The Community College Role in Shaping a Multiracial Democracy

By Dr. Curtis L. Ivery, Chancellor, Wayne County Community College District

The articles in this newsletter are based on the New Directions for Community Colleges sourcebook entitled The Future of the Urban Community College: Shaping the Pathways to a Multiracial Democracy (Jossey-Bass, summer 2013). I wish to thank my colleagues who contributed to the writing, editing, and publishing of this sourcebook: Arthur M. Cohen, Gunder Myran, Charles Kinsley, Michael H. Parsons, Calvin Woodland, Rosemary Gillet-Karam, Jerry Sue Thornton, Eduardo Padrón, Rufus Glasper and Wright L. Lassiter, Jr. We have endeavored in this newsletter to share a summary of the insights contained in the sourcebook.

This issue of WCCCD’s Great Leadership newsletter focuses on the essential role of community colleges in shaping our nation as a multiracial democracy. A multiracial democracy can be defined as one in which all citizens come together and overcome, at long last, the persistent and deeply entrenched inequities in areas such as income, mobility, literacy, economic opportunity, education, incarceration, and residential isolation experienced disproportionately by African Americans, Latinos, American Indians, and other minorities in American society. The future of the community college is deeply interwoven with the future of those disenfranchised and impoverished groups who live in the shadows of our cities, suburbs, and rural areas. While the inequities caused by racial isolation and concentrated poverty are more pronounced in our urban centers, our suburban and rural areas have experienced a rise in poverty levels in the past decade as well. For all these groups, the community college is the primary, and
often only, gateway to entry into the economic mainstream and social justice. If the community college of the future fails to provide local, state, and national leadership in creating a multiracial democracy, it will have forfeited its vital and irreplaceable value to our society.

My commitment to influencing the leadership role of community colleges in shaping a multiracial democracy arises from my personal experiences in my early years with segregation and racial discrimination. Higher education was my gateway to personal and career achievement, and I passionately want the open door of the community college to provide a gateway to freedom, success, and security for disenfranchised minorities. Nothing is more gratifying than that magical moment when community college services provide a lifeline that empowers a person who has experienced inequality to overcome its devastating impact and achieve educational and career goals.

Community colleges will play a central role in advancing the next phase of the civil rights and social justice struggle, that of shaping a multiracial democracy. In doing so, we must reject the assumption that racism is no longer a dominant issue in our society. The idea that our society has entered a color-blind era that affords equal opportunity to all is a fantasy. In the face of the enduring and entrenched effects of our nation’s history of racial discrimination, community colleges are taking bold and courageous steps to be in the front lines of the ongoing societal struggle to achieve a genuine multiracial democracy. Major innovations to address existing inequities are taking place in areas such as college and career readiness, student success and completion, career education and workforce development, organizational and leadership structures, new business and finance models, assessment and institutional effectiveness, student support services, and community engagement.

Of these innovations, the most impactful future roles of the community college in advancing a multiracial democracy are likely to be:

• **Serving both the individual and public good**: The community college of the future will increase its emphasis on community development to complement its traditional individual development role.

• **Serving as a primary center of community talent development**: Creating a pathway to career success trumps all other approaches to opening the door to the economic mainstream for underprepared individuals and is the primary contribution of the community college to regional and state economic development.

• **Serving as an advocate and leader of social justice**: An essential future role of community college leaders is the targeting of the educational resources of the college on overcoming barriers to career and college success such as racial and economic isolation, poverty, illiteracy, and limited job skills.

Wangari Maathai, recipient of the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize for her contribution to sustainable development, democracy, and peace, stated that “In the course of history, there comes a time when humanity is called to shift to a new level of consciousness, to reach a higher moral ground, a time when we have to shed our fear and give hope to one another.” The 2013-16 strategic plan of the Lumina Foundation calls the current racial and ethnic inequities in terms of educational opportunity an “intolerable situation that must be rejected on moral grounds given the increasingly severe consequences of not obtaining a post-secondary education.”

In my view, the commitment of a community college leader to engage in the struggle for a multiracial democracy is a “decision of the heart”—it is a decision to exercise moral authority rather than official authority. It is through leaders who embed the ideals of social justice and equality in their college’s values and culture that the ideals of a multiracial democracy can be achieved at the local level. From this local level, we can change the nation and indeed, the world. In the words of John F. Kennedy: *The energy, the faith, and the devotion we bring to this endeavor will light our nation and all who serve it, and the flow from that fire will truly light the lives of generations to come.*
Urban community colleges can contribute to unlocking the full promise of American democracy by closing the achievement gap for more minority students, according to a recent special issue of the New Directions for Community Colleges (NDCC) sourcebook. This issue focuses on the future of the urban community college and the challenge to provide leadership in creating a true multiracial democracy. This article is intended as a synopsis of the major conclusions contained in the publication.

The writers of this NDCC sourcebook urge urban community college executives "to become leaders on the frontier of a genuine multiracial democracy. It is a call to redress massive and persistent disparities that have created… the ‘pathology of despair’ in our inner cities. Leaders are challenged to transform the very nature of the urban community college just as those who came before us responded to the social revolution of the 1950s and 1960s amid the civil rights movement of that era. Today’s urban college is at the front line of the next phase in this revolution, leading efforts to overcome the persistent and entrenched racial, educational, economic, and social inequities that threaten the vitality of our cities and our nation’s democratic principles." (NDCC vol. 162, The Future of the Urban Community College: Shaping the Pathways to a Multiracial Democracy, Jossey-Bass, p. 7).

Suburban and rural community colleges have a stake in this calling as well since they also serve areas of increasing diversity and poverty. However, the challenge is most compelling and acute for urban institutions with the greater number and largest concentration of at-risk constituencies.

Most would agree that significant progress has been made with the dismantling of legal and institutional barriers to equality and social justice for minorities during the civil rights movement of the past fifty years. However, there are glaring indicators that the idea of a “color blind” society is a fantasy and that the nation still has a long way to go before fully overcoming the lingering after-effects of past oppression and discrimination. A crisis in urban American exists today with conditions of racial and economic isolation, concentrated poverty, high illiteracy levels and low job skill levels, high levels of unemployment, dysfunctional schools, distance from available jobs, drug abuse, high crime levels, mass incarceration, and deteriorating neighborhoods.

Urban community colleges play an essential role in responding to this “pathology of despair” in the nation’s urban centers. Of the 1200 community colleges in the United States, 56 are located in our largest metropolitan/urban regions. These colleges serve about 1.5 million students out of the 7 million enrolled in all U.S. community colleges, or 21 percent of the total national enrollment. Minorities represent 32 percent of the enrollment in all U.S. community colleges and 54 percent of the students enrolled in urban community colleges. On some urban campuses, the percentage of students from racial minorities is as high as 90 percent. From this platform of national importance, the response of urban community colleges to addressing generational racial disparities falls into four major categories: (1) student success and completion, (2) talent development, (3) diversity and social equity, and (4) community development.

In 2010, President Barack Obama challenged the nation’s community colleges to increase the number and percentage of earned higher education credentials by 50 percent. The centerpiece of this national agenda is the call to develop a highly educated and talented workforce to drive the nation’s competitiveness in the global economy. Among the national organizations responding to this call is the Lumina Foundation. The foundation’s 2013-16 strategic plan notes that “the national demand for talent to power our economy and support our democracy is growing rapidly. The vast majority of that talent … will come overwhelmingly from low-income, first generation, older adults and students of color.” The Lumina Foundation’s updated Goal 2025 calls for closing a myriad of individual attainment gaps for lower-income persons, immigrants, minorities and males. Calling such inequities an “intolerable situation” that “must

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be rejected on moral grounds given the increasingly severe consequences of not obtaining a postsecondary credential.” The Lumina Foundation further contends that “America’s democracy and its economy are ill-served by a system that fails to tap all of our talent.”

The nation’s urban community colleges are actively responding to this national agenda as well. Wayne County Community College District in Detroit, for example, is actively engaged in the WCCCD 2020 Student Completion Project designed to focus every facet of operations on student success and completion. Based on a review of the best practices of WCCCD and other urban colleges, the primary features of the future of urban community colleges can be summarized as follows:

• **Four cornerstones of the open door:** The foundation of the urban community college of the future will be the four cornerstones of the contemporary open door – student access, student success and completion, campus-wide diversity and inclusiveness, and community engagement.

• **Student success and completion:** In cooperation with K-12 schools and other community organizations, the college will serve as the primary community center for career and college readiness. Once admitted to the college, every phase of the student’s flow through the college from orientation and registration to degree or certification completion will focus on improving student success and completion.

• **Talent development:** The college will be a primary community resource for intellectual capital, entrepreneurship, and workforce development. The college will be a primary provider of a highly educated workforce in support of the growth of the metropolitan regional economy with an emphasis on “middle-skill” careers in technical, health, public service, business, hospitality, and other employment fields.

• **Social equity:** The college will be a primary leader, advocate, and implementer of community-wide efforts to shape a genuine multiracial democracy based on principles of equality and social justice. The college will be a catalyst for engaging community partners in transforming the metropolitan region into an inclusive and diverse center of economic and cultural vitality.

• **Sustainability and accountability:** The college will adapt to the “new normal” of limited financial resources and demands for increased accountability. Through the development of improved strategic planning processes, new business and finance models, and enhanced continuous improvement processes, the college will orchestrate its human, financial, physical, technological, and information resources to maximize the impact on student completion and other high-priority goals.

In these ways, the nation’s urban community colleges are reframing the very definition of “democracy’s college.” In so doing, they are on the forefront of the continuing struggle to create a genuine multiracial democracy and achieve the principles of social justice and equality on which our nation is founded.

The Institutional Diversity Strategy as a Community College Imperative

*Rufus Glasper*, Chancellor, Maricopa County Community College District

(Excerpted from NDCC Vol. 162 Chapter 8, *Achieving a Multiracial Democracy on Campus*)

“Diversity” is no longer just a predictable part of community college mission statements to simply share ethnic or cultural traditions. In the Maricopa County Community College District, it has become a strategic and increasingly embedded functional reality critical to a wide variety of more than 200,000 students at ten colleges in the greater Phoenix area.

The process of weaving diversity into the organizational culture has been driven by an ongoing commitment to social
justice through equal educational opportunity for all. By the year 2020, minority students will account for 45 percent of the nation’s public high-school graduates. Hence, we must make multiracial democracy more than an educational axiom; it must be a priority in our social contract.

The Chancellor’s Diversity Initiative is our overarching structure for diversity and inclusiveness efforts in support of student success. An advisory council of coordinators and liaisons from each college and the district office interface with other areas of the organization to promote a number of activities, programs and services that include the following:

**Hoop of Learning**

The Hoop of Learning is a high school bridge program that enables Native Americans to receive both high school and college credits. The goal is to increase academic achievement and provide a foundation for successful transition into higher education. Hoop of Learning has celebrated more than a decade of results and continues to grow.

Basic tenets replicate the indigenous Circle of Life philosophy long practiced by Native American peoples. These principles include lifelong development, strong positive cultural identities and integrity, culturally relevant education, traditional tribal community facilitated by a broad network of relations, individuals contributing to the well-being of the community, and native people serving as role models.

**Minority Male Initiative**

The impetus for the Minority Male Initiative (MMI) in Maricopa was national statistics indicating that minority males are not achieving at the same academic levels as white males and minority females. Nationally, just 16 percent of Hispanic and 28 percent of African American males ages 24-35 have at least an associate degree, compared to 70 percent for Asian and 44 percent of white males. The MMI Committee reviewed similar programs across the country to harvest best practices, focusing early on more targeted recruitment, welcoming campus services and enhanced classroom climate.

Our multifaceted approach encourages academic achievement, promotes personal and professional development, and provides support for minority males to stay in college, graduate and achieve their goals. Each spring MMI hosts an annual conference for students to network, expand their leadership skills, and learn about professional and academic resources. Each campus is also implementing a Male Empowerment Network chapter for students to participate in campus- and district-wide team building, cultural and professional-growth opportunities.

**Achieving a College Education (ACE)**

Nationally recognized for its success in motivating underrepresented students to complete high school and college, ACE was established in 1987 at Maricopa’s South Mountain Community College in Phoenix, and has since expanded to each Maricopa campus. It now serves more than 17,000 students, 85 percent of them graduating early or on time. The program helps make smooth transitions between three critical points of the educational pipeline — high school, community college and university. Essential elements include student cohort groups starting the summer before their junior year of high school, focus on at-risk students, high academic standards in a non-threatening environment, continuous contact, and family involvement.

ACE students can earn up to 24 college credits while still in high school. A Junior ACE bridge program engages 5th- to 10th-grade students with experiences that enhance retention and create pathways to high school and higher education. A Native American initiative has increased those students’ participation in ACE by 30 percent.

All of the above programs for the most part have two sociocultural outcomes: They promote educational success for diverse students, and begin to shift cultural norms to a framework of social entrepreneurship. Overall evidence of success at Maricopa includes improvements in completion rates for associate degrees in general studies over the past 10 years, nearly doubling for African Americans and increasing slightly for Hispanics. Systemic enculturation of such priorities requires persistent, thoughtful leadership by the institution and students alike. Most importantly, making outcomes measurable creates tangible results essential to the democratic ideals we represent.
The Miami Dade College Story: From Segregated Programs to College-Wide Inclusiveness and Equity

Eduardo J. Padrón, President, Miami Dade College

(Excerpted from NDCC Vol. 162 Chapter 7, Increasing the Relevance of Curricular and Student Services in the Urban Community College)

As one of the country’s biggest and most diverse institutions of higher education, Miami Dade College exemplifies the progress toward multiracial democracy defined “as a goal for a nation founded on the principle of human equality.”

Cubans and other residents of Latin American origin make up nearly 65 percent of Dade County’s rich urban tapestry. MDC’s seven campuses and several outreach centers serve 175,000 credit and noncredit students speaking 94 languages from 185 countries. They are 87 percent ethnic or racial minorities, and have one of the highest graduation rates in the country for the metropolitan community college sector.

Early data on student success showed that a more structured and rigorous general education foundation was required. MDC tightened admission criteria but still maintained an open door to those with a high school diploma. The institution established a set of general education requirements for all students as well as new standards of academic progress (SOAP) and enhanced academic support. But with the introduction of SOAP, another tacit tradition of the early years fell away as many students showing little progress were asked to leave. These reforms signified a response to new urban and demographic challenges by melding the equally important priorities of access and academic excellence.

Traditional arts and sciences programs have always shared the curriculum agenda with occupational tracks responsive to workforce trends. But in 2006, MDC put that foundation under a 21st century microscope trained on the dramatic changes affecting society and higher education. In an era of new knowledge and challenges, the project set out to clearly define what it meant to gain a Miami Dade College education.

Identifying learning outcomes implies the redefinition of liberal education. The Liberal Education and America’s Promise initiative by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) emphasizes the lasting tradition of “empowered individuals with the knowledge and skills to address complexity, diversity and change.” But making that tradition relevant demands awareness of the shifting landscape of science, culture and society.

At MDC, faculty honed a wide range of options down to 10 liberal-learning outcomes expected of graduates. The objectives were then implemented by thorough curriculum mapping, support for student achievement and assessment of program results. Ownership by faculty, staff and students is critical, as are two additional values repeated constantly: Intentionality of our efforts and authenticity of learning. Intentionality suggests that everything we do has an obvious and identified connection to one or more of the learning outcomes. Authenticity compels us to penetrate beneath the prevailing completion criteria; it implies a depth of understanding and the ability to apply learning to current, real-life situations. The very ambitious ultimate goal was transformation that could shift the course of student lives. The learning outcomes reflected the AAC&U-commissioned survey of 2006-10 that produced the term “360-degree people.”

MDC’s learning outcomes therefore include essential science, technology, engineering and math but do not minimize the importance of the humanities and social sciences, a trend all too prevalent today. Civic engagement and knowledge of the workings of a democratic society in the 21st century are also key elements. And the arts, too often relegated to discretionary status, are regarded as essential for learning.

MDC’s most recent efforts to effect student success include a range of strategies that comprise MDC’s Student Achievement Initiatives (SAI) project. They build on the Learning Outcomes project and give additional emphasis to essential student support needs. SAI includes mandatory orientation; a multi-tiered advising approach.
Urban community colleges face evolving challenges in technology, commerce, politics, and demographics over the next decade, requiring a new and transformative paradigm. Emerging signposts point to expectations of personalized educational pathways, job-relevant knowledge and skills, global integration, and economic alignment. At the same time, however, colleges are struggling with limited and increasingly constrained resources. States are spending 28% less per student in 2013 than they did in 2008.

Regardless, college leaders must deliver better student services, greater workforce competency, and in the end enhanced value to society. In the past, solutions to most problems tended to involve more people, more processes, more time and more money. But more is sometimes just that—more, and not necessarily better. Innovation and future success will instead be guided by daring and increasingly entrepreneurial institutions.

Clearly this is more than just some post-recession hangover. Colleges are facing a seismic shift in funding that will profoundly alter how they apply for, receive, and use public and private dollars for years to come. Survival requires a number of tough choices. The DCCCD chief financial officer and executive vice chancellor for business affairs, Edward DesPlas, dealt with it by working in concert with the DCC District Vice Presidents for Business Council. They crafted what was termed the “operational budget onion” as a vehicle for identifying and addressing budget and service priorities. This model will not only address the financial, human relations, service and student/success completion agenda, but also provides a framework for long-range financial planning.

As articulated by DesPlas, when faced with massive resource declines, as an alternative to across-the-board cuts we are better served by focusing on operational priorities. It can help to view the organization as an onion with multiple layers surrounding its core.

For colleges, of course, the core of operation is instruction. Its basic elements are students and the instructor. …The first layer around the core is comprised of the services that connect students and instructors, create a safe environment, and attend to basic business functions that enable the college to remain a going concern. … Moving toward the outside of the onion, the next layer consists of functions that support what is happening in the core and the first layer. This operational layer ensures the long-term success of the college and its mission. It includes accreditation, government requirements, facilities, and technology.

By now, one has an idea of how an organizational or budget onion can be drawn. The outer layers will look different based on different organizational priorities. However, the closer one gets to the core, the more similar these layers may look. As revenue declines, colleges can peel off outer layers to protect the core.

DesPlas offers this one caveat: The core is not immune from reductions, as instructional operations also lend themselves to budgetary and priority stratification. In other words, the core can become an onion unto itself.
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Mission Statement

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