

Doctoral Comprehensive Examination Question:

In an article that appeared in a special supplement to *The Chronicle* in 2004, six experts delineated the biggest challenges facing community colleges for the coming decade.

Using a review of the literature on community colleges, address the following:

(a) Choosing Among Competing Agendas; (b) Meeting the Needs of a Changing Society; and, (c) More Students and Less Money.

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Doctoral Comprehensive Examination Response:

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Issues of the Community College System of Education

The community college system of education – which consists of junior, community, and technical colleges – is an integral part of higher education fraught with challenges and opportunities. Milliron & Wilson (2004) suggested that “if they didn’t exist ... we’d have to invent them” (p.22); Eaton (2006) recommended to accrediting organizations that they “...do not [step] away from the historic community college commitment to access ...[this] would be a sad development for all of us and millions of students we serve” (p. 92); Honeyman and Sullivan (2006) suggested to Florida delegates that “to facilitate discussion and tackle these substantive policy issues” (p. 178) was critical to solving the pressing issues facing America’s community colleges; and, Milliron and E. de los Santos (2004) contended that “many community colleges have become a nexus of lifelong learning in their communities” (p.106). Additionally, Franco (2000) suggested that:

Ultimately, community colleges, in taking stock at the turn of a new century, have to determine their own developmental trajectory. By developing sustainable service-learning partnerships with K-12 schools, community-based organizations, and universities, community colleges can genuinely democratize higher education, the communities they serve, and the students they educate. (p. 135)

As the literature suggested, there are many pressing and competing issues in higher education: as an integral part of the educational system, community colleges are not exempt. This paper categorically denoted the issues as: (1) challenges in the community college, and (2) opportunities in the community college. The issues addressed are funding, enrollment, competition, diversity, opportunities, workforce development, etc. Moreover, college readiness impacts many of the issues noted.

Challenges in the Community College

The community college system of education faces an onslaught of challenges in the next five years (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2004). Six views were discussed and delineated as: (1) choosing among competing agendas, (2) meeting the needs of a changing society, (3) staying focused on suitable missions, (4) more students and less money, (5) hiring employees and motivating them, and (6) fragmentation, isolation, and divisiveness. Furthermore, Evelyn (2004a) suggested that community colleges have an image problem; DeGenaro (2006) noted that “critical discussions of 2 year college mission[s] should also be fostered” (p. 544); and Eaton (2006) and Bragg (2001) argued the need to protect the policy of open access to public community colleges. Of the many issues that challenge the community college, this paper addressed the following three topics: (1) Choosing Among Competing Agendas, (2) Meeting the Needs of a Changing Society, and (3) More Students and Less Money.

Choosing Among Competing Agendas

Competing agendas as suggested by The Chronicle of Higher Education (2004) are educational issues which will press the community college most for solutions. For example, professional development as compared to serving underrepresented or underprepared student populations suggested two interdependent, but contextually separate, agendas. Shkodriani (2004) indicated that community colleges are prime resources for teacher professional development, whereas Education Secretary Margaret Spelling suggested that community colleges were an ideal starting point for low-and-moderate-income students (Burd, 2006). These two competing agendas have underlying variables which require the community college to design different approaches.

Variations in the approaches to providing for professional development, underrepresented populations, and other agendas, can be found in the structure of the resources to support each function or agenda within the community college (Boggs, 2004; Dicroce, 2005; Dougherty & Hong, 2005; Grubb & Lazerson, 2004; Strout, 2006). For instance, Shkodriani (2004) suggested inherent problems in the way teacher professional development was structured and delivered as indicated in Table 1 (p. 4).

Table 1

Criticisms of Professional Development Efforts

Criticism	Criticism Explained
1	Inflexible and too short – instructors have a predetermined amount of material to get through in a short amount of time
2	Often designed as “one size fits all,” operating as if all participants have the same background, the same subject areas, and learn at the same pace and in the same way
3	Inconvenient, involving travel to areas sometimes a distance from home or school – it takes place outside the classroom environment and requires additional time beyond the normal daily schedule
4	Teachers are not involved in determining program content

As put forth in Table 1, the issues related to professional development require personnel resources devoted to seeking solutions for each sub-issue identified. Consequently, as the resources are allocated to address each problem, these resources may compete with other agendas. Instructional resources dedicated to the agenda of professional development may compete for resources to simultaneously address the instructional process to support underrepresented students or students with deficits in college readiness. Competing agendas require resources and as resources increasingly become scarce within the community college, tough choices have to be made as to which programs are supported and those which are postponed or unmet.

Bailey et al., (2005) conducted a study of student success in the community college. The study identified several “institutional characteristics that affect[ed] the success of community college students” (p. 2). Success, as argued in the study, was a composite of several competing agendas, including but not limited to: financial resources, efforts in retention, multi-institutional attendance, leadership, faculty relations, and local political influence. Additionally, as suggested by Bragg (2001), a major competing agenda is the argument that:

community colleges are continually expected to prepare individuals for careers, but vocational preparation need not be divorced from transfer. Indeed, enhancing transfer opportunities in all facets of the community college curriculum, including programs once thought terminal, can enhance opportunities for social mobility for all students. (p. 111)

Underlying the analysis of competing agendas in the community college is the relationship between institutional resources and accountability (Boggs, 2004; Dougherty & Hong, 2005; Jacobson, 2004; The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2004; VanWagoner, Bowman & Spraggs, 2005). Zarkesh & Beas (2004) studied performance indicators and performance-based funding in community colleges. In order to assess performance indicators, the study investigated indicators in the larger context of the movement towards accountability. The application of accountability is the watchdog of the competing agendas phenomena. As competing agendas vie for resources, stakeholders are looking to the community college as efficient centers of vocational training and higher education, all the while balancing competing agendas to maximize positive outcomes (VanWagoner, Bowman & Spraggs, 2005).

Evelyn (2004a) identified several entities which are looking closely at the community college for leadership and solutions to competing agendas. The entities noted were lawmakers, students, the business community, individual states, and community colleges: issues identified were supply and demand, funding, and policy; resources listed were funding diversification, experience, and physical capacity. As suggested by The Chronicle of Higher Education (2004):

[Physical] capacity is rapidly becoming the most critical challenge facing community colleges. More students are enrolling in community colleges than ever before – the result of an echo baby boom, immigration, job competition, and the need for retraining generated by corporate downsizing. There are, however, too few faculty members to teach too many students, and precious little classroom and laboratory space is available for needed classes in both the arts and sciences and in career programs. (B.10)

A review of the literature on the community college supports the framework of competing agendas that must be addressed and solved within the community college. Moreover, competing agendas will require the community college system of education to rethink priorities and seek alternate sources of support, inclusive of private donations (Strout, 2006). As suggested by Evelyn (2004b), “with new missions, surging enrollments, and falling support, even the promise of access for all is in question” (p. A27). While competing agendas are critical issues, the community college is also charged with meeting the needs of a rapidly changing society. Meeting the needs of a changing society includes the competing and evolving agenda of college readiness.

Meeting the Needs of a Changing Society

As indicated by Closson (1996), “the combined forces of demographics, social changes, and advancing technology create a swiftly changing society” (p. 3). A changing

society does not allow the community college system of education an exemption to remain in limbo: workforce development is contingent upon the community college to remain a rapid-responder for training (Ashburn, 2006; Milliron & Wilson, 2004). Status quo in higher education is cause for great concern; moreover, as societal forces shape the direction of national goals, education and training become the holistic catalyst to respond as force-multipliers in the lives of its citizens (Dicroce, 2005; Jacobson, 2004). Nowhere is the impetus for change greater than in the community college and one of the major delimiters in this process is capacity (VanWagoner, Bowman, & Spraggs, 2005; Zarkesh & Beas, 2004). Proactive community college capacity is defined as:

The primary goal for higher education policy in this era is not to increase capacity in traditional ways but to address public needs and priorities—needs and priorities that include greater emphasis than in the past on accountability, cost and prices, efficiency, and effectiveness. In fact, even states whose population growth requires increased capacity are likely to look as much to productivity improvements (such as greater use of current campus facilities) as to new campuses to meet the higher educational needs of their citizens. (Callan, Doyle & Finney, 2001, p. 18)

As suggested in the definition, capacity has a direct correlation to meeting the actual or perceived needs of a rapidly changing society. However, the capacity of the community college to meet the sundry needs of society is not restricted only to the number of teachers or classrooms (Callan, Doyle & Finney, 2001). Capacity will require a paradigm shift from *reacting* to the challenges of a changing society to *proactive* opportunities and innovative practices to *lead* a changing society (VanWagoner, Bowman & Spraggs, 2005). Wattenbarger (1983) conducted a study to determine the value of research for improving the community college. The study suggested that unless problems are investigated as a function of institutional research for the purpose of “turning theory

into action” (p. 58), viable, proactive, and innovative change is less likely to occur. The study conducted by Wattenbarger (1983) was supported by Cohen’s (2005) investigation of practitioners and researchers: “research on community colleges has been conducted for many decades, and for just as many years it has been ignored by community college practitioners ... even when the practitioner and the researcher are the same person...” (p. 51).

Furthermore, Cohen’s (2005) study identified two constructs which support the relationship of community college research to proactive solutions for a changing society: (1) “educational problems are always unique and for that reason always require unique responses, tailored as best as possible to the idiosyncrasies of the actual, unique situation” (p. 59), and (2) “for community college practitioners to attend to research conducted in the [community college], the divide between research and practice must be bridged” (p. 59).

To meet the needs of a changing society, the community college system of education must utilize its innovative prowess to understand the evolving community it serves. Consequently, to understand the underlying causes of a changing society enables the community college to proactively meet the needs of its constituents and stakeholders by taking the reigns of community leadership and participation (VanWagoner, Bowman & Spraggs, 2005). And to understand that enrollment levels are projected to increase while fiscal support is level-funded or reduced suggests that competing agendas are also attributes of a changing society.

More Students and Less Money

One of the most profound challenges the community college system of education will face in the next decade is the influx of college-eligible students (Conley, 2005). The U.S. Department of Education projects that by 2009, 75% of high school seniors will likely attend college (Boggs, 2004), which included an estimated 45% enrolled in public two-year technical, community and junior college institutions (Horn & Nevill, 2006; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2003). The Reference Service Press (2003) reported that current estimates for college-eligible students were expected to reach 15.3 million students, with a 15% increase to a projected 17.7 million students by the year 2012. Using the 45% enrollment projection for community colleges, the influx of students will range from 6.88 million ($15.3 \times .45$) to 7.96 million ($17.7 \times .45$) over the next decade.

Statistically, there are 1,186 community, junior, and technical colleges serving a range of 6.88 to 7.96 million credit students between 2006 and 2012, with another 5 million non-credit students (Phillippe & Sullivan, 2005). Considering the mean as a broadly defined reference, average enrollment per two-year institution is estimated at 6,711 students ($7.96 \text{ million} / 1,186$) by 2012. The Alabama [Community] College System has a total of 79,771 students in the system with an average Fall 2005 enrollment of 3,191 students (Alabama Commission on Higher Education, 2006). The numbers suggest that for many community colleges – all other things being equal -- prioritizing competing agendas will potentially become tantamount to rejecting the long-standing open-door policy of the community college system of education (Windham, Perkins &

Rogers, 2001). All other things being equal also included equal-or-less funding and minute increases in institutional physical capacity.

Boggs (2004) studied major issues impacting the community college system of education. The investigation detailed the many competing agendas and specifically noted several indicators related to students and funding:

1. California and Florida turned away 175,000 and 35,000 students, respectively, due to insufficient resources;
2. State funding for community colleges dropped by nearly \$584.8 million between 2002 and 2003, and 22 states, or 44% of the states supporting community colleges, reported decreased funding;
3. Institutions averaged 60% of their funding from state and local funds (35% for public four-year institutions) with only 21% of funding derived from tuition;
4. Tuition increased by 7.9% in the Fall of 2002 and 13.8% in the Fall of 2003; California planned to increase tuition in 2003-04 as much as 63.6% and Virginia Community Colleges raised tuition by \$15.59 per credit hour to \$52.71 (Larose, 2003);
5. Many community colleges have frozen or reduced course sections and, in extreme cases, have eliminated whole programs and summer sessions;
6. Close to half of all students who pursue higher education will do so in the community college; and,
7. Twenty-eight percent of students seeking credit and non-credit courses in the community college have at least a Bachelor's degree.

Enrollment is projected to increase exponentially, while state funding follows a more linear scale (Hendrick, Hightower & Gregory, 2006). As noted by Milliron and Wilson (2004), the juxtaposition of enrollment and funding may be classified as “funding agony and opportunity” (p. 56). Opportunity is synonymous with the methods, materials, and manpower resources to establish a significant community college. As noted by VanWagoner, Bowman and Spraggs (2005), “In the significant community college, the number of students passing through the ‘in’ door is not the important success measure—the number persisting to the graduation-transfer-employment door is of the greatest importance” (p. 39). Significant community colleges will pursue every means of opportunity to acquire alternate sources of funding and support, while funding agony is a multifaceted process. Components of funding agony are state appropriations, tuition, and institutional expenditures; nevertheless, funding woes are not without potential remedy. Funding remedy in the community college is a leadership derived culture of entrepreneurialism (Strout, 2006).

Enrollment agony may be found in several key issues. First, students have characteristics which impact enrollment, such as student swirl in which linear matriculation occurs infrequently (Borden, 2004; Komives & Woodard, 2003). As noted by Milliron and Wilson (2004), “students are more diverse and increasingly ‘swirled,’ using community colleges for short-cycle training, industry certification, reverse transfer, or graduate school options” (p, 55). And as students swirl, enrollment demands increase, while funding remains level or is reduced.

Second, student diversity has increased exponentially (Horn & Nevill, 2006; Kraman, 2006). As suggested by Hendrick, Hightower, and Gregory (2006):

In the last 40 years, 2-year college enrollments have exploded in the United States. Sheer numbers of students demanding higher education at the community college level—combined with issues of decreased funding and increased accountability—have put increasingly severe stress on the traditional open door policy of community colleges. (p. 628)

Additional enrollment and funding issues in the community college literature included: an increase in on-line students as the demand for distance education in the community college continues to rise (Carnevale, 2006); how to best meet the needs [competing agendas] of the millennial generation—the largest student population in history—as they enroll in the community college and impact instructional and institutional processes (Coomes & Debard, 2004; Debard, 2004); college-ready as compared to college-eligible, a significant difference in the ability of students to enroll and persist (Conley, 2005): included in the college readiness aspect is the amount of remedial courses students may require (Boulard, 2004; Conley, 2005; Spann, 2000); the influx of immigrants seeking to enroll and immerse themselves in the culture of the nation, while pursuing vocational training or degrees (Wang, 2004); and dual-enrollment programs, in which high school students dually-enroll in community college credit courses (Karp, Bailey, Hughes, & Fermin, 2005).

Palazesi & Bower (2006) studied the baby boomers as they reinvented themselves by taking advantage of the offerings within the community college. The study—noting the relationship of more students and less money—suggested that baby boomers give significance to “older adults [who] increasingly represent a larger population in postsecondary education” (p. 45). The study noted that as baby boomers attended community colleges for educational services, they generated revenue for the institution at the same time that they perpetuated increased enrollment. Demographic trends indicated

that the number of traditional students, ages 18 to 25, will begin to level out concurrently with the retirement era of baby boomers in 2011. As noted in the study, it is imperative that community colleges understand the intrinsic value baby boomers assign to the services provided by two-year institutions. To understand this generation's need to acquire life-long learning should give rise to significance in the significant community college. Even in light of the challenge of more students and less funding, innovative measures will create opportunities heretofore unlooked for in the community college system of education (VanWagoner, Bowman & Spraggs, 2005).

Within the next decade, the community college system of education will face many challenges. The system will encounter more students, without the much needed appropriations for additional services; competing agendas will require difficult choices as to which functions can and cannot be funded or supported; and, as society changes, the community college must be proactive in its leadership role to provide viable solutions to the community it serves. Challenges in the community college are not without potential solutions. However, solutions are the result of proactive thinking, research, application, and leadership. As suggested by VanWagoner, Bowman, and Spraggs (2005):

The move from success to significance will not be easy. Community college leaders will have to think differently, act differently, and respond differently to their environments. Nevertheless, the parts are there. Community colleges have long attracted leaders within their organizations who want to make a difference, who rise above the traditional culture, and who share a vision for the future. There has never been a better time or a greater need for community colleges to assume their significant role in creating the future...Community colleges are the right institutions at the right time, if we make the critical move to significance. (p. 50)

Opportunities in the Community College

The community college system of education, like its four-year counterpart, has alumni in every profession and sector of employment. Many of the alumni from both educational systems have noted individuals, some more significantly known than others. Boggs (2004) provided the following community college examples: Eileen Collins, NASA's first female mission commander; Dustin Hoffman, winner of an Academy Award; Kweisi Mfume, former Congressman and NAACP President; Nobel Prize recipient and chemist, Bruce Merrifield; Dr. J. Craig Venter, lead scientist in decoding the human genome; and, Bonnie Blair, Olympic speed skater.

A further review of the literature on community colleges revealed that although challenges exist in the two-year system, there is also considerable evidence that community colleges have established themselves as change-agents in the educational arena (Milliron & E. de los Santos, 2004; VanWagoner, Bowman, Spraggs, 2005). Mellow and Talmadge (2005) investigated the diversity of LaGuardia Community College. LaGuardia's population consisted of students from 159 different countries, speaking 110 different languages, and 66% were foreign born. As a result of the enormous diversity in the student population, LaGuardia developed significant and lasting changes to its operations, or what it termed "organizational-change initiatives" (p. 61). An outcome of the initiatives instituted at LaGuardia garnered the college significant accolades: it was "identified by the National Survey of Student Engagement as one of three top-performing large community colleges ... [and it] ... received a Certificate of Excellence from the Hesburgh Awards for significant contributions to faculty development that enhances undergraduate teaching and learning" (p. 65).

LaGuardia is but one of the many significant achievements in the community college system of education. The achievements of the community college are opportunities to excel in: areas of remedial education, which is a direct component of college readiness (Hendrick, Hightower & Gregory, 2006); the critical involvement the colleges play in the preparation of the nation's first responders--professionals such as law enforcement officers, firefighters, or emergency medical technicians (American Association of Community Colleges, 2006a); workforce readiness as 95% of businesses and organizations who employ community college graduates recommend community college workforce education and training (American Association of Community Colleges, 2006b).

The community college system of education is a significant partner in the training and education of 45% of all undergraduates (Lamkin, 2004). Although many examples and studies could be cited in supporting the opportunities and achievements within the community college, VanWagoner, Bowman and Spraggs (2005) suggested the following regarding opportunities in the community college:

Demand for services is increasing. Support from communities is strong. Business and industry leaders are increasingly turning to community colleges as their workforce providers. Large foundations are increasing their support...Community colleges are now more respected, better understood, and better positioned than at any other time in their history. But our challenges have risen with our status, and we must now impose a new paradigm upon ourselves...More than just a training provider, significant community colleges are economic drivers and essential community resources. (p. 38-41)

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