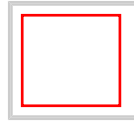


President's Monthly Message (archived)

- updated **December 21, 2006**



Learn more about the
< CCA President, Carolyn
Inmon, [here](#).

Notes from a "belly-button gazer"

Recently, the Orange County Register published a column criticizing community colleges for not producing more degrees and transfers. The piece said that the “belly-button gazers” would probably respond.

No time for belly-button gazing:

As president of the Community College Association, the union that represents thousands of instructors in California’s community colleges, and as former director of the Honors Program at Mt. San Antonio College, I suppose I’m one of the “belly-button gazers” that the Orange County Register referred to in its opinion piece “*Community Colleges not making the grade*” on Monday Dec. 4. To which I say, I only wish we had time to gaze at our belly buttons.

A complex mission:

Instead, I know that faculty in our 110 community colleges throughout the state are working hard in their classrooms to prepare some 2.5 million students for the state’s workforce. That includes providing them with basic skills, vocational education, professional training, as well as academics they need to transfer to four-year universities. In addition, we are also there for California residents who may want to try something different in their lives either for professional gain or personal enrichment.

And you know what? I don’t think there’s anything wrong with that.

Tell that to our diverse population:

The Orange County Register suggested that community colleges should narrow their mission and focus on transferring students to four-year colleges.

- **Tell that to people who work as our “first-responders”** – the police officer, fire fighter, paramedic and nurses who became certified for their jobs at their community college. I’d hardly call these workers failures because they didn’t transfer to a university.
- **Tell that to the new Americans** --- the students learning English so they can participate more fully in the society of their dreams. I’d hardly call these new Americans failures because they didn’t transfer to a university.
- **Tell that to the students** who have not experienced formal education and who come to the community college to “try it out” and are surprised when they see they have the aptitude to go on and learn a trade or even advance their education. . I’d hardly call these students failures because they didn’t transfer to a university.
- **Tell that to the seniors** in our communities who keep their brains engaged and their

bodies active. I'd hardly call these seniors failures because they didn't transfer to a university. Many of them already did that.

PPI study makes some good points:

The study by the Public Policy Institute of California raises some valid points. As an instructor who personally oversaw a program that provides support for students to move on to our state colleges and universities, I am all too aware of the need to increase the numbers of community college students who go on to earn their bachelor's degrees – and beyond. In fact, I'd say it is vital that we continue to focus our efforts in that direction.

So many challenges:

- **Under funded:** Despite recent increases in community college funding California community colleges remain at the bottom of the barrel in terms of funding when compared to colleges nationwide – and reaching many of these students takes resources.
- **Support services:** Support services and counseling continue to be underfunded and understaffed. Currently, the counselor-student ratio in our community colleges is 1:1,200 – certainly not anything to boast about. The number of counselors available can hardly meet the demand of students who arrive through out “open doors” ill prepared.
- **Staffing Crisis:** In addition, the continuing trend in which colleges are replacing full-time faculty with part-time instructors also has a dramatic increase on student progress. While our part-time instructors are dedicated, intelligent faculty members, they are often traveling from one campus to another to make ends meet, and are not given office hours when they can meet with their students to help them chart their course.

One doesn't have to look further than to a study by Dan Jacoby, the Harry Bridges Professor of Labor Studies at the University of Washington, which found that colleges with more full-time faculty members have higher completion rates.

The Power to define:

The Orange County Register is not the only attacker. There are many out there who don't understand the complexity of our system or the unique needs of our students. They cannot be given the power to define our mission. That is our responsibility. We must be vigilant to protect it as others try to redefine us. We cannot allow the Wal-Mart mentality and/or the elitist mentality to take away the California dream – an inexpensive college education for all. As an ex-debater and an ex-debate coach, I understand that the power of definition will win the debate and that is where we are in California community colleges. We must continue to have the power to define what we are about.

We welcome the PPIC report that brings the issue of transfer to the attention of the public. We absolutely need to improve the transfer rate of our students to four-year colleges. But suggesting, as The Orange County Register does, that we limit enrollment to those who plan to transfer to a university or college is much too narrow. It ignores the multitude of needs of Californians who look to their local community college for so much more.

Any questions? Call the CCA office at 916/726-4207.

