



The Urgency of Now: Equity and Excellence

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Book Review

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All of higher education, with community colleges leading the way, must sense and respond to the need to evolve to serve a new and increasingly diverse student body. We live in an era where students will increasingly require myriad new approaches to higher education in order for every student to realize their potential (8). That is the central thesis of *The Urgency of Now: Equity and Excellence*, one volume in a series sponsored by the Association of Community College Trustees.

Chapter one sets forth key arguments in favor of the need to transform community colleges in response to changing student demographics. Chapter two is concerned with the shifting role of accreditation in higher education. In chapter three, the authors address the current system's reliance upon the credit hour as a time-based model for allocating academic course credit and implore administrators to transition to competency-based models. Chapter four offers a comprehensive blueprint for creating an innovative community college-wide outcomes assessment system. Finally, chapter five targets the critical need for administrators to engage faculty in new and meaningful ways in order to successfully implement positive change that will result in improving instructor teaching and student learning.

Today there are increasing demands from public and private sector stakeholders for greater accountability and transparency by colleges and universities (19-20). Thus, "to insure equity in the form of economic opportunity for current and future generations" and to "provide demonstrable learning outcomes that position students for success," there is an urgent need for new models. At the heart of this call for transformation is the notion that higher education must become a student-centered system rather than defaulting to the traditional faculty-

centered model. Community colleges must be at the epicenter of determining what the essential ingredients of such a system should be (113).

The Urgency of Now argues that higher education must not simply react to changing demographics in America but it must embrace this phenomenon. The priority for the twenty-first century community college must be student needs and student learning (113). This will require that faculty abandon the function of serving primarily as “fountains of knowledge” and instead embrace a new role as “curators of content” and “tour guides of information” (115).

Understanding context is critical. America currently finds itself in the midst of the 2016 United States presidential election cycle. College affordability, rising student debt, and declining funding for public colleges and universities are issues now under debate by candidates for the nations' highest political office. The election comes at a time when the gulf that exists between those students and families who lack the economic resources needed to pay college tuition versus those who can readily afford the cost of higher education continues to rise.

The Urgency of Now adds to the political discussion by identifying some of the efforts championed by U.S. president Barack Obama to increase community college enrollment and strengthen public-private partnerships that will improve employment opportunities for those who complete a certificate or degree program (5-6). One must acknowledge that, in the face of opposition from his political adversaries, Barack Obama has advanced the goal of achieving equal access to college for all Americans regardless of race, ethnicity, or socio-economic status. Readers will find that this book offers a timely contribution to public discourse on these topics of concern to many among the American electorate.

An average book informs but an outstanding book sparks self-reflection and may even compel the reader to act in new and bold ways. *The Urgency of Now: Equity and Excellence* is an outstanding read that is recommended for anyone concerned with the plight of higher education. This book presents reasoned arguments which support the goal of reforming community colleges chiefly as a matter of sound public policy and implicitly to further the Judeo-Christian imperative which calls for social justice.

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