

Mission Priorities of Community Colleges in the Southern United States

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TABLE 1 CAN BE FOUND AT THE END OF THE ARTICLE

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Since their inception, community colleges have existed to identify and respond to the educational needs of adult learners within a specified service area (Cohen & Brawer, 1996; Vaughan, 1997; Gleazer, 1980). This mission becomes a daunting task when today's social, political, economic, and technological revolutions precipitate educational needs that differ greatly from those of the previous age (Bragg, 2001). Responding to educational needs that are unique to information-age learners presents an adaptive challenge to those who contribute to student success. An adaptive challenge occurs "when our deeply held beliefs are challenged, when the values that made us successful become less relevant, and when legitimate yet competing perspectives emerge" (Heifetz & Laurie, 1997, p. 124). Community college leaders must articulate the adaptive challenges ahead if colleges are to respond to learner needs in a rapidly changing environment.

One way to focus an organization's membership on the challenges that lie ahead is to provide strategic leadership for the institutional mission (Hill & Jones, 2001). Baker and Upshaw (1995) assert that understanding and supporting the college mission is a basic expectation for community college presidents and their leadership teams. In fact, the most successful community colleges are "those that have developed a well-defined mission and a shared vision of the future" (Boggs, 1995, p. 71). Successful community college leaders will invest in organizational renewal and reinterpret the mission, philosophy, functions, and modus operandi of the institutions they serve (Boone, 1992a). These leaders will reexamine the way their institutions create value (Alfred, 1998) and recognize that a successful strategy in the information age may be to do different things rather than the same things differently (Doucette, 1993). Indeed, redesigning community colleges to meet changing needs and expectations is a top management priority (Alfred, 1998).

In recognition of the changing climates in which community colleges operate, new or different community college missions often emerge as the institutions respond to changing learner needs. The purpose of this study is to analyze the content of community college strategic documents as they relate to the organizational mission. Focusing on the southern United States, this researcher analyzed the content of 102 community college mission statements, thereby producing a snapshot of the community college mission in its current state. The findings are significant in that they offer college leaders a pragmatic macro-perspective of what the information-age community college in the South does, whom it serves, and how it seeks to improve the quality of life within the 11-state region. Particularly relevant are departures from the historical mission of

the American community college. This macro-perspective of mission statements may serve as a point of reference for community college leaders who must involve faculty, staff, governing boards, students, and the community--many with competing priorities--in developing a shared vision for the future of their community college. In the absence of a clear mission and shared vision of the future, quality decision making and strategic planning may give way to organizational conflict and competition among those with competing interests (Yukl, 1994). An equally grave consequence is the possibility that community colleges without a strategic mission may continue to focus their resources on programs and services that have outlived their relevance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In a time when community colleges are criticized for trying to be all things to all people (Shearon & Tollefson, 1989), perhaps community college leaders should consider the merit of the mission statement as a leadership strategy. A mission statement is defined as a formal document that articulates the organization's purpose and direction (Boggs, 1995; Hill & Jones, 2001) and establishes the parameters within which the adult education organization functions (Boone, 1992b). Bart (2001) explains the value of mission statements by presenting three general benefits for their use as a leadership strategy: They guide decision making; they motivate and inspire employees toward a common purpose; they create balance among the competing interests of multiple stakeholders. The literature suggests that leaders who make use of the mission statement as a leadership strategy may reap favorable returns. As one example, Rice and Austin (1988) found an association among clarity of institutional mission and faculty satisfaction in liberal arts colleges. Maybe it is for similar reasons that mission statements "have become the management tool most commonly used by senior executives over the last 10 years" (Bart, 2000, p. 45).

An organizational mission commonly originates with the executive leadership team (Baker & Upshaw, 1995; Boggs, 1995; Katzenbach & Smith, 1993), but these teams seldom determine the mission independent of other stakeholders (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993). Successful leaders will acknowledge that the mission of the adult education organization must reflect the organization's history and values (Boone, 1992b). Because adult educators must understand and commit to the functions of the organization, particularly its mission, philosophy, and objectives (Boone, 1992b), they should have a voice in determining the organizational mission. After all, faculty and staff may be reluctant to commit to a mission that is forced upon them by the president and his or her leadership team. This is one reason why the development of an organizational mission statement should not be a top-down process (Bart, 2000). In support of this proposition, Bart and Baetz (1998) reveal a significant correlation between organizational performance and satisfaction with the process of creating a mission statement. Moreover, one study determined that a deliberately inclusive process for creating and sustaining an organizational mission facilitated organizational renewal in times of change (Ayers, 2002). Along similar lines, Bart (2001) posits that clear mission statements are especially important in times of change.

The community college mission has been described in terms of its different functions: student services, career education, developmental education, community education, transfer and liberal education, and general education (Cohen & Brawer, 1996). Similarly, Vaughan (1997) lists, seven defining characteristics of the public community college--public support, open access,

commitment to teaching, an identified service area, community-based programs, comprehensive programs, and support services. From an analysis of mission statements of community college systems, Fountain and Tollefson (1989) indicate that community college system mission statements typically express a mission focus on the following: (a) formal education including college transfer, career education, developmental education, and general education; (b) student services including counseling, placement assessment, and financial aid; (c) continuing education including noncredit courses such as literacy, job enrichment, and topics related to recreation; (d) community services such as seminars, lectures, concerts, plays, and consultative activities that enhance community life; (e) attention to the students to be served including traditional college-age students, high school students, adults of all ages, women and minorities, the educationally disadvantaged, and disabled students; and (f) economic development, which overlies career education but also includes consultative services to employers. Fountain and Tollefson's study not only summarizes the mission foci of community college systems but also reveals a precedent for analyzing mission statements as a means of understanding the strategic focus of American community colleges.

In terms similar to those of complex adaptive systems theorists, Vaughan (1991 / 1997) advances our understanding of the community college mission by depicting it as dynamic and dual focused. The first focus consists of formal educational programming, or the college's enduring, stable, educational core. It is this core that confirms the validity of the community college as an institution of higher education. Second, far from the educational core is the periphery of the institution. The periphery is the boundary between the college and the community it serves. Referring to this boundary as "the edge," Vaughan (1997) recognizes this focus as "where the community college intersects with its community and joins with other organizations, agencies, and institutions to identify and resolve broad-based issues that affect individuals and their communities".

According to Vaughan (1991/1997), the edge may ebb and flow unpredictably as it shifts to meet the erratically changing needs of adult learners in the community. Vaughan (1991) employs the term "assimilation" to explain this constant reshaping of mission as the community college responds to community needs. According to Vaughan, assimilation is "the process of identifying educational solutions to ever-emerging, broad-based social issues, and incorporating these solutions into...course offerings". Through assimilation, issues originally at the organization's periphery may eventually gravitate toward the educational core and then become a more permanent aspect of the organizational mission. Vaughan suggests that there exists a tension between the educational core and the edge and that this tension produces organizational renewal and an ongoing evolution of institutional mission.

Along similar lines, Levin (2001) describes a dual mission that has evolved in the last 10 years of the twentieth century. The first half of the community college mission parallels Vaughan's (1991/1997) idea of the edge. That is, a defining characteristic of the late twentieth century community college was a commitment to responsiveness. Within the deeply commercialized operational climates of the 1990s, however, responsiveness for community colleges often meant adopting the practices of business and industry. In other words, community colleges aligned themselves with the omnipresence of business and commerce by becoming a business venture.

According to Levin, the second half of the community college mission was that of new vocationalism, which served the middle class and fueled the booming economy of the 1990s.

Despite agreement that shared vision and clarity of purpose are essential for community college effectiveness, there is much debate surrounding the role that community colleges should play in addressing the educational needs of adult learners (Shearon & Tollefson, 1989; Vaughan, 1991/1997). Further aggravating the issue of community college purpose, Shearon & Tollefson (1989) point out that the roles, missions, and priorities of community colleges vary not only from time to time but also from place to place. In other words, local communities are different from one another. As community colleges renew their educational program offerings to meet the novel and unique needs of the local community, their mission focus is likely to fluctuate (Boone, 1992a/1992b; Shearon & Tollefson, 1989; Vaughan, 1991/1997). Consequently, the mission of one community college may evolve differently from that of another.

As new community issues and learner needs materialize, community colleges may be required to undergo fundamental change, which is likely to force community college leaders to facilitate difficult strategic decisions about their institutional mission. Cross (1985) proposes five possible routes in the evolution of the community college mission: (a) sustain the comprehensive mission despite claims that the college cannot be all things to all people and at the same time maintain quality standards, (b) improve the focus on formal education even though this strategy may force community colleges to compete directly with other institutions of higher education, (c) increase the focus on community-based education and convince reluctant constituents and the community to support this mission, (d) integrate the focus and assume that employers will hire workers with a liberal education, or (e) strengthen the focus on developmental education in the hope that the community college can rise as a top competitor for related funding. By proposing these options, Cross identifies potential evolutionary paths for community college missions. In an attempt to understand the community college mission at this point in its evolutionary path, this study provides an analysis of the content of community college strategic documents as they relate to the organizational mission.

METHODS

Drawing from a list of member institutions of the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), this researcher randomly selected 10 public, 2-year colleges for each state within the 11-state region served by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). He accessed a mission statement for each institution from the general information, college catalogues, or accreditation information posted on each college's Web site. In many cases, the mission statements often included information on institutional beliefs, philosophy, values, and other enduring characteristics of the college. Mission statements were not available for all community colleges, and in such cases the researcher contacted a college representative via e-mail to request a copy of the institutional mission statement. Eight colleges that did not publish mission statements on the Internet and that did not respond to the e-mail request were not included in the sample. It may be unwise to assume that the mission statements within the data set were precisely up to date, but once again, mission statements articulate a long-term strategy and describe enduring purposes and characteristics of the organization. As such, it is important for the reader to understand that this study provides the perspective of a broad time frame.

The sample consisted of 102 community college mission statements. Of these, 82 originated from comprehensive community colleges and 20 from technical colleges. These 102 documents provided 790 clauses and sentences referring to potential themes relating to the community college mission. An initial review of mission statements identified 10 preliminary themes, which gave way to a rudimentary coding scheme. Each mission statement was then analyzed thoroughly, with the researcher highlighting relevant text and writing codes in the left margin of each page. The first thorough review yielded a correction in the coding scheme. That is, four of the original themes failed to appear consistently across a majority of states, resulting in the rejection of each as a salient theme. By the same token, one theme not initially recognized came forth upon a more thorough analysis. On third and fourth reviews, additional themes were investigated but rejected as salient themes. After recurrent analysis, seven salient themes had emerged.

Running tallies indicated the proportion of community colleges in the sample that reflected each salient theme. The next task, then, was to calculate 95% confidence intervals to determine the probable high and low proportions of mission statements reflecting each theme in the broader study population. It was possible to calculate interval estimates for the qualitative data because proportions are a type of mean (Agresti & Finlay, 1997). Once provided with interval estimates for each proportion, it was possible to assess the prominence of each salient theme relative to the other salient themes. These assessments were made by comparing the overlap in interval estimates among all themes. In cases where interval estimates did not overlap, differences in proportions were significant. A significant difference indicated the prominence of the theme relative to the other themes to which it was compared. As indicated by the 95% confidence interval, significance was determined at the $\alpha = .05$ level. Finally, themes with interval estimates that were above the .5 mark were considered to be present in the majority of community colleges in the South.

FINDINGS

This study revealed seven themes relating to mission statements of community colleges in the southern United States: access, workforce and economic development, comprehensive programming, quality and excellence, responsiveness to needs, specified service area, and diversity. Frequencies, proportions, and 95% confidence intervals for each proportion appear for each theme in Table 1. A detailed analysis and discussion of each of the seven themes follow.

Access

With 82 of the 102 colleges ($p^{\wedge} = .7843$, $SE = .04$) specifically including "access," "open-admission," "open-door," or a clearly-related term as a component of the mission statement, this theme was the most widely represented among the mission statements. A confidence interval indicated that the population proportion within the 11-state region was between .71 and .86. In other words, it is safe to say with 95% certainty that the population proportion was within these parameters. When proportions of college mission statements reflecting the theme of access were compared to the proportion of colleges reflecting the theme of a specified service area, a significant ($p = .05$) difference was noted. A significant difference was also noted when the proportion of mission statements reflecting the theme of access was compared with the proportion of mission statements reflecting the theme of diversity. As such, the data indicated that mission statements reflecting the theme of access occurred in a significantly greater proportion

than did mission statements reflecting the theme of a defined service area and diversity. On the other hand, the data did not indicate significant differences among the proportion of mission statements reflecting the theme of access from the proportion of mission statements reflecting themes of workforce and economic development, comprehensiveness, quality, or responsiveness.

Many mission statements elaborated on specific definitions of access through a variety of terms. Thirty-one mission statements defined access, at least in part, in terms of affordability. Similarly, 21 mission statements defined access in terms of diversity, specifically ensuring access to all who can benefit without regard to ethnicity, race, technological capability, or level of academic ability. Sixteen mission statements specifically mentioned distance learning technology or alternative delivery systems as a means of providing access to either student services or educational programs. Finally, 22 mission statements cited convenient times, locations, or flexible scheduling as a means of providing access.

Workforce and economic development

With representation in 79 of 102 ($p^{\wedge} = .7745$, $SE = .04$) community college mission statements, the theme of workforce and economic development tied with comprehensiveness as the second most prominent theme in the sample. Within the study population this proportion fell between .69 and .85, based on a 95% confidence interval. The theme of workforce and economic development, therefore, appeared in a significantly greater proportion of mission statements than did the themes of a specific service area and diversity. The data produced no significant conclusions regarding differences among this theme and those of access, comprehensiveness, quality and excellence, or responsiveness. As with access, the data indicated that the majority of community colleges in the South articulate a focus on workforce and economic development.

The words chosen to describe the workforce and economic development focus were varied. In 31 instances, the language was broad, for example, "to strengthen the local economy" and "to provide workforce training." These statements did not specify the skills or programs that would lead to economic or workforce development. In 20 other instances the language was more specific, for example, "an educational link between adults with educational needs and employers with needs for a skilled workforce," and "to offer critical thinking, problem-solving, written and oral communication, computing, teamwork, and other skills that enhance...careers." These mission statements specifically described workforce and economic development in terms of specialized or customized training, skills, or needs of business and industry. Eighteen community college mission statements identified partnerships with business and industry as a critical element of workforce and economic development:

Comprehensive mission

Community college mission statements reflecting the theme of comprehensiveness met at least one of two criteria. First, mission statements calling direct attention to comprehensive programs using either the term "comprehensive" or a derivative of the term met the criteria for inclusion. Second, mission statements that explicitly listed a comprehensive set of programs--including student services, career education, developmental education, community education, and collegiate education--also met the criteria for inclusion. Programs that offered technical programs at the exclusion of arts and sciences programs, and vice versa, failed to meet these criteria.

Seventy-nine of the 102 college mission statements reflected a theme of comprehensiveness ($p^{\wedge}=.7745$, $SE=.04$). The population proportion of college mission statements reflecting this theme fell between .69 and .85, based on a 95% confidence interval. The data indicated that mission statements reflecting the theme of comprehensiveness occurred in a significantly greater proportion of mission statements than did the theme of a specific service area and diversity. The data produced no significant conclusions regarding differences in proportions of mission statements reflecting this theme and those reflecting themes of access, workforce and economic development, quality and excellence, or responsiveness. The data indicated that the majority of community colleges in the South specify a focus on workforce and economic development.

Quality and excellence

Seventy-three of the 102 community college mission statements ($p^{\wedge}=.7156$, $SE=.04$) included language reflecting a theme of quality and excellence. A 95% confidence interval indicated that the proportion of mission statements reflecting this theme in the study population fell between .62 and .80 ($p=.05$). The data indicated that the theme of quality and excellence occurred in a significantly greater proportion of mission statements than did the theme of diversity. On the other hand, the data provided insufficient evidence to distinguish among proportions of mission statements reflecting the theme of quality and excellence and those reflecting themes of access, workforce and economic development, comprehensiveness, responsiveness, or specified service area. The majority of community colleges in the South indicated a mission focus on quality and excellence.

Thirty-seven mission statements employed "quality," "excellence," "standards," "integrity," or "soundness" as a complement to educational offerings, programs, or opportunities. Eighteen mission statements used these terms in reference to teaching and learning, instruction, or courses. Other mission statements used "quality" or "excellence" as a descriptor of support services, community services, personnel, work environment, physical environment, the learning environment, and in one case, research. Two college mission statements employed "quality" in the sense of continuous quality improvement.

Responsiveness to needs

Seventy-one community college mission statements ($p^{\wedge}=.6960$, $SE=.046$) in the sample reflected the theme of responsiveness to needs. A 95% confidence interval indicated that the population proportion mission statements reflecting the theme of responsiveness to needs fell between .61 and .79. Accordingly, the data indicated significant differences among proportions of mission statements reflecting the theme of responsiveness to needs and proportions of mission statements reflecting the theme of diversity. The data did not indicate significant differences between proportions of mission statements reflecting the theme of responsiveness to needs and proportions of mission statements reflecting themes of access, workforce and economic development, comprehensiveness, or quality. Nevertheless, the clear majority of community colleges in the South indicated a mission focus on responsiveness.

Responsiveness to needs was generally undefined within the content of the 102 mission statements analyzed. Where the meaning of "responsiveness" was specified, it was often associated with "changing needs," "changing global society," "ever-changing society," "keeping curriculum up to date," or similar language. Statements, specifically acknowledging changing

needs at the level of the individual occurred in 24 of the 71 college mission statements that identified responsiveness as a priority. By the same token, 12 colleges defined responsiveness in terms of responding to macrolevel needs, for example, community needs, workforce needs, and diversity needs.

Specified service area

Fifty-six of the 102 community colleges ($\hat{p} = .5490$, $SE = .049$) in the sample identified individuals within a specific service area as targets of programs and services. A 95% confidence interval indicated that the population proportion of community college mission statements identifying a specific service area was between .45 and .65. As such, these mission statements occurred in a significantly ($p = .05$) lesser proportion than mission statements reflecting themes of access, workforce and economic development, and comprehensiveness. The difference in proportions among mission statements reflecting a theme of a specified service area and mission statements reflecting themes of quality and excellence, responsiveness to needs, and diversity was indistinguishable. Because the lower end of the confidence interval falls below .5, it is uncertain whether a mission focus on a specific service area occurs in the majority of community colleges in the South. The typical community college identified its specific service area as a set of counties or cities.

Diversity

One half of the community college mission statements ($\hat{p} = .5000$, $SE = .049$) in the sample recognized diversity in the target publics served. The population proportion of college mission statements reflecting the theme of diversity fell between .40 and .60 ($p = .05$), based on a 95% confidence interval. Accordingly, mission statements reflecting a theme of diversity occurred in significantly lesser proportions than did mission statements reflecting themes of access, economic development, comprehensiveness, quality and excellence, and responsiveness. The data did not differentiate among proportions of college mission statements reflecting the theme of diversity and those reflecting the theme of a specified service area. Because the lower end of the confidence interval fell below .5, it is uncertain whether the theme of diversity exists in the majority of community colleges in the South.

The mission statements described diversity in terms of culture, race, gender, ethnicity, national origin, disability, nontraditional, technological ability, veteran status, socioeconomic status, educational background, and in one case, political affiliation. Mission statements also described diversity as special populations that have been historically excluded from participation in postsecondary education. Statements regarding diversity appeared on a continuum with an appreciation for diversity on one extreme and mere compliance with the law on the other. For example, language reflecting an appreciation for diversity appeared in such statements as "[w]e appreciate the diversity in the students we serve," "we will offer a student-centered faculty and staff who embrace diversity in a friendly, inclusive learning environment" and "[r]espect for diversity is an important part of the educational process." Examples reflecting simple compliance with the law include "affords equal opportunity to all people regardless of age, race, religion, sex, veteran status, national origin, or disability" and carefully worded language such as "[the college] will not close its doors to anyone of eligible age who can benefit from its programs." The latter examples stated compliance with Title VII, Title IX, and related executive orders and constitutional guarantees whereas the former examples recognized value added through

diversity. At a midpoint between the two polar extremes was language that reflected simple tolerance such as "the college recognizes the diversity of its learner populations."

DISCUSSION

In summary, access, workforce and economic development, comprehensiveness, responsiveness, and quality emerged as clear themes of community college mission statements; however, results failed to confirm a specified service area and diversity as themes represented in a majority of mission statements. The findings also identified critical issues regarding the community college mission in the future. A discussion of these issues follows.

Quality versus open access

Education is becoming a top growth sector of the U.S. economy (McClenney, 1998), and within highly competitive markets like the education industry superior quality is "an absolute imperative for survival" (Hill & Jones, 2001, p. 130). This reality compels community college leaders to provide high quality educational programs and services (Baker & Upshaw, 1995). In the absence of a focus on quality, institutions risk irrelevance, given the increasing numbers of quality-oriented, for-profit organizations vying for increased market share. Yet the commitment to quality represents a quixotic challenge for community college professionals because it seems to be at odds with a longstanding commitment to open access. Because community colleges are not selective in admissions, they serve learners with varying levels of ability and diverse educational backgrounds. Consequently, community colleges serve many who are not prepared for college-level work. Roueche and Baker (1989) consider the paradox of an open-admission policy and a commitment to quality collegiate education, articulating a valid question: Can community colleges offer a quality postsecondary education while also opening the doors to those not prepared for college-level work? This problem is momentous because while quality is essential, open access has historically been a defining characteristic of the public community college (Vaughan, 1997).

Drawing from their research, Roueche and Baker (1989) answer their question in the affirmative. They place a heavy emphasis on developmental education as a means of bridging the gap between the learners' current levels of ability and that which is required for a successful postsecondary experience. Others are not as optimistic, however. In light of the fact that community colleges open many programs to the community at large, Cohen and Brawer (1996) question the classification of the community college as a "real college" (p. 299). Likewise, Dougherty (1994) believes that many academics disavow community college claims to provide quality collegiate education. Having noted this conundrum, Deegan (1989) predicted that the commitment to open-access would yield to "a greater emphasis on improving quality and productivity" (p. 204). The results of this study negate Deegan's (1989) prediction, however. The data indicated that the open-access mission continues as a priority of community colleges in the South. By the same token, mission statements continue to focus community colleges on quality. Because of the overlap of confidence intervals of mission statements reflecting themes of access and those reflecting the theme of quality, the analysis failed to establish one as more prominent than the other. Thus, themes of access and quality were among the top mission priorities of community colleges in the South.

Specified service area versus learning at a distance

As mentioned previously, 16 community colleges defined access, at least in part, in terms of asynchronous or distance learning. Though one cannot draw conclusions based on these data, the fact that these mission statements portray technology as a means of leveraging access is noteworthy. In the future if this finding plays out as a trend, then technology could redefine the open-access mission. This proposition raises a provocative question relating to the fundamental purpose of the community college: Can community colleges extend their programs to distance learners and still focus on learners within a specified service area?

Though a focus on a specific service area emerged as a salient theme in this study, the data failed to conclude that the majority of community college mission statements in the South specify an institutional focus on a specific service area. This finding calls into question Vaughan's (1991/1997) assertion that a mission focus on a specific service area is a defining characteristic of the community college. Though there may be many reasons for this discrepancy, one possible explanation lies in the rise of distance learning.

In the recent past, community colleges were often the only provider of postsecondary education for remote communities, which afforded the colleges a geographic market niche. It is likely that community colleges once successfully exploited the convenience of their locations as a means of sustaining competitive advantage. Today, however, when even remote community colleges face direct competition from the seemingly unlimited educational opportunities available online, it is possible that distance learning has diminished the competitive advantage afforded to colleges by their geographic proximity to learners. If this is the case, then it would make sense for community colleges to abandon the focus on serving a limited service area.

Alternatively, perhaps community colleges should maintain their focus on serving the local community and use technology specifically as a means of eliminating time and space barriers for local learners. If community colleges do venture into the distance learning market, however, then should the institutions' name continue to include the term "community?" Because of its potential to generate conflict, this issue raises a flag for community college leaders, suggesting a need for leaders to engage faculty and staff in clarifying their values and to commit to a common interpretation of the institutional purpose.

Comprehensive programming versus the strategic niche

In order to survive today's harshly competitive environments, many organizations have chosen to select a focus strategy as a source of competitive advantage (Hill & Jones, 2001). A focus strategy equates to concentrating on a strategically selected market niche. The geographic niche mentioned above is one example of a focus strategy. Community colleges also may serve niche markets through "unique and highly acclaimed" programs such as cybertechnology and alternative energy transportation (Goldman & Beach, 2001, p. 46). It is possible that community colleges are immune to the forces that compel other organizations to focus on niche markets, but if community colleges are not immune to these forces then their leaders may have to consider narrowing their institutions' comprehensive focus. Insofar as educational offerings are concerned, the comprehensive mission is the antithesis of the strategic niche. If community colleges continue with their comprehensive mission, then they will find themselves competing with numerous other organizations on multiple fronts. This strategy may deplete resources quickly. As such, the comprehensive mission of the community college may prove inefficient in light of the

current trend of diminishing revenues. Along the same lines, Dougherty (1994) asks the following: "Should [the community college] continue as a comprehensive institution offering vocational training, adult education, and university preparation, or should it shed one or the other of these dimensions? If it should narrow its role, which function should become central?"

At this point it is meaningful to mention that collegiate education did not appear consistently as a theme within the content of mission statements in this study. That is not to say that the community colleges have abandoned the collegiate tradition; it simply indicates that the focus is elsewhere. Since collegiate education has historically been a major community college focus (Cohen & Brawer, 1996; Gleazer, 1980; Vaughan, 1997), this finding reveals a possible shift in the core community college mission. This result supports the position of those who believe that community colleges should abandon their collegiate function and focus instead on vocational education (Clowes & Levin, 1989). Current literature corroborates this finding. For example, Bragg (2001) stated that in the 1960s there was a dramatic shift from liberal arts education to vocational education. Moreover, during the 1990s, Levin (2000) observed an increase of programs reflective of the new vocationalism. Based on this observation, Levin concluded that "the new vocationalism in the community college will shape the institution in the twenty-first century just as the access mission and the vocational mission shaped the institution in the twentieth century".

The shift from collegiate education to career education is likely the result of the community college's responsiveness to community issues in an age when the local economies are becoming intricately and inextricably linked with the global economy. During the 1990s, forces of globalization compelled community colleges to respond to environmental demands to meet the needs of business and industry. Levin (2000) states that the "mission of the community college by the end of the twentieth century was more suited to the rhetoric of the global community and to its demands". Accordingly, the community college mission transitioned from a focus on facilitating individual and community development to a focus on economic development and workforce preparation (Levin, 2000/ 2002). This shift in mission priority may spawn concern for those who advocate collegiate education as a means not only for pursuing a career but also for enhancing their ability to participate appropriately in the governance of our nation and to make quality decisions that lead to a better life for themselves and their families.

In conclusion, as Vaughan (1991/1997) points out, community colleges can transform themselves such that community needs once addressed at the organization's periphery become assimilated into the educational core. Over time the tensions between the educational core and the edge will produce variation among community college mission foci. The results of this study provide preliminary evidence that mission statements are changing in nature. Community college mission statements continue to communicate a dedication to open access, workforce and economic development, comprehensiveness, and quality; however, commitments to a specified service area and to meeting the needs of a diverse learner population could not be affirmed. It is the intent of the author to spark constructive dialogue about the strategic choices that must be made regarding the future of community colleges. This research represents only one measure and only one approach. In order for our discourse to be truly meaningful, however, we must gain a better understanding of the strategic choices that affect the evolution of the community college

mission. Additional research involving case study and survey methods may enhance our understanding of the community college mission as it continues to evolve.

Table 1:

Frequencies, Proportions, and Confidence Intervals of Mission Statements Reflecting Salient Themes

Salient Theme	Frequency	Proportion	Standard Error	95% Confidence Interval	
				Low	High
Access	82	.7843	.04	.71	.86
Workforce and economic development	79	.7745	.04	.69	.85
Comprehensiveness	79	.7745	.04	.62	.8
Responsiveness	71	.696	.046	.61	.79
Service area	56	.549	.049	.45	.65
Diversity	51	.5	.049	.4	.6

Note: n = 102

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