# THE NISOD PAPERS

*NISOD*

An occasional publication dedicated to topics of interest to community and technical college educators.

## It's Time to Reimagine the American Community College

In the last two decades, the community college has been going through a series of transformations supported by the federal and state governments, by foundations, and by community college leaders. It has become a respected and accepted member of the higher education community lauded by the nation's presidents, by the CEOs of major companies, and by millions of students and citizens who identity it as their pathway to the American dream.

In 2012 the American Association of Community Colleges issued a major report, *Reclaiming the American Dream*, that called for a new vision for community colleges: Redesign students' educational experiences, reinvent institutional roles, and reset the system to create incentives for student and institutional success. The commission that issued the report made seven recommendations that reflect the reforms that are currently transforming the nation's community colleges:

1. Increase completion rates by 50% by 2020.

2. Dramatically improve college readiness.

3. Close the American skills gap.

4. Refocus the community college mission and redefine institutional roles.

5. Invest in collaborative support structures.

6. Target public and private investments strategically

7. Implement policies and practices that promote rigor and accountability (*Reclaiming the American Dream*, 2012).

The transformation currently in progress focuses primarily on student success, but for 100 years, student access was the overarching mission of the community college.

### The Access Agenda

The Access Agenda—opening the door to higher education for students who never dreamed of going to college—has been a primary pillar of the community college. And community colleges have been enormously successful in achieving the goals of the Access Agenda. The open-door philosophy encourages any student who has graduated from high school, obtained a GED, or is 18 years or older to enter college. The comprehensive curriculum is designed to offer a number of options to these diverse students so they can find a pathway that meets their needs and their abilities. Financial aid and lower costs make it possible for community college students to actually attend. In the early days of the community college, California community colleges were tuition-free; in North Carolina, full-time students paid less than $20 per quarter. And, geographically, by design, the nation's 1,051 community and technical colleges are located within commuting distance of a great majority of the population. Even with a long state like Florida, there is a community college within commuting distance of the population usually defined as a distance of thirty miles. With the growth of distance, online, and asynchronous learning, a college education is now available even to those in the most remote areas, expanding access even further. No other nation has ever attempted to make a college education so accessible to so many of its citizens; the Access Agenda is the primary hallmark of the community college and will stand as its finest achievement in its first 100 years. (O'Banion, 2013)

Still today, access remains a high and continuing priority for community colleges because of the economic and social issues students face. Costs of college such as tuition, transportation, food, books, clothing, childcare, and a place to live are still major barriers. Special groups of students such as older adults, immigrants, prisoners, international students, LGBTQ students, and others do not always find the community college accessible. Even with the "free college" movement, access is likely to remain an issue for students and colleges far into the future.

### The Success Agenda

While access continues to be one of the pillars of the community college, student success emerged in the 21st century as equally important. Community colleges soon discovered, however, that proving that access led to success for a substantial number of students was a challenge.

*The Early Years – Building the Foundation and Counting Heads:* From the 1930s through the 1960s, most states focused on passing legislation first to authorize and

then to support public community colleges. Since the goal was to expand access to higher education, states and individual community colleges collected data to track year-to-year changes in the number of campuses, buildings, faculty, and programs of study. They also tracked enrollment, demographics, and costs. Accrediting associations adopted standards that focused on faculty qualifications, student admissions and graduation requirements, the curriculum, financial viability, buildings, equipment, and the size and scope of library holdings. Most state funding formulas were based on enrollment data. Few states or community colleges developed anything resembling a research agenda. (Cohen, Brawer, and Kisker, 2014)

*The Transition Years – Fighting for Fairness and Measuring Effectiveness:* Until 2018, the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), the federal government's primary higher education data-gathering tool, counted only first-time-in-college (FTIC) and full-time students. IPEDS also assumed that students who enrolled in college were there for one reason, to earn a degree. Since many community college students attended part-time, did not begin college directly after completing high school, and had educational goals that did not include earning a degree, many researchers who relied on IPEDS data concluded that community colleges were not living up to their promises. (Bailey, Leinbach, and Jenkins, 2005; Center for American Progress, 2019)

Community colleges questioned the findings, but legislators began to request evidence to prove that community colleges were effective. National foundations poured millions of dollars into efforts to increase the ability of community colleges to measure and improve student progress. Accrediting associations, following the example of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, began to adopt standards requiring institutions to provide evidence of their goals for student learning and whether they were meeting these goals (Smith and Pather, 1986). In response, community colleges established Institutional Effectiveness Offices, states began to collect and analyze data on the effectiveness of community colleges, and the U.S. Department of Education proposed a national collegiate assessment system. (Cohen, Brawer, and Kisker, 2014)

Community colleges started to produce more meaningful data, but the numbers were not always encouraging. Some community college leaders responded by continuing to question the accuracy of the data, while others insisted that their institutions were doing better than the data indicated; however, most recognized that there was room for improvement, especially in relation to students of color and lower SES students. (AACC, 2012; Center for American Progress, 2019)

In the middle of all this activity, some of the most thoughtful community college leaders cautioned that simply undertaking individual initiatives was not enough. To achieve student success and maintain it over time, community colleges needed to develop a "culture of evidence" and routinely collect, report, and use data to inform important decisions, and not just "participation" data, which had been the case for so long, but outcomes data. (Brock, Jenkins, Ellwein, Miller, Gooden, Martin, MacGregor, C., and Pih, 2007)

*The Reimagining Years – Improving Student Success and Changing the Culture:* In 2010, the Department of Education (DOE) convened the Committee on Measures of Student Success in Washington, D.C. The committee met for over a year, reviewed existing research and input from hundreds of sources, and then recommended that the DOE add three new cohorts to IPEDS; disaggregate data by race/ethnicity and gender; and collect data that included an unduplicated count of students who completed their program, transferred after earning an award, or were substantially prepared for transfer. (Committee on Measures of Student Success: A Report to Secretary Arne Duncan, 2011)

It took the Department of Education six years to act on these recommendations, but in 2017 the DOE released a revised set of graduation rates that included part-time and returning students, extended the time-to-degree from six to eight years, and included students who transferred before graduation or were still enrolled in college. The revised rates demonstrated that community colleges provided a path to success for more students than previous IPEDS data had indicated, while clearly confirming that there was room for improvement, especially in relation to increasing the success rates of students of color and students from lower socioeconomic groups. (Center for American Progress, 2019)

Long before the revised IPEDS results were released, however, three publications clearly identified the challenges facing community colleges, suggested strategies for meeting these challenges, and offered guidelines for reimagining community colleges in the 21st century: *Reclaiming the American Dream: A Report from the 21st Century Commission on the Future of Community College*s (AACC, 2012); *Access, Success, and Completion: A Primer for Community College Faculty, Administrators, Staff, and Trustees* (O'Banion, 2013); and *Redesigning America's Community Colleges: A Clearer Path to Student Success* (Bailey, Jaggers, and Jenkins, 2015).

Although developed by writing teams or authors with access to diverse data sets, all three publications reached comparable conclusions about the need for community colleges to reimagine their roles in a rapidly changing 21st century. All three offered similar insights into what really mattered in increasing student success, challenged the "business as usual" mindset at many institutions, and pointed out that community colleges

make a more compelling case for state and federal financial support commensurate with their mission, the challenges they faced, and the outcomes society expected them to achieve.

## Reimagining Requires a Strong Foundation

Research presents a clear and unambiguous picture of the actions community colleges need to take to increase student success. Research also identifies essential areas that colleges need to examine as well as steps that institutions must take to build strong foundations for tomorrow's community college. The following analysis of the essential areas that community colleges must address in any reimagining process is based on the work of the American Association of Community Colleges (2012); O'Banion (2013); and Bailey, Jaggers, and Jenkins (2015), as well as research published by national organizations.

*Leadership:* After analyzing their experiences working with a variety of community colleges across the nation, researchers from The Aspen Institute and Achieving the Dream concluded that, regardless of the setting, every high performing community college shared one characteristic: It was led by an exceptional president. These exceptional presidents also shared five traits: A deep commitment to student access and success, a willingness to take significant risks to advance student success, the ability to create lasting change across the entire institution, the vision to see the importance of – and the skills to build – partnerships outside of the college to increase both student access and success, and the ability to raise money and allocate resources.

Unfortunately, the same study found that trustees and others responsible for hiring presidents tended to undervalue three of these qualities (a commitment to improving student success, a willingness to take risks, and the ability to lead change) during the presidential selection process. In an effort to increase the alignment between the qualities of exceptional presidents and the priorities and preferences of trustees, The Aspen Institute and Achieving the Dream recommended that states and systems establish educational programs for trustees, that governors and others who appoint trustees clearly identify access and success as the state's highest priority for community colleges, and that professional associations emulate the Association of Community College Trustees in providing high-quality resources and educational experiences for trustees. (Aspen Institute, 2013)

Several years later, the Aspen Institute convened a task force to determine if college presidents of the future will need skill sets fundamentally different from the skill sets required of today's higher education leaders. After reviewing the data, task force members agreed that to effectively lead community colleges, future presidents will need different planning, budgeting, and revenue-raising capabilities. They also will need more sophisticated communication and public relations skills, as well as the ability to lead the college toward new models of teaching and learning, organizational alignments, financial sustainability, and more effective ways of using technology to increase student access and success. (Aspen Institute, 2017)

Recognizing that leadership is not just the purview of the president, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) in 2018 outlined the roles and responsibilities of senior-level leaders, mid-level leaders, and faculty in relation to developing a healthy institutional culture; assisting the college to respond to the changing realities of its students and the community it serves; and building an infrastructure that supports student access and increases student success. AACC also recommended that leaders across the college become adept at leveraging technology, creating partnerships within the college and in the community, serving as advocates for the college, and supporting the college's efforts to both identify additional revenue sources and allocate existing resources to maximize student access and success.

Leadership roles and responsibilities at all levels within the community college will continue to evolve at an accelerated pace, which means that the most important skills for future campus leaders may well be the ability to look at data objectively, and then support data-driven change. Leaders who make a difference will be open to exploring new instructional and support service models and questioning outmoded boundaries and approaches. Effective leaders also will pioneer partnerships across departments and divisions and collaborate with campus colleagues and community leaders to reimagine how the college can more effectively and efficiently meet the needs of its students and its community.

*Culture:* "Culture eats strategy for breakfast," is an old saying familiar to most leaders. When applied to community colleges, it means that real change cannot be achieved without a significant shift in the college's culture. The hearts, minds, and ways of doing business of everyone responsible for day-to-day operations must evolve in response to changing demographics, demands, and data. Unfortunately, culture frequently serves as a barrier to change as faculty and staff members champion established ways of teaching, supporting students, and conducting business, even in the face of evidence that these approaches are not working. When faced with opposition, leaders often compound the problem by electing to pursue goals that are achievable instead of goals that are critical to the institution's future. (Van Wagoner, 2018)

In response to external pressure to become more data-driven and demonstrate their impact on student learning and success, community colleges have been making small, incremental adjustments for several decades. Incremental changes, however, are no longer

enough. The rapid pace at which technology is evolving, the sophisticated analytical tools now available, and the emerging research about teaching and learning require a cultural transformation that allows community colleges to intelligently leverage emerging technology and analytical tools in a manner consistent with their mission and their values.

Changing the culture will not be easy. Culture is a byproduct of structures, processes, beliefs, and systems that have evolved for years, and it rarely changes overnight. Assisting members of the college community to analyze internal data and research to develop a realistic picture of the institution's existing culture is often the first step toward change. Devising incentives to encourage the entire college community to review external research and use that research to reimagine existing practices, procedures, and systems is frequently the second step. While the data analysis and reimagining is in progress, senior leaders must proactively and positively engage with the college's governance system, since governance sets the tone for a college's culture, and pay special attention to the faculty who, as a group, wield significant power over an institution's culture and its capacity for change. (Lorsch and McTague, 2016)

*Demographics:* Some institutions fall into the "wishful thinking" trap: they design courses, programs, and services for students they wish they had instead of the students who actually are enrolled. This is why demographics matter, especially "in a rapidly changing America and a dramatically reshaped world." (AACC, 2012, p.vii) Community colleges must develop accurate pictures of their students and the communities their institution serves. This picture must be based on up-to-date data, shared with faculty and staff, and used to drive decisions about instructional practices and delivery systems, course loads, and support services (both on and off campus). Data on demographics also must influence the allocation of resources, as well as the development of policies, procedures, and practices.

In 2017, for example, over 45 percent of all students enrolled in community colleges were students of color, 56 percent were women, 29 percent were the first in their family to attend college, 63 percent attended part-time, 59 percent received some type of financial aid, 15 percent were single parents, and the majority worked. (American Association of Community Colleges, 2019) The snapshot of students in 2017 differs significantly from the snapshot of students who enrolled a decade earlier (American Association of Community College, 2010) or the students who will enroll at the end of this decade. If members of the college community do not have an accurate picture of their students and what these students need to succeed, they cannot design and implement programs, processes, and services to increase student success. Similarly, if college leaders do not have a realistic picture of the community their institution serves, they will be unable to anticipate future needs,

build partnerships, and provide clear leadership on the campus and in the community.

*Definitions:* Does every member of the college community share the same definition of student success? As O'Banion (2013) noted, "Creating a definition of student success is difficult...and creates an almost insurmountable abyss between many factions…" (p. 4) However, it is essential that community colleges adopt a definition of student success that fits their mission, goals, and philosophy; clearly communicate that definition to the entire college community; and use that definition as a yardstick to guide important decisions. It is equally important that, from their first day on campus, students develop—and share with the institution—their definition of what success means to them. Without this baseline information, colleges cannot assist students to pursue, refine, change, or monitor progress toward their goals. More importantly, without a clear definition of success, students struggle to identify the path they need to follow and the connection between that path and their goals.

*Planning, Partnerships, and Professional Development:* If community colleges have learned one lesson in the last few decades, it's that student success doesn't happen by accident. In fact, even with a plan, support from high-powered national foundations, and extensive training, mentoring, and networking opportunities, community colleges have barely managed to move the student success needle. There are many theories about why reform efforts have not produced positive long-term results. Many efforts focused only on one segment of the student experience (e.g. front loading the first semester) rather than the entire experience, and the benefits faded after the intervention ended. Other efforts involved small pilot projects that produced good results for a few students, but proved too difficult or costly to scale up. Far too many efforts involved individual departments or divisions acting in isolation. (Bailey, 2017) Whatever the reason, data indicate that piecemeal reform doesn't work; comprehensive reform is essential; and reform efforts must be data informed, carefully designed, and involve the entire institution. Compelling evidence from early reform efforts also indicate that the model will not work unless it is designed to:

- Question the way current programs and services across the college are designed, delivered, and assessed; follow the evidence; and challenge—and change—instructional and support service frameworks that have been in place for decades.

- Address all four phases of the student experience (connection, entry, progress, and completion), outline the challenges student face at each phase, identify concrete strategies to help students to meet these challenges, and clearly describe how the college will assess the effectiveness of these strategies and use what it learns to strengthen its student success model. (Rassen, Chaplot, Jenkins and Johnstone, 2012)

- Focus on classroom instruction as well as support services. Too often, efforts to improve student success have focused primarily on strengthening support services even though the success or failure of any effort to increase student success depends on what happens in the classroom, whether that classroom is a physical or a virtual one. Without significant faculty involvement and a focus on learning, any efforts to significantly increase student success will fail.

- Build internal partnerships, especially between academic and student affairs, in order to create a seamless college experience for students and send two vital messages to the college community: Student success is everyone's business, and we are all in this together. (Bailey, 2017)

- Build external partnerships with local K-12 systems, higher education institutions, and communities in order to share information and data; improve students' readiness to start college and, after achieving their goals, either transfer or obtain employment; and increase the college's ability to anticipate and react to external changes and challenges. (AACC, 2012)

- Build an infrastructure to assist all members of the college community implement the college's student success model. Build a community of learners among faculty, staff, and administrators. Offer targeted professional development opportunities tied to the college's student success model. Leverage online learning opportunities, peer mentoring, and formal and informal meetings to help college employees grow and develop. Reinforce the importance of these activities by including learning goals in each employee's annual plan and linking their completion to annual performance reviews. (Van Wagoner, 2018)

- Factor the college's use of adjunct faculty and part-time employees into the equation. In 2016, more than 65 percent of faculty positions in two-year colleges were part-time positions. Among the full-time faculty, 63 percent were on non-tenure track annual contracts, 28 percent had multi-year or indefinite contracts, and eight percent had less than an annual contract. (American Association of University Professors, 2018) If part-time faculty and staff are not involved in designing the college's student success model, unable to participate in professional development activities, and not compensated for—or trained to—work with students outside the classroom, large scale institutional changes have little chance of succeeding.

*Evidence and Technology:* Community colleges leaders, faculty members, and support staff make difficult decisions every day related to allocating resources. They must determine which programs and services to implement, continue to support, or discontinue. They must identify and allocate resources to support the processes, practices, programs, and services that increase the chances that students will succeed. Without data, these decisions are challenging to make and even more challenging to defend. Without the right kind of technology, institutions will not get the most out of their data. Faculty will not be able to re-envision the teaching-learning process. Students will receive incorrect (or incomplete) educational road maps. Student service professionals will not be able to design or deliver support services in a timely manner. Institutions will remain trapped in tradition, unable to meet the needs of students who desperately need their help.

Lasting change starts with collecting and disseminating evidence, and the effective use of hardware and software. Efforts to use technology to establish cultures of evidence and improve the effectiveness of community colleges came in waves. (O'Brien and Milliron, 2019) During the first wave, community colleges used technology to streamline existing practices, processes, and procedures and to produce data they used to improve existing systems. This wave produced e-learning, e-tutoring, WebCT, and Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems. It also created interest in the value of technology to "enhance the capacity of colleges to effectively teach and support students." (Bailey, Jaggars, and Jenkins, 2015, p.197)

The *second wave* witnessed the rise of learning technologies and the start of giving faculty and students more – and better—options. Online learning, credit for prior learning experiences, and learning management systems surfaced during this time. Classrooms began to change as colleges introduced clicker technology, smart classrooms, and virtual learning spaces. Faculty began to experiment with online instructional videos, e-portfolios, and web-based hubs. Community colleges became aware of the digital divide and the institution's pivotal role in helping students bridge that divide.

The need for more sophisticated data about students and how they learn, the impact of various instructional approaches on student learning, and the role that technology plays in student access and student success drove the *third wave*. Community colleges began to collect more and better data and to use more sophisticated tools to map and monitor each student's educational journey, measure in-class learning, and assess a variety of learning outcomes. The efforts produced large amounts of data, which community colleges mined in increasingly sophisticated ways to better anticipate and respond to student needs and to assess the impact of specific initiatives or interventions on student success.

The *fourth wave,* now approaching at warp speed,

promises to use data and technology to transform the community college. Personalized educational pathways and support systems for students, game-based learning, smart tutoring, and virtual and augmented reality will become more common. Colleges will integrate the Internet of Things (IoT) into the college experience by developing apps that notify professors when students are struggling with the material, remind students when assignments are due and offer assistance, or suggest campus activities tailored to each student's interests. Artificial Intelligence (AI) will change how colleges recruit, admit, and retain students. AI also has the potential to profoundly change how faculty members teach and students learn.

The challenge for community colleges as the *fourth wave* hits is to use the tools at its disposal and the data these tools generate to become more efficient and effective in a manner that is consistent with the community college's mission and core values. Implementing sophisticated early warning systems, providing diagnostic data on students to faculty on dashboards organized by class, and providing more technology-driven hybrid courses are a few examples of using evidence to create programs and services that are consistent with the community college's mission and core values. On the other hand, using data to place students on a narrow path to graduation that is inconsistent with their goals or mining student data and selling it to third-party vendors may conflict with the institution's mission and values.

*Resources:* Throughout their history, community college funding models have varied. States experimented with unit-rate, minimum foundation, cost-based, and performance-based approaches. Local support varied by state and, occasionally, by taxing districts within a state. Over the years, both direct and indirect assistance increased, but one fact remained unchanged: Resources were finite and student needs seemed to be infinite. Community colleges responded by tying financial planning to the college's strategic plan, implementing cost-cutting measures, and exploring entrepreneurial options. At the same time, colleges increased their efforts to shape the funding debate by engaging in data-driven discussions with legislators about their mission, their impact on the community and the state, and their needs. (Cohen, Brawer, and Kisker, 2014)

In 2016-2017, the most recent year for which data are available, public community colleges received 32.8 percent of their funding from the state, 27.8 percent from tuition and fees, 19.9 percent from local revenue, 11.3 percent from the federal government, and 8.3 percent from other sources. (AACC, 2019) This level of funding allowed community colleges to spend an average of $14,090 per full-time-equivalent student, which is nearly five times less than private research universities ($71,597) and close to three times less than public research universities ($39,783). (Century Foundation, 2019)

For years, community college leaders have contended that their institutions consistently receive the fewest resources to educate students with the greatest need. (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012) When researchers discovered a cause-and-effect relationship between increased resources and degree completion in two-year institutions (Deming and Walters, 2017), it became even more important to determine if (and to what degree) community colleges were underfunded. With the support of the William T. Grant Foundation, the Century Foundation (2019) convened a *Working Group on Community College Financial Resources* to study the question of how much funding is needed to provide an adequate education for community college students.

After meticulously gathering and analyzing the data, the *Working Group* concluded that America's community colleges are "routinely under-resourced and fall short of their promise" and the blame for this "lies with policymakers who systematically shortchange community colleges financially, giving two-year institutions the fewest resources to educate those students with the greatest needs."(Century Foundation, 2019, p.2) The *Working Group* also recommended that states immediately begin to increase funding for community colleges, identified the need for new research to establish the true cost of providing an adequate education for community college students (similar to research done decades ago for the K-12 system), and provided a sophisticated, carefully-crafted framework to assist researchers in determining how to estimate the cost of a community college education. (Century Foundation, 2019)

Given the complexity of the task and the current political climate, it may take years for researchers to identify the amount of funding needed to provide an adequate education for community college students and even more time for policymakers to agree to increase the funds allocated to public two-year colleges. In the meantime, community colleges will have to continue making difficult decisions about allocating (and reallocating) existing resources, exploring innovative partnerships that benefit students and increase (or replace) revenue, and answering the most challenging question of all: How can we reimagine our institution to better meet the needs of today's students within the limits of existing resources?

In answering that challenging question, community colleges also will have to acknowledge an important truth: Additional resources are only part of the solution. Money does not guarantee success. In fact, throwing money at the problem, but neglecting to address the essential areas outlined in this chapter, is a recipe for failure. Meaningful change that increases student success requires more than money. It requires an honest assessment of the institution's strengths and weaknesses

in every area from leadership to instruction to support services. It requires a thoughtful analysis of the data generated by the assessment. And it requires the institution to act on the data and to make substantive changes that increase student success.

## Reimagining Is All About Balance

Maintaining a balance between student access and student success is one of the paradoxes that community colleges must manage in their efforts to carry out their unique educational mission. (Sydow and Alfred, 2013) For much of the 20th century, simply providing access to higher education allowed community colleges to offer millions of students a path to the American Dream. In the 21st century, that path requires community colleges to maintain their commitment to access while substantially increasing their commitment to student success.

The good news is that the last few decades have produced sophisticated tools to help community colleges find the right balance between student access and student success. Today's community colleges also benefit from an explosion of significant research on topics such as leadership, building college cultures that value evidence and inquiry, changing organizational structures, identifying what really matters in increasing student success, and the effectiveness of various funding models. In addition, community colleges now have access to the pioneering work on student access and success done by individual community colleges, often with the financial support of national associations or the state or federal government.

The bad news is that community colleges remain "stuck in educational models developed in the 18th century for an agricultural economy and in the 19th century for an industrial economy." (O'Banion, 2016, p. 38) Even though community colleges changed over the course of the 20th century, these changes did not occur by design: Most colleges simply evolved. New structures were superimposed on old structures. Innovative approaches were grafted on to existing organizational structures, and visionaries frequently were forced to adapt to or work around the institution's long established way of doing things. (Sydnow and Alfred, 2013)

It is time to design a community college that meets the needs of 21st century students, providing them with both access and a genuine opportunity to succeed.  In this rapidly changing world, no one can predict the exact form this reimagined institution will take. However, it is becoming increasingly clear that American community colleges must rethink who they are and what they are capable of becoming. Community colleges need to redesign students' educational experiences, reinvent institutional roles, and reset the system to create incentives for student and institutional success. (American Association of Community Colleges,

2012).

Community colleges are one of America's most valuable assets. Even though chronically underfunded, they have served as the first step on the ladder to success for millions of Americans. Recent research suggests that money spent on community colleges yields a payoff to the American taxpayer that is more than three times the cost of the original investment. (Levin and Garcia, 2018) Community colleges also have played a significant role in transforming American higher education and are well positioned to help America address many of the challenges facing higher education—and the country—today.

Unfortunately, this valuable asset is in danger of being devalued if state and federal legislators do not address major funding issues and if community colleges do not transform themselves to better align the institution with the needs of 21st century students and with the social, political, and economic realities of 21st century life. As  O'Banion observed in 2013, "If we do not create the systems that will ensure the success of our students, the community college we know today may cease to exist, and the community college we dream of for the future may never come to be." (p.3)

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**Terry U. O'Banion** served as President of the League for Innovation in the Community College for 23 years; he was widely regarded as an idea champion who helped set the agenda for higher education in the 20th century. He has written 18 books and over 225 articles on community colleges, consulted in over 1,000 community colleges, and had five national awards established in his name.

**Marguerite M. Culp** is the recipient of numerous national awards for excellence and innovation in student affairs. She has served as a faculty member, mid-level administrator, and senior student affairs officer at community colleges in Virginia, Florida, and Texas. The co-editor of five books and dozens of book chapters and journal articles, she now assists colleges and universities design and implement innovative student success models and effective cultures of evidence.

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