Fulfilling Dual Roles: Transitioning from the Community College Bachelor’s to a Regional University

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Introduction

Traditionally community colleges have provided access to two-year degrees, certificates and diplomas, thus focusing on workforce training as well as lower division college credit for transfer into the University system. In the past two decades there have been many national and state initiatives to increase the post-secondary education levels of the citizenry to meet the demands of the global marketplace. In response, some community colleges have set out to meet these initiatives by offering 4-year bachelor’s degrees. This trend has grown dramatically in recent years— in 2004 only 21 community colleges in 11 states offered four-year degrees and in the last 10 years that number has tripled. There are now more than 22 states that offer community college baccalaureate degrees and many other states, such as California with 112 community colleges, are considering the transition as well.

In this poster presentation, we evaluate the success of three open-enrollment institutions that began as community colleges and are now at different stages since adopting a broadened, dual mission. Items we assess include:
1. Degree production before and after the incorporation of 4-year degrees
2. Longitudinal data on degree offerings to determine if, as a University focuses more on Bachelor’s and graduate programs, less emphasis is placed on lower division & CTE related fields
3. Whether new community college offerings are initiated to meet areas of critical need, especially CTE and STEM fields
4. Access and retention to the baccalaureate programs by minority populations

Three of Utah’s Regional Universities

Weber State University (WSU) began as an Academy in 1889 and transitioned in to a Junior College, then a Senior College and is now a Regional Western University. Weber State awarded its first bachelor’s degrees in 1965 and now offers more than 250 undergraduate degree programs as well as 11 graduate degree programs with an array of professional certificate programs.

Utah Valley State College was approved to offer a 4-year degree in 1993. Twenty-years later, it now offers 66 baccalaureate programs and became Utah Valley University (UVU) in 2009. UVU expanded its academic role with 3 Master’s degrees but remains committed to maintaining a community college function. UVU’s 60 career and technical education programs award an array of associate’s, certificates and diplomas.

Dixie (DSU) was approved to award four-year degrees in 1999 and now offers 28 Bachelor’s degrees 17 Associate’s degrees and 13 certificates. Dixie was awarded University status in 2013 and with a new president who is setting a strategic plan that will direct its future, which includes new academic offerings at all levels (Master’s, Bachelor’s, Associate’s, and certificates).

Data Analysis

To evaluate the success of the community college to university transition, we investigate the following:

1. Degree Production

Evaluate degree production from 1987-present, before and after the incorporation of 4-year degrees.

2. Shifts in Degree Offerings

Assess whether the University focuses more on Bachelor’s and graduate programs and less on lower division programs from 2005 to present.

3. Impact on CTE

Evaluate changes in CTE by comparing the difference in upper and lower division degree offerings from 2010-2014.

4. Minority Access

Analyze access to baccalaureate programs by special populations (female, minority, Hispanic, and non-traditional) and compare to those populations in the community college.

Conclusions

1. Overall degree production increases at all degree levels with the inclusion of Bachelor’s degree programs, although certificate awards are highly variable.
2. While Bachelor’s degree programs experiences the largest growth, the number of lower division associate’s and certificate offerings stay stable or slightly increase over time.
3. There was growth in all degree types, including CTE level programming although future investigations will refine measures to focus on STEM fields.
4. All three institutions made gains in overall minority and Hispanic population enrollments from 2007-2011.

All three institutions made gains in overall minority and Hispanic population enrollments from 2007-2011. While Bachelor’s degree programs experienced the largest growth, the number of lower division associate’s and certificate offerings stay stable or slightly increase over time. All 3 institutions experienced net growth in every degree type including CTE level programming. However, lower division degree offerings at UVU and DSU suffered some losses as well. Future investigation will refine this measure and focus on assessing STEM specific programs over time.

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