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Five Faculty Labor Market Dilemmas Facing Community Colleges in the New Economy

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FIVE FACULTY LABOR MARKET DILEMMAS FACING COMMUNITY COLLEGES IN THE NEW ECONOMY

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Community colleges employ more than one-third of the nation's higher education faculty. Nevertheless, the labor market through which faculty are recruited, selected, hired, evaluated and retained or replaced is one of the least understood aspects of these institutions. Functional management and effective policy both require a clear understanding of the workplace dynamics and employment dilemmas associated with this labor market. This article begins by recognizing that the 21st century economy is being transformed by large scale social, political, and technological developments—developments often referred to as the emergence of a new economy. This new economy is transforming the nature of work and the character of worker-employer relations. Four core ideas in the new economy literature are developed to show how they are creating fundamental labor market dilemmas for community colleges. The concepts are (a) information age technology, (b) globalization, (c) neo-institutional theories of organization, and (d) work spatialization. Analysis of these concepts shows how the transformation of work and of workplace relationships produced by the new economy is creating five

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troublesome dilemmas for community college management, policy, and research. These dilemmas are examined to build theory and frame policy issues for research and action. The dilemmas involve distinguishing work spatialization from secondary labor market status, separating institutional from bureaucratic forms of control, identifying symbolic and substantive faculty work roles, clarifying managerial control structures and roles, and identifying the career pipelines that bring individuals into this occupation. Responding to these dilemmas shapes college management, frames higher education policy issues, and defines a research agenda for anyone interested in understanding and improving community college performance.

America's community colleges employ more than one-third of all higher education instructors and serve more than 44% of the nation's postsecondary students (Kirst & Venezia, 2004). Sheer size makes this an important set of social and economic institutions. Despite their importance, however, they are not well understood—particularly when it comes to how faculty members are recruited, selected, supported, evaluated, and promoted or terminated. Some features of this labor force are well documented, but the documentation raises almost as many questions as it answers. We know, for example, that 64% of the community college faculty members work only part-time for their employing institutions. We also know that the commitment of these part-time faculty members to institutional planning and program development is substantially lower than that of their full-time colleagues. By the most recent figures, only 16% of the part-time faculty are seeking full time employment in the community colleges (Cain, 1999). Additionally, we know that evaluation and support for the professional development of all community college faculty are underfunded and subjected to relatively little administrative supervision (Grubb, 1999).

There is also some solid knowledge concerning how community college faculty members are drawn apart into distinctive subcultural groups as they become aligned with the diverse instructional missions of the community colleges for whom they work. John Levin and his colleagues (Levin, Kater, & Wagoner, 2006) identify seven distinct groups of community college faculty and show that these groups face very different labor market conditions. Levin et al., begin by dividing the faculty between those whose responsibilities are academic in nature and those with responsibility for vocational education instruction. Then they divide the academically oriented faculty into three subgroups based on their subject specializations (arts and humanities,

social sciences, and physical sciences). The vocationally oriented faculty is differentiated into four groups: computer and technology specialists, faculty teaching relatively higher status professionals, trades instructors, and teachers of lower status professions. But even these broad divisions do not fully reflect the diverse aims of community college programs and their associated subcultures. The academically oriented faculty, for example, serve students who are seeking remediation for missing or deficient high school subject matter knowledge, those preparing to transfer to four-year institutions to secure at least a bachelor's degree, and a significant group of community citizens who take a consumer-oriented interest in education for personal growth or enjoyment, without explicit academic goals. And the vocationally oriented faculty are similarly split between proprietary college programs with limited ties to local business or industry and programs that are closely linked to sponsoring businesses or community development groups.

Another important dimension to the community college workforce is the mixture of career orientations found within it. Some faculty members in both the academic and vocational areas—and working across all of the community colleges' diverse programs—are career educators for whom community college instruction is a lifetime commitment. However, a very large number of faculty members have career employment outside the community colleges employing them (Leslie & Gappa, 2002; Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006). This is particularly true for faculty instructing in the skilled trades and professions, but it is also found among faculty in other subject areas. It is also known that significant numbers of community college faculty are passing through on their way to careers in other institutions (as when doctoral students in area universities work at community colleges to support themselves through their advanced degree programs). And a substantial number of community college faculty represent second income producers in families where their spouses are the primary breadwinners. Indeed, according to the 1999 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF-99) survey, only 28% of part-time faculty at community colleges considered their position their primary employment (Wallin, 2005). Cross-classification of the various subject areas with the diverse community college missions creates the differentiation of faculty roles outlined in Table 1.

Sample courses from a 2003 listing of California community college courses, illustrating the type of instruction each faculty subgroup provides, are shown in the cells of the table. Since both part-time and full-time faculty are found teaching courses in each of these

Table 1. Example courses serving the diverse community college missions

College missions	Subject areas		
	Arts & humanities	Social sciences	Physical sciences
Academic			
Transfer	English Dance	Sociology Political science	Biology Chemistry Physics
Remedial	Adult basic education	Job seeking/changing	General physical sciences
Consumer	Reading skills Photography Survival level ESL	Citizenship	Astronomy
Vocational	Computers/technologies	Trades	Professions
		High status	Low status
Proprietary	Computer & information sciences, general	Automotive technology	Business management
Sponsored	Industrial electronics	Heavy equipment operation	Commercial pilot
			Cosmetology
			Educational aide

cross-classifications, the table actually illustrates only about half of the different types of community college faculty work roles. Such a cross-classification of faculty instructional responsibilities reveals just how diverse this labor market is. These diverse responsibilities almost certainly rely on different career preparation patterns, create significant occupational status and role differences; thus, they rely on substantially different labor market mechanisms and processes. In short, it may not be appropriate to think of community college faculty members as belonging to a single occupational group despite the fact that they work in a common set of institutions (Outcalt, 2002; Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Outcalt, in a 2002 article, makes this point clear by saying, "apart from the title of community college instructor, little unites the disparate body of the community college professoriate" (p. 111). Based on the results from the 2000 Center for the Study of Community Colleges (CSCC) national faculty survey, it is almost impossible to consider community college faculty as a monolithic group.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To properly frame labor market issues surrounding community college faculty employment it will be helpful to briefly review some broader questions regarding how the entire 21st century economic system is being transformed by large-scale social, political and technological developments. In the last few decades, these changes have been recognized as creating profound changes in the overall production of goods and services and a commensurate set of changes in the nature of jobs, careers, and employment systems. According to Castells (1996), these profound changes can be recognized as the emergence of a new technological paradigm organized around new, more powerful, and more flexible economic systems. The changes are complex and involve shifts in social and political systems related to strategic planning, policy decision making, worker supervision, the management of competitive markets, and changes in consumer and government preferences, as well as incorporation of new technologies into most production systems. Carnoy, on the same subject, suggests that jobs, family, and community no longer work the way they have in the past. Fundamental changes are emerging both socially and economically as a result of information technologies and globalization (Carnoy, 2000). A number of scholars have tried to formulate overview conceptualizations of this new economy, (Castells, 1996; Carnoy, 2000; Sennett, 2006). However, it is probably too soon to

suggest that any particular formulation has proven itself successful in fully interpreting the tectonic shifts that are currently shaking up the economic system for both workers and employers. We comment here on the contributions of four core ideas that appear to be promising leads toward an appropriate conceptualization of the changing labor market for community college faculty. These core ideas, as described below, are best understood by trying to unpack their four central concepts: *information age*, *globalization*, *neo-institutionalism*, and *spatialization*.

The Information Age Economy

The digital computer with an attachment to the Internet is easily recognized as the archetypical incarnation of an economic and social system now dominated by the storage, retrieval, analysis, and interpretation of information about virtually every aspect of our lives operating, quite literally, at the speed of light (Carnoy, 2000; Sennett, 2006). Not always appreciated in this image, however, is the way this digitization and communication of information transforms the entire economic system. It is fairly easy to see the explosive growth and sudden decline of the dot.com industries and to recognize that the world's richest man made his fortune through computer operating system development. In commenting on the "young techies," Sennett (2006, p. 26) observes that they have "a mind-set completely at odds with that of the young bureaucrats depicted in the pages of Whyte and Crozier." They despise "steadiness of purpose" and, when they fail, they simply move on. And it takes but a few moments of reflection to see how digital technologies are changing entertainment and education—making access independent of one's location and providing high fidelity production and reproduction of art and culture. Castells (1996) identifies satellite TV as an example of this access independence and compares the old system of mass media to the new individualized, segmented and diversified global media. "We are not living in a global village" he argues, "but in customized cottages globally produced and locally distributed" (p. 341). More striking, but less obvious however, is the extent to which digital technologies are transforming general industry and commerce. Digital information has made just-in-time inventory control both possible and necessary. Digitization has dramatically shifted skill and knowledge from workers to machines.

The shift is also visible in the large-scale shift of manpower and capital from material manufacturing to information processing industries (Reich, 1992; Rifkin, 1995). As manufacturing production

jobs decline in the highly industrialized countries, these jobs are replaced by new jobs that require higher levels of education to keep up with the ever changing technology (Carnoy, 2000). As one economist observed three decades ago, the average machine has at least a high school diploma and is learning more every year (Theobald, 1972). The widely noted shrinkage of the American middle class is, no doubt, substantially linked to the awesome gap that has developed between what it takes to tend the new production machinery and what it takes to finance, design, build and manage it. That said, the real impact of technology on skills according to Spenner (1985), Freeman and Soete (1994), and Carnoy (2000) depends on the distinct qualities of the labor force and the relation between the economy and the educational system. As Carnoy (2000) puts it, "Technology seems simultaneously to de-skill and re-skill the labor force" (p. 43).

For many Americans, community colleges are the point of entry into the information age economy. "The 'technical revolution' created a plethora of specialized, high-skilled jobs that fueled a need for workforce training, which community colleges were willing and able to provide expeditiously" (Levinson, 2005, p. 47). They sort and assign their students to future roles in that economy. Their task, already enormous and growing more difficult all the time, is to assist their students in moving from service and production workers, who live to support the information economy infrastructure, into the ranks of knowledge workers who are capable of organizing and managing the information systems on which it is based (Griffith & Connor, 1994; Cain, 1999; Levinson, 2005). Business thinker Peter Drucker (1977) commented on this subject, saying that, "The substitution of knowledge for manual effort as the productive resource in work is the greatest change in the history of work, which is, of course, a process as old as man himself... Education has moved from having been an ornament, if not a luxury, to becoming the central economic resource of technological society" (as cited in Griffith & Connor, 1994, p. 78). To respond to these changes, the community colleges need a faculty that is both smarter than the average machine and capable of teaching students how to become reasonably efficient lifelong learners (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). This task is doubly daunting because community college faculty have high workloads, low levels of professional support, and typically are working with students who have a lot to learn just to catch up with more advantaged peers who are attending the nation's four-year colleges and universities (Grubb, 1999; McGrath & Spear, 1991; Kozeracki, 2002).

GLOBALIZATION OF ECONOMIC MARKETS

In addition to transforming the character of work and the relationship between workers and the machinery of production, the new economy transcends national borders and international political systems, establishing a globalized system of competitive markets. According to Carnoy (2000), this *globality* is made possible by technological advances such as microelectronics machinery, computer based transportation, and telecommunications. This new market structure involves both the trading of goods and services and the employment of workers. Carnoy (2002, p. 59) mentions that, "Today, unlike even a generation ago, capital, innovation, management, information, and core markets are globalized." The communication and transportation systems needed to breach national and regional boundaries are now sufficiently developed to permit worldwide distribution of such perishable commodities as fresh flowers and human organs for transplant operations. At the same time, this market system has made outsourcing of highly skilled work an everyday occurrence (Sennett, 2006). As Davies and Guppy (1997) have noted, economic globalization is not limited to multinational corporations—even highly localized production systems must be sensitive to changes in the mix of products and services that can easily be transported into their market space, creating fierce competition for market share. When they step back from the process of globalization and ask what it takes to be a successful participant in the global market system, Davies and Guppy (1997) advance two key propositions. First, success in the globalized market requires that producers of goods and services radically centralize their standards of production and delivery. Think about McDonald's—successful marketing of the Big Mac hamburger does not depend on it being the best possible hamburger, but upon it being the most reliable in meeting acceptable standards of flavor and price. To be successful, the Big Mac purchased in Paris, France, has to look, smell and taste like the Big Mac available in Perris, California. And this can only be accomplished if the McDonald's corporate executives insist on setting global standards of production and delivery. Without this standardization, brand recognition is impossible and marketing programs will fail (for a similar illustration see Griffin, 2003).

The second prerequisite for success in the global marketplace is decentralization of service delivery so that the specialized needs and preferences of customers and clients can be served efficiently and effectively. This decentralization, combined with the centralization of production standards, is achieved by having a long list of highly

standardized component parts or repertoire of service elements that can be mixed and matched by front line workers (Wallace & Brady, 2001). Think Dell Computer—a great variety of highly standardized parts are produced in far-flung manufacturing plants; all made to exacting standards so that they all arrive in Texas ready for off the shelf assembly into highly individualized computers (Levinson, 2005). In short, the label Made in America no longer makes sense as the parts are manufactured everywhere, which places us in a “world system” (Griffin, 2003, p. 251).

Partly because the core concepts of globalization have become an ideology driving organizational development and management strategies, and partly because measures of standardized educational attainment are now seen as reliable and appropriate, community colleges are being intensely pressured to adopt globalized marketing principles in their policy and management processes (Levin, 2001). Unfortunately, community colleges have only been able to develop systems for responding to half of the globalized equation—they produce an enormous variety of specialized educational programs, responding to virtually any recognizable community preference or demand. Cain (1999, p. 3) makes this point by comparing community colleges to Wal-Mart stores, saying, “The community college extends the one-stop shopping idea to education . . . If a need exists, a community college administrator is searching for a way to meet it.” But the colleges are sorely lacking in the capacity to centralize the standards for producing these educational programs. Lack of standardization is partly the result of the traditional emphasis on academic freedom in all colleges and universities. More often, however, it is simply the result of an inability to clearly specify what instructional standards are required, and a general weakness in the ability of college administrators to hold faculty accountable for meeting whatever standards they are able to specify (Grubb, 1999; Levinson, 2005).

The New Institutionalism: Legitimacy Trumps Productivity

A third way of interpreting the new economy has arisen in organizational sociology where the new institutionalism is replacing bureaucratic organizational theory as the dominant paradigm for analyzing complex organizations. Beginning in the 1970s with a seminal article by John Meyer and Brian Rowan (Meyer & Rowan, 1977), organizational sociologists have increasingly emphasized the fact that many organizational activities are not rationally linked to any sort of productivity goals. Instead, they have been developed as a means of securing and maintaining organizational legitimacy

in the eyes of governmental, professional, and community groups (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991).

Max Weber (Weber, Henderson, & Parsons, 1947) convincingly characterized rational bureaucracies as the archetypical modern social organizations. And Fredrick Taylor (Taylor, 1911) is generally credited with successfully disseminating *scientific management* as the appropriate mechanism for managing bureaucratic production (Ray & Reed, 1994). Both of these early 20th century conceptions of organization and management assume that the most effective organizations will be those characterized by rationalized management decision making, an articulated and detailed division of labor, and standardization of work roles. Within a very short period, however, organizational research scholars began to identify significant shortcomings in theories emphasizing the self-contained, closed system and proprietary goal pursuing aspects of organizational behavior (this history is summarized in Mitchell, 1996). Internally, scholarly critiques found a robust social and cultural life among workers that sharply limited their willingness and ability to comply with the presumed hyper-rationality of the bureaucratic model. Managers were forced to recognize the critical importance of human relations factors and to develop ways for professionals and autonomous craft workers to transcend organizational routines. Hanson (2003) adds to this discussion by emphasizing that management in these organizations has now begun to take into account of how people do behave in organizations rather than how they should behave. Externally, the critics of bureaucracy found sweeping evidence of non-rational and non-productive influences flowing into organizations from their environments. Thus, administrators recognized the importance of reconceptualizing organizations as a set of interrelated parts that interact with their environments much like a living organism (Scott, 1992).

For about half a century these critical insights were accepted as merely elaborating the basic bureaucratic model—simply adding complexity to bring the model into line with empirical evidence. By the 1970s, however, it had become obvious that the criticisms went to the heart of the bureaucratic paradigm itself, requiring a more radical reconceptualization of how complex social organizations are created and sustained. Research revealed that, within their boundaries, organizations are cultural systems with traditions, moral (or perhaps immoral), value systems, and a rich set of symbols and rituals for creating and expressing shared meanings capable of establishing social identities (not just work roles) for organizational members (Senge, 1990; Bolman & Deal, 2003). Beyond the organizational

boundaries, emergent scholarship was documenting the broad dependencies of all organizations on the ways in which environmental actors—civic governments, professional associations and community groups—are willing to endorse their legitimacy by embracing their organizational missions and approving their operational routines. As a result, contemporary organizational sociology has raised to central significance the institutional rather than the bureaucratic aspects of complex social organizations (Rowan & Miskel, 1999; Scott, 1992). By institutional, these sociologists mean that the moral, normative, and symbolic dimensions of organizational behavior are more important to organizational stability and success than are rational, means-ends productivity considerations. In short, the new organizational sociology proclaims that legitimacy has trumped productivity as the fundamental standard for evaluation and support (Mitchell, 1996; Powell & DiMaggio, 1991).

The community colleges have been on the cutting edge of this theoretical revolution. Beginning with their initial foundation in the first quarter of the 20th century, these institutions found themselves routinely penetrated by normative expectations regarding their diverse missions and the appropriate ways of pursuing them (Bogue, 1950). They have been seen by outsiders, and have seen themselves, as key institutions in the generation of civic and educational opportunity for marginalized citizen groups, and as the go-to agencies to support economic and civic cultural development in their local communities (Brint, 2003; Griffith & Connor, 1994; Levin, 2001).

By emphasizing environmental influences on organizational behavior, institutional theory explains why community colleges are faced with expectations that far exceed their capacities. Conceptualized as organizations responsible for meeting local community education needs, the colleges' legitimacy depends upon acknowledging and giving at least symbolic attention to virtually any locally initiated educational interest (Zwerling, 1976). Because they are typically organized and funded through state-level policies and budgets, however, they are also responsible for living within severe and unpredictable budget constraints while giving at least symbolic attention to state-level specifications of their missions and responsibilities (Dougherty, 1994; Peterman, 2001).

Institutional theory also helps to explain why these institutions are able to escape the tough accountability measures so prevalent in most sectors of the globalized marketplace (Levinson, 2005). Having begun with the explicit mission of providing an alternative to four-year college and university enrollment for low income and first generation college goers, community colleges were quickly characterized as

providing alternative educational options—vocational training, remedial help for students who were having difficulty meeting admission standards for the four-year institutions, and consumer type education for individuals who did not have clear academic goals (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Grubb & Lazerson, 2004). As a result, as they exist today, the community colleges do not have anything like a uniform set of outcome expectations for which their faculty and staff can be held accountable (Leslie & Gappa, 2002; Outcalt, 2002). They are more important as agencies for symbolically promising access to the American Dream of middle class citizens, but not for documenting the realization of that promise. As Brint and Karabel (1989) have so eloquently documented, symbolic commitment to these aspirations has been far more successful in legitimating these institutions as colleges than any realistic appraisal of their actual outcomes would justify. The dilemma is captured in Burton Clark's assertion that, "a major problem of democratic society is inconsistency between encouragement to achieve and the realities of limited opportunity" (Clark, 1961, as cited in Brint and Karabel, 1989, p. 10).

Spatialization: The Reorganization of Work in the New Economy

A fourth approach to interpreting the new economy focuses on how advancing technologies are combining with aggressive managerialism to fundamentally transform the nature of work and restructure the relationships between employers and workers. Ideas pioneered by David Gordon (Gordon, 1980) and creatively advanced by Wallace and Brady (2001) depict the development of the new economy as grounded in the inevitable tensions between labor and management as they seek to establish workplace rights and responsibilities within the evolving technologies of production and management. These scholars argue that industrialization, with its advancing complexity and intensification of workplace technologies, has created at least four distinctive periods of labor/management relationships. The earliest stage involved direct supervision of workers by the owner/entrepreneurs for whom they worked. The key change bringing this period into focus was the separation of workplace and domicile. Workers began to leave their homes, working under the entrepreneurs' roof and under their immediate supervision. Importantly, this did not involve a significant change in workers' craft methods. Supervisory control was simple and direct because the entrepreneurs were craftsmen themselves, jobs had not yet been divided into discrete tasks; thus, both the worker and the entrepreneur could gauge the

quality of the work at every point in its execution. This served to obscure social class differences while generating loyalty from the workers (Gordon, Edwards, & Reich, 1982).

As production technologies grew, a distinctive managerial class came into existence, creating a new framework for labor management relations and work supervision. The idea of *scientific management* emerged. Scientific management focused on technical control over worker activities through the disaggregation of tasks and utilizing time and motion studies of how each component task can be most efficiently performed to guide managerial supervision. Labor organization during this period was concentrated in the craft union movement bringing together skilled workers performing the same generic tasks (Gordon, 1980; Sennett, 1998).

A third era of labor/management relations and work organization emerged as intelligence gradually moved from the workers into their machines. Work supervision became more bureaucratic, and there arose a sharp distinction between the *primary labor market* for skilled and professional workers whose tasks required autonomy and managerial support (rather than supervisory direction) and a *secondary labor market* for unskilled workers who were managed through direct supervision. The unskilled workers who could be easily replaced responded by creating industrial unions which aimed at controlling access to jobs in entire firms rather than autonomous control over skilled tasks characteristic of the craft unions (Gordon et al., 1982). Public sector unions, including those embraced by community college faculty, are supported by statutes and practices that were framed to fit the industrial union paradigm.

Wallace and Brady (2001) argue that we are now moving into a fourth period in which labor/management relationships are driven by the *technologization* of the work itself. They call this fourth period the period of work spatialization to highlight two key components of the new worker/manager relationship. First, spatialization highlights the fact that the application of advanced digital technologies has resulted in work that is no longer place-bound to a particular factory or work site. Management, through detailed specification of measurable work standards, can farm out various components of almost any production process to far away places and still maintain tight control over its quality, quantity, and cost. This broad distribution of work components enables managers to both seek the most economical venue for production and, simultaneously, undercut the power of worker organizations by simply moving production away from organized worker environments (Burris, 1993; Harrison, 1994; Vallas & Beck, 1996; Wallace & Brady, 2001).

The second critical component of work spatialization is the shift of employment from permanent, full-time jobs to contingent, intermittent, task contracting. That is, new managerial technologies make it possible to supervise *outcomes* rather than *task performance*, and to employ workers only for the amount of time needed to complete specified tasks (Sennett, 2006; Carnoy, 2000). This strategy has dramatic consequences for work role definitions as workers are no longer expected to develop loyalty to their firms or to require fringe benefit packages that keep them tied to a particular firm. "Loyalty is dead" Sennett (1998, p. 65) asserts, and, therefore, "each vigorous employee ought to behave like an entrepreneur." Crucial to this redesign of work, however, is the development of managerial tools for actually monitoring production results (and assigning responsibility for those results to specific workers), rather than supervising the execution of specific tasks (Applebaum & Albin, 1989). Think, here, about the new strategies for building products as diverse as automobiles, computers, and household appliances. These products are now designed to consist of highly standardized modular parts whose production can be spatially distributed. Construction, repair, and maintenance of these products consist of assembling or replacing the appropriate modular components. This work can be monitored remotely and technologically (Griffin, 2003). Diagnostic instruments identify problematic modules, and worker training focuses on reading the diagnostic instruments and adjusting or replacing the appropriate module. Moreover, management can fairly easily test whether any given worker knows how to undertake the identification and proper installation of modular parts. Thus, workers can be hired contingently, performing tasks on a piece-work basis.

Wallace and Brady (2001) have observed that by the beginning of the 21st century 35% of all jobs in the U.S. economy had been successfully structured as contingency employment, just as Castells had predicted in 1996, organized around outcomes monitoring. Moreover, they predict continued expansion of this approach to task definition and work supervision. As Castells (1996, p. 268) concludes, "Overall, the traditional form of work, based on full-time employment, clear-cut occupational assignments, and a career pattern over the lifecycle is being slowly but surely eroded away." For the faculty of the community colleges, the contingent employment part of this scenario is fully established. Two-thirds of the faculty already work on contingent contracts, without continuing employment agreements, fringe benefits, or immediate task performance supervision (Leslie & Gappa, 2002; Wallin, 2005). What is missing, of course, is the other half of the Wallace and Brady model—the capacity of management

to remotely supervise and outcome manage the work performance of their part-time college faculties (Grubb, 1999; Leslie & Gappa, 2002; Levin, 2001).

IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGEMENT, RESEARCH, AND POLICYMAKING

The transformation of work and of the relationships between workers and their employers being produced by the new economy creates five troublesome dilemmas for community colleges as they adapt to these economic changes. Resolving these dilemmas defines the management, policy making and research agendas for anyone interested in understanding and improving community college performance. We examine these dilemmas to build theory and frame policy issues for research and action. As evolving theories prove themselves capable of interpreting community college faculty labor market processes, they will also provide insights into strategies for the support of professional recruitment, selection, retention and development of faculty members entering this occupation.

Dilemma #1

As suggested in the theories discussed above, the extensive use of part-time, untenured faculty to teach in all community college programs creates an interpretive dilemma for community college observers. Does reliance on part-time, frequently replaced faculty mean that community college faculty members are now part of the secondary labor market with its presumptions of limited skill, lack of career trajectories, and interchangeability of workers? Or is it more accurate to say that the community colleges have moved solidly into the new economy of spatialized work—hiring highly skilled workers who bring complex professional skills to work in a task-structured, outcome-managed and contingent-employment relationship with their employers?

It is essential in framing community college faculty labor policies to determine whether the shift toward employment of part-time temporary faculty represents a deterioration of institutional integrity among community colleges, indicating that they will continue to have difficulty meeting statewide and local community expectations for high quality instruction. Such a deterioration could explain the major findings of McGrath & Spear (1991) who argue in *The academic crisis of the community college* that it is common practice for community

college faculty members to modify courses so substantially that they bear little resemblance to official descriptions found in course catalogues. Often the modifications involve diluting course materials to either increase student “success” rates or accommodate classroom academic negotiations with students (see also, Grubb, 1999).

Spatialization theory offers a more positive take on the process, however, suggesting that reliance on part-time faculty can facilitate successful responses to a globalized pressure for the community colleges to increase the quality of their instruction. If this conceptual framework is right, part-time faculty are not participating in a secondary labor market positions, but they are providing the primary mechanism by which colleges are moving into the new era of *spatialized pedagogical work* in the new economy. If the movement to part-time faculty appointments is a mark of the deteriorating status of community college work, we will see faculty unions redoubling their efforts to protect faculty jobs and to prevent effective supervision and performance accountability policies from being implemented. If the shift represents the spatialization of this line of work, we will see the demise of the industrial union model of faculty unionism, to be replaced by a system of outcome accountability utilizing intensive assessment technologies to determine the extent to which faculty work is producing measurable value-added consequences for students. Moreover, the value-added assessments will actually inform management decisions regarding renewal of contingent instructional contracts and programs for faculty development.

It may be attractive to see the part-time faculty as belonging to the new economy and expect contingent contracts to substantially facilitate instructional improvement. In order for spatialization of pedagogical work to become managerially effective, however, three essential conditions must be met. First, there must be a significant pool of qualified replacement workers (otherwise the employment is not really contingent because the employers have to take all available applicants). Second, it must be possible for managers to validly and reliably monitor the competence and effectiveness of the workers (if work settings are chaotic or productivity too dependent on factors beyond the workers’ capacity to control, contingency becomes mere arbitrariness). And third, managers have to have the will and structural capacity to utilize their assessment of worker effectiveness to supervise and/or replace workers. If supervisory and hiring authority are not located at the point of work assessment, or if organizational cultures or policies prevent them from acting on the basis of assessment data, contingent contracts will fail to support performance improvement. At present, research evidence does not unequivocally

document that any of these three conditions are being met in the nation's community colleges.

Dilemma #2

Both formal governmental policy and the prevailing managerial practices in most community colleges are based on the assumption that faculty work takes place within a managed public bureaucracy dominated by principles of control and supervision derived from the rational pursuit of organizational goals. Institutional research and theoretical scholarship, by contrast, emphasizes the extent to which faculty work is embedded in an institutional context dominated by concern for legitimacy rather than goal attainment. This makes it uncertain whether community colleges should rely on bureaucratic policy and management systems to develop institutional designs that will improve overall college performance.

Community colleges have demonstrated great flexibility and entrepreneurialism in adapting to local, state, and federal pressures for program changes and in accommodating frequently changing external resource and regulation changes (Roueche & Jones, 2005; Levinson, 2005). However, the language of many policy debates and the command and control orientation found in most leadership training programs continue to assume that the appropriate normative model for the good community college is one in which strong executive leadership undertakes strategic and rational planning to pursue goals derived from the nominal public mission of the colleges (Robillard, 2000). For the most part, these policy and management practices focus on the input and process side of the colleges' productive processes—regulating financial resources, program content, and organizational processes rather than carefully monitoring outcomes and insisting on program and practice adjustments based on their impact on the production of such outcomes. It is reasonably clear, for example, that rhetoric to the contrary notwithstanding, the primary emphasis in accountability policies is compliance with procedures and practices rather than the attainment of results or the development of institutional legitimacy and staff loyalty or initiative.

Many governmental policies aimed at community college regulation explicitly treat community colleges as weak public bureaucracies in need of regulatory constraint. Cohen and Brawer (2003, p. 116) summarize this point, saying that, "Numerous authors have documented complaints about duplication, contradictory regulations, and the mass approvals that must be garnered from various

regulatory agencies before college leaders can make a move.” Such policies substantially limit the ability of the colleges to develop either independent working arrangements (such as highly spatialized short term contingent contracts) or strong institutional cultures. For the most part, state statutes and local board policies are aimed at securing organizational rationality and regularity rather than creating systems of outcome accountability. When, for example, California law specifies that colleges are required to have no less than 75% of their instructional work performed by full-time faculty, a clear consequence is to limit the ability of the colleges to move toward a more spatialized and outcome-contingent faculty supervision system. That may be because policy makers have not yet grasped the important reorganization of work implied by the new economy. Or it may be because they insightfully recognize that community colleges are not the proper venue for this kind of work restructuring. Whichever is the case, it is important to determine the extent to which labor market policies are producing intended rather than unintended constraints on employment of college faculties.

To date, research scholarship has not been able to determine whether either college administrators or the faculty themselves are capable of monitoring outcomes and adapting their practices in response to outcome measures. It is quite clear, of course, that when courses are taught some students learn much from them while others learn little or nothing; but there are few systematic efforts to determine which organizational, pedagogical, or curricular components of these courses are producing these outcomes.

Of course, outcomes are not everything. Students, and their teachers, are entitled to fair and equitable treatment regardless of the learning outcomes that result. Moreover, college life has much to do with the development of personal and social identities as well as the attainment of important learning goals (Brint & Karabel, 1989). So it is not at all unthinkable that community colleges would continue to function as care and nurture institutions producing unmeasurable outcomes and monitored for their fulfillment of political and social roles rather than academic goal attainment. It is certainly reasonable to imagine that community colleges should devote significant resources to both their institutional identity development and the production of academic achievement. But it is probably not reasonable to assume that proper attention will be given to these divergent purposes if little attention is paid to separating them and carefully studying how each can be optimized with the tight budgets and substantial political constraints most colleges are facing.

Dilemma #3

As the community colleges feel legitimacy pressures, they are likely to focus attention on symbolic faculty attributes (like hiring more faculty holding earned doctorates, or diversifying faculty by gender, race, and ethnicity). As important as these symbolic actions may be, however, it is not at all clear that they lead to improved pedagogical effectiveness.

The 1988 and 1999 NSOPF data sets make it quite clear that community colleges are succeeding in hiring increasing numbers of faculty possessing earned doctoral degrees. It is equally clear that they are not succeeding nearly as well at producing a faculty reflecting the racial, ethnic, and gender diversity of the students they serve. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that both the success in the first instance and the failure in the second reflect the degree to which community colleges are responding to a legitimacy crisis rather than enhancing productivity. In some locales, institutional legitimacy pressures are focused on faculty racial, ethnic, and gender composition; in others, it is more focused on the status benefits of securing faculty with more advanced academic degrees. A perusal of the literature makes it fairly obvious that most colleges moving on either of these fronts are doing so on the basis of concerns about legitimacy in the eyes of significant stakeholders rather than on the basis of known contributions to academic or other kinds of productivity (Dougherty, 1994). In addition to the obvious institutional legitimacy benefits derived from changing the composition of the community college faculties, it is important to discover whether there are consequences for learning and long-term student success.

Dilemma #4

It is increasingly clear that the full-time community college faculty have become the *de facto* managers of instruction (White, 1998; Ortiz, 2003)—responsible for program and curriculum definition and development, peer review, and institutional resource mobilization through contract and grants development. It is also clear that these faculty members have little authority to effectively carry out their management responsibilities and, possibly, too much loyalty to their faculty peers or their union memberships to really accept managerial responsibility.

This dilemma is grounded in the laws and regulations governing community college organization. For example, California's Donohoe Education Act of 1960, following the recommendations of California

Higher Education Master Plan, assigned differing functions to the University of California, the California State Universities and the California Community Colleges, creating an explicitly three-tiered higher education system. The University of California educates an academic elite student body (the top 12.5% of their graduating classes), and it is the State's primary academic research agency. The California State Universities reach deeper into the top tier of high school graduates, but still restrict admission to the top third of each class. These four-year universities are primarily teaching institutions with degrees through the Masters degree (a 2005 statute [SB724] authorized the State University system to grant a Doctorate of Education degree for the first time). Under the Donohoe Act, the California Community Colleges were assigned the responsibility of offering academic and vocational instruction to anyone seeking college admission. They were allowed to conduct institutional research on student learning and retention, but basically they were designated as teaching institutions with an emphasis on vocational training and preparation for transfer to four-year colleges and universities.

The information above explains the evolution of the higher education policy system in California. A historical look at the evolution of the system as a whole helps us understand the responsibilities of community college faculty today in a broader perspective.

The governance of California Community Colleges reflected the most hierarchical structure with power concentrated in the president and flowing from there to the layers of staff to faculty. As Outcalt (2002) indicated, the faculty's primary responsibility was teaching, curricula, and matters involving teaching and learning. As might be expected, the community college faculty were given the highest teaching loads and the lowest level of support services (Outcalt, 2002). (Indeed, the per student full-time equivalency (FTE) support for community colleges has often been less than that provided to California's secondary schools). Not surprisingly, this work structure stimulated an interest in industrial unionism on the part of the faculty, and in 1975 they were authorized by SB160 to join unions and enter into collective bargaining agreements with the colleges. By 1988, under Assembly Bill 1725, the authority of community college faculty was formally extended to include development and implementation of policies and procedures including hiring, peer evaluation, and tenure recommendations, much like the University of California and the California State University systems (Howell, 1997).

To the extent that program definitions, curricula specification, and evaluation of instructional performance are in the hands of the full-time faculty members, these individuals represent the real

managers of instructional work. Unfortunately, in the absence of a clear understanding of how these managerial responsibilities are linked to the larger question of instructional work in the new economy, it is difficult to imagine how the discharge of these management and supervision responsibilities can be expected to produce systematic improvement in the colleges' instructional programs. Under the spatialization of work paradigm, the managers who have responsibility for ascertaining the quality and quantity of work products should be the ones who are responsible for making decisions regarding the maintenance and renewal of contingent work contracts. In some colleges, at least in some departments within colleges, this is probably exactly what is happening—full-time faculty are determining whether contingent contract part-timers should be retained and renewed (Akroyd & Caison, 2005). However, all faculty members tend to belong to the same unions, and the rights of full-time faculty to discharge management of contingent instructors is not clearly articulated. What is almost certainly true, however, is that it is impossible to realistically judge the productivity of part-time faculty without the kind of intimate knowledge of their work that full-time colleagues possess. Moreover, it is impossible to tell whether there is real value added by either part-time or full-time instruction without far more detailed data regarding the consequences for students than the overwhelming majority of community colleges are currently able to generate.

Dilemma #5

The high degree of fluidity and diversity among community college instructional missions makes it difficult to identify and support a faculty career pipeline capable of keeping the community colleges supplied with an effective workforce.

One of the most troublesome aspects of the community college faculty labor market is the absence of clearly defined career patterns tracking individuals through their period of preparation, into the workforce and through their institutional careers (Leslie & Gappa, 2002; Outcalt, 2002). Here, the great diversity of faculty jobs described in the introduction to this paper frames the context for much needed research and analysis. Except for the small number of faculty passing through a handful of community college faculty training programs spread across the country, we simply do not know when and how most faculty members make the decision to seek employment as a community college teacher, and we know even less about who leaves, when, or why. Hence faculty recruitment is a complex

and uncertain process. It is not clear how to effectively change this pattern—serious research needs to be undertaken aimed at tracking faculty careers; then, systematic experiments need to be undertaken to see if changed recruitment and support systems significantly change faculty composition or performance levels.

CONCLUSION

This article has reviewed the pressures placed on community colleges faculty selection, hiring, and development created by fundamental changes in the 21st century economy. In identifying and describing the basic dilemmas of the community college faculty labor market, this paper has focused on the California experience. California is used to frame this analysis for three reasons: the authors are most familiar with developments in this state, California has the largest community college system in the nation, and this system is the one most thoroughly studied and most fully documented, making it easiest to test theoretical ideas against the experiences in this state. Acknowledging that it is not yet possible to definitively describe which features of this new economy are most salient in transforming institutions like the community colleges, we have traced the impacts of the four most salient characteristics of this economy: information technologies, globalization of competition, the need for institutional legitimacy, and the spatialization of work tasks and work roles. We have argued that these features of the new economy have created five fundamental dilemmas for policy makers and community college administrators as they seek to organize a high quality faculty into an effective instructional delivery system. As important as it is to create policies and organizational structures to deal with these dilemmas, it is even more important to recognize that critical knowledge about the dynamics and long term consequences of choosing one or the other horn of each dilemma is not yet available. Substantial research is greatly needed to address questions like the following: how to build robust and politically legitimate institutional cultures; how to bring accurate outcome assessment findings to bear on the instructional efforts of the highly spatialized work of part-time and short term faculty; how to incorporate new information technologies into both instruction and college administration; and how to strengthen the community colleges' position in the global marketplace. Research on these questions will need to reach deeply into the organizational life of the nation's community colleges, but it will also need to tap into the political, intellectual, and fiscal resources that are (or can

be) made available through local communities, state legislatures, and federal policy makers.

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