From the Editors

America’s biggest cities are pulse points for the entire country. Already weakened by decades of decline, their uneven recovery from the recent Great Recession has resulted in the further concentration of prosperity in a few and hardship for all the rest. Their citizens similarly reflect widening disparity between the wealthiest and poorest, threatening an endangered middle class that used to be the proudest measure of our economic and democratic ideals.

Urban community colleges are undergoing rapid, multidimensional changes in response to the new conditions and demands everywhere. The challenge for all, regardless of size or location, is to reinvent themselves so they can better meet the particular needs of their respective communities. This national higher-education mandate is vital to democracy itself, especially given the multiracial nature of metropolitan areas, where challenges and opportunities have always been most pronounced.

The future is as unpredictable as the events that brought us to this critical juncture. Spurred by outside pressure and support as well as deep commitment from within, urban colleges are vigorously exploring new strategies for sustainability and success. In this volume, some of the most prominent practitioners examine every major aspect of the change-engagement process, including the role of governing boards, workforce development, community partnerships, and redesign of outdated business and finance models.
The Future of the Urban Community College: Shaping the Pathways to a Multiracial Democracy

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EDITORS

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*Gunder Myran*

Community colleges are transitioning from an old business and finance model to a new future-shaping one. They are being redesigned to become leaner, smarter, more efficient, more creative, and more focused in response to long-term financial constraints as well as rapidly changing workplace skill requirements, technological advances, and globalization.

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Editors’ Notes

This sourcebook is dedicated to the memory of Marliss Myran, who passed during its final completion but was always the primary object of devotion for her loving husband, Gunder.

The urban community college exploded onto the national higher education scene in the 1960s as Baby Boomers began to flood through its open doors and demands by minorities for equal access to educational and economic opportunity reached the boiling point. Early adopters of the community college idea in urban centers were Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York City. It was said at the time that a new community college (many still called junior colleges) was created every week. In fact, 413 were born during the 1960s, including start-ups in Cleveland, Dallas, St. Louis, Detroit, Miami, Denver, Phoenix, Philadelphia, and Seattle.

One of the early national meetings about the potential of the community college to energize urban change took place in Dallas in 1966. It involved the American Association of Junior Colleges (now the American Association of Community Colleges, or AACC) and urban community college representatives. The meeting resulted in a report entitled The American Dream Updated, which contained this statement: “We accept the challenge of the inner city with all its complexities, its difficult problems and immense costs. The battleground is in the inner city—stay and fight where you are.”

But first another skirmish was in order, as no black community college president had served on the national association’s board of directors prior to 1970. The board had previously added three new seats to accommodate minority representation, but the nominating committee failed to propose a single African American candidate. During a disruptive floor fight at the national convention in 1970, a caucus of African American presidents demanded a leadership voice in their own association. They proposed a complete slate of minority nominees for board positions, resulting in the election of Malcolm Hurst that year, followed by Norvel Smith in 1971. Another important milestone was the election of Abel Sykes as board chair in 1976. Since then, a number of African American and Latino presidents have served as board chairs and members.

Edmund Gleazer, AACC president from 1958 to 1981, led a Kellogg Foundation–funded effort during the early 1970s called Project Focus to democratize the association and national community college leadership. The Project Focus report in 1971 resulted in changes to the board structure
and the inclusion of various administrative groups in the form of councils. One of the first was the National Council of Black American Affairs.

It can be well said that the current black chancellors and presidents of urban community colleges stand on the shoulders of those pioneers who came before them. A case in point is Walter Bumphus, AACC’s current president and the first African American to hold that national leadership position. He joins the legacy of Hurst, Smith, Sykes, and others who helped make the dream of “democracy’s college” come true at the highest national level.

Following decades of robust growth and cycles of financial ups and downs, today’s community colleges are challenged to reinvent themselves once again—to do much more with less. They are called upon to maintain their cherished open-door and low-cost principles even while in many cases losing much of their state and local funding. They are expected to produce 50% more degree and certificate completions by 2020, although a third of the nation’s high school graduates are not ready for college-level work. In addition to their traditional university transfer, student support, and general, career, continuing, and developmental education functions, they are looked upon as a primary source of workforce talent critical to the creation of a highly skilled and globally competitive labor force. And as postsecondary institutions in the best position to accommodate the various needs of an increasingly diverse and underprepared low-income citizenry, they are the country’s beacon of hope for reversing the widening achievement, wealth, and opportunity gaps that threaten the very existence of an American middle class.

To all these challenges, known loosely and collectively as the “new normal,” the editors of this sourcebook have one more to add: the unfinished business of a true multiracial democracy. This is not something new, but an ideal as compelling as those well-known words in the Declaration of Independence proclaiming the indisputable truth “that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” Multiracial democracy is not just “a goal for a nation founded on the principle of human equality” as defined throughout this volume, but the founding force behind community colleges. As the most important measure of their future success, it is also the ultimate motivation for the unfinished work of all community colleges.

Urban community colleges have been at the forefront of the quest for a multiracial democracy, serving as examples for each other as well as for suburban and rural colleges facing many of the same issues posed by rising poverty, declining college readiness, demographic transformation, dwindling financial resources, and greater workforce-training demands. Looking to the future, all share the commitment to increase student success, economic prosperity and social equity. It is in this spirit that we offer these stories, experiences, and best practices from urban colleges—to inspire all in
their universal quest “to come together across lines of race, religion, class, and gender to collectively unite in support of racial and civic equality” (Ivery & Bassett, 2011, p. xcii).

The chapters of this sourcebook are organized under two primary themes. The first three essays outline dimensions of the future urban community college, while the remainder address the solutions that are already shaping the colleges of tomorrow.

Chapter 1 by Gunder Myran and Michael Parsons is a call to action for America’s urban community colleges to redress massive and persistent disparities that have created a “pathology of despair” in our inner cities. It examines how national completion and success agendas can accomplish the goal of a multiracial democracy, and poses numerous dimensions for the future of these institutions. Chapter 2 by Curtis Ivery further discusses the history of racial identity and understanding and how it contributes to the urban condition of today. It then looks at the emerging consensus on effective ways to deal with the consequences. Chapter 3 by Calvin Woodland and Michael Parsons presents a new leadership paradigm for engaging the “new normal” of the 21st century, which is described in various ways throughout the book and defined in this chapter as “Today’s seemingly bleak budget coupled with rapid, omnidirectional change.”

In Chapter 4, Rosemary Gillett-Karam focuses on the unique relationship between trustees and the urban colleges they serve, from the perspective of a university professor who also serves as a Baltimore City Community College board member. Ten recommendations for future governance illustrate the importance of commitment to values and missions. In Chapter 5, Gunder Myran and Curtis Ivery discuss the new emphasis on workforce development as key to disrupting the cycle of poverty and unemployment that has produced a wealth gap of 2,000% between white and black households. Middle-skill careers in particular have become a niche area for community colleges, further described in terms of career education and workforce development innovations. Chapter 6 by Jerry Sue Thornton offers best-practice examples of community partnerships resulting in career training and employment opportunities for high school students at community colleges in Ohio and Missouri. The programs tend to emphasize high-demand STEM careers in fields such as the aerospace industry that typify tomorrow’s opportunities for the future workforce.

Chapter 7 by Eduardo J. Padrón on increasing the relevance of curricular and student services tells the very American story of a community college in Miami that in its earliest years segregated most of its black and white students. Now Miami Dade College has grown into one of the country’s biggest and most diverse institutions of higher education, and is one of three cadres working to produce national models for student success under partnership grants from the Gates Foundation’s Completion by Design program. In Chapter 8, Rufus Glasper explains how Maricopa Community Colleges (also one of the nation’s largest, with 200,000 credit and noncredit
students at 10 geographically based colleges in the metro Phoenix region) has thoroughly infused its institutional culture with strategic diversity awareness and responsiveness during the past 20 years.

In Chapter 9, Wright Lassiter addresses capacity building, the process of reshaping community college resources in light of dwindling traditional revenue streams. After describing the “operational budget onion” as a vehicle for identifying and addressing budget and service priorities, this chapter delves into specific examples of managing deficits with improved cost efficiencies and programs like early retirement. Also described is the leveraging of information technology in federal financial aid applications to enhance service and improve student retention in the process. Finally, Chapter 10 by Gunder Myran urges community colleges to transition to a new business and finance model. The new model focuses on innovations that create new markets and program delivery methods while adapting to emerging financial constraints and changing demographic, economic, technological, and social conditions. Ultimately, the model orchestrates all college resources for maximum impact on student, business, and community goal achievement.

Reference


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