

Community Colleges and Global Environments: Increasing Visibility

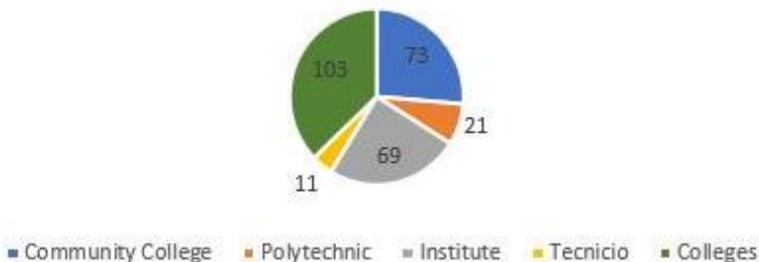
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The over 150 institutions in the Community College and Global Equivalent sector have long been invisibilized within international higher education discourse. Within this sector are post-secondary higher education institutions designated as International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) levels 4 or level 5, and some institutions that span both levels instruction. These institutions offer:

1. Enrollment options for non-traditional students that foster social equalization via higher education access
2. Investment in local communities as curriculum and job placement aligns with local needs
3. College-to-work pipeline and flexible/transfer pathways for further education, often to a university
4. Skills-based training, higher-level academic focus, and internationalization practices
5. Educational learning to grow economic and social capital for gaining stable employment and learning capabilities skills for improving social conditions

The institutions within the sector include community colleges, further education colleges, polytechnics, technical and further education (TAFE) colleges, technical colleges, vocational educational colleges, vocational training centers, university colleges, university institutes of technology, and universities of applied sciences. Every country offers at least one of these institutions (Graph 1). There is no common name by which the sector is referred.



Graph 1. Number of Institutional Types Found in Selected Countries.

Critique

For fifty-years, comparative research has studied how the sector developed, the diversity between the sector's institutional types, and the impact of educational borrowing that reinforces similarities between institutions. Yet, the inconsistency in how the sector is publicly portrayed leads to a constant need for justification of the sector's existence, worth, and impact that it makes to the field of higher education. For example, the terms 'Community Colleges and Global Equivalents', 'Colleges & Institutes', and 'TVET' are not widely applied. Associations also misalign the sector. For example, UNEVOC.UNESCO definitions differentiate HEI from TVET categorically, and in so doing ignores that TVET is included in post-secondary and higher education. The lack of distinction invisibilizes the sector in policy and data collection. In fact, accurate and comparative information about the sector is not widely available, which results in under-reporting in international databases, qualification frameworks, and regional policies. This in turn, results in lower funding in national budgets that impact faculty, staff, and students.

The exclusionary practices position universities as the authorized centers of knowledge which enables hegemonic categorization of the sector and facilitates deficit perspectives of the students who attend these institutions. Hegemonic terms are applied including, 'short-cycle' that denotes a lesser frame of quality based on length of instruction and 'third category', 'sub-baccalaureate', or 'second-tier' that defines the entire sector as lesser-than. The term 'non-university' denotes inequity by defining the sector by what it is not. No institution refers to itself as a non-university. Equally important is that these hegemonic categorizations label students who attend these institutions as 'less able', 'non-traditional', 'less competitive', and 'losers' because they need a second chance.

Practice

An international framework is needed to gather inclusive and accurate data on success indicators, especially from countries where data is under-represented or excluded. Publicizing success enables scholars, policymakers, and practitioners to better position the sector as an equal partner to the university sector:

- Equity by extending the definition of who is a student
- Flexible fee structure and geographic location that enables access
- Enroll over 1 million students in 12 countries and 100,000 students in over 30 countries
- Completion rates between 33% - 58%
- Flexible/transfer pathways within and between sector levels
- Gainful employment in jobs with higher salaries than students who do not attend these institutions and some jobs that have students earn more than university graduates
- Outcomes that are advancing Sustainability Goals

Internationalization

Comparative research on internationalization practices ignores the contributions made by Community Colleges and Global Counterparts. Nonetheless, the sector is defined by international educational borrowing and student and staff mobility, internationalizing curriculum, international development, international collaboration,

and linking international outreach to practical research projects are commonplace. Income disparity remains an issue, and in poorer countries, chronic underfunding negatively affects salaries, professional development, and even the professionalization of the sector.

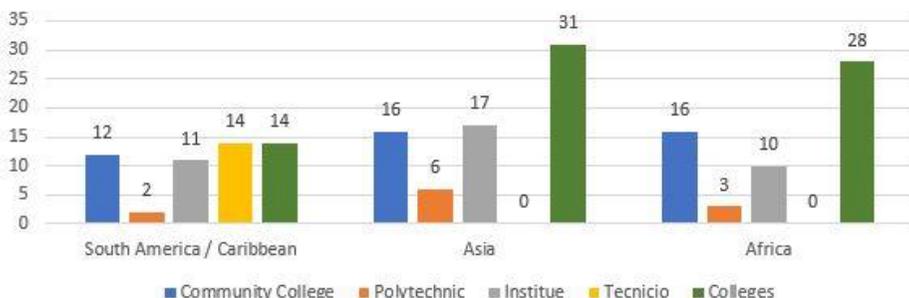
Moving Forward

To increase visibility of the sector, there is a need to:

1. Build an agreed-upon terminology to reference the sector. As shown in Graph 2, the five primary institutional types are found worldwide. As such, a common term will increase visibility and can be a framework to be used comparatively within and across countries.
2. Reinforce equity of the new classification to dismantle hegemonic structures that disadvantage the minority world. Since the two institutional types, ‘Colleges’ and ‘Institutes’ are equally found in every continent it minimizes ownership by any region.
3. Acknowledge that the use of hegemonic terms ignores the sector for its own merits and reinforces an inequity lens especially when situated against the norm of the university.
4. Use visibility to elevate the field in national and regional qualifications, and position it to create opportunities for non-traditional, lower-income, and disadvantaged student enrollment.

In conclusion, there is no single word that can accurately speak to all 150 different institutions. But the broader categories of ‘colleges’ and ‘institutes’ are now recognized descriptors that as nouns reference the most common institutions in the sector without privileging one institutional type over another. As nouns as well, these terms avoid descriptors that are often grounded in inequities. In fact, by using a common term, all countries can begin to address the inequalities stemming from invisibility.

Comparative Institutes in Designated Countries



Graph 2. Comparative Institutes in Designated Countries

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