activity in the nation. Community colleges appear to have the inside track on alliances with business, and Dale Parnell and the current AACJC Board are pushing hard for national legislation to strengthen this particular form of horizontal extension (Parnell, 1982).

The evidence is just beginning to pile up that students are using community colleges in a strikingly different manner than most traditionalists think, and most of the current student usage patterns are creating pressures toward the horizontal focus. Almost

Plan, April, 1982, p. 19). If that trend continues, which I think it will, the community colleges of Massachusetts may be looking at horizontal missions with more favor than is presently the case.

So far I have outlined and illustrated the essential elements and philosophy of three foci for community colleges in the 1980s -- the vertical, the horizontal, and the comprehensive. The remaining two foci are the integrated focus and the remedial focus. I use the term integrated focus to contrast Arthur Cohen's proposal for a general education focus with the horizontal and vertical foci already discussed. Cohen is proposing major attention to linkages within the community college rather than external linkages either vertically or horizontally. Cohen's intent is to make liberal arts and the humanities an important part of the learning experience of all learners, be they transfer, career, compensatory, or community education students. The trend that distresses Cohen most in community college education is the collapse of the sequential curriculum. He believes that a community college education should contain a "sequence of intended learnings" in which sequence is defined as "a pattern or progression that has some rationale, order, and deliberate arrangement" and "intended learnings" have outcomes that are defined in advance (Cohen, 1981, p. 35). He takes a dim view of the community college that "purports to serve up anything that anyone in the community wants" (p. 36).

Cohen's focus advocates a program of studies that calls for a reconceptualization of all five of the traditional functions of

the community college. His integrated focus would place liberal education for the informed citizen at the hub of career, compensatory, collegiate, and community education. Community colleges would not only guarantee the availability of liberal education to all students at any time in their lives, but would require it lest, as Cohen says, "the gulf between social classes in American be accentuated as members of the elite group learn to control their environment, while the lower classes are given career education and training in the basic skills" (Cohen and Brawer, 1982, p. 327). The Massachusetts Long-Range Plan, in one of its most directive statements agrees, urging all institutions to "build on a base of strong liberal arts education as one way to develop shared background and inherited culture" (Long-Range Plan, April, 1982, p. 23)

Finally, a proposed focus for community colleges recommended by the Carnegie Council in 1979 has received little discussion and has generally been met with little enthusiasm by community colleges. I don't find it especially surprising that community colleges failed to respond to the Carnegie proposal that community colleges assume "residual responsibility for youth." Clark Kerr and the members of his council tried to address the real and growing "youth problem" in the United States by suggesting that community colleges develop a comprehensive set of "youth service functions" which would include guidance, job preparation, job placement, referral to other community agencies for help with legal and medical advice, apprenticeships,

and almost any other type of service needed by young people to help them become responsible and productive citizens. In this remedial focus, the community colleges would be identified as full service "institutions for the young."

There are many obvious problems with the proposal which, to its credit, does tackle a problem in serious need of attention. First and foremost is the fact that community colleges have not been rewarded in the past for their social concern. Indeed, they are far more likely to have been the targets of sometimes vicious criticism for enrolling disproportionate numbers of minorities, for recruiting students with poor academic skills, for poor retention of students, for failure to provide upper division transfers for four-year institutions, for preserving the social class structure, and a host of other charges related to their present remedial role of taking on the "youth problem." Having been burned in the past for their handling of a problem that no one yet knows how to deal with, it is unlikely that they are going to move more heavily into remedial functions in the future unless some sorts of rewards are forthcoming -- special funding, feelings of accomplishment, recognition by others, and the self-satisfaction of having served individuals and society well.

A second major flaw in the Carnegie Proposal is that almost no college wants to be identified these days as the "institution for youth" which is a declining population and quite opposite from the direction in which most community colleges are currently moving.

Community colleges, more than any other type of institution, are becoming institutions for adults. What seems more likely is that four-year institutions will move increasingly into the remedial function in order to gain enough full-time students to protect their enrollments from serious decline in the 1980s. If anything, it seems likely that the community colleges that have borne most of the remedial functions will now be joined in those efforts by the high schools under vigorous public pressure and by the four-year colleges under severe demographic pressures.

Now, having gone out on a limb with the prediction that at the national level, there are new pressures on high schools and four-year colleges to join community colleges in their efforts at remediation, I should remind you that the one function that is singularly reserved for the community colleges in the Massachusetts Long-Range Plan (p. 28) is remedial/developmental education. Stated in unambiguous language, it reads, "Consistent with their comprehensive mission, the community colleges should provide most of the remedial programs and should develop further expertise to assist differentially-prepared students successfully. The baccalaureate degree-granting institutions, consistent with their missions, should make available only those services required by qualified students to refresh or to upgrade specific skills" (p. 35)).

Basically, the Massachusetts Long-Range Plan assumes the continuation of the comprehensive mission for Massachusetts community colleges. But the comprehensive mission

is going to take money and so far there is little indication that the Commonwealth is prepared to ante up.

Nationwide, community colleges are under attack on the quality/retention/transfer dimension, and most community colleges are trying to shore up the vertical focus. But that is, I think, a "corrective" approach. By that I mean that because the transfer function was allowed to slip into disrepute -- or at least disuse -- in the 1970s, many colleges are trying to reallocate to the transfer function its fair share of 20 percent of the comprehensive mission. Viewed from that perspective, the corrective approach is not destined to last more than a few more years, and it does not really address the question of mission.

Some colleges, however, may elect to stay with the vertical focus, once they get it working. Others will elect other options. Few, I think, will be able to maintain the comprehensive mission with quality for all five functions. What happens in the next ten years will have profound implications for the community college movement. It is going to be difficult if not impossible to lead a national community college movement with the energy and sense of mission that characterized the 1950s and 60s. What seems to be happening is that colleges are beginning to break out of a united identifiable community college movement by making individual college choices that may weaken the community college movement but will probably strengthen individual colleges.

When Jonathon Daube invited me to meet with you tonight,

he asked me to challenge you and to be prepared to argue with you. This I have tried to do by being very candid and by trying to draw some sharp lines that will lend themselves to some clarification through discussion.

REFERENCES

- Anandam, Kamala. Promises to Keep. . .: Academic Alert and Advisement. Paper. Miami-Dade Community College, May, 1981.
- Bok, Derek. The President's Report. 1980-81. Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, March, 1982.
- Breneman, David and Nelson, Susan. Financing Community Colleges: An Economic Perspective. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1981.
- Cohen, Arthur M. "Dateline '79 Revisited." In Vaughn, G. (Ed.), Questioning the Community College Role: New Directions for Community Colleges. No. 32. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1981.
- Cohen, Arthur M. and Brawer, Florence B. The American Community College. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1982.
- Duea, Jerry. "Presidents' Views on Current and Future Issues in Higher Education." Phi Delta Kappan, April, 1981, pp. 586-588.
- Gleazer, Edmund J. Jr. Values, Vision, and Vitality. Washington D.C.: American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, 1980.
- Harper, H., Herrig, J., Kelly, J.T., and Schinoff, B.R. Advisement and Graduation Information System. Paper. Miami-Dade Community College, March, 1981.
- Hechinger, Fred. The High School-College Connection, in Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Common Learning: A Carnegie Colloquium on General Education. Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1981.
- Hunter, Russel and Sheldon, M. Stephen. Statewide Longitudinal Study. Report on Academic Year 1979-80 Part 4 - Spring 1980 Results. Sacramento: Chancellor's Office, California Community Colleges, 1981.
- Kelly, Terence J. Restructuring the Academic Program: A Systems Approach to Educational Reform at Miami-Dade Community College. Paper. Miami-Dade, March 2, 1981.
- Kissler, Gerald R. (Chairman) Report of the Task Group on Retention and Transfer. Office of the Academic Vice President, University of California, Berkeley, June, 1980.

Long-Range Plan for Higher Education in Massachusetts, Phase I.
Working Draft, April, 1982.

Losak, John, Schwartz, Margery I., and Morris, Cathy. High School Preparation as Viewed by Academically Underprepared Students. Miami, Florida: Office of Institutional Research, Miami-Dade Community College, February, 1982.

McCabe, Robert H. Why Miami-Dade Community College is Reforming the Educational Program. Paper. Miami-Dade Community College, March, 1981.

Parnell, Dale. "Putting America Back to Work: Community, Technical, Junior Colleges Ready." Community and Junior College Journal, September 1982, pp. 12-15.

Robertson, Piedad F., and Thomas, Sharon C. Emphasis on Excellence. Paper. Miami-Dade Community College, May, 1981.