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The U.S. Community After Globalization

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Internationalization in Vocational Education and Training: Transnational Perspectives

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The U.S. Community After Globalization

Introduction

Community colleges in the United States have a history dating back to the 19th century, originating as junior colleges with a focus upon postsecondary education and training at the pre-baccalaureate degree level in academic, vocational, and adult education areas (Frye, 1992; Meier, 2103). Although as community colleges since the 1960s they have exhibited multiple functions and missions, they have maintained several underlying principles, such as open-access, a comprehensive curriculum, and community responsiveness, as well as an aspiration to further democratize U.S. society (Levin, 2001). While the institution is market sensitive in responding to new student populations and in training for the vocations, community colleges were not adherents to neoliberal principles of competition or performativity, or the privileging of the private sector, and certainly not inequality (Quiggan, 2010).

Our focus is upon the rise of neoliberal policies for and practices of U.S. community colleges following this period of the 1990s. During the 1980s and 1990s, the globalization process shaped and influenced U.S. community colleges (Levin 2001). These institutions comprise the major U.S. postsecondary (or tertiary) education sector that provides pre-baccalaureate degree education and training for adults, although the recent addition of the baccalaureate degree in over 20 states has expanded the curricular focus of the community college (Russell 2010).

Both state and institutional policy and organizational behaviors emphasized program completion (including credentialing) and student learning outcomes, on the one hand, and state policy emphasized a globally competitive workforce and economic development, on the other hand. Education policies and practices point to the ways in which ideology, particularly neoliberal or liberal market ideology, used the globalization process and globalizing tendencies (e.g., international labor forces, immigration, and information technology). Globalization, interrupting nation-states' physical borders, has led in education to the establishment of a new territory, and disturbed established local and even national values and institutional logics (Seddon et al. 2013). Over the past two decades, through "traveling neo-liberal reforms" (Seddon et al. 2013, p. 12), public higher education adopted liberal market practices (Campbell and Pederson 2001; Crouch 2011; Quiggan 2010), potentially altering the seminal qualities of education and training and replacing these with economic values, in the form of money and profit for private rather than for public purposes (Ball 2012). Yet, community colleges maintained critical components of their mission(s), or parts of these, such as access to educational opportunities for adults, a community orientation, and a focus upon students as learners. These characteristics have over the decades since the 1960s set community colleges apart from other postsecondary institutions (Cohen et al. 2013; Meier 2013). It is the conflict and tension between neoliberalism and community college institutional characteristics that figure prominently in the development of the institution since the 1990s.

We draw upon a longitudinal investigation of U.S. community colleges that highlights three community colleges in three separate states—California, Washington,

and Hawaii—examined initially in the period of 1989-1999 and subsequently in the period of 2000-2013. These institutions during the former period emphasized, in their official articulations, international education, cultural diversity, and access to further education as well as job preparation as key features of curriculum (Levin 2001). Their operations featured efforts of greater efficiency, the use of information and educational technology, international partnerships and projects, and shifts in organizational structures and management. During the latter period, institutional behaviors and actions took on a decidedly more neoliberal tendency, with greater direction by the State as financial concerns, particularly after 2008 (i.e., the Great Recession), student outcome measures, and efforts for greater accountability and legitimacy were evident. As a result, community colleges in the U.S. reflect State policy aims for a globally competitive workforce so that the U.S. and states' economies can prosper. Furthermore, states' policies and practices result in both the rationing of higher education and behaviors connected to the generation of revenues (e.g., external grant seeking and recruitment of international students). Community colleges are both vehicles and models of state policy; but they also act within a socio-cultural and institutional context where institutional norms and values come into conflict or tension with state policy and practices.

To demonstrate both the policy aims of states and the results of these policies in community colleges, we undertake discourse analysis of selected state policies for higher education in three states and narrative analysis of interviews conducted at three community colleges. Documents include state legislation, higher education system reports and strategic plans, special commission reports, and non-government

policy reports aimed at each state's higher education system and institutions.

Interviews include semi-structured interviews with samples of faculty and administrators at three colleges.

From Globalization to Neoliberalism: The U.S. Community College Under Pressure

Globalization as a process of connectivity of institutional practices nationally and internationally and a mechanism for moving national policies or parts of these from one country to another resulted, arguably, in the preeminence of an ideology known as neoliberalism. Specifically, the vehicle for the proliferation of neoliberal educational policies internationally was globalization (Seddon et al. 2013). In the U.S., in the late 1980s and 1990s, federal and state policies aimed to move community colleges to global economic competitiveness and in the process to shape the mission of the community college toward economic goals (Levin 2001). There was considerable emphasis in the 1990s and the beginnings of the 2000s on globalization as multivalent, with various domains, such as cultural, political, technological, and social, as well as economic, as significant components of the globalization process. For higher education, globalization was fused with internationalization, and promises of cultural development and multiculturalism were ascendant (Levin 2001). Information technology was acclaimed as the purveyor of a globalized society where there would be universal connectivity and the assumption of greater intercultural understandings (Castells 2000). Yet for community colleges, the domains of culture, information, and politics took a back seat to the economic domain, and by the second decade of the 2000s, neoliberal values and emphases took hold.

Neoliberalism is connected to economic marketplace principles (Crouch 2011) that entail not only competition but also inequality (Quiggan 2010). Brown (2013) emphasizes marketization of higher education, where everything is for sale. Ball (2012) stresses profit, particularly as a motive for institutions to cut costs. Crouch (2011) emphasizes market principles as the standard for social and institutional judgment, so that the only important goals are profit goals. Flew (2014) views neoliberalism as a project for institutional change that would align institutions with a liberal market.

The claim is that neoliberal practices have driven public sector higher education to depend less upon government funding and rely more on an entrepreneurial pattern of behaviors that leads to the acquisition of private revenues streams, such as tuition and grant money (Ball 2012). Governments view colleges and universities as economic investments; private foundations and policy bodies look to higher education to satisfy ideological preferences, such as educational and training attainment to meet workforce needs of the private sector (Olssen and Peters 2005). The public, dissatisfied with higher taxation, prefers cost containment to address rising higher education tuition. National political leaders, such as President Obama, as well as presidents Bush and Clinton (Ayers 2005), view and articulate higher education as an instrument for national productivity and global economic competitiveness (The White House 2015). Ball (2012) terms the key mechanism for judgment or assessment of higher education institutions as “performativity,” evaluation based upon economy, efficiency, and effectiveness.

Arguably, neoliberal initiatives, such as competition based upon performance and state disinvestment in the public sector, have become more pronounced in community colleges in the past two decades, more evident since the 2008 Great Recession (Rampell 2009), and more corrosive to the characteristics and critical mission components of the community college.

The role of the states 2000-2013: State policies and their goals for community colleges

Higher education policies determine the context of action of community colleges, thus we examined the adoption of neoliberal ideas in community (and technical) colleges policy documents in three states—California, Washington, and Hawaii. California community colleges (CCC) constitute the largest system of community colleges in the United States (California Community College Chancellor's Office 2015). CCC consist of 112 community colleges in 72 districts (Student Success Task Force 2012). In 2012, the colleges enrolled 1.4 million students (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] 2013). Moreover, California's community college student population accounts for nearly one of every five students enrolled in a U.S. community college (Student Success Task Force 2012).

Under the *Donahoe Act* (State of California 1960a) and *The Master Plan* (State of California 1960b), CCC were consolidated with the state's other two systems of higher education: the University of California (the state's research institutions) and the California State University (the state's comprehensive universities). One intention of legislation was to allow the CCC to enable all eligible citizens to participate in some form of postsecondary education. Over the period since the act and the plan, the

mission of CCC has increased beyond access for academic and vocational education to include remedial instruction, ESL, adult non-credit, community services, and the advancement of “California's economic growth and global competitiveness through education, training, and services that contribute to continuous work force improvement” (California Department of Education 1997, Section 66010.4 (3)).

Washington’s higher education system is composed of state and regional universities, a state college, community colleges, and technical colleges (Washington State 1992). In 1991, an “independent system of community and technical colleges” [CTC] for Washington was created (Washington State 1991). This system separates CTC from both the public secondary schools and the universities in the state. Originally, the CTC system included colleges that provided basic skills and literacy education, as well as occupational education, technical training, and university transfer. Since 2010, CTC in Washington were authorized to offer applied baccalaureate degrees (Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges [WSBCTC] 2015), a practice that started with a pilot program five years earlier (Glennon 2005). There are 34 community and technical colleges in the state. In the fall of 2012, they served 139, 311 students (NCES 2013).

The University of Hawaii (UH) is that state’s postsecondary education system and is composed of three universities and seven regional community colleges spread across the islands of Hawaii, Maui, Oahu, and Kauai. The University of Hawaii contains both native serving and Asian American Native American Pacific Islander serving institutions. The majority of Hawaii’s indigenous population attends UH community

colleges (Model Indigenous-serving University Task Force [MISUTF] n.d.). In 2012, the seven community colleges enrolled 29,333 students (NCES 2013).

The goals for community colleges in state policies

Three overarching neoliberal principles or intentions are prevalent in the higher education policies of California, Washington, and Hawaii; however, these principles or intentions are manifested differently in each state. First, the policies in these states direct community (and technical) colleges towards efficiency outcomes—particularly with a focus on degree completion and university transfer. Second, the neoliberal theme of individualism appears in the policies and practices; however, individualism in Hawaii appears in the collective singular sense whereas Washington and California exemplify more traditional notions of individualism. Finally, each state emphasizes economic and workforce development. These principles and intentions are delineated differently in each state’s policies due to nuances in the structure of each state’s higher education system, culture, and historical background of the community college. In spite of these differences, the states exhibit neoliberal initiatives that push community colleges toward performativity, individual responsibility, and market behaviors.

California’s community colleges and the discourse of “student success.”

The passage of SB 1456, the 2012 Student Success Act, completed a process in California’s community colleges initiated by then Governor Reagan in the 1960s away from an emphasis on state support toward emphasis on the individual (Geiger 2005).

This movement in California Community Colleges (CCC) was part of a larger national discourse increasingly focused on completion, efficiency, and economic development. Each state responded to the pressures associated with this discourse by identifying institutional problems that prevented completion, efficiency, and economic development. California responded by articulating the problem as housed, not within the state or institution, but rather within individual students, and to a lesser degree, individual staff and faculty.

Following the fiscal crisis, which began in December of 2007, the CCC experienced budget cuts totaling as much as \$1.5 billion between fiscal years 2007-2008 and 2011-2012 (Zumeta and Frankle 2007). This crisis prompted an increased emphasis on efficiency and credentialing at an unprecedented pace. As a consequence of these budget cuts, California policy makers made deliberate efforts to focus on students deemed most able to complete in an increasingly competitive economic climate. Moreover, programs designed to support vulnerable populations (e.g., students with disabilities) saw dramatic cuts to their funding allocations. In many cases, the cuts experienced in the 2009-2010 fiscal year were as high as 40% over previous years (Contreras 2013; Farr 2010).

These funding cuts challenged the state's long outdated Master Plan (State of California 1960). The Master Plan was designed to serve the state from 1960-1975, as part of a tripartite system in which all Californians would be served while the state provided institutional support (Douglass 2007). Yet, the Master Plan began to show cracks as early as 1966 when Governor Reagan began to deemphasize state support for public education. This was further exacerbated by the passage of Proposition 13 (a

state-wide referendum) in 1978, which limited available property tax revenue for community college funding, as well as the introduction of fees to the once tuition-free community colleges in 1984 (Kurlaender and Jackson 2015). The introduction of fees was coupled with the introduction of the Board of Governors' tuition fee waiver, which further individualized state support (Kurlaender and Jackson 2015)

Yet, recent funding cuts, beginning in 2008, and policies throughout the 2000s placed pressure upon the ideals of the Master Plan beyond what it could bear. These cuts came on the heels of a period, 2000-2008, which bore witness to a deliberate movement away from the diversity and access missions to one of completion and accountability on a scale previously unseen. One example of this movement came in 2004 with California's passage of Assembly Bill 1417 [State of California 2004], which established the Accountability Reporting for the Community Colleges program that required the Board of Governors of the CCC to recommend a framework for the evaluation of performance in meeting efficiencies. Building on the movement toward efficiency during the early 2000s, Shulock and Moore's (2007) *Rules of the Game* further articulated this movement by crafting the argument that access-driven policies hinder student completion and attainment. This coming just prior to the financial crisis of 2008 set the stage for state's response to this crisis, which ultimately culminated in the passage of the 2012 Student Success Act.

The Student Success Task Force developed eight recommendations from a legislative bill, SB 1456 (Student Success Task Force 2012). The first five recommendations address deficiencies in individual students, specifically highlighting students' lack of college preparedness, lack of direction upon entering, lack of

progress toward degree, and lack of basic skills acquisition. Recommendation six furthers this deficit view by addressing the lack of professional development opportunities for faculty and staff. Despite the rhetoric during recent years, which focused on institutional needs, the state chose to increase efficiency by removing perceived deficits in the individual. In conjunction with state actions that remove perceived individual deficits, there is support for high achieving individuals. For example, students who complete education plans and make measurable progress toward completion are favored under SB 1456 in relation to those who struggle and fail to identify a program major and make adequate academic progress, arguably the students in need of the most institutional support.

The nature of SB 1456 speaks to the ideals of completion, efficiency, and individualism embedded within a neoliberal agenda. However, while this legislative act is central to the immediate future of behaviors within the CCC, it is only a means to a larger end. If the amelioration of perceived student, staff, and faculty deficits is the means, then economic and workforce development is the larger end goal. Governor Brown's 2015-2016 CCC budget proposals speak to the reason for investing in community college education (Brown 2015; Taylor 2013). The Governor asserts that there is a "high return on investment" in community colleges and lists the rationale for investment in community colleges in order to improve technical education and apprenticeship programs, as well as to increase funding for career development (Brown 2015, p. 43). As such, the "traditional professional culture of open intellectual inquiry and debate has been replaced with an institutional stress on performativity" (Olssen and Peters 2005, p. 313). Moreover, the overall discourse within CCC policy

suggests that the overarching goal of community colleges, particularly in response to financial constraints, is one of economic and workforce development. Furthermore, legislative behaviors in California suggest that the largest impediments to this goal are not institutional deficits, but rather individual deficits. As such, CCCs are expected, for the foreseeable future, to be grounded firmly in values of efficiency, completion, individualism, and economic development.

Higher education policy in Washington: Community colleges as credentialing suppliers. Current higher education policy in Washington state has its basis in the “2008 Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education” (Washington Higher Education Coordinating Board [WHECB] 2007). This “umbrella policy” determines the direction of other policy documents in the state: (a) the role of the post-secondary system is to promote the state’s economic growth, as well as individuals’ social mobility; (b) higher education programs will respond to labor market demands; (c) degree attainment will be promoted in, and connected to, all educational levels, that is pre-kindergarten to graduate school (P-20); (d) programs will be customized, responsive to students’ demands; and, (e) the postsecondary system will make systematic use of indicators of quality and efficiency. For the community and technical colleges (CTC) in the state, these trends translate into a major focus on university transfer and “swirling” demands (whereby students move among institutions), increases in credential and customized programs, and on-going use of assessment indicators.

The depiction of higher education as the primary tool to promote economic growth in Washington is not new. During the 1990s, higher education policy in the

state tied postsecondary education explicitly to the improvement of the “economic condition of the state within a globally competitive environment” with little attention to social issues (Levin 2001, p. 103). In contrast to 1990s’ policies, policies after the Master Plan exhibit more explicit interest in underrepresented populations such as women, students of color, low-SES individuals, and adults or non-traditional students. But, similar to the 1990s’ policies, higher education policies from the mid-2000s to the present focus on one primary issue: train these populations to become a highly skilled workforce. Degrees (baccalaureate, master’s, and doctoral) are conceived of as a source of social mobility and “the primary route out of poverty” (WHECB 2007, p. 22). Thus, preferred programs at the CTC are university transfer programs as well as programs in technical and applied fields, which increase individuals’ probabilities of employment and high income.

In Washington policy documents, knowledge is depicted as a private good that produces economic benefits to students as well as economic development for the state. The role of CTC is to satisfy the demands of individuals who return to higher education for new job skills (Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges [WSBCTC] 2010) and to help them capitalize their knowledge. Credits become a private good that students can obtain at various CTC and these credits then serve students for university degrees. Programs and courses at CTC are customized to respond both to student needs (e.g., limited time) and to students’ choices (e.g., interest in a productive activity). Students are seen as consumers of a product—education in the form of credits—who have the right to transport that product to different higher education institutions. Similar to consumers, students can be

convinced to pay for a product (e.g., program or major) that responds to the job market and state economic needs (WHECB 2012a, 2012b; WHECB et al. 2011). Moreover, one of the goals of CTC is to attract new types of consumers (adult learners, primarily) by depicting these colleges as a postsecondary pathway.

Community and technical colleges are thus stepping-stones in a “life-long learning” pathway that has one final end: degree attainment. This applies to both traditional age students and adult learners. In this scheme, for example, CTC and K-12 education work in collaboration for the development of programs such as “running start” that enable high school students to gain credits useful for a college degree (WHECB 2011b). Congruently, CTC’s main role is to transfer students to universities. Additionally, CTC are expected to respond and facilitate students’ “swirling”—transferring back and forth among different CTC—to ease students’ transition to college. In these policies, the concept “life-long learning” has a narrow connotation (a life-long possibility of degree attainment, primarily for adult learners) that contrasts with the educational use of this term. This emphasis gives priority to the CTC’ university transfer mission.

CTC are expected to work in line with an efficiency rationale, which requires that “production” is maintained without increasing costs (WSBCTC 2010; WHECB 2011a). The Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges depict the adoption of a “culture of evidence” for CTC leaders as necessary to ensure colleges’ assessment and accountability practices, which would result in transparency, improvement of quality (Jenkins et al. 2012), and the reduction of expenditures in education (WSBCTC 2010). CTC are incentivized to improve student outcomes

measured in the form of transfer rates, completion rates, and student performance in gatekeeper programs (programs that are necessary for transfer or degree completion). The Student Achievement Initiative, for example, provides funding for colleges that improve their “achievement points” or measures of both completion of credentials and achievement of intermediate milestones. Since university transfer is a top priority of the state, CTC are expected to establish and assess different paths to baccalaureate degrees (WHECB 2009). The Washington Higher Education Coordination Board defines a “successful” college as one that transfers a large number of students, allows swirling, and “avoids loss of credits” in the process (2011b). Terms such as productivity, measurable outcomes, input efficiency, responsiveness to job market demands, and students’ choices refer to expectations for CTC, spelled out in state policies. CTC are perceived as convenience stores from which to obtain credits necessary for a degree of any kind and less conceived of as higher education institutions with a democratizing and access mission.

Hawaii higher education policy: Culture and neoliberal ideology. Hawaii’s postsecondary education policy continued the trend of globalization of the 1990s (Levin 2001) through the expansion of partnerships, technology, and diversity (State Board for Career and Technical Education [SBCTE] 2014; University of Hawaii [UH] 2006). Yet, the discourse of higher education policy in Hawaii has adopted a neoliberal propensity since the start of the new millennium, with a greater emphasis on revenue generation, accountability, state influence and control, entrepreneurship, competition, workforce demands, and student learning outcomes (SBCTE 2014; University of Hawaii Innovation Council [UHIC] n.d.). The discourse embedded within Hawaii’s

policies utilizes an anti-deficit rhetoric to laud the state's strengths, as well as promote goals that lead to an ideal future for the state.

In spite of the positive tone of the policy documents, there are inherent tensions with policy. First, policy documents indicate that Hawaii's higher education system must comply with federal mandates on activities such as student financial aid (State of Hawaii Office of the Auditor [SHOTA] 2012). Although the state attempts to comply with such legislation, Hawaii lacks the necessary institutional structures for compliance (SHOTA 2012). Thus, the positive rhetoric, while appropriate culturally, may mask challenges and issues that the University of Hawaii [UH] system faces. Second, policy for community colleges instructs institutions to respond to the state's economic demands and to promote efficiency (Levin 1999); however, university documents also emphasize "continual quality improvement" and quality of life (UH 2009, 2015)—values in direct conflict with efficiency (Levin 1999). Furthermore, the neoliberal tendencies present in the documents conflict with the Hawaiians' emphasis on family and community. Indeed, Hawaii challenges traditional notions of neoliberalism in which individualism is rationalized and lauded. Hawaii's emphasis on community, social responsibility, and *ohana* (family) questions the "individual as individual" conception and suggests a reconceptualization of the neoliberal individual as the collective singular.

Hawaiian culture places significant value on the community and it is the mission of the University of Hawaii to develop priorities and goals based on assessment of community "needs" (UH 2006) and "well-being" (UH 2009). Tradition, sustainability, and preservation of indigenous culture are imperative to the mission of

the University of Hawaii (UH 2009). According to MRC Greenwood, former President of the University of Hawaii, “Everything we do is, or should be, imbued with Hawaiian values and respectful of the traditions practiced here for centuries” (MISUTF n.d., p. 2). Not only is development of higher education policy in Hawaii based on economic benefits and workforce development but also policy and practices are adopted because they are *pono*—the right thing to do (MISUTF n.d.). Hawaiian education policies speak of *kuleana* (responsibility) [MISUTF n.d.]. This suggests that while neoliberal ideology has infiltrated Hawaii’s higher education policies, the local culture moderates, and perhaps reshapes, those neoliberal tendencies in practice.

Hawaii community college documents from the 1990s emphasize quality, enrollment, access through distance education, technological advancement, internationalization, partnerships, and a student-centered approach, (Tsunoda 1996; UH 1996; UH 1999). Although the documents from the 2000s continue to emphasize excellence, access (UH 2006), enrollment, technology, globalization, and partnerships (UH 2002), they introduce new performance measures, such as degree completion by race (with a particular focus on Native Hawaiians) [University of Hawai’i 2012], certificates earned, disbursement of Pell grants, extramural funding, patents and licenses, funding sources, and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) degree completions (UH 2008).

Workforce development is the preeminent theme in the policies of both the 1990s and 2000s. The documents of the 1990s accentuate meeting the needs of the local, state economy (UH 1996; Tsunoda 1996; UH 1999). In the 1990s, the emphasis was on partnerships and job training in tourism, and labor-intensive industries such

as agriculture, as well as technological fields (Tsunoda 1996; UH1999). However, discussions of workforce development in the 2000s took on a more global tone. Hawaii's higher education policy of the 2000s outlines a vision of the University of Hawaii community colleges that seeks "to provide the trained workforce needed in the State, the region, and internationally by offering occupational, technical, and professional courses and programs which prepare students for immediate employment and career advancement" (UH 2006, p. 1). The University of Hawaii Innovation Council report recommends that the University of Hawaii advance "economic growth and future competitiveness" in a "global marketplace" (UHIC n.d., p. 4). Workforce development continues to be central to the mission of Hawaii community colleges.

A focus on accountability is also evident in Hawaii's higher education policy documents and reports from 1989-2013. The documents from the 1990s emphasized accountability in the use of human and physical resources (UH 1996); whereas, the strategic plans from the 2000s focused on fiscal integrity and accountability to taxpayers, families, students, and donors in order to maximize the "value" of their investment (UH 2002).

Finally, although policies and documents of the University of Hawaii and its community colleges, in the 2000s in particular, indicate an emphasis on innovation, marketization of ideas, and revenue generation (UHIC n.d.)—neoliberal values—UH and its community colleges do not fully embody the independence and individualism of traditional neoliberalism. This may be the result of considerable influence of the

state and federal governments on Hawaii community colleges and the UH system. This influence takes form in the reliance on state funding as well as federal financial aid.

The same but different. Higher education policies in California, Washington, and Hawaii propose goals for community (and technical) colleges that prioritize measurable outcomes. In each state, degree completion, certificate attainment, and university transfer are used as benchmarks of goal achievement. For Washington and California, however, university transfer is a more complex process than for Hawaii, due to the division between universities and community colleges in the former and the integration of these institutions in the later. Additionally, the focus on the population that completes a degree varies by state. In Hawaii, strategies are directed towards native Hawaiians educational achievement; in California, the focus is on the attainment gap between underrepresented populations and their White and Asian peers; and, in Washington, the priorities are for adult learners and low-SES populations.

Policies in these three states favor an individualistic view of the benefits of and responsibilities for postsecondary education, consistent with neoliberal ideology. Nevertheless, individualism has a different connotation in these states. In California, the benefits of education and the consequences of poor performance fall on the individual. In Washington, postsecondary education is expected to provide economic benefits to individuals, but individual colleges have responsibility for achieving benchmarks and thus suffer the consequences of failure. Policy in Hawaii, in some contrast, equates the individual with the community, particularly for benefits. Finally,

policies in each state emphasize the economic and workforce development mission of community colleges.

Three colleges and the effects of state policies

We examine in brief the attributed effects of state policies upon three community colleges located in California, Washington, and Hawaii. These three colleges are given pseudonyms—Suburban Valley Community College, City South Community College, and Pacific Suburban Community College—identical to those names used in a longitudinal qualitative investigation spanning from 1989-2013 (see Levin 2001). Here we identify effects confined to the period of 2000-2013 as conveyed by a sample of faculty and administrators.

Suburban Valley Community College, California

State policy has affected Suburban Valley College (SVCC) on several fronts, but two are most prominent, and these two are intertwined by the second decade of the 2000s. On the one hand, policies have increasingly moved the college from concerns about access to concerns over student performance and outcomes. On the other hand, policies have led to funding shifts in two directions, with incompatible outcomes. First, there were 2008-2012 reductions in state funding to the institution (and all California community colleges) that resulted in the rationing of instruction and student support services. Second, after 2012 there was an increase in state funding that resulted in the privileging of some activities and populations over others. As extensions of state policy, the state's funding behaviors are at their dramatic climax in the period of 2009-2013, during a period of sharp decline and then restoration. The

stratifying of student populations may have reached its zenith through privileging of student groups based upon the Student Success Act of 2012. Indeed, state policy coalesces around expenditures—funding allocations for the college from the state—and values attached to education and training. The Chancellor of the community college district that oversees SVCC indicated that the message from the state government was clear.

[T]he state told us, “Your priorities are now transfer, basic skills, and career technical education, and do not spend your scarce resources on lifelong learning, community services, those kinds of things”...[Their] intention was to pay for as little as they could...clamping down on things including how many times you can repeat a course. (District Chancellor)

Faculty interpret this message as an indication “that the community college is no longer a community college” (Social Sciences faculty member). The two—funding and the Student Success Act—are conjoined because the legislation makes it clear that funding for the college is tied to compliance with the strictures of the act. “[W]e go along with it because there’s funding tied to it” (Developmental Education faculty member).

The response on campus has been mixed. One response is compliance as noted above because of the financial dependency of the college on the state. Yet, another form of compliance is passivity as noted by a department chairperson. “[A] lot of the fight is out of us. I feel like I’m on a mode where I’m going to devote as little energy and angst as possible. I’m going to do the minimum of what’s asked of me in terms of the bureaucratic requirements.” This department chair identifies two key changes: “a

workload increase [and]...real core changes to our mission as an institution.” The president of SVCC was more sanguine about financial issues, treating them as problems that can be addressed by institutional groups through planning. Indeed, during the period of considerable financial stress, the president established a college tribunal, referred to as the Institutional Planning and Budget Process, with the intent that this process determines priority areas for deleting, curtailing, or maintaining programs, units, and activities of the college. This process led to “a lot of loss” (College president), but a high level of employee participation. “There was a lot of loss and at the same time people were constantly trying to reorganize and figure out ‘Ok...we have to work together. How are we going to do this?’” The president characterized this budget process as “broadly democratic, genuinely participatory.” The emphasis here then was on process not outcomes. Yet others did not agree with the president on process, and viewed the process as secretive and competitive. Two faculty members described the process as inquisition-like in order to justify the elimination of programs and layoff of employees. For these faculty the process led to discontentment and demoralization. “I’ve never seen such discontent in my many years” (Science faculty member). For one administrator, the Institutional Planning and Budget Process was an opportunity structure for jettisoning inefficient and ineffective programs. ““We’ve studied your program reviews for a long time and your enrollment is down, down, down, all the time and we’ve been dumping resources... and things haven’t changed”” (College Dean). Deletion of programs and course offerings and increases of class sizes are the consequence of diminished state funding and policy priorities.

City South Community College, Washington

Skills development and ultimately credentials are the cornerstone of City South Community College's (CSCC) actions, within a context of both state demands and local market conditions, including market demand in the form of students and market needs in the form of a labor force. Yet City South's focus upon meeting local market needs rests with the development of baccalaureate programs in applied areas, which are equated state-wide with economic development, but viewed at City South as a mechanism to increase enrolments on the one hand and produce credentials on the other. "[M]ore kids from high school [will enroll]...for our baccalaureate degrees...Our thought was raise aspirations" (College District Chancellor). These degrees will extend the vocational and career technical mission of the community college, yet push the institution away from community college identity as a two-year institution toward the four-year sector. Degrees would be four years in the areas of "manufacturing engineering technology or electrical engineering technology...appropriate BAS [Bachelor of Applied Science] degrees. University of Washington, Washington State [University] don't offer those" (Senior administrator). Thus, the baccalaureate degree both addresses skills development, at a considerably higher level than traditional vocational programs, and leads to a more market salient credential than the associate's degree (traditional two-year community college credential).

The market orientation of City South extends to other Washington state community colleges, which also offer applied baccalaureate degrees. A second statewide effort to tie community and technical colleges to market behaviors comes in the form of new directions in funding institutions, based upon college performance.

Performativity is judged statewide through outcomes performance funding whereby the state withholds \$50,000 a year from each of the colleges. The re-gaining of the \$50,000 is achieved through a statewide competition amongst the community colleges.

[T]hey take 50,000 dollars per college and they put it in this pot and then that money gets allocated based on performance. And it's called a Student Achievement Initiative... [T]hey publish the data for all the colleges and...there's...competition among...colleges not to look bad. (College administrator)

Some college members are unaware of this competition; rather, they are sensitive to enrollment funding whereby the college receives funding based upon student numbers. "[T]he only performance that I've heard of is that when they decide how much money to give us they look at what we did last year for [enrollment] and if we don't hit our target then we could lose money" (Science faculty and college committee leader). A senior administrator, more familiar with the state's efforts to control expenditures, views the performance funding plan as mostly a plan and not yet an implemented action.

[T]hey're saying, "Oh, we're going to move from an enrolment based model to a completion model," but so far they've just talked about that a lot....[O]n a six hundred million dollar budget, they put three million dollars into it...[T]he real incentive [would be if they] put...three hundred million in...before people would change their behavior. (Senior administrator)

The district chancellor for CSCC views performance funding as a combination of effort from the state government in the form of both the elected officials and the state board. “[O]ur state board is pushing more for performance funding...I think the legislature’s pushing also for that.” The chancellor ties this funding to student achievement, driven by the Gates Foundation and other states’ approaches to funding. Although a small step, performance based funding in Washington satisfies state policy preferences as well as those of private sector influencers to align the colleges with a neoliberal environment.

Pacific Suburban Community College, Hawaii

Although the cultural values of community and Native Hawaiian traditions and ways of knowing are prevalent at Pacific Suburban Community College (PSCC), and indeed the bedrock of organizational members’ rationales for their work engagement and professional identities, economic conditions and imperatives as well as performativity guide and shape college behaviors. Both administrators and faculty describe this combination of Hawaiian native culture and native populations, along with performativity goals.

The Board of Regents changed the mission to say that serving native Hawaiians is an inherent part of the mission of the University of Hawaii...[We make] native Hawaiians a focus of the outcomes measure...[T]here are five measures that have dollars attached to them: Graduates, number of graduates, number of STEM graduates, number of native Hawaiian graduates, number of Pell recipients...(Senior Administrator, University of Hawaii)

The number one goal [of the UH system's strategic plan] was more native Hawaiian students going to college, more native Hawaiian students being retained, more native Hawaiian students graduating... [W]e have a native Hawaiian garden; we have a native Hawaiian lab. There may be some of that connection happening...for them to feel that there is a place for them here. ...[O]ur buildings are named after native Hawaiian plants...[O]ur services...are named Hawaiian on purpose... to say to them, "You're important to us. Our host culture is important to us." (Business faculty member)

Indeed, there is a practice at PSCC of socializing faculty into both Hawaiian culture and pedagogy for Hawaiian native students.

I've helped with...professional development things for faculty regarding Hawaiian values [and] pedagogy that work with local students...in training and helping faculty who didn't know the Hawaiian culture figure out how to deal with it...[T]here are strategies you can use in the classroom so that you're not singling people out, so that it's not a debate, so it's not competitive; it's more collaborative...(History faculty member)

Performativity at PSCC is in the form of outcome measures, required by the accrediting agency, The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, Western Association of Schools and Colleges (ACCJC), and reinforced by University of Hawaii policy. Performativity pertains to the outcomes of the college's programs relative to the system's goals including number of graduates and also student achievement in program areas. Outcomes are tied loosely to funding.

Strategic planning is done at the UH system level...They laid out the strategic outcomes...We're trying to get every student we can to be successful...[W]e have measurable outcomes [demonstrated through]...program review...[I]t's everything ...remedial, developmental, math, reading, writing, culinary, dental, EMT, sports science, IT, liberal arts, marketing, medical assistant...[I]n this comprehensive program review...they also look at the contribution of the program to the college's strategic outcomes. (College Administrator)

Even those areas, such as the liberal arts, customarily detached from outcome measures that are applied to workforce programs, are party to judgment. Thus performance expectations and measures are uniform.

I think the liberal arts faculty do have to come around to realizing that...the gen. ed. learning outcomes (critical thinking, communications...integrated learning)...is so that students can be...good family members, good citizens, and productive employees...or managers...There has to be a movement of liberal arts towards understanding that your curriculum's important but it's also training people. (College Administrator)

Thus, tensions at PSCC can be found between market based performance expectations and social and cultural development goals of the institution.

The neoliberal imperative

Although apparent in previous decades and fostered by the globalization process (Levin 2001), in the decades of the 2000s community college actions are aimed largely at the maintenance of mission and the expansion of mission under conditions of dependency on resources and state government policy. Given that states

are neoliberal in their orientations and practices (Ball 2012), community colleges are vehicles for neoliberal or market liberal policies, which flow through state actions and shape institutional behaviors.

During the 1990s, while community colleges in the U.S. adapted to a global economy as well as to global flows in the form of culture, information, and immigration (Appadurai 1990; Levin 2001), governments curtailed their largesse in the funding of higher education as a public good (Slaughter and Leslie 1997). This led ultimately to greater levels of resource dependence, and state governments in the U.S. could press their demands on public institutions for accountability and their preferences for programming, particularly upon those institutions with the high levels of dependence on governments and the public purse: community colleges. Thus, the neoliberal state could establish and implement policies that community colleges were forced to enact. In some cases, these policies were not consistent with either community college values, such as access, or with community needs, such as social and cultural development. Community colleges, then, had to endeavor to incorporate neoliberal policies into institutional missions and values, and often compromise these missions and values, in order to maintain the flow of resources from the state, even if the flow had diminished during the period.

Community colleges in these three states—California, Washington, and Hawaii—responded more deliberately to calls and state requirements for institutional performance than in the past. These requirements for performance are consistent with those in businesses and industries. In this liberal market standard for performance, a form of competitiveness, both externally and internally, may deflect

attention away from the educational purposes of higher education (Ball 2012). As community colleges become focused upon quantitative measures of student completion, on graduation rates, and on particular groups' movement in programs and on to universities and into occupations, these institutions can lose sight of their social and personal development functions, and can favor the more able over the more needy, or underserved.

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