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Understanding Community Colleges ed. by John S. Levin and Susan Kater (review)

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Further consideration for inequalities in groups such as Afro-Brazilians and indigenous populations in Peru, Bolivia, and Guatemala may provide alternative perspectives in addressing the problem of access to higher education. While quotas and affirmative action affect efficiency, college preparedness is necessary to globally preserve true meritocracy. *The Road to Academic Excellence: The Making of World-Class Research Universities* teaches us that within access, efficiency may best be maximized through good strategic planning and implementation.

John S. Levin and Susan Kater (Eds.). *Understanding Community Colleges*. New York: Taylor & Francis, 2012. 288 pp. Paper: \$49.95. ISBN 13: 978-0-415-88127-2.

REVIEWED BY CHRISTOPHER DOWNING, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT, HEARTLAND COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Understanding Community Colleges brings together a variety of subjects and issues that face community colleges as they evolve in the higher education landscape. The edition is organized into four sections that cover three arenas: students, administration and leadership issues, and workforce development. Each chapter, regardless of author, does a quality job of explaining the historical context of the given issue and the development or change that is occurring for community colleges nationwide. The text is accessible for those unfamiliar with community colleges and does not fall into the writing traps of consistently comparing community colleges to four-year institutions. Instead, each chapter treats community colleges as stand-alone entities, examining them in each particular setting with no preconceived notions.

Section 1, "The Core," provides necessary background on community colleges and surveys their many student populations. The opening sections by Ken Meier and Lindsey Malcolm are well-condensed overviews of community colleges as a concept, laying the groundwork and needed background to fully appreciate later chapters. In Chapter 1, Meier succinctly reviews the community college's mission from a historical perspective. In Chapter 2, Malcolm briefly reviews the trends in student diversity in community colleges and the accompanying challenges. These "Core" chapters provide the uninformed reader with a necessary understanding of the history of community colleges as well as the specialty backgrounds of their diverse student populations.

In Chapter 3, Joan Hirt and Tara Frank discuss the growing culture of consumerism among

students, a phenomenon that community colleges share with their four-year counterparts. The authors point to how consumerist tendencies have led to changes in and expansion of student services on many campuses.

Linda Serra Hagedorn and Yi Zhang, in Chapter 4, discuss the small but growing population of international students on community college campuses. The authors explore students' rationale for studying in U.S. community colleges and the effect their presence has upon the campus.

In Chapter 5, Virginia Montero-Hernandez and Christine Cerven discuss the agentic approach and its influence on community college cultures. A sense of agency, active participation, and the co-creation of learning in the classroom is more prevalent among adult learners. This is a key distinction on community college campuses, where adult learners are often in the majority. Dolores Perins, in Chapter 6, turns readers' attention to underprepared students and highlights what has been, and will continue to be, the defining issue for community colleges in the 21st century.

As the author points out, the mission of simply providing access is no longer enough. The community college must help academically challenged students make greater strides and show documented growth in their learning capacities and abilities. As a collection, these six opening chapters on "the core" of community colleges provide a comprehensive overview far better than a single author could likely accomplish, while making surprisingly little overlap of subject matter.

The transition to Section 2, "Institutional Issues for Community Colleges," loses the breadth the earlier "Core" section provided. Instead, four of the five chapters in this section speak to leadership issues that do not seem unique to community colleges but which are common across all colleges and universities and reflect general changes in the larger state of the working world.

David Ayers and Michael Ayers, in Chapter 7, take a look at program planning models and issues. Pamela Eddy, in Chapter 8, examines management trends and their shift over time in community colleges, while Marilyn Amey, in Chapter 9, looks at evolving models of leadership, pipeline issues in preparing community college leaders, and transitions. Carrie Kisker and Susan Kater, in Chapter 10, provide a historical overview of governance models in community colleges, and the connection between governance models, external expectations, and the ability to accomplish objectives.

Each chapter makes very salient points on what the new leaders in community college face: the flattening of the management structure throughout the college, the need to meet quickly changing demands, and a call for a shifting governance model. Each chapter within the section works well

to show where leadership in community college has come from before, explores why change was needed, and analyzes aspects of today's demands that call for more. Only Jim Palmer, in Chapter 11, offers something unique to community colleges, thoroughly discussing the various mechanisms through which states provide funding for public two-year colleges.

In Section 3, "Economic and Workforce Development," three chapters examine different facets of this important community college function. Debra Bragg, in Chapter 12, provides an overview of career and technical education, beginning with its roots in the early 20th century, and laying out many longstanding challenges and concerns. Lucinda Dar, in Chapter 13, recasts career education as a component in a larger external political economy, rightly pointing out that the value and complexities of this function cannot be understood by examining it in isolation.

In the subsequent chapter, Matthew Mars examines career education as a form of academic capitalism within the community college, fueled by society's larger neoliberal dynamics. Dar's and Mars's contributions update and illuminate the difficulties of many of the challenges Bragg sets forth in the opening chapter of this section.

The final section, "The Future," turns attention to community college research and scholarship. In the section's only chapter, John Levin points out the disconnect between the collection of research literature on the community college, and what those institutions are today. Accurate and current theoretical and conceptual understandings of the community college are needed. Levin uses faculty as an illustration, pointing out how broad-brush categories and labels obscure the complexity among community college faculty, their career paths, and their work-lives. Research on these fascinating institutions is in need of resuscitation, Levin declares, and calls on scholars to take up the challenge.

Most notably, the book extends into interesting areas of community colleges that may not get as much visibility within research. Beginning with Hagedorn and Zhang's earlier chapter on international students and their potential impact as they seek out community colleges for their entrance into American higher education, the nuanced discussion moves to Palmer's discussion of state funding for community colleges (Chapter 11) and three variants that explain funding decisions (ideological, structural, and socio-political). The connections of various economic and political theories throughout the workforce development sector create fertile ground for interdisciplinary discussions for community colleges. Dar's discussion (Chapter 13) of comparative political economic theories and how they apply to each individual state's use and

degree of investment in vocational education can have ramifications beyond simply understanding community colleges and their programs.

A limitation of the collection is the lack of focus on community education at community colleges. Gaining importance in many communities for aging populations and as a faster means of reeducation for already employed workers, the community education sources specialize in a way that no other higher education source can duplicate. This topic is unique and has numerous applications and ramifications that could be explored by multiple authors as well. It is also a necessary component in fully understanding the impact community colleges have on their local communities and how they build networks of support.

In all, this text is a quality primer of community colleges. Students, scholars, practitioners, and state policymakers alike will find it useful and informative. It can be used for selected pieces or as a full set of texts and does not lose any effectiveness through either format.

Samuel D. Museus and Uma M. Jayakumar. *Creating Campus Cultures: Fostering Success among Racially Diverse Student Populations*. New York: Taylor & Francis, 2011. 240 pp. Paper: \$44.95. ISBN: 978-0-4158-8820-2.

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Ten years after William Smith, Philip Altbach, and Kofey Lomotey (2002) published *The Racial Crisis in American Higher Education: Continuing Challenges for the Twenty-first Century*, Samuel D. Museus and Uma M. Jayakumar have moved the discussion of race and culture forward by leading a discussion of how to practically minimize racial and cultural challenges on college and university campuses. In *Creating Campus Cultures: Fostering Success among Racially Diverse Student Populations*, Museus and Jayakumar provide much-needed resources for diversity advocates committed to enacting strategies that address a host of pervasive historical, social, student, faculty and administrative racial and cultural challenges highlighted in Smith, Altbach and Lomotey's work. In the spirit of acknowledging the social justice commitment of critical race theory, a discussion of the transition between these two works is warranted to examine the ways in which the "crisis" has been considered.

Creating Campus Cultures facilitates a discussion highlighting an evolution of research; moving from presenting racial issues and challenges (Smith, Altbach, & Lomotey) to enacting solutions that