

# THE AMERICAN MYTH OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES AS A MECHANISM TO PROMOTE SOCIAL EQUITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: LESSONS FOR THAI COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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Received: October 2005; accepted: September 2006.

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to examine the myth of community college as a mechanism to promote social equity. With its open access policy and its transfer function, community colleges are believed to provide social mobility opportunities for baccalaureate aspirants from disadvantaged backgrounds. However, studies of American community colleges show a low transfer rate and low academic performance and a high attrition rate among disadvantaged community college students. Even worse, studies found that there existed implicit racial and class-based tracking systems in community colleges. Therefore, this study attempts to explore barriers to academic achievement among disadvantage students and provide suggestions for organization improvement. Upon conclusion, author suggests the lesson that the newly established Thai community colleges can learn from their American counterparts.

Keywords: Community college, social equity, social mobility, social reproduction, cultural reproduction.

## INTRODUCTION

Up until the 1997 economic crisis, the Thai government regards economic growth as the key indicator of national development. Afterwards, the government successfully restored the economic stability of the nation, pushing the minus economic growth rate back again to the plus side. However, such an overemphasis on economic growth results in many other sequential problems, for instance, the

imbalance between economic, social, environmental, and technological development; gap between the rich and the poor; disparities in the standard of living between those in the rural and urban areas; negligence of the communities, local and indigenous cultures; and deterioration of human values and environmental conditions. More specifically, there are problems from the migration of those in the

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rural to metropolitan areas, yearning for better education and work opportunities (Wong Cha-Oom, 2003). Oftentimes, those who move to pursue education in Bangkok leave their hometown and their cultural heritages behind after graduation. Besides, during the study, these students need to make a great adjustment in their personal and professional life. Worse still, some students are lured away by various distractions of the large city until eventually drop out. Many other graduates who return to work in their communities find that what they have learned is neither relevant nor applicable to problems of their own hometown.

With an awareness of many problems resulting from such overemphasis solely on economic prosperity, the government revised its national development strategies by putting a greater emphasis on a holistic, people-centered, and sustainable development. This is evident in the Eighth National Economic and Social Development Plan which aims at holistic development of human potentials, improving people's quality of life, strengthening the communities, promoting a greater participation of the communities and other non-governmental organizations in national development, and protecting environmental conditions. Building on the Eighth Plan, the Ninth Plan emphasizes balanced development of human, social, economic, and environmental resources. This plan adopts the philosophy of sufficiency economy as a guiding principle for national development and management. The National Economic and Social Development Board reports that the vision of Thai national development for the next two decades is to alleviate poverty and upgrade Thai people's quality of life to achieve sustainable development and well-being for all. It also gives priority to pursuance of good governance at all levels to achieve real sustainable people-centered development. The most recent version of Thai good governance behaviors are ten fold, rule of law, virtue, transparency, participation, accountability, break-even point or bang for the bug, learning organization, knowledge management and information technology, public management, and human resource system

development. Achievement of these goals depends on the strength of the nation's human resources. Thai citizens need to be well-educated, critical reflective and lifelong learners. They need better education in terms of both quantity and quality. Quantitatively, the government extends a compulsory education to all school-aged children from six to nine years and basic education to twelve years. This results in a greater demand for furthering higher education. Furthermore, this national development plan also targets upgrading skills and basic knowledge of industrial workers as well as providing a greater educational access for the underprivileged groups. Qualitatively, Thai education system undergoes a major teaching and learning reform toward the direction of learner-centered education.

To accommodate greater demands for higher education and workforce training, the government made several structural changes, for example, granting Rajabhat Institutes a university status, and establishing community colleges in the Thai higher education system. Hence, the focus of this paper will be the social role of community colleges in terms of how they contribute to social equity, an important element for sustainable development of the nation.

Community College has its origin in the American higher education system, which upholds to the democratic ideal. In theory, American community colleges are believed to provide more people with access to educational, social, and life opportunities. However, in practice, many studies of American community colleges show that it seems to fall short of its democratic goal (Karabel, 1986; Rhoads and Valadez, 1996; Valadez, 1996; McGrath and Spear, 1991). What are roots of the problem? Does it have to do with deficiencies of individual students, practices of higher education institutions, or injustice in the larger society? Importantly, what lessons can we learn from our American community college counterpart in order to have a system that serves the country and the people. These will be the subject under exploration of this paper. Our emerging community colleges

have many things to learn from our American predecessor, probably with some modifications.

The purposes of this paper are as follows: (1) to provide background information about American community colleges; (2) to describe distinctive features of community colleges; (3) to discuss the discrepancies between the professed social role of community colleges and their realities; (4) to summarize how different schools of thought perceive the role of community colleges as an avenue toward democratic and equitable society; (5) to suggest implications for institutional practices; and finally (6) to suggest implications of those American lessons for Thai community colleges.

### Background information about American community colleges

What is community college? Community colleges can be described as two-year colleges, known as junior colleges, which offer instruction at the lower division of the collegiate degree program. According to Maneelert (1979), community colleges are closely similar to technical colleges in the British higher educational system in that both have an open admission policy, offer certificate degree programs, and provide flexible instructional arrangements. However, one significant feature of British technical colleges that differentiates them from community colleges is that technical colleges also offer bachelor degree along with other various certificate degrees. Chantarakul (1979) defines community colleges as educational institutions that provide education at the level higher than secondary school but not at the degree level. It is comparable to Thai technical colleges, nursing colleges, and teacher colleges but one difference is that community colleges offer programs in many areas of study with an emphasis on responsiveness to the community's needs. Cohen and Brawer (2003) offer one of the most comprehensive definitions of community college as "any institution regionally accredited toward the associate in arts or the associate in science as its highest degree". This definition includes both comprehensive two-year

colleges as well as public and private technical institutes. However, it excludes vocational schools and adult education centers, proprietary business and trade colleges.

### Distinctive features of community colleges

Community colleges have some unique features that reflect their democratic ideal.

*First*, with the open-door policy, community colleges admit students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, levels of academic preparation, races, ethnicities, genders, and age-groups (Karabel, 1986; Rhoads and Valadez, 1996). Many of them are disadvantaged, first-generation college goers, illiterate adults, mid-career changers and part-timers (Karabel, 1986). As such, community colleges are perceived as inclusive and second-chance colleges for disadvantaged groups.

*Second*, to accommodate needs of diverse students with different educational aspirations, community colleges offer wide ranges of programs, including academic transfer preparation/ transfer education, vocational/ technical education, continuing education, developmental education, and community education. Recently, vocational programs in most community colleges seem to gain popularity among students as well as funding providers (Karabel, 1986).

*Third*, unlike education in the colonial colleges which aims at transmitting the "canon" or classical knowledge to the selected few intellectual elites, educational programs of the community colleges aim at providing practical and community-oriented education and training for the mass.

*Fourth*, transfer education programs are expected to be the disadvantaged groups' upward mobility channel. This is because the collegiate degrees are viewed as a ticket to many high-paying professional careers. However, this assumption about community colleges as a ladder for upward mobility starts to be challenged as increasing number of recent research reveal low transfer rates among community college students, particularly among disadvantaged groups (Rhoads and Valadez, 1996; Karabel, 1986).

### De-constructing the myth of community colleges as an upward mobility ladder

*Are community colleges actually equal opportunity higher education institutions? Do community colleges contribute to social mobility for the mass, particularly the disadvantaged groups?* While American higher education upholds to the democratic ideal, it is a highly differentiated and hierarchical system with research universities at the top of the echelon and two-year community colleges at the bottom. In other words, there is a division of labor among American post-secondary education institutions.

Although community colleges with their open access policy represent American democratic ideal, they are criticized for perpetuating class-based tracking, class and racial inequity, and education inflation in higher education system (Karabel, 1986). How? Its very existence provides legitimacy for other more prestigious higher education institutions to deny access for those academically under prepared disadvantaged students (Rhoads and Valadez, 1996; Karabel, 1977). More to the point, community colleges are regarded as second-class higher education institutions. Even though community colleges provide the mass with a wider access to higher education, seats in community colleges guarantee neither their academic achievement nor professional careers which are path toward upward mobility. Why does this become an issue of concern among advocates for social equity? In comparison with other types of higher education institution, community colleges are composed mostly of minorities from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Karabel, 1977). These minority and working-class students tend not to do well academically. Research shows that there are high attrition and low transfer rates among minority and working class students (McGrath and Spear, 1991; Valadez, 1996; Karabel, 1986). A large number of baccalaureate aspirants who are minorities and working-class students fail to get transferred and complete a bachelor's degree from the four-year higher education institutions. They end up instead in vocational programs of the

community colleges (Karabel, 1986). Although vocational education diplomas enable these students to get semi-skilled jobs, they do not provide them with adequate qualifications to attain professional, managerial positions or high-paying careers, which are the ladder toward upward mobility (Karabel, 1986).

*Why do these disadvantaged groups tend to have a low academic achievement? What are causes of the low transfer rates, particularly among the minority and working-class students?* These issues are under debate among academics from various schools of thought. Traditionalists tend to blame individual students for lacking of intelligence, motivation, and other personal traits. Progressive educators, on the other hand, attribute this problem to the prejudice of the academic culture. According to the progressive educators, the predominant culture of the higher education institutions, including community colleges, are that of the white ("honkie/honky"), middle-class population. This mainstream culture reflects in curriculum, teaching and learning, as well as administrative practices. It determines the kind of knowledge worth transmitting to students, known as the *canon* as well as appropriate values and behaviors. This culture or norm is oftentimes not apparent to the outsiders, and so it is sometimes referred to as a "hidden curriculum". Minority and working-class's cultures, known as "border knowledge", on the other hand are marginalized in the academic arena. Therefore, from the progressive view, low academic achievement among minority and working-class students are not due to their lack of abilities. Instead, it is because of discrepancies between the mainstream academic culture and that of the minority and working-class students. At the same time, minorities and working-class's cultures are delegitimized in the academic arena.

More specifically, Bourdieu (1977) and Rhoads and Valadez (1996) explain the problem of low academic achievement among disadvantaged groups through his *social and cultural reproduction theories*. These theories point out the

relationship between one's social class and educational achievement. Central to these theories are the notions of social and cultural capital. *Social capital* refers to social relationships or a network of relationships as a form of capital that can be converted into socially valued resources and opportunities. *Cultural capital* refers to sets of linguistic and cultural competencies that individual acquire from the social location of their family (Smith, 2004). From this point of view, higher education institutions serve to maintain existing social structure by legitimizing the white middle-class cultures, known as the canon and marginalizing other diverse cultures. While higher education is to serve its main function of transmitting the canon to all students and expect them to assimilate into the mainstream academic culture, regardless of their diverse cultural backgrounds, minority and working-class students are deprived of cultural capital that is valued in higher education of academic cultural capital (Rhoads and Valadez, 1996; Valadez, 1996; Karabel, 1977; Smith, 2004).

In addition, and even worse, there are many unspoken and unwritten codebooks of academic norms that students need to know in order to thrive in their academic study or what is known as a *hidden curriculum*. To navigate through those implicit norms, students need to possess the "right" cultural capital or sets of skills and knowledge essential for interpreting the dominant academic culture. Some of these skills include time management skills, study skills, networking skills, etc. Depriving of the right culture and the right tool, many disadvantaged students get lost in their academic journey.

Consequently, common practices among community colleges in dealing with these problems are watering down the academic standard (McGrath and Spear, 1991). How? Community college instructors lower their expectations toward students. They require students to do less intellectual demanding exercises (McGrath and Spear, 1991). For example, they have students read textbooks instead of sophisticated primary source

literature. They replace writing composition exams with multiple choice tests, which require short-term information retrieval skills. They provide students with various choices in the academic study, known as *shopping mall curriculum* in order to customize the students' demands. By this way, community colleges provide students with variety of choices and leave to students the responsibility to make a wise decision (McGrath and Spear, 1991). Deprived of the right cultural capital and social capital, some disadvantaged students choose an easy path that might not serve them well in the long run, because most professional careers require individuals to possess those sophisticated intellectual skills.

Those minority and working-class students not only lack cultural capital essential to thrive in their academic study and aspired professional career life, they also lack appropriate *social capital* or the form of social networks that can lead to other social opportunities. For example, comparing with those white-middle class students, they tend to have inadequate access to essential sources of information about their possible prospective career options, particularly regarding professional careers. As a result, many of them have to rely solely on institutional career counseling service. Unfortunately, being influenced by federal and business sectors that demand semi-skilled workforces, many community colleges attempt to channel students, especially those who do not perform well academically, into the vocational track. This is also partly because of limited professional career positions that are available. Therefore, instead of providing counseling service to facilitate those academically under-prepared baccalaureate aspirants to access the form of institutional accepted knowledge, it serves as a mechanism to divert them from professional career path which is an opportunity for upward mobility. Clark attributes the low transfer rate among disadvantaged groups to the implicit class-based tracking system, believed to operate within the community colleges, known as "*cooling out*" (Clark, 1960, 1980).

What is exactly “cooling out”? How does it work to divert collegiate aspirants into the vocational track? According to Clark (1960, 1980), cooling out can be described as a career counseling process, which serves to re-channel the baccalaureate aspirants who are academically under prepared from the liberal arts/academic track to the vocational track. This process involves mandatory courses on career planning and self-evaluation. Cooling out process begins with the pre-entrance testing that determines whether students will be assigned to remedial courses. Then, academic counseling along with mandatory career planning courses serve as a mechanism that forces students to engage in a self-appraisal process through accumulated evidences such as test scores, course grades, and recommendations from teachers and counselors. The low achievers may stubbornly persist in the regular program on probation. However, if they do not pass the probation, they eventually will have to leave the academic track. This is a slow procedure to divert the academically under prepared baccalaureate aspirants from the transfer programs to the vocational program. As a result, these students fall short of their dream to further their education in the four-year higher education institutions, a promising pathway toward professional careers and upward mobility.

#### **Viewpoints of different schools of thought regarding the social role of community colleges as pathway toward democratic and equitable society**

From the aforementioned description, do we still believe community colleges to be an upward mobility channel for the mass? Can we still wholeheartedly call community colleges a democratic institution? This debate reflects different philosophical assumptions regarding relationships between community colleges as educational institutions and workplaces.

*The traditional functionalist view* (Carnoy and Levin, 1985) emphasizes the responsibility of education institutions in prospective workforce preparation to serve the capitalist society. It assumes the correspondence between the structure and

practice of education institutions and that of the workplaces. Education is considered as an instrument to achieve other social ends. Pertaining to debates over community colleges' contribution to social equity, this view defends community colleges for fulfilling several social needs, such as expanding educational opportunities for the disadvantaged groups through their open admission policies, enabling traditional four-year universities to maintain their academic excellence, among others. It makes college attendance possible for the disadvantaged groups who otherwise would never have access to higher education.

*Instrumentalist Marxists view*, such as those of Carnoy and Levin (1985), Bowles and Gintis (1976), and Dougherty (1991), criticizes that community colleges reinforce social inequity by channeling working-class students to the vocational programs in response to industrial demands for semi-skilled workforces. At the same time, the existence of community colleges provides legitimacy for four-year higher education institution to deny access for those academically under-prepared students from working-class backgrounds (Rhoads and Valadez, 1996). So, these students will have limited opportunities to land in the professional occupations and achieve upward mobility. There are many factors that influence community colleges' tendency to be vocationalized such as limited professional positions in the job market, a greater federal and industrial funding supports for vocational programs. The Instrumental Marxists see the root of social inequity problem as residing in the division of labor of the capitalist society. These critics call for education reform through state interventions (Carnoy and Levin, 1985).

*Institutional Critique view* (Rhoads and Valadez, 1996) agrees with the Instrumental Marxist view that community colleges serve to reproduce social inequity. However, the slight difference is that while the Instrumental Marxists see the root of social inequity problems as residing the capitalist society, Institutional critics put the blame on the structures and practices of higher education, such as the cooling-out process that serves to limit the ambition of baccalaureate aspirants.

There are also many groups of progressive educators who provide suggestions for educational reform to achieve democratic society, mostly through cultural transformation. Overall, these educators see existing education system as oppressive, dehumanized, mechanistic, and racist. Pioneering progressive educators, such as Dewey (1916), perceive education as a process of living as opposed to a preparation for future living. They envision progressive education to produce the new generation of change agents who are able to transform existing oppressive system of the Industrial Society. At the heart of progressive education are democracy, autonomy of education, and experiential education. *Critical theorist educators* also call for more relevant and intellectual stimulating education. They suggest teaching and learning through a *problem-posing approach which has critical reflection* at the heart of the process. Students are expected to develop into autonomous lifelong learners. *Post-modernists/multiculturalists critics* do not only call for higher education to be more equitable to the disadvantaged groups from working-class backgrounds, but also to those from diverse cultural backgrounds. *Post-modernists/multiculturalists critics* call for inclusive education programs that embrace diverse cultural perspectives throughout the programs of study.

In sum, functionalists argue that community colleges serve the democratic society well by simultaneously widening higher education opportunities for disadvantaged groups and enabling the selective four-year universities to maintain their academic excellence. Instrumentalists and institutional critics, on the other hand, share the same view about the failure of community colleges in helping baccalaureate aspirants from disadvantaged backgrounds to succeed but explain roots of this problem differently. For progressive educators, on the whole, they believe in autonomy of education institutions to make a difference and blame community colleges for allowing social inequity to persist. At the same time, they call for education reform through an experiential, emancipator, and inclusive education.

### Implications for institutional practices

Up until now, academics suggest various structural approaches to improve transfer rate and academic performance, particularly among minorities and disadvantaged groups, such as transformation of community colleges into four-year institutions or their branches. Such alternative may smooth the transfer process, but they will certainly threaten the identity and unique strengths of community colleges, such as diversity, practicality, and community-oriented-ness. In fact, American community colleges initially evolve from two-year junior colleges which offer liberal arts programs in parallel with those of the four-year universities (Karabel, 1986). A more viable solution for reform is for community colleges to strengthen their commitment to teaching and community development which are their main missions. In addition, community colleges should balance between transforming their institutional culture to be more inclusive and facilitating disadvantaged groups' socialization into the academic culture.

Teaching and learning in community colleges need to be more inclusive. Such changes need to not be merely at the surface by incorporating content on diverse ethnic cultures into existing curriculum or behave in culturally sensitive ways. Instead, the whole teaching and learning paradigm needs to be transformed. At its root, epistemological assumptions of instructors, curricular developers, academic administrators and students need to be transformed from the traditional perspectives or what Pratt et al. (1998) refer to as the *transmission perspective* to progressive perspectives, including *developmental, nurturing, and social reform perspectives*. Based on these progressive perspectives, knowledge is not something objective, existing outside learners, but it is socially and culturally constructed among the community of learners, composed of both students and teaching facilitators (instructors). Curriculum is not merely lists of ahistorical and ideologically neutral courses prescribed to all students as a preparation for them to become effective and docile citizens. Instead, it should be re-conceptualized as a

site of contention and negotiation among diverse cultural groups, otherwise known as “discourse” or “self reflexivity”, in order for their cultural knowledge to be accepted in the academic arena. This line of reasoning is very similar to what the post-modernists have in mind. It follows from this that if knowledge/reality is socially constructed, partial, and distorted; it should then be socially deconstructed or being a serious subject for discourse, among relevant stakeholders.

One of the inclusive curricular model that seems appropriate for the current multicultural context of community colleges is Gaff's Learning Community curricular models, which are curricular structures that link or even restructure existing courses in order to make curriculum coherent (Gaff, 1992). There are many models of learning community including Freshmen Interest Groups, Linked Courses, Learning Cluster Model, Federated Learning Community, and Coordinated Study Model (Gabernick et al., 1990; Shapiro and Levine, 1999). This curricular model seems to be a viable solution to alleviate the intellectual combats between the Conservative position that calls for restoring the *canon*, the form of knowledge they regarded as superior, and Progressive position that calls for more inclusion of the multicultural perspectives across regular curriculum. Gaff's model treats the *canon* merely as one of diverse cultural knowledge bases that deserves to be included in curriculum along with other cultural knowledge. At the heart of Gaff's Learning Community curricular model is the use of conflicting perspectives as an instrument to foster students' critical thinking and conflict resolution skills.

Correspondingly, instructional practices of community colleges need to change from the “banking approach” (Freire, 1970) to progressive approach which can be characterized as student-centered, inclusive, and emancipator. In the banking approach, teachers as the content experts transmit an objective and legitimate knowledge or *canon* to ignorant and passive students who are expected to retrieve them back for exams. On the contrary, in progressive or emancipator education, the chief

instructional goal is to develop students into autonomous lifelong learners, who have critical awareness of how historical, social, and cultural contexts, shape their existing living condition. The typical instructional approach among progressive educators is the collaborative learning and problem-posing approach. In a problem-posing approach, instructional content and learning activities revolve around students' experiences upon which they are encouraged to critically reflect together. Instructors serve as learning facilitators, mentors, co-investigators, co-creators of knowledge or even agents of social reform.

In terms of student service, students need to be assisted in learning how to de-code the “hidden curriculum” or the implicit nonverbal academic and disciplinary cultures, such as study skills and how to appropriately interact with faculty and peers in the academic community. In terms of career counseling, students need to be provided with adequate career information through both formal and informal channels. Career counselors need to serve as mentors who empower them to fulfill their full potential and make a wise career choice. Instead of being *cooled out* into the vocational track just to serve the capitalist market, students need to be *heated up* (Rhoads and Valadez, 1996). That is, they need to be challenged to critically reflect upon their historical and cultural background to see how they shape their existing living condition as well as their career choices. They need to be aware of short-term as well as the long-term consequences of their career choices. Student service providers need to collaborate with instructors in nurturing students both inside and outside classroom

In terms of knowledge production or scholarly activities and community development, unlike research universities, the main mission of community colleges is not pursuance of basic research to produce cutting-edged knowledge. However, this does not mean that community college faculty can neglect scholarly activities. Forms of knowledge produced in community colleges need to be practical and useful for

instructional and community improvement. This provides community college faculty ample opportunities to integrate scholarly activities with teaching and community services through their involvement in the scholarship of teaching and scholarship of engagement (Ward, 2003). *Scholarship of teaching* can be described briefly as scholarly activities that explain how and why regarding student learning outcomes. To be labeled *scholarship*, scholarly activities must be public as well as open to critical appraisal and collegial exchanges (Braxton et al., 2002). They should also be usable as a foundation for further inquiry. Classroom research is an example of scholarship of teaching. Scholarship of teaching enables faculty to integrate their teaching and knowledge production responsibilities. Such practice is consistent with the main emphasis of the community colleges on teaching and learning. In terms of community services, faculty members together with students should actively involve in the scholarship of engagement (Ward, 2003). *Scholarship of engagement* can be described as service activities grounded in disciplinary or professional knowledge. It requires scholars to integrate knowledge production with service functions. Scholarship of engagement includes such activities as community-based action research and service learning. At the heart of both scholarship of teaching and scholarship of engagement is critical reflection. In scholarship of teaching, instructors need to reflect on how and why students learn particularly the minority and disadvantaged groups. In scholarship of engagement, faculty members as well as students need to critically reflect on how they serve the community and their impacts.

### Lessons for Thai community colleges

Ideas of establishing community colleges have been initiated many times since 1972 but never succeeded until 2001. At present, there are approximately eighteen pioneering community colleges located mostly in provinces that have inadequate higher education institutions, including Mae Hong Son, Tak, Buri Ram, Phichit, Nong Bu

Lamphu, Mukdahan, Sa Kaeo, Uthai Thani, Ranong, Narathiwat, Pattani, Yala, Satun, Samut Sakhon, Yasothon, Phang-nga, Trat, and Bangkok. Thai community colleges modeled after those American predecessors in virtually every aspect including principles, missions, types of programs offered, and faculty and student composition.

Thai community colleges operate based on the following principles: open access, low-cost, program variation, responsiveness to the communities' needs for economic and social development, emphasis on quality and relevancy, alliances with private sectors, collaboration with alliances inside and outside the communities, emphasis on community involvement in institutional administration, and continual adaptation to changing environment (Bureau of Community College Administration, 2006; <http://cc.mua.go.th/>). Like the American counterpart, missions of Thai community colleges are as follows: (1) to provide education at the level lower than baccalaureate degree; (2) to provide training for career development and quality of living improvement; and (3) to enhance students' potentials (Bureau of Community College Administration, 2006; <http://cc.mua.go.th/>). In terms of education provision, community colleges offer various types of programs including two-year transfer programs, professional certificate programs, short-term programs for career development and quality of life improvement, and remedial education. Credit transfer from training courses to academic programs is possible. Community college programs revolve around communities' problems and needs such as Local Government, Community Development, Early Childhood Education, Tourism Industry, Computer Business, General Management, Agricultural Technology programs. These programs emphasize practicality and responsiveness to communities' needs for societal and economic development (Bureau of Community College Administration, 2006; <http://cc.mua.go.th/>).

In terms of teaching staff, Thai community colleges hire few regular full-time faculty members, that is, around ten faculty members per college.

These full-time faculty members have to serve as both college teaching staff and administrators. Thai community colleges use a lot of guest lecturers who are professionals in their fields (as opposed to academics) and local wisdom gurus. In terms of student population, students who are the target customers of community colleges are diverse including those who complete secondary education, those who complete nine-year compulsory education, disadvantaged working-class students, illiterate adults and dropped out students, retired citizens, working people who want to upgrade their skills and knowledge, and students in regular formal education who want to improve their performance on certain subjects. In terms of instructional settings, community colleges typically use existing local government offices in order to maximize the usage of government offices, such as the Tambon Administration Organizations and temples. There is also a distance learning project to link university instruction with instruction at different education provision sites of Thai community colleges. In terms of institutional management, these Thai public community colleges are governed by the institutional councils. Members of these institutional councils are composed of experts from all sectors of the communities (Bureau of Community College Administration, 2006; <http://cc.mua.go.th/>).

Evidently, Thai community colleges share many similarities with their American counterpart. Being at the neophyte stage, Thai community colleges have many lessons to learn from their American counterpart and here are some suggestions:

1. Diversification is a unique strength of American higher education system. However, it is also hierarchical in nature with research universities at the top of the echelon and community colleges with lower recognition at the bottom. Some of the institutions at the lower echelon attempt to imitate those at the top, a phenomenon known as *academic drift*. Confounded by the problem of low transfer rate among community college students, some academics even suggest for elimination of

community colleges or make them branches of four-year institutions. However, such action will not only deprive disadvantaged groups of higher education opportunities, but also threaten the very strength of American higher education system (Rhoads and Valadez, 1996). A better alternative is for each community college to focus on its unique strength, that is, teaching and community development, and perform its best.

Reflecting upon Thai higher education system, the classification of higher education institutions has not been firmly institutionalized. However, there are signs that institutions whose initial commitment is to provide higher education opportunities for the mass, such as Rajabhat universities, Ramkhamhaeng University, and Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University attempt to imitate those elite institutions by emphasizing research and graduate education. Community colleges, as newly emerged institutional types in Thai higher education system, should focus on their unique strength as democratic institutions with a strong commitment to education for the masses concept as well as teaching and community development as their main missions. At the same time, these community colleges should collaborate with Rajabhat universities to facilitate the transfer function of Thai community colleges. This is partly because both share mutual commitment to expanding higher education opportunities and improving communities.

2. In comparison with American higher education, particularly American community colleges, the student composition of Thai higher education institutions is less diverse, except in certain Southern provinces such as Satun, Yala, Pattani, and Narathiwat. Socialization in Thai education system tends to emphasize assimilation more than celebration of diversity. The lessons of the American "blueprint" suggest that students' low academic performance is partly due to the discrepancies between students' cultural knowledge and the mainstream academic culture. As such, academic programs of community colleges, particularly those with diverse student population,

need to be inclusive. Instructional practices should encourage students to make use of their experiences in constructing new knowledge. At the same time, there should be adequate student support services to help students adjust to the academic culture.

Additionally, due to its non-selective admission policy, community college students tend to have lower academic performance. Therefore, in order to be fair to them, community colleges should be assessed based on the value-added contribution that they made to students' academic performance, that is, student improvement.

3. Most programs of study in Thai community colleges tend to be practical and vocational oriented. Nevertheless, students should not be trained to mindlessly do the job. Instead, instructors should facilitate student development in key competencies, such as critical thinking, reading, writing, and foreign languages. These competency requirements should be incorporated across curricula. To produce liberally educated practitioners, competency-based curriculum is an interesting model for the vocational program of Thai community colleges. A competency-based curriculum is a curricular model in which cores of the learning experiences are organized around learning outcomes/ learners' competencies. Assessment is used as a tool for structuring learning experiences. Expected learning competencies are conveyed to students from the beginning and throughout the programs. Students are assessed in both content knowledge and key competencies.

4. In terms of scholarly activities, Thai community colleges should encourage their faculty members to integrate teaching, knowledge production, and community service together. The form of knowledge produced by community college faculty members should be slightly different from their counterparts in research universities. While faculty members in research universities are supposed to produce cutting-edged research, community college faculty should pursue scholarship of teaching by doing classroom research and scholarship of engagement by doing community-based research (Braxton et al., 2002).

In summing up, the query posed at the outset is whether community colleges actually egalitarian higher education institutions? The answer is that structurally they attempt to provide wide ranges of people an equal opportunity to pursue higher education. However, we need to make a distinction of the impacts that community colleges have on students between providing an equal opportunity to *access* higher education and providing an equal opportunity to *be successful* in higher education. Community colleges certainly achieve to a certain extent in providing disadvantaged groups an equal opportunity to get higher education, but that does not mean that these students have equal chance to achieve in their academic study or attain upward mobility through prospective professional careers. This is partly because the mainstream academic culture tends to ignore disadvantaged groups' cultural knowledge. These students in turn feel alienated in the existing academic community. Alternatively, to be a truly egalitarian higher education institution, the culture of community colleges needs to be transformed. Academic programs of community colleges need to be inclusive and embrace diverse cultural knowledge. Scholarship of teaching and engagement should be accepted as legitimate knowledge-production activities. Thai community colleges which are still at their embryonic stage can certainly learn from their American predecessors. However, to borrow an American blueprint and steadfastly put it into use without any modification is likely to put a square peg in a round hole or *vice versa*. As such, further comparative study on American and Thai community colleges should be carried out and the result of which should serve as a starting point for some modifications of the American model to fit Thai context.

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Received: August 2006; accepted: December 2006

ABSTRACT

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The basic requirements for the educational technology center to support the center for students in five community colleges in Bangkok were investigated. The information obtained from the study was used to propose a good management model of educational technology center in community colleges in Thailand. The data were categorized into five categories: educational material production, audio-visual aids facilities, orientation, training for the students to take full advantages in using the facilities, and budget to run the activities of the center. The results obtained from the questionnaires returned from 25 college administrators in five community colleges consisting of four colleges in Bangkok and one college in other parts of Thailand. The data were consisting of 114 items, which divided into three parts. The first part was the biography of respondents. The second part was dealing with the management of the centers that currently existed. The third part was the opinion to solve the existing problems and their existing management model of the center.

It was shown that the management problems that currently existed in the educational technology center were as follows: budget to run the activities of the center, orientation and training program for the students to take full advantages in using the facilities, production of educational materials and provision, inadequate audio-visual aids facilities and spaces.

It was found that in terms of existing problems, the budget to run the activities of the center was ranked first, followed by orientation and training for the students to take full advantages in using the facilities, the production of materials and provision services of audio-visual aids, and building and facilities, respectively. All of the respondents expressed their needs for the center as follows: the orientation and training of the students to take full advantages in using the facilities was the immediate need, followed by the production of materials and provision services in supplying audio-visual aids, adequate