

Reconsidering the Community College

Author(s): Philo A. Hutcheson

Source: *History of Education Quarterly*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (Autumn, 1999), pp. 307-320

Published by: Cambridge University Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/370012>

Accessed: 12-01-2020 03:49 UTC

## REFERENCES

Linked references are available on JSTOR for this article:

[https://www.jstor.org/stable/370012?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/370012?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references_tab_contents)

You may need to log in to JSTOR to access the linked references.

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at

<https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Cambridge University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *History of Education Quarterly*

# Reconsidering the Community College

*Philo A. Hutcheson*

This essay represents an effort within this larger historiographical conversation to examine how historians of higher education have addressed *institutions*, specifically, the public community college.<sup>1</sup> With an institutional lens providing the focus, it examines current efforts in the field and speculates on directions scholarship appears to be taking. Even with an array of institutions before them, from research universities and comprehensive colleges to two-year schools and specialized institutions, historians of higher education have tended to use the research university as the means for understanding United States higher education in its institutional form. This essay asks, should we pare down historical analysis of higher education to one institutional type? What have we lost by focusing so narrowly on that level? Further, can we learn the nature of United States higher education in its institutional form by also considering the community college?

In general, historians of higher education have paid little, if any, attention to the community college. A careful search of the literature revealed only three scholars who substantially addressed community college history; an accident of assignment as a conference paper discussant revealed another who has repeatedly studied the history of junior colleges. Steven Katsinas has focused on development in one southern state. Robert Pedersen has examined the origins of the institution, including leaders' planning efforts. John Frye, with the only book-length treatment of public two-year colleges, has raised questions about the accuracy of assumptions about national leaders' influence on junior colleges. Edward A. Gallagher

---

Philo A. Hutcheson is associate professor of educational policy studies at Georgia State University, where he also serves as faculty coordinator of the higher education doctoral program. His recent publications include a chapter co-authored with Linda Buchanan, "Re-Considering the Washington-DuBois Debate: Two Black Colleges in 1910-1911," in *Southern Education in the 20th Century: Exceptionalism and its Limits*, ed. Wayne Urban, (New York: Garland Press, 1999), as well as "McCarthyism and the Professoriate: A Historiographic Nightmare?" in *Higher Education: The Handbook of Theory and Research*, v. 12, ed. John C. Smart, (New York: Agathon Press, 1997).

<sup>1</sup>This work focuses on community colleges as a public two-year institution, and offers no examination of the private junior college. For an intriguing look at those institutions, see Barbara Townsend (ed.), *Community Colleges for Women and Minorities: Enabling Access to the Baccalaureate* (New York: Garland Press, 1999). This essay uses the terms community college, junior college, and two-year college interchangeably. While this is generally inappropriate without historical specificity in each use of each term, it is seemingly appropriate for the purpose of a historiographical rather than historical examination.

has provided perhaps the most extensive treatment of two-year schools with a focus on Alexis Frederick Lange and his involvement in the junior college and progressive movements in California.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to these few studies, two important books have discussed the history of the community college, perhaps providing the two most influential interpretations of this history for the general historian of higher education. Historian Laurence Veysey is an immediate object of study because of his continuing presence in the history of higher education for a work he wrote over thirty years ago.<sup>3</sup> Two sociologists using historical methods, Stephen Brint and Jerome Karabel, deserve attention because they offered a historical perspective on the community college from its foundation to the recent past, and their work is a revision of the historical (and sociological) treatments of the two-year college.<sup>4</sup> This essay will examine how Veysey and Brint and Karabel have portrayed the community college. That

---

<sup>2</sup>See Robert T. Pedersen, "Value Conflict on Community College Campus: An Examination of Its Historical Origins," *Managing Community and Junior Colleges: Perspectives for the Next Century*, ed. by Allan M. Hoffman and Daniel J. Julius (Washington, D.C.: College and University Personnel Association, 1993), and Robert Pedersen, "The St. Louis Conference: The Junior College Movement Reborn," *Community College Journal* 65 (5) April-May 1995: 26-30; Steven G. Katsinas, "George C. Wallace and the Founding of Alabama's Public Two-Year Colleges," *Journal of Higher Education* 65 (4) July/August 1994: 447-472; and John H. Frye, *The Vision of the Public Junior College, 1900-1940: Professional Goals and Popular Aspirations* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1992). At times, Frye's historical treatment is awkward. See, for example, his arguments that college professors "passed" ministers in occupational status in the early 1900s because by that time there were more professors than ministers, p. 21. See Edward A. Gallagher, "The California Teachers Association: An Interest Group as Progressive Reformer," *Michigan Academician* 29 (1997): 51-68; Edward A. Gallagher, "Revisionist Nonsense and the Junior College: Early California Development," *Michigan Academician* 26 (1995): 215-228; Edward A. Gallagher, "Jordan and Lange: The California Junior College's Role as Protector of Teaching," *Michigan Academician* 27 [vol. appears out of sequence] (1994): 1-12; Edward A. Gallagher, "Alexis Lange and the Origin of the Occupational Education Function in California Junior Colleges," *Michigan Academician* 22 (1990): 241-257; Edward A. Gallagher, "Alexis Lange, Progressivism and Junior College Functions," *Michigan Academician* 7 (1974): 111-122; Edward A. Gallagher, "A Potent Bacillus at Ann Arbor: Origin of the Junior College Idea," *Michigan Academician* 6 (1974): 435-444. Other scholars have examined community colleges and raised historical questions; the search for this essay focused on those using some form of historical analysis to examine community colleges.

<sup>3</sup>Laurence Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965).

<sup>4</sup>Stephen Brint and Jerome Karabel, *The Diverted Dream: Community Colleges and the Promise of Educational Opportunity in America, 1900-1985* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989). Brint and Karabel's pedigrees are solidly in the field of sociology, or more specifically, the sociology of education. Nevertheless, they list an impressive array of historians of education in their bibliography, including John Brubacher and Willis Rudy, Lawrence Cremin, Carl Kaestle and Maris Vinovskis, Ellen Lagemann, Diane Ravitch, Frederick Rudolph, Lawrence Veysey, Harold Wechsler, and Robert Wiebe. As my arguments will evidence later in the essay, I am concerned that a sociological conception of history takes precedence for Brint and Karabel. Another possible work for this examination is Kevin J. Dougherty, *The Contradictory College: The Conflicting Origins, Impacts, and Futures of the Community College* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994). Dougherty accepts, however, the point of view of Brint and Karabel and the opposing positions that argue for the community

examination includes a consideration of the differences between historical and historical-sociological methods. In concluding, the essay turns to more recent historical scholarship to develop a historical framework for understanding these institutions.

### *Veysey and the Community College*

There is really no simple answer to the problem of understanding community colleges, although one is available. The simple answer, which Laurence Veysey provided in a footnote in *The Emergence of the American University*, is that historians cannot even be sure that the community college is a higher education institution: "On its face, the widespread development of junior and community colleges after World War II might seem to contradict this assertion about organization [that the basic pattern was set by 1910]. Yet these institutions are so closely related to the public school system that it may be questioned whether they are part of 'higher education' in more than a nominal sense."<sup>5</sup> That is, the community college does not exist in historical terms. It is not real in higher education; it exists only in K-12 terms. To a significant degree, historians of higher education have treated the community college in just that way.<sup>6</sup> Yet Veysey's footnote belied both his arguments and evidence.

Veysey employed traditional historical methods to develop his arguments about the university. That is, he used footnotes, archival sources for institutional and individual information, and critiques of other historians' work to formulate a thorough comprehension of colleges and universities from 1860 to 1910, with some discussion of earlier and later years in order to anchor his arguments beyond the primary historicity of his book.<sup>7</sup> His

---

college as an institution of opportunity, indicating that the origins question is whether the community college is a product of elite organizations (universities and businesses) or student and parent demand, p. 7. Furthermore, his examination of the origins of the community college focuses heavily on the 1960s and 1970s, pp. 119-188. Hence Brint and Karabel's attempt to cover the entire history of two-year colleges offers a better source of comparison and contrast for this essay.

<sup>5</sup>Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University*, p. 338, note 237.

<sup>6</sup>In addition to Veysey, see also Frederick Rudolph, *The American College and University: A History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), p. 463. John S. Brubacher and Willis Rudy offer a more extensive treatment of the junior college, suggesting that it appeared to be an appropriate mechanism for handling the large influx of students in the 1900s; see *Higher Education in Transition: An American History: 1636-1956* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), pp. 247-255. Finally, David O. Levine devotes a chapter to the same theme, "Junior College and the Differentiation of the Public Sector," *The American College and the Culture of Aspiration, 1915-1940* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1986), pp. 162-184.

<sup>7</sup>Veysey is not, of course, for the casual reader, and a discussion of historiography and higher education deserves a consideration of Veysey as historian. At the beginning of the term when I teach the history of higher education, I try to give students a quick sense of what we will be doing in *historical* terms. I suggest that there are three ways of understanding history. The first I call the "Place-Name-Date" approach. They are relieved when I indicate that

central conclusion regarding the nature of the university is that it incorporates, in a bureaucratic form, *utility*, *research*, and *liberal education* (each with varying institutional and individual meanings). According to Veysey, utility carried several connotations of democracy, including individual success and keeping society free from discontent by offering a “classless education.” Vocational courses are especially important to advocates of utilitarian education.<sup>8</sup> Proponents of research in the 1800s had argued that the university was the proper home of science and that the discovery of facts would reveal general laws.<sup>9</sup> Advocates of liberal culture in the late 1800s and early 1900s often evidenced a strong sense of moral code, with an emphasis on the “noble” and the “gentleman,” and studies in the arts and literature of Western civilization.<sup>10</sup> Veysey, regrettably, dismissed religion in the form of discipline and piety, barely acknowledging any, much less persistent, influence. As Linda Eisenmann argues in her essay, historical scholars of higher education need to pay more attention to the issue of religion and the development of higher education in this country. Nevertheless, the idea of the university, as a central institution and as an awkward combination of potentially competing if not conflicting ideals, sustains in the late twentieth century. The bureaucratic nature of the institution, and its emphases on utility, research, and the liberal arts are evident on a daily basis. Veysey captured its essence, an essence that applies to higher education in general.

Given Veysey’s achievement as a historian of higher education, how can we explain his simple answer regarding community colleges? We cannot dismiss his assessment as inaccurate because of his presentism in 1965.<sup>11</sup>

---

I have no patience for such history. The second I call “amateur history,” quickly explaining that the amateur nature is not meant to be disparaging. Rather, it is a distinction between volunteer and paid historical interests, a historical approach which values artifacts as much as documents. The third way of understanding history is the professional form, dominated by historians *qua* professors. Footnotes, searches in archives, biographical readings, translations, and critiques of others works are well within the domain of professional historical understanding. This method comes together so that we can, in the words of Jacques Barzun and Henry Graff, trust history. As they explain, our trust derives from documents that are critically tested, using judgement governed by probability, with an understanding that the notion of an absolute past is a delusion, with an objectivity based on “testing in all ways possible one’s subjective impressions, so as to arrive at a knowledge of objects,” and finally, given that causes may be indeterminate, the historian analyzes only conditions and may organize them as a pattern. In this sense, Veysey is clearly a professional historian. See Jacques Barzun and Henry F. Graff, *The Modern Researcher* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., rev. ed. 1970), pp. 163-191.

<sup>8</sup>Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University*, pp. 61, 64, 65, 66, and 116-117.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 123, 136, and 138.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 184-85, 186, 188, 190, 207, and 215.

<sup>11</sup>Arguing for presentism of course only states that Veysey wrote of community colleges as he did, rather than explaining it. See C. Vann Woodward, *Thinking Back: The Perils of Writing History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), pp. 36-37 for his evaluation of his own presentism, in which he suggests it is a subtle mechanism that shifts over time.

His scholarship in regard to United States higher education remains fundamental and not just because no one else recently has had more bravura to attempt a sweeping history of higher education in this country. Although he did not examine all institutions, or the entire history, of higher education, Veysey's evidence remains a model, and his arguments about the stability of the new university structure of 1910 remain unchallenged.<sup>12</sup> That is to say, whether he wrote in 1965 or some other year of some other decade, the meaning of the research university continues to obtain. Nor does what we might call regionalism appear to apply to this problem. While his view of the community college was likely grounded in the California institutions, that is not a sufficient explanation of his questionable reasoning. The influence of the California version of higher education, and of the California version of the two-year college, is documented well beyond Veysey. In fact, the authors who serve as counterpoint to Veysey in this essay, Brint and Karabel, also use the California influence as a central part of the argument about the development of American higher education.

What may be missing from the historiography of higher education in Veysey's conception is not whether the community college is a viable institution of higher education given its attachment to the schools, but whether historians can offer the argument and evidence that it is an institution of higher education with bureaucracy, utility, research, liberal education (and religion). It appears that Brint and Karabel begin to provide an answer, and that answer is in the affirmative.

### ***Brint and Karabel: "Historical Sociologists"***

In *The Diverted Dream*, Stephen Brint and Jerome Karabel used two devices to develop their history of the community college; the first is struc-

---

<sup>12</sup>This is not to argue that historians of higher education have been unable to revise Veysey. See, for example, Colin B. Burke, *American Collegiate Populations: A Test of the Traditional View* (New York: New York University Press, 1982); although Burke focuses his arguments on Hofstadter's portrayal of the Great Retrogression, his work also answers Veysey's arguments about discipline and piety. Also see Roger L. Geiger, "The Era of Multipurpose Colleges in American Higher Education, 1850-1890," *History of Higher Education Annual* 15 (1995): 51-92. Finally, Veysey does not discuss different groups and their important contributions to higher education issues and debates in the late 1800s; see Barbara Miller Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women: A History of Women and Higher Education in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985) and Linda Eisenmann, "Reconsidering a Classic: Assessing the History of Women's Higher Education a Dozen Years after Barbara Solomon," *Harvard Educational Review* 67 (Winter 1997): 689-717. Still, it is very hard to dodge Veysey, as evidenced by Geiger's work on research universities. See Roger L. Geiger, *To Advance Knowledge: The Growth of Research Universities, 1900-1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) and *Research and Relevant Knowledge: American Research Universities since World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). The importance of those institutions then and now is very much a part of the history of higher education. Finally, Veysey offers an enduring statement on structure in United States higher education and its pattern of utility, research, liberal education and religion, as this essay argues.

tural, the second thematic. Brint and Karabel repeatedly referred to the “educational system” of this country, and they specifically position the community college: “Poised between a burgeoning system of secondary education and a highly stratified structure of economic opportunity, the junior college was located at the very point where the aspirations generated by American democracy clashed head on with the realities of its class structure.”<sup>13</sup>

According to Brint and Karabel, the community college began in the early 1900s as a uniquely American invention. Their assumption appears to be appropriate: since it was in 1901 in Joliet, Illinois, that the separate and distinct institution of the public junior college first appeared. And, it appeared, of course, under the ministerial hand of William Rainey Harper, president of the University of Chicago. While the two-year college was thus a product of the research university, it was also a break from that institution.<sup>14</sup> In addition to advocating and supporting the separate collegiate institution at Joliet, Harper also encouraged the development of an internal junior college at Chicago. However, that structural arrangement has had little following, so it requires even less explanation from Brint and Karabel.<sup>15</sup>

Much of Brint and Karabel’s historical narrative, especially in their discussion of the junior college prior to World War II, focused on the development of this separate institution, the public junior college. They argued for its distinct nature, and they also examined its bureaucratized character. For example, in their extensive examination of the Massachusetts system of community colleges (the focus of the book’s entire second half), they argued that from top to bottom, the community college is a bureaucracy. The first members of the governing board evidenced “a strong commitment to the signature elements of managerial culture: efficiency and productivity.” Its chief executive officer deliberately controlled the colleges’ presidents, and they in turn controlled their institutions.<sup>16</sup> In this sense, the community college is part of the bureaucratic development that Veysey highlighted.

Brint and Karabel’s second, thematic, device is more important to their arguments about the community college. They argued that the purpose of the junior college is to provide college-level instruction, primarily in a terminal form, in anticipation of the demands of the university and the business community, in what they call “*anticipatory subordination*,” that is, these schools recognized their low place in an educational hierarchy and

---

<sup>13</sup>Brint and Karabel, *The Diverted Dream*, p. 9.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>15</sup>Yet early conceptions of the junior college specifically, even deliberately, focused on the internal arrangement. See Edward A. Gallagher, “A Potent Bacillus at Ann Arbor: Origin of the Junior College Idea,” *Michigan Academician* 6 (1974): 435-444.

<sup>16</sup>Brint and Karabel, *The Diverted Dream*, p. 146 on the governing board, pp. 151-152 on controlling presidents, p. 167 on presidential control of institutions.

subordinated their expectations accordingly. From their beginning, community colleges had offered liberal arts courses for students interested in transferring to four-year institutions. Yet community colleges could not compete with four-year colleges or universities in attracting talented liberal arts students, and since they had to attract some support, including the business community so that their graduates could find employment, community colleges increasingly emphasized utilitarian studies.<sup>17</sup> They subordinated their aspirations, and, Brint and Karabel argued, those of their students. Thus Brint and Karabel addressed the curriculum of the community college, presenting it as a school that throughout its history has offered both liberal education and utilitarian education. Initially, the institutions' subordination was to university presidents and their demands for liberally educated and talented transfer students, but by the 1970s community colleges succumbed to business leaders and their needs for trained workers.<sup>18</sup> Thus, within the bureaucratic structures of higher education, the community college (with its admitted direct links to secondary schools) offered instruction for the first years of college in two of Veysey's key programmatic areas: liberal education and utility.<sup>19</sup>

Brint and Karabel's use of theme to organize their arguments and evidence highlighted their self-description as historical sociologists. There are relationships between historical and sociological studies of higher education, and John Thelin argued that historians and sociologists "mutually benefitted" from each other's studies in the 1970s. Thelin suggested:

On the one hand, sociologists were intrigued by the methods and sources favored by historians: historians' ease with memorabilia, artifacts, clutter, unwieldy documents, and voluminous organizational records allowed them to explore all the closets and corners of complex institutions.... The fair exchange was that sociologists provided historians with concepts and themes which constituted an escape route from the formula of linear chronicles associated with the "house histories."<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>18</sup>Brint and Karabel, *The Diverted Dream*, pp. 30-32 and 37-41 for the national movements in liberal arts and vocationalism, respectively. In the case of Massachusetts community colleges, see pp. 148-151.

<sup>19</sup>In a personal conversation, Edward Gallagher has noted that the American Association of Junior College's leadership in the pre-World War II era was dominated by private junior college educators. Given the number of those institutions with denominational affiliations, it might be that a third area of Veysey's analysis, religion, had a strong presence as well. This history is not yet written. As for private junior colleges and denominations, see Thomas C. Hunt and James C. Carper, *Religious Higher Education in the United States: A Source Book* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996) for a number of denominations' stories about their junior colleges.

<sup>20</sup>John R. Thelin, "Beyond Background Music: Historical Research on Admissions and Access in Higher Education," in *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research*, ed. by John C. Smart, vol. 1 (New York: Agathon Press, 1985), p. 357.



While this exchange has had its rewards, we should not underestimate the disadvantages of cross-disciplinary efforts.<sup>21</sup> Brint and Karabel indeed had a theme—anticipatory subordination—that could offer an “escape route” from simple historicity. How they used it, however, raises historiographical problems.

For example, Brint and Karabel were far too casual in their discussion of university leaders in the early 1900s, so many of whom were progressives. They clearly viewed these progressives, as exemplified by such educational leaders as Doak S. Campbell, Walter Crosby Eells, and Leonard V. Koos, as “channeling fundamental moral and ethical concerns into a secular outlet” by establishing institutions and institutional procedures to track students into occupations befitting their abilities.<sup>22</sup> Yet as historian Edward Gallagher argued, progressivism in its California form of the junior college was far more than a simple middle-class repression of immigrant and working-class perspectives and aspirations.<sup>23</sup> Progressivism was a complex movement with many participants, and while David Levine’s arguments about junior colleges and progressivism could advance our historical understanding of the two-year institution, he was more interested in the junior college of the 1930s, when progressivism was a shadow of its earlier vibrant self.<sup>24</sup> The complexities of progressivism, of so much interest to historians, elicit virtually no attention from Brint and Karabel. Second, Brint and Karabel shifted, without the evidence of pattern typically found in historical works, from the institutional, student, and parent emphasis on liberal education at the community college in the 1930s to an examination of federal and state plans for a vocationalized community college in the post-World War II era, providing little explanation for shifts in student interests in the 1970s beyond media stories about unemployed PhDs.<sup>25</sup> The theme, rather than the awk-

---

<sup>21</sup>Ibid. Thelin highlights how Ralph Turner’s work, “Sponsored and Contest Mobility and the School System,” *American Sociological Review* 25 1960: 855-867 informed a great deal of work on higher education, including Harold Wechsler, *The Qualified Student: A History of Selective College Admissions in America* (New York: Wiley, 1977) and Martha G. Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door: Discrimination and Admissions at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, 1900-1970* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1979). For another discussion of the social sciences and their impact on historical study of higher education, see Lester F. Goodchild and Irene Pancner Huk, “The American College History: A Survey of Its Historiographic Schools and Analytic Approaches from the Mid-Nineteenth Century to the Present,” in *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research*, ed. John C. Smart, vol. 6 (New York: Agathon Press, 1990), pp. 201-290.

<sup>22</sup>Brint and Karabel, *The Diverted Dream*, p. 34.

<sup>23</sup>See Gallagher, “Alexis Lange, Progressivism and Junior College Functions.”

<sup>24</sup>Levine, *The American College and the Culture of Aspiration*, pp. 162-184.

<sup>25</sup>Brint and Karabel’s discussion of government and institutional efforts to increase vocational offerings is clear, not so their discussion of student interests. See *The Diverted Dream*, pp. 66-83 on the period from the late 1930 to the early 1950s, pp. 191-202 on government and institutions, pp. 113-116 on the mass media.

ward pattern of shifts in educational goals and behaviors, holds together their arguments.

Brint and Karabel use the rise of the American Association of Junior Colleges, beginning with its 1920 conference, as a focal point for the theme of anticipatory subordination, arguing that through this mechanism Campbell, Eells, and Koos were able to disseminate the concept of vocational education. That Association, however, received a different interpretation from Robert Pedersen. In contrast to Brint and Karabel, Pedersen analyzed the transcripts of the sessions at the Association's 1920 conference and concluded that the local nature of the two-year college was the organizational thrust.<sup>26</sup> For Gallagher and Pedersen, unwieldy documents and organizational records offer explanations beyond the confines of a theme. For Brint and Karabel, anticipatory subordination rather than a historical interpretation of the past holds their book together.

Nevertheless, key arrangements in the research university—bureaucracy, liberal education, utility—can be seen in the historical arguments that Brint and Karabel offered. They recognized the community college as an institution of higher education, although a subordinated one. These two examinations of community colleges raise important historiographical issues. One issue is the matter of description of the institution: is it a secondary school aspiring to higher education or is it a postsecondary institution? Another issue is more analytical in nature, whether the institution exhibits continuous or discontinuous characteristics.

### *A New Interpretation: A Distinctively American Institution?*

C. Vann Woodward suggested that a central problem of historical interpretation is what he called the province of the New Continuitarians, a province occupied by both neo-conservatives and Marxists. These scholars attempted to establish continuity. Yet their continuity also falls prey to discontinuity, to "*continuity interruptus*."<sup>27</sup> Woodward did not offer a clear sense of what the problem of continuity and discontinuity really is. In the case of institutional considerations of the history of higher education, Veysey seemed to seek continuity through the eye of the research university, and Brint and Karabel seem to find disruption in the diverted dream. There is, however, another way of considering the community college.

The historiographical problem of the community college runs deeper than simply a problem of continuity or discontinuity. It might appear

---

<sup>26</sup>Brint and Karabel, *The Diverted Dream*, pp. 32-42; Pedersen, "The St. Louis Conference," pp. 26-30. Pedersen has also developed this argument in "Value Conflict on Community College Campus."

<sup>27</sup>C. Vann Woodward, *Thinking Back: The Perils of Writing History*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), pp. 68-70.

that the institution severed relations with school districts from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, changing the course of its own destiny. The community college might also appear to have chosen vocational education over liberal education in the 1970s in an effort to secure students, funding, and public support. Regardless of these apparently discontinuous characteristics in the 1960s and 1970s, the community college shares a great deal with its past as well as with its present. Reconsidering the question of what an institution of higher education is brings us closer to understanding Veysey's omission and the eisegesis of Brint and Karabel. The community college is not simply an element of the public school system, nor is it in and of itself a unique American institution: it is a thoroughly American educational institution.

The Yale Report of 1828 provides an important insight. Despite Richard Hofstadter and Wilson Smith's documentary presentation of that report, it was much more than a defense of the classical curriculum.<sup>28</sup> The report's authors addressed not just the classical curriculum, but more broadly, the role of the college in United States society. Their statements remain instructive in considering the nature of higher education in the United States. They were clearly aware that colleges depend on a variety of sources of support. They addressed the question of admission, including whether as a result of who enters the institution it becomes an academy or a college. The college bears the responsibility to educate all segments of society (a limited definition at that time, although we would fool ourselves, and confirm a core post-modernist argument, to suggest that today we offer complete access), as long as those students are ready for college-level instruction. College offers a higher education that is liberating and utilitarian, and in that combination, provides a needed defense of a fledgling national experiment, the republic. And, college is a place to further thought, although the science at Yale in 1828 was not the same as the science at Johns Hopkins University some fifty years later. Finally, and obviously, the college offers moral instruction.<sup>29</sup>

The community college, now and then, seeks support from a variety of sources, public and private, individual and institutional. It admits students with little regard to preparation, and as the authors of the Yale Report noted, that is an age-old practice in this country for institutions of higher education (although as the Yale Report authors also made clear, some insti-

---

<sup>28</sup>See Richard Hofstadter and Wilson Smith, eds., *American Higher Education: A Documentary History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961). See Stanley M. Guralnick, *Science and the Ante-bellum American College* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1975), pp. 28-33 for an argument that the Yale Report was more than a defence of the classical curriculum. Guralnick's examination focuses on the issues of science and the "modern university," and he argues that the Yale faculty looked forward as well as backward.

<sup>29</sup>Hofstadter and Smith, *American Higher Education*, v. 1, pp. 277-291.

tutions were more concerned than others about student preparation).<sup>30</sup> The community college offers utility and liberal education and to a lesser degree than four-year institutions, but now more often than earlier, research. In fact, faculty members at community colleges are increasingly engaged in research; from 1969 to 1989, the percentage of community college faculty producing at least one article virtually doubled, from 23.7 to 46.7 percent.<sup>31</sup> Nor should historians of higher education forget the role assigned to the junior college by the 1947 Report to the President on Education for Democracy, which stated that community colleges, with their diverse curricula and “open” doors, were a necessary part of the continued advancement of democracy.<sup>32</sup> Finally, the elements of discipline and piety might not be too obvious, although in the trade of the whip for the standardized test, “cooling out” might well be a way of disciplining students to their appropriate behaviors.<sup>33</sup> The essence of the community college reflects arguments about the nature of United States higher education outlined in the early nineteenth century and eventually substantiated by Veysey.

The balances among these characteristics have changed; for example, Koos’ 1926 analysis of the junior college portrayed an institution more focused on transfer than does Adelman’s 1992 work.<sup>34</sup> But the characteristics endure. Thus the community college is a distinctively American educational institution, unconstrained by the dicta of state or federal ministries

---

<sup>30</sup>For a discussion of the indistinct nature of academies and colleges in the nineteenth century, see Robert L. Church and Michael W. Sedlak, “The Antebellum College and Academy,” *Education in the United States: An Interpretive History* (New York: The Free Press, 1976), pp. 23–51. For an intriguing examination of three southern institutions that faced admission issues, see Linda R. Buchanan, “Not Harvard, Not Holyoke, Not Howard: A Study of the Life and Death of Three Small Colleges” (Ph.D. dissertation, Georgia State University, 1997). See also Eldon L. Johnson, “Misconceptions About the Early Land-Grant Colleges,” *Journal of Higher Education* 52 (4) 1981: 333–351. As he indicates (336–337), several land-grant colleges opened in western states that had few or even no secondary schools. Wisconsin offered instruction that began with the first year of secondary school; Arizona started without any secondary schools in the state, and the University of Nevada had only two. The interface between student preparation and postsecondary education in this country has never been neat and tidy, for all the efforts of such groups as the Committee of Ten.

<sup>31</sup>For 1969 data, see Alan E. Bayer, *College and University Faculty: A Statistical Description*, v. 5 no. 5 (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1970). The data from 1989 are from the Carnegie 1989 “Survey Among College and University Faculty,” available from the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, Storrs, Connecticut.

<sup>32</sup>*Higher Education for American Democracy: A Report of The President’s Commission on Higher Education* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947), pp. 37–38.

<sup>33</sup>Burton Clark, “The ‘Cooling-Out’ Function in Higher Education,” *American Journal of Sociology* 65 (1960): 569–576. Clark in fact specifically thanks a colleague for alerting him to the concept of “cooling out” as developed in the psychiatric work of Erving Goffman. See Clark, “The ‘Cooling-Out’ Function in Higher Education,” 569, Note 3. The issue of control over individuals is explicit in Clark’s work.

<sup>34</sup>Leonard V. Koos, *The Junior-College Movement* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1925) and Clifford Adelman, *The Way We Are: The Community College as American Thermometer* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, February 1992).

of education but necessarily responsive to local as well as regional and national shifts of popular expectation. The community college also evidences the very characteristics that Veysey argues are central to the nature of United States higher education: it operates as a bureaucracy with curricular and faculty patterns of utility, liberal education, and to a lesser degree, research as well as piety and discipline.

This argument appears to be part of what Gallagher and Pedersen—whom I might call the real revisionists, rather than Brint and Karabel—suggested in their historical examinations of the community college. The problem of knowing these revisionists is twofold, however. First, the community college remains a marginal institution attracting little interest on the part of scholars. Second, the community college does not exist as text. Its history for professional historians is not even buried; it was destroyed, since little care to archival records of these institutions, such as those records existed, has ever been taken. For instance, the archival records of the University of Chicago are rich indeed and available to historians like Veysey; the archival records of Joliet Junior College are repressed in that they are dust, lost in the financial shuffle of larger institutions and contrary goals (the polity does not evidence interest in its history). This is the very reason why universities survive historically because of their relatively impressive archival records, while other institutions falter or fail historically.<sup>35</sup> Developing a framework for understanding the community college requires not only reinterpretation of insightful scholarship but also new means of understanding institutions beyond their records. While neither Gallagher nor Pedersen is a postmodernist, they have at least looked beyond the monumental research university characteristics of documents. For Gallagher, the life of Alexis Frederick Lange established the interpretive process; for Pedersen, an association's conference in interaction with its member institutions provided evidence. So, too, Colin Burke in his substantially quantitative analysis of college enrollments, Roger Geiger in his use of various documents for Ohio colleges, and Christine Ogren in her examination of student life at normal schools have looked beyond the pale of the research university.<sup>36</sup> While the question of what historians ought to do about documents remains open, at least the question is before us.

---

<sup>35</sup>Certainly most historians of higher education, fledgling or senior, have experienced the problem of the archive at institutions other than major research universities (not that those archives are perfect repositories, despite the work of careful archivists). One of my students reported that in the midst of doing archival research at a local woman's college, where they simply gave her the key to the archives room, she found jewelry in a box. She is still trying to figure out how to place that event into her study of intercollegiate athletics at women's colleges; all I can do is assure her that major universities do not keep literal jewels in their archives.

<sup>36</sup>Burke, *American Collegiate Populations*; Roger L. Geiger, "The Era of Multipurpose Colleges in American Higher Education, 1850 to 1890"; Christine A. Ogren, "Where Coeds Were Coeducated: Normal Schools in Wisconsin, 1870-1920," *History of Education Quarterly* 35 (1) Spring 1995: 1-26.

Historians have yet to help us understand more fully the contemporary discomfort of the community college, in that it clearly is part of a process that keeps students as equally talented as four-year college students from the baccalaureate degree. Empirically speaking, with innumerable characteristics held constant, students at four-year colleges intending to earn the bachelor's degree are between 10 and 20 percent more likely to do so than students with the same aspirations at community colleges.<sup>37</sup> The structural characteristics of the two-year school have an impact, but how it got to that point seems to be less well answered than one might suspect after reading Brint and Karabel. Blaming it on the progressives, or self-interested university leaders, or business-minded junior college leaders, disregards any sense of independent agency on the part of two-year colleges or their students.<sup>38</sup> Historians, with the partial exception of David Levine, have not yet linked the present to the past in this regard. While it should be obvious that an institution that offers less than baccalaureate instruction would be less likely to have students achieving the bachelor's degree, the tension between access and degree completion is an unresolved problem in historical analysis.

What, then, can we learn in historiographical terms, from this examination of the community college? Part of the problem, even in this small area of study of the history of higher education, is that we too are subject to the cautions that Peter Novick offered in regard to all historians, that as our historical studies become more specialized, it becomes more difficult to know the secondary literature.<sup>39</sup> We are victims of our growth. Second, examinations of "other-than-research" institutions are relegated to a conception as "anti-university colleges" (according to Christopher Jencks and David Riesman), created unwittingly or otherwise by Laurence Veysey, Frederick Rudolph, Richard Hofstadter, Helen Horowitz, and others in their investigations of the research university and its similar manifestation,

---

<sup>37</sup>Raymond L. Christie, "The Net Effects of Institutional Type on Baccalaureate Degree Attainment: A Study of the Sophomore Cohort of the 1980 National Center for Education Statistics High School and Beyond Data" (Ph.D. dissertation, Georgia State University, 1998), 38.

<sup>38</sup>Brint and Karabel discuss student agency, framing it within Ralph Turner's arguments regarding contest and sponsored mobility. Nevertheless, for their analysis, institutional anticipatory subordination remains paramount. See *The Diverted Dream*, pp. 234-235, Note 7; on Ralph Turner's arguments, pp. 264-265, Note 5 on student agency and the importance of institutional policy. As a troubling indicator of community college student agency, see Lois Weis, *Between Two Worlds: Black Students in an Urban Community College* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985). Weis argues, "Paradoxically, it is the culture which students produce within the college that helps to ensure the continued structural bases of their own 'superexploitation,'" p. 2.

<sup>39</sup>Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 573, 581-582.

the highly selective liberal arts college.<sup>40</sup> This perspective of the research university appears to explain Veysey more than charges of presentism or regional inductive reasoning. As a product of the University of California-Berkeley, his view of the community college seems to reflect more the German university than his time or geographical location. That is, the concept of higher learning is primary, rather than the concept of higher education. Curiously, the same argument applies to Brint and Karabel, for, after all, the community college student is diverted in his or her dream from the four-year college and most of all, from the research university.

So, here is a return to the challenge of developing a framework for understanding community colleges in historical terms, to the question of how our major historical treatments of institutions define higher education in this country. As a reconsideration, the meaning of the United States college and university is not the research university but a form of higher education—not higher learning—that is distinctive and hybrid and has multiple versions. Whether it is Yale College of 1828 or the community college nearly two centuries later, it is a higher education institution with formal organizational structure and varied constituencies and goals. It is no easy matter to understand that institution in historical terms, but paring it to the mission and structure of the research university is using Occam's razor far too quickly. Nor do continuity and discontinuity define historical analysis. Meaning defines historical analysis, and although meaning shifts over time, it has sufficient centrality for us to develop further understanding of historical problems.

---

<sup>40</sup>Christopher Jencks and David Riesman, *The Academic Revolution* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Anchor Books, 1969), Chapter XI, "The Anti-University Colleges: The Community College Movement, pp. 481-492; Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Campus Life: Undergraduate Culture from the End of the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press edition, 1987).