Examining Community College Global Counterpart Completion Agendas

Janice Nahra Friedel[a], Rosalind Latiner Raby[b,*], and Cristobal Salinas Jr.[c]

[a]*Iowa State University of Science and Technology, USA*
[b]*California State University, Northridge, USA*
[c]*Iowa State University, USA*

Introduction

In the United States, the community college completion agenda has been a focus of discussion for almost a decade. However, there is very little known about the completion agenda in community college global counterparts outside of the United States. Hence, the purpose of our research is to understand the structures at community college global counterparts which support issues related to completion by a) identifying if the completion agenda exists internationally, and b) depicting the ways in which this agenda is being formed and implemented.

Community college global counterparts offer a more advanced curriculum than secondary school and serve as a lower-cost pathway that gives options for university overflow for adult learners, displaced workers, life-long learners, workforce learners, developmental learners, and non-traditional learners (Raby and Valeau 2009). This institutional type is known by several names including Colleges of Further Education, Community College, Polytechnic, Technical College, and Technical and Further Education (TAFE). While these institutions admit a range of non-traditional students, what happens after admission is not as clear. In the context of this research, completion is a defined set of requirements (UNESCO 2011) that are taken and finished by the student for: (a) short-term diplomas, certificates, or industry skill credentials; (b) multi-year course work leading to an associate degree and gradua-

tion; or (c) multi-year course work leading to the ability to transfer to a university.

Significance

The completion agenda is a byproduct of a changing era. Some suggest that any participation in tertiary education brings wage advantages especially for non-traditional students. Several studies examine ways in which to improve completion at community college global counterparts in Turkey (World Bank 2007), in England (Longden 2013), in Ireland (Kerr 2006), in Australia VET system (Herault, Zakirova, and Buddelmeyer 2012), in New Zealand VET system (Scott 2009); and in British Columbia (Andres 2009).

Methodology

An on-line survey was administered to individuals who work at community college global counterparts, to individuals who work at a United States community colleges that have on-going partnerships with community college global counterparts, and to researchers who have published on community college global counterparts. The first pilot survey was administered in winter 2012, with sixteen responses and a follow-up survey was administered in spring 2013, with twenty-five responses. All respondents were asked to answer from the perspective of community college global counterpart with which they are affiliated.

―――――――――――――――
*Corresponding author: Email: Rabyrl@aol.com; Address: California State University, Northridge, USA.

Results

The survey provides information on a) community college global counterpart profiles; b) issues related to completion; and c) identified challenges in the field.

Profiles

Approximately 66.7 percent of respondents were from United States community colleges who were actively involved in a partnership with a community college global counterpart and 33.3 percent worked at a community college global counterpart. Most respondents were directors or researchers, and only three had the rank of college president.

Issues Related to Completion

Accrediting Bodies. Raby and Valeau (2009) define distinct organizational patterns in which community college global counterparts are managed nationally, regionally, state-based, or by individual districts. The survey confirms this variety with institutions gaining accreditation from Ministry of Education (52.8 percent), Ministry of Higher Education (16.7 percent), local university system (16.7 percent), Ministry of Economy (10.3 percent), Ministry of Labor and Employment (8.3 percent), and Ministry for Vocational Education (2.2 percent). Each accrediting body has a unique reason for defining completion, which in turn, accounts for a lack of definite patterns when examining community college global counterpart completion agendas.

Policy. 61 percent of respondents said that they did not know of specific completion policies. Respondents described national policies in Australia, Hungary, and Sweden, regional policies in India and Pakistan, institutional policy in Sweden, and city level policy in Jamaica. In Israel, a State Comptroller (2008) report "pointed out very low completion rates (less than 50 percent) and called for reform in the budget/finance of colleges to encourage them to improve completion rates" (Survey Respondent). One respondent shared a personal opinion that "students [in Singapore] pay hefty sums so I think family pressure for completion is the biggest factor" (Survey Respondent).

Financial Incentives to Institutions to Award Completion. 85 percent said that there was no institutional financial incentive to push for completion. Incentives do exist in Jamaica, where "special funds are given to the colleges for supporting drop-outs and those in danger to drop-out" (Survey Respondent) and in Australia, where there is "an additional 'taximeter'" connected to completion (Survey Respondent).

Financial Incentives to Students to Achieve Completion. Most respondents said that where financial aid given to students exists, there is no connection to performance. Two respondents did share that their institutions in Lithuania and Latvia do have government financial support that is given to well-performing students.

National/Institutional Goals. Worldwide, there is a common goal to increase student access and completion. In Denmark, a goal is to have "95 percent pass a youth education," and another goal is to have "60 percent of each cohort of young complete higher education as the number today is 45-48 percent" (Survey Respondent). In Australia, the goal is to half the proportion of Australians aged 20-64 without qualifications at a goal is to double the number of higher qualification completions (diploma and advanced diploma) over the next ten years (Herault, Zakirova, and Buddelmeyer 2012). To achieve these goals, Australia institutions have an "early help before the student is in major trouble with his/her studies, offering special workshops for the students and even for the drop-outs" (Survey Respondent). Finally, Tobago Community College has a program in which "students must finish 75 Credit hours" for completion (Survey Respondent).

Identified Challenges in the Field

Since few respondents identified completion agendas, the low percentage of those who actually track students is understandable. Nonetheless, most respondents indicated reforms to begin and/or refine such tracking and noted four specific challenges. First, financial challenges, from the changing global economy impact

both institutional and individual abilities to establish a completion agenda. One respondent from Tobago noted that "the politicization determines whether financial assistance should be given." A respondent from Denmark noted that the "increase of the world economic crisis will have resulting changes in the political environment which will influence the higher education community" (Survey Respondent). Secondly, quality assurance and external accreditation presents unique challenges as multiple agencies may be involved in defining metrics for measurement. Thirdly, several respondents discussed how institutional change in terms of raising faculty credentials and standards will help improve overall educational goals.

Finally, there is a perceived need for institutional policies to establish programs that train students. One respondent noted a challenge "is how to sensitize students to make them accept their responsibility as future leaders of Tobago. At an Australian institution, the challenge "lies within the 5-15 percent of students that may not be fully prepared for higher educational programmes and the challenges hereby" (Survey Respondent). Another respondent from Australia noted that "many young people are persuaded and rewarded for entering higher education programmes, meaning that not all of them have intrinsic motivation to complete" (Survey Respondent). "The need to target students was also mentioned as a challenge by a China respondent in terms of "increasing the student population and creating international awareness and study abroad interest" (Survey Respondent).

Conclusion

This benchmark study begins a conversation on the completion agenda at community college global counterparts. The demand for higher education continues to increase due to a direct correlation between obtaining certificates/diplomas and job opportunities. It is known that access alone will not build human capital enough to transform patterns of inequality. As such, future research will need to identify specific policy and then identification of how these policies are being enacted, monitored, and then utilized towards achieving specific goals.

References

Andres, Lesley. 2009. *The Dynamics of Post-Secondary Participation and Completion: A Fifteen Year Portrayal of BC Young Adults.* Vancouver, BC: British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer.

Herault, Nicolas, Rezida Zakirova, and Hielke Buddelmeyer. 2012. *National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER).* Melbourne, Australia: Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

Kerr, Mary. 2006. *Funding Systems and Their Effects on Higher Education Systems: Country Study-Ireland.* Paris, France: OECD. Available online at: http://www.oecd.org/education/skills-beyond-school/38308018.pdf.

Longden, Bernard. 2013. "Bearing Down on Student Non-Completion: Implications and Consequences for English Higher Education." *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory and Practice* 14 (1): 117-147.

Raby, Rosalind Latiner and Edward Valeau. 2009. *Community College Models: Globalization and Higher Education Reform.* Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer.

Scott, David J. 2009. "A Closer Look at Completion in Higher Education in New Zealand." *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management* 31 (2): 101-108.

UNESCO. 2011. "Beyond Busan: Strengthening Aid to Improve Education Outcomes." Education for All Global Monitoring Report, Policy paper 2. Paris, France: UNESCO: Available online at: http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002144/214454E.pdf.

World Bank. 2007. *Turkey: Higher Education Policy Study.* Washington DC: World Bank. Available online at: http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2007/06/8730072/turkey-higher-education-policy-study.