

Community Colleges for International Development (CCID)

September, 2008

The Truman Commission: International Developments for Colleges

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Abstract: Research briefly details the purpose of the Harry S. Truman administration's *Commission on Higher Education for Democracy* to support community colleges. Contrary to histories that define later origins in the 1960s, this paper makes an argument that the historical foundations of ideation for international education in community colleges originate with the Commission report's goals to advance global themes in higher education.

Community, junior and technical colleges in the United States first found their greatest support with initiatives from the Harry S. Truman administration and its *Commission on Higher Education for American Democracy* in 1947. The Commission aimed to achieve several goals in supporting the colleges, including diversifying educational opportunities for minorities, women, and working adults. Specifically, the support of the community college aimed to open equal opportunities for the periphery of American life. With the restructuring of higher education under the administration, the colleges organized to directly serve community needs, design programs for student occupational development, integrate academic learning and vocational study by offering a two-year degree, and provide for adult education. While the emphasis at the time was limited, advancing international themes and foreign language study in community colleges also became an objective. Today, there is much debate over the role of two-year institutions both domestic and abroad, but the core

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goals of the colleges, here “at home,” are the same. This short paper argues that the origins of international education in community colleges essentially begin with the Commission.

The philosophic foundations for international education in general, for all pragmatic purposes in noting that learning from Marco Polo to exchanges in earlier ages signify prior experiential roots,¹ can be drawn to idealist philosophers of the Western Enlightenment such as Kant, Montesquieu, and Rousseau whom upheld education and international organization as the means for achieving international peace, cooperation, and prosperity.² Following global movements for democracy and constitutional governance, into the late nineteenth century began coordinated efforts for international organization.³ However, it was essentially not until following the two world wars that the idealist vision for international organization began to realize itself as the post-WWI League of Nations transformed into the United Nations and the international community instituted organizations such as the World Bank and the IMF to facilitate economic relations. During this same time, the United States sought a global agenda to promote internationalization,⁴ including within higher education.⁵ The efforts for cooperation and peace then met with obstacles throughout the Cold War Era as ideals for international education struggled throughout Lyndon Johnson’s presidency.

¹ *The Discoverers* (New York: Random House, 1983) by Boorstin proves to be a valuable history.

² Brief detail on the influence of the Enlightenment philosophers is itself noted in Scanlon, D.G., (Ed.), *International Education: A Documentary History* (New York: Bureau of Publications: Teachers College, Columbia University). For analysis of the idealist vision, specifically the Kantian view, of international organization, see Gallie, W.B., *Philosophers of Peace and War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), which includes differing political scientific lenses.

³ Articles by Layne, C. and Schwarts, B., “American Hegemon –Without an Enemy,” *Foreign Policy*, No. 92, (Autumn, 1993), pp. 5-23 and Steel, R., “A New Realism,” *World Policy Journal*, Vol. 14, Issue 2, (1997), pp. 1-9, provide relevant historical perspectives on American internationalism.

⁴ For further information on the subject, see Claude, I.L., *Swords into Plowshares: The problems and progress of international organization* (New York: Random House, 1959).

⁵ For a complete history of the developments and national movements for international higher education in the United States, particularly following the two world wars, see Vestal, T.M., *International Education: Its history and promise for today* (London, Praeger: 1994).

The historical foundations of international education in community colleges have been identified as beginning in the late 1960's when "policymakers and administrators began to see community colleges as a plausible receptacle for international education."⁶ Throughout this period, as colleges recognized the importance of international education, programs initiated to include designs for study abroad, curriculum development, and support structures such as with the formation of the Community Colleges for International Development (CCID).⁷ Nevertheless, the relevance of the Truman Commission's influence in furthering noteworthy efforts to internationalize education as early as 1947 cannot be overlooked.

The first volume of the Commission's report emphasizes the ideals of moving toward a fuller realization of democracy. The report addresses the need to focus on international-mindedness, noting: "that citizens be equipped to deal intelligently with the problems that arise in our national life is important; that they bring informed minds and a liberal spirit to the resolution of issues growing out of international relations is imperative."⁸ The Commission thus advances ideation to achieve harmony and cooperation among differing races, customs, and opinions through mutual acceptance and respect as integral to international peace and prosperity, which "must depend, [and] begin at home."⁹ While the Commission's support for community colleges in American life did not exactly make institutions the core upon which the nation inaugurated peace and cooperation, the report does address the role of two-year institutions for both national and international community.

⁶ Raby, R.L. and Valeau, E.J., "Community College International Education: Looking Back to Forecast the Future," *International Reform Efforts and Challenges in Community Colleges: New Directions for Community Colleges*, 138, (2007), pp. 5-7.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ President's Commission on Higher Education, *Higher education for American democracy, a report* (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1947), Vol. 1, p. 15.

⁹ Ibid., p. 8.

For community colleges, the Commission is well known for its purpose to remove barriers to educational opportunity so that students can “discover and develop individual talents at a low cost and easy access.”¹⁰ The goals of encouraging both technical and liberal arts education for personal, professional, and social development of intellectual capacities and technical competencies with an enthusiasm for learning focused on community remained central to the report’s objectives. The report proves extensive in its support for students of all ages, particularly given the economic and occupational challenges that the country faced. While the advances for improving access to the expansion of adult education sustain themselves with any recognition of the Commission’s importance, noting that the objective is quite modest, its purpose for international development receives little acknowledgment.

The 1947 Truman Commission’s report on higher education clearly notes the importance of foreign language study,¹¹ and, in particular for adult education, notes that significant factors at the time, which arose from developments in the domestic environment and the world community itself, required the advancement of broad programs in adult learning.¹² Inclusive of this, the report called for an agenda to “disseminate information regarding recent developments in fields such as government, economics, the physical and natural sciences; provide opportunities for discussion . . . of issues vital to national life and international relations.”¹³ The Commission identified the perceived necessity for expanding education due in part to the fact that “most of the broadening studies such as civics, economics, sociology, problems of democracy, and international relations usually are taught

¹⁰ The President’s Commission, Vol. 1, p. 67.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 69.

¹² The President’s Commission, Vol. 3, p. 60.

¹³ Ibid., p. 59.

only above the elementary school.”¹⁴ Meaning, the value of international consciousness, with an idealist vision, humbly incorporated itself into the report on community colleges.

The American community college is a model institution, critical in providing students with the knowledge and skills to become members of their community while cognizant of local, state, national, and international social, political, and economic currents. The ideal of opening equal educational and occupational opportunities for all, offering vocational and liberal arts curriculum (both skills and meanings) is foundational. The college serves the community accordingly, establishing a learning environment focused on the present and future with respect for the past. As noted, the idealist vision of international organization met with obstacles of Cold War rivalry as well as numerous debates and differences in domestic politics, including national debates over the importance and purpose of international higher education. Inasmuch as reforms lacked gradual, progressive steps forward throughout the twentieth century, the debates remain today as internationalization faces the quick pace of sweeping reform. The current trends will affect community colleges but its core values remain: service to a community of learners, providing “general education with technical education that is intensive, accurate, and comprehensive enough to give the student command of marketable utilities.”¹⁵ First supported by the Truman Commission, nothing could be more important in today’s interdependent and fast changing world.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ The President’s Commission, Vol. 1, p. 69.