

Innovate *to* Compete *in the* *21st Century*

Anticipating the Demand for
Colorado Community College
Services in 2020

Executive Summary
October, 2007

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About McREL

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) is a nonprofit education and research organization based in Denver, Colorado. For more than 40 years, McREL has been dedicated to helping educators use research to improve student achievement. As a national leader in research, school improvement, standards-based education, balanced leadership, professional development, and scenario planning, our highly respected education researchers and experts have provided services to educators in all 50 states and 18 foreign countries. Our website (www.mcrel.org) offers hundreds of reports, tools, guides, and services designed to improve school and student performance. To learn more about McREL, contact us at 303.337.0990 or info@mcrel.org.

About this Report

This executive summary briefly summarizes the scenario planning process that took place between April and October 2007 in Denver, Colorado, describes the outcomes of the process, and offers a set of recommendations for the consideration of CCCS leaders. A final report along with the complete set of scenarios is also available. The report is submitted to:

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Executive Summary

Introduction

As the state's largest system of higher education, the Colorado Community College System (CCCS) serves more than 116,000 students annually, through 13 career and academic programs located throughout the state as well as several partnerships with local school districts. CCCS' role and mission focus on two-year colleges, primarily serving Colorado residents, and offering a broad range of programs. Key features of the CCCS mission include:

- Open access
- Career and technical education (secondary and post-secondary)
- Transfer to four-year institutions
- Basic skills (remedial education), and
- Workforce development.

In fall 2006, McREL was engaged to facilitate a scenario planning process to help the Colorado Community College System envision the future of Colorado community college services in 2020.

About Scenario Planning

Scenario planning is the process of creating stories about possible futures in order to anticipate and prepare for changes beyond one's control. Scenarios do not predict the future, but they do provide a way to identify and manage uncertainties. Scenario planning challenges the current mode of thinking, bringing new insights that drive transformation in organizations and institutions. The process involves eight steps: 1) select the issue of focus and timeframe, 2) explore the external world, 3) clarify uncertainties, 4) develop the scenario framework, 5) write the scenarios, 6) identify implications and options, 7) monitor trends, and 8) take action.

Scenario Planning for the Colorado Community College System

The work began in April, 2007 with an introductory presentation by Laura Lefkowitz, McREL's vice president for policy and planning services, on drivers of change and the scenario planning process. Through the discussion, CCCS identified its focal issue to be this question: *What will be the demand for Colorado community college services in 2020?*

A series of three intensive workshops were held May through September 2007. A group of 17 representatives from across the system—named the “Envisioning the Future” work group—developed a scenario framework focused on the dimensions of education as a public good or private benefit crossed with the dimensions of a culture of high or low expectations for learning. The first dimension—education as a public good or education as a private benefit—reflected the notion that it was possible that society could view the purpose of education as only to benefit the individual learner in order to get a job as opposed to having a broader, public purpose. As such, the role of government in education would decrease, over time (education as a private benefit). Conversely, it is also possible that the public or civic purposes of education could increase and with it, the role of government in education would also increase, over time (education as a public good).

The second dimension—culture of learning (high expectations or low expectations)—reflected the idea that society could continue to tolerate mediocrity, a media- or entertainment-culture, and other distractions at the expense of academic achievement and rigor in learning. In the world where low expectations permeate society, despite the efforts of educators, there is little motivation to learn and achieve among the general population. In the world where high expectations are the norm, students, and society as a whole are highly motivated to learn and demand rigorous education.

These dimensions were crossed on a Cartesian plane creating four quadrants representing four distinct worlds and possible futures. Deep causes were identified in order to create a logic outlining how the world got from the current reality of today to each of the four possible futures of 2020. From here, four separate, plausible, logical, and relevant scenarios were written. A brief abstract of each scenario appears below. The complete set of scenarios along with an analysis of the implications of each one and strategic options for the CCCS are provided at the end of this document.

The World in 2020: Four Possible Futures and their Implications for the CCCS

Scenario A: Education is Job #1

In this scenario, the prolonged war in Iraq escalates draining focus and resources from domestic issues like education until 2011 when the opportunity arises in Colorado to develop and bring to scale a new technology that would end American dependence on foreign (and domestic oil). Colorado benefits from the vision and tenacity of a constellation of key leaders representing several generations—Senator Smith, an aging baby boomer; Maria Martinez, a visionary Millennial heroine; and Governor Simon, a pragmatic Gen-X leader—combined with a multi-sector and multi-industry effort to pull together for the common good. Together, the leaders galvanize the potential of Colorado to play a key role in renewable energy solutions for the world. The leaders recognize that education is the key to doing this and they organize a massive campaign, called the “Education=Job #1 Campaign” to generate new investment and focus on high quality education for all.

Scenario B: Uncle Sam Knows Best

In this scenario, Colorado and the US are experiencing a recession as a result of global flattening. Many middle-income jobs have moved off shore to China and India. Economic stratification has deepened and the country is losing its middle class. Jobs are available, but they are low-skill, and low-paying. Although educators and policy makers alike recognize that higher levels of education is the key to securing higher paying jobs and economic development, their efforts come in the form of increased mandates and strict accountability that produce the opposite effect—turning off students from learning because they do not see the relevance of learning and achievement to their lives or as a pathway to a better job.

This scenario describes a large, reluctant-to-change public educational system swimming upstream against a societal and youth culture more interested in Paris Hilton, Britney Spears, and Hannah Montana than in learning or achievement. In the scenario, this world continues without much change from 2007 to 2020. There is support for the idea of education as a public good and some level of resources to match, but not enough to truly transform the system into one that leverages

innovation and creativity to reach the highly tech-savvy, gaming- and entertainment- distracted youth of today and tomorrow. It's as if society has just resigned itself to accept things the way they are. Technology itself has expanded and become so inexpensive and available to all that information—what was once the domain of learning in school—is easily accessible to just about anyone. What's the point of school when most of the jobs that are readily available do not require higher learning? Readers view this world through the eyes of Madison, the main character, who strives to become a dancer and struggles to see the relevance of more education.

Scenario C: McDegree-You Deserve a Break Today!

In this scenario, for profit companies find great benefit in offering a high volume of fast degrees, on the cheap. This matches the demands of the population which seeks the fastest, easiest route to a job—and credentials—rather than a more well-rounded education. Society has pretty much given up on public education to provide the “fast learning” options demanded by both culture and industry. The void is quickly and easily filled by ready, willing, and able private companies who take the concept of learning anytime, anywhere, and in any way to a whole new level. They provide easy access, cheap tuition, quick degrees, and various “mix and match” options for students. They build on technological advancements to allow multi-tasking and extreme personalization to play a role. Public institutions, which have struggled to keep up over the years, are truly left in the dust in this world.

The scenario presents the correspondence between Marci, an atypical, traditional college student who unlike the majority of her peers, seeks a more well-rounded higher education, her father, a traditional college professor, and his colleague, who has gone to work for one of the “McDegree” institutions. Their conversation reveals the tensions inherent in the competing values present in this world.

Scenario D: Pepsi University

In this scenario, the 800 pound gorilla dominates the education scene in every way, shape, and form. Brought on by declining affordability of public higher education, lack of quality in K-12, growing demands for a more highly-educated workforce due to globalization, and the slowness of public systems to adapt to changing times—big business gives up trying to “help,” and simply moves in for its own benefit. Large corporations like Pepsi are able to set up shop, branches, franchises, and establish well-regarded corporate “identities” within the education world, and society (and learners) eagerly respond. Pepsi University, Google University, Harpo University all represent the “in” brands of the decade and competition heats up among selective students to choose to attend the “best” brand. Corporate universities have the prerogative to be selective as the demand for their “product” is very high. Over time, they become increasingly selective and reach further into the educational pipeline to “lock in” the high achievers at early ages. Their influence begins to spread to K-12 education as well.

In the scenario, the CEO of PepsiWorld, Dennis Prease, becomes motivated to start his own school and university by the low quality education his grandchildren receive in the public system. Pepsi University is highly successful as the first-to-market of any such institution, but spawns a movement across the corporate world. The scenario offers a glimpse of this world through an ABC News series in June 2020, focused on the remarkable success of the Corporate College model.

Once these scenarios were written, read, and analyzed, the work group used them as a context for determining the implications for the CCCS as well as strategic options that would enable the CCCS to survive and thrive in each of these four possible futures.

Implications and Options for the CCCS

Implications and Options for Scenario A: Education is Job #1

Community colleges have a tremendous opportunity, if properly prepared and positioned, to increase their relevance and demand for their services in the high public good/high culture of learning world. In order to benefit, they must remain agile, flexible, and able to adapt to changing times as well as changing industries. They must stay on the lookout for emerging industries—such as the potential within renewable energy—and invest in partnerships that tie the educational services they provide to jobs within the industry. They must also overcome some weaknesses and threats inherent in this world, such as competition from four-year institutions which become more appealing to greater numbers of students after high school since they are better prepared for college than at previous times in history. The demand for remedial education is likely to drop in this scenario. Community colleges can overcome this by firmly positioning themselves as THE path to the baccalaureate degree, developing stronger partnerships with K-12 and offering college courses earlier. Establishing community colleges as a key piece of a P-20 educational system (perhaps a 10th through 14th grade) is another way for community colleges to benefit in the high public good/high culture of learning world. Key to its success is the ability to obtain mission-driven funding as opposed to the current FTE model of funding for community college. Finally, coordinating efforts and leveraging resources and influence across the system while eliminating competition among colleges also helps community colleges to succeed in this scenario.

Implications and Options for Scenario B: Uncle Sam Knows Best

Community colleges maintain a high demand for their services in this scenario by continuing their commitment to remedial education, providing education for the service sector, and continuing strong rapport among policy makers. Colleges struggle mightily to motivate and engage students in learning within this scenario and must turn to entertainment-focused “gimmicks” like getting celebrity endorsements in order to catch the attention of the youth culture of the future in the low culture of learning/public good world. If public policy is dominated by tight controls and lack of flexibility and incentives for innovation, reaching the student population will be even more difficult. Strengthening the connections between college and jobs is a good way to prepare for success in this world. Boosting creative efforts to engage students across the board is another way. Colleges may also want to improve student services, especially those focused on retaining students in school and supporting them as they learn the connections between school and employment opportunities. Finally, the opportunity to demonstrate results through measurement of outcomes would help increase public resources in this scenario.

Implications and Options for Scenario C: McDegree

Community colleges will have a difficult time competing in this scenario without dramatically increasing their flexibility and ability to adapt and innovate quickly, in order to keep up with the changing demands of society and industry. Holding on to many of the “traditions” of higher education—even those as simple as the three-credit courses, or the notion of seat time as a

measure for learning—is likely to hold community colleges back from the innovation that will be needed in order to survive in this private benefit/low expectations for learning world. Without question, the mission of community college itself will be under threat in this world. Community colleges will need to radically transform themselves in order to provide a higher quality offering, for less money. Opportunities to meet this challenge do exist, however. Colleges could begin expanding anytime, anywhere learning, focused on outcomes instead of “seat time,” and improving the quality and variety of delivery methods for learning. Offering shorter-duration “courses” that help students complete programs in shorter periods of time might also help community colleges maintain an edge in the face of the “McDegree” competition. Expanding the number of early college models where community colleges partner with K-12 schools and offer programs earlier in their schooling combined with close ties to business and industry is another way for community colleges to prepare for this future. Proactively coordinating and partnering with industry clusters also helps community colleges maintain a multitude of programs and degrees within key industries. Finally, marketing services to students who are currently not attending community college—the un-enrolled and the baby boomers—is another way that community colleges might seek a competitive edge in this world.

Implications and Options for Scenario D: Pepsi University

As difficult as it will be to compete against corporate goliaths, Colorado community colleges do stand a chance if they become well coordinated and organized as a system—and perhaps even one that operates in a “corporate” manner. In this private benefit/high culture of learning world, the “system” itself, is a strength, if it can become a high quality “brand” desired by students who seek more variety and flexibility in their educational opportunities than the corporate “tracks” provide. Individual colleges may need to identify and find their particular “niche” within the market in order to compete. Increased collaboration with the private sector, especially those mid-sized companies that are not likely to create their own universities, but rather seek to partner with higher education, is key. Finally, developing strong and well coordinated career pathways for students will be essential for community colleges to survive in this scenario.

Robust Options and Recommendations for the CCCS

Strategies that applied to all possible futures were deemed to be the most “robust” of the options and were used to generate a set of recommendations for CCCS to pursue today in order to prepare for tomorrow. Through these discussions and analyses, the work group determined that it is essential for CCCS to enable Colorado community colleges to *innovate* in order to successfully *compete* in the ever-evolving 21st century world. This became the group’s overarching theme for this entire body of work. By implementing the following robust options, the CCCS can become well prepared to face any future.

1. **21st Century Mission**: Make Colorado community colleges the place to learn 21st century skills; Integrate 21st century skills in everything community colleges do
2. **Student Engagement**: Encourage system-wide support for student engagement
3. **Corporate Relations and Partnerships**: Provide support to enhance partnership opportunities among colleges and business and industry

4. **Perceptions**: Improve the perceived value of community colleges in Colorado
5. **Research and Accountability**: Strengthen the focus on accountability and institutional research, system-wide
6. **Advocacy Agenda**: Develop a long-term strategic advocacy plan for the state legislature, Governor's office, Department of Higher Education, and the federal government that includes improving state funding for the full community college mission
7. **Career Placement**: Formalize process and infrastructure to increase the number of graduates who are directly placed in jobs.

Recommended Next Steps

The strategies outlined during the scenario planning process are the first in an ongoing process of planning for the future. The following recommendations are offered as CCCS considers its next steps:

1. Present results of scenario planning process to and discuss final report with the State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education.
2. Consider ways to engage the broader community in conversations about the future of community college services in Colorado.
3. Establish an ongoing mechanism to monitor trends, communicate them, and analyze their implications for the CCCS.
4. Translate robust and strategic options into a concrete action plan that guides program implementation and operations.
5. As the CCCS begins taking action on its robust options or other strategies, consider the following:
 - a. Engage in a process to prioritize the needs of the CCCS.
 - b. Examine the current and proposed CCCS policies and practices in light of the scenarios and their implications.

Conclusions

The enclosed final report describes the scenario planning process used along with the discussion and analysis that informed the development of CCCS' robust options for the future. By considering four possible responses to the focal issue, the Colorado Community College System has successfully begun to prepare for any possible future and position itself for ongoing success as time marches steadily toward 2020.



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