The Lay of the Land from A Mile High

Being The “Darling”!!
The Community College Conundrum
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
  - Proof (2006-2007 tuition):
    - Community Colleges: $2,272
    - Public Four Year: $5,836
    - Delta: $3,564 ***

- 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
    - FTE Appropriation/FTE (FY 2003)
      - Community Colleges: $6,725
      - BA/Masters Universities: $9,178
      - Research Universities: $14,289
  - CCs provide an *Access Relief Value*
    - For Politicians
    - For the Rest of Higher Education
  - And CCs aren’t arrogant
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
The Rub:
(from the inside looking out

- And, we know why we’re having trouble turning access into success
The Rub:
(from the inside looking out

- And, we know why we’re having trouble turning access into success -- IT’S SIMPLE ECONOMICS
  - Supply (ergo quality) is eroding because demand exceeds supply.
  - And marginal costs of providing quality service exceed marginal revenue from tuition alone.
  - Creative solutions abound – but on the margin.
- 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—Witness
    - VSA – 4yr colleges
    - Transparency By Design – online providers
    - CCs -- nada
- Why? Because 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
One Metric – Degree Productivity

Appropriations FTE

- Community Colleges: $6,725
- Public BA/Masters: $9,178
- Public Research Univ: $14,289
## One Metric – Degree Productivity

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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

But Be Sure To Speak The Truth

Hype has a very short half-life in an information society