



Defending the Community College Equity Agenda

Thomas Bailey, Vanessa Smith Morest

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Community colleges enroll almost half of all undergraduates in the United States. These two-year colleges manifest the American commitment to accessible and affordable higher education. With about 1,200 institutions nationwide, community colleges have made significant progress over the past decade in opening access and have become the critical entry point to higher education for many Americans who traditionally have been left out of educational and economic opportunity. Yet economic, political, and social developments have increased the challenges community colleges face in pursuing an "equity agenda." Some of these include falling state budgets combined with growing enrollments, a greater emphasis on outcome-based accountability, competition from for-profit institutions, and growing immigrant student populations.

These trials come at a time when community colleges confront crucial economic and workforce development pressures that may impact their mission. How can community colleges continue to maintain their open-door policies, support underprepared students, and struggle to help enrolled students complete degrees and certificates that prepare them for success in the workplace?

Building on case studies of colleges in six states—New York, Texas, Florida, California, Washington, and Illinois—this volume offers a fresh examination of the issues currently facing American community colleges. Drawing on their fieldwork supplemented by national data, the authors analyze how these challenges impact the community college mission of educational opportunity—especially for low-income students, students of color, and other underserved groups—and how colleges are responding to a drastically different environment. They then propose a set of strategies to strengthen the role of community colleges in providing both access and opportunities for achievement for all students.

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