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School of Education

6-30-2008

Strategizing for the future

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Recommended Citation

Eddy, Pamela L. and Lester, Jaime, "Strategizing for the future" (2008). *School of Education Book Chapters*. 32.

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This final chapter reviews strategies that community colleges can use to address issues of gender and create more equitable and pluralistic environments. It also discusses the need for research that examines the intersection between social identities and community college mission, culture, and environment.

Strategizing for the Future

Pamela L. Eddy, Jaime Lester

The chapters in this volume review a variety of issues regarding gender at community colleges. The context of higher education provides the backdrop for how community college leaders and campus members see the issues they face and how they begin to make meaning of their location and experiences on campus. There is a wide variety of circumstances within community colleges that make the needs of each campus different. As campus members begin to think of strategies for the future, it is important for them to understand and identify the critical issues. This chapter summarizes critical areas facing two-year colleges, provides recommendations for future research, and reviews strategies for implementation.

Pressing Issues

Several areas of concern are pressing on American campuses. At the forefront of gender conversations have been assaults against affirmative action practices. In particular, Title IX restrictions and limitations have been enacted, and some states have passed legislation banning the use of affirmative action in hiring and admission decisions. At the same time, how we think about gender has expanded. No longer are gender issues strictly about women. The notion of the social construction of gender begins to blur the lines between the sexes. Baca Zinn, Hondagneu-Sotelo, and Messner (2005) conceptualized a matrix of the construction of gender, identifying over nine hundred permutations that can represent gender.

Affirmative Action. Until the passage of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and other legislation passed that year, women and students were exempted or not covered by antidiscrimination laws. Title IX has long stood for the commitment to obtaining gender equity in education since it prohibited exclusion from participation in educational programs based on sex. In 2005, the Department of Education issued a Title IX clarification that allows schools to show compliance with the law using less rigorous measures that document compliance (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). The long-term effects of this change in policy remain unknown, but the loss of support for equality for women and girls raises concern.

Affirmative action is also under attack. The impetus for affirmative action was to redress long-standing discrimination against women and people of color in employment, education, and contracting decisions. In 1996, passage of Proposal 209 in California, which amended the state constitution, prohibited public institutions from granting preferential treatment based on race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin. More recently, the Michigan Civil Rights Initiative, or Proposal 2, passed, eliminating preferential treatment for previously protected groups, including women and individuals of color. Leading up to the passage of Proposal 2 in Michigan were two Supreme Court rulings regarding the admissions process at the University of Michigan. In the case of *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003), use of affirmative action in admissions to the law school was upheld. However, the case of *Gratz v. Bollinger* (2003) determined that the undergraduate affirmative action admissions policy at the University of Michigan was too mechanistic and therefore unconstitutional.

Affirmative action opened the doors of college for many women and students of color. Title IX contributed to a marked increase in the participation of women in college and in college athletic programs in particular. Sadly, it has not been applied vigorously to many other areas of disparity, such as the low proportion of women faculty in areas like chemistry compared to the number of qualified women with doctorates in chemistry. The elimination of preferential treatment in hiring in California and Michigan may limit the ability of colleges and universities to recruit a more diverse student body or workforce.

Indeed, community colleges already have wide representation of women as students and faculty. Almost 60 percent of the study body is composed of women, and faculty are near parity, with 48 percent women and 52 percent men (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005). The community college has been a welcoming site for women returning to education after periods of absence and for students of color given its lower cost and increased access. Community colleges have also shown movement toward compliance with Title IX. In Chapter Nine, Castañeda, Katsinas, and Hardy found that females received near equal amounts of athletic aid despite the fact that they represented a little over one-third of the total number of athletes. Furthermore, there were almost equal numbers of intercollegiate athletic teams for women and men. Gains are still needed in salary equity

for coaches and the number of female athletes, but community colleges are attempting to achieve equity and comply with Title IX.

Expansion of Gender Construction. Gender issues on campus are not limited to women. Recently attention has focused on the reversal of participation in postsecondary education by men. As noted, men are now in the minority of participants at community colleges, representing 40 percent of all students. Furthermore, African American men represent only 13 percent of the student body (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005). Instead, men more often seek employment directly out of high school. Although many indicators show both male progress and lack of progress in higher education, long-term evidence of male enrollment in college demonstrates that young males in high school are faring better than females and that men are enrolling and completing college in larger absolute numbers than previously. The overall picture cannot be reduced to the simplistic views of winners and losers that dominate much of the discussion of males in higher education today.

Another critical illustration of the gender gap concerns the participation of black and Hispanic students in postsecondary education. The gender gap has been shown to disfavor black and Hispanic students who were underrepresented in postsecondary education. Yet the declines in male enrollment are even across all race and ethnic categories, demonstrating a decrease in male enrollment despite race or ethnicity. In Chapter Two, Perrakis found that male students are more alike than different. Across racial groups, student outcomes and predictors of student success remained constant. Financial aid among black and Hispanic students also illustrates a conflicting pattern. Townsend (Chapter One) explains that 76 percent of blacks receive financial aid, but the majority of the aid is in the form of student loans. High levels of aid are important to promote persistence in college, but loan debt creates a significant burden for students once they complete college.

Harris and Harper (Chapter Three) also provide evidence of the unique experience of men in community college in a discussion of masculinity. The vignettes of male students in the chapter illustrate how gender socialization, which is connected to masculine notions of physical prowess, responsibility of providing financially for a family, and participation in sports, bears on academic success. Without support that validates the gender conflicts, male students often face academic and social difficulties in community colleges.

Recommendations for Future Research

The research reported in this volume points to several key findings. Townsend discussed the advances in thinking about gender in community colleges over the past decade. Key in her discussion is the fact that community colleges offer more parity in numbers for women in faculty ranks. Duggan (Chapter Five) found that the majority of staff members responding to her survey were women. Female respondents indicated they were more likely to have interactions with faculty and students and that they were satisfied

with their jobs. When asked about work-life balance, Sallee (Chapter Eight) determined that those working at the case site chose a community college to obtain increased work-life balance. Issues facing campus members included child care and elder care responsibilities, with participants noting in particular the lack of policies to promote work-life balance. Eddy and Cox (Chapter Seven) concluded that despite larger numbers of women obtaining community college presidencies, parity was still not achieved. Furthermore, the gendered organization framework of community colleges reifies and values male norms, creating a disadvantage and deficit for women. Disparity was evident in athletics as well. Although Castañeda, Katsinas, and Hardy found that sports were equally available for both women and men at community colleges, participation numbers were not equal.

The research findings set out in this volume point to areas for future research. First, it is important to study the best practices that support an expanded notion of gender on campuses. The perception of more gender equity in the two-year college sector aids in creating a reality that these campuses are gender friendly. Although some of the research presented in this volume questions the extensiveness of this gender equity, it is clear that women are able to find advancement opportunities and job satisfaction at community colleges. Determining what best practices are most supportive and discovering how to replicate these programs on other campuses is needed.

Given the expanded definition of gender, it is important to conduct research on the points of intersection of race, class, and gender. The conception of community colleges as “democracy colleges” (Cohen and Brawer, 2003) lays a foundation of expectation that these institutions are receptive and open. Clearly community colleges provide opportunities for second chances for their students and enroll the highest percentages of minority students. Understanding more of the influence of the climate of the community college on future career paths for students and employees can enable leaders to be more purposeful in creating programs to promote women and individuals of color into administrative, staff, and faculty positions.

The career pathways for women in community colleges are serendipitous. Fugate and Amey (2000) found that faculty often happened upon their two-year colleges as career options versus purposefully seeking these career options. The presidents in Eddy and Cox’s study did not start their careers with an intention of seeking a presidency. Their career sequencing to accommodate work-life balance was not always planned. More research is needed on the career pathways of staff, faculty, and leaders to understand the patterns inherent in careers based within two-year institutions. Furthermore, a fuller comprehension of policies and practices that promote women and individuals of color can be replicated on campuses. Moreover, appreciation of the barriers preventing advancement is important to allow more choices along the pipeline.

Collaborations among community colleges and regional four-year institutions can both share and pool best practices to support campus members.

The American Council on Education Office of Women in Higher Education provides national and regional forums to help prepare women for advanced leadership positions, with training open to women from both community colleges and four-year colleges.

Research is needed to determine key points in development practices for staff, faculty, leaders, and students. Development activities may reach a wide audience for participation and be relevant across job and status locations. Given the fact that many of the students at community colleges are adults, they are facing many of the same issues of child and elder care and work-life balance needs as are campus members. Understanding more of the impact of these policies on the populations will help.

Strategies for Practice

A number of programs can be implemented to target different populations within the community college. Following are suggestions for students, faculty, and leaders. Finally, overall policy suggestions provide a way of addressing potential organizational issues.

Students. One of the methods to address gender issues among students is to acknowledge the diversity of the student population and promote greater gender awareness and sensitivity. As open access institutions, community colleges enroll large numbers of students of color as well as students from various socioeconomic groups. One important suggestion to assist students who face identity conflicts is to provide a forum to discuss identity issues with a focus on the negative perceptions of help seeking that are often connected to gender socialization. Using journaling, media messages, and Internet blogs as examples of socialization may help to begin the discussion and spark dialogue. Campuses may also want to consider increasing the participation of students in campus programs to assist students in identifying with their role as college students and with the campus. Importantly, campuses need to collect data through interviews, focus groups, and surveys to assess student identity-specific needs.

The pervasive discussions of the gender gap among students and the low representation of women in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields illustrate that gender gaps still exist. Women are not entering the STEM fields, and the enrollment of males overall has decreased. Community colleges should create mentoring programs within high schools as well as between the college and community organizations. Several community colleges across the country have partnered with local organizations that seek to establish more women in vocational fields, such as welding and construction management. The community colleges match professional women with current students who job-shadow and interview women in the field. Students report feeling less isolated and more supported, and they have a more realistic idea of the field of their interest. Community college

may also consider promoting TRIO programs (or other similar programs) within local high schools to target males. Community college can hold informational sessions, identify and recruit male students in need of additional aid to go to college, adopt a student group, or inform parents of the educational and economic gains male children will experience by attending college. Each of these programmatic efforts may promote the enrollment of males in postsecondary education and decrease the gender gap.

Faculty. The community college has historically shown parity between men and women in the faculty ranks, and Townsend notes that community colleges are more likely to be gender-equitable institutions compared to their four-year counterparts with respect to numbers of men and women in faculty positions. Despite the relative equity of community colleges, gender inequities remain, as evidenced by salary disparities, the low numbers of women in certain fields, and the lack of involvement of women on high-powered governance committees. Lester and Lukas (Chapter Six) demonstrated that women faculty show similar involvement in campus governance overall but are underrepresented on the governance committees that make budgetary, tenure, and promotion decisions. To address the disparities of faculty representation on key committees, community colleges need to conduct internal self-examinations, create benchmarks that promote the representation of women across all areas of the college, and empower faculty to advocate for change. Surveys and focus groups of faculty can assist in understanding which aspect of the climate prevents equal representation. From the self-study, policies that require the representation of men and women on governance boards or new practices in the faculty hiring process may emerge. Colleges should require that high-power committees have equal representation of men and women, as well as faculty of color. In addition, colleges need to empower faculty to become more involved and to advocate on behalf of the hiring of women and faculty of color. Creating training programs with a focus on faculty leadership and workshops on creating change can bring together like-minded faculty and promote the presence of change agents across the campus.

Another pressing concern among faculty that requires practical solutions concerns the number of part-time faculty. As Sallee noted, part-time faculty comprise more than half (63 percent) of the total number of faculty at community colleges, and many of those part-time faculty are women (49 percent). The large number of part-time faculty also has an impact on campus governance, which is reliant on the volunteer work of a small number of full-time faculty. The exclusion of part-time faculty is impractical, as part-time faculty are needed to maintain democratic colleges. Discussions need to occur to deconstruct biases that current full-time faculty and administrators hold that have prevented the inclusion of part-time faculty (Kezar, Lester, and Anderson, 2006). Many individuals believe that part-time faculty are not considered real faculty or that part-time faculty do not have an interest in the health of the college. Deconstructing these biases can get at the root of the systematic exclusion of part-time faculty and promote dis-

cussions of policy development and revision. Creating new or revising old policies will be met with resistance without time for deconstruction.

Leaders. One means to address gender equity within the leadership ranks is by leadership development training and intentional succession planning. Preceding the need for development is the requirement to redefine traditional leadership ideals. As Eddy and Cox pointed out, current expectations of the disembodied worker based on male norms (Acker, 1990) create a standard that marginalizes women. The community college literature is replete with examples of white men leading the institutions over time (Amey and Twombly, 1992), leaving little room for alternative role models. The situation for leaders of color is even starker. While community colleges boast the highest percentage of presidents of color at 14 percent, this number has changed little over the past decade and is not near the parity of numbers of students of color within two-year colleges. Community colleges also are held in regard for the number of women of color in the presidential office. Almost half (48 percent) of all women presidents of color are found at the community college (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005). In context, this percentage appears paltry since only 4.3 percent of all college presidents are women of color (Harvey and Anderson, 2005).

Leadership development should be a focus for succession planning on campus. The projected turnover in upper-level administrative ranks underscores a need to plan ahead. Over 45 percent of current community college presidents are sixty-one years of age or older (American Council on Education, 2007). The American Association for Women in Community Colleges provides an annual program that focuses on developing women in leadership positions, but not all women or campuses can support attendance to this conference. The limitations of current development opportunities underscore the need for community colleges to develop leadership training unique to them. This format allows cultural-specific development and more clearly aligns with institutional needs. The creation of campus or regional leadership academies can address needs. Particular attention can then be given to the construction of alternative models of leadership and the preparation for the leaders of the future (Kezar, Carducci, and Contreras-McGavin, 2006). Ethical leaders with cultural competencies and adaptive leadership abilities are required to lead the complex organizations of today. One model of leadership is no longer acceptable to meet current demands.

Policy. Individual campuses can develop policies to help support acceptance of a wider conception of gender roles. Policy can begin to remove structural barriers—for faculty, administrators, and students. Establishing guidelines for family leave policies eliminates the need for individual negotiation of time off (Wolf-Wendell, Ward, and Twombly, 2007). Family-friendly policies can begin to address concerns over work-life balance for campus employees. This model can then influence the appreciation for the balance that community college students negotiate every day with their

multifaceted lives. Cluster hiring can expand opportunities for individuals of color and provide support for their work on campus. The creation of women's studies departments and centers and child care centers can symbolize the support of gender issues on campus.

The reality of fiscal demands puts pressures on institutions to support the full array of programs and projects to support gender issues on campus. Entering into regional compacts with other educational institutions can aid in meeting the demands of the college at a lower cost. The historic mission of community colleges to meet community needs is also fulfilled in these forms of partnerships. Community colleges should also support state and federal policies that foster the full participation of women and individuals of color.

Conclusion

This volume provides an update to gender research conducted since the publication of Townsend's 1995 volume of *New Directions in Community Colleges* that focused on gender. The research reported here shows that how we think of gender has expanded over time. Current pressures on gender advancement include restrictions on affirmative action and limitations on Title IX. Gender equity has not uniformly been obtained and certainly is uneven along the lines of race and ethnicity. A focus on intentionality needs to occur for gender advancements to continue. There remains a need for more gender-neutral organizations. Despite the increasing number of women in all avenues of the community college sector, male norms still dominate and serve as the measure for evaluation. This type of deficit model will mean that women will not be ideal workers since they still bear the major responsibilities for family care.

Individually, women can prepare and work toward change. Preparation can include getting the appropriate credentials required for advancement, advocating for family friendly work policies, and mentoring others to continue the progress made to date. Positional leaders can model a work ethic not based on the disembodied worker ideal (Acker, 1990), but one based on balance and that allows for expanded ways of learning. Those in upper-level positions can advocate for policy changes that make the workplace more gender friendly.

A need exists to educate hiring committees on merits of hiring someone not necessarily in the mold of the past. Glazer-Raymo (1999) highlighted how hiring boards tend to hire those who look like them, namely, white men. Moving beyond this practice can bring increased diversity to the community college sector.

We can be encouraged that we see marked changes in the thirteen years since Townsend's volume. However, the slow growth in women ascending to the community college president's office raises concerns over advancing equity. The effect of the erosion of affirmative action policies is not yet known. Thus, we need to be vigilant in working for equity for all.

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