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AUTHOR Boggs, George R.  
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ABSTRACT

A paradigm is a way of understanding that includes rules and regulations that: (1) establish boundaries; (2) provide fixed rules for success within the boundaries; and (3) act as filters for data. While a paradigm may help people to operate in terms of things as they are, it also may blind them to alternative ways of looking at the world around them. The current paradigm for community colleges views them as teaching institutions, as opposed to research institutions, and the most important people in the institution are the providers of instruction. However, mounting evidence indicates the existence of anomalies that this paradigm does not explain, such as the lack of success of minority students, or the perceptions of the business community that students are not being adequately prepared. A new paradigm must propose that the colleges are learning, not teaching, institutions and that the most important people in the institution are the learners. Under the new paradigm, teachers become designers, managers, promoters, and facilitators of student learning. To institute the new paradigm, colleges must address areas of resistance, focus on learning outcomes, and revise mission statements to clearly state that student learning is the main goal. Learning outcomes will drive curricular reform under the new paradigm. Institutional resources will include student, faculty, and staff composition, while processes will center around curriculum, learning technology, and leadership. (PAA)

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# CELEBRATIONS

AN OCCASIONAL PUBLICATION OF  
THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR STAFF AND ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (NISOD)

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*George R. Boggs  
Superintendent/President  
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## COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND THE NEW PARADIGM

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The time has come for us to change the way we define the mission of the community college. The new mission will require us to initiate a number of changes. Some of the changes will, no doubt, be met with resistance. Implementing them may be unpopular or even painful at first. Nevertheless, I believe that they are essential if our colleges are to realize their potential.

We cannot afford not to change. Let me share with you the words of Galileo Galilei in *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems—Ptolemaic & Copernican*, with respect to being left behind in a world where a new way of looking at things was about to replace the old.

Take note, theologians, that in your desire to make matters of faith out of propositions relating to the fixity of sun and earth you run the risk of eventually having to condemn as heretics those who would declare the earth to stand still and the sun to change position—eventually, I say, at such a time as it might be physically or logically proved that the earth moves and the sun stands still.

Change is inevitable in our colleges. Although we may not go so far as to label as heretics those who are slow to change, we have to commit our efforts to shifting to a new paradigm to guide us to the future.



A paradigm, as most natural scientists and a growing number of business leaders know, is a pattern or a model, in particular "an outstandingly clear or typical example or archetype." Synonyms are model, mold, ideal, standard, paragon, and touchstone. A paradigm is a way of understanding and making sense of information about a subject. When we are functioning within a system, we can say that we are operating according to its paradigm.

As futurist Joel Arthur Barker reminds us in his videotape *The Business of Paradigms*, a paradigm includes rules

and regulations that:

- establish boundaries,
- provide rules for success within the boundaries, and
- act as filters for data.

What is obvious to people within a paradigm may be invisible to people outside it, and vice versa.

A paradigm helps us operate in terms of things as they are, but may blind us to alternative ways of looking at the world around us. A classic example of this filtering effect of paradigms appears in Thomas Kuhn's book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

Kuhn describes an experiment reported by J. S. Bruner and Leo Postman in *Journal of Personality*, XVIII, in which subjects were asked

... to identify on short and controlled exposure a series of playing cards. Many of the cards were normal, but some were made anomalous, e.g., a red six of spades and a black four of hearts. Each experimental run was constituted by the display of a single card to a single subject in a series of gradually increased exposures. After each exposure the subject was asked what he had seen, and the run was terminated by two successive correct identifications.

Even on the shortest exposures many subjects identified most of the cards, and after a small increase all the subjects identified them all. For the normal cards these identifications were usually correct, but the anomalous cards were almost always identified, without apparent hesitation or puzzlement, as normal. The black four of hearts might, for example, be identified as the four of either spades or hearts. Without any awareness of trouble, it was immediately fitted to one of the conceptual categories prepared by prior experience.

If you have seen the Barker videotape about paradigms, you have had the opportunity to participate in a truncated version of this experiment and to learn how easy it is to see what we expect to see, no matter what is really there.

What is the current paradigm for community colleges? We define ourselves by comparison to other institutions of higher education. Criteria for judging quality are almost always based upon inputs and process measures rather than outcomes. Factors such as selectivity of student admissions, number of Nobel laureates on the faculty, and quality of research, service, and teaching are used to rate

Department of Educational Administration, College of Education  
The University of Texas at Austin, EDB 348, Austin, Texas 78712

colleges and universities.

The paradigm of major universities is that they are institutions dedicated to research, scholarship, teaching, and public service. If the business of an organization is research, its mission is the production of research. Researchers are the most important people in the organization. Everyone else is there to facilitate their work.

If the business of an organization is scholarship, its mission is the production of knowledge. Scholars are the most important people in the organization. Everyone else is there to facilitate and support their work.

Community colleges were not established as centers for the production of research findings nor the production of knowledge. By contrast, we define ourselves as teaching institutions. We take pride in the quality of the instruction we provide. Most community college mission statements say that they provide quality instruction in developmental, academic, and vocational subjects. We have chosen a process rather than a product as our reason for being.

An unpublished 1992 study of community college mission statements by Robert B. Barr, Director of Institutional Research and Planning at Palomar College, has shown that this approach is representative of the "teaching" paradigm now dominant in community colleges.

We provide instruction. The most important people in the institution are the providers of instruction: the teachers. Everyone else is there to facilitate their work. Administrators, librarians, secretaries, buildings and grounds staff, and other employees support the teachers and the teaching process. More and more evidence points to the conclusion that, unfortunately, our students are all too often not even engaged by the teaching process.

Kuhn identifies characteristics of "all discoveries from which new sorts of phenomena emerge." These include "the previous awareness of anomaly, the gradual and simultaneous emergence of both observational and conceptual recognition, and the consequent change of paradigm categories and procedures often accompanied by resistance."

Are these characteristics present in our colleges today? Are we seeing anomalies that the current paradigm does not explain? What about the lack of success of our minority students, whose learning styles may not match our teaching styles? How do we explain the perceptions of business representatives who claim that students have not learned the skills and behaviors necessary to succeed on the job? What about resistance to the use of new technology because it does not fit the current teaching paradigm?

Using a "teaching" paradigm, can we justify the rising costs of supporting a "teaching" institution? Can we answer questions from the public and from our elected officials regarding what they are getting for their money?

Recently, Sam Ewing of *The Wall Street Journal* remarked, "The president says American kids are entitled to the best education in the world. But, let's face it, how many of us can afford to send our children to a foreign country?" While his comment may be amusing, it also conveys a disturbing feeling that our educational institutions are not doing their job.



The perception that we as educators are not delivering is pervasive.

Does our inability to deal with these anomalies suggest that our colleges are ready for a new paradigm? I believe that the answer is "yes," and that the new paradigm will give us a productive framework for addressing many of the issues facing us.

The new paradigm says that community colleges are learning, not teaching institutions. The mission is student learning. The most important people in the institution are the learners. Everyone else is there to facilitate and support student learning. Faculty members, librarians, counselors, administrators, custodians, and secretaries are all important in facilitating and supporting student learning.

We are all familiar with the story of the two bricklayers who, when asked what they were doing, responded very differently. One answered that he was laying bricks. The other responded that he was building a cathedral. Under the new paradigm, everyone at all our colleges will be involved in "building the cathedral of powerful learning environments," Barr said. The groundskeeper's job, for example, is not to mow the lawn but to create an environment conducive to student learning.

Are the old and new paradigms really much different? K. Patricia Cross's work on classroom research, "In Search of Zippers: Pat Cross on Closing the Teaching/Learning Gap," revealed that there frequently is a gap between what is taught and what is learned. Her classroom assessment techniques are intended to focus the teacher on what the students are and are not learning.

C. Twigg and D. Doucette, in the article "Improving Productivity in Higher Education—A Paradigm Shift Needed," point out that the current teaching paradigm, requiring labor-intensive, classroom-based instruction, does not allow us to make effective use of technology to promote student learning. They say that the key to success is the transformation of the teaching and learning process from one that is teacher-centered to one that is learner-centered. Innovation in the new paradigm will not be focused on better methods of teaching, but on better methods to promote and support learning.



Are teachers still important under the new paradigm? Of course they are! They will be the key people in

transforming our colleges from the teaching to the learning paradigm. However, their roles will shift.

Under the new paradigm, they will be designers, managers, promoters, and facilitators of student learning, in much the same way that a coach facilitates the very best performance of an athlete.

Teachers still will develop curricula and plan educational experiences under the learning paradigm. The difference will be that the curricula and experiences will not be limited to the traditional classroom setting.

What can be done to promote the new paradigm? College personnel have a tremendous amount of time and energy invested in the old paradigm and its rules and may be resistant or blind to the need to change. Changing the way we view our roles as educators will not be easy. Remember what happened to Galileo!

In the Bruner and Postman playing card experiment, some subjects could not adjust their way of looking at cards so that they could perceive the differences. One of them was quoted as saying: "I can't make the suit out, whatever it is. It didn't even look like a card that time. I don't know what color it is now or whether it's a spade or a heart. I'm not even sure now what a spade looks like. My god!"

One college's integration of the learning paradigm into its planning process resulted in opposition to the college's attempt to establish standards for measuring learning and to its allocation of resources to developing new ways to promote student learning.

Teaching was viewed as a creative endeavor that cannot be standardized or measured. Emphasis was placed on adjusting the present system to make it work, in a manner reminiscent of the way that Ptolemaic astronomers tried to deal with discrepancies in their system by creating an increasingly complex set of modifications to it.

But can we ever know enough about ways to encourage student learning? As Mae West once said, "Too much of a good thing is wonderful!"

Although some individuals in our colleges may be resistant to change, I believe that most will be open to focusing on learning, once they understand what is involved.

We also will have to deal with entrenched systemic support for the old paradigm. For example, our society's commitment to the idea that our business is instruction is reflected in the way we are funded, and in how we are judged. Financing of colleges is based on numbers of students in classrooms and not on learning outcomes, and we are judged on the quality and comprehensiveness of our curricula and not on the quality of our products. This creates a powerful set of forces supporting the dominant paradigm, according to Barr.

Given these forces, how can we refocus?

We can start by working with campus innovators and leaders. Develop a vision that is endorsed by all col-

lege segments, a vision that focuses the institution on learning. Revise the college mission statement to define clearly that student learning is the college's purpose. Change catalogs, publications, and job descriptions.

For example, at Palomar College we have revised the job description for our instructional deans to include responsibility for creating effective learning environments for students. Student services deans are expected to develop and evaluate the performance of assigned personnel in terms of their contributions to student learning and success.

Revise recruitment brochures to attract a faculty and staff committed to promoting and supporting student learning. Schedule student learning forums to explore ways to promote and support student learning. Orient new employees, including full- and part-time faculty members and even new board members to the new paradigm.

Among the things we can expect the new paradigm to promote are collaborative learning; learning communities; focus on learning outcomes; better use of technology; recognition of the importance of everyone's role in promoting, supporting, and facilitating student learning; and a new unity of purpose among all of the college's people, particularly the faculty and the students.



What are the dangers of not shifting to the new paradigm? Swiss watchmakers saw their businesses destroyed because they did not recognize the paradigm shift from the mechanical to the quartz watch. American tire companies lost most of their markets because they did not foresee that radial ply tires would displace the bias ply tires they continued to manufacture. If the American railroad companies had viewed their mission as transportation in general rather than just rail transportation, we probably would see some different names on airplanes and truck trailers.

We educators also can find ourselves left behind by the changes in our society and the expectations regarding our performance.

Traditional measures of success, such as enrollment and participation rates, may no longer count. Traditional course delivery may not be supported. In an environment where accountability is increasingly being emphasized, we cannot afford to find ourselves without meaningful data that show our constituents and supporters what they are getting for their educational dollar. Just counting the number of students in and out will not be enough.



Following Barr's analyses, let us look at some of the differences we can expect using the new paradigm.

First of all, our institutional purposes will change.

Under the old paradigm, we were concerned about quality teaching; comprehensive, diverse programs and courses; access for diverse students; and faculty success.

Under the new paradigm, we will focus on quality learning, improved talent development, success for diverse students, and greater learning for fewer resources and less student time.

This means that the purpose of the faculty will change. Under the old paradigm, the faculty exists to provide instruction and to classify and sort students.

Under the new paradigm, they create learning experiences which develop students' competencies and talents.

Our criteria for success will be different. Under the old paradigm, we measured success by looking at enrollment growth, revenue growth, program additions, quantity and quality of resources, and quality of entering students.

Under the new paradigm, we will be concerned about quality of learning, learning growth and efficiency, increasing the graduation rate, increasing the transfer rate, and increasing the retention rate.

We will change the structure of our systems. Under the old paradigm, we are structured for teaching, with one teacher to one classroom. We have disciplines and departments. With our traditional quarters or semesters, all classes start and end at the same time. Teachers must attend to the grading of students in classes. A degree is conferred based upon accumulated credits.

Under the new paradigm, we will be focused on learning environments, specified learning outcomes, pre- and post-assessments, and institutional assessment of student knowledge and skills. A degree will guarantee knowledge and skills.

We will focus on different means for achieving our ends. Under the old paradigm, we worry about hiring quality teachers, gaining more resources, and specifying teaching goals. We encourage innovations in programs, and we emphasize operational planning.

Under the new paradigm, we will channel our resources toward producing powerful learning environments, greater learning with fewer resources, innovations in learning methods, specification of learning goals, and an emphasis on strategic planning.

The roles of those within the system will be altered. Under the old paradigm, faculty are primary teachers. Staff are there to support faculty and the teaching process. We operate under the principles of "line" governance.

Under the new paradigm, faculty are primary designers of learning environments and methods. Staff are responsible for supporting and promoting student learning and success. We focus the institution on our mission of student learning by making decisions using shared governance.

Learning outcomes will drive curricular reform under the new paradigm. Inputs to the institution will in-

clude student, faculty, and staff composition and characteristics, along with fiscal and other resources. Our processes will center around curriculum, learning technology, learning environments, leadership and management.

The outcomes that will be important to the learning paradigm will be measured in terms of variables such as mean skills and knowledge gained, mean satisfaction, and the completion rate.



Even if we do everything in our power to explain and develop the new paradigm and work toward it on our campuses, there will be resistance. Economist Barry Asumus has been quoted as saying that if Thomas Edison had invented the light bulb in 1993, all of the major news networks and newspapers would have screamed, "Tragedy strikes the candle industry." Like the subjects in the playing card experiment, we can expect that there will be those who find it difficult, or even impossible, to look at the role of our colleges from a different perspective.

However, most thoughtful people will recognize that student learning should be the real mission of the community college. It is important that community college leaders prepare their institutions for the new paradigm. We cannot afford to let any opportunity pass in defining community colleges as institutions of student learning.

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