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Our Universities: Community College Innovation

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Our Universities: Community College Innovation

The work of higher education is fairly simple. Teachers teach, students learn and benefits accrue; individually, corporately, and socially. As student abilities, backgrounds, needs, and aspirations change, so too must our approaches to teaching. Or, there will be no learning.

We in universities are not in the democracy business. What we do, when we're doing it, is teach and learn.

Stanley Fish

Forces at work in the educational environment demand responsiveness to the changing educational landscape.

One key ingredient for success in U.S. higher education lies on the stoop of our community colleges. National leadership is focused on more effective integration of community colleges in the higher education milieu. But true effectiveness lies in partnerships with universities.

Workforce education is a three-way partnership of universities, community colleges and online providers. Soon, every baccalaureate transcript will have courses from as many as 10 to 15 different institutions: from for-profit, free, public, private, two-year, and four-year colleges. U.S. higher education and thoughtful educational leaders will take hold of the moment and build supportive and positive working relationships. For students, such openness is not weakness but strength. When correctly choreographed and motivated towards teaching and learning, "cherry-picking" of opportunity allows alignment with individual students' needs, aspirations, and institutional strength, and plays to strengths up and down the ladder.

Affordability, formally the challenge for four-year institutions, is now trickling into two-year schools. Sen. Tom Harkin (D – Iowa) Chair of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, is begging to address affordability. He rightly claims that, "states still have a primary role to play."

Oregon is moving to increase need-based financial aid with an approach called the "shared responsibility model." Oregon assumes the difficult but honest position that "the student, as the primary beneficiary of the education, bears the first and most significant responsibility for paying for college," according to Camille Preus, Commissioner of the Oregon Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development.

Remediation is shifting from four-year institutions -- increasingly not funded for remedial coursework by states -- to the purview of community colleges. *The Boston Globe* addressed new approaches to remedial math this week at North Shore Community College in response to the 57% of students requiring help in math in two-year schools in Massachusetts. New software provides access to the basics of introductory math. Northern Essex Community College is "also pleased by the results of its redesign

program, which now has about 200 students enrolled," according to Linda Murphy, the college's curriculum coordinator. Teaching and learning.

With increased concerns about costs, community colleges are feeling the pressures of performance funding while traditionally held harmless from scrutiny of graduation and persistence rates, degree or certificate of completion, or transfer rates.

No more.

The Voluntary Framework of Accountability (VFA) a national effort of the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), developed measures of accountability that make sense, according to George Boggs, then CEO of AACC. The handwriting is on the wall and it's plain as day: As costs rise, access shrinks, and accountability skyrockets.

Meeting the needs of industries and individuals partnerships with the private sector should flourish. Walter Bumphus, current CEO of AACC suggested this week in *Time Ideas* that even with a modest average tuition of \$2,963 per year, community colleges must tighten belts and provide bridges for students. He cites relationships with Siemens, Verizon, UPS, and Goldman Sachs as meeting needs for workforce improvement and helping students attain life aspirations. Teaching and learning.

The value of a community college degree is so important that many students are exercising reverse transfer. Reverse transfer occurs when a student leaves a community college to attend a senior institution, and on the way to the bachelor's degree, transfers hours back to the community college, allowing the granting of the Associate's degree. The State University of New York, with support from the Lumina Foundation, is working diligently to create more reverse transfer opportunities, according to Nancy Zimpher, Chancellor of SUNY. It is a win-win shotgun marriage.

Stanford University has partnered with Foothills Community College to engage students in research. Peter Murray, Dean at Foothill, said that "13 students are currently in Stanford internships." These innovative relationships encourage persistence and mark new covenants in higher education that may yield great benefits. Teaching and learning.

Mission clarity and simplification is important in all institutions, but especially pronounced in community colleges. The first two years at a community college can be had at a 75% discount off the State U rates right down the street. The issues of workforce preparation and university transfer identify the two most important missions of almost all community colleges, and our universities should wholeheartedly get in the ball game to promote efficacy in teaching and learning. For both purposes.