

EDITORS' NOTES

The 2000 edition of the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education lists nearly 1,700 public and private accredited, degree-granting institutions in its "Associate's Colleges" category (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2001). (The list would be considerably longer if the degree-granting requirement were relaxed.) Unlike other major groupings, this very large and diverse group of institutions is not broken down into subcategories, nor has it ever been since the Carnegie Classification's initial publication in 1973. The Carnegie Classification was developed as a way to gain analytic purchase on the great diversity of U.S. institutions of higher education by creating categories of roughly comparable institutions. While its promise has largely been realized with respect to four-year institutions, as attested to by its wide adoption and endurance over three decades, the same cannot be said for the two-year sector. This volume is intended as a step toward addressing that need.

In the following pages, five different classification schemes are advanced and applied to a random sample of institutions for purposes of illustration and comparison. In addition, four contributors offer constructive criticism from three different perspectives: as representatives of a national association, as a seasoned community college educator and leader, and as a university-based researcher of two-year colleges. Although some of these schemes have been proposed previously, this is the first time that several distinct schemes have been presented together, applied to a common sample, and systematically critiqued from multiple perspectives.

We do not intend this to be the final word on classifying two-year colleges. Rather, we hope that it will serve to stimulate further discussion, critique, development, and refinement of approaches to the classification of this vital and diverse group of institutions. Indeed, we are encouraged by related work by other authors not represented in this volume, including dissertations by Milam (1995) and Johnson (1999), as well as a recent article on peer group identification by Hurley (2002).

In Chapter One, we elaborate the argument that classifying two-year colleges will contribute to the advancement of knowledge about these institutions while noting some of the unintended consequences that the Carnegie Classification has had among four-year institutions. This chapter also includes a brief conceptual discussion of classification approaches, and it makes the important distinction between classification and ranking. The last part of the chapter discusses some of the particular challenges in classifying two-year colleges.

Chapters Two through Six present the five different classification proposals. These examples testify to the difficulties involved in balancing the various purposes for which different audiences might employ a classification system. Thus the proposals are driven by distinct conceptions of how to define and differentiate two-year colleges. Despite these differences, four of the five approaches explicitly incorporate college size as one (and sometimes the only) classification criterion. The five chapters also differ in their definition of the universe of eligible institutions: two of the five include both public and private two-year colleges, while three confine their analyses to public colleges (in one case this restriction is due only to limitations in the available data). Four of the five proposed classification schemes are limited to degree-granting colleges; the fifth uses a broader definition that incorporates institutions that award only certificates. Finally, three of the schemes begin with prior conceptualization of the important differentiating factors and then move on to specific proposals, while two others take a more empirical approach, deriving their categories from patterns of similarity and difference revealed in the data.

Extending and elaborating his prior efforts to develop a classification for community colleges, Stephen Katsinas (Chapter Two) proposes categories that are fundamentally structural, taking several dimensions into consideration: control, characteristics of the surrounding community, size, specialization or distinctiveness of purpose, and administrative organization. He notes the importance of these factors in determining key differences in institutional function and operation. This approach seems particularly useful for policymakers at the state or national levels.

Gwyer Schuyler and Arthur Cohen both view differences in colleges' instructional missions as the fundamental organizing principle for a classification scheme. Drawing on a study of college curricula, Schuyler (Chapter Three) categorizes college missions by calculating the proportion of liberal arts courses (those offering traditional academic training and transfer to four-year institutions). Cohen (Chapter Four) likewise notes the significance of course offerings. Given the absence of national data, however, he advocates the use of total enrollment as a proxy for those patterns.

In Chapter Five, Jamie Merisotis and Jessica Shedd adapt their classification work conducted under the auspices of the National Center for Education Statistics. Their approach uses empirical methods to find natural groupings of public and private two-year colleges.

While the role of student demand in shaping colleges is implicit in the work of Schuyler, Cohen, and Merisotis, Susan Shaman and Robert Zemsky (Chapter Six) apply an explicitly market-based framework in their empirically derived classification model. Using a multivariate analysis of price differences among community colleges, they extend their previous analyses of market segmentation among four-year colleges and universities to two-year colleges. This analysis leads them to find a fundamental (and somewhat

surprising) consistency between the four-year market and the two-year one. Their results are then used to assign colleges to three distinct segments within the two-year market.

In the interest of enhancing the usefulness of this volume and stimulating further development and refinement of classification approaches, Chapters Seven through Nine offer reactions to the proposed classification approaches from several perspectives, each one representing potential classification users.

The contributors were asked to consider the following questions in assessing the various models:

Would the various schemes be useful to you in your work? How might they be improved?

Are there other important dimensions of variation that have not been addressed?

What unintended consequences might result from the adoption and proliferation of one or more of these classification schemes?

Applying their experience with the diverse constituency of the American Association of Community Colleges, Kent Phillippe and George Boggs (Chapter Seven) offer valuable feedback from a national policy perspective and set out important cautions about how classification might be misinterpreted and misused. Drawing on his extensive background as a community college educator and leader, Alfredo de los Santos (Chapter Eight) offers valuable insights into how the various models might be viewed from the campus or system perspective, with some cautions about temptations to make comparisons. Finally, Thomas Bailey (Chapter Nine) represents the research community, the constituency for whom the original Carnegie Classification was developed. His comments call attention to the need for more useful and comprehensive data describing the work of two-year colleges, and he illustrates the kind of data that, if available, would advance the cause of classification and thus the study of these institutions.

Chapter Ten reviews the practical application of the five proposed classification schemes, presenting the results of using each proposal to categorize an illustrative sample of two-year colleges. The chapter incorporates the results in the form of six exhibits. The first exhibit lists the colleges alphabetically, showing how each is classified according to the five schemes. The remaining exhibits show how each classification scheme groups these colleges, enabling readers to assess and compare the five proposals.

These classification schemes differ in their conceptualizations of both the meaningful distinctions among two-year colleges and the appropriate methodologies for bringing these differences into relief. While it is easy to criticize each scheme for what is overlooked or not included, an appreciation of the diversity of approaches and emphases calls attention to the need

to match a chosen classification scheme to an analytic purpose. Each of these might be elaborated or improved on or may inspire still more novel approaches to defining and specifying important dimensions of variation among two-year colleges.

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