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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Affordability, Accessibility and Accountability in Higher Education

Proceedings of the Community College Virtual Summit

June 28, 2007

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OFFICE OF VOCATIONAL AND ADULT EDUCATION

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U.S. Department of Education

Margaret Spellings
Secretary

Office of Vocational and Adult Education

Troy Justesen
Assistant Secretary

January 2008

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Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| 1. Purpose, Process and Principals of the Summit | 1 |
| 2. Introductory Remarks by the U.S. Department of Education: The Community College Role in Higher Education | 5 |
| 3. Details of the Topical Discussions. | 7 |
| 4. Summary of Major Themes and Findings | 15 |

“You can’t have a serious conversation about higher education without discussing the 11 million Americans attending community colleges every year.”

MARGARET SPELLINGS

SECRETARY

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

This report summarizes the proceedings of the Community College Virtual Summit held on June 28, 2007, concurrently in Washington, D.C. and four regional sites in New York, California, North Carolina and Texas. The report has four sections: 1) a summary of the event's purpose, process and principals; 2) the introductory remarks from the U.S. Department of Education; 3) greater detail of each of the four topical discussions; and 4) a summary of the major themes and findings.

1. Purpose, Process and Principals of the Summit

Purpose

The main intention of the Community College Virtual Summit, as stated by Troy Justesen, assistant secretary for vocational and adult education, was to explore four critical issues facing community colleges: 1) Two- to four-year transitions; 2) Adult and nontraditional students; 3) Accountability; and 4) Leadership. These were selected as the most pertinent issues for community colleges from among the key findings in *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of Higher Education*, the 2006 report issued by the Secretary's Commission on the Future of Higher Education. These four issues also are central in the specific action items that came out of the National Summit on Higher Education, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education in March 2007. The Community College Virtual Summit was scheduled to follow close on the heels of regional summits hosted by the Department that were devoted to all-encompassing higher education issues, and to similarly kick off actions that might be initiated during the following 12 to 18 months.

The goal of the Community College Virtual Summit was to have a rich and thought-provoking discussion to highlight the importance of the four topics and suggest approaches for further action. The summit drew upon the expertise of nationally known leaders in the four issue areas, some of whom served on a panel at the Washington, D.C. site, and some of whom led regional site gatherings at selected model institutions. The summit resulted in a back-and-forth dialog among participants at the five sites. From this discussion, strategies were discussed to address better affordability, accessibility and accountability for community colleges.

Process

The Washington, D.C. site was hosted by the U.S. Department of Education and was moderated by Pat Stanley, deputy assistant secretary for community colleges at the Office of Vocational and Adult Education. Secretary Spellings delivered pre-taped opening remarks, while Undersecretary Martinez-Tucker underscored the secretary's remarks with a live presentation. The panel of content experts was also present at the site throughout the summit. The four remote sites were selected because they modeled exemplary approaches to the four key issues. They were: Monroe Community College (New York), Coastline Community College (California), Central Piedmont Community College (North Carolina), and the University of Texas-Austin. All of the sites were connected by video teleconference so participants could observe and hear all of the proceedings, make their own presentations, and pose additional questions to

the expert panel. In addition, there was a post-summit networking reception to continue the discussion with selected leaders who attended in Washington, D.C.

The moderator posed a question to a different content expert for each of the four issues and followed with a related question to the facilitator at one of the remote sites, asking how the facilitator's institution handles the issue. Some sites used additional staff to help answer these questions. Both panel members and participants at the remote sites could subsequently respond with additional comments, creating a dialog on the issues. The event lasted 90 minutes.

Principals

The following individuals made presentations or presided during the summit.

U.S. Department of Education

Margaret Spellings, secretary

Sara Martinez-Tucker, undersecretary

Troy R. Justesen, assistant secretary, Office of Vocational and Adult Education

Pat Stanley, deputy assistant secretary for community colleges, Office of Vocational and Adult Education

On-site Content Experts

Glenn DuBois, chancellor, Virginia Community College System, Two- to Four-Year Transitions

Charlene Nunley, former president, Montgomery College (Maryland), Adult and Nontraditional Students

George Boggs, president and CEO, American Association of Community Colleges, Accountability

Christine Johnson-McPhail, professor, Morgan State University (Maryland), Leadership

Remote Site Facilitators

R. Thomas Flynn, president, Monroe Community College (New York), Two- to Four-Year Transitions

Ding-Jo Currie, president, Coastline Community College (California), Adult and Nontraditional Students

Rita Cepeda, president, San Diego Mesa Community College (California), Adult and Nontraditional Students

P. Anthony Zeiss, president, Central Piedmont Community College (North Carolina), Accountability

Mark Milliron, director, National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development, University of Texas-Austin, Leadership

Walter Bumphus, professor, Community College Leadership Program, University of Texas-Austin, Leadership

The following individuals helped organize, produce and report on the summit, under the direction of Pat Stanley.

Gail Schwartz, senior adviser to the deputy assistant secretary, Office of Vocational and Adult Education
Gregory Henschel, senior policy analyst, Office of Vocational and Adult Education

Those interested in viewing the full proceedings of the Community College Virtual Summit can do so at:
<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/cclo/virtualcc07.html>.

2. Introductory Remarks From the U.S. Department of Education: The Community College Role in Higher Education

Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings opened the Community College Virtual Summit by referencing the work of the Commission on the Future of Higher Education, which included a community college representative. The commission's report identified pervasive problems in higher education access, affordability and accountability. In response, the U.S. Department of Education, in March 2007, targeted five specific action areas to deal with these problems: high schools must have more rigorous coursework aligned to college and work; adult students must be better served; financial aid must be simplified and need-based grants increased; colleges must become more cost-effective; and there must be greater transparency about learner outcomes so parents and students can make informed choices about higher education. Students who want to attend college in order to secure jobs in the growing sectors of our economy should not be prevented from doing so by insufficient preparation, high costs or lack of good information.

Undersecretary of Education Sara Martinez-Tucker amplified these remarks by citing her observations from recent national and regional summits at which there were discussions of five actions items, similar to those Secretary Spellings mentioned, (alignment, access, affordability, cost and transparency) and 25 working items from the Department's action plan, including who should be taking action. These regional events grappled with the same issues the Commission on the Future of Higher Education uncovered. The summits were also a reminder to Martinez-Tucker that students and parents are looking not just for financial assistance but also for relevant role models for where higher education might lead. She was excited that this kind of dialog could continue in a more particular way for community colleges at the virtual summit, and grateful that this event could deal with four themes related to the five action items, draw upon highly regarded content experts, and utilize the best practices embedded at several community colleges and the university participating directly at the four sites. She was hopeful that action could be generated.

"One of the best ways to ignite inspiration and motivation for young students is to keep that career prospect in front of them."

SARA MARTINEZ-TUCKER
UNDERSECRETARY
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

3. Details of the Topical Discussions

Two- to Four-Year Transitions

Dialog on this issue centered on ways to improve affordability and seamless transfer for students moving from community colleges to four-year institutions. The trend of students beginning their education in a community college and transferring to a four-year institution to complete their degrees is the clearest example of the unique contribution that community colleges can make to address the issue of higher education's affordability.

Moderator: "What policies and practices could be changed to improve standards for transfer of credits among higher education institutions to in turn improve accessibility and reduce time to completion for our students?"

Content Expert: Glenn DuBois, chancellor of the Virginia Community College System, began by stating that there was a keen interest now in transfer, driven by several factors: the relatively lower price of community colleges compared to four-year institutions, the greater array of jobs that broader pathways might lead to, and the interest among universities to diversify their student base. Parents, students and legislators who recognize the option of community colleges as an affordable "on-ramp" to a four-year degree have embraced the importance of transfer. But there often need to be financial incentives holding tuition constant to foster collaborations among institutions, along with policies to guarantee uniform transfer of both credits and degrees. The latter would be the best first step for this idea to take hold at the national level.

"Most community college students transfer credits, not degrees. It's important for us to come up with policies to transfer degrees."

GLENN DUBOIS
CHANCELLOR
VIRGINIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM

Highlighted Site: Tom Flynn, president of Monroe Community College, pointed out that his college has been very aggressive in establishing a guaranteed, seamless transfer process, having 2+2 programs with 22 four-year institutions in New York state. Transferring students do not have to apply for admission to the four-year institutions. But he wondered how a broader system would work, given that general education requirements vary from state to state. DuBois replied that this issue was a minor one in Virginia compared to the financial issues that the legislature and governor needed to flesh out prior to the broader articulation agreement, which easily accommodated academic requirements.

“When we first started these community colleges, approximately thirty percent of the students were transfer students and seventy percent, then, were in career-related programs. Today that trend is reversed.”

R. THOMAS FLYNN

PRESIDENT

MONROE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Further Discussion: George Boggs cautioned that policies varied quite a bit across states and suggested that a small set of academic disciplines might be where to test this idea. Charlene Nunley emphasized that the goal ought to be across state lines, reporting that students transferring from her college ended up in over 40 different states. Christine Johnson-McPhail challenged community colleges to take a close look at students when they first enter the institution and find out if they are transfer-bound and, if not, if they can become transfer-bound. Community colleges need to help students get in the best positions to take advantage of transfer opportunities.

“It’s important for us to think more broadly about these issues beyond just our state lines ... because community college students really are going everywhere to pursue their education.”

CHARLENE NUNLEY

FORMER PRESIDENT

MONTGOMERY COLLEGE

Adult and Nontraditional Students

Community colleges are eager to find solutions to increase access for adult and other nontraditional students.

Moderator: "Where are we with improving the alignment of adult education with entry requirements for post-secondary programs?"

Content Expert: Charlene Nunley, former president of Montgomery College and a member of the Secretary's Commission on the Future of Higher Education, summarized that the current situation, nationwide, is not positive. High school and postsecondary systems are not well-aligned to start with, and the programs for GED holders are truly not aligned. The vast array of programs that serve English language learners do not share any common outcomes. There will not be enough traditional students in the pipeline to fill all the high-level jobs our economy will demand as the baby boomers retire. Adults will have to fill that gap and are interested in obtaining the postsecondary education these jobs require, but they have trouble dealing with the scheduling requirements and costs of traditional academic programs.

"We need to focus a lot more attention on the adult population ... we tend to drift back to the traditional student."

CHARLENE NUNLEY
FORMER PRESIDENT
MONTGOMERY COLLEGE

Highlighted Site: Ding-Jo Currie and Rita Cepeda, presidents of neighboring Coastline and San Diego Mesa Community Colleges, respectively, jointly presented what they are doing at their institutions about this issue. At Coastline, flexibility, accessibility and connectedness are the keys to engaging the non-traditional student population. The college works with employers directly in many ways and through a variety of programs to meet the adult learners' as well as employers' needs. Coastline is also developing course offerings targeted for students age 50+. San Diego Mesa College, which is part of the San Diego Community College District, sees adult learners as motivated and focused on their education goals. To help them, the college has set up systems in direct partnership with the district's Continuing Education campus, including orientation, counseling and advising. The college is also working to develop and implement a smooth transition process for transfers and a curricular alignment that includes both academic and occupational skills. In addition, San Diego Mesa is piloting a bridge program for GED students that provides critical skills needed to complete college-level courses and assesses their critical needs in the area of basic skills. More needs to be done for all adult learners, including: adjusting the curriculum, using technology better, providing support services and employing different outreach methods.

“If we do a better job in terms of assessment of barriers as well [as academic skills], we could do more preventive measures to help adult learners be much more successful ... ”

DING-JO CURRIE

PRESIDENT

COASTLINE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Further Discussion: George Boggs added that policy challenges remain barriers. States do not tend to fund non-credit programs, and universities have not gone very far in offering flexible degree programs in terms of time and place, making it difficult to transfer and to complete degrees. Glenn DuBois added that even in Virginia, which has paid attention to transfers, not enough has been done to accommodate nontraditional learners, particularly those with GEDs.

“One of the wonderful things about adult learners is that they are targeted, they are extremely motivated ... they are very practical in what they want.”

RITA CEPEDA

PRESIDENT

SAN DIEGO MESA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Accountability

This portion of the program focused on the need for better data and an all-encompassing, transparent data system to track student outcomes. Discussion centered on institutional use for data systems, rather than on public use.

Moderator: "What lessons have we learned from system-level and statewide information systems already built?"

Content Expert: George Boggs, president and CEO of the American Association of Community Colleges, emphasized that community colleges have generally been receptive to unit record data systems that permit following or tracking students because they recognize that students are very mobile. Community colleges would embrace a well-conceived federal data system that would yield data that could be used to improve their programs and to demonstrate student success, which would strengthen community college's advocacy with their state legislatures. The lessons learned from existing systems are: 1) field-developed common data definitions are necessary; 2) there is often a reporting burden for smaller institutions; 3) data needs to come back to the colleges to help improve programs; 4) systems have to be compatible across federal, state and accrediting agencies; and 5) measures drawn from the data collected must reflect the reality that community colleges have a broad mission serving many kinds of students.

"... for making use of data, making colleges evidence-based to improve success rates for students ... it's important that we get this information to our colleges."

GEORGE BOGGS

PRESIDENT AND CEO

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Highlighted Site: Tony Zeiss, president of Central Piedmont Community College, addressed the same question, and the related one of "How can greater transparency build accountability?" He stated that good outcome data will be an imperative as America faces its greatest labor shortage in history. But he emphasized that, going forward, data will have to be compatible for the many entities that request it, and that the specific data elements ought to be appropriate and useful for making improvements. He used the example of his institution: Central Piedmont Community College is part of a larger statewide data system with longitudinal features that generally works well, as each college can extract what it needs to gauge learner outcomes and satisfaction. One campus representative explained how the college taps this information every year, comparing its performance to benchmarks and enhancing the data with student surveys, additional student testing and annual program reviews. President Zeiss asked how a federal system can be constructed that assures compatibility with other data systems already in place while also attending to privacy and cost concerns.

“Once you get the data ... what are you going to do with it? How do you close the loop? How do you make sure that your college and learning have improved as a result?”

P. ANTHONY ZEISS

PRESIDENT

CENTRAL PIEDMONT COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Further Discussion: Charlene Nunley added that she, too, supports a unit record data system to make improvements, but emphasized concerns that the data not be used in a punitive way and that privacy of students be protected. She stressed an honest and open examination of data along the lines of what the Achieving the Dream project has fostered. George Boggs replied that he is not fully satisfied with the term “transparency” as it implies passive access to data but not any active communication of it, as Central Piedmont has done. He also stressed the importance of the internal distribution of the data beyond administrators to instructors.

“As president of a community college, how can I make my institution better if I don’t know what’s happening to my students?”

CHARLENE NUNLEY

FORMER PRESIDENT

MONTGOMERY COLLEGE

Leadership

While the fourth issue does not deal with affordability, accessibility or accountability, appropriately preparing a new generation of community college leaders will be a surefire way to assure proper action to solve these issues.

Moderator: “What should we be doing to take on the challenge of preparing new and supporting existing leaders?”

Content Expert: Christine Johnson-McPhail, professor at Morgan State University, who coordinates its Community College Doctoral Leadership Program, listed four things that need to be done in the area of leadership. Foremost is the need to change not just how we train leaders but also, and more fundamentally, our expectations of them, adding courses that deal with current issues in higher education. Second, we must cast a wider net when conducting top leadership searches, going beyond traditional pathways to those posts. Third, governing boards must be brought into leadership training, especially as the need to incorporate more accountability into higher education becomes paramount. Finally, we must start cultivating faculty and staff into the leadership pipeline, lengthening the timeframe for succession planning, and being more positive about leadership and the systems that leaders will inherit so they will not be dissuaded from taking the leadership road.

“Governance is the other side of leadership that we haven’t developed, and I think we need to get into the business of doing that.”

CHRISTINE JOHNSON-MCPHAIL
PROFESSOR
MORGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Highlighted Site: Mark Milliron and Walter Bumphus, who direct programs at the University of Texas-Austin to develop community college leaders, spoke about state-of-the-art professional development. For example, at UT-Austin’s annual conference this year, the leadership development series focused on community colleges partnering with universities and corporations, and community colleges “growing their own.” Bumphus has experience with a Louisiana program of “growing your own,” a series of workshops for those already in the pipeline aimed at increasing diversity among leaders and embedding best practices. Mark Milliron reiterated the need to look deeper into the pipeline for leaders and to use succession planning as an opportunity to pay attention to strategic directions for the institution.

"[We] wanted to get away from the friends and family plan of hiring, really going out and looking at best practices for innovative programs and services, and looking at ways to bring in a group of diverse leaders to implement the best practices that were identified by benchmarking trips around the country."

WALTER BUMPHUS

PROFESSOR

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS-AUSTIN

Further Discussion: Glenn DuBois highlighted the need to encourage faculty members to pursue leadership programs as a way to motivate and inspire them. George Boggs concurred with Christine Johnson-McPhail's suggestion to look at pathways to leadership other than those commonly associated with the instructional pathway. Walter Bumphus reemphasized the need for an open search for the best and brightest potential leaders, while Mark Milliron added that leaders will require new skill sets such as technology and fundraising.

"We need to look at different pathways [to leadership posts] ... we need to cast that net real wide."

CHRISTINE JOHNSON-MCPHAIL

PROFESSOR

MORGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

4. Summary of Major Themes and Findings

The Community College Virtual Summit focused on the four topics from the perspectives of the three principal challenges facing higher education in America today: affordability, accessibility and accountability. Based on the deliberations at the summit, these particular facets were most emphasized.

Two- to Four-Year Transitions

- Policymakers' interest in students transferring from community colleges to universities is driven by their focus on cost effectiveness, labor market demands, and their desire for a more efficient higher education system.
- Colleges need to be aggressive in establishing transfer agreements with each other, but states may also need to offer financial incentives to ensure less of a patchwork system. Ideally, agreements should expand beyond state boundaries since students pursue their education all over the country.

Adult and Other Nontraditional Students

- There are not enough traditional students in the pipeline to fill the high-level jobs in the future economy. Adults will have to fill the gap, but they are having trouble navigating the current higher education system.
- Some colleges have done more than simply marketing to attract and retain nontraditional students; working with employers directly, assessing student needs up front, altering curricula, offering flexible degree and transfer programs, providing support services and serving those with GEDs and English language learners are some of the approaches that have been used.

Accountability

- Community colleges generally support the establishment of a unit record data system that could provide information by tracking students as they progress through their education. The additional student-specific data could help community colleges improve their programs and be used to demonstrate success when advocating with state leaders.
- Existing data systems offer lessons that ought to be heeded before establishing a federal data system; compatibility, active usage for program improvement and nonpunitive uses are key considerations.

Leadership

- Preparing new and supporting current community college leaders will require changing our expectations, casting a wider net in searches, lengthening the pipeline for succession planning and providing for governance board development.
- Leaders will need to come from professional programs that explore the diverse nature of community colleges and address community college concerns, deal with current education issues in innovative ways, and impart modern skill sets.

“Community colleges are not at the crossroads. They are in the fast lane driving at full speed.”

MARK MILLIRON

ENDOWED FELLOW AND DIRECTOR
NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR STAFF AND ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS-AUSTIN

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