Critical Thinking about Perceptions of and Issues related to American and Global Education: Implications for Best Practices in Community College Classrooms with examples from Psychology

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• This paper acknowledges the history of community colleges and notes that they are at a crossroad.

• Perceptions of the role and function of community colleges as well as the economy and globalization, converge to create a unique environment, to which new responses have to be constructed.

• What is the role of faculty in responding to these larger changes?
OVERVIEW OF OUR JOURNEY INTO EDUCATIONAL ISSUES -2

• Do these changes have implications for classroom content and best practices across disciplines and Psychology in particular?

• How does Psychology prepare students for transfer, for jobs, and for managing their complex and very full lives?

• The paper investigates statistics that profile community colleges with regard to learning outcomes, as well as the content and practices within the discipline of psychology.
INTRODUCTION

• Joliet Junior College (Joliet, Illinois), is the oldest community college, it was founded in 1901.

• Today, 11.5 million students (6.5 million of whom are studying for college credits) are enrolled in almost 1,200 community colleges according to the American Association of Community Colleges.

• Community college students constitute an important 46 percent of all undergraduates, yet community colleges are often stigmatized and perceived as less than a real college.
INTRODUCTION

• The 20\textsuperscript{th} century saw explosive growth in education in America. America had some of the highest graduation rates, could boast about having the best educational institutions in the world and turned out its fair share of innovators and scholars.

• As we enter the 21\textsuperscript{st} century there have been some shifts in the educational landscape such that America’s graduating rates have fallen, and we no longer number among the top five countries.
FIGURE 1.

PROGRAM FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ASSESSMENT (PISA) 2009.
One of the most widely used international measures. TIMSS Trends in International Mathematics & Science Study 4th & 8th grade measurements. PIRLS Progress in International Reading Literacy Study also used.

RANKS IN MATHEMATICS SCORES ARE SIMILAR FOR SCIENCE AND READING
High school graduation rates in the U.S. improved for every race and ethnicity in 2010, however, differences among racial groups persist: Asian students had the highest graduation rate, with 93 percent of students finishing high school on time. White students followed with an 83 percent graduation rate, American Indians and Alaska Natives with 69.1 percent and African Americans with 66.1 percent.
For decades, high school graduation rates were routinely overstated in official statistics, with the Education Department putting the nation’s rate above 80 percent and some states reporting rates above 90 percent.

In 2005, the Education Department began publishing an official estimate of graduation rates, and all 50 states agreed to adopt a standard method of calculating those rates by 2013.
• How does this compare with other countries?
• While the U.S. public high-school graduation rate climbed to a 35-year high in 2010, according to new federal data, U.S. high-school students are still struggling to keep up with their international peers.
HOW DO WE COMPARE?

• In 2008, the U.S. high school graduation rate was lower than the rates of the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Norway, South Korea, Japan, Italy, Ireland, Finland and Denmark.

That same year, the U.S. was the only developed nation where a higher percent of 55- to 64-year-olds than 25- to 34-year-olds had graduated from high school.
IMPLICATIONS OF THESE H.S.GRADUATION RATES FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGES

• The U.S., which once had one of the highest graduation rates of any developed country, has slipped and now ranks 22nd out of 27 developed countries, according to a 2012 ranking by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

• What are implications of these high school graduation rates for community colleges?

• Community colleges have become the destination for students with GED as well as many underperforming high school students.

• Data from NCES indicate that 90 percent of entrants to four-year institutions take either SAT or ACT but only 40 percent of community college entrants do so. In addition community college students are more likely than other students to score in the bottom quartile on such tests. 10 percent of community college students do score in the highest quartile.
IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES

• The students community colleges serve and the role they play in providing citizens who fill important jobs and support major institutions in our society, make the educational process different from four year colleges.

• Community colleges today, train 80% of the country's police officers, firefighters and emergency medical technicians and more than half of its new nurses and health care workers.

• They are the go-to destinations for displaced workers and immigrants seeking language and cultural skills. Community colleges are where people most often go when they need to brush up on math or English before pursuing a college degree.

• Transfer to four year colleges is only one of the functions community colleges fill. There is also a need for citizens that can be well educated in two years and anchored in the reality of the 21st century work environment.
• Being feeder colleges for four year institutions that have better funding and higher status can be very limiting factors, these lead to negative comparisons all too often.

• Making sure that community colleges are recognized as different from their four year institutions, and that they are critical to the sustainability of an American democracy is one issue for faculty, looking at best practices.

• We have a responsibility to take pride in this far more complex societal function and pass on the excitement of achievement and contributing to the varying types of success our students need to attain.
• Firefighter and nurses are among the most noble service providers in the country, nurturing their ethics and values that contribute to a high quality of humanity in American life as compared to the hyper-materialistic ambitions cultivated in so many graduates from four year and graduate institution, is an important goal, and worthy of pride and celebration.

• Community colleges are sandwiched between high schools and four year colleges and universities. Community college’s operations and success are inevitably related to both. Today the trajectory of change has broadened as indicated earlier, to include a global environment as well.
TEACHING PSYCHOLOGY AT A COMMUNITY COLLEGE

• Having looked at some of the issues in the larger educational system, the recent competition and changes that have occurred or not occurred, we focus more narrowly now, on the discipline of psychology:

• How pervasive is it? How is it taught in the classroom?

• The leadership of the American Psychological Association (APA), specifically its Board of Educational Affairs (BEA) has provided clear guidelines for teaching psychology.

• The degree should document that students have the ability to think scientifically about behavior, developed skills related to the conduct of research, embody values that reflect psychology as both a science and an applied discipline and one that encourages personal growth. Tables 1 & 2 follow and summarize the learning goals.
Table 1. APA Guidelines for the Undergraduate Psychology Major . . .

Structure of the Guidelines

-1-

Knowledge, Skills, and Values Consistent With the Science and Application of Psychology

Goal 1: Knowledge Base of Psychology . . . . . . .
Goal 2: Research Methods in Psychology . . . . . . .
Goal 3: Critical Thinking Skills in Psychology . . . .
Goal 4: Application of Psychology . . . . . . . . . . .
Goal 5: Values in Psychology . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
Table 2. APA Guidelines for the Undergraduate Psychology Major . . .
Structure of the Guidelines

Knowledge, Skills, and Values Consistent With Liberal Arts Education That Are Further Developed in Psychology . . . . . .

Goal 6: Information and Technological Literacy . . . .
Goal 7: Communication Skills . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
Goal 8: Sociocultural and International Awareness . .
Goal 9: Personal Development . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
Goal 10: Career Planning and Development . . . . . . . .
As can be seen the 10 learning goals are very comprehensive and reflects the broad scope of subject matter, the method and the skills involved in the teaching of psychology.

Overall, over a million students take psychology courses every year.

How much of this can be taught in community colleges?

Community colleges have the option of getting students started on all ten paths!

The opportunity to lay this kind of foundation is exactly the kind of challenge that growing minds need.
• These are important standards to establish, protect and develop. Equally important, is the extent to which they address the knowledge, skills and perspectives that so many careers and jobs, as well as, further success in college require.

• In 2009–10, more than half of the 1.7 million bachelor's degrees awarded were in five fields: business, management, marketing, and personal and culinary services (22 percent); social sciences and history (10 percent); health professions and related programs (8 percent); education (6 percent); and psychology (6 percent).
Overall, the number of associate's degrees awarded from 1999–2000 to 2009–10 increased by 50 percent, or by 285,000 degrees.

The field of psychology experienced the largest percent increase in the number of associate's degrees awarded over this time period 352 percent, from approximately 1,500 as shown below, in Table 3. to 6,600 degrees.

In 2009–10, females earned 62 percent of all associate's degrees awarded.
Table 3. Excerpts from Community College Associate Degrees Conferred by Major Field of Study, 1996–97

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Field of Study</th>
<th>Conferred</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liberal/general studies and humanities</td>
<td>167,448</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health professions and related sciences</td>
<td>76,848</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business management/administrative services</td>
<td>71,766</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering-related technologies</td>
<td>20,208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>9,687</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biological sciences</td>
<td>2,046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>1,659</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical sciences</td>
<td>1,658</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>1440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>765</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science technologies</td>
<td>743</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural sciences</td>
<td>688</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>456,508</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2, below shows the increases in Bachelor degrees awarded during the two periods identified, psychology degrees at this level also show a significant increase from over 74,000 to over 97,000.

This would suggest that psychology as separate discipline and also as a contributing discipline, (at least one course is often required for many related social science, education, health related and science majors), is a discipline that is being seen as important in community college and undergraduate education.
Figure 2: Number of bachelor's degrees awarded by degree-granting institutions in selected fields of study: Academic years 1999-2000 and 2009-10

SOME STRENGTHS OF PSYCHOLOGY - 1

• From the data presented above Psychology as a discipline seems to be holding its own in a changing environment.

• Rather than being a discipline that focuses solely on a single aspect of understanding, in studying human beings, psychology was forced to call upon many disciplines in order to provide an adequate strategy for studying human behavior and functioning.

• A pedagoge in psychology at a community college has the privilege of engaging students in powerful ways, ways that lay a critical foundation for success in baccalaureate courses, a professional career in psychology and related fields, as well as being upstanding citizen.
• There are at many skills that a pedagoge can model and invite students to develop in teaching psychology, skills in concentration, writing, use of the scientific method, statistics, communication and ethics, among others.

• These skills and areas of study correspond well to the learning goals identified by the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA).

• The General Goals as well as some of the learning goals related to Reading, Math and Science follow, they are presented in Tables 1, 2, 3 & 4.
Table 3. Performance in Program for International Student Assessment: PISA : What is measured?  
PISA 2009 Defines Four (4) General Areas of Assessment

1. Knowledge in each subject that students need to apply: In Psychology we have heavy content areas, e.g. Biology and Statistics.
2. Competencies in each subject that students need to apply: In Psychology students can become competent in the use of scientific method, statistics, as well as clinical methods.
3. Contexts in which students encounter problems: In Psychology students can do internships in various settings.
4. Students’ attitudes and dispositions towards learning: In Positive Psychology students are encouraged to investigate and develop attitudes that lead to success in learning and in life.

OECD (2010), PISA 2009 Results: What Students Know and Can Do – Student Performance in Reading, Mathematics and Science (Volume I) http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264091450-en
Table 4. PISA READING MEASURES

1. The capacity of an individual to understand, use, reflect on and engage with written texts in order to achieve his/her goals, to develop his/her knowledge and potential, and to participate in society.

2. In addition to decoding and literal comprehension, reading literacy also involves interpretation and reflection, and the ability to use reading to fulfill one’s goals in life.

3. PISA focuses on reading to learn rather than learning to read. Therefore, students are not assessed on the most basic reading skills.

OECD (2010), PISA 2009 Results: What Students Know and Can Do – Student Performance in Reading, Mathematics and Science (Volume I) http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264091450-en
TABLE 6. PISA MATHEMATICS

• The capacity of an individual to formulate, employ and interpret mathematics in a variety of contexts. It include reasoning mathematically and using mathematical concepts, procedures, facts and tools to describe, explain and predict phenomena.
• It assists individuals in recognizing the role that mathematics plays in the world and in making well-founded judgments and decisions that constructive, engaged and reflective citizens would require.
• Mathematical literacy is related to wider, functional use of mathematics; engagement includes the ability to recognize and formulate mathematical problems in various situations.

OECD (2010), PISA 2009 Results: What Students Know and Can Do – Student Performance in Reading, Mathematics and Science (Volume I) http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264091450-en
TABLE 5. PISA FOCUS ON ASSESSMENT OF SCIENCE

1. Possesses scientific knowledge and uses that knowledge to identify questions, acquire new knowledge, explain scientific phenomena and draw evidence-based conclusion about science-related issues.

2. Understands the characteristic features of science as a form of human knowledge and enquiry.

3. Shows awareness of how science and technology shape our material, intellectual and cultural environments.

4. Engages in science-related issues and with the ideas of science, as a reflective citizen.

OECD (2010), *PISA 2009 Results: What Students Know and Can Do – Student Performance in Reading, Mathematics and Science* (Volume I)  
http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264091450-en
There are many skills and many areas that a pedagogue can model and invite students to develop in teaching psychology. Regarding areas:

- They can teach for example, Biology, Statistics, Social Psychology, Learning Theory, and Psychological Disorders and Therapy.
- Students exposed to this breadth, develop a respect for the discipline instead of thinking they know it all, they begin to see the complexities and the challenges of the discipline and they come to see options and opportunities they can work on, develop, use personally and in a profession.
• Psychology as a science and its relationship to philosophy is an important issue that a pedagogue can address early. To complex for community college students?

• Two basic questions generally kick off these discussions. How old is psychology? Two categories of answers emerge from students: 1. As old as man, thousands of years and 2. Under two hundred years, about 1870 something. The latter comes from students who had another course in psychology and the former from students are new to the discipline.

• Both are correct! The perfect lead in into the history of psychology as located in philosophy and the evolution of psychology as a science and the implications for current developments.
• Yet another issue is the relationship of psychology and common sense, the relationship that needs to modeled is one of mutual respect. Is science the only way of knowing? Some students know that’s not true. Psychology as a science refines knowledge, uncovers underlying mechanisms, specifies variations that are a function of particular situations, predicts behavior, etc. Acknowledgement of the role of common sense creates a space where students can respect their own thinking and are motivated to develop it further.
• Some academic institutions still steeped in a value free mentality have systematically pushed ethical issues to the margins of knowledge acquisition. Ethics instead being integrated into each discipline as it applies, has been overtly and covertly dismissed as irrelevant. An added problem is that it does not lend itself well to scientific investigation. The Milgram study which was a brilliant study on some of the complexities regarding ethical behavior as it intersects with institutional commands, is a banned experimental paradigm in the United States. As a student of Dr. Milgram, having to defend himself against accusations of being unethical! When in fact and indeed, he had protected individuals from the consequences of their own decisions and actions, under circumstances that can and do happen daily in real life. Psychology need not be limited in teaching ethics.
Some students, often male, wonder about whether psychology is really a science. This an important question to address. What does it means to be a science? Some basic requirements include being observable and testable. A question all my students have to confront: Is everything about human beings observable? testable? Students recognize that the answer is “No”.

What implications does this have for psychology as a science? Students begin the journey of thinking critically in psychology, what aspects of psychology can be scientific and what aspects do not lend themselves well to quantification or measurement. The role of technology in making things visible for scientific study is also introduced at this time. What are MRIs doing to understanding the brain today? Students can see how science can progress.
Still another issue that a pedagogue in Psychology is privileged to teach is the fallacy of value-free science. Parker J. Palmer, writes: “We have yet to uproot the myth of “value free” knowledge” We systematically and relentlessly privilege intellectual detachment over engagement with the world. Together with overspecialization by and within our disciplines, we are encouraged and supported to claim ignorance about things we know, we knew or should know. In turn this is what and how we teach, what we accept and model. This has consequences for our students, who end up with large amounts of intellectual indigestion and emotional tensions while engaged in the college experience.
Strategic Skills that are/can be taught in Psychology

- Psychology has made its mark with the APA style of writing.
- However, reflective essays are also an important form of writing that provide an excellent counterpoint to the strictures of research writing. A good pedagogue will provide students with many and varied writing opportunities in the course of a semester. Scaffolding assignments can help students develop good application and analytical skills.
- Communication skills are also key; frequent opportunities to use new concepts and vocabularies in class are important for students’ growth and transformation.
- Basic research design skills also come under the purview of a good psychology professor, as well as the use of basic statistics. Using these, frequently, to frame questions and to come up with solutions, get students started on critical ways of organizing, viewing, and using knowledge.
Percentages of 7 Risk factors at Community Colleges
Can we be effective teachers of students with the characteristics?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk Factor</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delayed entry</td>
<td>48 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolled part time</td>
<td>46 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worked full time</td>
<td>35 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financially independent</td>
<td>35 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had dependents</td>
<td>21 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single parent</td>
<td>11 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No high school diploma</td>
<td>11 percent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

YES!! The motivated ones want the challenge, they are turned off by things that lack substance and relevance, they are eager to get knowledge and skills that make a difference!
What about the not so interested ones? They represent a problem that needs attention.

1. One answer focuses on how dynamics have shifted today with regard to student conduct in the classroom. The educational landscape with regard to student/faculty relations has shifted. And for the millions of students who attend college there are now many industries that have emerged to help them avoid learning.

2. The availability of paper mills, in addition to the digital options that the internet provides, make it very easy for students to avoid developing the thinking and writing skills that require consistent work and practice. Electronics also make it easier to cheat on tests. And a culture of value free science says: “If it can be done, why not?”
3. Perhaps more important, however, is the shift in student values. In the 1960s most colleges students saw higher education as vehicle for intellectual, moral and personal growth. Today students see higher education as the means to a substantial income. These signal different motivations and reflect societal trends that indicate that making money is more important than how you make it, and bending the rules is fine, just don’t get caught
• 4. These shifts in motivations are further complicated by the establishment of sites like Rate-my-professor.com where students can go and find out who the best/easiest professors are. It is also where students can go leave a public record of their anger at a professor and buttress it with many misrepresentations.

• 5. These attitudes are further complicated by FERPA and HIPAA and State laws designed to protect students privacy. While the original focus was on students’ academic records, issues related to reporting student conduct are also now surrounded by a web of laws, that make even addressing students’ behavior in class a potential source of conflict.
6. To be effective in the classroom educators need to exercise a level of discipline that is based on moral authority and in turn students perceive their actions as legitimate and fair. However, FERPA and similar laws have led to a legal entitlement of students that has resulted in an increase in formalization of classroom discipline. One consequence is that the educator’s moral authority is now frequently undermined and challenged. “Innocent until proven guilty” is the posture a student can adopt when spoken to, regarding distracting classroom behavior.
CHALLENGE TO COMMUNITY COLLEGES

• The 21st Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges in 2012 wrote that the community college is one of the greatest assets of this nation, in the task of creating a better future. A great challenge and an opportunity are at hand.

• Here is the CHALLENGE: The United States, which for generations led the world in college degree completion, now ranks 16th in the world in completion rates for 25- to 34-year-olds. At the very time that global competitiveness depends on a well-educated citizenry, we find ourselves losing ground in relative educational attainment.
WHAT OPPORTUNITY IS AT THE END OF THE RAINBOW?

• Here is the OPPORTUNITY: By 2018, nearly two thirds of all American jobs will require a postsecondary certificate or degree. The most recent analyses indicate that the United States has been under producing graduates with postsecondary education.

• The 21st Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges believes that community colleges must change their institutional characteristics as follows:
COMMISION’S RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Move FROM --------------------------------- Move TO
1. A focus on student access ---------- ---A focus on access and student success
2. Fragmented course taking---------- Clear, coherent educational pathways
3. Low rates of student success ---------- High rates of student success
4. Tolerance of achievement gaps ------------Commitment to eradicating achievement gaps
5. A culture of anecdote --------------------- A culture of evidence
6. Individual faculty prerogative -----------Collective responsibility for student success
7. A culture of isolation ------------------------------- A culture of collaboration
8. Emphasis on boutique programs -------------------Effective education at scale
9. A focus on teaching -----------------------------A focus on learning
10. Information infrastructure as management support ----Information infrastructure as learning analytics
11. Funding tied to enrollment -----------------------Funding tied to enrollment, institutional performance, and student success

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS - 1

- The arc of this presentation has been very wide.
- We started in 1901 with the inception of community colleges. We acknowledged not only their meteoric rise and critical contributions but the fact that today we are at a crossroad.
- Community colleges are sandwiched between relatively poor performing high schools and more expensive and often disdainful four year colleges.
CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS - 2

- Nonetheless we are all now confronted with these facts: the high price of education and relatively poor performance of our students by national and international standards.
- We looked at a single discipline, Psychology, and saw a well-structured curriculum, with great potential, one that was also a good match with international standards, e.g. PISA.
- We also looked at the dynamic opportunities for teaching and learning engendered by such a diverse discipline.
• However, these educational opportunities were limited by the students’ behavioral problems, related legal entitlements and the administrative practices that tend to undercut the academic and moral authority of educators in the classroom.
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CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

• If we are to increase the frequency of student success as the Commission suggested we need to, the issues of students’ behavior and students’ rights as they negatively impact learning and not just a focus on our pedagogy must become a priority.
• A priority not just for faculty but for commissions and administrators, who seem locked into a single cause fallacy focused only the teaching half of the teaching/learning dyad.
Thank you for listening. It's always a joy to communicate with colleagues. I welcome your questions and comments.