

Chapter 3

Mission Evolution and International Community Colleges

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ABSTRACT

With its focus on opportunity and access, the mission of community colleges in the United States has allowed millions of otherwise non-included populations to receive two years of higher education. Thus, these graduates have contributed to the citizenry of the U.S. and to their own social and economic statuses. In this chapter, the authors focused on that mission as it applies to international community colleges, a growing phenomenon in many divergent countries. Instead of locking themselves into a role of offering a standard for international colleges in regards to their missions, the authors offered multicultural foci built on the cultural texts of those colleges. In addition, while it seemed obvious that the impact of the features of the American Community College mission had influence over the rise of international community colleges, their own definitions of services, issues, and needs must take precedence over simple emulation of practices.

INTRODUCTION

One is always in danger of transferring one standard of accomplishment, especially by a dominant culture, to the culture of other peoples and their institutions. We take counsel from the literature of Bourdieu's conceptual model of cultural capital—cultural knowledge, skills, norms, language (Bourdieu, 1990) to offer a caveat for this essay: Elements of monocultural implementation of ideas on other contexts is to be avoided as we understand community colleges to be “guardians of cultural texts” (Shaw, Valadez & Rhoads, 1999, p. 1). Thus any recommendation to simply impose such standards without careful regard of the culture of *others* is not the intention of this paper. Here we attempt to draw parallels and

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historical ideas that may influence other international colleges that seek parity and association with U. S. community colleges. We believe they can do so through their own missions which guide their own community colleges.

We also know this irrefutable fact—that community colleges “play a critical role in the process of upward mobility in American society” (Shaw, Valadez & Rhoads 1999, p.1). Indeed, authors may second-guess the role of community colleges as they relate to a diverse society and question whether, in fact, such colleges enhance the social mobility of working-class and minority students. If the intention of International community colleges is to enhance social mobility of the underrepresented or underserved, then caution and consideration must be at the forefront of evaluations of their parallel institutions.

The mission of higher education has been to produce and transmit knowledge and the ideology of the dominant elite; this knowledge has then been passed down to develop a skilled labor force (Varghese, 2014). When U.S. President Truman convened his Commission on Higher Education for Democracy in 1947, he must have had these ideas in mind. The authors of the resultant Truman Report offered a solution of community colleges as a vital and low-cost segment of the American higher education system (The President’s Commission, 1947) and the report implicitly suggested social, economic, and educational mobility for the masses. As a visionary policy document, the foundation was laid for community colleges to serve as the great equalizer, reflecting the American ideal of democracy. The tenets of open access and equal opportunity have become synonymous with the American community college (Carter, Marmolejo & Spaid, 2016). This essay proposes to offer suggestions that reflect the history of American community colleges and their determination to be the *people’s colleges*. A historical reflection depends on telling the story of the era in which community colleges began to proliferate in the United States—post World War II. Democracy and its ideals emerged as a critical factor in American higher education when then President Truman convened a commission to study and make recommendations about higher education for the least represented students. This type of democratic idealism mirrors the works of Dewey (1922) in which workers reshape their workplaces into democratic organizations (Kincheloe, 1995). During this time of American reflection, the plight of many Americans who had been denied education based on race, religion, economic status, and gender were being questioned. We pose this idea to inquire what has motivated international community colleges to focus on alternate forms of higher education in their countries, and to examine how their missions and visions reflect their own focus on their populations, who for many reasons, may not have access to higher education. To do this we begin with an exploration of how American community colleges shaped their missions.

Shaping the Community Colleges Mission

No accidental effort allowed the American states to begin to develop and organize for the building and proliferation of American community colleges by the 1960s Cohen, Brawer and Kisker (2014) and Vaughan (1980), voiced their opinions about the creation of these institutions. From a simple history of the development of the community college with reference to the similarity of Lazarus’ quotes on the Statue of Liberty, Vaughan posited that community colleges, for the most part, were to serve the underserved. Community colleges reflect the idea that education and social mobility are directly connected. Dougherty (2006) appraisal of community college development generally focused on deliberate criticism of vocational education and the fact that community colleges hindered transfer and graduation for students to senior institutions.

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