

An Executive Brief

# The Coming Tsunami

*Leadership Challenges for Community Colleges*



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*"It was the best of times,  
it was the worst of times..."*

Thus did Charles Dickens begin *A Tale of Two Cities*. In many ways, community colleges face this ambivalent situation today. In the past 15 years, America's Presidents have again and again identified community colleges as the best hope for the future of our youth, and have made federal funding available to support new educational and workforce initiatives. Yet never before have community colleges faced such serious challenges as they do today.

The paradigm shift embodied in the learning college movement, coupled with the impact of the Internet and information technology, has vastly changed how we administer and teach. Learning is now a 24/7 proposition, and the relationship between teacher and student has been radically altered. Community colleges are changing, perhaps more rapidly than the colleges would prefer.

The National Council for Continuing Education & Training is one of the oldest affiliate councils of the American Association of Community Colleges. Not long ago, its members were relegated to the fringe of college life, identified in one famous article as the "shadow college." Today, its membership is growing, as they are asked to take on new responsibilities. Because they interact with the community so often, they are more likely to ask the hard questions that need to be raised. They are more likely to see what is on the horizon. They are no longer on the fringe.

It is one thing to write a paper on issues for which there is considerable documentation. University libraries are filled with theses, dissertations and other tomes that are filled with footnotes, graphs, charts and other minutiae, usually cited only when another entry to the list of arcane scholarship is added to the stacks or microfiche. This paper is about one possible scenario for the future. It is not a work of scholarship, but of opinion and concern. The following sources provided information, perspective and ideas for this paper:

National Association of States Budget Officers (NASBO); Community College Research Center; National Education Association; American Association of Retired People (AARP); Bureau of Labor Statistics; American Management Association; National Commission on Accountability in Higher Education; Center for Economic Policy and Research; State Higher Education Executive Officers; Congressional Budget Office; American Enterprise Institute; *Eight Strategic Questions for Community Colleges* (monograph published by NCCET and SunGard Higher Education); *New Game, New Rules – Strategically Positioning Your College to Meet The Workforce Development Challenge* (NCCET Abstract); and *The Perfect Storm* (ETS - Educational Testing Services monograph).

Finally, we wish to acknowledge the generosity and commitment of Cem Erdem and Augusoft, Inc. for underwriting this document. If technology has changed the way in which we facilitate learning and manage our institutions, then surely Augusoft has been pivotal in helping community colleges keep ahead of the multiple challenges of today and tomorrow through their commitment to lifelong learning. Enjoy this monograph, and keep your eyes on the horizon!

William J. Flynn  
Managing Director, NCCET

# Storm Warnings

## The Coming Tsunami

A tsunami is a series of waves created when an external force, such as an earthquake, volcanic eruption or landslide, significantly moves a body of water. As populations struggle to deal with the immediate effects of the initial disaster, the potential aftereffect - the tsunami - is neglected.

At sea, a tsunami's wave speed and height remain nearly constant and barely perceptible. Only when it reaches a coastline does the true force and magnitude of its power become apparent, inundating and flooding coastal areas, destroying long - established structures, stripping beaches of sand that may have taken decades to accumulate, and undermining trees and other coastal vegetation. It is both a breathtaking and a terrifying sight to behold, one that moves silently and virtually unnoticed until it strikes.

There is a tsunami approaching community colleges.

## Defining The Danger

Forward thinking college leaders with an eye on the horizon looking for challenges with which they must deal, would be wise to look out for these forces:

- The long range impact of static or declining funding for public education, exacerbated by increasing federal deficits;
- Increased calls for accountability in education, most recently seen in challenges to current accreditation standards;
- A generation of retirees seeking retraining, recreational and avocational learning opportunities; and
- A continued preoccupation with academic credit and the transfer function, thus effectively stifling comprehensive workforce development and negating the comprehensive mission of the community college

*America's Perfect Storm*, a perceptive and challenging report recently issued by Educational Testing Services (ETS), identified three trends that, when taken together, could produce a confluence of forces that could seriously impact our country. The forces - divergent skill distributions among US population groups, a changing economy, and demographic trends of a growing, more diverse population, could produce a society with greater inequity in wages and wealth, leading to increasing social and political polarization.

The report's title was taken from the successful book *The Perfect Storm: A True Story of Men Against the Sea* by Sebastian Junger. The book recounted the loss of the Gloucester sword-fishing boat Andrea Gail off the coast of Nova Scotia in 1991. A convergence of warm air combining with cool air from another front, coupled with humidity from an approaching hurricane, produced rare conditions that created high winds and waves, and extreme danger to ships at sea caught in the deadly combination. Shorelines were battered and lives were lost. The ETS report argues that, unlike the storm recounted in Junger's book, the storm it describes will not dissipate, instead producing an increasing danger to America unless remedial action is taken.

In this paper we are not talking about a storm, a tidal wave or even Tidal Wave II. We refer to a convergence of other trends, patterns and challenges, that when taken together, could mean the potential erosion or decline of an educational system that deals with almost half of America's undergraduates. Each force by itself is serious. Should they converge, they may become an unseen, yet overwhelming challenge that our colleges may not be able to withstand. We are not talking about a storm, but something worse.



Each of these forces has the potential to severely diminish a college's ability to respond. Should several of them arrive at the same time, the result could be devastating. Here is a brief analysis of each challenge and the tsunami that could prove to be deadly.

### Follow The Money

Community colleges have always been at the end of the funding line when competing with four-year colleges, universities and K-12 programs. Funding formulate vary from state to state, ranging from dependence on the local tax base to legislatively - driven state boards providing allocations. As costs increase, colleges become increasingly dependent on tuition and fees to make up for inadequate state and local funding, thus placing a greater burden on both parent and student.

The pattern of declining state support is not new. States spent just under 10 percent of their budgets on higher education in 1980. By 2000, it had dropped to 7 percent. At the same time, the net price of the cost of a college education (tuition minus grant aid) increased more for students attending public institutions than private ones. Following September 11, the economy's decline made it more difficult for states to meet ongoing obligations such as rapidly increasing Medicaid costs. During FY 2002, 39 states reduced their enacted budgets by about \$15 billion. Many states used across-the-board budget cuts; reserves declined precipitously. Legislators had to choose between spending cuts and tax increases. Guess what won.

Higher education is somewhat unique in that it can always defer expansion in tough times, while mandated programs - elementary and secondary education, welfare and its reform, prisons and low-income health care needs - take precedence. While there have been



some small victories in recent years, publicly funded community colleges should prepare for several years of uncertain growth or inflation-adjusted declines in state support. Tuition and fee increases can provide some fiscal relief, but the political limits of this strategy may be quickly reached when tuition payers and voters suffer from stagnant incomes or unemployment. And higher tuition without increased need-based student aid reduces access to students who need education the most.

Yet there are few alternatives. Colleges must cope with the cost of technology support for the virtual

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dimension of their offerings, as well as replacement costs for equipment and software with a short shelf life. In unionized environments, multi-year contracts and a need to deliver salary increases to constituencies drive operating costs upward without measurable return on investment. Anyone who says the future is bright hasn't been paying attention.

### The Coming Funding Crisis

No issue has dominated political debate in recent years more than the Iraq war. Due to partisan rancor on both sides of the political spectrum, there has

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been practically no meaningful debate on the actual cost of the war and its ultimate cost to the American taxpayer.

Among the many mistakes committed by the architects of the Iraq war, it's been generally overlooked that no cost-benefit analysis was done in the days leading up to the invasion. As of this writing, the direct cost of the Iraq war is approaching a half trillion dollars. The Pentagon is spending about \$2 billion a week, according to the Congressional Budget Office. There is no end in sight.

A sustained increase in defense spending over the next ten years, combined with a "no new taxes" mantra that has permeated political debate since the Reagan administration, will eventually have severe consequences for the American economy. Higher interest rates and inflation will escalate calls for government spending cuts. The current housing slump is beginning to send shockwaves throughout the economy. A weakened dollar in international markets will mean more imports and fewer exports, more jobs lost to globalization, and continued shifting of responsibility and cost from the federal to the state level.

If states are impacted by diminished federal assistance and a stagnant national economy, they will face tough choices as revenues decline and mandated entitlement programs continue to increase in cost. Community colleges may be caught in a battle against more powerful constituencies, all struggling to maintain and increase their subsidy. This is the funding challenge, slowly growing in size and ferocity, which will contribute to the potential tsunami that may break on higher education's shore.



## Demanding More, Giving Less

In 2004, the State Higher Education Executive Officers launched a National Commission on Accountability in Higher Education, co-chaired by former Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley and former Governor of Oklahoma, Frank Keating. The Commission reviewed ways that the states have improved performance in higher education and their experience in using accountability systems toward that end. However, some disturbing facts emerged from the Commission's research:

- For the first time in decades, the United States no longer led the developed world in the rate of college completion;
- Large developing economies, especially China and India, were successfully educating thousands of scientists and engineers in order to compete in the global economy;
- Four out of ten students in colleges and universities fail to graduate within six years;
- One-fourth of low-income students in the top quartile of academic ability and preparation failed to enroll in college within two years of high school graduation;
- Higher education costs had grown persistently faster than the consumer price index;



- State support and federal programs like Pell Grants were increasingly falling behind enrollment demand and inflation; and
- A large percentage of our workforce in science and technology now came from highly motivated and able international students.

A subsequent report contained a series of recommendations designed to improve student preparation, public investment in educational priorities, teaching and research, cost-effectiveness, and the availability of key data.

The Commission called the current system of accountability “cumbersome, confusing, and inefficient,” and said it “fails to answer key questions, provides excessive misleading data, and overburdens institutions by requiring them to report it.” Noting that, “too often accountability is a battleground between educators and policy makers,” the Commission called upon business leaders, state and federal policy makers, educational leaders, and faculty and students to set and meet challenging goals, respect the boundaries between different roles, and work towards common purposes. It asked

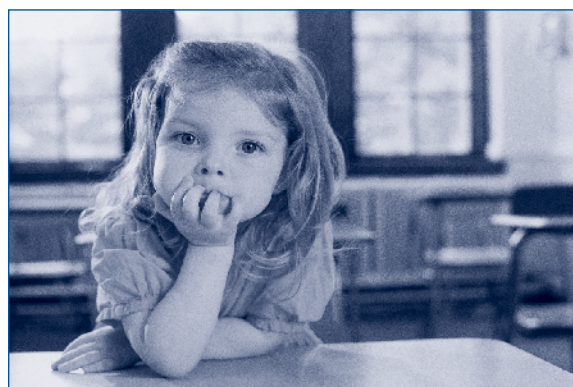
## How responsive has **your** institution been to the call for increased accountability?

these stakeholders to adopt accountability measures that would “build confidence, sustain improvement, and extend to future generations the benefits of a great American system of higher education.”

How much has been accomplished since that report was issued? How responsive has your institution been to the call for increased accountability?

## The Resistance Movement

Think about community colleges for a moment. What are some of their proudest attributes? Let’s start with the concept of shared governance, which implies that all campus constituencies have an active role to play in determining the goals, direction and operation of the college. No other entity in society embraces this collectivist approach to managing its affairs. But truly shared governance is more often honored in



the breach than in the observance. Faculty zealously guard the curriculum as their exclusive property, but they can, and often do, selectively determine what role they play in institutional management decisions on a case-by-case basis, effectively holding a veto over meaningful change. Significant intellectual energy and precious time is committed to positioning and posturing within the campus political climate. Reaching a critical mass of consensus requires long deliberation and consultation. With every hand on the tiller, the collegiate ship of state does not change course easily or often. Is this the best model to respond to external calls for change and increased accountability?

In reality, both college administrators and faculty are prisoners of a system, structure, and history that prevent meaningful collaboration between and among campus stakeholders in order to answer to governmental funding sources that want more return on investment. Creative, innovative teachers are still held hostage by the Carnegie unit and by the recurring rhythms of the academic year. Everyone - faculty, administrators, support staff, trustees – are caught up in defending a system not of their creation. It is the system in which they were educated. It is the system that annoys or infuriates them when, as parents, they see their children endure some of its inanities. Yet when they are inside it, when they work in it, when they teach in it, they become the system, and - amazingly - they resist changing it.

This institutional inertia prevents colleges from being responsive entities ready to accept calls for greater accountability. If we could redesign our community colleges today by changing their organizational structures, functions, processes, governance, mission, values, the way in which teachers and students interact – if we could change their individual and unique organizational culture - how many institutions would simply duplicate what they already have? Could your college meaningfully change?

Historically, quality in higher education has been defined as adherence to self-defined standards, with accrediting agencies overseeing academic enterprises. While other countries regulate higher education through a government ministry, America has opted for a system of voluntary self-regulation. Over time, criticism about the relatively static rate of change in higher education, low completion rates and poor workforce preparation has increased.

## The Latest Challenge

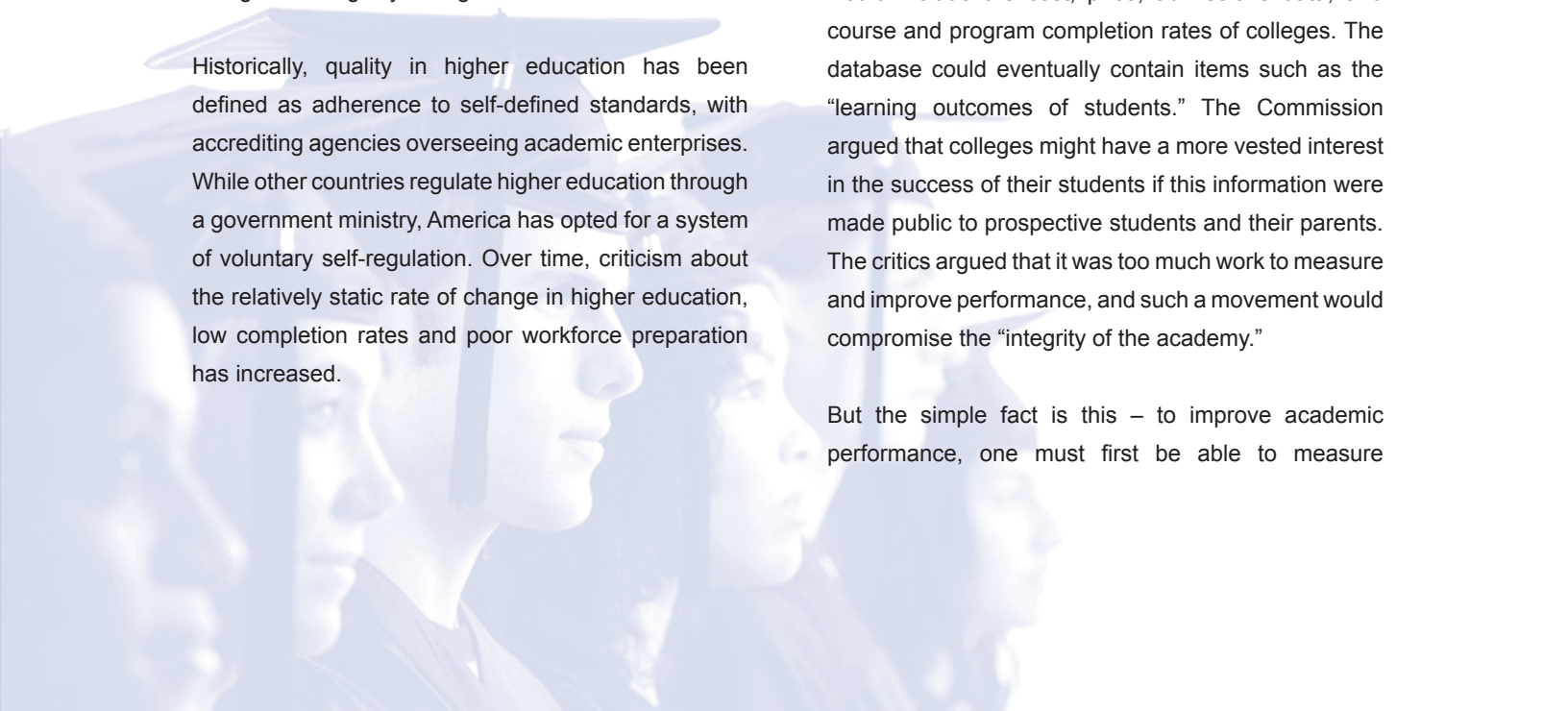
Enter the Spellings Commission, a group charged with recommending a national strategy for reforming post-secondary education, with a primary focus on how well colleges and universities are preparing students for the 21st-century workplace. A significant motivation behind the Spellings Commission's formation was the fear that the American higher education system was deteriorating and failing to prepare the American workforce for the rigors and competitiveness of a global marketplace. Not unexpectedly, the Commission's report was met with sustained and vocal criticism from the education

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establishment. Suspicion of an Administration that created the testing regimen of No Child Left Behind was strong.

The greatest concern was focused on a Commission proposal that would create a public database, where statistics and other information about colleges and universities could be viewed by anyone in order to provide necessary accountability. The information that would be made available in the proposed database would include the cost, price, admissions data, and course and program completion rates of colleges. The database could eventually contain items such as the "learning outcomes of students." The Commission argued that colleges might have a more vested interest in the success of their students if this information were made public to prospective students and their parents. The critics argued that it was too much work to measure and improve performance, and such a movement would compromise the "integrity of the academy."

But the simple fact is this – to improve academic performance, one must first be able to measure



academic performance. Current systems have limited ability to obtain reliable information on a student's progress and attainment.

Colleges and universities provide the graduate and the employer one piece of documentation to validate that the bearer is an educated person – the academic transcript. And what does it contain? Documentation of completion of a series of courses, the time frame in which they were taken, and a letter grade attached to each course. No wonder employers distrust the transcript.

What a college transcript *doesn't* contain is what is really needed to validate and document a graduate's education: what was learned; how it was learned; how much learning was retained; how that learning was related to any prior learning; how learning in one course related to learning in other courses; what knowledge, skills, competencies, or abilities were acquired while attending that institution; or the graduate's ability to apply that knowledge in the world of work.

Employers are the true customers of colleges because they are asked to invest in a product – the graduate. Employers repeatedly indicate that many new graduates lack the critical thinking, writing and problem solving skills needed in today's workplace. Is

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it any wonder that they support changes to a closed system that resists any external scrutiny, a system they see as failing to produce the next generation of their employees?

There is a dangerous link between the funding challenge referenced earlier and increased calls for



accountability, a quid pro quo that legislatures and governmental agencies could use to leverage unwilling colleges into cooperation. Publicly funded institutions need to be accountable to their principal stakeholder – the public. Should colleges continue their resistance to change and accountability measures, they risk exacerbating an already tentative relationship with their benefactor, and the second element of the tsunami will move into place.

### **Meet The New Student – Same As The Old Student**

While our educational system is structured and funded to provide an education for its citizens, the reality is that our government provides students with an educational experience only once. There is precious little funding for returning workers to upgrade skills and abilities.

Our aging population wants to enhance their skills and competencies, as well as energize their interests and passions. But there is little evidence that they want to go

through the hassle of pursuing another degree. They've been there, done that and with the aid of technology and courted by a new crop of competitors, they are seeking an active mental and physical lifestyle that community colleges may not be able to address. This is a potentially huge lifelong learning market that is mostly ignored by the marketing and recruitment mechanisms of our colleges, except on the periphery.



How big a market? The President of AARP recently described the baby boomer phenomenon – with its 76 million members - with these statistics:

- A baby boomer turns 50 every 7.5 seconds; and
- The size of the 50+ population will more than double over the next 35 years.

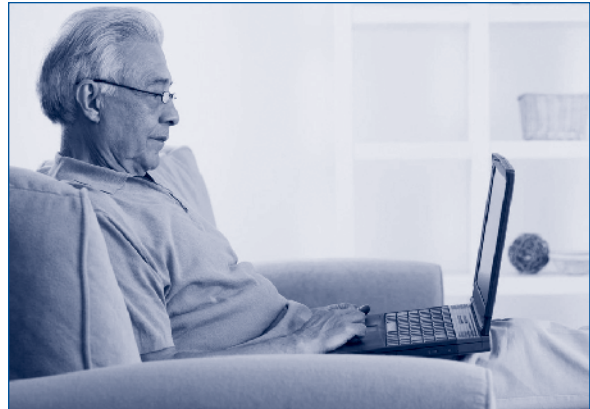
This is changing the fundamental age distribution in our population. In 1900, only 13 percent of the population was age 50 or over. In 2000, it was over 27 percent. And, by 2020, it will be over 35 percent. And the boomers don't intend to sit on the porch and watch the cars go by.

- 8 in 10 baby boomers plan to work at least part-time
- 5% anticipate working full-time at a new job or career
- 35% will work mainly for interest and enjoyment
- 23% will work mainly for the income
- 17% envision starting their own business

In recent years, the highest growth rate in the US workforce was among workers aged 55-64. In 2000, 13 percent of the workforce was 55 and older. By 2010, it will rise to 17 percent, almost 27 million workers. By 2015, nearly one in five workers will be 55 or older. Conversely, during that time, the number of younger workers, those aged 25-44, will actually decrease. There will be a critical shortage of qualified workers, ones with a solid track record, mature basic skills and a commitment to quality. There is a potentially huge retraining market awaiting the educational institutions that see and respond to the trend.

This pattern of demographics should be changing the way colleges deal with enrollments. Participation

rates and students' age distribution have changed significantly, particularly with the expansion of adult learners. Thirty-nine percent of students enrolled in degree-granting institutions are above age 25, including 18 percent over 35 years of age. A casual visitor to night and weekend classes at the local community college may think he is in an adult education center rather than the next step after high school. The average



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age of the student body continues to increase. Are we ready to deal with this diversity of interests, goals and attitudes?

The baby boomer phenomena is just starting to reach its peak and it will have significant impact on community colleges and their ability to provide educational services to all citizens. As Peter Drucker once observed: "The extreme youth culture of the last 40 years was based on demographics. It's an old rule that the population group that is both the biggest and growing the fastest determines the mood." Due to continuing medical advances, people turning 50 today probably have half their adult lives ahead of them. What will they do with all that free time?

Plenty. Mature Americans make up 35 percent of the population, have 77 percent of the financial assets and 57 percent of the discretionary income. They see retirement as a transition rather than a termination. Marketers have traditionally thought of life after 50 as one of diminishment – retirees, some living in “empty nests,” living on a modest pension augmented by

It is doubtful that our current infrastructure can support the massive influx of a multigenerational, technologically sophisticated student population seeking learning other than through a formal degree program.

Just as our society is becoming a service economy – the manufacturing and services sectors of our econ-

omy have essentially reversed their positions of importance in the past 50 years – so will community

## Are we ready to deal with this **diversity** of interest, goals and attitudes?

Social Security. But that stereotype no longer is valid. It is more likely true that people will experience more life transitions in their fifties than in any other decade. Baby boomers are leading a demographic revolution that is changing the way we think about aging, as well as a consumer and workforce revolution that is changing the way America will ultimately do business.

colleges come to be seen as service - oriented institutions. And ultimately, if adult learners see themselves as customers - paying the bills and having high expectation of receiving solid educational value for money, they will go – or log on – to the institution that fulfills a lifelong learning need.

Community colleges are looking at the possibility of serving – perhaps for the second or third time – a generation of adults who are informed consumers – and voters. Are they up to the challenge?

### **Learning Is For Life**

We are increasingly a nation of lifelong learners. Beginning with kids coming to college campuses for summer community services workshops and seminars that enhance their maturation, through senior citizens seeking enrichment through noncredit programs and activities, community colleges are asked to serve the entire population. Workforce members of all ages come to us for refresher courses, skills upgrades, and retraining. As technology impacts our lives, our jobs and our society, and as the very definition of what we call community changes, we need to become more than just community colleges - we must become the learning centers of our communities, responsive to all citizens.



Colleges that have a blind eye to serving this substantial constituency are ignoring the potential of added revenue and greater community support in order to cling to the old paradigm of being a transfer and degree granting institution, thus alienating an affluent population that votes for trustees and in bond elections. Ignoring this potentially huge market contributes to the tsunami effect.



## The Workforce Challenge

The era of workforce development has been a mixed blessing for community colleges. The movement to “get the federal government off our backs” essentially relocated the burden of support to the state level, where the enabling Workforce Investment Act placed a lot of responsibility, but not necessarily adequate funding. While colleges were not identified as mandated players in the WIA scenario, nonetheless when the initiative got to the local level, they were asked to respond, develop plans, hire staff and implement initiatives many felt were not part of the core mission of the college. In response to these new mandates, community colleges quickly needed to develop a coherent response to a federal program that was anything but coherent.

The Workforce Investment Act was an attempt to respond to some disturbing trends in our society:

- Between 1950 and 1997, the proportion of American jobs classified as unskilled dropped precipitously from 80% to approximately 15%. More importantly, it was projected to drop still further in coming years;
- 70% of new jobs would require significant post secondary education;
- By 2028 there would be 19 million more jobs than workers sufficiently prepared to fill them;
- According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, over the next decade the US economy will create more than 10 million creative sector jobs. Already, this sector accounts for more than \$2 trillion—nearly half—of all wages and salaries paid in the United States;



- An American Management Association study reported that 40% of job applicants lacked necessary workplace skills; and
- 69% of CEOs surveyed by Coopers and Lybrand cited employee skill deficiencies as a barrier to growth.

While solutions to these and other trends would ultimately be driven by local and regional considerations, community colleges were slow to recognize that continuing education and training were rapidly becoming a major growth industry. Traditional degree-centered offerings were just one dimension – a valued one to be sure – of a college’s response to a complex matrix of WIA requirements. To train the entire workforce in a community required a broader perspective than was traditionally practiced.

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a lifelong learning need.**

Colleges were very good at dealing with those individuals that NCCET called, in a published abstract, the “*emerging workforce*,” those individuals typically 22 years of age or younger, who were preparing for their first full-time employment. They were the students who came to community colleges from high school, often with few if any career plans. They experimented with courses, vacillated between transfer and occupational choices, and eventually settled on a prescribed program of study that would lead to employment. They were more likely to be day students, possibly holding a part time job, and in many cases, did not have the necessary academic skills to advance quickly to a four-year institution.

But were *they* the workforce? Technically, they hadn’t even entered the workforce, but if you examined the resources, staffing and programs they were offered while in school,



social and financial situation by switching jobs. Their motivation is high and their time frame for re-entering or moving up in the workforce is short.

**Entrepreneurial workers** - people who operate or own a small to medium-size business. They have discovered the local community college substitutes beautifully as their local “in-house” training center, and take advantage of a variety of available programs, offerings and services, including community services programs, weekend college, fast-track courses or non-credit workshops. With limited resources at their disposal, they seek a quick and economical return on investment, and the local community college provides it.

**Incumbent workers** - those who are currently employed and need additional training to maintain their current job, or those who seek additional training for promotional opportunity. They

often rely on company sponsored professional development programs to access educational opportunities, and have a

strong desire to attain new skills at an accelerated pace. Increasingly, community colleges interact with this segment through customized contract training.

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it would seem that this segment was the only one that mattered to the college.

But to truly serve the workforce in their communities, colleges need to consider its other segments:

**Transitional workers** - those who are moving from one career to another for a variety of reasons. They could be laid off from previous employment, returning to the job market after time out for family reasons, or upwardly mobile individuals seeking to improve their

### Increasing Challenges

In *The End of Work*, Jeremy Rifkin convincingly argued that rethinking the very nature of work would be the most pressing concern facing society in the coming years. If this is true, and if community colleges are asked to provide training, education and certification in a society struggling with this monumental issue, it



is time to ask some fundamental questions about how colleges position themselves to meet this challenge.

It is time to question what a contemporary work-related curriculum should be, and why it takes so long to conceive, design, seek approval for, and implement it. It is time to challenge the rationale for designing and staffing our student support programs to serve primarily recent high school graduates when the average age of our overall student body creeps toward 30 plus. It is time to do a gap analysis between what the college's mission statement says it does, and what it is actually doing.

In an era of declining resources, growing enrollments and increased stress, community colleges are asked to deliver technical and occupational education to students in the emerging workforce, take on economic development and contract training responsibilities for the incumbent worker, meet the needs of both the entrepreneur and small business owner, modularize credit curricula and deliver it in non-traditional modes, and absorb new groups of transitional workers into an already heavy caseload of undergraduates. They must do all this while being flexible and responsive, operating under labor contracts, staffing patterns and education codes developed in an era untouched by the Internet or national workforce legislation. They must satisfy the increasing demand for credentialed education and training that falls outside the traditional college calendar and model for measuring completion, while working within organizational cultures deeply rooted in many long-standing academic traditions, slow to respond to new initiatives perceived as being externally driven.

If colleges cannot meet these demands by becoming flexible, responsive and service-oriented to all segments of the workforce in their community, if they cannot get their houses in order to meet the workforce

challenge, another dimension is added to the forces that may lead to the tsunami.

### **Is There Hope?**

Is America's education system antiquated? Can we meet the needs of a multigenerational, technologically sophisticated citizenry with structures and approaches that are centuries old? We boast of the best education system in the world, yet our own internal indicators of

## **We boast of the best education system in the world, yet our own internal indicators of student success are dismayingly.**

student success are dismayingly. Community colleges say they are comprehensive, yet an analysis of their budgets, staffing, programs and services shows an overwhelming preference to serving only one segment. They do not walk the talk.

The so-called "knowledge migration" to the United States has slowed down tremendously since 9/11 because of restrictive governmental policies. The best and brightest from all over the world once came here for higher education, many choosing to subsequently live and work here. But now we are losing the brainpower we used to attract. Today, international students are choosing other countries in which to study. In 2003, the growth rate of foreign student enrollments fell from 6.4 percent to 0.6 percent and in 2004 and 2005 there was negative growth rate. Our national debt grows at a historic rate while our economic leadership is being challenged from all sides. The strength of the dollar continues to decline. The Internet, global communications technology and outsourcing allow low paying service jobs to be sent overseas. The playing field is being leveled. The rest of the world is catching up.

To meet the needs of today's multiple generations, to train and retrain adults and create an agile workforce, to regain the international leadership we have squandered, a system must be built that is different

from the one originally designed to serve an agrarian economy. We must design a system that is a true lifelong learning system.

It's never too soon or too late for learning. More than anything else, lifelong learning is attitudinal. Ideally, you can and should be open to new ideas, decisions, skills or behaviors as long as you live. A lifelong learning system should provide citizens with learning opportunities at all ages and in numerous contexts: at work, at home and through leisure activities, not just through K-12 or higher education or corporate training. In later life, especially in retirement, continued learning takes diverse forms, crossing traditional academic bounds and including recreational activities. With the acceleration of scientific and technological progress, lifelong learning becomes even more essential. Knowledge and skills initially



Yes, it will mean change. Colleges will need to adopt a Lifelong Learning Management System, a truly comprehensive infrastructure that will support their unique business needs internally at the same time providing training and growth experiences for citizens time and time again, documenting knowledge, skills and competencies

throughout a lifetime of interactions. It will be a new way of doing business, implementing a system that will provide a means of articulating institutional, classroom and personal learning

outcomes at all levels as well as a way to consistently assess performance toward those objectives, a system that will serve our colleges and citizens well from recruitment through retirement and beyond. We need the right tools to do our job. The traditional academic approach or the systems and tools designed for that environment do not answer today's rapidly changing demands of our customers.

We said at the beginning that a tsunami is a series of waves brought about by external events, often unrelated, that when taken together can be devastating. Each force we have discussed – funding problems, accountability issues, new populations to serve and workforce development – may be dealt with effectively when taken

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acquired in the traditional educational system are no longer sufficient to sustain a subsequent professional career spanning four or five decades.

Who is better positioned to rise to the challenge of creating a lifelong learning system than America's community colleges? To do so, we must examine and change the institutional priorities that marginalize lifelong learning and continuing education programs despite the evidence of growing popularity nationwide. We must stop paying lip service to workforce development and actually develop the entire workforce. We must continuously assess our own performance as well as student performance, thus effectively responding to accountability challenges. We must earn the respect and support of our communities by serving all citizens.



separately. But should they come together, it is unlikely that community colleges as we know them, will be able to compete.

If our college leaders are the stewards of their institutions and the designers of their future, their vision must extend beyond the limitations imposed by a “we’ve always done it that way” mentality and become strong advocates for providing lifelong learning for our citizens. By becoming a lifelong learning institution, by valuing all dimensions of the learning experience, not just the credit experience, colleges can increase their revenue, build community support, respond effectively to oversight and truly serve all segments of the workforce.

Starting a campus-wide dialogue on developing a sensible, cost effective and institution-wide response to the demands of workforce legislation should be a first step. A clear understanding of the implications of accountability issues should be demanded of all campus stakeholders, and they should be challenged to develop lucid and documented responses to these challenges. Preferences for serving old market segments, clinging to outmoded organizational structures, and continuing turf wars and caste systems on campus must be replaced by an institutional strategic plan to meet current and future demands. Meeting new challenges with old responses and structures is not the best way to insure success – or even survival.

All of us have a stake in ensuring that America is a society ready to be competitive in a global economy. A workforce educated and trained for life is necessary and essential for us to meet that competition. Given the challenges we face as a nation in a complex and dangerous world, we can no longer afford to accept the status quo. It is time to step back, take a hard look at how we position and organize ourselves, and get our houses in order – before these forces combine to create the tsunami that could engulf us.

## About the Author

**William J. Flynn** has compiled 33 years experience working as faculty and administrator in community colleges in Maryland, New Jersey, Arizona, Ohio and California. In 2001, he retired after 12 years of service at Palomar College in San Marcos, California where he was Dean of the Division of Community Learning Resources.

For the National Council for Continuing Education & Training (NCCET), he has served as State Liaison, Regional Director on the NCCET Board, National Conference Director and Publications Editor. In 1998, the Council gave him its Award for National Exemplary Leadership. In 2001, he became the Managing Director of NCCET. For the past four years he has chaired the Coalition of Affiliated Councils of the American Association of Community Colleges.

He has served as Executive Producer and moderator for 2 live national teleconferences on PBS Adult Learning Services, produced the annual North American Conference on the Learning Paradigm, held in San Diego 1997 – 2001, produces conferences, institutes and colloquia for NCCET, and co-chaired the first two Learning Summit Conferences for the League for Innovation in the Community College.

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**Cem Erdem** is founder, President and CEO of Augusoft, Inc., the first software company to establish web-based lifelong learning systems for the higher educational community. Augusoft today celebrates over 13 years of innovation under his leadership.

Erdem, a Turkish born native left Hilton Corporation in 1994 for the United States with the fascination of the Internet and the learning possibilities it could bring to people and businesses. Erdem’s foresight and vision to advance and improve the delivery of Lifelong Learning for everyone have been central to the success of Augusoft’s products and services.

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