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Analysis of Texas' and New Mexico's Urban, Suburban, and Rural 2-Year

Community Colleges' Mission Statement Themes

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Abstract

The mission statements of 105 two year community colleges in Texas and New Mexico were analyzed to determine the presence of themes and the extent to which these themes were similar or dissimilar among urban, suburban, and rural community colleges. A qualitative analysis yielded 10 themes: Comprehensive; Vocational/Technical Need; Life-Long Learning; College Transfer; Fulfills Individual and Community Needs; Enhance Educational, Cultural, Economic Development; Providing Accessible, Affordable, High-Quality Education; Job Entry, Workforce Training, Career Development; Committed to Teaching and Learning; and, General Education or Well-Rounded. Once these themes had been identified, the qualitative data were quantified and coded into a SPSS-PC database. Statistical analyses yielded differences in the presence of identified themes among the three groupings of community colleges. Implications of these findings are examined.

Analysis of Texas' and New Mexico's Urban, Suburban, and Rural 2-Year Community Colleges' Mission Statement Themes

The mission of community colleges is to serve the community (Weisman & Longacre, 2000). Communities, coming in various sizes from small to large, can be defined in several different ways. Weisman and Longacre (2000) stated, "The community is best seen in terms that describe its people, such as working class, disadvantaged, youthful, ghetto, unemployed, marginal, vocational, welfare and poor" (p. 365). Because community colleges have been serving particular geographic areas that have "schools, governmental agencies, taxpayers, business and industry, religious groups, and associations" (p. 368), Weisman and Longacre extended the definition of community to include "the negotiation, collaboration, and competition of the interests that these individuals and groups represent" (p. 368). Weisman and Longacre (2000) added, "In carrying out their practice, community college professionals identify the needs (interests) of the community, and prioritize them in relation to the community college mission. In this way, the mission of the community college represents the balance struck by the institution to meet the needs of its multiple constituencies" (p. 360)

Goals of Community Colleges

Weisman and Longacre (2000) contended that a major goal of the community college is to meet the needs of young adults so that geographic and economic barriers are removed and young adults can obtain an affordable accessible education. Locating community colleges in rural, suburban, and urban areas allows access to education. In addition, community colleges should also serve the needs of adults for vocational training and provide remediation of literacy skills. Weisman and Longacre stated, "Due to an increased commitment to the open door policy of the community college, faculty and administrators struggled to balance the demands of providing education for the underprepared student with the academic standards for transfer courses required by articulated agreements with four-year institutions" (p. 362).

College transfer courses are designed for students who wish obtain a baccalaureate degree, whereas vocational and technical courses lead directly into employment. General courses help individuals develop thinking skills, identify values, and respect diverse traditions. Community colleges also seek to develop the communities where they are located by requiring students to undertake projects that help solve a community problem. "Through service learning, students volunteer in their communities, bring the knowledge that they gain in the classroom to the

community and the lessons they learn in the field back to the classroom” (Weisman & Longacre, 2000, p. 363).

Swanger (2003) observed that many community colleges serve as the cultural centers of their communities, bringing art, theater, music, dance and other cultural events to the community where they are located. Historically, community colleges offered a central place where residents of a geographical area could prepare for further study at a four-year university or obtain a vocational certificate so that they could enter the workforce right away. Ayers (2002) pointed out that community colleges often provided the only postsecondary services in remote areas. He stated, “It is possible that distance learning has diminished the competitive advantage afforded to colleges by their geographic proximity to learners” (para. 33). Levin (2000) reported that “in the 1990s, the mission of the community college had less emphasis on education and more on training, less emphasis upon community social needs and more on the economic needs of business and industry, and less upon individual development and more upon workforce preparation and retraining” (para. 4).

Serving Minority Students

Reitano (1998) observed that community colleges are the place where many minority students enter the higher education system. “The average parental income of

the two-year college student is significantly lower than that of the four-year college student” (p. 121). Furthermore, “Fifty percent of all African American college students and 43% of all Hispanic college students are in the two-year institutions” (p. 121). Reitano also found that more than 50% of the students in community colleges are women.

Community colleges in urban areas make higher education available at times and places that suit a working population. Community colleges also try to be within commuting distance for every student. Reitano (1998) stated, “Two-year colleges claim to provide access to four-year colleges, to jobs, to lifelong learning, to compensatory education, to community enrichment, and, last but not least, to individual self-growth” (p. 119). Increasingly, two-year colleges are focusing on preparing students for a career. Reitano (1998) stated, “Technical education has displaced liberal education as the purported key to success” (p. 122). Reitano added that vocational education can really be “class-based tracking” that prepares students for “middle level jobs” that have no chance of future advancement. She went on to state, “Without a solid liberal arts foundation, the two-year colleges were providingbargain basement education that would not wear well with time” (p. 123). Reitano commented that the transfer function of community colleges is often

referred to as its “collegiate function” (p. 123) and urged that transfer to four-year colleges be the goal of all students.

Stakeholders

Berg, Csikszentmihaly, and Nakamura (2003) described how community colleges are accountable to several categories of stakeholders. Internally, community colleges must satisfy the needs of its administrators, faculty, staff, trustees, and students. Externally, community colleges must meet the expectations of accrediting agencies and sources of funding, such as alumni, businesses, and government programs. “Finally, schools are also confronted by a set of more general social and cultural forces - the values and attitudes that prevail in the culture at large, the economy, politics, and demographics” (para. 16).

Curriculum and Mission

Because of constant change in all of the above forces, Berg et al. (2003) pointed out that “the growth of information technology is transforming our understanding of what students need to learn. . . . At the same time, the traditional disciplines that used to constitute the core of a college education, such as classics, religion, or foreign languages, have all but disappeared from the curriculum” (para. 27). The study of liberal arts gives students flexibility. Berg et al. said that flexibility is

especially important in a postindustrial society where workers will have to change jobs several times in their lives.

On the other hand, Ayers (2002) recommended that community colleges abandon comprehensive services and develop specialized technical programs. Ayers stated, "If community colleges continue with their comprehensive mission, then they will find themselves competing with numerous other organizations on multiple fronts" (para. 35). Modern environments are increasingly competitive and many educational programs are now available through distance learning. Berg et al. (2003) stated, "Having a clear, agreed upon, and relevant mission matters because it focuses the energies of both the institution and the individual who works in it. . . . It provides the institution with a compass for navigating a course when tension or outright conflict arises, either between the school and its environment or between sets of external forces that touch the school" (para. 49).

Traditionally, community colleges have served communities where they are located, whether rural, suburban, or urban. Community colleges have provided affordable alternatives to four-year colleges that are easily accessible to most students. Comprehensive community colleges have provided liberal arts education that has enabled students to transfer to four-year institutions after two years.

Alternatively, students could stop with an associate's degree and enter the workforce right away. Comprehensive community colleges have also offered remedial education and special programs for students with disabilities. Students could also take courses for recreation that did not lead to a degree. Finally, community colleges have served as cultural centers for their geographic areas and have offered musical, theatrical, and artistic programs to area residents.

Comprehensive community colleges will face many challenges in the twenty-first century. Distance learning has already eroded their geographic advantages. Students have become more focused on careers and less willing to take liberal arts courses. At the same time, liberal arts courses have historically developed flexibility in the thinking patterns of young adults. Flexibility may be the most important consequence of higher education. Today's students will change careers several times during their lives, and learning how to learn may become their most important asset.

Statement of the Problem

Community colleges are stimulating entrepreneurship and business development, preparing people for productive work, spearheading telecommunications networks, and providing leadership for regional development. As such, community colleges are reaching out to people in all walks of life, giving them access to education and

economic opportunity. In larger communities, however, though the functions continue to be prevalent, functions have expanded to the larger community with the resulting effect that the smaller parts of community no longer benefit from such functions to the same degree as in the past. The role of the community schools in the larger community is to restore to the smaller community the benefits of community education (Minzey & LeTarte, 1994). Thus, differing reasons appear to be present for the adoption of community colleges in different size communities.

Purpose of Study

The first purpose of this study was to identify the themes present in the mission statements of urban, suburban, and rural 2-year community colleges. Once themes had been identified, then similarities and dissimilarities in the themes identified in the mission statement of urban, suburban, and rural 2-year community colleges would be determined. The third purpose was to determine whether statistically significant differences were present in themes reflected by institutions' mission statement of urban, suburban, and rural 2-year community colleges.

Research Questions

1. What are the themes that can be identified in the mission statements of urban, suburban, and rural 2-year community colleges in Texas and New Mexico?

2. What are the similarities and dissimilarities in the themes that can be identified in the mission statement of urban, suburban, and rural 2-year community colleges in Texas and New Mexico?
3. Are there statistically significant differences in themes reflected by institutions' mission statement of urban, suburban, and rural 2-year community colleges in Texas and New Mexico?

Methodology

Participants

The sample consisted of 105 community colleges from Texas and New Mexico. Eighty-five (approximately 81%) of the community colleges included in the sample size were located in Texas and 20 (19%) of the community colleges included in the sample size were located in New Mexico. The population distribution was 31.4% of the community colleges sampled were below 20,000 (rural), 34.3% of the community colleges sampled were from 20,000 to 99,999 (suburban), and 34.3% of the community colleges sampled had a population of 100,000 or above (urban).

Procedures

The Texas Community College Teacher's Association (TCCTA) website was used to select all Texas community colleges' and all New Mexico community colleges' web addresses to collect the mission statements of each community college

or community college district. The physical addresses of each community college were used to obtain the physical city and state in which the community college resided. Using an AOL search function, each city and state along with the word 'population' was typed into the search engine box. In all cases, out of the web results that came back, the result that indicated the city, state, and wikipedia the free encyclopedia was selected to obtain the population of the city where each community college physically resided. Once all population data had been collected for each community college, both the community college name and its corresponding city population were put into a Word Excel book spreadsheet document. The population was then divided into the the three indicated size-specific categories to form a mostly even distribution of the sample size categorically. Mission statements were then collected for each community college or community college district listed. Then each mission statement was analyzed for specific phrases and/or words through a content analysis.

Results

Qualitative Findings

When analyzing the mission statements of urban, suburban, and rural 2-year community colleges in Texas and New Mexico, 10 themes that occurred frequently

were identified: A Comprehensive theme was found in those colleges that exhibited to offer a wide variety of courses that would contribute to a broad knowledge base.

Preparation for a Technical or Vocational Career was another theme that was common. These schools offered courses to prepare students for a job market in a certain vocation or job that required specific technical training.

Many colleges had in their mission statements the theme of Life-Long Learning. These colleges expressed that through the student coursework the colleges would produce life-long learners who would continue educating themselves after college. Two-year community colleges often prepare students to enter four-year universities. Thus, a theme of College Transfer was common in mission statements and reinforced the idea of taking community college coursework to prepare for a university setting.

Fulfilling Individual and Community Needs was another theme that frequently occurred in the college mission statements. These colleges had a vision of satisfying students' needs and therefore providing for the community that they served. A number of community colleges also provided coursework and resources that were designed to Enhance Educational, Cultural, and Economic Development.

The theme of Providing Affordable, Accessible, and High Quality Education was a theme on which many of these community colleges based their existence.

They wanted to send a clear message to prospective students of inexpensive and easily accessible classes. Another function of community colleges expressed through their mission statements was to prepare individuals for entering the job market and training for specific careers such as health professions (i.e., Job Entry, Workforce Training, and Career Development theme). Some community colleges wrote in their mission statements their emphasis on Committed to Teaching and Learning from their faculty members. Lastly, providing a Well-Rounded or General Education was deemed important enough to some of the community colleges in this sample to be present in their mission statements.

Quantitative Findings

Once these 10 themes had been identified in the qualitative analysis, the themes were then coded into an Excel database and then converted into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software program (SPSS-PC Version 13.1). This process occurred through quantifying the qualitative data as follows: When a theme was present in the mission statement of a specific community college, a one was placed in the respective Excel cell. When a theme was not present in the mission statement of a specific community college, a zero was placed in the respective Excel cell. Thus, each community college mission statement comprised a row in an Excel

file. Numeric values on this row were ones when themes were present and zeros when themes were not present. Once an Excel file had been generated from the qualitative analyses of all of the mission statements, it was then converted into an SPSS-PC database. Initially frequencies were calculated for all themes and are displayed in Table 1. As can be seen in Table 1, the theme of Fulfills Individual and Community Needs occurred the most, 87.6%, followed next by Providing Accessible, Affordable, High-Quality Education (Programs & Services), 79.0%. Two more themes, General Education or Well-Rounded at 32.4% and Life-Long Learning at 28.6%, occurred less than a third of the time.

Table 1
Themes Identified in Mission Statements

Theme	Theme Present	Theme Not Present
Comprehensive	51.4	48.6
Vocational/Technical Need	57.1	42.9
Life-Long Learning	28.6	71.4
College Transfer	43.8	56.2
Fulfills Individual and Community Needs	87.6	12.4
Enhance Educational, Cultural, Economic Development	58.1	41.9
Providing Accessible, Affordable, High-Quality Education (Programs & Services)	79.0	21.0
Job Entry, Workforce Training, Career Development	56.2	43.8
Committed to Teaching and Learning	41.9	58.1
General Education or Well-Rounded	32.4	67.6

Next, the database was split by population level such that the percent to which the themes occurred for each of the three levels of rural, suburban, and urban could be determined. This set of percentages allows the reader to determine similarities and dissimilarities in the extent to which each theme was present in the mission statements.

Table 2
Themes Identified in Mission Statements

Theme	Rural	Suburban	Urban
Comprehensive	66.7	50.0	38.9
Vocational/Technical Need	72.7	50.0	50.0
Life-Long Learning	27.3	33.3	25.0
College Transfer	60.6	47.2	25.0
Fulfills Individual and Community Needs	93.8	88.9	80.6
Enhance Educational, Cultural, Economic Development	63.6	66.7	44.4
Providing Accessible, Affordable, High-Quality Education (Programs & Services)	72.7	80.6	83.3
Job Entry, Workforce Training, Career Development	69.7	44.4	55.6
Committed to Teaching and Learning	45.5	44.4	36.1
General Education or Well-Rounded	36.4	33.3	27.8

To determine the extent to which community colleges' mission statements differed as a function of population, Pearson chi-square statistical procedures were computed. This statistical procedure was viewed as appropriate because all data were nominal in nature. The independent variable consisted of three groups and each

dependent variable consisted of two values (theme present or theme absent). A Pearson chi-square was conducted to determine whether a statistically significant difference was present among rural, suburban, and urban institutions on the theme of College Transfer. A conventional level of statistical significance was reached, $\chi^2 (2) = 9.126, p < .01$, with the rural sites having this theme present in 60.6% of their mission statements, compared with less than half, 47.2% of the suburban sites and only one fourth, 25.0% of the urban sites. As the setting grew larger, the theme of College Transfer was less likely to be present. Based on a Cramer's V of .295, the effect size was determined to be moderate in nature (Cohen, 1988).

A Pearson chi-square was conducted to determine whether a statistically significant difference was present among rural, suburban, and urban institutions on the theme of Comprehensive. Though a conventional level of statistical significance was not reached, the finding was suggestive of a trend, $\chi^2 (2) = 5.363, p < .068$, with the rural sites having this theme present in 66.7% of their mission statements, compared with only 50.0% of the suburban sites and 38.9% of the urban sites. As the setting grew larger, the theme of Comprehensive was less likely to be present. Based on a Cramer's V of .226, the effect size was determined to be moderate in nature (Cohen, 1988).

A Pearson chi-square was conducted to determine whether a statistically significant difference was present among rural, suburban, and urban institutions on the theme of Vocational/Technical Needs. Though a conventional level of statistical significance was not reached, the finding was suggestive of a trend, $\chi^2(2) = 4.773$, $p < .092$, with the rural sites having this theme present in 72.7% of their mission statements, compared with only 50.0% of the suburban sites and 50.0% of the urban sites. As the setting grew larger, the theme of Vocational/Technical Needs was less likely to be present. Based on a Cramer's V of .213, the effect size was determined to be moderate in nature (Cohen, 1988).

For the other themes of life-long learning, fulfills individual and community needs, enhance educational, cultural, economic development, providing accessible, affordable, high quality education, job entry workforce training career development, committed to teaching and learning, and general education or well rounded, no statistically significant nor near-statistically significant differences were yielded, all $ps > .05$.

Discussion

Ten themes were identified in the mission statements of the sampled community colleges: Comprehensive course offerings; Preparation for a technical or

vocational career; Life-long learning; Collegiate transfer to enter 4 year colleges; Fulfilling individual and community needs; Providing courses and resources that will enhance educational, cultural, and economic development; Providing accessible, affordable and high quality education; Providing training for specific careers such as the health profession; Stressing commitment from staff; and Providing a well-rounded general education. Of these themes, the themes that were most similar across the rural, suburban, and urban divisions ranged from Life-long learning, which was present 27.3%, 33.3%, and 25% of the time to Fulfills individual and community needs, which was present 93.8%, 88.9%, and 80.6% of the time. Providing accessible, affordable, high quality education was also present 72.7%, 80.6%, and 83.3% of the time. Clearly, fulfilling individual and community needs while providing accessible and affordable high quality education was important no matter where the community college was located.

Of the identified themes, the sampled community colleges statistically differed, or came close to the conventional level of .05, on three themes. The theme of College Transfer was present in the mission statements of rural community colleges 60.6% of the time, in suburban sites, 47.2% of the time and in urban sites, 25% of the time.

Ayers (2002) pointed out that community colleges located in rural areas often

provided the only postsecondary education available. Reitano (1998) pointed out that technical education was taking the place of liberal arts education in community colleges. Liberal arts education used to be the collegiate function of 2 year colleges that prepared students to transfer to 4 year colleges. This function is still alive in rural community colleges, but has been phased out in suburban and urban areas where technical training has been emphasized.

A second statistically different theme was the word Comprehensive in mission statements. It was present 66.7% of the time in rural community college mission statements, 50% of the time in suburban community college mission statements, and 38.9% of the time in urban community college mission statements. Comprehensive mission statements indicate that the college tries to meet a broad range of needs including remedial education, special programs for students with disabilities, recreational programs for students who are not seeking a degree, 2 year vocational certification, collegiate transfer, and special programs of a cultural and artistic nature. Because community colleges are often the only postsecondary college in rural areas, the comprehensive mission has survived there the longest. Suburban and urban areas have abandoned comprehensive services to develop technical programs, as Ayers (2002) recommended.

The third statistically different theme was the theme of Vocational/technical needs that was present in 72.7% of the mission statements of rural sites, and only 50% of the mission statements of suburban and urban community colleges. Possibly the wording has been removed from the mission statements of the suburban and urban colleges because it has connotations of an inferior type of education. Suburban and urban schools are focusing on preparing students for careers according to Reitano (1998) and Ayers (2002). These careers are often highly specialized and require high tech equipment; they are not “vocational” according to the historical use of the word.

From a philosophical perspective, community colleges are turning away from the liberal arts of the Idealist (Guttek, 2004) tradition and turning more towards the Pragmatic (Guttek) orientation. Rural schools are slower to follow this shift, perhaps because they are the only postsecondary schools in their geographic areas. Ayers (2002) pointed out that, while they have a geographic advantage now, the future will bring more distance learning opportunities to these remote areas, and diminish the geographic advantages of community colleges.

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