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Title: The 'Fuzzy Divide' between Community College and University: The Past, Present
and Future Aims of Higher Education

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What kind of education is really needed to prosper our society today? How can we better prepare students with the necessary credentials they need to become full participants in our knowledge economy? As we enter the second decade of the 21st century, there is a large need to prepare young people to handle the rigorous pressure of our rapidly changing labor force. Community colleges and vocational schools in both European and Western countries are playing a critical role to ensure that all young people are given the opportunity to acquire the necessary skills needed to actively participate in our information society. Although many academics are playing a central role to the development of our society, more is needed from them to guarantee that all students will have the opportunity to complete a college degree and enter the labor market. Community colleges and vocational schools, which generally serve the low-performing students, are grossly under-resourced compared to four-year colleges as a result to its high bureaucratic nature with other industries and stakeholders. The irresistible rise of academic bureaucracy has significantly led many teachers and staff to leave the academia world for better pay. Moreover, bureaucratic structure has led to poor management and external interference for faculty members all of which create tensions between stakeholders. As a result, many community colleges and vocational schools in European and Western countries are imitating other higher education structure (mimetic isomorphism) and instilling the 'therapeutic turn' into post-secondary education as a way to improve their institutional identity largely for bureaucratic control rather than ideological or philosophical approach. Though there is a large 'fuzzy divide' between community colleges and universities in many higher education institutions, both from the academic identity to the academic profession, the behaviors of community colleges and

vocational schools as dual-section institutions must shift its focus on becoming less like universities or mission adrift and more focus on mission expansion and newly created models that would allow more students to enter alternative pathways to those who do not fit the traditional higher educational profile.

But what exactly makes a community college education different from a university education? Is there a large fuzzy divide between 'community colleges' and 'universities' in higher education? Prior to understanding this global debate, the context and purpose of community colleges and vocational schools must be fully examined as a whole. Since the establishment of community college education and vocational education, both Europe and Western societies have undergone massive changes to further improve the quality of technical and trade schools both for students as well as staff (Grubb, 2006: 29). The community college model outlined in the UK and the US outlines that all citizens, whether rich or poor, deserve an equal opportunity to pursue post-secondary education. The notion to prepare young individuals for the real professional world has not only been critical and vital to the development of a knowledge-based economy but also for dissemination of an information society (Wolf, 2010).

Back in the early 1900s, the opportunity to pursue post-secondary education had once been restricted to those of the elites (Garrod & Macfarlane, 2009: 5). The US happened to be the first major economy to develop a system of mass education of which "junior colleges" were created in the early twentieth century as extensions of senior public high schools (Garrod & Macfarlane, 2009: 10). Yet as we start the second decade of the 21st century, community colleges and vocational schools are defined in a variety of contexts. According to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC),

community colleges and vocational schools in the US have largely been viewed as “centers of education opportunities aimed to provide education to all individuals in its service region (AACC).” They are characterized as two-year curriculum aimed to equip students for direct entrance into an occupation. In other words, the United States identifies community college as a place where any individuals are given the opportunity to expand their overall knowledge and skills.

Unlike from the United States, the United Kingdom phrases the term community colleges as ‘further education(FE)’. Further education in the UK had once developed during the period between the end of the Second World War in the late 1990s (Simmons & Thompson, 2008: 607). The term ‘further’ generally referred to students who were out of school that saw the need to acquire more knowledge but not necessary undergoing higher level of learning (Young, 2006: 3). The primary aims of further education was intended to give male working class the opportunity to develop their technical and vocational skills for their specific jobs in the church, the law and in medicine (Simmons & Thompson, 2008:608). One could classify community college as an institution where students receive customized training for specific “needs” of particular employers while technical and vocational education as institutions that teach prepare students with specific skills needed for them to handle the changing occupations of their work environment (Grubb, 2006: 30). Nevertheless, a community college education is different compared to a university education in that one focuses on preparing students to become ‘critical thinkers’ while the other focuses on disseminating ‘more’ skills to the students (Macfarlane, 2011). The ‘specialness’ of community college and higher education is increasingly open to question because more community college educators are starting to

conduct research while more higher education staff are doing little to no research (Macfarlane, 2011).

Consequently, it is not surprising to hear that many scholars divide post-secondary education into two sectors: 1) community college or vocational education and 2) higher education or university (Garrod & Macfarlane, 2009: 1). A few community college and vocational schools are aimed to help students transfer to four-year institutions (Nolan & Swift, 1976). Others, however, are aimed to equip more students with the necessary skills needed for employment. Generally, higher education is largely different in that they teach student higher-order and critical thinking skills needed to help them think outside the box. A university education allows students to not only expand their critical thinking skills but also enable them to understand the meaning to complete specific tasks both now and in the future. One can easily categorize the university as a place where the development of student skills, attributes and professional competences takes place as much as the pursuit of "pure" or "academic" disciplines for research (Garrod & Macfarlane, 2009). Although there has been a large 'fuzzy divide' between community colleges and universities, both institutions are seen to be quite similar in that these organizations offer semi- and professional courses that results to an associate or bachelor degree (Raby, 2009: 3).

So the question arises: does higher education and further education have aims? If so, are these aims largely philosophical or bureaucratic? In this complex world today, many post-secondary institutions in the UK and the US are beginning to loss their aims to higher education because of the constant rise of stakeholders entering the higher education industry (Grubb, 2006: 33). In Ronald Barnett's article *Does Higher Education*

Have Aims?, the scholar portrays the aims of universities as fundamentally 'inappropriate' and 'misleading' and often at times "supercomplexity" (Barnett, 1988: 239). Back in the early days, Whitehead (1932) had once saw that the idea of higher education was to allow students to gain practical knowledge needed for work, or as he refers as the "imaginative acquisition of knowledge" (p. 145). A few years later, Jose Ortega y Gasset (1946) suggested that the primary purpose of a university is to transfer ideas into society or as he coins as "the vital system of ideas of a period" (p. 44).

Additionally, Pratt (1992) outlines that:

"Higher education should serve the economy more effectively and have closer links with industry and commerce, and promote enterprise"; access "to take account of the country's need for highly qualified manpower", including studying "needs of the economy so as to achieve the right number and balance of graduates..."; and enhancing quality and improving efficiency, the former including more selectively funded research, targeted with attention "to prospects for commercial exploitation" (p. 29).

Hence, Barnett has criticized the aims of higher education as ideological from a variety of angles questioning whether the purpose of university is to generate confusion among people to whether university is aimed to equip individuals to live effectively in our complex world today (Barnett, 2000). Though Barnett suggests that the aims of higher education are increasingly philosophical or what he phrases as 'emancipatory', John White argues that the aims of higher education are instead bureaucratic (White, 1997: 7).

White, who is an Emeritus Professor of Philosophy Education at the Institute of Education, University of London, writes in *Philosophy and the Aims of Higher Education* to ideally reject Barnett's philosophical claim that higher education has 'emancipatory' aims. From the article, White openly argues that there is absolutely no difference between higher education and further education; instead, he believes that the aims of higher

education and further education are heavily driven towards 'consumer sovereignty' (White, 1997: 14). White (1997) suggests that stakeholders should be given independent authoritative to decide what they constitute as higher education (p. 15). However, this isn't usually found in community colleges and four-year universities because the aims of higher education are rather bureaucratic than ideological or philosophical. White writes:

There is no essence to further education, just as there is no essence to higher education: any line between them is bureaucratic, not Platonic...I see no essential difference between further and higher education, only a continuum of orientations and courses (White, 1997: 9 & 15).

In other words, White (1997) emphasizes that most ideological aims in higher education typically won't withstand various bureaucratic aims at the policy level. As a result, White believes that there is a sharp divide between community college education and university education because these institutions are generally over bureaucratic rather than philosophical.

Generally, term 'bureaucracies' are often found in human organizations (i.g., community colleges and universities) designed by individuals to achieve some kind of short-term rational goals (Elwell, 1999). German sociologist Max Weber theory of rationalization once claimed that higher education is becoming more bureaucratic in nature because our state of mind dictates our thoughts of what they perceive as community colleges or universities. When universities become more bureaucratic, goal oriented rational behaviors becomes more dominant in guiding many of our overall actions (Elwell, 1999). As a result, David Riesman (1980) perspective on "student as consumer" can be portrayed as one of the primary reasons why changes to the higher education industry are both bureaucratically and politically. Back then, higher education

was often not as bureaucratic as corporate and government institutions (Elwell, 1999). Now, entering the second decade of the twentieth first century, many department heads, college presidents and elected officials deal with many kinds of bureaucracy both in community colleges and universities.

Thus, from this paper, I argue that a large number of community colleges and vocational schools in European and Western societies are imitating other higher education structure (mimetic isomorphism) and instilling the 'therapeutic turn' into post-secondary education as a way to improve their institutional identity largely for bureaucratic control rather than ideological or philosophical approach. Fifty years ago, the distinguished American scholar Burton R. Clark once described community colleges as doing much of the dirty work of higher education (Parry, 2010). Now, fifty years later, many community colleges and vocational schools are still considered of doing much of the dirty work within their hierarchal bureaucratic institution. These works may consist of the increase number of teaching loads, the limited amount of research facilities available, and the issues of not being paid well at their institutions compared to those at universities. Hence, one can argue that community colleges and vocational schools have inarguably been the toughest place to work at because they deal with a number of students whose aspirations are lower status, are low performing, are lower-income, and/or are students of color who are least served by their previous public school education (Parry, 2010). Thus, it is no surprise to hear that Wolf (2003) categorizes vocational education as 'a great idea for other people's children' or the 'Less than' and 'Second-class' institutions (Raby, 2009). As a result, many community colleges, technical schools and vocational schools are pressured to imitate other higher education structure (mimetic isomorphism) as a way to

fight all the prejudices surrounding vocational education and to improve its overall academic identity.

In theory, the mimetic isomorphism perspective occurs when organizations tend to model themselves on comparators that they perceive to be successful (Giulian, 2006). DiMaggio and Powell (1983) define 'mimetic isomorphism' as "a constraining process that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions" (p. 149). In other words, they suggest that community colleges and vocational schools are starting to mimic other universities around the world in hope to reshape their academic status in both European and Western societies. An example in particular is the growing number of further education becoming "dual sector" institutions in Australia, England and South Africa. Many of these dual sector institutions are established to address the economic, social, and racial inequalities in their societies (Garrod & Macfarlane, 2009: 6). A recent case is Thames Valley University of which a former English polytechnic merged with another further education institution, creating the first English dual sector university (Macfarlane, 2010). Thames Valley University, who recently changed its name to the University of West London, is no longer categorized as a dual-service institution because many staff had felt excluded from the cultural norms of university committees. This, in large, has caused a growing number of community colleges (i.g, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Unitec Institute of Technology) to become more like universities, a process often described as the 'academic drift' or 'academisation'.

The academic drift is a term used to describe how lower status, non-university institutions aspire to work towards becoming more like universities (Pratt & Burgess,

1974), or as Pratt (1992) coins as the “apotheosis of academic drift” (p. 35). Because more community colleges are starting to become like universities, students are given more choice to easily transition themselves from one post-secondary sector to the other sector without applying to another institution (Garrod and Macfarlane 2007: 1). Though there are some benefits to establish more ‘dual sector’ institutions in the UK, these universities are generally without a doubt both problematic and risky. The academic drift these past few years has constantly created pertinent issues at the University of West London, such as, separate government funding, seamless curriculum pathways, poor or non-existent planning, and weak leadership among its senior staff. Despite all the penitent issues faced at the University of West London, the general idea to create and re-create more dual sector institutions can be extremely helpful to students who seek an alternative, non-traditional path to higher education.

Generally, students entering community colleges or vocational schools are far less likely to complete baccalaureate degrees because these institutions are shifting down students from once academic transfer programs into lower-status occupational programs, or otherwise known as the ‘cooling out’ technique (Grubb, 2006: 32). Hence, it is not all surprising that many low-performing students look down upon studying at community college institutions because of its bureaucratic nature. As a result, community college leaders and change agents must find better niches to restore their institution that would allow them to significantly improve their academic structure for a ‘new managerialism’ approach. Leaders, change agents and stakeholders must play a larger role to the development of students that would enhance the management of curriculum development, the flow of resource acquisition, and the number of “boundary-spanning

agents” needed to maintain a healthy community college and vocational school (Frost, 2009: 611-612).

The perspective of ‘new managerialism’, also known as the ‘new public management’, is used to encourage other institutions to practically change the quality of management conducted at their institutions. Developed in the 1980s, the ‘new managerialism’ approach aims to help community colleges and vocational schools implement efficient and effective changes to the higher education industry (Brady & Randle, 1997). Like the ‘new managerialism’, the ‘therapeutic turn’ in education also gives leaders and change agents the opportunity to foster their skills when helping other people to gain access to positive social relationships in all spheres of community life (Hyland, 2006). The ‘therapeutic turn’ can help faculty and staff members lead new professional activities in emotional management, life coaching, mentoring, counseling, and interventions all needed to make people feel good emotionally in the pursuit of motivation, educational achievement and social inclusion (Hyland, 2008). Though many community colleges and universities will always remain vastly bureaucratic rather than ideological, the aims of higher education still remain the fact that all students deserve the right to be well served by their community colleges. If community colleges aren’t well served, many of these low-performing students won’t have the opportunity to pursue higher degree education and are more likely to be a drain in future society (Achieving the Dream, 2010).

Macfarlane’s most recent book entitled *The Academic Citizen: The Virtue of Service in University Life* clearly emphasizes the need for more academic staff to perform service to the community, or as he coins as the ‘academic citizenship’. Though teaching

and research may take a larger part of an academic life, the art of service should also be valued when promoting campus life for students at research universities. Senior management teams and faculty members must take more responsibility to assist and role model lower academic leaders (Macfarlane, 2006: 6). Student service must also be re-valued both as a moral imperative and as a pragmatic measure. By training educators to take a larger role in becoming academic citizen, faculty members and staff can easily become more prepared to better serve students at both community colleges and research institutions.

Although a large number of universities are now structured to teach “higher” critical thinking skills rather than “further” technical skills, these institutions also must do better prepare students for the labour market force. Barnett’s recent book in *A Will to Learn: Being a Student in an age of Uncertainty* clearly emphasizes that all teachers should place more emphasis to develop and sustain student's desire to learn. Community colleges and universities must place more emphasis on building and re-building an academic culture that encourage students to be challenged as emphasized by Barnett (1990) aims to higher education: 1) the development of student’s critical abilities, 2) the development of the student’s autonomy, and 3) the development of student’s character formation (p. 8-9). Barnett writes:

In the higher education sketched out here, students come into themselves. The challenge on the educator is to provide an experience in which the student can be released into herself. (Barnett 1994: 191)

In other words, community colleges and vocational schools must focus less on imitating other higher education structure (mimetic isomorphism) and more on cultivating student intellectual growth. As U.S. President Barack Obama once stated in 2009:

“Tonight I ask every American to commit to at least one year or more of higher education or career training. This can be community college, a four-year school, vocational training, or an apprenticeship. But whatever the training may be, every individual will need to get more than a high school diploma.”

Thus, community college programs and vocational schools must do better in connecting students to the regional labor market demands and the local workforce development systems. Failure to aggressively improve community colleges and vocational schools can significantly impact the intellectual growth of a student. Moreover, if institutions fail to change, student frustration over inferior opportunities will likely to grow, along with economic inequality. The quality of their lives will be lowered, the costs that they impose on society will be higher, and many of their potential contributions to society will go unrealized.

In short, community colleges and vocational institutions must place heavy emphasis on improving the quality of its academic programs in order to better prepare its adolescents and young adults to lead a productive and prosperous lifestyle as adults. Rather than imitating other hierarchical intuitions or organizations, the behaviors of community colleges and vocational schools must shift its focus on becoming less like universities or mission adrift and more focus on mission expansion and newly created models that would allow these students to attain better educational opportunities and achieve alternative pathways to those who do not fit the traditional higher educational profile. Community colleges and vocational schools in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, the US and the UK must place more emphasis on training and retraining leaders and change agents in order to meet the growing challenges of globalization in higher education. Instead of pursuing bureaucratic or philosophical ideologies, community colleges and universities should invest more time to ensure that all students

are well prepared to enter the labor market. Further education or vocational schools should not all become dual-section institutions; instead, these institutions should focus on mission expansion that foster students and staff well-being of autonomy on self and social understanding. Though there is a large 'fuzzy divide' between community colleges and universities in many post-secondary institutions, both from the academic identity to the academic profession, community colleges and vocational schools must invest more time in creating new models that allows more students to enter alternative pathways to those who do not fit the traditional higher educational profile.

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