

EDITORS' NOTES

The recent reconfiguration of the Carnegie classification system for institutions of higher education (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2006) created distinctions between community colleges based on location and size, allowing scholars and practitioners to empirically examine for the first time what many have known for years: that community colleges vary tremendously by geographic location and size. One new category in the Carnegie system is rural community colleges. Rural community colleges make up 60 percent of all two-year institutions and educate one-third of all community college students each year. Rural community colleges are defined as public two-year institutions with a physical address outside the hundred largest standard or consolidated metropolitan statistical areas. Small rural community colleges are those with enrollments under twenty-five hundred students, community colleges with enrollments between twenty-five hundred and five thousand are midsized, and those with enrollments greater than seventy-five hundred are considered large (Katsinas, 2003). Although, clearly, rural institutions make up a sizable percentage of all two-year colleges, often community college headlines focus on urban or large colleges rather than small and more remote ones. Many of the issues community colleges face—such as greater need for remediation, changing student demographics, use of technology in the classroom, and pending retirements of faculty and leaders—are faced by both urban and rural colleges, but in the rural context these issues play out differently. Understanding better how issues and challenges are different in rural colleges certainly benefits those who work and study in rural institutions, but it benefits those in urban and suburban colleges as well, because they may learn from their rural counterparts' successful tactics and approaches to the complex issues all colleges face.

As community colleges gain greater national and political attention, it is important not to overlook rural colleges and to think about how these institutions can meet the demands placed on them. In planning for the future, should rural community colleges try to concentrate on certain missions—such as transfer education or distance learning—or should they continue trying to be all things to all people? In this area, urban and suburban community colleges face similar institutional dilemmas and choices and can learn from the experiences of rural colleges.

This volume explores what it means to lead, teach in, partner with, or attend rural community colleges. Challenges for community colleges include attracting and retaining faculty and selecting leaders who understand

the unique issues that two-year colleges face—including resource constraints, stagnant economies, and isolated service areas. Recruiting and retaining rural community college faculty and leaders are also a challenge because of the lack of amenities in these more remote regions of the country. Faculty are often the sole persons responsible for their discipline, which results in a lack of support from peers and singular responsibility for teaching the discipline. This often means multiple preparations every academic term. In addition, students are affected by the lack of faculty diversity because—with the exception of some adjunct faculty—the only voice they hear on a particular topic is that of a single faculty member. Administrators and faculty must also live in areas with fewer cultural amenities, areas that are often located at a great distance from the state capital—critical for lobbying efforts and statewide meetings. They face the challenge of leading a smaller institution with fewer resources and greater economic constraints. Yet leaders of rural colleges are still expected to meet the community college's tripartite mission of preparing students for transfer to four-year institutions, educating the workforce, and aiding in economic development (Cohen and Brawer, 2003).

This volume of *New Directions for Community Colleges* should be useful to those leading and working in rural community colleges, community agencies and universities involved in partnerships with rural community colleges, college members of the Rural Community College Alliance and the Rural Community College Initiative, and those interested in understanding the role geographic context plays on community college campuses. In addition, the volume provides institutional researchers with a better understanding of the demographics and pressing personnel issues faced by rural community colleges, and offers potential rural college leaders and faculty knowledge about how to prepare for their roles at these institutions. As well, university educators and researchers with an interest in community colleges will benefit from this important addition to the community college research base.

Chapter One, by David Hardy and Stephen Katsinas, provides a context for the issues rural community colleges face by describing how these institutions differ from their urban and suburban counterparts, as well as how small, medium, and large rural colleges differ from each other. Chapter Two describes what Charles Fluharty and Bill Scaggs term the “rural differential”—the chronic underfunding of rural community colleges in comparison to those in urban and suburban areas—and discusses the corresponding challenges this gap causes in maintaining campus operations, generating philanthropic donations, and fulfilling the rural college mission.

Chapter Three, by Michael Miller and Daniel Kissinger, explores how rural community colleges work with their surrounding communities. Rural community colleges play a different role in regional economic development than urban institutions, which have more partners available to help in renewal efforts. In rural communities, the two-year college is often the largest employer and the entity to which others turn for help in developing the

economy. In recent years, many rural areas have experienced declining populations as the traditional agricultural base continues to shift to fewer, larger farms and people move to urban areas or retire to sunnier climes. As well, recent economic downturns have increased pressure on rural two-year colleges to aid in economic development, often resulting in an increasingly important role for these colleges in their local communities. Chapter Three discusses these challenges and describes how rural community colleges can contribute to their communities' sense of identity formation and engagement through continuing education programs and other noncredit activities.

The next two chapters focus on issues related to rural community college leadership. Research shows that community college presidents lead a campus for an average of five years (Corrigan, 2002) and that we are anticipating a shortage of leaders to replace the 70 percent of presidents who plan to retire within the next ten years (Shults, 2001). With a national demand for community college presidential replacements, how will rural colleges attract and compete for new leaders? Fewer cultural events, lower pay, and isolated locations all create challenges and impediments for attracting and retaining rural college leaders. Chapter Four, written by Jay Leist, describes these issues and details how rural community colleges can create accurate and informative presidential job advertisements that will enable a better fit between presidential candidates and rural colleges. Chapter Five, written by Molly Clark and Ed Davis, takes another tack, describing how rural colleges can establish partnerships with universities to create programming that will help locally develop and enhance the leadership needed in rural locales. Specifically, Chapter Five describes the MidSouth Community College Fellowship Program and best practices in leadership development.

Chapters Six and Seven then turn to issues related to rural community college faculty. In Chapter Six John Murray describes challenges specific to teaching in rural locations and discusses how rural colleges can better recruit and retain faculty members. Chapter Seven, written by Pamela Eddy, addresses the fact that faculty in rural community colleges, although few in number, are still responsible for keeping up to date on teaching pedagogies, particularly in how technology affects student learning. Therefore, access to professional development and resources to support professors as they stay current in the field are critical. Chapter Seven discusses these issues, and highlights the challenges many rural community colleges face in providing effective faculty development programs.

Chapters Eight and Nine discuss issues of critical importance to many rural community colleges: on-campus student housing and distance education. At rural community colleges, students must often commute longer distances than their urban counterparts do. Therefore, although living facilities are not always associated with community colleges, many rural institutions provide on-campus housing for students. Chapter Eight, by Pat Moeck, David Hardy, and Stephen Katsinas, provides data on student housing at rural community college campuses and discusses the implications for rural

colleges and their students. Chapter Nine, by Brent Cejda, reviews the importance of distance learning for rural community colleges and discusses some of the challenges these institutions face in providing online and other forms of distance education.

Chapter Ten, written by Pamela Eddy and John Murray, synthesizes lessons learned from Chapters One through Nine and describes strategies that rural community colleges can take to address the issues and challenges presented in this volume. The chapter also provides a list of sources to which practitioners and scholars can turn for more information on teaching, learning, and leading in the heartland. Taken together, the chapters in this volume provide community college leaders, faculty, staff, and scholars with a better understanding of the unique challenges and issues that rural community colleges face. Each chapter includes campus-based examples, offers best practices, or covers implications for practice and policy in a rural environment. Urban and suburban college leaders can transfer the information and best practices presented here to their institutions by applying them to an urban or suburban context.

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