



Tony Zeiss (far left) comments on information received at the AACC Summit on Workforce Development. Listening to Zeiss (from left) are: Mary Ellen Duncan, CEO Howard Community College; Norman Fortenberry, National Science Foundation; David Buettner, CEO, North Iowa Area Community College; Paul A. Elsner, Chancellor Emeritus, Maricopa Community Colleges; Scott Ralls, N.C. Community College System; Jane Hilley, Jobs for the Future.

Al Lorenzo, CEO of Macomb Community College, (head of table) addresses participants at the AACC workforce summit.



# CONVENING OUR PARTNERS:

—PAUL A. ELSNER

## AACC Summit on Workforce Development

**I**N MARCH, THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY Colleges hosted two first-of-their-kind meetings to address issues crucial to its institutions: workforce development and leadership.

The first of these meetings, held March 15, was the AACC Summit on Workforce Development. The workforce Summit, created by AACC President and CEO George R. Boggs, began development of a national community college workforce strategy. The goals of the strategy are: to help community colleges assess changing forces in human resource development and articulate and promote a national perspective on workforce development; assess ongoing, fundamental changes in the workforce preparation environment and determine more aggressive strategies for community colleges to be involved at the national level; evaluate structures for delivering workforce training; determine what should be retained and what should be jettisoned; and identify ways to raise the visibility of community colleges as the nation's primary public training provider, and develop strategies for implementation.

The second meeting, held March 16, was the AACC Community College Leadership Summit. The leadership Summit's main goal is to ensure the stability and quality of future community college leaders. Drawing on the Vision of AACC's Future statement, the Association pledged to develop "leadership capability at all levels to ensure that community colleges are served by people who understand and share a deep commitment to the community college mission."

Two of the Summits' participants, Paul A. Elsner and Kay M. McClenney give their analysis of the major themes and ideas proffered at the two meetings.

*Editor*

“Community colleges are the only American learning institutions that effectively link general education to the dynamic of skill changes in the workplace.”

Anthony P. Carnevale and  
Donna M. Desrochers

George Boggs, President and Chief Executive Officer of the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), stepped into his crucial role as convener of the AACC Summit on Workforce Development on March 15, 2001.

Approximately 30 participants gathered at AACC headquarters to participate in this major roundtable. In addition to several community college CEOs, (whose local colleges represent aggressive and successful records in workforce preparation) policy leaders ranging from such diverse perspectives as youth, labor, economic development, business and training alliances participated and led the discussions.

Other interested parties including representatives from industries, such as Intel, and the National Governors Association (NGA) offered their views on this central issue: What is the role of community colleges in workforce development?

### Translating the Role

The session opened with Boggs shaping a framework and background for the day's discussion. The community college role in workforce development is well established, according to Boggs, but “we cannot assume that our role is taken for granted or well known among the broader communities of interest.” Although community college associate of arts (AA) degrees are the fastest growing degree granted (31 percent from 1998 to 2000), it is not generally known that the number of AA degrees surpass even bachelor's degrees in rate of growth.

“We are placing students well in a number of areas,” cites Boggs. For example, some dental hygienists can enter the marketplace at \$42,000 a year; network specialists can enter at the same range, but demand levels need to be better met. Challenges abound. One occupational area—information technology (IT) workers—account for 843,328 shortages. “This shortage represents less than half of the demand, an unacceptable trend for community colleges and higher education,” added Boggs.

Panel participants stressed that community college graduates can better themselves in the job market by integrating job training with more math and science compo-

nents. When such integration occurs, higher wages result. As much as 10 percent to 20 percent more in salary can occur when graduates demonstrate technical specialties to prospective employees.

The shorthand version of the above is that the associate of applied sciences (AAS) degree completers earn more than the AA degree completers. Moreover, Boggs pointed out that AAS completers do nearly as well as do BA completers.

Both Roberts T. Jones, president of the National Alliance for Business (NAB), and Boggs emphasized that community colleges are at an important crossroads of the public policy debate. Workforce preparation is a national preoccupation. Business and industry are now foregoing real business opportunities because they cannot deploy sufficient and ready-to-execute workforces. “This is an intolerable situation for business, but business will find its own remedies wherever, however, and any way they can find them,” according to Jones.

Boggs had pointed out in his opening presentation that only 33 percent of businesses rated community colleges as effective for training information technology workers. Later in the discussion, an industry representative from one of the largest semiconductor manufacturers said that his firm uses community colleges in his area, but are just as likely to use well-established technical proprietary schools because of their readiness to train and because of their established track record for producing skilled workers.

Jones, in an expansive presentation, translated a different role of the community colleges for the workforce development debate. Jones emphasized that we should worry less about roles, and more about the larger community's collective interest.

### The National Debate

It is possible to become “defined out of the debate,” according to Jones. He added that the workforce readiness issue is so important that a national collective interest will eclipse the tried and established groups and players.

The business community is moving away from “workforce systems” that have historically meant groups, independent systems, and institutions. “It's not about completers as much as competencies.” Less concern is expressed about where these competencies are achieved. It is outcomes, not institutions.

Jones stressed that at no time in our history have the debates on workforce issues

opened better possibilities for community colleges. “You enter these debates with established credibility, flexibility, responsiveness, and being there when called upon, but you must capture the opportunity to redraw, recast, and redesign an old system.”

“The system we know is not the system to meet the new demands,” Jones said. The debate setting calls for new financial models, creative partnerships, much greater response and flexibility than has been shown.

“Moreover,” Jones continued, “we must assume a global context for all that we design and propose to execute.” A multi-partite design by business, government, and education is the mandate. The educational community can disaggregate to many other providers such as training alliances, charter schools, proprietary institutions, community colleges and corporate universities to seek solutions. “It is not necessarily about traditional groups,” said Jones. “It is about who can forge a solution for manpower development in the national interest.”

Jones cited many positive opportunities for community colleges not the least of which is the ever-growing area of e-learning. Community colleges find themselves in a vortex that includes, but is not limited to, the following forces:

1. Increased demand for skilled workers
2. Group shortages of skilled workers
3. Decreasing job tenure
4. Jobs requiring more education
5. Increased productivity based on skills
6. Increased higher education attainment
7. Increased enrollments in postsecondary education
8. Increased educational level of the workforce
9. Increased enrollment in community colleges
10. Increased diversity of the potential/future workers
11. Anywhere and anytime learning
12. Competencies versus completions
13. Increased public or government attention to workforce issues

While the opportunities are evident, the challenges for community colleges remain daunting, but doable. Tony Carnevale and Donna Desrochers state these challenges well:

Community colleges have a dual challenge in responding to the new economy. First, they will need to play their part in educating and training the workforce necessary for other employers to meet new competitive standards for cost efficiency quality, variety, cus-

tomization, convenience, and speed. Secondly, community colleges will need to meet the new competitive requirements for quality, variety, customization, convenience, and speed at mass-production prices that began in American manufacturing that have now spread to private service industries and beyond. Ultimately, they are the standards every institution must meet (p. 31).

**B**oggs had earlier contrasted an existing framework with a new and an expanded one. He gave examples of the structure growing out of current national legislative initiatives, such as the Perkins provisions, the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), and Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF). Each of these actions affect state structure for workforce development response and the state role in interpreting and promulgating rules and regulations for federal legislation. In addition, Boggs stressed varying state responses to the workforce development agenda. Data presented showed that 19 states incorporated workforce development as a part of state appropriation; 32 reached to access other state funds; 31 states used non-state sources such as local economic development or direct contracts for industry training; and three states had no specific funds available, whatsoever.

Boggs set forth his list of challenges. The list included valid, real challenges in the field:

- The graying of community college leadership and faculty
- Growing, ever-present competition
- Curriculum repackaging
- 24/7 learning
- Decreasing life cycle of training equipment
- Growth of adult learners

These challenges provide new opportunities, but the paths to solution are still being designed and rewritten as we speak. In credentialing for the “New Economy,” we combine vendor-provided credentials, vendor-driven curricula, and rapid-fire change and reconstruction of content. Are we ready for such demand with now over 300 discrete certifications? There were over 2.4 million IT certifications awarded to 1.6 million individuals by early 2000, according to Boggs and many of the training providers now reside outside of traditional

higher education. One participant responded that “it's a jungle out there,” but that this is the world we must come to know and operate within.

Jones' messages became even more sobering as he emphasized that the workforce debate centers on the kind of system that will deliver the best results; it is not how good, bad, or indifferent community colleges are. “It is,” according to Jones, “how community colleges enter the debate, how they shape the design of a reconstructed system, how community colleges become the leaders and more often the conveners of this debate and the principal catalyst for a national solution.”

Jones offered what the debate is *not* about:

- It is not about completions; it is about competencies.
- It is not about traditional credentials; it is about credentials employers want to recognize.
- It is not about institutional alignment; it is about outcomes and outputs.

Jones underscored that government, higher education and schools must come together. They must collectively realize that market responses are driving the debate. There are no solo flights; it's about partnerships.

Tony Zeiss, President of Central Piedmont Community College in Charlotte, N.C., reinforced the collective nature of solving the national problem of workforce development. “We don't do much alone. Our economic development partners are part of the larger engine that propels us into training for prospected business relocations in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg area, and the dislocated workers who can be picked up by new sources of employment, including new and reconstituted business...it's all part of the larger development milieu. We have to be a part of it and that means being in the middle of it.”

Jones would argue that if community colleges are in the “middle of it,” then community colleges are in a position to reshape the beast. Community colleges can lead with credibility because their track record has shown more responsiveness and flexibility. Thus, community colleges find themselves in an interesting position in relation to key conditions:

- Demand outstrips availability of workers.
- AA degrees are most in demand.
- 80 percent of youth and adults are virtually walking into higher education systems.
- Financial well-being and wage advantage accompanies more higher education.

During this favorable condition, Jones challenged community colleges to take advantage of positive winds. It means moving beyond higher education legislation. It means establishing our visible leadership position on national or regional workforce issues. He urged that community colleges become experts on the market forces, on workforce trends, on changing skill sets, and on the crucial policy issues.

Community colleges were urged to form tri-partite coalitions of business, government and community colleges. In so doing, they must recognize that government is isolated. Government must be drawn out to the field of our operation so that they come to know us firsthand. "Government has to get out of its offices," Jones emphasized.

When Boggs opened the discussion to wider participant contribution, many observers from the policy community urged community colleges to deconstruct the noise system by leading the workforce debates. Currently, industry appears to be forging the debate. The same question arose several times: "Are community colleges leading the debate? If not, why not?"

### Confronting Capacities and Gaps

While industry may be leading the debate, the economic development community urged focus on the hot spots, such as Seattle; Palo Alto and Cupertino, Calif.; Austin, Texas, and other "edge" regions to get readings on the new economy and the new workforce expectations.

This suggestion was segue for Jean Floten, a practicing CEO with a track record for accommodating workforce demands in such high-charged communities, to lead the discussion. As the president of Bellevue Community College in Bellevue, Wash., she sits at the epicenter of the Microsoft empire. Like all dynamic technology centered regions, the area is a constellation of supporting business and supplier communities that have to be served as much as the Microsoft giant.

To provide full workforce service, one has to examine the total synergy of suppliers, providers, and cutting edge production companies. Bellevue represents such a synergy.

Floten introduced herself and her college as part of the "other Washington," a counterpoint region of unfolding challenges for workforce providers. She raised a seminal question: "Do we have the political will to fulfill the mandates?" Participants discussed community college credibility to summon key policy shapers and opinion leaders.

Generally, the group conceded that we have to shake off our reticence and build our confidence and capacity to be a convener, a catalyst, if you will, to summon the community on such important issues as workforce development.

Floten also suggested that we frame our discussion around the gaps that we must acknowledge and subsequently fill, and to be an activist player in the workforce solution. "We might start with the gap in providing relevant credentials for the new economy." She suggested that there were gaps in our pedagogy and gaps in our reliance on theory. Even so, we possibly spend too little time on learning theory. Discussion followed from Floten's lead on whether we have gaps in leadership preparation.

Jesus Carreon, superintendent/resident, Rio Hondo College in Whittier, Calif., asked whether we really have wide-ranging competencies to forge a workforce agenda in our colleges, much less in our communities. He cited his visitations to companies, employers, and community-based organizations. "I was shocked to learn that many of them had never been called upon."

Other CEOs responded to Floten's admonition about leadership gaps: One participant said that CEOs are better prepared to work the internal mechanisms and climate than the external challenges required for a sound workforce development strategy. Another participant claimed that survival usually meant "internal" survival. The leadership mental model must include the external world as well. Zeiss insisted that it was not only the CEO, but also the whole complement of the college program and leadership cadre. "If our folks do not have their tentacles out into the community, no matter what the CEO thinks or does, no follow-up or execution can occur." Workforce clients know if we are positioned or not by the demeanor and preparation of our own people.

Floten's facilitation brought out discussion about the value of setting out industry clusters such as the manufacturing process cluster, the health service and provider cluster, the financial service cluster, and others.

Conceptualizing these subsets of training and education permitted higher degrees of focus, targeted response, and flexibility. Emphasis should be placed on "soft skills" as well: human relationships, group participation, and attitude formation come into greater play than industry sometimes acknowledges. Community college specialists from the behavioral and social sciences

know a great deal about such components of training; they should be included in workforce development strategies.

Discussion also developed around what skills industries really want. Jones advised that we take many readings from industry. It is not unusual to get conflicting advice. "Therefore, take several readings and sift out the common elements," Jones offered. "More importantly, talk to the foreman, the training director, the chief learning officers, and the CEOs, and take multiple readings if you can."

The discussion often settled back to economic development. CEOs, as Carreon had pointed out, need the bigger picture. Economic development allows a window on the engine of job creation, of company prospecting, and of creating community wealth.

One question raised, but not answered, was whether economic development is a subset of workforce development or vice versa. It might not matter if we understand that they are intertwined, offered another participant.

When Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) were mentioned as an information source, it was quickly pointed out that groups like the Urban League, OICs, and skill centers have long histories of workforce building. CBOs should be more often brought into the arena of policy determination, the group conceded. "Many are outside of the design and conceptualizing of workforce strategy," added a participant.

### Translating Missions

In moving toward a wrap-up of the day's summit, Al Lorenzo, a long standing and successful CEO of Macomb Community College in Warren, Mich., offered that one of community colleges' major burdens or "curse," as he put it, is their multiplicity of missions. When asked to describe the university mission, it was easy to see that getting people to achieve a bachelor's degree was one of the central motivations. To a school superintendent, it was likely to get a youngster to complete high school.

When we speak to community colleges, it gets more complex as well as confusing. "Community colleges are more difficult to translate to the public," adds Lorenzo, "but an explanation confuses more than it clears up the public perception about us. Ask what the other segments want to achieve, you get sort of a short answer. Ask a community college leader and you get an essay—so it seems."

Lorenzo used the analogy of a boat at sea to explain community college challenges to

respond to a rapidly developing new economy.

"First, we must attend to the design of our craft to determine if it is shaped and fitted for swift currents and tumultuous waters." Lorenzo extended the metaphor to the skills of the boat's team, without which design alone cannot carry the day at sea.

Finally, President Lorenzo said that the environment or the condition of the sea, e.g., turbulent waters or calm seas could affect the success of our ventures. Lorenzo's metaphor led others to say that unsuitable craft and design has encouraged us to create secondary, more marginalized delivery services, a step beyond the college core because the core functions are not "design-viable." Faster response mechanisms have been designed: economic development departments or specifically targeted centers for corporate and industry training services. While such marginalized services have been effective, they are sometimes referred to as "shadow colleges." They do not shape or develop the capacities of the core faculty.

### Conclusion

As the Summit closed, George Boggs framed the salient points raised during the discussion and added these considerations:

- Since community colleges must still translate themselves to the policy community and to our large array of users, more consistent information about community colleges needs to be developed. This agenda calls for a more unified research agenda.

- AACC should explore creating a National Business Forum. Such a Forum would build stronger connection and mutual understanding with the business community.

- State government and community college leaders need help in learning approaches to workforce development. "Best practice" exchanges could help leaders cope with the fast changing workforce environment.

- We should collect current data and inventory models that highlight what we do and what we know about workforce strategy.

- Community colleges must begin to assume our role as a convener of central shareholders wishing to participate in solving national, state, and local workforce issues.

- Community colleges should be marketed as a major part of the economic development engine.

- Community colleges should solicit help from the more knowledgeable market and



public information community on translating our role as principal players in workforce development.

- AACC and local community colleges should create tri-partite arrangements with business, government, and education and leverage the best financial models for workforce development.

- Finally, community colleges must more strongly assert their role in workforce development.

Boggs challenged the summit participants to forward their ideas and suggestions. He emphasized the importance of existing resources such as the AACC Workforce Development Commission and projects like the Knowledge Net effort to help with state and local initiatives. The joint "white paper" produced by the National Council of Occupational Education and the National Council of Continuing Education and Training was cited as an additional resource. These foundational resources can aid in building a new vision of workforce development.

Finally, Boggs pledged to get our workforce message out. "We will publish these deliberations to the broader membership and public review." The group was thanked for their candor, their contributions, and their pledge to continuing support.

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