

THE
AMERICAN
COMMUNITY
COLLEGE

SEVENTH EDITION

CARRIE B. KISKER
ARTHUR M. COHEN
FLORENCE B. BRAWER

J JOSSEY-BASS™
A Wiley Brand

The American Community College

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Seventh Edition

Carrie B. Kisker
Arthur M. Cohen
Florence B. Brawer

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Preface

This is the seventh edition of a book published originally in 1982. It is about American community colleges, institutions that offer associate degrees, occupational certificates, and, increasingly, baccalaureate degrees to their students and that provide a variety of other services to the communities in which they are located. These nearly 1,000 institutions range in size from fewer than 100 to more than 60,000 students in a multi-campus district. Less than one-tenth of them, mostly the smaller colleges, are privately supported. The others, the comprehensive, publicly funded institutions, are found in every state.

Audience and Scope

In this edition, as with the previous editions, our purpose is to present a comprehensive, one-volume text useful for everyone concerned with community colleges: administrators, faculty, staff, trustees, graduate students and university-based scholars, and state-level officials. The descriptions and analyses of each of the institution's functions can be used by administrators seeking to learn about practices that have proven effective in other colleges, curriculum planners involved in program revision, faculty members seeking ideas for modifying their courses or participating in shared governance, student services personnel seeking to better support students, and trustees and officials concerned with college

policies and student progress and outcomes. Community college scholars, particularly those affiliated with the Council for the Study of Community Colleges, have been largely responsible for extending our understanding of the contemporary college and its students, and many of their studies are reflected in these pages, making this book a useful resource for those seeking a starting point for future research.

The American Community College focuses mainly on the period since 1960, when the rapid growth of the institutions ensured access to college for virtually every American. Over the next 40 years, the number of community colleges more than doubled and the percentage of 18- to 24-year-olds enrolled in college increased from 18% to 36%. (The number of colleges has since declined, but enrollments have increased to 40% of 18- to 24-year-olds.) This book pays particular attention, however, to events and trends occurring in the twenty-first century, as shifts in institutional functioning and financing during these decades are especially useful to those interested in how the community college will carry out its missions and perform a larger social role in the years to come.

The book is written as an interpretive analysis. It provides data on community college students, faculty, curriculum, governance, financing, and many other quantifiable dimensions. It explores shifts in institutional purpose over time, including the rise of occupational education and the blending of career and transfer curricula. It explains how, for a time, students' patterns of college attendance forced a conversion from a linear to a lateral curriculum pattern, from students taking courses in sequence to selecting at will from an à la carte menu of (mostly) introductory options, as well as more recent efforts to reverse the trend and provide incoming students with a structured course map through one of a limited set of program areas. It shows how the developmental, integrative, liberal arts, occupational, and community service functions are interrelated and how advising, counseling, and other support services can be integrated into the instructional program

to support student persistence and well-being. It tracks efforts to collect and analyze student progress and outcomes data as educators and policymakers alike became more concerned with institutional accountability and, more recently, student equity. It examines some of the criticism that has been leveled at the community college by those who feel it has failed either in its social role or in various aspects of institutional functioning, and it concludes with a look to the future for these colleges. An appendix discusses the for-profit institutions that similarly offer associate degrees and workforce certificates but have little else in common with community colleges.

New in the Seventh Edition

A revised edition of our work is warranted now because several changes have occurred since the sixth edition appeared in 2014. Some of these changes can be attributed to (or were exacerbated by) the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath, but many others are the realization of trends that have been decades in the making. Among the highlights:

- Once likened to herding cats or turning a large ship into the wind, organizational change has not only become a necessity in higher education but is now a process in which community college faculty and staff are much more adept. Certainly, the colleges' quick pivot to virtual instruction in March 2020 hastened this evolution, but years of experimenting with innovative and sometimes entrepreneurial approaches to serving students and communities provided a foundation for this new openness to change.
- As institutions designed to enable greater access to the postsecondary system, over the years community colleges have gradually incorporated an equity-minded approach to

teaching and supporting students. In recent years, however, embracing equity in all aspects of institutional functioning has become “an urgent leadership imperative” (McPhail and Beatty, 2021, p. 2), and community colleges once again have an opportunity to modify structures and practices that have historically precluded economic and social mobility for marginalized groups.

- The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare what many in higher education already knew: that unconscionable numbers of students suffer from basic needs insecurities or mental health challenges, and that the most vulnerable are low-income learners; LGBTQ+, transgender, and nonbinary students; students living in rural areas; and those from races and ethnicities that have been historically marginalized in both society and in higher education. Although colleges and universities have ramped up their provision of wrap-around services, supporting these learners in life and in their educational journeys has become a defining challenge and one in which community colleges cannot afford to fail.
- More and more students now view higher education as a choose-your-own adventure in which they can piece together degrees, certificates, apprenticeships, and non-degree credentials in ways that suit their lives and career progressions. Although community colleges have worked hard to integrate liberal arts and occupational pathways, incorporate stackable credentials, and develop transfer agreements between applied associate and bachelor's degree programs, there is far more work to be done to normalize the fluid and flexible ways in which students engage with postsecondary education and to create multiple entry and re-entry points where learners feel welcomed and supported.

Despite these and other changes, many things have remained the same. Hardly any new community colleges have been formed in the past 20 years (in fact, most tallies continue to decline as institutions offering the baccalaureate are moved to four-year categories). The major purposes have remained stable, including a mission to serve the community, although conceptions of these functions continue to evolve. The institutions are still concerned with providing relevant educational services to their clients, who attend for various reasons. And while many of the issues we note at the end of each chapter are new, a few are repeated from earlier editions; the most intractable problems are never solved.

Thus, although the structure of the book remains largely the same, much has changed in this edition. Each chapter reviews the antecedents of practices and policies purposely to show the history underlying contemporary activities and perceptions. But throughout the book, research findings and statistics have been updated, and we have incorporated new examples of services the colleges provide. Perhaps most importantly, this edition breaks from its predecessors in that its guiding perspective is that of a woman born roughly 75 years after junior colleges first emerged in America, whose twenty-first century graduate education and professional experience provides a lens for understanding community colleges and the society in which they operate that is, at times, fundamentally different from that employed by her beloved and much-missed co-authors. In that sense, this edition may feel completely new. It is my hope, however, that the aspects of *The American Community College* that have proven so useful to educators, scholars, and policymakers over the last 40 years remain intact, and that this book endures as a valuable resource for all those concerned with the progress and success of community colleges in America.

Overview of the Contents

Chapter 1 recounts the social forces that contributed to the expansion and contemporary development of community colleges. It examines the ever-evolving institutional purposes and forms, provides an overview of curricular functions, discusses the community college's place in the academic pipeline, and questions what the shape of American higher education would be if there were no community colleges.

Chapter 2 examines the diverse backgrounds, identities, and purposes of community college students and explores reasons for part-time attendance and swirling or stop-and-start enrollment patterns. The chapter also examines students' lives, levels of academic preparedness, and academic or occupational intentions.

Chapter 3 describes community college faculty, both full- and part-time, and examines their workload, salary, and tenure. It discusses the effects of collective bargaining, modes of faculty evaluation, and professionalization. It considers the emotional labor required to teach at a community college and describes faculty satisfaction and desires, as well as the varied characteristics and experiences of part-timers.

Chapter 4 provides an overview of governance in the community college and describes the multiple governing and coordinating bodies that influence college functioning. It also assesses the role of institutional accreditation, provides various examples of organizational structures, examines possibilities for shared governance, and summarizes new theories and approaches to community college leadership.

Chapter 5 describes the sources of funds to community colleges, including patterns in state and local allocations, performance-based funding, federal contributions, and tuition and fees. It also looks at the ways in which colleges spend money, attempt to control costs, and seek alternative revenue streams.

Chapter 6 examines the design and discipline of instruction, outlining numerous approaches to supporting student learning and persistence. It comments on learning resources and assessment. And it examines how the technology of instruction has changed over time, culminating in extensive efforts to teach and support students online and through other twenty-first century technologies.

Chapter 7 traces college efforts to engage and support students in the areas of enrollment management, learning support, student support, and co-curricular services. It also considers issues related to the funding and effectiveness of student services, the support of online students, and college efforts to provide wrap-around services for students with basic needs insecurities.

Chapter 8 traces the decline in student literacy at all levels of education, the misalignment of high school graduation and college readiness standards, and other factors contributing to the magnitude of developmental education in community colleges. It also examines developmental teaching and contemporary approaches to developmental education, including multiple measures of assessment and placement and compressed or corequisite courses. The chapter concludes by examining program effects and revisiting the dilemma of tracking.

Chapter 9 introduces integrative education as a way of redefining the principles of general education, which originally meant preparing students to be successful workers, scholars, and citizens. Over the years the term had been corrupted to describe a set of distribution requirements organized according to academic disciplines, but this chapter attempts to reframe the colleges' integrative mission around existing efforts related to critical thinking; service learning; civic learning and democratic engagement; equity, inclusion, and belonging; and sustainability, environmental stewardship, and climate change.

Chapter 10 discusses both the liberal arts curriculum in community colleges and the university transfer function, although

we take pains not to conflate the two. The chapter also examines collaborations with high schools and the provision of dual enrollment for high school students (which, like the transfer function, is not limited to liberal arts disciplines) and describes efforts to integrate academic and occupational coursework into a comprehensive program of study.

Chapter 11 considers the rise of occupational education as it has moved from a peripheral to a central aspect of the community college curriculum. It outlines various occupational programs and credentials, including applied associate and baccalaureate degrees, certificates and non-degree credentials, apprenticeships, and contract training. And it explores the public and private benefits of occupational education and the extent to which community colleges are responsible for the American economy.

Chapter 12 considers the multitude of ways that community colleges serve their communities, including through lifelong learning, Adult Basic Education and English as a Second Language, correctional education, entrepreneurship training and small business incubation, and community-based education and services. It also examines the organization, funding, and effectiveness of these offerings, as well as their legitimacy and future in community colleges.

Chapter 13 illustrates how data collected on and in community colleges evidences a national focus on both equity and accountability. It outlines measures of student progress and outcomes, including transfer, degree and certificate completion, equity gaps, and job or goal attainment. It also considers the individual and societal benefits of college attendance and problems and possibilities in assessment.

Chapter 14 begins by outlining the major sources and forms of research that have contributed to a robust literature on community colleges. The chapter then examines critiques of the institution—either for failing in its social role or in its effectiveness as a school—

and underscores the importance of critics, advocates, sceptics, and scholars in helping an imperfect institution live up to its democratizing ideal.

Chapter 15 projects trends within the community college sector, as well as in student and faculty demographics, and indicates areas where change may occur in college governance, financing, curriculum, and student support. The chapter concludes by stressing the importance of institutions that, despite their imperfections and shortcomings, are committed to social justice and dedicated to providing all learners with safe, welcoming, and supportive environments in which they can be themselves, reinvent themselves, achieve their personal objectives, and contribute to the social and economic betterment of their communities.

The Appendix considers the for-profit sector, which mirrors the community colleges in programs and credentials offered, as well as in student demographics, but that differs in so many other ways that it does not belong in analyses of community college missions, characteristics, or outcomes.

Sources and Biases

The information included in this book derives from many sources but predominantly from published books, journals, research reports, and national data, most often from the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics. This attention to the extant literature has both positive and negative features. On the plus side, it enables us to plot trends in curriculum, faculty functioning, patterns of student attendance, and college priorities and reflects the most recent research on the institutions and their stakeholders. On the flip side, it restricts our sources of information to empirical work, national surveys, and published accounts of experiences in the colleges, which necessarily limits our awareness of college cultures and practices to those

institutions where staff or outside researchers have written descriptions for general distribution.

Although we have tried to present an even-handed treatment, we must admit that we have our prejudices. We are advocates for community colleges, believing they are an essential thread in the fabric of American education. We believe in the comprehensive nature of their curriculum and responsiveness to community, student, and workforce needs. We strongly endorse their integrative dimension, the aspect of their work that links all other functions and ensures that students gain the analytical, communication, quantitative, and interpersonal skills necessary to thrive. And we favor especially their efforts to ensure both access to a transformative college experience and the equitable supports necessary for all learners to take advantage of it.

However, our advocacy does not extend to blind boosterism. Above all, we are critical analysts, concerned more with examining the ideas undergirding the community colleges' functions and assessing their successes and failures than with describing the operations themselves. We wonder about how changing patterns of governance and funding affect institutional priorities. We worry about how faculty and administrators will balance demands for equity and efficiency. And we are fascinated by the ways that community colleges continually seek to modify their functions while remaining true to their historic missions and role in society.

Acknowledgments

Someday, maybe, I will see the names on the front cover of *The American Community College* and not feel a pang of sadness for the passing of my esteemed co-authors, mentors, and friends Arthur M. Cohen and Florence B. Brawer. For sure I will never forget the immense honor it was to collaborate with them on the sixth edition of this book, and I will always feel the privilege and great weight of responsibility for carrying their work forward in this seventh edition. Art and Flo: I hope this edition of our book makes you proud. If you were here, I am sure you would not always agree with my choices about what to include or my perspective on every issue, but I know also that you would see how your guidance and support has shaped my scholarship and my writing. I am hopeful you would recognize my efforts to preserve the qualities of this book that have made it so useful to community college educators, scholars, and policymakers over the past 40 years and also respect my need to make it my own, which at times meant taking a stance opposite that which had appeared in previous editions. I am so thankful for the nearly 20 years in which our lives and work intersected and will do my best to carry your legacies forward.

Other colleagues and friends also deserve recognition for their part in the preparation of this manuscript. To my extraordinary research assistant, Lauren Kater: I'm not sure I could have done this without your diligent sourcing of materials, fantastic ideas, and ability to work a week ahead of me at every step of the process.

Thank you for keeping me on track and for your always cheerful Monday morning check-ins. I am excited to witness all the ways you will make your own mark in the field of higher education. Thank you also to my colleagues in the Council for the Study of Community Colleges, whose scholarship provides the backbone of this book, and especially to Jason Taylor, Erin Doran, Marissa Vasquez, Sue Kater, Marilyn Amey, Pam Eddy, Jim Palmer, Chris Mullin, Carlton Fong, Gloria Crisp, Cliff Harbour, Mark D'Amico, and Debra Bragg for reading and commenting on (sometimes multiple) drafts of various chapters. This edition is much better for your insights, suggestions, and, at times, pointed critiques.

Last but not never least, thank you to Sean, Meredith, and Grayson for being consistently inspirational human beings and for never complaining that we had to order dinner (again) because I was still working. This edition of *The American Community College* is dedicated to Arthur and Florence, but everything else is dedicated to you.

Carrie B. Kisker
Los Angeles
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About the Authors

Carrie B. Kisker is president of Kisker Education Consulting in Los Angeles and a director of the Center for the Study of Community Colleges (CSCC). She received her BA (1999) in psychology from Dartmouth College and her MA (2003) and PhD (2006) in higher education from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Drawing from her own and others' research, she regularly consults with college leaders on issues related to entrepreneurship and innovation, program and policy development, strategic planning and accountability, and civic learning and democratic engagement. Kisker is author of numerous journal articles, research reports, and chapters on community colleges, and is a former managing editor of the Jossey-Bass quarterly series *New Directions for Community Colleges*. In addition, she is author of *Creating Entrepreneurial Community Colleges, A Design Thinking Approach* (2021), the sixth edition of *The American Community College* (2014), written with Arthur M. Cohen and Florence B. Brawer and *The Shaping of American Higher Education: Emergence and Growth of the Contemporary System* (second edition, 2010) with Arthur M. Cohen.

Arthur M. Cohen (1927–2020) was professor of higher education at UCLA from 1964 until 2004. He received his BA (1949) and MA (1955) in history from the University of Miami and his PhD (1964) in higher education from The Florida State University. He was director of the ERIC Clearinghouse for Community

Colleges from 1966 to 2003 and president of CSCC from 1974 to 2007. Over the course of his career, Cohen served on the editorial boards of numerous journals and wrote extensively about community colleges, including 21 books; more than 80 book chapters, journal articles, and essays in edited volumes; and untold numbers of conference papers, journalistic pieces, and research reports for CSCC.

Florence B. Brawer (1923–2014) was CSCC's longtime research director and a former UCLA research educationist, psychometrist, and counselor. She received her BA (1944) in psychology from the University of Michigan and her MA (1962) and EdD (1967) in educational psychology from UCLA. She is author of *New Perspectives on Personality Development in College Students* (1973) and co-editor of *Developments in the Rorschach Technique* (volume 3, 1970).

Cohen and Brawer together wrote *Confronting Identity: The Community College Instructor* (1972), *The Two-Year College Instructor Today* (1977), *The Collegiate Function of Community Colleges* (1987), and six previous editions of *The American Community College* (1982, 1989, 1996, 2003, 2008, 2014), the most recent with Carrie B. Kisker. Together with other ERIC staff members, they also wrote *A Constant Variable: New Perspectives on the Community College* (1971) and *College Responses to Community Demands* (1975). Cohen and Brawer have edited several series of monographs published by CSCC and the ERIC Clearinghouse for Community Colleges. In 1973, they initiated and were the long-time editors of *New Directions for Community Colleges*.

Background: Evolving Priorities and Expectations of the Community College

The American community college dates from the early years of the twentieth century. Among the social forces that contributed to its rise, most prominent were the need for workers trained to propel the nation's expanding industries; the lengthened period of adolescence, which mandated custodial care of the young for a longer time; and a drive for social equality and greater access to higher education. The ideas permeating higher education early in the twentieth century fostered the development of these new colleges across the country. Science was seen as contributing to progress; the more people who would learn its principles, the more rapid the development of society would be. New technologies demanded skilled operators and training them could be done by the colleges. Individual mobility was held in the highest esteem, and the notion was widespread that those who applied themselves most diligently would advance most rapidly. (A more nuanced understanding of the societal and institutional structures precluding social mobility for some groups would not emerge in the mainstream for nearly a century.)

Social institutions of practical value to society were being formed, and in the colleges, the question "What knowledge is of most worth?" was rarely asked; the more likely question was "What knowledge yields the greatest tangible benefit to individuals or to society?" The public perceived schooling as an avenue of upward

mobility and a contributor to the community's wealth. The diatribes of Veblen (1918) and Sinclair ([1923] 1976) against domination of the universities by industrialists were ineffectual outcries against what had become a reality.

Publicly supported universities, given impetus by the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890, had been established in every state. Although many were agricultural institutes or teacher-training colleges little resembling modern universities, they did provide a lower-cost alternative to private colleges. The universities were also pioneering the idea of service to the broader community through their agricultural and general extension divisions. Access for a wider range of the population was expanding as programs to teach an ever-increasing number of subjects and occupations were introduced. Schools of business, forestry, journalism, and social work became widespread. People with more diverse goals demanded more diverse programs; the newer programs attracted greater varieties of people.

Probably the simplest overarching reason for the growth of community colleges was that an increasing number of demands were being placed on schools at every level. Whatever the social or personal problem, educational institutions have been asked to solve it. Schools were at the forefront of dismantling racial segregation. Colleges have led the way in working to close equity gaps in persistence and completion between historically marginalized racial and ethnic groups and their White or Asian peers. Furthermore, state legislatures, as well as economic and workforce development boards, have looked to colleges and universities to prepare skilled workers to attract new industry and reduce unemployment.

Indeed, despite periodic disillusionment with the colleges, the pervasive belief has been that education, defined as more years of schooling, is beneficial. It was not always that way. In earlier centuries and in other societies, people did not ascribe such power to

or make such demands on their schools. Instead, the family, the workplace, and various social institutions acculturated and trained the young. But the easily accessible, publicly supported school became an article of American faith, first in the nineteenth century, when responsibility for educating the individual began shifting to the school, and then in the twentieth, when the colleges were asked to take on responsibility for relieving many of society's ills. The community colleges thrived on the new responsibilities because they had no traditions to defend, no alumni to question their role, no autonomous professional staff to be moved aside, no statements of philosophy that would militate against their taking on responsibility for everything.

Institutional Definitions

Two generic names have been applied to community colleges. From their beginnings until the 1940s, they were known most commonly as junior colleges. Eells's (1931) definition of the junior college included university branch campuses offering lower-division work either on the parent campus or in separate facilities; state junior colleges supported by state funds and controlled by state boards; college-level courses offered by secondary schools; and local colleges formed by groups acting without legal authority. At the second annual meeting of the American Association of Junior Colleges, in 1922, a junior college was defined as "an institution offering two years of instruction of strictly collegiate grade" (Bogue, 1950, p. xvii). In 1925, the definition was modified slightly to include this statement: "The junior college may, and is likely to, develop a different type of curriculum suited to the larger and ever-changing civic, social, religious, and vocational needs of the entire community in which the college is located. It is understood that in this case, also, the work offered shall be on a level appropriate for high-school graduates" (p. xvii). But the instruction was still expected to

be “of strictly collegiate grade”; that is, if such a college had courses usually offered in the first two years by a senior institution, “these courses must be identical, in scope and thoroughness, with corresponding courses of the standard four-year college” (p. xvii). Vocational training alone was not considered sufficient to qualify an institution for the appellation junior college. A general education component must be included in the occupational programs, as “general-education and vocation training make the soundest and most stable progress toward personal competence when they are thoroughly integrated” (p. 22).

In the 1950s and 1960s, the term *junior college* was applied more often to the lower-division branches of private universities and to two-year colleges supported by churches or organized independently, while *community college* came gradually to be used for the comprehensive, publicly supported institutions. By the 1970s, community college was usually applied to both types.

Several names in addition to community college and junior college have been used. Sometimes these names refer to the college’s sponsor: city college, county college, and branch campus are still in use. Other appellations signify the institutions’ emphases: technical institute and vocational, technical, and adult education center have had some currency. The U.S. Department of Education categorizes most community colleges as public or private two-year institutions, although many educators rightly point out that few associate degree-seekers, let alone those pursuing a community college baccalaureate, complete their degree in two years. The colleges have also been nicknamed the people’s college, democracy’s college, the contradictory college, opportunity college, and anti-university college—the last by Jencks and Riesman (1968), who saw them as negating the principles of scholarship on which the universities had been founded.

Sometimes deliberate attempts have been made to blur the definition. For example, in the 1970s, the American Association

of Community and Junior Colleges (AACJC) sought to identify the institutions as community education centers standing entirely outside the mainstream of graded education. In 1980, the AACJC began listing regionally accredited proprietary institutions in addition to the nonprofit colleges in its annual Community, Junior, and Technical College Directory, although since 1976 the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) has accounted for these for-profit institutions separately.

Beginning in the late 1980s, several states began authorizing their community colleges to offer bachelor's degrees, thus further blurring the definition. Indeed, as the first community colleges began awarding baccalaureates in various applied subjects, many dropped "community" from their names, despite remaining firmly rooted in a desire to serve the local population. Some of these baccalaureate-granting institutions were renamed as state colleges (as in Florida). However, as the community college baccalaureate has become more widespread, many institutions have opted not to change their name, following the assumption that providing area students with pathways to applied bachelor's degrees is simply providing a new and necessary service to the community. Despite this, most accrediting agencies classify baccalaureate-granting community colleges as four-year institutions.

We define the community college as any accredited public or nonprofit institution that awards the associate as its highest degree or that offers at least one baccalaureate program but confers more than 50% of degrees at the associate level. By Carnegie Classification, these include both associate's colleges and baccalaureate/associate's colleges (American Council on Education, 2022). This definition includes the comprehensive community college—those that collaborate with universities to offer baccalaureate degrees *and* those that confer their own—as well as many technical institutes, both public and private. It excludes many of the publicly supported area vocational schools and adult education centers and all of the

proprietary colleges. Unless otherwise noted, figures reported in this book generally refer to institutions in the public sector. Information related to for-profit institutions is presented in the Appendix.

Development of Community Colleges

The development of community colleges should be placed in the context of the growth of all higher education in the twentieth century. As secondary school enrollments expanded rapidly in the early 1900s, the demand for access to college grew apace. The percentage of those graduating from high school grew from 30% in 1924 to 75% by 1960, and 60% of those graduates entered college in the latter year. Put another way, 45% of 18-year-olds entered college in 1960, up from 5% in 1910. Robinson (1986) contended that the growth of schooling in the United States can be predicted by a “model in which the proportional change in enrollments at any given level of schooling is a simple function of the numbers of people in the relevant age group and in the previous level of schooling” (p. 521). Green (1980) put it more simply, saying that one of the major benefits of a year of schooling is a ticket to advance to the next level. As high school graduation rates stabilized at 72 to 75% in the 1970s, the rate of college going leveled off as well but turned up again in the 1990s, hovering near 70% before dropping to 66% in 2019; in that year, one-third of those (22% of all high school grads) enrolled first in a community college.

Soon thereafter, however, college-going rates fell substantially as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the colleges’ quick pivot to virtual instruction, enrollment of recent high school completers fell to 63% in Fall 2020 across all institutional types, with community colleges bearing the brunt of enrollment losses. Arizona’s community colleges experienced a 15% enrollment decline between the 2019–2020 and 2020–2021 academic years (Arizona Community College Coordinating Council, 2022).

California's community colleges lost nearly 300,000 students (17%) between Fall 2019 and Fall 2021 (Bulman and Fairlie, 2022). In many ways, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing societal and educational inequities, with already vulnerable populations (low-income learners, those enrolled in developmental courses, males, and those from races and ethnicities historically underserved in higher education) showing the largest enrollment declines.

Recent events aside, the states could have accommodated most of the people seeking college attendance simply by expanding their universities' capacity, as indeed was the practice in a few states. Why community colleges? A major reason was that several prominent nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century educators wanted the universities to abandon their freshman and sophomore classes and relegate the function of teaching adolescents to a new set of institutions, to be called junior colleges. Proposals that the junior college should relieve the university of the burden of providing general education for young people were made in 1851 by Henry Tappan, president of the University of Michigan; in 1859 by William Mitchell, a University of Georgia trustee; and in 1869 by William Folwell, president of the University of Minnesota. All insisted that the universities would not become true research and professional development centers until they relinquished their lower-division preparatory work. Other educators—such as William Rainey Harper, of the University of Chicago; Edmund J. James, of the University of Illinois; Stanford's president, David Starr Jordan; and University of California professor and member of the State Board of Education Alexis Lange—suggested emulating the system followed in European universities and secondary schools. That is, the universities would be responsible for the higher-order scholarship, while the lower schools would provide general and vocational education to students through age 19 or 20. Folwell argued for a strong system of secondary schools with

“upward extension to include the first two college years,” because “a few feeble colleges, an isolated university, cannot educate the people” (cited in Koos, 1947, p. 138). Harper also contended that the weaker four-year colleges might better become junior colleges rather than wasting money by doing superficial work. In fact, by 1940, 40% of the 203 colleges that enrolled 150 or fewer students in 1900 had perished, but 15% had become junior colleges (Eells, 1941).

In California, it probably would have been feasible to limit Stanford and the University of California to upper-division and graduate and professional studies because of the early, widespread development of junior colleges in that state (nearly two opening every year between 1910 and 1960). Such proposals were made several times, especially by Stanford’s President Jordan, but were never successfully implemented. Grades 13 and 14 were not given over exclusively to community colleges in any state. Instead, the colleges developed as an alternative to the channel of graded education that reached from kindergarten to high school, the university, and then graduate school. This could occur because the organization of formal education in America had been undertaken originally from both ends of the continuum. Dating from the eighteenth century, four-year colleges and elementary schools were established; during the nineteenth century, the middle years were accommodated as colleges organized their own preparatory schools and as public secondary schools were built. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the gap had been filled. If the universities had shut down their lower divisions and surrendered their freshmen and sophomores to the two-year colleges, these newly formed institutions would have been part of the mainstream. But they did not, and the community colleges remained adjunctive well into the middle of the century.

Their standing outside the tradition of higher education—first with its exclusivity of students, then with its scholarship and academic freedom for professors—was both good and bad for the