Chapter 13
Challenges Facing Contemporary Community Colleges

Shah S. Ardalan
Lone Star College, USA

ABSTRACT

For over a century, American community colleges have delivered on their mission of open access and now educate about half of all undergraduate students in the United States. Recognized as primary providers of higher education and workforce training, especially to non-traditional and socioeconomically disadvantaged students, community colleges serve as transformative engines of prosperity and democratization of education. Contemporary community colleges face many challenges. Mainly, while community colleges are persistently underfunded, their leaders are under ever-increasing demand to improve student completion.

INTRODUCTION

Rationale

As the community's college and a significant engine of upward mobility, American community colleges have proven their remarkable value for over a century, but face serious challenges. Socioeconomic challenges facing a community or the nation are challenges facing community colleges. With an ever-increasing focus on accountability and expectations of improved student graduation rates, contemporary community college leaders are faced with historic challenges. These challenges include staying true to their original mission of providing open access while meeting the country's ever-increasing expectations and demands for improved student completion rates. If social justice remains a national priority, community colleges can fight poverty, serve the socioeconomically disadvantaged, and build America's middle class. However, their fundamental challenges, such as significant and chronic budget cuts must be understood and addressed. This chapter provides a review of the more prominent challenges facing the contemporary American community colleges.

Introduction and Significance

In September 2017, the United States Census Bureau reported that in 2016, over 40.6 million or 12.7% of total population and nearly 13.3 million or 18.0% of American children under 18 lived in poverty (Income and Poverty in the United States, 2017). Without getting into different categories of poverty such as deep poverty, generational, and situational poverty, experts agree that the best way to fight or prevent poverty is through education. However, a nationwide study of 3,000 public high schools conducted by the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center revealed poverty is the best predictor of college attendance and completion, not national origin, ethnicity, race, or the high school attended (Sparks & Adams, 2013). According to Stroud (2013), by addressing poverty as a barrier to student success, community colleges offer an essential opportunity to upward mobility. Therefore, as the primary provider of education to the majority of socioeconomically and otherwise disadvantaged students in the United States, it is critically important that American community colleges increase their student graduation rates significantly.

Community colleges were created to serve as a beacon of hope to end socioeconomic inequalities by allowing everyone an opportunity to reach the American dream. However, despite its glorious past, in just a few decades, the United States has dramatically and continuously lost its distinction as the nation with the highest percentage of an educated population. "Unless America's higher education institutions can improve the skill level of the labor force, the nation risks failing to produce the talent required to maintain its economic competitiveness" (Auguste et al., 2010). As a primary provider of higher education, American community colleges, can and should play a significant role in the prosperity of Americans and America by dramatically increasing their low graduation rates.

The Evolving Community College Challenge

Higher education leaders and scholars have recognized the uniqueness of American community colleges. "American community colleges are much like the nation that invented them. They offer an open door to opportunity to all who would come, are innovative and agile in meeting economic and workplace needs, and provide value and service to individuals and communities" (Boggs, 2010). Striving to address an essential part of the nation's most complex socioeconomic challenges such as equity and poverty, the community colleges and their mission continue to evolve. The public's relatively new attention to accountability has also resulted in urging educational leaders to consider transformative changes that would increase student graduation rates. Enrolling about half of all incoming higher education students in America, community colleges have participated in major reform strategies and initiatives like Achieving the Dream (ATD) and Completion by Design (CBD) to improve their student graduation rates. Unfortunately, the national trends in student success have not improved at scale.

Considering critical national economic dependency and the strong reliance of global workforce competitiveness on community colleges' effectiveness, their leaders must either improve student graduation rates or could be accountable for the possible demise of American community colleges as we know it. "We need to completely reimagine community colleges for today and the future" (American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), 2012, p. VI).

13 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/challenges-facing-contemporary-community-colleges/211594

Related Content

Using Experiential Learning to Improve Student Attitude and Learning Quality in Software Engineering Education
Ferdinand Ndifor Che, Kenneth David Strangand Narasimha Rao Vajjhala (2021). *International Journal of Innovative Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (pp. 1-22).*
www.irma-international.org/article/using-experiential-learning-to-improve-student-attitude-and-learning-quality-in-software-engineering-education/273133

Strategies for Engaging Students in the Online Environment
Kimberly A. Whiter (2020). *Handbook of Research on Fostering Student Engagement With Instructional Technology in Higher Education (pp. 305-326).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/strategies-for-engaging-students-in-the-online-environment/236858

Pedagogical Innovation in Higher Education: Defining What We Mean
Jae Major, Sandi Lynne Tait-McCutcheon, Robin Averill, Amanda Gilbert, Bernadette Knewstubb, Anita Mortlockand Liz Jones (2020). *International Journal of Innovative Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (pp. 1-18).*
www.irma-international.org/article/pedagogical-innovation-in-higher-education/265504

Newly Created Heterogeneous Groups: The Time to Adjust to Significant Race and/or Gender Differences
Theodore E. Davis (2014). *Advanced Research in Adult Learning and Professional Development: Tools, Trends, and Methodologies (pp. 224-235).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/newly-created-heterogeneous-groups/99535

A Case Study of Duke Kunshan University
Matthew Vollrath, Robert A. Lloydand Yanxu Liu (2017). *The Future of Accessibility in International Higher Education (pp. 21-36).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/a-case-study-of-duke-kunshan-university/181933