

The Community College

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CI 8700: Introduction to Scholarship

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The day starts off like any other. As the computer boots up, I look around the small classroom of 16 students to see several of them prepared and eager to learn, but also a few gazing into the computer screen, searching the Internet for entertaining videos on YouTube® or perhaps checking on their Facebook® status.

Heather, a student in the course and mother of three, approaches with some concerns about missing the next class. Heather has to take her son to a doctor's appointment that is unfortunately scheduled during the same time as this class. After assuring her it will be fine, I briefly cover the lesson of what we will look at and provide her with some resources to help her stay current.

After class, I run into another student named David who has an issue with financial aid. David is 40 years old and has an incredible eye for photography, but has struggled the past two years to complete the basic math requirements for his associate's degree. Because David has taken several developmental math courses that were not in his original academic plan, he must now submit an appeal to the financial aid office to continue receiving funds in order to possibly graduate this spring. As his academic advisor, I sign off on the appeal form and offer some words of encouragement to help David overcome this difficult situation.

Moments later, a message comes through e-mail from a student in my Interactive Media distance learning course. Neal is a war veteran returning to school on a Veterans of Foreign Wars grant. He is struggling with the technology used within the course to publish his website

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that he has created for the Internet. I reply with a brief list of steps he should follow to get the site on-line. Later that afternoon, Neal gets his site published to the web and kindly replies through an e-mail with thanks.

Later in the afternoon I return to the classroom. High school seniors in a technical preparation program at the local technical center attend two classes a week to earn college credit while completing their final year in high school. This program allows students to explore career opportunities prior to graduation, as well as give them a jump start on completing their associate's degree. Lindsey, a student in the class, shows up late because she missed the bus from the tech center and doesn't have a driver's license. As this has become a reoccurring issue, I advise Lindsey to consider how important it is to be punctual for school, and how it will prepare her for her professional career. I offer some suggestions that might get her to school on time so that she can be punctual for class.

As demonstrated through the previous examples, it is evident that students at a community college face different challenges than the average freshman at a major university. Even though there is much diversity among the students at a community college, they all seem to share a common goal of learning skills and gaining experience to obtain a well-paid job that they can enjoy. Some are post-secondary educational option (PSEO) students like Lindsey, completing college level classes while finishing up high school. Others may be returning to school to update their skill set for their current job like Neal. The community college was developed to meet the growing demand for higher education opportunities, while considering the needs of a diverse population (Boggs, 2010).

The community college, also known as the 2-year College, junior college, or technical college, refers to a public institution that provides learning opportunities for adults who wish to

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continue their education. In most instances, students attend a community college to obtain a certificate, diploma, or associate's degree, while others may elect to take classes of interest or update a skill that is required of their employer. Furthermore, students may elect to take academic classes that may prepare them for a university (Clotfelter, Ladd, Muschkin & Vigdor, 2012). Once a student completes their education at a community college, they have the opportunity to pursue a career or continue their education by attending a university or four-year liberal arts college (Yindra & Brenner, 2002). **The community college student is only limited by how far they wish to push their education.**

Literature often seeks to identify the benefits, as well as the concerns, that are often associated within community colleges. The community college is often compared and contrasted on the same level as the major university. Students typically enroll into a community college because of the smaller class sizes, flexible scheduling, open enrollment, lower tuition rates, program selection, developmental courses, shorter commute times, and are commonly found to enroll a more economically and ethnically diverse population than the 4-year college (Millar & Tanner, 2011; Clotfelter, Ladd, Muschkin, & Vigdor, 2012; Scrivener & Coghlan, 2011; Boggs, 2010). **Because the community college has so much to offer for so many people, it has become a popular choice among those considering the pursuit of a higher education.**

Students may find that they only need an associate's degree to obtain the job they want, while others may attend the community college to complete general education requirements in order to move onto a bachelor's degree (Yindra & Brenner, 2002). Not only are community colleges an affordable alternative to the major university, but statistics show that people with a community college education are more likely to receive higher paying jobs than those who have no higher education at all (Belfield and Bailey, 2011). **With low tuition rates, and the**

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possibility of earning more money, people of all ages have begun to consider the community college as a worthwhile expense that may pay-off in the end.

Unfortunately, the community college also has limitations that sometimes discourage students from attending. Issues such as higher drop-out rates, limited on-campus housing, lower career flexibility and a narrow knowledge base may be a deciding factor between the community college and a university (Grimes & David, 1999; McCabe, 2003; Kokemuller, 2013). In addition, community colleges with their open enrollment policies often permit students to enroll that are unprepared for the academic rigor that college entails (Scrivener & Coghlan, 2011; McCabe, 2003). This situation is not as common at a university because of the entry test score or grade requirements needed to enroll (Millar & Tanner, 2011); whereas the failure of the community college to uphold these same entry standards often results in substantial drop-out rates that occur within the first year (Grimes & David, 1999; McCabe, 2003). Community colleges are also faced with the issue of retention and its profound impact on the institution's funding, which is directly linked to these high drop-out rates resulting from the student's lack of "college readiness" (Barbatis, 2008, Millar & Tanner, 2011). **The community college has struggled with negative**

To understand the challenges and opportunities for improvement that a community college faces, it is important to look at the various curriculum theories that provide the education field with a foundation to build student success. As the community college seeks to be recognized as an institution that provides students with this success, it is essential to be open-minded in regards to the various theories that exist.

The community college offers opportunities to students that would otherwise be out of their reach. Boggs (2010) suggests that the true community college was a, "Social movement that has widely broadened access to higher education and training opportunities to students who

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would not otherwise have the opportunity to attend college due to economic, mobility, and social barriers” (p.2). Some historical theories of education promote this opportunity, while others may discourage it. The community college is well known for its sense of “community” and the post-modern approach to education shows that cooperative learning is essential to student success. Critical theorists may question the mission of a community college due to the limitations on a graduate’s employment opportunities compared to students who obtain a degree from a university. Mythopoetic theorists may search to identify a new direction that the community college could pursue in order to provide students with skills that are critical for the 21st century. Before looking forward to what can be done to improve the community college, it is critical to first understand its history and how this concept became a reality.

A Brief History of the Community College

Conceptually, it can be argued that the inception of the community college began with the simple idea of adults wanting to further their education without having to attend a major university. The theory of adult learning influenced several educational leaders to develop and explore concepts in adult education. Established by Lewis Miller and John Heyl Vincent, the Chautauqua Movement began as a Sunday school assembly that eventually evolved into the opportunity for adults to further their education (Howell, 2006). Scott (1999) summarizes Vincent’s theory of adult education by quoting, “Mature men and women are able to learn, educational opportunities should extend beyond formal schooling, life is education, agencies promoting adult learning should work together, and adult education should examine current social issues” (p. 391). **Warrent**

Historically, the Chautauqua Movement offered several lessons still evident in modern adult education programs. Among these lessons were: a need for financial management for those

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facilities offering adult education programs, the need for rewards and recognition for milestones achieved by adult students, and the understanding that successful programs will be mocked by competitors (Howell, 2006). These lessons were a vital component in the development of the community college concept and the promotion of higher education for adult learners.

It is evident that Vincent's theory is still valued as part of the curriculum in modern community colleges. Intrigued by these lessons, William Harper Rainey joined the Chautauqua Movement because of his belief in the system. Rainey envisioned a college that would offer a diverse learning experience, including the separation of education into components, the use of correspondence learning, and the acceptance into a program based on student's ability, not grades (Mayer, 1957). **To this day, the community college still upholds the highest standards of diversity, distance learning, and open enrollment.**

In 1892, The University of Chicago divided the first 2 years from the standard 4-year program to create what would later be known as the junior college. Harper's vision of a junior college concept would offer more diversity in the field and better prepare the student for a college education by separating it from the standard 4 years found at a university. Harper's vision became a reality in 1901, when he joined with J. Stanley Brown to found the nation's first public junior college in Joliet, Illinois. The concept of the junior college began with only 6 students and offered the same academic quality and content received in the first 2 years of a major university. This experimental post-high school college, officially named Joliet Junior College in 1916, would accommodate those students who lived locally (Joliet Junior College, 2012). **Warrant**

It wasn't until 1947 that the term "community college" was adapted during President Harry Truman's Commission report (Boggs, 2010). It can be argued that this was the point at

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which higher education moved from being only available to the entitled, to the opportunity for anyone to further their education (Boggs, 2010). After World War II, the increased demand for industrial skills workers led to a growing popularity of community college (Clotfelter, Ladd, Muschkin, & Vigdor, 2012). **Warrant**

By 1961, The U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare conducted a study to investigate the standards which had been developed over the years to identify criteria for establishing and maintaining community colleges. Along with the identification of said criteria among the state laws and regulations, the report also sought to obtain feedback from individuals who studied at community colleges and provide guidelines for those who might be interested in establishing a community college or institution (Morrison, 1961). The popularity of the community college has continued to grow, offering opportunities for higher education. In 1967, 20% of college student were enrolled in community colleges, were as the 2009 National Center for Educational Statistics reported that 35% of college students are enrolled within a community college (NCES, 2009). In 2009, the American Graduation Initiative was implemented to “reform and strengthen community colleges” (U.S. White House, 2009). This initiative calls upon community colleges to help strengthen the U.S. economy and is expected to increase five million additional graduates by the years 2020 (SICP, 2009). **Warrant**

Historical Perspectives

Throughout education history, many curriculum theories have been developed to establish guidelines for education. Historically, the sociological structures in education were supported by the three positions of positivism, progressive, and liberal humanist, or otherwise known as the Hamiltonian, Jacksonian, and Jeffersonian Traditions respectively (Purzycki, 2013; Smith, 2012; Kohn, 2008). The use of developmental courses in a community college may be

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considered a contentious topic between these social structures in education. One viewpoint may be that developmental courses provide an equal opportunity for the student, which is a common belief of the Jeffersonian Tradition; however, participating in a developmental course does not guarantee success. Furthermore, if a student is unable to successfully complete the course, they are denied the chance to move on in their coursework.

Many view the community college as an educational option that will cater to these needs and provide the necessary resources to meet the goal, either a professional degree or a certificate in a specific field. The Jacksonian Tradition supports the idea that all students should be treated equally. It is unfortunate that this “left wing” approach to education may prevent gifted or advanced students from proceeding, or place students into classrooms that they are not properly prepared for. It can be argued that the PSEO student, like Lindsey, is not yet ready for college and should remain in high school to finish out her academic studies before proceeding to college. Currently, the standards high school students meet in order to participate in such a program may have been set lower than expected in order to maintain enrollment numbers in such programs.

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Adult students may have the ability to perform a job, yet lack some of the basic academic skills that are required to obtain a degree. Similar to David’s situation mentioned earlier, the need for developmental courses can offer extra opportunities for students to achieve their life goals by concentrating on the basics not retained from high school. It is also typical for adult students who are returning to college years later to need additional help re-familiarizing themselves with the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Furthermore, the lack of college readiness that exists among many students entering a community college may require additional focus on the skills needed to succeed. As four year colleges typically require a standard academic

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aptitude for admittance, the community college does not necessarily uphold the same expectations of the registering student (Millar & Tanner, 2011). For a majority of students who may not be “college ready”, the community college may be their only option.

In some instances, universities may offer developmental courses; however, many universities are discontinuing offering developmental courses due to funding cuts. Also, it may be more affordable to complete any required developmental courses at a community college due to the lower tuition rates. There is also the option of college transfer which allows students to not only gain college readiness skills, but complete many basic academic courses that will give them credit toward their bachelor degree. Still, acceptance into a major university most commonly requires a minimum grade point average and/or placement testing scores to meet a predetermined standard. Students accepted in a major university that meet these predetermined standards most likely will not need developmental courses. Millar and Tanner (2011) suggest, “Four-year institutions typically have test score and/or grade average requirements that serve as gatekeepers to advanced study” (p.2). **Warrant**

Looking ahead, community colleges will most likely continue to explore options for ensuring that students are “college ready” or that the opportunity for developmental courses will be offered to ensure their success. Scrivener and Coghlan (2011) suggest assessing high school students with college level exams, offering dual enrollment to high school students and providing a summer bridge program (p. 10). Unfortunately, these suggestions will not benefit everyone moving onto a community college. This initiative focuses on students moving from high school to college such as Lindsey, and does not benefit those who are returning to school after several years such as David, Heather, and Neal. Possibly a college preparatory program could be established and integrated into the curriculum for those considering the return to college and

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ensure that they are college ready. Many schools also offer student services and support groups that assist students in the process of adapting to college life (Scrivener and Coghlan, 2011).

The Post-Modern Community College

The community college can arguably be considered a post-modern approach to education due to its dedication toward the “community”. The support of community plays a vital role in the success of a student because it entails both the collaboration that occurs among students and the individualized instruction that is commonly found in the community college classroom. Slattery quotes, “The postmodern school is a place where relations between people are viewed primarily in cooperative terms and not in coercive business terms” (1995, p.93). It is evident that many students choose the community college alternative to major universities because of the closer relations that individuals may have with both their educators and fellow students. However, it can be argued that students at a university are exposed to a better social experience because of on-campus housing, social clubs, and intramural sports that community colleges typically do not offer (Kokemuller, 2013).

Scrivener and Coghlan (2011) comment that, “Community colleges, with their open access policies and low tuition, are an important pathway into postsecondary education for nearly half of all U.S. undergraduates” (p.1). Scrivener also alludes to the fact that only a small portion of these students actually reach their goal, primarily because the students in a community college often are unprepared, have responsibilities outside of school, and may struggle to provide funding for tuition (2011). In regards to “college readiness”, drop-out rates are higher for those who are not prepared (Grimes & David, 1999). The administrators of community colleges must consider this statistic when planning and implementing strategic plans that concern student experience and success. As a technical advisor at a community college, it is obvious that many

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of the challenges faced by a community college student impact their ability to be successful and complete their degree in a reasonable time. It also should be noted that the lack of financial aid results in more students having to work, thus lowering their enrollment status to that of a part-time student.

One way to deal with this issue is to look at financial incentives being directly tied to classroom performance. If a student could earn money while maintaining a full schedule, they would likely complete the program in the required time, as well as gain some additional work experience that may contribute to a more meaningful career. The Opening Doors Demonstration launched by the Mongolian Development Research Center (MDRC), a nonprofit, nonpartisan education and social policy research organization, conducted a study in 2003. The research focused on students in a Louisiana community college, where a scholarship was offered for maintaining an average grade while completing coursework full-time (Scrivener 2011, p. 2). The results of the study showed a substantial improvement in academic outcomes which continued beyond the scholarship opportunity. It was also found that students were more likely to attend college full-time (Scrivener, 2011). The positive results of the study suggest that student success may increase when an extrinsic award is offered that may also alleviate stress and reduce part-time work, thus letting the student focus on academics. As this stress could eventually lead to student attrition, a vigorous benefit of this program would be its result on retention and lower drop-out rates.

The implementation of an enhanced student service program may also impact the overall success of students at a community college. Services such as academic advising, career counseling, and tutoring can provide a student with the additional help they need to successfully complete their coursework and find career opportunities after graduation. Often, services such as

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counseling are limited due to the student to advisor ratio. Furthermore, as many adults return to school, they may be reluctant to speak to an advisor about career or life goals. Research conducted at Lorain Community College and Owens Community College involved the organization of students into advising groups. The group allowed advisors to meet with fewer students during the semester. In addition, each student was to meet with their advisor at least twice during the semester to increase personal contact (Scrivener, 2011, p.5) The results of the study showed an increased number in both students returning to school the second semester and credits earned, compared to those who did not meet with an advisor (Scrivener, 2011, p.6). Once again, the aspect of community and collaborative learning are evident in the structure of a community college and support the post-modern approach to education.

Another benefit of the community college is the use of Learning Communities to enhance student experience and engagement. Specifically, the Learning Community seeks to build relationships between students by grouping them together and offering them the opportunity to work together in a variety of classes and projects (Scrivener, 2011). Scrivener suggests that these communities are beneficial to those who are not ready for college and may require developmental courses (2011). By building the relationships in a learning community, students will be less likely to drop out of college because they are unable to complete the developmental coursework. As there are many other opportunities for students to work together at a community college, the learning communities focus on the primary goal of preparing students for the academic challenges that lie ahead.

Critical Theory in the Community College

The Critical Theory of Education, primarily seeking to identify power, structure, and language relations, also may question the purpose of the community college and its mission to

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provide opportunity. Critical theorists believe that education should provide society with people who effectively contribute to that society. The community college, in many ways, provides an educational experience that not only mocks that of career, but prepares individuals for the workforce by providing instruction in specific skills that will enhance one's ability to be an effective member of society. Many of the skilled courses focus on policies and procedures that will be required for success on the job. These technical courses require students to learn management skills that provide them with the confidence they need to accept the responsibility. Other fields may require creativity and the ability to think critically when faced with a challenge.

Perhaps the benefits of a community college can be outweighed by the overall experience one obtains from a major university? In their mission to examine and identify contradictions, critical theorists will ask why someone would attend a community college if they need a bachelor's degree to fulfill the requirements for a career position. Are community colleges misleading students and offering them an education that is meaningless?

An obvious difference between a 2 and 4 year school is the additional 2 years of experience one gets at a university. Kokemuller (N.D) states that, community colleges lack social experience, lower employment and income potential, as well as failing to provide a broader knowledge base that is obtained from experience at a university. It can be argued that the more time one puts into their education, the more they will be able to contribute to society. This is evident through the mass amount of employers who will not even offer an interview to anyone who has less than a bachelor's degree. With this trend gaining more attention in the job market, many are discouraged against the community college because the result of their two years in school will not meet the expectations for future employment. For many careers, one must attend

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a four year university in order to have such an opportunity. In order for the community college to compete with the universities, they must join the university.

Transfer credit is a major factor in bridging the gap between 2 and 4 year schools. Understanding the significance of the 2+2 programs that exist among a majority of community colleges and universities can provide students with some options (Maes, 2011). Since many students consider community college as an affordable gateway to a major university, some universities have taken advantage of this and have implemented agreements with local community colleges to offer the transfer of credits (Maes, 2011). An example of the success that comes from a 2+2 program is evident at Kansas State University, which created a program with all 19 community colleges in the state to offer a bachelor's degree to students who transfer in after two years and complete their education through a distance learning program (Maes, 2011). One of the main components of this program is the "agreement" that is implemented, which clearly identifies specific coursework that will apply towards the transfer. Maes (2011) comments that, "Students spend valuable time and money on courses only to find out credits do not fully transfer, resulting in their having to retake course work". Arguably, this could be one of the instances that results in a student's decision to drop out, thus effecting retention. By having the agreement in place, advisors have confidence to plan the student's future beyond the community college.

There are several steps in the process of creating such a partnership. Specially looking at the curriculum, both schools must share their respective curriculum standards and come to an agreement. Typically, the community college will provide the curriculum for an associate's degree and the university will review it, offering any suggestions or recommendations for changes. Once the agreement is made, it is suggested by Maes (2011) that a degree map be

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created to list the courses which need to be completed at both schools. This list should be made publicly at both schools to ensure its effectiveness (Maes, 2011). The process of creating an agreeable set of curriculum standards may require the community college to add or revise the current curriculum standards to meet those of the university. For some schools, this may become a formidable task, but ultimately, the student's ability to transfer with little or no issues will surely payoff.

A Mythopoetic Approach to Community Colleges

Throughout the years, the community college has evolved to meet the needs of the student. Many community colleges began as technical colleges, focusing on a technical skills needed for a career. Due to an increased demand for academic preparation for four year universities, a number of institutions have transformed from the limited technical programs to a more versatile curriculum (Boggs, 2010). Boggs (2010) quotes, "While most community colleges restrict their programs to two years or less and confer associate degrees and certificates in a wide variety of subject areas, a growing number of them now offer baccalaureates in applied fields, teacher education, and nursing" (p.2). While the community college continues to grow in is practicality, there is a potential for even more programs to stretch beyond the 2 year limitation. What's to stop the community college from taking on more bachelor programs?

As stated earlier, the sense of "community" that is found in the community college is comforting to its students. Small classrooms, individualized instruction, low tuition and a variety of practical programs that offer the skills for immediate employment help to keep the community college thriving. As education is a vital part of life, the community college embraces this by offering knowledge, skills, and life experiences that fuse together to provide the individual with

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what they need to succeed. The community college will continue this life-long learning opportunity by expanding programs and reaching further into society.

Looking Forward

One of the main missions of the community college concept was to offer adult learners the opportunity to further their education without having to complete coursework at a major university. Through the history of the community college, a common theme has been developed which promotes smaller class sizes, individualized instruction, and the opportunity for academic development. The community college has been well known for its attention to specific skills required for job placement and/or professional growth. As the various community college creation methods have evolved, so has the standards that are maintained to ensure academic quality within these 2-year institutions.

Currently, the community college offers a variety of benefits that provide for a diverse student population. As an affordable alternative to the major university, the community college can arguably rival the same academic rigor found in a 4-year school. Standards established by the Ohio Board of Regents ensure consistency in transfer of credits for community college students, thus allowing them the opportunity to cognitively grow and continue their education (Ohio Higher Ed, 2013). With the aid of developmental courses and enhanced student services, the community college student has the opportunity to be successful. Looking to the future of the community college, the opportunities will continue to present themselves as technology improves working conditions, and the demand for specialized training is made available at these institutions. The primary goal of the community college, as it has always been, will be to continue providing adult learners with opportunities to learn skills and gain experience for their

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career while having the individualized attention and flexibility that community colleges are recognized for.

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