

## FOREWORD

Community colleges, like their sister colleges and universities, face widely documented challenges for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Meeting those challenges is a societal imperative, as an educated citizenry is essential to the health and growth of the nation. According to Selma Botman, former executive vice chancellor and university provost at the City University of New York (CUNY):

A democratic society is strengthened by those with knowledge, by those who know history and thereby comprehend current events, by those who can understand the uses of probability and trend analysis as it relates to business and economy, and by those who value the arts as a way to compare and contrast human experience throughout the ages.<sup>1</sup>

Particularly at public community colleges, educators have a moral and civic responsibility to provide an educational experience of this kind for *all* students to enable them to confront the demands of this complex age, including information, science, and technology literacy and civic engagement. But the challenges must be met. Over two decades ago, Ernest Boyer summed up eight points of tension at colleges and universities that undermine the educational experience, both for faculty and students: “the transition from school to college, the goals and curriculum of education, the priorities of the faculty, the condition of teaching and learning, the quality of campus life, the governing of the college, assessing the outcome, and the connection between the campus and the world.”<sup>2</sup> The resolution of these tensions, according to Parker J. Palmer,<sup>3</sup> lies in Boyer’s idea of the community that the college or university should model. A college or university should be:

- An educationally purposeful place where learning is the focus
- An open place where civility is affirmed
- A just place where persons are honored and diversity pursued
- A disciplined place where group obligations guide behavior
- A caring place where individuals are supported/service is encouraged
- A celebrative place where traditions are shared

As challenging as it is, the 21<sup>st</sup> century is equally as exciting, a moment in history when the ideas of community and partnered, collaborative learning can thrive. CUNY is at the forefront of efforts to transform the educational experience in a public, urban setting, and for Queensborough Community College (QCC), as for all community colleges in this setting, the moral and civic imperative is even more pressing. At QCC, faculty, administrators, and staff are confronting these issues and, much in the spirit of Boyer’s legacy, are changing the conversation about the educational experience.

## COMMUNITY COLLEGE PEDAGOGY FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

The professoriate of the community colleges are, first and foremost, practitioners of teaching. Although there is some discipline-based research conducted at the community colleges, the principal focus is usually on teaching. To enhance teaching and learning effectiveness, further research needs

---

<sup>1</sup> Prefatory Note to *Reclaiming the Public University: Conversations on General and Liberal Education*, ed. Judith Summerfield and Crystal Benedicks (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), xiv.

<sup>2</sup> *College: The Undergraduate Experience in America*, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 6.

<sup>3</sup> Preface to *Creating Campus Community: In Search of Ernest Boyer’s Legacy* (New York: Jossey-Bass, 2002), xviii.

to be conducted—at the community colleges—about student learning, effective teaching methodologies, factors that most affect retention and graduation rates, and essential components of a general education in community college curricula. There are a few examples of areas that could benefit from systematic inquiry.

CUNY and QCC are particularly well positioned to pioneer this research. Faculty members of the community colleges of CUNY are generally doctorate-holders, as the contractual requirement calls for the Ph.D. for entry into a tenure-track at the assistant professor level. Even without the equivalencies granted by the Board of Trustees, the percentage of faculty members who hold doctorates at CUNY’s community colleges is almost triple the norm at the nation’s community colleges (NCES/IPEDS). Under the necessarily stringent guidance of institutional review boards, the university can conduct empirical research that emanates from the classroom and, using these findings, contribute to the body of knowledge about community college pedagogy.

## **CASE STUDY: QUEENSBOROUGH COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

Over the past decade, CUNY has been grappling with fundamental questions about the undergraduate education experience. As the chancellor of CUNY, Matthew Goldstein, notes about liberal education, though it could just as easily describe any solid undergraduate education experience:

A liberal education is critical to our ability to make connections across disciplines, across concepts, across centuries, across communities. It stimulates independent thinking and a lifelong love of inquiry and knowledge. It encourages an appreciation of human endeavors and natural phenomena and an abiding devotion to the spirit of discovery and preservation.<sup>4</sup>

At CUNY, discussions have been conducted at the faculty and executive administrative level, both intra-collegiate and inter-collegiate, about the fundamental questions of this educational experience. One result is CUNY’s “campaign for success,” in which each college is required to submit to the university a long-term, comprehensive plan by which students achieve their goals and each college demonstrates student persistence and graduation in greater numbers.

Even as it responds to CUNY’s campaign, QCC’s campaign remains consonant with its own mission and educational goals and its long tradition of fostering a general or liberal education. According to the *2008 QCC Faculty Survey*, faculty agree that critical thinking skills, problem analysis skills, and oral communication skills are essential competencies, skills central to transferability to a career or to a baccalaureate institution. As such, they should form the foundation on which the undergraduate education experience rests. To this end, QCC continues to coordinate and integrate the teaching and learning experience. For the students, the CUNY Proficiency Examination (CPE), which is conducted university-wide, is a measure by which QCC and the other CUNY colleges can demonstrate essential skills like critical thinking, problem solving, and oral communication. For the faculty, QCC is positioning itself as a place where the serious study of community college pedagogy occurs.

### **College-wide Plans**

Under the leadership of Dr. Eduardo J. Martí, appointed as president in July 2000, the college has refocused and clarified its direction. A vision for QCC was promulgated that centered around three core values: 1. celebrating the art and science of teaching and learning, 2. nurturing the growth of the individual student in a supportive environment, and 3. establishing an atmosphere of mutual respect

---

<sup>4</sup> Foreword to *Reclaiming the Public University*, vi.

and understanding. Subsequently, drawing on campus-wide discussions of the college’s mission and strategic planning, four long-term goals were articulated:

- *Initiate a community of learners.* Create integrated teaching/learning experiences that equally challenge and support students and that, acknowledging their preparation, invite them to be partners in intellectual inquiry; adopt a holistic approach by providing a curriculum that incorporates general education and interconnected and multi-layered learning experiences.
- *Provide coordinated academic and support services.* Create an individualized plan that engages students on entry and results in a supportive partnership for learning; encourage students to take the role of active, responsible learners working collaboratively and cooperatively in the classroom and community.
- *Expand the research environment through the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL).* Continue the college’s tradition of discipline-based research and publications and encourage the scholarship of teaching and learning in diverse student populations, resulting in publications on pedagogy; facilitate collaboration among academic and instructional support staff, promoting research, presentations, and publications.
- *Nurture the development program.* Establish an ongoing program of giving that will enable the institution to continue to attract excellent faculty, provide scholarships for students, and provide funding for special projects.

## Freshman Academies

Following the development of these four long-term goals, college planning combined the first three long-term goals above into a coordinated, campus-wide effort to establish an *academy* model of higher education. In fall 2009, six Freshman Academies will be instituted, founded on the essential principle that student failure is both an institutional responsibility and an undesirable outcome of open admissions. The six Freshman Academies will include: Business; Education; Liberal Arts (including the social sciences); Health Sciences; Visual and Performing Arts; and Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). All first-time, full-time students will be admitted through one of these academies. In these Freshman Academies,

- All first-time, full-time students will have an extended, two-day orientation.
- All first-time, full-time students will take the Introduction to College Life course and linked courses or a learning community, including remedial courses if necessary. Pedagogical research must be conducted to find the most efficient ways for students, both low-achieving high school graduates and adult learners, to meet the rigor of the curriculum.
- Each student will have an administrative “home” staffed by a secretary and freshman coordinator. Freshman Academies will be staffed day and evening.
- Academy-specific counseling and discipline-clustered tutoring will be provided. The college must institutionalize processes that bring students together, through linked courses, learning communities, specialized extra-curricular activities, and group projects.
- Each freshman coordinator will have a case load of about 150 students. Freshman coordinators will be responsible for ensuring that students attend classes, get the help they need, and feel welcomed. Each Freshman Academy will have a faculty coordinator, who will ensure that the lines of communication between Freshman Coordinators and faculty are open.
- Student activities, which will be tailored to each Freshman Academy, will feature e-portfolios, internships, and research projects. Milestone and capstone experiences, which will be designed by the faculty teaching in each of the Freshman Academies, will range from internships and mentorships to a class project or service learning.

Colleges and universities have been known as the academy or academia or academe throughout history. They have been the repositories and disseminators of knowledge and inquiry over time. At

QCC, a “Freshman Academy” is a holistic term that describes the vehicle by which the college’s mission is fulfilled for students. Each Freshman Academy is the cohort of students pertaining to a specific curriculum or curricula, as indicated above, and the physical location where they interact. Each Freshman Academy functions to provide students with a sense of identity, community, and intellectual engagement in support of focused academic and career goals.<sup>5</sup> As Judith Summerfield has written in another context of Lee Shulman’s argument about the liberal arts, the Freshman Academies must enable students “to take their place within professional communities of practice.”<sup>6</sup>

Finally, to ensure institutional effectiveness and renewal at the level of the new Freshman Academies, the college developed plans for assessing student learning. At the sixth conference of the college, “Troubling the Waters: Dialogues in Assessment of Student Learning and the Launching of the Six Learning Academies,” the vice president for academic affairs invited participants to engage in a discussion of assessing student learning outcomes and transforming how the college views its effectiveness. According to the *2008 QCC Faculty Survey*, faculty views are mixed about the use of assessments of student learning to improve learning; the sixth conference of the college marked an important watershed in the development of the assessment of student learning at the academy level.

## **Faculty and Pedagogical Research**

The research program in pedagogy continues to mature: CETL operates as a faculty development center and as an office of research. The director (currently, while an unfilled position, being supervised by the assistant director) coordinates with the director of sponsored programs to find sources of funding to support this endeavor. There are significant private and public funding opportunities for this kind of pedagogical research, particularly because of the numbers of community college students (nationally, close to 50 percent of all undergraduates attend community colleges) and the credentials of faculty at QCC, the majority of whom have doctoral degrees. QCC’s report to CUNY, which is filed each year, cites the high level and number of faculty publications and presentations at national and international conferences. In addition, the college sponsors an annual lecture series of highly prominent scholars: the fall lecture is given by a scholar from within CUNY, and the spring lecture is given by a scholar from QCC’s own scholarly community.

CUNY has an obligation to the community college sector to engage in empirical pedagogical research. QCC can be a leader in this area. Together, the university and college can engage in pedagogical research, experiment with various teaching methodologies, and share findings with this important sector. The very size of the community college sector makes it imperative that QCC study the pedagogy that works best in its own heterogeneous population, hailing from over 130 countries.

## **Institutional Advancement**

Strategic fundraising is essential. Sophisticated donors are attracted to excellence with clear direction. If there is excellence in teaching, if there is an emphasis on high standards in the classroom, if there is evidence of serious research, graduating students will transfer to better programs, and they will obtain better jobs. In addition, a college that has a good reputation is able to attract better students, faculty, and administrators. With this in mind, fundraising has included the following:

- A feasibility study was conducted in 2002.

---

<sup>5</sup> Kay McKlenney (2005), “Benchmarking Effective Educational Practice in Community Colleges,” *The Community College: SUNY General Education Assessment Conference*, Syracuse, NY Survey of Student Engagement, which demonstrates the efficacy of student services by measuring the degree of student engagement.

<sup>6</sup> “The Project: Common/Uncommon Ground,” in *Reclaiming the Public University*, 23.

- Two “catalyst” campaigns were started, one for the Art Gallery and another for the Holocaust Resource Center and Archives.
- The Art Gallery building was completely renovated, and six major exhibitions have taken place in the last four years, funded with private dollars. A new degree program in Gallery and Museum Studies has been developed. Efforts have also been made to integrate the use of the Art Gallery into other curricula.
- Capital funding for the Holocaust Resource Center and Archives was obtained. A campaign for an endowment of \$5 million was started. The first \$1 million gift toward the endowment was obtained. Another \$900,000 has been raised. Once the building is completed, more donors will realize the need to maintain operations in perpetuity through an endowment.
- The Fund Board of Directors has been revitalized and expanded and is active in its fundraising, fund stewardship, and judicious allocation of funds.

Compared to the \$329,500 raised in 2001, in 2008 the college has raised over \$2.5 million, and next year the plan is to raise \$2.8 million. Since the current president’s tenure began, the institution has raised over \$9 million and is on target to meet its \$19 million goal for the Invest in CUNY Campaign, a university-wide effort to raise funds and establish endowments in perpetuity for college and university initiatives.

QCC has made deliberate progress toward emphasizing academic excellence, pedagogical research, and institutional advancement. In consultation with faculty, administrative, and student leaders, the institution has set goals over the next five years that include:

1. Establishing the Freshman Academies for all first-time, full-time students and for those part-time students who want to participate
2. Positioning QCC as a place for serious inquiry about applied experimentation on community college pedagogy
3. Completing the \$5 million endowment campaign for the Kupferberg Holocaust Resource Center
4. Starting a scholarship campaign with the eventual goal of establishing an endowment capable of offering a full scholarship to every first-time, full-time student attending the college. By providing private scholarships, the college can also address the needs of undocumented students without access to federal or State financial aid.

## **SELF-STUDY PREPARATIONS**

Preparations for the self-study began in spring 2006 and have involved the president, his cabinet, and the faculty executive committee. From these discussions a chair for the steering committee was recommended, the assistant dean for academic affairs, and appointed, and the basic configuration of the steering committee was determined. A call went out to faculty to fill the three volunteer positions on the committee. By the end of the spring semester, the steering committee membership, comprising a broad campus representation, had been established.

Toward the end of the fall 2006 semester, at the first meeting of the steering committee, the committee chair reported both on the Middle States institute and annual conference, attended by the chair and several steering committee members, and provided a full packet of materials and documents for the committee’s use during the self-study process. At this meeting, the committee also decided on the kind of self-study report to adopt: the comprehensive report with reordered standards. Discussion began on the development of broad institutional questions and issues that the college faces. Over several meetings, this discussion led to the development of the charges to the working groups and the questions that they would have to consider in their investigations.

Beginning in 2007, the committee met to establish the co-chairs of the eight working groups—one faculty member and one administrator—required to complete the self-study. Co-chairs were provided with a job description of the role that they would have in the working groups and objectives for the work of the groups. Once the co-chairs were established, a call went out to the campus for volunteers for the eight working groups. At the end of the spring 2007 semester, the working group memberships were established. At the beginning of the fall 2007 semester, a kick-off meeting was scheduled of all steering committee members and co-chairs to discuss the timeline for the entire project and to discuss the protocols for operation. In preparation for the meeting, working groups were required to complete matrices that aligned group questions with the fundamental elements of the standards assigned to them and the data sources they would use to do their research. At the kick-off meeting, the co-chairs had the opportunity to present their questions publicly and to elicit comment. Discussion among the participants was constructive and helpful.

In addition to this committee work, the committee chair has developed a number of tools for the working group members. With the assistance of the Academic Computing Center, a self-study website was developed that will be used to disseminate information to the campus community and act as an archive of useful documents and materials. In addition, a SharePoint site was developed that will be used by the steering committee and working groups to post and review documents and for collaborative documents. The steering committee chair also developed a self-study glossary to define and clarify some unfamiliar terms and acronyms.

During the summer, when reorganizing, condensing, and editing of the self-study report occurred, it was decided that the section on general education and basic educational skills, originally part of chapter 7 on related educational activities, belonged more logically in chapter 6 on educational offerings. At the same time, it was decided that the section on distance education should be moved from chapter 6 to chapter 7.

The final steps of the self-study process have included: submission of final reports from the working groups early in the summer; editing of the document over July, August, September, and October 2008; dissemination of a draft document to the campus community early in mid-September 2008; open hearings for a discussion of the draft document; revisions to the document in response to the open hearings; an extensive meeting with students leaders in October 2008 to review and discuss the draft document; further revisions to the document in response to student comments; presentation to the Academic Senate; final review by the steering committee in October 2008; final changes and printing of the self-study report for consideration by the site team chair, Dr. Edna Baehre, in late October 2008; and, in response to Dr. Baehre's recommendations for revision, preparation of the official self-study report document in January 2009.

## **CONCLUSION**

The challenges that QCC faces are those of the community colleges at large. What distinguishes it is its highly credentialed faculty and administration that plan to transform the paradigm: to offer students an educational experience that integrates academic programs and support services in an atmosphere of partnered learning. The long-range goal is to engage and focus students in a more substantive way, to provide them with the resources they need to ensure that they meet the standards of multiple literacies (information, numerical, social) in an organized and coordinated way, and to leave them with clear, focused options for a career and transfer. In short, QCC is engaged in changing the conversation about teaching and learning.