

FROM COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY COLLEGE TO *NOUVEAU* COLLEGE

Our purpose is to explore the multi-faceted work of community college faculty, including their occupational and professional identities and roles. The overarching observation we make and explore in this book is that community college faculty resemble, or indeed are, New Economy workers. That is, they have become aligned with a globalized economy that values flexible, specialized production, particularly knowledge production tied to new technologies, and “multifaceted, pan-occupational team players,” who contribute to reduced costs, increased profits, or produce measurable outcomes, and expand markets.¹ Our perspective carries with it the assumption that community colleges are now different institutions from what they have been in the past. We use neo-liberalism, globalization, postindustrialism, new capitalism, and the New Economy as concepts that frame our understanding of the community college. These concepts suggest that advanced production relies upon new technologies, and the work ethic of a labor force that is shaped by both a managerial class and corporate elites, along with global competition, defines organizations that function in a contemporary political economy. In this chapter, we explore our conceptualization of the twenty-first century community college and how this conceptualization presents an alternative discourse about community colleges as institutions. As well, and of significance to this book as a whole, we suggest implications of this conceptualization for faculty.

A substantial body of scholarly literature as well as a considerable number of ruminations by practitioners has framed our understanding of the community college over the past three decades. Since 1981, with Patricia Cross’ examination of the community college mission,² followed by the 1985 edited work from William Deegan and Dale Tillery, and particularly Cross’ contribution within that edited work,³ scholars began to mold the concept of a modern, comprehensive community college. While the community college discourse prior to the 1980s did reflect an institution with multipurposes and a variety of students, it nonetheless was conceived of as an alternative educational institution, framed by curriculum and instruction, as Arthur Cohen

observed in 1969.

It is viewed variously as democracy's college, as an inexpensive, close-to-home alternative to the lower division of a prestigious university; as a place to await marriage, a job, or the draft; and as a high school with ashtrays. For many of its enrollees, it is a stepping stone to the higher learning; for most, it is the last formal, graded, public education in which they will be involved. The community college is—or attempts to be—all things to all people, trying valiantly to serve simultaneously as custodian trainer, stimulant, behavior-shaper, counselor, advisor, and caretaker to both young and old.⁴

This “all things to all people” label was maintained through the following decades, even to the end of the twentieth century as Grubb notes in 1999 with respect to instruction, as do others when they argue about student access and outcomes.⁵ But with advancing postindustrialism and competition, as well as leaders' efforts at institutional legitimacy, the smorgasbord approach and function began to abate.⁶

Through the 1980s, the work of scholars such as Arthur Cohen and Florence Brawer, Richard Richardson, Steven Brint and Jerome Karabel, and John Roueche and George Baker, as well as John Dennison in Canada, developed into a discourse that tied the institution to a more conceptually sound articulation of its purposes and identity.⁷ This discourse became mainstream thinking about the comprehensive community college, even among national leaders and institutional practitioners such as Dale Parnell and George Vaughan. Indeed the comprehensive community college was an understood and accepted entity for critics and boosters alike. Historian John Frye speaks about the various perspectives of university professors, national leaders, and local practitioners; but they share a common discourse whether they are critics or boosters. The comprehensive community college—the center of the discourse about the institution—was an articulation based upon curriculum.⁸ Several scholars categorized this curriculum (Patricia Cross, Arthur Cohen and Florence Brawer, John Dennison and Paul Gallagher, Dale Tillery and William Deegan); several critiqued its outcomes (Kevin Dougherty, Steven Brint and Jerome Karabel, Richard Richardson and Louis Bender, and Lois Weis);⁹ and several argued to strengthen the resolve of those who championed its underlying values, such as access, and yet sought improvements in organizational performance (John Roueche and George Baker, John Roueche and Suanne Roueche).¹⁰ Later works following along the lines of this discourse of the comprehensive community college include Robert Rhoads and James Valadez' *Democracy, Multiculturalism and the Community College* and W. Norton Grubb's *Honored but Invisible*.¹¹ Both extend the discourse through critical examination of curriculum and instruction, first of students and second of faculty as units of analysis. The so-called critics of the institution, such as Weis, for example, took the theoretical position that student opportunities and outcomes were the fundamental purposes of community colleges—either community colleges provided opportunities for social mobility or they reproduced structural social inequality.¹²