



# A Defense of Baccalaureate Education

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## Introduction

In the course of political debate, it is all too commonly the case that the most important elements of the debate are left to the side or forgotten altogether. In the most recent exchanges regarding whether to offer the applied baccalaureate or some other form of four-year education at community colleges, two essential questions have been lost in rhetoric to detriment of everyone involved – students, parents, community colleges, and four-year public universities. The first question we must ask is what is best for students? All interested groups have an answer to this question, but they differ in important ways that should be made explicit to all who are interested in the outcome of this debate. Second, what purposes should our public community colleges and four-year universities play in the state as providers of postsecondary educational opportunities? The U.S. is unique in the world precisely because of the array of opportunities, the permeability of the system, and the high quality of the education available.

All of this is possible precisely because of the different types of institutions comprising our educational landscape. We should recognize our colleges and universities for the important roles they play and expect them to excel in their respective roles, all to the benefit of the students they serve. Offering the applied baccalaureate degree at community colleges suggests only one way to think about the potential benefit to students and it neglects the important distribution of roles in American higher education. Ultimately, the supposition that community colleges can offer baccalaureate level education more efficiently and effectively than public universities implies a lack of understanding of baccalaureate education and devalues the important role this sector of higher education plays.

In this brief, we will begin by answering the two questions posed above – we must keep students at the center of the conversation and we must be clear about the purposes of our institutions. In fact, in many ways these two questions overlap but they are sufficiently independent to warrant separate treatment in this document. Next, we will articulate a definition of baccalaureate education. The definition may seem clear to many but if you search those writing on the issues of the applied baccalaureate or the community college baccalaureate, they begin by defining the degree as an extension of what is provided at the community college rather than as a reflection of a long standing educational staple offered in a four-year college setting.

## A Defense of Baccalaureate Education

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### INTRODUCTION

# A Defense of Baccalaureate Education

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Next, we will describe what the applied baccalaureate represents and how it differs from the conventional four year degree. We will conclude by describing the challenges community colleges would face attempting to provide this form of education in a way that keeps students at the center of the conversation and allows them to achieve their established purposes in an efficient and effective way. In many ways, this would mirror the challenges four year universities would face if they were asked to provide technical and vocational training in programmatic areas they do not currently address. They could do it but at a considerably greater cost. These are the sorts of trade-offs we need to consider in the applied baccalaureate conversation because such decisions do not operate in a vacuum. All of these decisions have implications and it is in everyone's best interest to understand those implications before changes are made and new expectations are set.

## What is Best for Students?

When students are asked what they value most about a college education, invariably they identify preparation for careers and a range of factors associated with employability at the end of the degree. Students understand – and colleges have embraced – that a college education is positively related to future career and employment outcomes, including both employability (declining likelihood of unemployment) and earnings (higher wages). This is true. In fact, for every additional degree earned, students make more money and are less likely to face unemployment during their careers. Unfortunately, this well-established relationship has rather suggested that simply generating more degrees will ultimately lead to greater individual outcomes for a broader range of individuals and, by extension, society as a whole. We suggest that those improved economic outcomes are not simply a consequence of more credits earned or a greater amount of time spent in classrooms; rather it is the different sort of education provided at each level of postsecondary education that the degrees approximate (or is intended to approximate). Simply put, learning is the cornerstone of a well-trained workforce and degrees serve as proxies or economic signals for that preparation. Colleges and universities define the learning and are responsible for defending the value of those credentials. Without this important check on the system, degrees would simply be worth the paper they were issued on.

So while employment is important, we suggest that the learning approximated by the degree is really where we must focus our attention when it comes to addressing what students need. When employers are asked what they value in employees, they recognize the distinction but frame it in different ways. They want employees who know how to do the job or elements of it, but they also want thoughtful, engaged, critical thinkers who work well with others, can adapt to changing environments, operate in a global context, and learn continuously over the course of a career. Employers recognize that even the most applied forms of postsecondary education will need to be supplemented with on the job training, so what they really need are students that have been trained to learn.

What students need then, is an education that prepares them to be flexible, adaptable, and entrepreneurial in an economic environment that is uncertain and ever changing. New generations of prospective employees will be required to re-invent themselves several times over the course of a career and they will be asked to assume roles that did not exist when they first entered the job market.

## A Defense of Baccalaureate Education

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### **WHAT IS BEST FOR STUDENTS?**

## A Defense of Baccalaureate Education

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### **WHAT IS BEST FOR STUDENTS?**

In many cases, this conversation devolves into an intractable debate balancing increasing calls for equity and an equally strong commitment to excellence. Bowen, Kurzweil, and Tobin (2005) suggest that equity and excellence is a false dichotomy but it has framed the debate in a way that suggests a zero sum game. In reality, we have to pay equal attention to both expanding the equitable distribution of postsecondary opportunity and defending vigorously the high quality of that education. Failure at the former will result in a high quality education for a few, where failure on the latter will give greater access to a mediocre education. Failure at either is simply not an option.

From an institutional perspective then, community colleges are viewed as the defenders and promoters of equity where public universities (in this case) stand firm in defense of excellence. In reality, both sectors care about equity and excellence but their arguments on the issue of the applied baccalaureate tend to emphasize one over the other. Deborah Stone (2001) illustrates the elusive definition of equity by way of analogy. Utilizing the metaphor of a cake, she points out how the definition of equity relies upon ones' understanding quality and for whom they believe equity is an issue. For example, it may be equitable from one perspective, to ensure that the cost of college is the same for everyone. To another person, the cost should be less for those from families with fewer resources if we hope to achieve equity, because they cannot afford the same cost as others. To a third observer, equity is achieved by maintaining open access institutions like community colleges where only a high school diploma or its equivalent is necessary for enrollment. They note cost is less an issue because community college tuition is lower than any other type of institution. A fourth person may say that equity is not achieved at the community college because the real economic benefit comes from the bachelor's degree and most entering community colleges never make it through to a four year degree. It will effectively cost them more in terms of time and foregone wages to earn the bachelors degree, which is not equitable.

We face this same challenge in terms of the applied baccalaureate that prevents an honest conversation about what our colleges and universities do, how they do it, whom baccalaureate education is for, and how much it costs. The next question we must explore then is the purposes of our two general types of institutions—community colleges and four-year public universities. Both segments play important roles in the provision of postsecondary education, which is both sensible and efficient. We suggest it is inherently inefficient to ask or allow one set of institutions to duplicate the work being done at another level, particularly if we hope to maintain a shared focus on both equity and excellence.

# What Purposes Should Postsecondary Institutions Play?

One of the unique benefits of American higher education is that students can begin postsecondary education and nearly any level of preparation and earn the highest degree in their field if they work hard enough and can afford to continue. In many countries around the world, educational opportunities are decided exclusively upon merit where top scoring students are tracked into universities and less prepared students are tracked into vocational colleges. Once those placements are made it is difficult for students to alter their educational or career trajectory. In the U.S. the story is very different – even when the final outcomes are remarkably similar.

Community colleges occupy an important role in American higher education and are alternately praised for providing the gateway to a better life for millions of low income, first generation, minority, and non-traditional age students (Adelman, 2004) while equally criticized for doing little more than diverting students from the four year degree (Brint & Karabel, 1984). The perceived value of the community college has waxed and waned over the past 100 years but much of the confusion results from the lack of a clear and focused understanding of their proper role.

The junior college was the grand experiment of William Rainey Harper at the University of Chicago and his vision was to create a distinction between the first two years of college as a general education intended for all and the latter two years of focused study in a particular field or profession. As such, the early junior colleges were intended principally to serve as transitional institutions between high school and the four-year institution. The transfer function remains an important part of the community college mission but it is only a small part of an expansive role.

Community colleges assumed a second important role subsequent to World War II. In 1944, Truman signed into law the Serviceman's Readjustment Act providing among other things, tuition subsidies for members of the military returning from the war. Three years later, President Truman convened the commission on Higher Education and American Democracy to consider the functions of higher education and the social role it plays. In particular, the President (President's Commission on Higher Education, 1947) asked the commission to consider the following: (1) ways and means of expanding educational opportunities for all able young people, (2) the adequacy of the curriculum, particularly in international affairs and social understanding, (3) the desirability of establishing a series of intermediate technical institutes, and (4) the financial structure of higher education, specifically regarding the expansion of physical facilities.

## A Defense of Baccalaureate Education

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### **WHAT PURPOSES SHOULD POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTIONS PLAY?**

# A Defense of Baccalaureate Education

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Two of the most important results of the Truman Commission were the recommendation for the broad creation and expansion of the 'community' colleges, so that proximity would not be a barrier to any capable student, and the articulation of a clear statement on general education. The former addressed the problem of institutional capacity brought about by the influx of veterans to college campuses and the latter provided a compromise between the vocational, utilitarian education, and the liberal arts curriculum so highly valued by four year colleges. The commission also suggested the first two years of college be provided for all students as a matter of equity (Conley, 1995). Interestingly, the commission took a slightly different tack in terms of the transfer function. In particular, they advocated strongly for the focus on the terminal associates degree.

More recently – in light of greater emphasis upon college preparation, attendance, and completion for students and accountability for outcomes by institutions – states have relied more heavily upon community colleges for adult basic education for those who left high school without a diploma or requisite literacy and numeracy skills, remedial education for under-prepared degree seeking students, English as a second language, and various entry level and continuing workforce development and retraining in partnership with local and community employers (Bailey & Smith Morest, 2003). Researchers have pointed out that these multiple missions can either be a blessing or a curse (Bailey & Averianova, 1998; Brewer, 1999; Rosenfeld, 1999). On one hand community colleges are valued and revered for meeting their democratic commitment to provide the education necessary for the benefit of the community. Advocates argue that multiple missions are a reflection of agility and adaptability of these institutions to respond to changing needs and community expectations. On the other hand, detractors of the multiple mission institution suggest that by assuming too many roles, community colleges find themselves in the unenviable position of not being able to achieve any one of them extremely well.

Four year universities enjoy a much longer history in American higher education and their roles have evolved over time as well. From the founding of Harvard College (circa 1636) our colleges have been expected to train future generations of active and engaged civic and religious leaders. Their roles evolved dramatically in nineteenth century, first as the public university evolved out of those supported only by private sources and then as the industrial revolution called for a change in curricular offerings. The landgrant acts called upon public higher education to serve the specific educational needs of the burgeoning agricultural and technical industries. In particular, as the following passage demonstrates, universities were called upon to provide both liberal and practical components of education:

*To grant lands to each loyal state to support a college "where the leading object shall be, without excluding other scientific and classical studies and including military tactics, to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts...in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions of life." (Morrill Act of 1862)*

The American public university assumed a new set of roles and purposes during the 20th century, particularly subsequent to World War II. The federal government began to invest substantially in military sponsored research and universities (public and Private) became home to some of the most important military and civic advances of knowledge in the 20th century. The creation of National Science Foundation (NSF) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) evolved in similar ways to infuse federal resources into the establishment of research designed to address the most pressing national issues of our times. Like community colleges, public universities have continued to serve these multiple purposes.

During these transformations, four year colleges have been forced to reflect upon the purpose of the education they provide and while the definition is broadened, the core purpose remains. In response to one of these transitional periods, faculty at Yale University issue a report (Yale report of 1828) reminding the higher education community that the purpose of baccalaureate education was to provide the furniture of the mind, instilling students with the skills to think and act critically, to examine issues deeply, and to root their thinking in the history and philosophy of primarily Western thought.

Today, the same debate occurs, but we think of it in terms of general education or liberal education and the results are stronger analytic skills, greater rhetorical aptitude, and the ability to adapt to a changing world. In effect, universities (and other four year colleges) have incorporated more concrete elements of vocational training into their curriculum, but at their essence focus more heavily on the training of the mind – which we suggest is the training students need to succeed in an ever changing global knowledge economy.

Both segments of higher education – community colleges and four year public universities – serve multiple missions and respond to the changing needs of society and they do so in different but equally important ways. Community colleges have expanded their mission in ways that more closely align with the high school curriculum and also with workforce development. Universities have expanded their missions to reflect the need for advanced degrees including masters and doctorates as well as the need to

## A Defense of Baccalaureate Education

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**WHAT PURPOSES SHOULD  
POSTSECONDARY  
INSTITUTIONS PLAY?**

# A Defense of Baccalaureate Education

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## **DEFINING BACCALAUREATE EDUCATION**

produce new knowledge across the disciplines. And both have made important inroads in terms of facilitating the transitions from community college to the four year institution vis-à-vis transfer articulation agreements and collaborative joint ventures through the university centers established at many community colleges – a model we discuss in the conclusion.

## **Defining Baccalaureate Education**

In many ways, defining baccalaureate education is as elusive as understanding equity. We know the baccalaureate degree has been the staple of colleges and universities since the creation of American higher education. We also know that it typically requires 120 to 128 credit hours or academic units, suggested to span 4 years. And we know the bachelor's degree is a critical nexus between undergraduate and graduate educational opportunities. In many conversations this is as far as we go. However, if we dig deeper, there are a few additional elements we know about baccalaureate education.

First, the bachelor's degree is more than simply an accumulation of 120 college credits. Community colleges understand this because they too are in the business of developing and delivering cogent curricular options; policy makers however, are frequently lured into thinking that the degree is simply an acquisition of credit. To see this belief in action, one only needs to look at calls for credit amnesty for those that earned credit at some point in the past or the proliferation of dual enrollment for high school students. In other states, calls for common course numbering, universal articulation agreements from 2- to 4-year colleges fall, and credit for life experience all treat credit as currency and as soon as one earns enough currency, they can cash it in for a degree.

From a postsecondary perspective, the curriculum comprises three essential elements, all of which contribute to our understanding of baccalaureate education. The major curriculum receives a great deal of attention and it is an important element of the college curriculum. It reflects the learning expectations within a specific field of study which most often aligns with a set of job/career opportunities. The general education curriculum is the foundation upon which the baccalaureate degree is built. All students are expected to complete a common curriculum typically during their first two years of study and it is intended to provide students with the knowledge, skills, and experiences to become what the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AACU) calls intentional learners<sup>1</sup>:

*Becoming such an intentional learner means developing self-awareness about the reason for study, the learning process*

<sup>1</sup>AACU (2002). Greater Expectations. Washington, DC.

*itself, and how education is used. Intentional learners are integrative thinkers who can see connections in seemingly disparate information and draw on a wide range of knowledge to make decisions. They adapt the skills learned in one situation to problems encountered in another: in a classroom, the workforce, their communities, or their personal lives. As a result, intentional learners succeed even when instability is the only constant (p. 21).*

The third element of baccalaureate education is the elective curriculum. Colleges and universities recognize that college is a time of great exploration. Most students have never been exposed to a whole range of curricular options and potential career opportunities and electives give them the opportunity to explore options. In fact, these three elements are common across postsecondary education, no matter the institution or the field of study. However, there are two important points that need to be emphasized. First, the college curriculum is intentionally designed to provide a specific sort of education that both prepares a student for entry into a set of career options and prepares them to be active engaged learners and citizens. The mix of these three elements differs by institution and program and degree type, but they are all intentional about their curriculum. Second, the focus on the general education or what is commonly described as liberal education, is the cornerstone of baccalaureate education and it may be the most distinguishing factor between the traditional baccalaureate degree and the applied version.

## Defining the Applied Baccalaureate

In the previous brief examining the state sponsored study of the desire of community colleges to offer applied baccalaureate degrees, we deal with the definitional issues from a public policy perspective and show that the study employs an overly broad definition that belies existing state definitions. Those definitions are important but they start at the wrong place. We suggest that any definition of an applied baccalaureate must necessarily begin with the baccalaureate. In reality, there are at least two ways to define the sort of credential proposed by community colleges here – (1) an offshoot of baccalaureate education or (2) an extension of existing associates level education.

We begin from the perspective that the proposed degrees are in fact an extension or variation on the traditional baccalaureate degree. The term applied baccalaureate suggests that it is both similar to a baccalaureate so as to be treated and valued as its four-year degree counterpart, but different so as to suggest there is something unique about this degree relative to the traditional baccalaureate. Whether or not it is treated or valued as a bachelor's

## A Defense of Baccalaureate Education

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### **DEFINING THE APPLIED BACCALAUREATE**

# A Defense of Baccalaureate Education

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## **DEFINING THE APPLIED BACCALAUREATE**

degree is a market question and can only be answered by observing how industries compensate BAS earners relative to their BA and BS counterparts. However, there is a value proposition that must be addressed that provides a useful segue into what makes the applied degree “applied”. Students should necessarily be curious regarding the degree to which the BAS will align with the expectations for admission to post-baccalaureate degree opportunities at both the masters and doctoral levels and the answer to that question depends in large measure upon the degree to which the applied degree is similar to the traditional baccalaureate.

When we look at which elements of the baccalaureate curriculum are not applied, one may naturally conclude that general education is where differences are most likely to be found. The major curriculum is the most “applied” component of baccalaureate education because it is the most closely aligned with potential job and career opportunities. The elective curriculum could be a target because it is not applied in the same way, but it is more practical in the sense that it gives students the opportunity to explore unknown areas. But if the general education is the backbone of baccalaureate education which is the gateway to post-baccalaureate education and the applied appellation suggests minimizing the most distinctive feature of the degree, are we left with baccalaureate education or is it something different?

The second vantage point from which to view the applied baccalaureate is as an extension of existing curricular options unique to community colleges. Consider a favorite example in Michigan – the concrete technology program at Alpena Community College. Currently, ACC offers an Associates of Applied Science (AAS) in concrete technology. Today, the expectations placed upon the concrete technologist may extend beyond the AAS training they receive and suggests more in depth training in the profession to remain current in the field. Is this post-associates advanced education baccalaureate level, does it constitute some form of post-associates certification, or is it a reflection of a credential that has yet to be defined? If the field requires advanced training, then it should be provided in some way, but the distinction may be whether employers of concrete technology are demanding more in depth training in the major area or if they are asking for a broader base of skills and aptitudes more similar to what was described above under the intentional learner. If the former is the case, then we may have a new certification or a credential requiring a new term, but it would not be a baccalaureate degree. If it is the latter, then an AAS combined with a business management or some existing four year program may be equal to the demand.

Unfortunately, it is likely we are caught up in terminology precisely because we recognize that while we are talking about something

different, a baccalaureate degree suggests a certain prestige and commensurate market value. It is our estimation that what constitutes baccalaureate education should be rooted in the quality and intentionality of the education and not what value it will yield in the workforce. As the DLEG study suggests and the answers provided by community colleges reinforce, this is not simply a question of a new sort of degree offering. Rather, given the considerable emphasis on nursing education, the motivation for the authorizing legislation was to allow community colleges to offer traditional baccalaureate education more efficiently (in terms of cost). In the next section we address this fallacy of efficiency.

## Efficiency and Baccalaureate Education

There is a growing belief that community colleges are an incredible bargain when it comes to higher education. And it is true the cost of tuition for students is considerably less at community colleges than at four year public universities. On average, a year of tuition at a community college is approximately \$2,000 for in-district students. In our public universities, the cost is closer to \$8,000 per year for in-state students. When we do this math, clearly, the cost of attending a community college for two-years is much less than attending a four-year institution for the same period of time. If we assumed that all things are equal, then it does not take much to conclude that a community college could offer four years of education for the same tuition cost of one year at a public university. There are however, three limitations to this notion of efficiency that must be addressed in order to accurately reflect what is truly efficient: (1) the funding structure for community colleges, (2) the quality of the educational offering, (3) and the rates of success for community college students.

## Funding Community Colleges

Frequently we forget that community colleges are funded in different ways than four-year public universities. For our universities, there are four essential sources of revenue to cover the cost of providing its education – state appropriations, tuition, federal student aid, and institutional contributions (which may or may not include contributions from endowment, private sources of revenue, and tuition discounting). In recent years in particular, the mix of these funding streams has changed to the point where state appropriations are declining as a proportion of the cost of providing an education (and a proportion of the total state budget) and federal aid has failed to keep pace as well. As a consequence, tuitions have risen and institutional contributions to financial aid have grown.

## A Defense of Baccalaureate Education

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### **EFFICIENCY AND BACCALAUREATE EDUCATION**

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### **FUNDING COMMUNITY COLLEGES**

# A Defense of Baccalaureate Education

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## DIFFERENT QUALITIES

Community colleges are subject to similar revenue streams with one important exception. In addition to state appropriations, federal aid, tuition and some institutional contributions, community colleges also derive a substantial proportion of their funding from local taxing authority. Consider for example, the tuition rates reported for Michigan community colleges through the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The in-district rates average \$2,000 as reported above but they also publish an in-state rate which is anywhere from 40% higher to nearly double (\$800-2000), meaning that local millages may cover nearly as much of the cost of college as is passed on to local students. That is an important source of revenue, which is currently not available to public universities, but is tax support for higher education. More to the point, communities support their community colleges through local property taxes for the specific purpose of empowering those institutions to respond effectively to the local needs of the district it serves. So while, this may be a bargain for the state, it is simply a different tax stream from the perspective of the student (who pays into both). If we take this into account, the gap begins to shrink and the notion of efficiency becomes a bit more complex.

## Different Qualities

It is always difficult to address notions of quality when discussing differences between sectors of institutions because in doing so, one invariably infers that one set of qualities is greater or more valuable than others. We believe this is the wrong way to think about quality because each set of institutions provides tremendous value to those they serve. And frequently quality neglects the notion of value-added, which accounts for the fact that different institutions serve different populations of students. We find it more useful then, to avoid the divisive notions of valuing one set of qualities over another and instead focus on the qualitative differences in what is provided and how.

The first difference can be observed at the faculty level. There are two important differences to highlight. First, and not surprisingly, community college and university faculty are different in terms of their roles and subsequently their levels of education. Where nearly 65% of all faculty members at 4-year institutions nationally hold a doctorate or first professional degree (e.g. JD, MD), slightly less than 15% hold the same degree level at the community college. The majority (55%) of community college faculty hold a Masters degree where nearly one in four hold a Bachelors or less. Nearly 30% of four-year faculty hold a Masters degree as their highest credential and about 5% teach with a Bachelor's degree.<sup>2</sup> This does not speak to the quality of instruction but it does suggest differing roles that result in different outcomes. PhD level fac-

<sup>2</sup>Data derived from the National Survey of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF:2005) utilizing the Data Analysis System (DAS) available on line at <http://nces.ed.gov>.

ulty members are trained to conduct research. That research is a part of their academic responsibility and it informs what they teach and how they teach it. The trade-off is that they teach 2-3 courses a semester.

At the community college level, faculty members are there to teach and as such teach 5 and sometimes 6 courses in a semester. Now from a simple cost efficiency perspective teaching 10-12 courses per year per faculty member is less expensive than 4-6 on average for four year universities, if the only set of expectations is crafted in terms of teaching load. Similarly, it is less expensive to hire Masters and Bachelors educated instructors than it is to hire PhD's. But the qualities of that experience are different. Community college instructors, by virtue of being in the class more, may excel at the dissemination of information. PhD instructors may excel at the critical analysis of complex problems and the methods for answering complex questions by virtue of their experience in research. Both are valuable, but they are different. The Voorhees group points out that regional accreditation standards expect that at minimum, individuals earn a least a degree above the level at which they teach. At that standard, Masters trained faculty could teach baccalaureate level courses but their contribution to the course would be different. That is simply a different educational experience and we have to recognize it as such.

To offer a baccalaureate-type degree at the community college then, one might expect that the faculty look similar in terms of training and what they bring to the classroom. However, the cost of hiring a PhD instructor v. a Master's instructors is substantial. Assuming that PhD educated faculty bring something different to the educational experience and that they are compensated at higher rates, it is clear the costs would be greater even if the PhD trained faculty teach the full community college course load. If PhD level faculty were given release time to conduct research at community colleges, the costs would rise again. Of course related to the level of faculty and the expectations for research is the cost of providing sufficient research facilities. All of this suggests if you want the same "qualities" in the baccalaureate education, it will cost community colleges more to provide it than their current budgets allow. Conversely, if it is something different, then we should call it something different and allow community colleges to continue to focus on sub-baccalaureate education.

## A Defense of Baccalaureate Education

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### **DIFFERENT QUALITIES**

## A Defense of Baccalaureate Education

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### **RATES OF SUCCESS**

## Rates of Success

An equally problematic issue for community colleges that affect the efficiency conversation is that students attending community colleges tend to finish degree programs at much lower rates than students at four year institutions (even after accounting for transfers, continuous enrollees, and occasional attenders). In many ways, this is a function of who community colleges serve and not of the quality of the education provided or the effort colleges make to help students succeed. Rather, it is a fact that it takes community college students longer to earn a degree, they work more hours outside of school, and many have been out of school for some time which requires some advanced training and support. NCES publishes graduation rates that suggest students should finish within 150% of the time expected to degree. For two year institutions, we may expect they graduate within 3 years. In truth, community college students may take even longer, with suggestions that we allow at least 4 years to calculate community college graduation rates.

What this suggests is that community colleges serve students that cannot, by conventional standards, proceed through a degree program in what might be considered an efficient pathway. They will take more time, they will work more hours, and are likely to stop out more frequently along the path. If a 2-year associate takes as long as 4 years, it may take the same students 7-8 years to complete the baccalaureate degree. So they will serve more challenging students and they do so with fewer resources than they should receive and in the end, fewer of their students will complete the bachelors than at public universities on average. If this decision were about cost alone, then the efficiency one might expect will clearly not materialize if we genuinely offer baccalaureate education at the community college. This analysis should not suggest that these students will progress more quickly through public universities; there are a whole range of factors that need to be addressed to improve completion outcomes. This analysis does point out however, that community colleges may not be as efficient as they are being cast, when they are asked to provide a level of education they currently do not provide.

## Conclusion

It is important to return again to the notion of what is best for students. Lower cost is clearly very important so long as the qualities of baccalaureate education are maintained. Geographic access is an important consideration and much like the Wisconsin Idea of the 19th century, we should bring education to the people. And we should meet the demands of the workforce as best we can so long as in doing so, we maintain our core vision of what represents high quality education. Much like any business is expert in what they sell or what they produce, colleges and universities – and not policy makers or business executives – are experts in the provision of higher education. We need to maintain those high standards because it is the learning approximated by the credential that keeps the value of the baccalaureate degree high in the workforce.

Conversely, we should not assume that any college can offer any sort of degree or course of study as well as any other. Community colleges play important roles in higher education, particularly as gateways for access and change agents for workforce development. Universities could not fill this need as efficiently as community colleges have. The same is true for baccalaureate education. Assuming we want to maintain the same qualities for all baccalaureate degree offerings, then it is unrealistic to expect that community colleges could do so as efficiently and effectively as public universities. Similarly, we should not call a new degree offering something it is not. If the applied terminology really implies a different sort of degree, we should name it accordingly. In the case of cement technology it might well be a post Associates certificate. There may be a new degree strata that reflects the changing nature of community colleges in a knowledge economy.

Ultimately, baccalaureate education is an important and valuable credential precisely because of the intentionality with which it is constructed. General education in particular is a cornerstone to the baccalaureate degree and it is the essence of liberal education. Any attempt to minimize general education to promote a more applied curriculum should at very least not be characterized as baccalaureate education. It may have a place and it would certainly have a value, but it is different and should be identified as such.

Finally, we should not forget that Michigan has an established model for expanding baccalaureate opportunities to students primarily served on community college campuses. The University Center (UC) model is one that has existed in Michigan for nearly 20 years and it is well suited to the highly autonomous, market oriented “system” we have in Michigan. The UC model reflects

## A Defense of Baccalaureate Education

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### CONCLUSION

# A Defense of Baccalaureate Education

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## **CONCLUSION**

a partnership between community colleges and universities to provide specific degree programs that align with the workforce demands of specific communities. The model provides a nice balance of both equity and excellence. The programs are offered on community college campuses, which makes them more accessible to local communities. The degree program is sponsored by the partnering four-year college or university, who is ultimately responsible for ensuring the quality of the program and then offers the degree for successful completion.

The recommendation of the Cherry Commission was to begin by expanding these sorts of partnership and we agree that this is the right approach. The second part of the recommendation indicates the legislature should consider community college offered applied baccalaureates where needs remain unmet and partnerships have not addressed the problem. We disagree with this assessment for a number of reasons as articulated above. Additionally, we reject the assumptions that the unmet needs are well known and understood and that, once they are, that partnerships will fail to address the need. We recognize that it may not be possible to forecast future workforce demands in many areas because the fields are changing too quickly. Fields like nursing tend to be the battleground because the need is well documented and it is unlikely the field will disappear; though it may look very different in years to come. The nursing issue will be taken up in the third and final brief of the series in part, because the issues are unique and the rhetoric is currently misaligned with the reality.

Baccalaureate education is one of our great treasures. It is essential that we think critically about what it does and does not accomplish and we should defend vigorously the values and qualities of that form of education. We must resist the temptation to simplify baccalaureate education to an accumulation of credit and to treat credits as a single currency. Doing so devalues the important contributions of the baccalaureate degree and by extension all of those institutions—public and private—that specialize in the provision of this sort of education. We need to re-value the Bachelor's degree and it begins by recognizing what is truly valuable about baccalaureate education, valuing the unique and complementary purposes of our institutions, and resisting temptations to impose solutions before the problems are well understood.

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