

HALE Comprehensive Exam: Part One Section A
(Assigned code)

A. The study of organization and leadership in higher education makes initiating and responding to change an essential theme. Write an essay in which you offer an account of how one sector of postsecondary education (e.g., research universities, comprehensive universities, community colleges, liberal arts colleges, minority serving institutions, or corporate and/or institutional training programs) has changed in the past twenty-five years. Your essay should: a) Specify what aspects of the institutions in the sector you think have shown the most change and the least, and why; b) Describe the role of institutional leaders in these changes; and c) Include an account of policies or initiatives, and the role of leaders in implementing them, you think most necessary to improving the performance of the sector you have chosen in the years ahead, recognizing the changes already made that you have discussed.

Introduction

Regarded as a distinctly American and innovative form of higher education (Altbach, 2001; Boggs, 2004; Thelin, 2011), community colleges have served an important role within higher education since the start of the twentieth century. Their time honored commitment to serving as an entry point to higher education for the underserved (Thelin, 2011) has helped community colleges become the largest sector of higher education within the United States (Boggs, 2004). With relatively low prices, less strict admission requirements, and convenient locations, they provide viable options for many students to which more selective and elite institutions are not an option (Baum, Little, & Payea, 2011). George R. Boggs (2004), President of the American Association of Community Colleges, argues “beyond their primarily local focus, community colleges increasingly are viewed as a national network and key national resource” (p. 8). It’s an argument that has been made by American Presidents, from President Truman’s Commission Report on Higher Education devoting “substantial attention to the public community college as an institution crucial to ensuring universally accessible post-secondary education” (Thelin, 2011, p. 269), to President Obama calling for community colleges to produce an additional 5 million graduates by 2020 (White House, 2014). While community colleges have long served the purpose of increasing access to higher education, they have seen a number of changes during the past twenty-five years. In this paper I will discuss enduring aspects of

community colleges, changing aspects of community colleges, role of institutional leaders, and policies and initiatives to improve community college performance in the years ahead.

Enduring Aspects of Community Colleges

The following are a few aspects of community colleges that have endured, or in other words, have changed very little over time: open admissions policies, focus on teaching, and low institutional status.

Open Admissions Policies

An enduring and distinguishing feature of community colleges is their openness and willingness to serve underrepresented populations. The majority of community colleges have open admissions policies (Altbach, 2001; Boggs, 2004; Hagedorn, 2010; Lattuca & Stark, 2009; Thelin, 2011), which means their doors are essentially open to any and all who want to pursue a higher education. Due to their open-door admissions policy, community colleges are often described as “the people's or democracy's colleges and are widely credited with opening access to higher education to the most diverse student body in the history of higher education” (Boggs, 2004, p. 8).

One feature of community colleges' open door policies is less strict admission requirements as compared to other types of higher education institutes. For example, whereas elite liberal arts colleges carefully select students from a large pool of applicants (Keohane, 2001), community colleges often allow students without a high school diploma to take courses (Thelin, 2011).

Community colleges are also a more affordable option as compared to other institutional types. Average tuition and fees for a fulltime student attending a public community college during 2010-11 was \$2,713, whereas the average for attending a public four-year institution was

\$7,605 (Baum, Little, & Payea, 2011). The affordability of community colleges provides students looking to transfer to a four-year institute a low-cost option for completing their first two years of study (Altbach, 2001), and also affordable local opportunities for work training (Boggs, 2004). The affordability of community colleges makes them an open and accessible form of higher education to those who cannot afford attending more elite and selective institutes, such as research universities and liberal arts colleges.

Focus on Teaching

Another aspect of community colleges that has changed very little is their focus on teaching. Community colleges are very teaching-oriented, and there is the expectation for faculty to spend much of their time interacting with students (Lattuca & Stark, 2009). A characteristic of community colleges' commitment to teaching is faculty members who "concentrate on teaching to the exclusion of scholarly activities" (Townsend & Rosser, 2011, p. 8). Whereas faculty at research universities are often expected to spend at minimum half their time engaged in research, resulting in teaching loads of only four to six hours per week, community college faculty spend about fifteen to twenty-one hours a week teaching (Clark & Clark, 2008).

Low Institutional Status

Even though community colleges serve an important role in higher education they do not command the high level of respect from the public as do other types of institutes. At the top of the American higher education hierarchy are the research universities, which are highly valued for their leadership in research (Altbach, 2001). Professor and higher education historian, John Thelin (2011) has expressed frustration with influential higher education scholar Alexander Astin's view of community colleges not being real colleges. Hagedorn (2010) points out

“community colleges entered the postsecondary sphere as ‘marginal’ institutions” and “have retained the status of a disconnected underclass of institutions” (p. 189). As a result, community colleges have often been the subject of hurtful humor within the greater academic community and general public (Hagedorn, 2010).

Changing Aspects of Community Colleges

The following are several aspects of community colleges that have changed quite a bit during the past twenty-five years: increased use of part-time faculty, increased use of technology, increased need for remedial education, and the increased offering of undergraduate degrees.

Increased Use of Part-Time Faculty

While the presence of part-time faculty has long been part of all institutional sectors (Clark, 2011), the use of a part-time faculty has grown “greatly during the last two decades as a form of mobile and inexpensive labor” (p. 27). Levin, Kater, and Wagoner (2006) describe it as “both strikingly and significantly, over the past thirty years, part-time instructors have become the majority of community college faculty” (p. 81). Meanwhile, Clark (2011) describes the use of part-timers as a “deteriorating situation for staff in community colleges” (p. 27), due to the marginal institutional influence part-time faculty typically possess.

While the use of part-time instructors provides college leaders with a flexible and inexpensive workforce, it also presents a number of challenges (Umbach, Lattuca, Museus, Hartley, & Melguizo, 2011). One such challenge pertains to the *Learning Revolution*, which is rapidly spreading across all sectors of education (O’Banion, 2011). O’Banion (2011) argues, “the community college has become the most visible crucible in which the concepts and practices of this revolution are being forged” (p. 166). In order for this revolution to be effective teachers need to become designers of learning environments and apply the best active learning

methods (Barr & Tagg, 1995). Part-time faculty likely will not have the time, resources, or institutional commitment to make such a paradigm shift, or at least not as effectively as a more stable fulltime staff likely would.

Increased Use of Technology

Another change in community colleges pertains to their increased use of technology. Technology has seen widespread use throughout higher education largely due to the changing nature of students. Students today often “come to school powered-up and wired with the newest technologies available” (Roblyer, McDaniel, Webb, Herman, & Witty, 2010, p. 134), and they “expect to be able to work, learn, and study whenever and wherever they want to” (Johnson, Adams, & Cummins, 2012, p. 4). Thirty-two percent of students in higher education take at least one course online resulting in 6.7 million students enrolled in online education (Allen & Seaman, 2013). The Obama Administration has called on community colleges to develop more online course materials, such as interactive tutors and simulations (White House, 2014). For the over two-thirds of community college students attending part-time, while also working or raising a family or both (Hagedorn, 2010), online courses provide a flexible and convenient learning opportunity.

Another factor contributing to the increased use of technology is the pursuit of cost-savings and efficiencies. Digital technologies change the very nature of work itself (Bastedo, 2012). If not readily apparent by the title of its report, *Transforming American Education: Learning Powered by Technology*, the U.S. Department of Education (2010) clearly sees technology as a means of changing the nature of education. The report claims that although most American organizations make improving productivity a daily focus, “education has not, however, incorporated many of the practices other sectors regularly use to improve productivity

and manage costs, nor has it leveraged technology to enable or enhance them” (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, p. xiv).

Increased Need for Remedial Education

The open admissions policies of community colleges, discussed earlier, have resulted in accessible higher education opportunities for the most diverse student population in the history of higher education (Boggs, 2004). Their open-door policy has also resulted in a heavier burden of remedial education needed by students than found at institutions higher up in the institutional hierarchy (Clark & Clark, 2008; Lattuca & Stark, 2009). Over two-thirds of recent high school graduates arrive at college in need of remedial education (Umbach, Lattuca, Museus, Hartley, & Melguizo, 2011). The inadequate high school preparation many students receive represents an obstacle to effective teaching and learning at the college level (Immerwahr, 2002).

In recent years, community colleges have struggled with meeting the demand of increasing numbers of students in need of remedial education (Boggs, 2004). Clark (2011) describes the effects of remedial education on the teaching task at community colleges as being “closer to secondary-school, particularly during the first year of college, than what is found in selective universities” (p. 25). The burdens of remedial education within community colleges not only affect institutional prestige, often resulting from lower graduation rates as compared to elite institutions (Lax, 2012), they also affect the enthusiasm of faculty faced with teaching often-unprepared students (Tinberg, Duffy, & Mino, 2007).

Increased Offering of Undergraduate Degrees

Another recent change in community colleges pertains to the number of institutes offering undergraduate degrees. Michigan recently became the twenty-first state to grant its community colleges legal authority to issue bachelor’s degrees (Fain, 2013). Eight years prior to

Michigan's legislative action, only eleven states granted such legal authority (Fain, 2013). The recent increase in the number of community colleges approved to confer baccalaureate degrees makes defining what a community college is even more challenging (Hagedorn, 2010).

Hagedorn (2010) argues, "the emergence of the community college baccalaureate threatens to blur the thickest border separating the 2- and 4-year sectors—the awarding of the bachelor's degree" (p. 199). Proponents of community colleges offering bachelor's degrees state they will only offer degrees where needed to meet unmet needs (Fain, 2013). However, advocates of four-year universities are concerned about duplication of efforts potentially resulting from two-year colleges also offering bachelor degrees, and also view it as likely being harmful to collaboration efforts between two and four year institutes (Fain, 2013). Meanwhile, uncertainty exists as to whether or not four-year degrees offered by community colleges will be viewed as having the same legitimacy as those offered by traditional four-year institutes (Hagedorn, 2010).

Role of Institutional Leaders

The changes discussed in the prior section present community college leaders with a variety of challenges and opportunities. How college leaders respond to the changes will determine whether they have a positive or negative impact on their institutions and the quality of education they offer.

Unlike at the top of the higher education institutional hierarchy where faculty leadership and governance are strong, community colleges are very managerial, and instructors at such institutions often feel they have little authority (Clark & Clark, 2008). An affect of the managerial approach to governance is the move towards utilizing more adjunct faculty, which in turn limits or removes all together the faculty from governance (Giroux, 2002).

As discussed earlier, community colleges have experienced a large increase in the number of part-time faculty employed (Levin, Kater, & Wagoner, 2006), resulting in a detrimental effect on faculty (Clark, 2011). To college leaders, the use of cheap and flexible part-time labor may seem like a good idea, given community colleges often need to quickly incorporate program and instructional practices demanded by local industry (Lattuca & Stark, 2009). It is reasonable for community colleges to utilize part-time faculty to an extent in order to remain responsive to their communities, but an overreliance can result in a faculty feeling exploited and demoralized (Giroux, 2002). Community college leaders must also consider the impact part-time instructors have on the academic planning, a question that remains unanswered (Lattuca & Stark, 2009).

Community college leaders will play an important role in determining and supporting the overall mission of their institutes. As more and more two-year colleges begin to offer bachelor degrees, institutional leaders will have to consider if the new degree options will negatively impact support for students requiring special assistance (Hagedorn, 2010). As leaders push their institutions in new directions, such as more innovative use of technologies, they will have to ensure incentives align with goals or else risk employees shirking their responsibilities in achieving them (Lane, 2012). To effectively teach the growing number of online students requires technical skills that are likely new to educators (Collins & Halverson, 2009; Tennant, McMullen, & Kaczynski, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Faculty not only need to become literate in multiple media formats, but also need to be able to foster such digital literacy in new ways of teaching (Brown, 2006). Community college leaders can and should play a key role in making sure faculty have the resources and incentives needed to be successful.

Hagedorn (2010) believes “community colleges and their students will be best served by breaking out of the underclass status and entering that of respected co-existence within the postsecondary sector” (p. 194). The change in status Hagedorn desires for community colleges is likely not to come from a single leader or small group of leaders, but instead from a concerted effort across the community college sector. Levin, Kater, and Wagoner (2006) argue, “community college leaders at the institutional, state, and national levels as well as policymakers and legislators need to include community college faculty as colleagues in their deliberations and actions that influence the community college and its students” (p. x).

Policies and Initiatives to Improve Performance in the Years Ahead

Community colleges and their leadership face a multitude of challenges. Some of those challenges are a result of policies and initiatives aimed at improving performance in the coming years. These policies and initiatives, if properly implemented, could lead to improvements, but if improperly implemented could lead to undesired outcomes. A few policies and initiatives focused on improving performance in the years ahead are a culture of assessment and accountability, call for increased collaboration among institutes, and improved transfer and articulation agreements.

Culture of Assessment and Accountability

For over thirty years now, “state and federal policy makers have increasingly pressured higher education to create a culture of evidence and, specifically, to account for student learning” (Shavelson, 2007, p. 26). For example, President Obama has charged states with developing standards and assessments to measure 21st century skills, and to leverage technology in enhancing the quality and efficiency of higher education (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

While measuring performance is not inherently bad, the result of doing so may have unintended consequences. For example, an overemphasis on graduation rates may result in colleges admitting only students who are well-prepared to succeed, and serve as a distraction to focusing on the needs of increasingly diverse student population (Ruppert, 1997). Lax (2012) is concerned that an arbitrarily selected performance measurement, such as graduation rates, fails to take into account the diversity of community college student bodies and the diversity of learning goals.

Astin (1993) states, “clearly, traditional assessment practices in American higher education do not adequately reflect the multidimensionality of student outcomes” (p. 41). Student success at community colleges has multiple definitions, such as completing a degree, earning a certificate, and even simply completing a single course (Hagedorn, 2010). Identifying, agreeing on, and assigning priorities to complex learning outcomes, along with communicating those outcomes to government and the public, are very difficult tasks (Schmidlein & Berdahl, 2011). However, if community college leadership wants to ensure all that their institutes and students accomplish are reflected in assessment practices they must not shy away from such tasks.

Call For Increased Collaboration Among Institutes

State funding of higher education has been shrinking for quite some time (Boggs, 2004; Diamond, 2006; Immerwahr, 2002; Staley & Trinkle, 2011). As a higher education is viewed more as a personal and private investment (Boggs, 2004), state policymakers have “argued that students and their families should pay more of the cost of higher education” (p. 10). Decreases in public funding could and should result in different institutions being more inclined towards sharing resources.

Hagedorn (2010) has called for the sharing of technology resources and facilities between two and four year institutes to save money. The U.S. Department of Education (2010) views collaborative efforts across districts and states as one of the means to effectively leveraging technology to improve education. To help ensure the needs of their diverse student population continue to be met and their doors remain essentially open to all, community college leaders will have to carefully balance any cost efficiencies gained with any negative effects resulting from such actions.

Improved Transfer and Articulation Agreements

In recent years there has been a reemphasis of the role community colleges provide students wanting to transfer to four-year institutes (Altbach, 2001). Hagedorn (2010) has called for a “transfer policy redo” (p. 209). She also calls for articulation agreements to be written to reflect the flow of transfers from two-year to four year institutes and also the reciprocal (Hagedorn, 2010). Even clearly stated articulation agreements are only valuable if students are aware the agreements exist and have easy access to them (Hagedorn, 2010). The national college completion push has placed more pressure on community colleges to produce graduates (Fain, 2013). Clearer and more effectively disseminated transfer and articulation agreements could help increase the number of college graduates both community colleges and four-year colleges produce.

Conclusion

Since their inception at the start of the twentieth century, community colleges have been providing higher education opportunities to those who more costly and selective higher education institutional types are not an option. Unfortunately, community colleges do not command anywhere near the same high level of respect the top research universities and liberal

arts colleges do. Their inferior status is largely due to their focus on teaching and open admissions policies. Over the past twenty-five years or so, community colleges have experienced a number of changes, including an increased use of part-time faculty and technology, an increased need for remedial education, and the adding of undergraduate degrees to their academic offerings. The community college leadership, while quite managerial in nature, will likely be able to more effectively react to the changes occurring within their institutes if they include college faculty as colleagues in their decision making process. Policies and initiatives, such as accountability measures, collaborative efforts, and improved articulation agreements, are being put forth to improve the performance of community colleges. To ensure the policies and initiatives have their intended effect, institutional leadership must take an active role in ensuring performance gains are not offset by negative effects to quality and access.

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