

# Reclaiming the American Dream

Community Colleges and the  
Nation's Future



A Report From the  
21st-Century Commission on  
the Future of Community Colleges

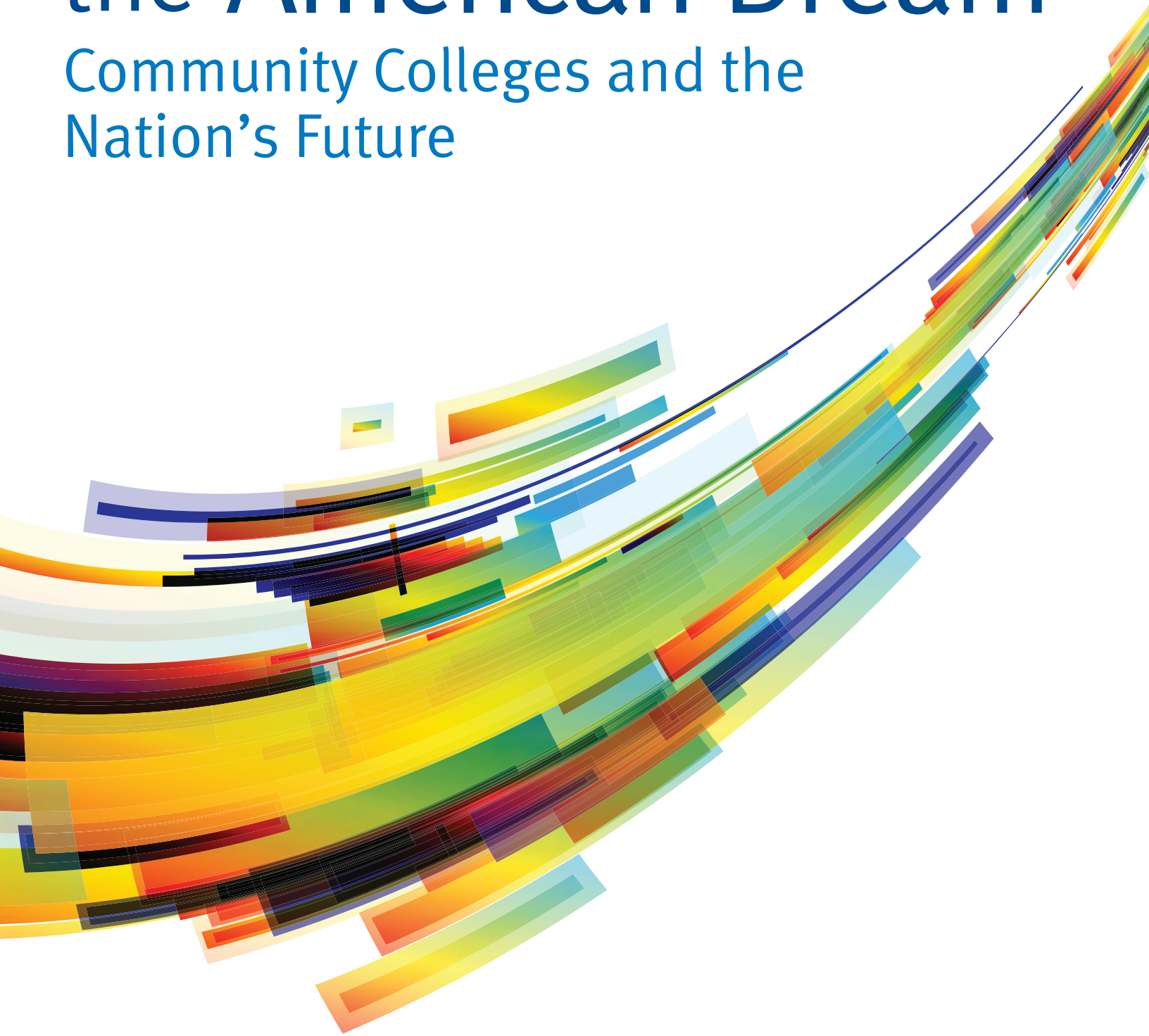
American Association of Community Colleges

With Support from Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Kresge Foundation, ACT, and Educational Testing Service



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The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) is the primary advocacy organization for the nation's community colleges. The association represents more than 1,200 two-year, associate degree-granting institutions and more than 13 million students. AACC promotes community colleges through five strategic action areas: recognition and advocacy for community colleges; student access, learning, and success; community college leadership development; economic and workforce development; and global and intercultural education. Information about AACC and community colleges can be found at [www.aacc.nche.edu](http://www.aacc.nche.edu).



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# Acknowledgments

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We also want to thank the individuals who, with very little notice, provided us with short but powerful working papers on central issues confronting community colleges and American higher education. We cannot adequately acknowledge the value of these papers and the degree to which the Commission relied on them in working its way through myriad and complex challenges.

We particularly appreciate the contributions of Sarah Cale-Henson, program manager for the 21st-Century Initiative. Sarah performed Herculean tasks in organizing the meetings of the Commission and making sure each member had the materials he or she needed. She contributed immeasurably to our effort.

Finally, we want to acknowledge the assistance we received from the following people: James Harvey of Harvey Associates, Seattle, Washington, for drafting and revising this report; Norma Kent, AACC Senior Vice President, Communications and Advancement, and Deanna D’Errico, Editor, Community College Press, for managing editing, design, and production; and Brian Gallagher, Brian Gallagher Design, for design and production. We are grateful for their contributions.

# Foreword

In the summer of 2011, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) launched a new 21st-Century Initiative. The overall goal of the initiative is to educate an additional 5 million students with degrees, certificates, or other credentials by 2020. Grounded in the enduring commitment of community colleges to improving the lives of students through opportunity and excellence, the initiative, which enjoyed the support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Kresge Foundation, ACT, and the Educational Testing Service, unfolded in two phases.

In Phase 1, a listening tour, AACC staff gathered information from across the nation on student access, institutional accountability, budget constraints, big ideas for the future, and what AACC can do for its members. During that activity, AACC staff heard from more than 1,300 stakeholders in 10 regions of the country—students, college faculty and staff, administrators, trustees, state policymakers, and college presidents and chancellors. A report on broad consensus findings from the listening tour was completed in early 2012. The report emphasized several dozen issues, including the need to reexamine the role, scope, and mission of the community college; the existence of an “achievement gap” and need for “scalable proven practices” to respond; the use of data metrics emphasizing transparency, inclusion, and accountability; and the need for strategic partnerships with the business world, local communities, and K–12 and baccalaureate institutions. Community college representatives demonstrated formidable energy and commitment to student, community, and national needs during the listening tour.

The 21st-Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges represents Phase 2 of the AACC effort. The Commission was handed an imposing charge. Recognizing that emerging challenges require unprecedented vision, ingenuity, courage, and focus from community colleges, the Commission was asked both to safeguard the fundamental mission of the community college—ensuring that millions of diverse and often underserved students attain a high-quality college education—and to challenge community colleges to imagine a new future for themselves, to ensure the success of our students, our institutions, and our nation. In this investigation, everything was to be put on the table, including the issues of the nation’s prosperity and its global competitiveness, community college student success and completion rates, equity of access and outcomes across student groups, public accountability for institutional performance and student success, and effectiveness and efficiency in preparing students for real jobs paying family-supporting wages.

This report, *Reclaiming the American Dream*, is the culmination of that effort. I want to thank the members of the Commission for their hard work and dedication to our common task. Special gratitude goes to the three co-chairs of the Commission for their remarkable leadership. Augustine P. Gallego (Chancellor Emeritus, San Diego Community College District), Kay M. McClenney (Director, Center for Community College Student Engagement, The University of Texas at Austin) and Jerry Sue Thornton (President, Cuyahoga Community College) were tireless in their commitment to bring the work of the Commission

to a successful conclusion, with a dramatic new vision of the important transformation that lies ahead for community colleges.

This report is but the beginning of the community college transformation story. I intend to work with community college leaders to breathe life into the vision outlined by the Commission, in which students' educational experiences are *redesigned*, institutional roles are *reinvented*, and the system itself has been *reset* to meet the needs of students, their communities, and the nation. As part of the

strategy for implementing the recommendations of the Commission, AACC proposes to establish a 21st-Century Center. The Center will coordinate implementation work, serve as a clearinghouse for research and institutional strategies, act as a repository for promising practices, and promote development of community college leaders for the future.

Walter G. Bumphus  
President and CEO  
American Association of Community Colleges



# Executive Summary

## Introduction

The American Dream is imperiled. Upward mobility, the contract between one generation of Americans and the next, is under siege. Once unchallenged, this nation's primacy in college graduation rates has already been overtaken by committed competitors from abroad. The nation can take great pride in what America's community colleges have accomplished, but the message of this Commission is simple and direct: If community colleges are to contribute powerfully to meeting the needs of 21st-century students and the 21st-century economy, education leaders must reimagine what these institutions are—and are capable of becoming.

In a rapidly changing America and a drastically reshaped world, the ground beneath the nation's feet has shifted so dramatically that community colleges need to reimagine their roles and the ways they do their work. The premise of this Commission can be summarized in three sentences: The American Dream is at risk. Because a highly educated population is fundamental to economic growth and a vibrant democracy, community colleges can help reclaim that dream. But stepping up to this challenge will require dramatic redesign of these institutions, their mission, and, most critically, their students' educational experiences.

## An Imperiled Dream

Once, the American people understood that each new generation could enjoy a better standard of living than that of their parents. The generation

of Americans now passing through middle age may not be able to make that promise to the next. The American Dream has stalled. Median income in the United States stagnated between 1972 and 2000. Since 2000, median family income has declined by 7%. A child born poor in the United States today is more likely to remain poor than at any time in our history. Many other nations now outperform us in educational attainment and economic mobility, and the American middle class shrinks before our eyes. In late 2011, the Associated Press reported on census data revealing that nearly half of all Americans—a record number—either have fallen into poverty or have earnings that classify them as low-income. Not coincidentally, the United States for the first time is seeing that younger generations actually will be less educated than their elders. Today, the compact between the generations is threatened, the promise of America as the land of opportunity is at risk, and the nation's children and grandchildren stand to lose.

## Education and National Progress

The connection between education and American prosperity is direct and powerful. Education and historic circumstances have many times come together to inject new energy into American life. Furthermore, education historically has not been a partisan issue, because national leaders typically have understood that the more educated people are, the more likely they are to be employed, earning a decent living, capable of supporting a family, paying taxes, contributing to the community, and participating in the democratic life of the nation.

Despite its difficulties, the United States remains an exceptional nation and the wealthiest in the world. The nation faces a simple but critical choice: It can actively create its future and control its destiny, or it can be shaped by uncontrolled social and economic circumstances. Community colleges, an American invention, are one of the greatest assets of this nation in the task of creating a better future.

A great challenge and an opportunity are at hand. Here is the challenge: The United States, which for generations led the world in college degree completion, now ranks 16th in the world in completion rates for 25- to 34-year-olds. At the very time that global competitiveness depends on a well-educated citizenry, we find ourselves losing ground in relative educational attainment. Here is the opportunity: By 2018, nearly two thirds of all American jobs will require a postsecondary certificate or degree. The most recent analyses indicate that the United States has been underproducing graduates with postsecondary skills since at least 1980, in the process contributing substantially to income inequality. Community colleges have a crucial role to play in seizing this opportunity. If this nation can add 20 million postsecondary-educated workers to its workforce over the next 15 years, income inequality will decline substantially, reversing the decline of the middle class.

Even while acknowledging the challenges and opportunities facing the United States and its community colleges, the Commission notes the many ways that these conditions are shared by other countries and similar institutions around the globe. In addition, it is important that college graduates, whatever their location, be not just *globally competitive* but also *globally competent*, understanding their roles as citizens and workers in an international context. While identifying common problems, we may also discover common solutions.

## Redesigning the Community College

The historic commitment of the last two generations to the development of community colleges created a prodigious engine of opportunity and economic growth. All told, by 2010 community colleges enrolled more than 13 million students in credit and noncredit courses annually. They have prepared millions of students for careers and for transfer to baccalaureate institutions. Even now, in the midst of an economy struggling to recover, community colleges have responded to calls for retreading the American workforce, training displaced workers, and helping develop new industries. For a remarkably diverse student population, they have long served as the gateway to higher education and thus to the middle class. It is a record for which all Americans can take great pride.

Despite these historic successes, and amidst serious contemporary challenges, community colleges need to be redesigned for new times. What we find today are student success rates that are unacceptably low, employment preparation that is inadequately connected to job market needs, and disconnects in transitions between high schools, community colleges, and baccalaureate institutions. Community colleges, historically underfunded, also have been financed in ways that encourage enrollment growth, though frequently without adequately supporting that growth, and largely without incentives for promoting student success. These conditions hinder middle-class students and have a devastating effect on low-income students and students of color, those often in greatest need of what community colleges have to offer.

These are harsh judgments, but the evidence to back them up is abundantly clear. Campus leaders understand that far too many students

are arriving at college unprepared for college-level work, that developmental education as traditionally practiced is dysfunctional, that barriers to transfer inhibit student progress, that degree and certificate completion rates are too low, and that attainment gaps across groups of students are unacceptably wide. They know that student and academic support services often are inadequate. They know that student career planning is too often uninformed and that the gap between the skills needed locally and the training offered on campus is often uncomfortably large. These leaders live with the daunting financial challenges created by enrollment expansion of over 1.6 million students over the last decade, with no increase in funding per student. And whether on urban, rural, or suburban campuses, they know that all of these factors undermine the aspirations of students. These are the challenges community colleges must address if they are to contribute to the restoration of the American Dream.

## Essential Elements in Institutional Transformation

In moving forward, it is clear that several crosscutting elements must be incorporated into work to transform institutions. This Commission supports the open door to college and its historic grounding in an enduring commitment to equity. Given the pressing needs for change, committed and strategic leadership is critical. Collaboration at entirely new levels, among internal and external entities, will be essential. And the need for systems of support—including professional development, technology, and a new culture of evidence—is inescapable.

Community colleges must reimagine their purposes and practices in order to meet the demands of the future, optimizing results for individuals,

communities, and the nation. In this effort, hard choices will be inevitable. Whom are community colleges going to serve? What are the colleges' priorities? What outcomes will they seek? To whom and to what missions will they say "No"? Or, "Sorry, but not any longer"? How will limited resources be reallocated to bring effective educational practices to scale? What academic programs or student services will be eliminated? How will colleges ensure equity in educational outcomes? How will faculty associations and collective bargaining units lead and contribute to the redesign of students' educational experiences? How will governing boards appropriately define their roles in ensuring institutional focus on student success? How will adjunct faculty be fully prepared for and fully involved in the work ahead? How will governing boards and college leaders ensure that institutions engage in the courageous conversations that must occur before these questions can be answered?

## Recommendations for Reimagining the Community College: The Three Rs

While the reimagined community college cannot yet be fully defined, the Commission suggests a framework for change. The Commission believes that community colleges must change their institutional characteristics as follows.

- *From a focus on student access to a focus on access and student success.*
- *From fragmented course-taking to clear, coherent educational pathways.*
- *From low rates of student success to high rates of student success.*
- *From tolerance of achievement gaps to commitment to eradicating achievement gaps.*
- *From a culture of anecdote to a culture of evidence.*

- *From individual faculty prerogative to collective responsibility for student success.*
- *From a culture of isolation to a culture of collaboration.*
- *From emphasis on boutique programs to effective education at scale.*
- *From a focus on teaching to a focus on learning.*
- *From information infrastructure as management support to information infrastructure as learning analytics.*
- *From funding tied to enrollment to funding tied to enrollment, institutional performance, and student success.*

Building on the legacy of the contributions of community colleges, the Commission calls for a new vision grounded in the “Three Rs.” Incorporating seven recommendations, the Three Rs consist of the following: *redesign* students’ educational experiences, *reinvent* institutional roles, and *reset* the system to create incentives for student and institutional success. Each of the seven recommendations is accompanied by a set of implementation strategies that are described in the body of this report.

### Redesign Students’ Educational Experiences

#### Recommendations:

1. Increase completion rates of students earning community college credentials (certificates and associate degrees) by 50% by 2020, while preserving access, enhancing quality, and eradicating attainment gaps associated with income, race, ethnicity, and gender.

2. Dramatically improve college readiness: By 2020, reduce by half the number of students entering college unprepared for rigorous college-level work, and double the number of students who complete developmental education programs and progress to successful completion of related freshman-level courses.
3. Close the American skills gaps by sharply focusing career and technical education on preparing students with the knowledge and skills required for existing and future jobs in regional and global economies.

### Reinvent Institutional Roles

#### Recommendations:

4. Refocus the community college mission and redefine institutional roles to meet 21st-century education and employment needs.
5. Invest in support structures to serve multiple community colleges through collaboration among institutions and with partners in philanthropy, government, and the private sector.

### Reset the System

#### Recommendations:

6. Target public and private investments strategically to create new incentives for institutions of education and their students and to support community college efforts to reclaim the American Dream.
7. Implement policies and practices that promote rigor, transparency, and accountability for results in community colleges.

## A Final Word

America's exceptional dream consists of opportunity, community, and intergenerational upward mobility. In pursuit of that dream, community colleges have been a national asset, creating opportunity for and nourishing students and communities. And every year, community college leaders see the powerful emotions of parents and students as graduates take their place on the commencement stage. Community colleges have served the nation, and its communities and families, well.

Now community colleges are asked to take part in a great rebirth of America. The nation's future is

at risk, in part because of inadequate investment in our human capital. The development of human potential is what community colleges are all about. This is an issue that community college leaders and their partners must take up and make their own. For it is in grappling with the complexity of global issues that Americans can learn again the simplicity of human aspiration. It is in wrestling with uncertainty about the economic future of the nation that educators can reimagine the role of community colleges in reclaiming the American Dream. And it is in nurturing the struggling dream of America that community colleges contribute mightily to the futures of their students, their communities, and the nation.

The American Dream is at risk. Community colleges can help reclaim it. But stepping up to the challenge will require dramatic redesign of these institutions, their missions, and most critically, students' educational experiences.



# Introduction

The American Dream is imperiled. Upward mobility, the contract between one generation of Americans and the next, is under siege. Once unchallenged, this nation's primacy in college graduation rates has already been overtaken by determined competitors from the Russian Federation, South Korea, Canada, Japan, and elsewhere. Although every member of the 21st-Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges takes great pride in the contributions of community colleges to the welfare of the American people, we are united in this assessment: If community colleges are to contribute powerfully to meeting the needs of 21st-century students and the 21st-century economy, education leaders must reimagine what these institutions are—and are capable of becoming. Our message is that simple, that direct, and that important.

In a rapidly changing America and a drastically reshaped world, American community colleges have served as the people's colleges and the Ellis Island of American higher education. They have been the platform from which millions of low- and middle-income Americans have launched their dreams. They do the toughest work in American higher education. And they do some of the most

important work in America. They have served our communities and our nation well, and they have done so for more than 100 years.

But no matter how significant the contributions of community colleges in the past, the ground beneath their feet has shifted so dramatically in recent years that they need to rethink their role and mission. Just as a century ago the United States underwent a transition from an agricultural to a manufacturing economy, it is today emerging from a similar shift from manufacturing to services in a knowledge-based economy. No matter how diligently community colleges perform their traditional role, they cannot effectively meet the needs of their students and communities without responding to the transformation in the larger economic and societal environment.

The premise of this Commission can be summarized in three sentences: The American Dream is at risk. Because a highly educated population is fundamental to economic growth and a vibrant democracy, community colleges can help reclaim that dream. But stepping up to this challenge will require dramatic redesign of these institutions, their mission, and, most critically, their students' educational experiences.



Once, the American people understood that each new generation could enjoy a better standard of living than that of their parents.

The generation of Americans now passing through middle age may not be able to make that promise to the next.





# Part 1: An Imperiled Dream

Americans are slowly beginning to realize that the America of their imaginations might rapidly become a thing of the past. What was true for two centuries in this nation is now at risk. Once, the American people understood that each new generation could enjoy a better standard of living than that of their parents. The generation of Americans now passing through middle age may not be able to make that promise to the next. The nation's situation is very troubling:

Median income in the United States stagnated between 1972 and 2000. Since 2000, median family income has declined by 7%.<sup>1</sup>

- A child born poor in the United States today is more likely to remain poor than at any time in our history. According to the Urban Institute, about 23% of American children were poor in 2011, and more than a fifth of them are likely to be poor as adults, a generation characterized by high rates of dropping out

and unwed teenage pregnancy, along with erratic employment.<sup>2</sup>

- The great American middle class is shrinking. In late 2011, the Associated Press reported on census data revealing that nearly half of all Americans—a record number—either have fallen into poverty or have earnings that classify them as low-income.<sup>3</sup>
- The American Dream has stalled. Recent studies confirm that nations such as Norway, Sweden, and Canada now outperform us in educational attainment and intergenerational economic mobility.<sup>4 5 6</sup>

What is at risk is the essence of the American ideal: the promise that each generation would do better than the last. For more than 200 years, Americans have kept that promise. Today, the compact between the generations is threatened, the promise of America as the land of opportunity is at risk, and the nation's children and grandchildren stand to lose.

Our network of community colleges provides America with a capacity that few other advanced industrial economies enjoy: the ability to rebuild the workforce, reinforce connections between education and the economy, and reverse the decline of the middle class.



# Part 2: Education and National Progress

## Time to Think Anew

The connection between education and American prosperity is direct and powerful. Education and historic circumstances have many times come together to inject new energy into American life. In putting his signature on the Morrill Act in 1862, President Lincoln established great land-grant institutions and helped open the American West. President Eisenhower's 1958 National Defense Education Act laid the foundation for winning the race to space. President Johnson vastly expanded access to higher education with the Higher Education Act of 1965. In signing the 1972 amendments to that legislation, President Nixon established what are today known as Pell Grants.

Education has not historically been a partisan issue, because national leaders typically have understood that education, as Horace Mann put it, "is the great equalizer . . . the balance-wheel of the social machinery." Simply put, the more educated people are, the more likely they are to be employed, earning a decent living, and able to support a family, pay taxes, and contribute to the community while participating in the democratic life of the nation.

For community colleges, few federal laws rivaled the impact of the Higher Education Facilities Act of 1963, which set out to double college enrollments and open 500 new community colleges within the decade. Edmund J. Gleazer, one of the champions of the community college movement, remarked on this success in 1972. He said, "We built the colleges. The millions came."<sup>7</sup> Today we must think anew. Millions more need

what community colleges have to offer, but as they currently function, community colleges are not up to the task before them.

## A Challenge and an Opportunity

Despite its challenges, the United States remains an exceptional nation. It is both the most powerful economy on the planet and the wealthiest nation in the history of the world. America's great national challenges are manageable if Americans can find the will to address them. The nation faces a simple but critical choice: It can actively create its future and control its destiny, or it can be shaped by uncontrolled social and economic circumstances. Our view is unshakeable: Community colleges, an American invention, are one of the nation's greatest assets in the task of creating a better future.

In this effort, the United States draws on many strengths. In addition to the nation's economic strength, we are a relatively young nation with the world's most entrepreneurial people. We can draw on remarkably productive and hard-working employees. And our network of community colleges provides America with a capacity that few other advanced industrial economies enjoy: the ability to rebuild the workforce, reinforce connections between education and the economy, and reverse the decline of the middle class.

A great challenge and an opportunity are at hand. The United States, which for generations led the world in college degree completion, now ranks 16th in the world in completion rates for 25- to 34-year-olds.<sup>8</sup> At the very time that global competitiveness depends on a well-educated

citizenry, we find ourselves losing ground in relative educational attainment. Helping reclaim preeminence in degree completion is the historic opportunity presented to this generation of community college leaders. Between now and 2025, the United States will need to find an additional 15–20 million employees, as an aging and highly skilled workforce retires.<sup>9</sup> How is the nation to replace these skills?

Two analyses from the Center on Education and the Workforce at Georgetown University frame the opportunity. The first outlines the growing reliance of the American economy on college-educated workers, especially workers with community college credentials.<sup>9</sup> The second demonstrates that expanding the number of Americans with postsecondary credentials can help close the income gap that has characterized American society since 1980.<sup>10</sup>

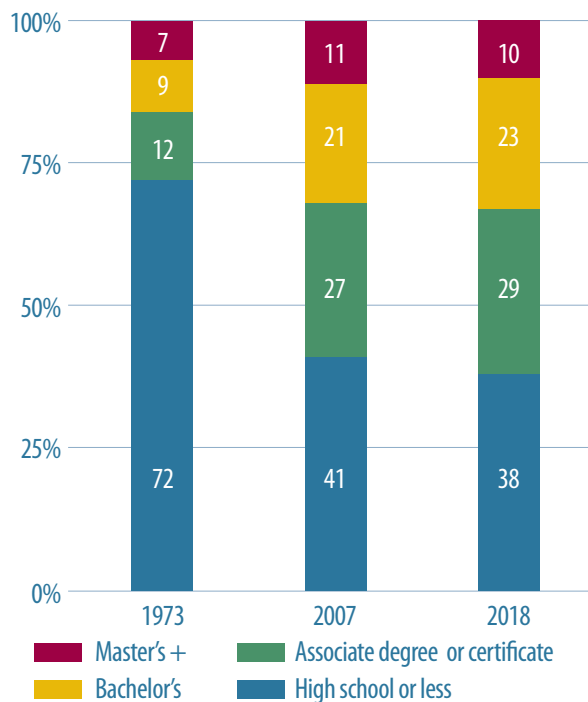
A generation ago, nearly three quarters of employed Americans could get by with a high school diploma or less (see Figure 1). A certificate, an associate degree, a bachelor’s degree, or post-baccalaureate education was a requirement for employment for only about one quarter of Americans. Those proportions are in the process of being reversed. By 2007, 59% of employed Americans needed a postsecondary credential or degree, a figure that is expected to approach two thirds of all employed Americans by 2018. Can the nation meet this challenge?<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile, it is clear that the United States has been underproducing graduates with postsecondary skills since at least 1980, in the process contributing substantially to income inequality. Unless the nation turns this around, up to 60 million Americans are at risk of being locked into predominantly low-wage jobs that cannot support a family. Community colleges have a crucial role to play in this situation. If this nation is able to

add 20 million postsecondary-educated workers to its workforce over the next 15 years, according to the Center on Education and the Workforce, income inequality will decline substantially, reversing the decline of the middle class.<sup>10</sup>

Even while acknowledging the challenges and opportunities facing the United States and its community colleges, the Commission notes the many ways that these conditions are shared by other countries and similar institutions around the globe. In addition, it is important that college graduates, whatever their location, be not just *globally competitive* but also *globally competent*, understanding their roles as citizens and workers in an international context. While identifying common problems, we may also discover common solutions.

**Figure 1. Percentage of Workforce by Educational Attainment: 1973–2018**



Note. From Carnevale, Smith, and Strohl (2010).



The nation can take great pride in what America's community colleges have accomplished, but the message of this Commission is simple and direct: If community colleges are to contribute powerfully to meeting the needs of 21st-century students and the 21st-century economy, education leaders must reimagine what these institutions are—and are capable of becoming.

**Table 1. 2012 Community College Fast Facts**

**Number and type of colleges<sup>1</sup>**

Public—986                      Tribal—31  
 Independent—115              Total—1,132

Headcount Enrollment (fall 2009)					
By program type	#	%	By attendance	#	%
Credit <sup>2</sup>	8 M	61.5%	Part-time <sup>2</sup>	7.54 M	58%
Noncredit <sup>3</sup>	5 M	38.5%	Full-time <sup>2</sup>	5.46 M	42%
Total	13 M				
Estimated increase fall 2009–fall 2011: 2.9% <sup>4</sup>					

Student Demographics					
Age <sup>5</sup>		Gender <sup>2</sup>		Ethnicity <sup>2</sup>	
Average	28	Women	57%	White	54%
Median	23	Men	43%	Hispanic	16%
≤21	39%			Black	14%
22–39	45%			Asian/Pacific Islander	6%
40+	15%			Native American	1%
				Other/unknown	10%

**Other significant demographics:<sup>5</sup>**

First generation to attend college—42%  
 Single parents—13%  
 Non-U.S. citizens—6%  
 Veterans—3%  
 Students with disabilities—12%

Representation of Community College Students Among Undergraduates (fall 2009) <sup>2</sup>	
% who are CC students	Undergraduate segment
44%	all U.S. undergraduates
43%	first-time freshmen
54%	Native American
51%	Hispanic
45%	Asian/Pacific Islander
44%	Black

**Employment status (2007–2008)<sup>5</sup>**

Full-time students employed full time—21%  
 Full-time students employed part time—59%  
 Part-time students employed full time—40%  
 Part-time students employed part time—47%

**Student financial aid (2007–2008)<sup>5</sup>**

<b>% of students applying:</b>	<b>% of students receiving:</b>
Any aid—59%	Any aid—46%
Federal aid—42%	Federal grants—21%
	Federal loans—10%
	State aid—13 %
	Institutional aid—11%

**% of federal aid received by community colleges (2009–2010)<sup>6</sup>**

Pell Grants—32%  
 Campus-based aid—10%  
 Academic competitiveness grants—18%

**Average Annual Tuition and Fees (2011–2012)<sup>7</sup>**

Community colleges (public, in district)—\$2,963  
 4-year colleges (public, in state)—\$8,244

**Degrees and Certificates Awarded (2008–2009)<sup>8</sup>**

Associate degrees—630,000  
 Certificates—425,000  
 Bachelor’s degrees—awarded by 48 public and 82 Independent colleges<sup>1,8</sup>

**Revenue Sources (2008–2009)<sup>9</sup>**

State funds—34%	Federal funds—16%
Local funds—20%	Other—13%
Tuition and fees—16 %	

**Fast Facts Sources**

<sup>1</sup> American Association of Community Colleges. (2012). Membership database.  
<sup>2</sup> National Center for Education Statistics. (2009b). *Integrated postsecondary education data system (IPEDS) fall enrollment survey* [Data file]. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.  
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# Part 3: Redesigning the Community College

## Today's Challenges

The historic commitment of the last two generations to the development of community colleges created a prodigious engine of opportunity and economic growth. All told, by 2010 community colleges enrolled more than 13 million students in credit and noncredit courses annually.<sup>11</sup> They have prepared millions of students for careers and transfer to baccalaureate institutions. Even now, in the midst of an economy struggling to recover, community colleges have responded to calls for retraining the American workforce, training displaced workers, and helping develop new industries. For a remarkably diverse student population, they have served as the gateway to higher education and thus to the middle class. It is a record for which all Americans can take great pride. (See Table 1 for facts about community colleges.)

Despite these historic successes, and amidst serious contemporary challenges, community colleges need to be redesigned for new times. What we find today are student success rates that are unacceptably low, employment preparation that is inadequately connected to job market needs, and disconnects in transitions between high schools, community colleges, and baccalaureate institutions. Community colleges, historically underfunded, also have been financed in ways that encourage enrollment growth, although frequently without adequately supporting that growth, and largely without incentives for promoting student success. These conditions hinder middle-class students and have a devastating effect on low-income students and students of color, those often in greatest need of what community colleges have to offer.

These are the challenges community colleges must address if they are to contribute to the restoration of the American Dream. The consequences of the current education model are evident. They are no longer acceptable. And they take a particular toll on low-income students, students of color, and first-generation college students.

## Student Success Rates

The evidence on student success in community colleges is distressing. Consider the following examples:

- The community college landscape is littered with lost credits that do not add up to student success. Fewer than half (46%) of students who enter community colleges with the goal of earning a degree or certificate have attained that goal, transferred to a baccalaureate institution, or are still enrolled 6 years later.<sup>12</sup> The rates, unfortunately, are lower for Hispanic, Black, Native American, and low-income students. Nearly half of all community college students entering in the fall term drop out before the second fall term begins.<sup>13</sup>
- “Students don’t do optional.” Almost a third (30%) of entering students do not attend orientation; most avoid online orientation; about 90% indicate that academic planning and advising is important to them, yet less than a third of entering students report that a college advisor helped them set academic goals and create a plan for achieving them; and although a large majority of entering



students are underprepared for college-level work, 76% never use tutoring services.<sup>14</sup>

- Well into the first term, many students have almost no idea of how well or poorly they are doing academically and report a general sense of bewilderment with registration processes.<sup>15</sup>
- Developmental (remedial) education is all too often a burial ground for student aspirations. Getting up to speed in math and reading for some students can take 3 or more years (P.U. Treisman, personal communication, 2011).
- Placement methods and advising are often dysfunctional. Colleges often lack the structure and coherence in academic planning, advising, career counseling, financial aid, and course-taking patterns that are required if larger numbers of students are to succeed (P.U. Treisman, personal communication, 2011).

## Rocky Transitions

A significant element in the student success challenge is that transitions from secondary schools to community colleges and then on to baccalaureate institutions are hardly ideal. The majority of incoming students are not well prepared for college work, and the proportion of students transferring to baccalaureate campuses is far lower than the proportion enrolling with intent to transfer.

- **From high school to community college.** Among high school graduates, only 24% of those intending to go to college meet all four ACT benchmarks of college readiness in English, mathematics, reading, and science.<sup>16</sup> About 60% of community college students take at least one developmental education course.<sup>17</sup>
- **Transfer to baccalaureate institutions.** The situation is hardly better in terms of success in transferring to baccalaureate institutions. Definitions of eligible transfer students

vary, but a number of studies examining students enrolling in a community college with the intention of transferring indicate that somewhere between 25% and 39% of these students succeed in transferring to a baccalaureate institution within 4–6 years.<sup>18</sup>

A related issue must be raised. Too many senior college and university leaders, faculty, department chairs, and deans are ambivalent about community colleges, understanding them not as having different missions but as somehow inferior because of their open-door admissions. Community college transfer students often have to fight to have their credits recognized at baccalaureate institutions, and universities often are reluctant to share data about transfer students and their performance. This ambivalence complicates the effort to improve articulation between the two sectors and lends credence to calls for more comprehensive policy solutions at the state level.

## Job Market Needs

Close examination of the connections between education and training and employment demands reveals serious shortcomings pertaining to student career planning, curricular and program alignment with labor market needs, and the preparation of students in terms of high-demand job skills.

### The Career Planning Gap

Reports suggest an overabundance of both adult and younger students planning to enroll in low-demand fields, and a corresponding shortage of students planning to enroll in high-demand fields paying a family-supporting wage. Estimates indicate employment opportunities for just 3% of students planning on enrolling in fields such as personal services, employment-related services, regulation and protection, crafts, and



the creative and performing arts.<sup>18</sup> While there may be compelling personal reasons for students to pursue these courses of study, a healthy employment outlook is not among them.

On the other hand, students' plans prior to college entry indicate very little understanding of employment possibilities in high-demand, high-wage fields (see Table 2). The disparities in employment plans versus employment demand are striking:

- The initial plans of students in several high-demand fields indicate that, even if they finish their programs, they will meet only 19% of labor-market demand overall.
- The gap between plans and employment possibilities indicates that just 3% of jobs in distribution and dispatching are likely to be filled by community college students with certificates or degrees. Comparable rates in other occupational clusters are as follows: 5% of jobs in communications and records are filled by community college graduates, 10% in manufacturing and processing, and 38% in transport operations.<sup>19</sup>

It seems clear that a substantial opportunity exists for community colleges to (a) do a better job of counseling and advising students, (b) find ways to align program and degree offerings more closely with labor-market demand, and (c) teach the skills required for a 21st-century workforce that is globally competitive.

### The Degree Gap

Whatever the plans of the students, the fact is that community colleges are producing too few graduates to meet workforce needs in several high-demand occupations (see Table 3). According to one study, community colleges produced enough graduates to meet just 51% of demand across eight occupations seeking nearly one million new hires in 2009–2010.<sup>19</sup> The analysis indicated that

- If the health professions were removed from the calculation, associate degree production would be sufficient to meet only 31% of demand in the remaining seven occupational categories.
- Degree underproduction ranged from meeting just 13% of demand for construction trades to 75% of demand for legal studies.

**Table 2. Career Plans of Entering Community College Students and Occupational Demand: Fall 2010**

Career Area Planned	Potential Supply	Demand	% of Demand Met
Distribution and dispatching	44	1,284	3%
Communications and records	1,348	24,553	5%
Construction and maintenance	2,049	33,418	6%
Manufacturing and processing	1,153	11,158	10%
Marketing and sales	2,890	21,763	13%
Mechanical and electrical specialties	2,556	11,541	22%
Transport operations	438	1,148	38%
Management	13,278	19,185	69%
<b>Total</b>	<b>23,756</b>	<b>124,050</b>	<b>19%</b>

*Note.* Data are drawn from all high school seniors who took the ACT and enrolled in a community college, fall 2010. Cited in ACT (2012).

- In the case of health professions and related programs, community colleges actually overproduced graduates in 2009–2010, although it is unclear if that is a continuing problem or a temporary challenge—related, perhaps, to inability to fill job openings in the public sector amidst funding cutbacks.<sup>19</sup>

In another study, ACT analyzed occupational data for more than 18,000 jobs against three essential skills: applied mathematics, locating information, and reading for information. These skills are required for 98% of jobs in occupations paying a wage sufficient to support a family. Indexing the three skills against the 18,000 jobs, analysts found that community college graduates were, on average, adequately skilled for just 57% of these desirable occupations.<sup>19</sup>

It should be noted that apprenticeship programs; proprietary, profit-making schools; and on-the-job training fill some of the unmet labor market needs in areas such as construction trades, materials moving, and mechanics and repair technologies. Still, each of these high-demand areas represents an occupational category in which community colleges are already productive and competitive.

## Underfunding

Financially, community colleges face daunting challenges. These institutions rely on state and local government for 55% of their revenues.<sup>19</sup> In the current economy, pressure on community college budgets has been, and remains, acute.

Enrolling 8 million credit students,<sup>11</sup> community colleges spend close to \$13,000 annually per full-time-equivalent student.<sup>20</sup> That amount is not much more than average K–12 per-pupil expenditures. It is also considerably below per-student expenditures at 4-year colleges and universities (see Figure 2). Over the past decade, community colleges have shouldered the lion’s share of higher education enrollment growth, serving over 1.6 million additional students with no more money per student. By raising tuition, senior public and private institutions more than compensated on a per-student basis for recent reductions in state and local appropriations. Community colleges, which offer low tuition as part of their commitment to access, are disproportionately harmed when enrollments surge and public funding fails to keep pace.

**Table 3. Community College Areas of Study With The Largest Shortages: 2009–2010**

Area of Study	Supply	Demand	% of Demand Met
Construction trades	19,414	147,357	13%
Transportation and materials moving	16,280	73,929	22%
Business, management, marketing, and related support	106,043	319,314	33%
Science technologies/technicians	2,103	5,931	35%
Mechanics and repair technologies	50,977	111,788	45%
Precision production	23,652	47,925	49%
Legal professions and studies	7,242	9,596	75%
Health professions and related programs	241,771	191,262	125%
<b>Total</b>	<b>467,482</b>	<b>907,102</b>	<b>51%</b>

*Note.* Data are drawn from all high school seniors who took the ACT and enrolled in a community college, fall 2010. Cited in ACT (2012).

The Commission offers the following observation without reservation: Community colleges are not funded at a level permitting them to perform the monumental tasks expected of them. This is not the private pleading of a special interest, but the public statement of our conviction that today's society is shortchanging this generation of community college students. At the same time, community colleges must make better use of the resources they have. Most of the necessary changes in these institutions and in student outcomes will come not through an influx of new or restored funding; rather, they will come through the leadership commitment and skill to reallocate existing resources to fund effective educational practice at scale.

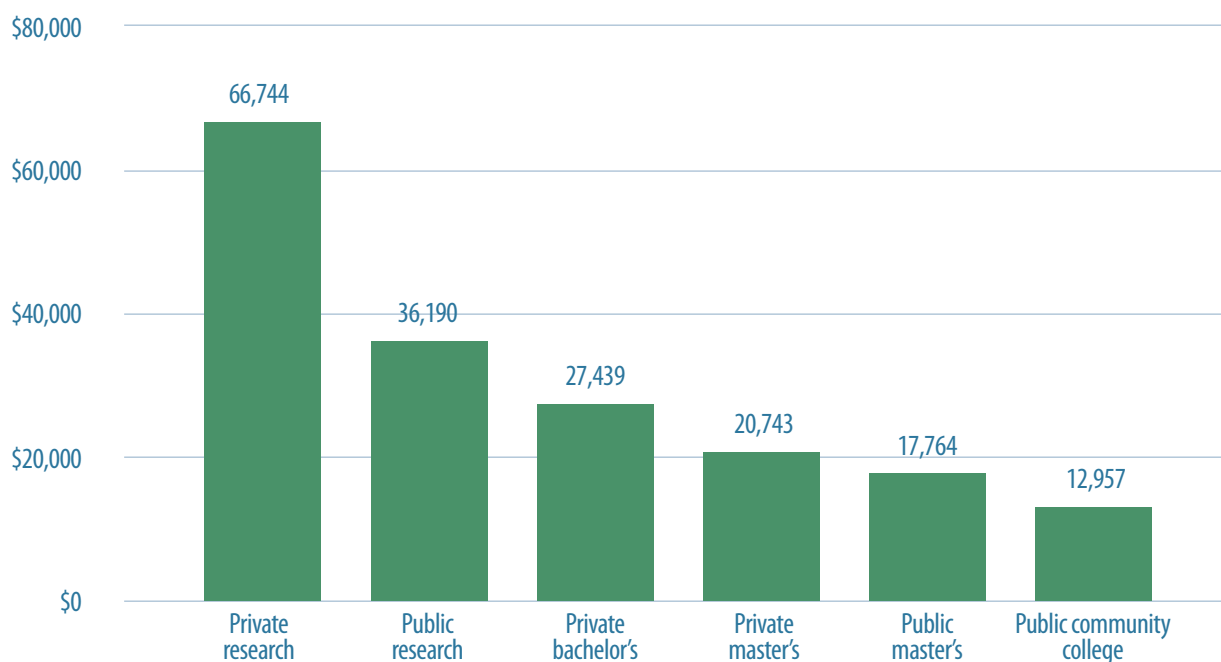
A great debate about how to ensure the economic future of the nation is underway nationally and in state capitols. How that debate is resolved remains to be seen. What remains true is that

amidst the politics of austerity, additional funds for community colleges will be hard to come by. Equally at a premium will be new thinking on campuses to respond to the situation in which educators find themselves. The issue is not about spending less, but about getting better value for the dollars expended. As community colleges help more students achieve success in terms of jobs, certificates, degrees, and transfer, the benefits of the public investment will become increasingly apparent to all stakeholders.

### Acknowledging the Equity Challenge

All of these factors have a devastating effect on low-income students and students of color. Compared with students at 4-year public and private institutions, community college students are much more likely to come from low-income households, to be first-generation college

**Figure 2. Expenditures Per FTE Student, by Institution Type: 2009**



*Note.* From Desrochers and Wellman (2011).

students, and to attend part time while working or taking care of children. These challenges are evident in both urban and rural community colleges. Policymakers often are surprised to learn that many rural community colleges enroll even higher proportions of low-income students and first-generation college students than do their urban and suburban counterparts. Throughout the community college world, even a modest increase in tuition can cause turmoil in family budgets and disrupt the dreams of students.

More than half of U.S. Hispanic and Native American undergraduate students are enrolled in community colleges, and so are more than 40% of Black students and students of Asian and Pacific Islander origin.<sup>21</sup> Yet completion rates for students of color in some groups—often those students facing the greatest challenges—are disappointing in the extreme: For example, one

analysis indicates that 6 years after college entry, only 30% of low-income community college students, 26% of Black students, and 26% of Hispanic students have completed either a degree or a certificate, compared with 39% and 36% of White and high-income students, respectively.<sup>22</sup> These blights threaten the American future and must be addressed.

### Moving Ahead

The reality community college leaders need to address is a world in flux, demanding dramatic institutional responses. Figure 3 depicts a framework for the changes required. Clearly, the future demands reimagination of what community colleges can be and how they can better serve their students, their communities, and their nation.

**Figure 3. Framework of Institutional Responses Needed to Move Community Colleges Ahead**

Move From	Move To
A focus on student access	A focus on access and student success
Fragmented course-taking	Clear, coherent educational pathways
Low rates of student success	High rates of student success
Tolerance of achievement gaps	Commitment to eradicating achievement gaps
A culture of anecdote	A culture of evidence
Individual faculty prerogative	Collective responsibility for student success
A culture of isolation	A culture of collaboration
Emphasis on boutique programs	Effective education at scale
A focus on teaching	A focus on learning
Information infrastructure as management support	Information infrastructure as learning analytics
Funding tied to enrollment	Funding tied to enrollment, institutional performance, and student success



The Commission believes that the unique and powerful contribution of community colleges lies in preserving access *while also* emphasizing student success, enhancing quality, and closing attainment gaps associated with income, race and ethnicity, and gender. To abandon the open door would be to betray the historic mission of these institutions.



# Part 4: Essential Elements in Institutional Transformation

In moving forward, it is clear that several crosscutting elements must be incorporated into work to transform institutions. This Commission supports the open door to college and its historic grounding in an enduring commitment to equity. Given the pressing needs for change, committed and strategic leadership is critical. Collaboration at entirely new levels, among internal and external entities, will be essential. And the need for systems of support—including professional development, technology, and a new culture of evidence—is inescapable.

## Leadership

Change cannot be achieved without committed and courageous leaders. While many things need to happen to accomplish institutional transformation, none of them will happen without leadership. The leadership challenge becomes all the more critical in light of three trends:

- The pool of current leaders is graying and approaching retirement.
- The pool of potential presidents is shrinking.
- The continuous rotation and recomposition of governing boards means that at any given time a significant number of board members are relatively new to their responsibilities.

A new joint effort of AACC and the Association of Community College Trustees promises to address these issues, but the Commission believes that further work is necessary.<sup>23</sup> Community colleges have been developing leaders to maintain the

inherited design. They need now to develop leaders to transform the design. Reshaping the community college of today to meet the needs of tomorrow means that community college leaders need to see change as their friend, embrace it, and, then, indeed, lead it.

## Collaboration and Partnerships

The word *community* in the term *community colleges* is no accident. These institutions have always been about serving their communities. They also have served as a staging ground from which community and business leaders can collaborate in launching new economic development activities. Now is the time to bring partnerships with community, business, and K–12 leaders to a new level.

The idea of using community colleges as engines of economic growth that generate jobs paying a family-supporting wage is far from fanciful. From one end of the United States to the other, entrepreneurial community college leaders have helped create entire new regional industries in fields from wineries and health care to food services and global distribution (see Table 4). Institutional ingenuity and entrepreneurship can be community game-changers in creating new jobs and industries. Just as important, community college leaders committed to genuine collaboration can reach out to colleagues in other education sectors, helping to pave new and more seamless pathways from K–12 to community colleges, and on to universities and the workforce.

**Table 4. Community Colleges as Entrepreneurs**

Here are three examples of community colleges that have served as community game changers in everything from health care and food services to wineries and worldwide distribution networks.

#### **Putting People Back to Work** | City Colleges of Chicago (IL)

City Colleges of Chicago is in the midst of an ambitious plan to grow the economy and create jobs by tailoring the curriculum to meet employers' needs for workers in fields such as health care, computer science, transportation, hospitality, and manufacturing. The program has high-level support from the mayor and business leaders. Part of the effort, the College to Careers program, offers to partner faculty with industry leaders to better align college programs with marketplace demand in high-growth fields. One of the truly attractive features of the effort is that it offers City Colleges' students access to what every ambitious Ivy League MBA student

knows is a direct link to employment—internships and job interviews.

These efforts are paying off. Nursing students at Malcolm X College now enjoy career introductions at the Rush University Medical Center. Meanwhile, MAC One Midway, which manages a food and beverage contract at Midway Airport, is so impressed with the students it has interviewed at the Richard J. Daley, Olive-Harvey, and Kennedy-King campuses that it has hired dozens as distribution clerks, bartenders, and servers. Mac One Midway finds itself calling as many as 40% of students back for second interviews.

#### **Helping Keep UPS in Louisville** | Jefferson Community and Technical College (KY)

In 1996, United Parcel Service (UPS) was considering moving its hub from Louisville, Kentucky, because it was having staffing problems. With 20,000 employees, the loss of UPS to the state, the region, and Jefferson County would have been traumatic. Out of this crisis emerged a partnership between UPS, the state of Kentucky, Jefferson Community and Technical College (JCTC), and the University of Louisville to establish Metropolitan College. UPS provides part-time employment for students in the program, pays half the cost of tuition, and provides reimbursement for textbooks. State and local governments pay the other half of tuition at JCTC and the University of Louisville. Students who par-

ticipate in Metropolitan College work part time at UPS with full-time benefits as they attend college during the day.

The results are remarkable. In 1996, just 8% of UPS workers had a postsecondary degree. A decade later, the figure increased to 45%. Annual turnover among new hires dropped from 100% in 1998 to 20% in 2009, as much as a 600% return on UPS's investment in JCTC students. UPS, half way out the door in 1996, completed a one million square foot expansion of its hub in 2006 and announced plans for a second billion-dollar investment to add another one million square feet of space.

#### **Wineries Renew a Once-Depressed Economy** | Walla Walla Community College (WA)

For years, rural Walla Walla County in Washington, close to Idaho and hugging the Oregon border, was known regionally for wheat, sweet onions, Whitman College, a state penitentiary, its community college, and little else. All that has changed in the last 20 years. Walla Walla is now known as wine country.

Looking around for value-added opportunities as the county's population declined and the community lost jobs,

Walla Walla Community College focused on the area's nascent wine industry. At the time, there were 17 wineries in the area. After a limited number of course offerings proved popular, the college went on to create a commercial winery run by its students. Today 152 wineries have created hundreds of new jobs in the county, and the once-depressed community is now thriving.

*Note.* Adapted from Ashford (2011), Poling (2012), and Skiba (2012).



## Supports for Change

As critical as leadership and partnerships are, they can only do so much. The work of effective institutional change requires a strengthened infrastructure of support, including strategically focused professional development programs, technologies for learning and learning analytics, and institutional capacity for collecting, analyzing, and using data to inform a student success agenda. Aided by these structural supports, community colleges can embark and persevere on the journey of change.

### Professional Development

Bringing transformational change to any complex entity in the midst of a rapidly changing environment is always difficult; it is a particular challenge on community college campuses with their multiple missions, proliferated programs, and diverse education and training needs. General education faculty members do not always see eye-to-eye with specialists on workforce training. Adjunct instructors, who now constitute 68% of the faculty,<sup>24</sup> may be marginalized and constrained in their ability to understand institutional mission and priorities. Individual board members may focus on one aspect of the college's role over others. Colleges need to find ways to make student success central to the work of everyone on campus, particularly the faculty and including the governing board—equipping all with the knowledge and skills required for their most effective work.

Effecting this transformation will require a clear and steady commitment to professional development across the institution, focused relentlessly on student success and completion. “Across the institution” means just that—governing board members, administrators, deans, department chairs, and faculty need to

be engaged in reengineering institutional policy and practice, being more responsive to student needs, and clarifying pathways for students to acquire meaningful credentials.

### Technology

The promise of technology to both expand learning and control costs has been unevenly grasped. At the state level, it is used too frequently to collect summative data for reports and too infrequently to report back on state and institutional progress and challenges. Institutionally, technology is used too often not to innovate, but to automate back-office services and existing instructional practice.

At the state and system levels, significant needs exist for developing data systems that track outcomes across institutions, systems, and sectors. High priority should be assigned to efforts to provide community college faculty and students with access to state-of-the-art technologies designed to foster instructional innovation and effectiveness. Predictive analytics, Web-based learning environments, simulations, games, embedded assessments, and sophisticated remote laboratories all hold great promise for improving the student experience and should be vigorously pursued.

### Data and Evidence

The unfortunate truth is that many community colleges have trouble monitoring their own performance. That reality has encouraged leaders in the field, national and state officials, and several foundations to support data-informed decision-making and development of a “culture of evidence” on more campuses. It seems clear that community colleges must have the capacity to do the following:

- Collect and analyze data on entering student cohorts, routinely disaggregating data by income level, race, ethnicity, gender, and college readiness upon entry.
- Use data to measure progress toward student success goals and for routine and rigorous evaluation of the effectiveness of institutional strategies for improvement.
- Employ evidence-based educational practices to improve outcomes for all students.
- The expectation of the Commission is that each institution will be able to report on its progress toward meeting student success goals by using disaggregated data and clearly defined indicators, including successful completion of developmental sequences and subsequent college-level courses, overall successful course completion rates, term-to-term retention rates, credit accumulation benchmarks, transfer, and completion of certificates and degrees.

(See Tables 5, 6, and 7 at the end of this section, which describe three current models for building a culture of evidence.)

### A 21st-Century Center

A critical addition to the support provided through professional development, technology, and data and evidence is the support of community colleges themselves—in the form of shared knowledge, expertise, and innovation. To facilitate sharing across colleges nationwide, AACC proposes to establish a 21st-Century Center. The Center will coordinate implementation of the Commission’s recommendations, serve as a clearinghouse for research and institutional strategies, act as a repository for promising practices, and promote development of community college leaders for the future.

## Beyond the Open Door

As context for the recommendations the Commission makes in this report, it offers a direct and unapologetic endorsement: This Commission strongly affirms the open-door mission of the community college. The Commission believes that the unique and powerful contribution of community colleges lies in preserving access *while also* emphasizing student success, enhancing quality, and closing attainment gaps associated with income, race and ethnicity, and gender. To abandon the open door would be to betray the historic mission of these institutions.

The Commission holds this conviction as well: Access without support for student success is an empty promise. If the door is to remain open, virtually everything else must change. The door must open into a community college with high academic standards that are clearly defined and carefully communicated to current and prospective students. And educational experiences of students must be designed to ensure academic quality while supporting student success. In this effort, we call on our colleagues in the K–12 community to join in partnerships to reduce by half the percentage of students who graduate from high school unprepared for college-level work. Community colleges will do their part by agreeing on a common performance level for “college and career-ready” high school assessments, working with secondary school leaders and teachers to align high school and college curriculum, and communicating more clearly to students the consequences in time and money of not meeting the college-ready standard on graduation from high school.

## Hard Choices

Most experts agree that community colleges are inadequately supported to do the work that is being asked of them. Obviously money matters, but what matters just as much is how institutions use the dollars they have. Community colleges are now forced to confront hard choices. Whom are they going to serve? What are the colleges' priorities? How broad should the curriculum be? What outcomes will they seek? To whom and to what missions will they say "No"? Or, "Sorry, but not any longer"? How will limited resources be reallocated to bring effective educational

practices to scale? What academic programs or student services will be eliminated? How will colleges ensure equity in educational outcomes? How will faculty associations and collective bargaining units lead and contribute to the redesign of students' educational experiences? How will governing boards appropriately define their roles in ensuring institutional focus on student success? How will adjunct faculty be fully prepared for and fully involved in the work ahead? How will governing boards and college leaders ensure that institutions engage in the courageous conversations that must occur before these questions can be answered?

**Table 5. Common Core State Standards**

The Common Core State Standards, developed under the leadership of the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers, are intended to provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so that teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them. The standards are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that young people need for success in college and careers. With American students fully prepared for the future, communities will be best positioned to compete successfully in the global economy.

The standards are informed by the most effective models from states across the country and coun-

tries around the world and provide teachers and parents with a common understanding of what students are expected to learn. Consistent standards will provide appropriate benchmarks for all students, regardless of where they live.

These standards, in both mathematics and English and language arts, define the knowledge and skills students should have within their K–12 education careers so that they will graduate from high school able to succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing, academic college courses and in workforce training programs. The standards

- Are aligned with college and work expectations.
- Are clear, understandable, and consistent.

- Include rigorous content and application of knowledge through high-order skills.
- Build upon strengths and lessons of current state standards.
- Are informed by other top-performing countries, so that all students are prepared to succeed in our global economy and society.
- Are evidence-based.

The Common Core State Standards are supported by a wide variety of business, parent, and education groups. They establish essential learning objectives in mathematics and English and language arts for elementary and secondary schools. They have been endorsed by more than 40 states.

*Note.* Adapted from Center on Education Policy (2012).

**Table 6. The Degree Qualifications Profile**

In January 2011, the Lumina Foundation for Education presented the Degree Qualifications Profile as a guide to help transform American higher education. The profile provides a preliminary framework for benchmarking the outcomes of education and defining what students with associate, bachelor's, and master's degrees should know and be able to do. The profile explicitly addresses five basic areas of learning. With regard to community colleges, the profile calls for students to be able to do the following at the associate degree level.

**Broad Integrative Knowledge**

- Describe how existing knowledge or practice is advanced, tested, and revised.
- Describe and examine a range of perspectives on key debates and their significance both within the field and in society.
- Illustrate core concepts of the field while executing analytical, practical, or creative tasks.
- Select and apply recognized methods of the field in interpreting characteristic discipline-based problems.
- Assemble evidence relevant to characteristic problems in the field, describe the significance of the evidence, and use the evidence in analysis of these problems.
- Describe the ways in which at least two disciplines define, address, and interpret the importance of a contemporary challenge or problem in science, the arts, society, human services, economic life, or technology.

**Specialized Knowledge**

- Describe the scope and principal features of field of study, citing at least some of its core theories and practices, and offer a similar explication of at least one related field.
- Illustrate contemporary terminology in the field.
- Generate substantially error-free products, reconstructions, data, etc., or juried exhibits or performances as appropriate to the field.

**Intellectual Skills**

- Analytic inquiry. Identify, categorize, and distinguish among elements of ideas, concepts, theories, or practical approaches to standard problems.
- Information resources. Identify, categorize, evaluate, and cite multiple information resources necessary to engage in projects, papers, and performances.
- Diverse perspectives. Describe how knowledge from different cultural perspectives would affect interpretations of prominent problems in politics, society, and art.
- Quantitative fluency. Present accurate calculations and symbolic operations and explain how such calculations and operations are used in either the specific field or in interpreting social and economic trends.
- Communication fluency. Present substantially error-free prose in both argumentative

and narrative forms to general and specialized audiences.

**Applied Learning**

- Describe in writing at least one substantial case in which knowledge and skills acquired in academic settings are applied to a challenge in a non-academic setting; evaluate the learning gained from the application; apply the learning to the question; and analyze at least one significant concept related to course of study, in light of learning outside the classroom.
- Locate, gather, and organize evidence on an assigned research topic addressing a course-related question or a question of practice in a work or community setting; offer and examine competing hypotheses in answering the question.

**Civic Learning**

- Describe one's own civic and cultural background, including its origins and development, assumptions, and predispositions.
- Describe diverse positions, historical and contemporary, on selected democratic values or practices and present one's own position on specific problem involving values.
- Take an active role in a community context and examine the civic issues encountered and insights gained from community experience.

*Note.* Adapted from Adelman, Ewell, Gaston, and Geary Schneider (2011).

**Table 7. Voluntary Framework of Accountability**

The Voluntary Framework of Accountability, developed in partnership by the American Association of Community Colleges, the Association of Community College Trustees, and the College Board, is the first national system of accountability specifically for community colleges and by community colleges. Until now, community colleges have been largely assessed using measures developed for 4-year universities, which, in many cases do not match the mission or the characteristics of community college student populations. For example, many national assessments are pegged to full-time students, but most community college students attend part time. Through the VFA, community college leaders have now defined the most appropriate

metrics for gauging how well community colleges perform in serving a variety of students and purposes.

The VFA is structured as a three-phase initiative. Phase 2 ended in fall 2011 with the completion of the following:

- A technical manual to define and instruct calculation of measures.
- A framework for guiding colleges in the assessment of student learning outcomes.
- A blueprint and mock-up of a data collection and display tool.
- The preliminary results of pilot testing.
- A strategic plan for college participation and engagement in the VFA.

Phase 3, the implementation phase, is currently underway.

The manual and framework provide specific metrics to assess how community colleges perform in areas such as student progress and achievement, implementation of career and technical education programs (credit and noncredit), and transparency in reporting outcomes. These metrics were pilot tested over five months by 58 community colleges, both large and small. The release of the metrics manual is intended to give each community college a roadmap to greater and more rigorous accountability with clearly defined measures, methodologies, and context validated via the pilot colleges and evaluation.

*Note.* From AACCC (2012b).

Community college leaders must ask themselves what legacy they want to leave for the next generation of community college students. Is it to be the community college of the 1970s? Or a new model ensuring that community colleges serve the students of today and tomorrow ever more effectively?





# Part 5: Recommendations for Reimagining the Community College: The Three Rs

## A Preview of the Reimagined Community College

Community college leaders must ask themselves what legacy they want to leave for the next generation of community college students. Is it to be the community college of the 1970s? Or a new model ensuring that community colleges serve the students of today and tomorrow ever more effectively? Times have changed. Students have changed. Jobs are different. Modes of learning and of accessing information have been transformed too. Much has been learned about effective educational practice. Yet, with few notable exceptions, community colleges today resemble those of yesteryear. What is needed are new designs to meet the needs of the future.

What might such a reimagined community college look like? The evidence is still coming in, but here is a preview: It would be an institution that genuinely welcomes every student on entry and prepares that student for individualized assessments of academic readiness for college. It would require students to participate in on-campus orientation and would provide multiple opportunities for students to create connections with the campus community. It would insist on first-semester advisement designed to acquaint students with the options available to them, help them set goals, and ensure that they create a clear plan for attaining their goals. All or most students would complete a student success course in their first term and enter a structured program of study as soon as possible. Students would find accelerated basic skills or developmental education instruction (as needed) embedded in a

redesigned curriculum that stacks credentials into meaningful certificates and degrees as students progress through their programs of study.

Student support services would be aligned with students' needs and schedules and typically integrated into redesigned courses and curriculum pathways. Teaching strategies would promote active learning and extensive student–student and student–faculty interaction. Assessment of learning outcomes would be embedded in key courses to ensure the quality of the credentials awarded. As part of this great reinvention effort, community college leaders would preside over a culture of evidence, able to put their hands at a moment's notice on data about student and institutional progress toward essential goals. How many students are enrolled in developmental education programs? How are they progressing? Are students successfully completing the courses they start? What do transfer rates look like? Are persistence and completion rates on the rise? How do these data break down by race, ethnicity, age, and gender? These questions and more should be part of the constant campus conversation.

To reimagine the community college required for new times, the Commission sets forth a set of imperatives it calls the “Three Rs.” The Three Rs, incorporating seven recommendations, are as follows:

- **Redesign** students' educational experiences.
- **Reinvent** institutional roles.
- **Reset** the system to create incentives for student and institutional success.

## Redesign Students' Educational Experiences

### Purpose

The intent of the Commission's redesign recommendations is to restore U.S. preeminence in college completion among young adults by helping an additional five million students earn degrees, certificates, or other credentials with value in the workplace. For most community colleges, this means improving completion rates and helping improve college readiness of students, especially for low-income students and students of color who have too frequently been left behind.

### RECOMMENDATION 1

*Increase completion rates of students earning community college credentials (certificates and associate degrees) by 50% by 2020, while preserving access, enhancing quality, and eradicating attainment gaps associated with income, race, ethnicity, and gender.*

#### Implementation Strategies

- Construct coherent, structured pathways to certificate and degree completion. This strategy should aim to incorporate high-impact, evidence-based educational practices; integrate student support with instruction; promote implementation at scale; rigorously evaluate the effectiveness of programs and services for students; and courageously end ineffective practices.
- Promote transfer from community colleges to baccalaureate institutions through state policy stipulating that students who complete an agreed-upon core of transfer courses and earn an associate degree may transfer to junior standing at a public university without loss of credits.
- Devise strategies to identify students who have earned 30 credit hours at community colleges and to assist them in earning credentials.

### RECOMMENDATION 2

*Dramatically improve college readiness: By 2020, reduce by half the numbers of students entering college unprepared for rigorous college-level work, and double the number of students who complete developmental education programs and progress to successful completion of related freshman-level courses.*

#### Implementation Strategies

- Redesign developmental education fundamentally, creating new evidence-based pathways that accelerate students' progress toward successful college-level work. Incorporate design principles emerging from community college research and practice: acceleration, contextualization, collaborative learning, and integrated student and academic support.
- Align explicit expectations defining readiness for college-level work with enhanced expectations for high school graduation, while collaborating in implementation of the Common Core State Standards.
- Implement large-scale and effective collaborations with K–12 districts at both leadership and faculty levels, aimed at developing a college-going culture, building students' college success skills, and expanding dual/concurrent enrollment and other strategies for accelerating the progress of students on the college pathway.



## RECOMMENDATION 3

*Close the American skills gaps by sharply focusing career and technical education on preparing students with the knowledge and skills required for existing and future jobs in regional and global economies.*

### Implementation Strategies

- Ensure students' opportunities for career advancement and upward mobility through design of coherent career pathways leading to "stackable" credentials—multilevel, industry-recognized credentials reflecting attainment of the knowledge and skills required at different stages of a career.
- Build community college capacity for accurately identifying unfilled labor market needs and for ensuring that career education

and training programs are streamlined to address those high-need areas. Develop technology-based tools that will help local colleges access available labor market data to identify and monitor skills gaps in their regions.

- Mobilize powerful local, regional, and national partnerships (involving community colleges, employers, and government agencies) to accomplish a collaborative agenda that
  - ◆ Ensures that program planning targets skills gaps.
  - ◆ Promotes the associate degree as a desired employment credential.
  - ◆ Establishes alternative models for completing skills-based credentials, including classroom instruction, online learning, credit for prior learning, and on-the-job learning.
  - ◆ Develops a national credentialing system.

## Reinvent Institutional Roles

### Purpose

The aim here is twofold: First, refocus institutional mission and roles on 21st-century education and employment needs. Second, develop support structures that help multiple institutions meet local, state, and national needs.

### RECOMMENDATION 4

*Refocus the community college mission and redefine institutional roles to meet 21st-century education and employment needs.*

#### Implementation Strategies

- Ensure that students can learn what they need to learn, when and how they need to learn it, by shifting community colleges from playing the restricted role of local provider of direct instructional services to an expanded role as broker of educational access, connecting students to learning opportunities available through multiple providers and multiple modes of delivery. Of necessity in an increasingly open learning environment, the brokering role will require expanding community college work in academic advising, learning assessment, and credentialing.
- Establish venues and protocols for engaging governing boards, college presidents, faculty leaders, and partners in necessary discussions and decisions about hard choices: Whom will this college serve? In what ways? Seeking what outcomes? And to what and whom will we say “no”?

### RECOMMENDATION 5

*Invest in support structures to serve multiple community colleges through collaboration among institutions and with partners in philanthropy, government, and the private sector.*

#### Implementation Strategies

- Create partnerships or consortia for the development and support of student data systems, data analytics, educational diagnostics, learning management systems, institutional research, and professional development.
- Implement programs (in individual community colleges, systems, and states) to strengthen credentialing through rigorous assessment and transparent documentation of the knowledge and skills of students.

## Reset the System

### Purpose

The recommendations for resetting the system urge strategic investment to promote student progress and to ensure rigor, transparency, and accountability in the community college sector.

### RECOMMENDATION 6

*Target public and private investments strategically to create new incentives for all institutions of education and their students and to support community college efforts to reclaim the American Dream.*

#### Implementation Strategies

- Advocate at the local, state, and national levels for *renewed public investment in the public good*—the development of the nation’s people—as necessary both to economic competitiveness and a vibrant democracy.
- Incorporate *incentives for student performance and progress* into student financial aid programs at the federal, state, and local levels, while also elevating the priority of need-based aid.
- Implement funding strategies that put money toward providing incentives and support for collaborative work across educational sectors (preK–12, community college, and university) to facilitate student transitions and accelerate their educational progress.
- Develop public funding models that include provisions for *making student success and college completion matter*, incorporating incentives for community colleges to preserve access and continue serving high-risk and traditionally underserved students.
- Create accessible and interactive statewide data systems, learning analytics, and other tools essential to the capacity of community colleges to monitor student progress, institutional performance, and changes in community and labor force needs.

### RECOMMENDATION 7

*Implement policies and practices that promote rigor, transparency, and accountability for results in community colleges.*

#### Implementation Strategies

- Ensure that credentials represent real knowledge and skills by implementing the Degree Qualifications Profile as a framework for learning outcomes assessment and quality assurance in community colleges.
- Leverage the influence and collective purchasing power of community colleges to press for development of learning outcomes assessments that meet community college specifications for modular, course-embedded assessments (e.g., writing, quantitative reasoning, technological literacy) that are tied to the Degree Qualifications Profile.
- Implement state data systems that permit colleges to track students on their educational and career pathways. By following students into higher education and the workforce, education leaders can demonstrate the employment- and wage-related impacts of a community college education. Simultaneously they should work with states, funders, and national associations to develop a concise set of indicators of student progress and success.
- Implement the Voluntary Framework of Accountability nationwide, while also developing strengthened approaches to measuring student learning and employment-related outcomes.

America's exceptional dream consists of opportunity, community, and intergenerational upward mobility. In pursuit of that dream, community colleges have been a national asset, creating opportunity, supporting students, and building communities.



# A Final Word

This is not the first commission to take up the challenges and opportunities facing American community colleges, nor will it be the last. This report follows in the tradition of two other major reports: The 1947 report of the Truman Commission, which envisioned community colleges as a mechanism to make higher education available to all, and the 1988 report of the Commission on the Future of the Community College, which set forth an agenda to strengthen the community college role in “building communities.”<sup>25</sup>

America’s exceptional dream consists of opportunity, community, and intergenerational upward mobility. In pursuit of that dream, community colleges have been a national asset, creating opportunity, supporting students, and building communities. And every year, community college leaders see the powerful emotions of parents and students as graduates take their place on the commencement stage.

Community colleges have served the nation, and its communities and families, well.

Now community colleges are asked to take part in a great rebirth of America. The future of the nation is at risk, in part because of inadequate investment in our human capital. The development of human potential is what community colleges are all about. This is an issue that community college leaders and their partners must take up and make their own. For it is in grappling with the complexity of global issues that Americans can learn again the simplicity of human aspiration. It is in wrestling with uncertainty about the economic future of the nation that educators can reimagine the role of community colleges in reclaiming the American Dream. And it is in nurturing the struggling dream of America that community colleges contribute mightily to the futures of their students, their communities, and the nation.

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# Appendix A: Members of the 21st-Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges

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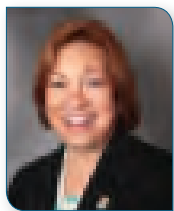
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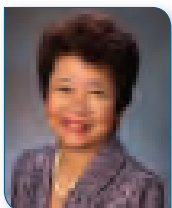
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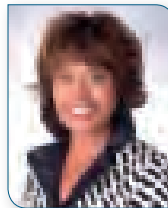
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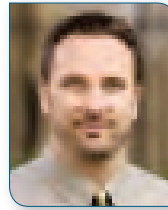
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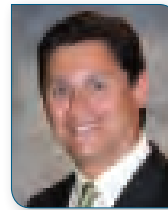
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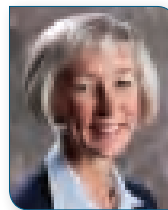
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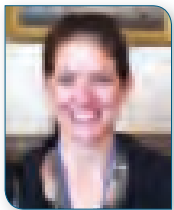
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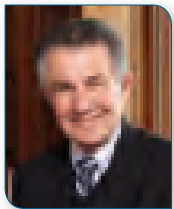
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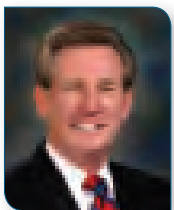
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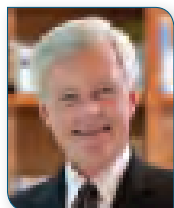
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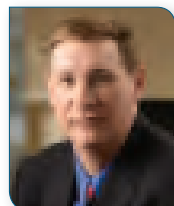
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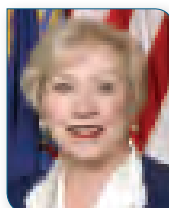
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**Nancy Zimpher**  
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The State University of New York

# Appendix B: Experts Who Presented to the Commission

## August 11–12, 2011 | Washington, DC

Sarita E. Brown, Co-Founder and President, *Excelencia* in Education!  
Walter G. Bumphus, President and CEO, American Association of Community Colleges  
Samuel Cargile, Vice President, Grantmaking, Lumina Foundation  
Michael Lawrence Collins, Associate Vice President, Postsecondary State Policy, Jobs for the Future  
Kati Haycock, President, Education Trust  
Mark David Milliron, Chancellor, Western Governors University, Texas  
Eloy Oakley, Superintendent-President, Long Beach City College  
Vincent Tinto, Distinguished University Professor, School of Education, Syracuse University  
Philip Uri Treisman, Director, Charles A. Dana Center, The University of Texas at Austin  
Suzanne Walsh, Senior Program Officer, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

## October 17–18, 2011 | Washington, DC

Thomas Bailey, Director, Community College Research Center/National Center for Postsecondary Research  
Anthony P. Carnevale, Director, Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce  
Cable Green, Director of Global Learning, Creative Commons  
Kenneth C. Green, Founding Director, Campus Computing Project  
Martha J. Kanter, Under Secretary, U.S. Department of Education  
Martin L. Scaglione, President, Workforce Development Division, ACT  
Stewart E. Sutin, Clinical Professor of Administration and Policy Studies, University of Pittsburgh, School of Education  
Candace Thille, Director, Open Learning Initiative, Carnegie-Mellon University  
Jane Wellman, Executive Director, Delta Cost Project

# Appendix C: Overview of the Listening Tour

National and state leaders have expressed grave concern about the fact that the United States has declined from its standing as first in the world in college degree completion among young adults to a position in 16th place. In accordance with its mission, AACC responded with a two-part 21st-Century Initiative with the support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Kresge Foundation, ACT, and the Educational Testing Service.

In Phase 1, a listening tour, AACC staff gathered information from across the nation on student access, institutional accountability, budget constraints, big ideas for the future, and what AACC can do for its members. During that activity, AACC staff heard from more than 1,300 stakeholders in 10 regions of the country—students, college faculty and staff, administrators, trustees, state policymakers, and college presidents and chancellors. A report on broad consensus findings from the listening tour was completed in early 2012 and is available from AACC at [www.aacc.nche.edu/21stCenturyInitiative](http://www.aacc.nche.edu/21stCenturyInitiative).

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## 21st-Century Initiative Listening Tour Itinerary

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	Date (2011)	Location	Host/Venue
1	January 31	Austin, TX	Meeting of the Texas Association of Community College Trustees and Administrators
2	February 17	Detroit, MI	Wayne County Community College District and Macomb Community College
3	February 23	Washington, DC	American Association of Community Colleges
4	March 3	Tallahassee, FL	Meeting of the Florida Council of Presidents
5	March 21	Jamestown, NC	Guilford Technical Community College
6	March 23	River Grove, IL	Triton College
7	March 24	Columbus, OH	Sinclair Community College
8	April 4	New York, NY	City University of New York
9	July 20	Anaheim, CA	North Orange County Community College District
10	July 21	Martinez, CA	Contra Costa Community College District
11	July 28	Des Moines, IA	Meeting of the Iowa Association of Community College Trustees
12	September 8	New York, NY	State University of New York
13	October 21	Harrisburg, PA	Harrisburg Area Community College
14	November 2	Grand Island, NE	Meeting of the Nebraska Community College Association

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# Appendix D: List of 21st-Century Commission Working Briefs

**A** ACC commissioned 11 working briefs from leading experts in the field. The briefs were used to provide background information as well as to aid and inform the Commission as it worked to create a new vision for the future of community colleges.

1. **Coming Through the Open Door: A 21st-Century Community College Student Profile**  
*Cynthia D. Wilson*
2. **Equity in Community Colleges**  
*Mario Martinez*
3. **The Case for College Completion**  
*Dewayne Matthews*
4. **Strengthening Student Success in the Community College**  
*Thomas Bailey, Shanna Smith Jaggars, and Davis Jenkins*
5. **College: Ready or Not?**  
*Michael Lawrence Collins*
6. **Institutional Transformation for Student Success**  
*Byron McClenney*
7. **Learning, Teaching, and College Completion**  
*Terry O'Banion*
8. **Workforce Strategies for America's Future: Community College Contributions**  
*Julian L. Alssid and Melissa Goldberg*
9. **Technology: Conducive and Disruptive Roles in Improving Student Success and College Completion**  
*Candace Thille*
10. **Policy Visions: Creating the Conditions for Community College Effectiveness**  
*Richard Kazis*
11. **Changing Lives, Building a Workforce: Preparing Community College Students for Jobs and Careers**  
*ACT, Inc.*

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*Note.* The 21st-Century Commission working briefs are available at [www.aacc.nche.edu/21stCenturyInitiative](http://www.aacc.nche.edu/21stCenturyInitiative).







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