

Post-High School Education: Its Needs, Its Potential

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"The commitment of the American society to the maintenance and expansion of opportunity for post-secondary education will be realized primarily through the junior colleges."
—Sociologist Robert Havighurst (7).

READING nearly any general education article of the recent past seems to suggest that there are two *major* underlying needs for post-secondary education in our society. The first need is to provide for a greater breadth of educational opportunity through broadening the student base. The second need is rather multifaceted, but one that suggests the caption: "Flexible Response to a Changing Society; Enhancing the Quality of Our Culture."

The present role and future potential of the community college in meeting these challenges will be the focus of this article.

Need 1: Broadening the Student Base

"All available talent should be nurtured by as much education as is necessary to bring it to flower."
—Edmund Gleazer, Jr., AAJC (4).

In a recent book (6), Dugan highlighted the increasing involvement of our society in education by summarizing this growth as follows:

In 1900, only about 10 percent of high school age youth were in school; about 75 percent of those who graduated went on to college.

However, by the 1950's, 90 percent of all children of high school age were in school—reflecting almost universal secondary education. Of this, a more heterogeneous group of about 25 to 35 percent went on to college. In 1968, there were approximately seven million college students; in comparison to earlier figures of all youth ages thirteen to twenty-one, while 5 percent were attending college in 1910, nearly 50 to 55 percent were attending post-secondary education in 1968 (6).

Students as they come into high school soon know if there is an institution somewhere in that state or locale where they can go, and which they can afford. In California, 80 percent or more of all high school graduates take some kind of post-secondary higher education, while in New Jersey, only about 30 percent of the high school graduates go on to post-secondary education. In New Jersey, the expectation level of high school graduates was relatively low because of the limited educational opportunity available. The present development of county-based community colleges in New Jersey should alleviate this condition.

The major commitment of the community college is to extend educational opportunity. The need is not only to extend

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such an opportunity but to attend to a larger student population with more diverse social origins.

The elementary and secondary schools are now fully committed to serving the entire spectrum of youth as exemplified by the comprehensive high school concept. The climbing enrollments in higher education institutions seem to indicate that such institutions are also being asked to assume a broader responsibility for educating all segments of our society (4).

Potential 1: "Open Door" Admission Policy

The community colleges have answered this challenge in a way unique to higher education. The "open door" policy, allowing anyone with a high school diploma, or who is a mature adult, to take courses, has created a student body with a wide range of academic skills, interests, and achievements. Typically, these students are from the middle level achievement (39 percent) and lower level achievement (25 percent). This compares with the four-year college, in which the middle level students represent 23 percent and the lower level students comprise only 6 percent. The junior college compares more closely with the general population characteristics than with the characteristics of students attending four-year institutions (2). To this extent, then, the community colleges are truly "peoples colleges" and this concept has not been lost on various minority groups.

The open door concept has led to a heavy emphasis on student development activities, with special attention to the counseling functions, and also to the creation of various levels of noncredit or nontransferable courses in a "Development Program." Such topics as learning skills, reading comprehension, writing skills, math skills, and others are structured to give the lower achieving student a realistic chance to improve himself.

Potential 2: Low Student Costs

The students who do come through the "open doors" are representative of the general population, with a large percentage being

the first generation of college-goers in the family. The student cost of obtaining post-secondary education, therefore, is an important consideration. Gleazer (4) reports that over half the students hold part-time jobs. Typical tuition costs may range from \$8 to \$12 per semester hour credit.

While the financial barrier to college attendance has been lowered impressively, rising costs of operations are making it difficult to keep student fees within reach, and if the effectiveness of this new institution as a "flexible response" to social and economic mobility is to be maintained, then these financial barriers must be kept minimal.

Potential 3: Accessibility

The community college has responded to the need for providing higher education locally. In Florida, for example, before junior colleges were established only 7 percent of the high school graduates entered colleges. Ten years later, 52 percent of them began college, with 45 percent of them attending the local community college. Florida's development of these colleges has now put a community college campus within 25 minutes' driving time of 97 percent of the state's population.

In Chicago, studies showed that the percentage of college-age groups enrolled at the campuses decreased markedly with the distance from the college. In the rest of Illinois, the community college development is rapidly approaching the landmark set in Florida, while in other states, plans are being made to implement an optimal distribution of campuses.

Need 2: A Flexible Response to Change

Aside from the philosophic point as to whether an educational institution is to be a transmitter of our cultural heritage or society's "change agent" to remodel and build a new one, a number of problems are now impinging on the educational establishment. Such here-and-now conditions as urbanization, with its staggering socioeconomic inner

city problems and the mass transportation dilemma; people mobility; the moral (?) issues of drug use, refusal of military service, overreactive confrontations, and campus violence; and the survival issues of pollution, environmental control, and ecology have all intruded into instruction and the curricula of our schools. In spite of the pressure placed upon the schools by such changes, education has been slow to respond (5).

Potential 4: Curricular

Mayhew (9) recently suggested that there are at least four major kinds of study which ought to be part of the educational experience of all students. These studies are delineated as general, basic, or common studies; liberal or broadening studies; contextual studies; and studies of some depth in a major field.

Most community colleges have responded to this need by providing college transfer (parallel) courses, career (occupational) courses, general studies, and adult and continuing education studies which might even include graduate extension courses from a major university in the region.

The diverse curriculum needs are reflected in the growing list of studies indicating what should be implemented. For example, Solomon (10), in examining the health services manpower needs in New York, found that medical care establishments expect a 27 percent overall expansion of their work force in the next five years. At this rate of expansion, medically related occupations would rise as a group from 56 percent of current employment to 62 percent in five years.

In a single site study of the post-secondary educational needs of Columbus, Indiana, Blee (1) found that a community college located there would meet the community needs: by providing occupational programs that are "tailored to the performance requirements of employment that is available both in and out of Columbus"; by providing transfer courses of study; by providing "basic and general adult educational services that are tailored to the needs of people at varied levels

of educational attainment"; and by providing community service programs and cultural activities to the students and community at large.

Interest in new career programs to meet growing community needs in areas of environment, new technologies, ecology, and so forth is exemplified by the numerous career and certificate programs being established. Such curriculum program samples as the following are indicative of the response community colleges, and even technical institutes, are making to these needs:

Environmental Technician . . . Dental Hygiene . . . Emergency Medical . . . Urban Technologies . . . Tree Farming . . . Water Treatment Inspector . . . Law Enforcement . . . Forest Protection Aide . . . Aviation . . . Radiologic Technician . . . Library Assistant . . . Wastewater Technology . . . Mid-management.

Potential 5: Cocurricular and Continuing Education

Cocurricular activities, such as cultural art series, guest lecturer series, foreign film shows, "coffee house" music groups, and summer tours overseas, all provide the student various opportunities for experiences. Such activities contribute toward some of the guidelines suggested by Mayhew (9) in that the student should acquire experience in off-campus activities, engage in ad hoc activities, learn by using the newer media, and have an aesthetically creative experience regardless of the level of his performance.

Continuing education and adult education provide learning situations for the established citizenry to further their own personal goals for self-development and individual growth within the framework of organized classes. This area is the sleeping giant of the community college field, and its potential to respond to community needs is just beginning to be felt.

Potential 6: Policy Making and Organization

One of the unique ways in which most community colleges differ from the usual university structures is the process by which

they are governed. While the pattern varies from state to state, generally a local Board of Trustees, elected or appointed publicly, votes on policies and procedures within the constraints of state statutes and boards. Although funding operations also vary, the local residents and voters are closely involved either through local tax levies or through bond referenda in support of the college. This close "political" and financial power base makes the community college far more responsive to the educational needs of its citizenry than a four-year college.

With the advent of accountability in education, performance contracting, learning systems, management by objectives, and shared policy making, Figure 1 is suggestive of a model to maintain a "flexible response" to the educational needs of our society. While no single college presently functions entirely

within such a framework, various components are being tried. Shoreline Community College near Seattle has four such councils operating, while Lahti (8) recently discussed the potential of the management system approach that is beginning at Harper College in Illinois.

For those concerned with the curriculum and instructional staffing, Voegel (11) has discussed a curriculum organization grid system which suggests strategies to optimize human and other resources in achieving improved student learning. With one new community college opening its doors every week over the next several years, each institution must strive for a balance between varying societal goals and constraints and the individual's need for varied post-high school education.

The community colleges' response to re-

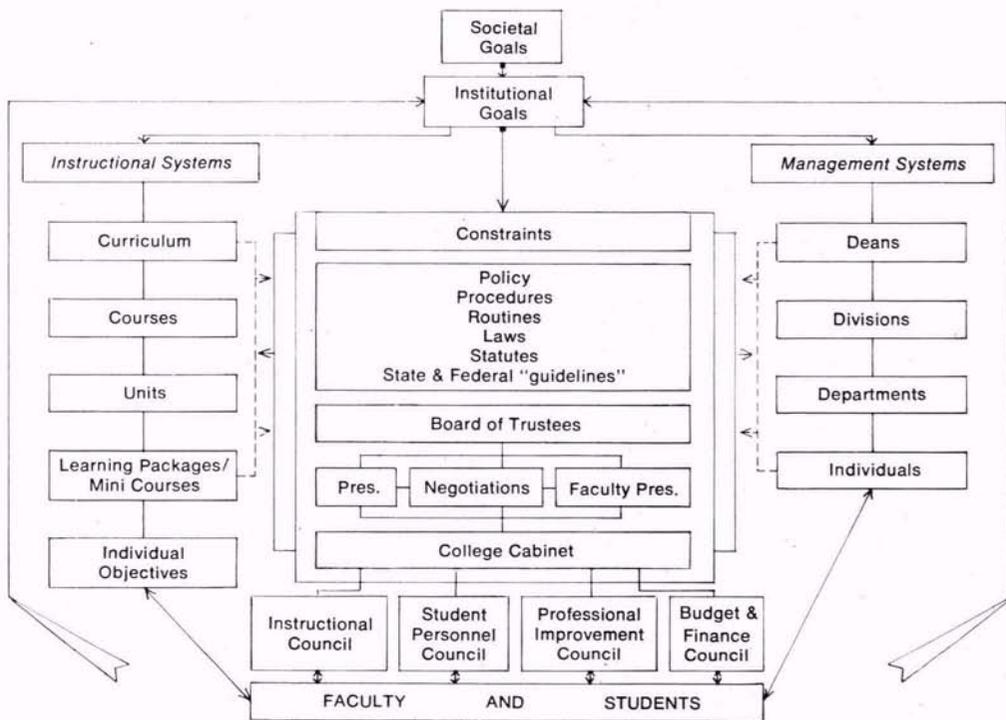


Figure 1. A "Flexible Response" Model for a Policy-Making and Systems Approach to Institutional Self-Renewal

newal in the seventies may be akin to John Gardner's closing words in his book, *Self-Renewal*:

They will understand that their society is not like a machine that is created at some point in time and then maintained with a minimum of effort; a society is being continuously recreated, for good or ill, by its members. This will strike some as a burdensome responsibility, but it will summon others to greatness (3).

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