The Politics Behind The Policies: Federal/State Intersection

Sustaining Vibrant Community Colleges In This Environment

Bridges To Opportunity Initiative

Winter Meeting

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COMMUNITY COLLEGES IN TODAY’S POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT -- The Public Policy Heroes

- From the Federal Political Perspective:
  - CCs cheap to students – and cost is a popular political issue
  - CCs are the *Champions of Access*, and Access is the federal reason for being in this picture
COMMUNITY COLLEGES IN TODAY’S POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT -- The Public Policy Heroes

- From the State Political Perspective:
  - CCs cheap to the State – and cost-effectiveness is highly valued
  - CCs provide an Access Relief Value
    - For Politicians
    - For the Rest of Higher Education
The Rub: (from the inside looking out)

- CHEAP doesn’t necessarily mean EFFECTIVE
- And, we know that better than politicians do
  - Tough to serve the most difficult to serve with inadequate funding
- As a result
  - Remediation is not working as well as it should
  - Collegiate instruction is not working as well as it should
  - Career and Technical instruction is not working as well as it should
And, we know why we’re having trouble turning access into success -- IT’S SIMPLE ECONOMICS

- Supply (ergo quality) are eroding because demand exceeds supply.
- And marginal costs of providing quality service exceed marginal revenue from tuition along.

Our Political Dilemma – We can’t admit this
The Community College Political Dilemma – We can’t admit this

- You’re heroes for being cheap
  - Heroes to the Feds
  - Heroes to the States

- The Culture of Community Colleges is to remain cheap

- There are obvious downsides for admitting performance gaps – perceived as failure
And, it’s tough for leaders to say the system isn’t *THRIVING* under their watch.

- Easy to say you will suffer,
- Tough to say you are suffering
- But that makes for a rather unconvincing argument to politicians who are solving current crises – not impending crises
The Danger Facing Community Colleges in “The Politics Behind The Policy”

- Transparency & Accountability are the name of the policy game these days.
  - It’s all about metrics and evidence
  - Faith is giving way to Proof
- And, the evidence will tell what we know; not what politicians have traditionally believed
  - Through-put is wanting
  - New program development is waning
  - Gaps in performance for disadvantaged groups are significant
The Danger Facing Community Colleges in “The Politics Behind The Policy”

- In a zero/sum policy finance environment friends aren’t always friends
  - Within higher education
  - Within the political environment --
- Even A legitimate portrayal can be damning (witness California)
The Danger Facing Community Colleges in “The Politics Behind The Policy”

- And the traditional CC response is often unconvincing.
  - Condemning the evidence, without providing better evidence.
  - Dividing the higher education community
  - Imprudent,
    - Given where political power actual rests (the politics behind the policies)
    - Given that CCs Chief Advocates are not the most politically powerful & politics can be fickle
A Near Conundrum for Community Colleges

The Only Logical Response

Speak Truth To Power