

  
**Education Review**      **Reseñas Educativas**  
**Resenhas Educativas**

November 6, 2019

ISSN 1094-5296

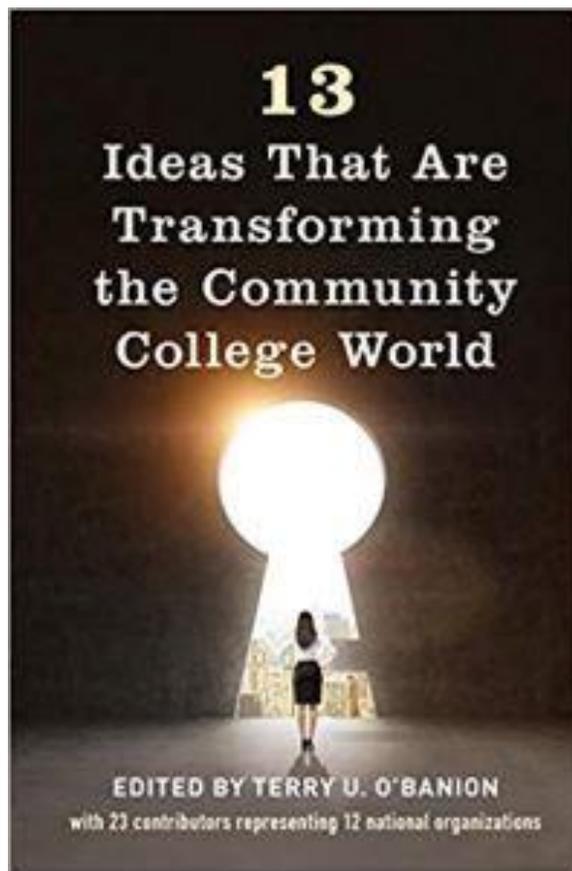
**O'Banion, T. U. (2019). *13 ideas that are transforming the community college world*. New York: NY: Rowman & Littlefield and American Association of Community College.**

**316 pp.**

**ISBN: 9781475844917**

**Reviewed by Rosalind Latiner Raby  
California State University, Northridge  
United States**

*13 Ideas that are Transforming the Community College World*, edited by Terry U. O'Banion, is a primer that explores the historical and theoretical foundations of 13 reform efforts in U.S. community colleges. Each chapter examines a specific idea that has led to widespread reforms in the field. The chapters detail why the idea was adopted, how the idea is influencing changes in the community college mission, how the idea relates to other reform efforts, and how the reforms stemming from the idea are impacting the field. In the process, each chapter also shows how each educational reform effort is grounded in national policy, affiliated with foundation or association programs, and is the focus of current research. A central point of the book is that contemporary educational reform mirrors the constantly evolving missions of the community college and provides insight into changing stakeholder needs as well as power struggles that have emerged over time. Even the name, community college, "avoids the pejorative and the hyperbolic and is generic enough to include a variety of values, missions,



purposes, programs, policies and practices under its ‘big ten’,” as O’Banion notes (p. 3).

O’Banion has a 23-year tenure as Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the League for Innovation and is a recognized leader in the field for more than six decades. Each co-author also has impressive credentials as leaders in the field of U.S. community colleges, including the current and past Presidents and CEOs of the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), the AACC Senior Vice President, Workforce and Economic Development, the President of Higher Learning Commission, the Chair of the Colorado State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education, and the U.S. Under-Secretary of Education, emeritus. Several authors also have senior positions at foundations: Deputy Director on Post-Secondary Success Team of Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Leader of the College Promise Campaign, Senior Vice President of Complete College America, Vice-President of Jobs for the Future, Founding Director for the Center for Community College Student Engagement, Cofounder of Civitas Learning, and President of EDUCUSE. Finally, some authors are leading researchers representing institutions that are known for their innovative research on community colleges, including the Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University, Higher Education Leadership, Florida Atlantic University, Macomb Community College, Roueche Graduate Center, and Department of Leadership, Higher and Adult Education, University of Toronto. Each author is also responsible for creating or overseeing one or more reform efforts that they wrote about. The range of authors confirms O’Banion’s claim that “there has never been so much funding from foundations to implement programs and practices that support completion; there has never been so much research on what works to achieve student success; there have never been so many institutes, policy centers, and special agencies

created to recommend and guide policy, programs, and practices related to completion” (p. 284).

Each chapter examines historical, conceptual, and research grounded discussions on a specific idea or program that resulted in widespread reform efforts. The book is divided into three parts. Part 1 examines ideas as national initiatives. The authors detail how an idea that was implemented in one or more community colleges influenced changes in other colleges. In turn, the idea caught the attention of a foundation or association, which in turn, provided funding to augment and eventually propagate that idea on a national level. Examples are the Learning Paradigm movement, Guided Pathways program, Community College Baccalaureate movement, Student Success and Completion Agenda, and the College Promise movement. In Part II, authors examine ideas as internal functions. The chapters in this section detail ideas and programs that have their roots in the basic structure of the community college, but which in contemporary times, have been modified to meet the unique needs of a specific college or the unique needs of a specific student body. Inter-connected with internal and local responses to a specific need, these chapters show how colleges implement reform efforts that enable them to be accountable to federal and state agencies, accrediting associations, and their own communities. Examples include expanding and upgrading workforce education, modifying traditional remedial education to a contemporary developmental education, expanding pathway alliances with high schools, and enhancing matriculation agreements with universities. Part III deals with what O’Banion calls “enabling ideas,” ideas upon which programs were created, that in turn, have transformed every aspect of the community college. These ideas have subsequently become so engrained in the community college that they are considered to be required in all successfully implemented reform initiatives and ground future ideas.

Examples include the role of technology in the curriculum, in student support, and in institutional practices. Enabling ideas are also grounded in the transformational leadership movement, the culture of evidence movement, and the mentoring-trustees-to-be-transformational-leadership movement.

Finally, as each of the chapters explicitly show,

All of the thirteen ideas in this book have emerged from reform efforts to redesign the contemporary community college. Each idea has its champions and advocates, support from national organizations, projects to field-test models or implement programs and practices, funding to support these efforts, and in many cases increased research to examine the value and veracity of the claims of its advocates (p. 283).

There are five themes that are of particular importance for those studying and working in community colleges and that will challenge how educators re-think community college missions in an age of dwindling resources, lowered enrollments, and diversification of students. The first theme links higher education to economic development as the “college itself . . . continues to evolve to serve the nation’s economic and social interest” (p. 16). It is generally acknowledged that educational access is a necessity for providing economic and social capital that is needed to ensure secure employment, gain a higher income and enable social prosperity (OECD, 2015). It is particularly the “multi-purpose curricula [found in U.S. community colleges] that is designed to meet regional medium-term labor credentials for high demand global economy occupations needing educated skilled technicians” (Raby & Valeau, 2018, p. 5). The foundational document used in most of the chapters references the American Association of Community Colleges’ (AACC) *Reclaiming the American Dream* (2012), which is grounded in the premise that the global economy demands educated post-secondary students and that it is

the role of the community college to provide such graduates. (See chapters by Boggs, McClenney, and O’Banion.)

The second theme questions who has access to community college and if access is enough to counter inequalities that are inherent in the community college construct (chapters by Boggs and Edgcombe). A hallmark of the community college is that all who reside in local communities have access. Nonetheless, in this century, access has been complicated by tuition cost, tracking, and inequities in terms of what type of student persists from one term to the next. There are also external issues of homelessness, food insecurity, child-care insecurity (chapter by Walsh & Milliron) that augment already unequal conditions and complicate access for some students. Internal issues, such as placement of low-income and minority students unequally into developmental programs place “an artificial barrier between students, particularly low-income students and students of color, and a postsecondary credential” (chapter by Vandal, p. 146). The issue of access and equity is fundamental “when today’s community college leaders continue to labor in the minefields of all-too-familiar and disruptive challenges such as continued open-door access, *equity*, and success; college closures and consolidations, free tuition, and declining enrollments – to name a few” (chapter by Mathis & Rouech, 2019, p. 250). In the chapter by Edgcombe, the author explores how deficit stereotypes attributed to lower-income and students of color truncate opportunities, and she also shows how demographics can become an opportunity for success. Since access is such an important component of the community college, specific programs have been implemented to widen access and build equity opportunities, including the College Promise of free tuition (chapter by Kanter & Armstrong), Guided Pathways Program, which allows all students to know what to do and therefore provides a context in which all

can equally succeed (chapter by McClenney), technology programs that increase opportunities for expanded learning (chapter by Million & O'Brien), and the baccalaureate option, in which students do not need to travel beyond their local communities to get a BA degree (chapter by Floyd & Skolnik).

The third theme questions what constitutes success and explores if success can simply be measured by completion or if success needs to involve demonstration of different forms of engagement. At the core of this theme is a shift from individual to college responsibilities as the drivers of student success. In one chapter, Boggs shares that in the 1960s, institutional policies were often based on allowing students their right to fail, which placed measures of success on the student such as motivation and initiative. In the 1990s, institutional policies changed and began to focus on the college being responsible for what they offer, how they offer it, and how they advise students. This shift in policy aligns with programs aimed at increasing inclusivity and programs that foster social and economic justice (chapter by Edgecombe). Examples include the Learning Paradigm (chapter by Boggs), Student Learning Construct and Engagement (chapter by Boggs); Learning Colleges (chapter by O'Banion), and College Promise (chapter by Kanter & Armstrong). In this century, institutional responsibilities are connected to offering programs aimed at filling access gaps by offering baccalaureate degrees (chapter by Floyd & Skolnik) and enhancing high school and community college pathways, including dual enrollment, common core, early college high school, and guided pathways programs (chapter by Vargas, Hooker, Collins & Gutierrez). A direct connection to linking student success to institutional practices is the current focus on institutional effectiveness that determines if colleges meet or do not meet their agendas. This is seen in terms of cultural of evidence movement (chapter by Gellman-Danely & Martin), the role of

regional accreditation agencies (chapter by Gellman-Danely & Martin), changes in developmental education (chapter by Vandal), changes in workforce development (chapter by Jacobs & Worth), and the Achieving the Dream & Completion by Design programs that mandate the use of data to monitor various programs and levels of success (chapter by McClenney).

The fourth theme defines and details the ladder of student success that interconnects access, learning, completion and post-graduation outcomes. The emphasis on student success coincides with political and association goals of doubling the number of students who complete certificates and degrees, making that goal an inherent component of the contemporary community college mission (Bailey, Jagers, & Jenkins, 2015). Student success initiatives are closely linked to the task of gathering evidence of student success that has the support by various political agencies as well as the imprint of social pressures (chapter by Boggs). A series of resulting programs emerged in this century including Completion by Design, sponsored by the Gates Foundation, which focuses on where students gain or lose momentum on the Ladder (chapter by Walsh & Milliron); Student Engagement (CCSSE), which focuses on what criteria institutions need to implement to involve students in their own learning (chapter by Walsh & Milliron); Guided Pathways to College Completion & Equity, which focuses on articulation agreements with clear markers on what courses to take for transfer as well as what courses to take for career pathways with the belief that clear pathways will ensure success for all students (chapter by McClenney), and the baccalaureate movement, which addresses the post-graduation component of ladder (chapter by Floyd & Skolnik).

The final theme is transformational leadership, which is particularly important in that about 50% of CEOs will soon retire,

making succession a leadership crisis (Stripling, 2019). An industry of programs that use transformational leadership as a foundational principle has been built to train new leadership (AACCC, 2019; Aspen Institute, 2019). At the core is the belief that transformational leadership leads to positive change. Transformational leadership is explored in terms of a change in leadership style (chapter by Mathis & Rouech), evolution of community college Leadership Programs (chapter by Mathis & Rouech), and Teaching Trustees about using data in the BOTI Training programs (chapter by McClenney).

In the epilogue, O'Banion discusses what is still missing in the literature and in practice. He suggests that reformers have focused on various aspects of the institution, but that they have forgotten about the transformation of the curriculum in terms of what is taught and how it is taught. He also suggests that such a transformation will be difficult to get faculty buy-in due to faculty and department isolation from one another as each advocate for their own agenda. As an example, O'Banion suggests that there are now too many choices for a student in terms of classes, programs, and even degrees, and that too many choices lead to confusion and ultimately to non-completion status. Instead, O'Banion advocates for a common core completion requirement that includes a series of classes that embed key components from both liberal education and workforce education to "ensure that a student is equipped to earn a good living and live a good life" (p. 288).

I suggest that there is one more missing element in the book: international education. Many of the chapters reference the AACCC's *Reclaiming the American Dream* (2012), a document that signifies higher education as a means to serve the global economy, yet none

of the chapters add the importance of international education to aid in this process. Similarly, O'Banion acknowledges that "international" is a part of the community college focus in that "over time the workforce function began to expand to serve regions beyond the local geographical area, then states, then the entire nation; a number of community colleges even served an international market" (p. 16). But he does not link international education to programs related to access, completion, and success. Finally, if international research (Raby, 2016) had been included in this book, it would have shown a clear link to O'Banion's proposed common core curricula, in that students who participate in international education gain skills in "problem solving, critical thinking, teamwork, collaboration and communications" (p. 288).

This book is a needed addition to the field of community college education, as it succinctly helps students who study at community colleges and those wanting to embark on future leadership roles to understand why current reform efforts were needed, what historical connections the reform efforts were based upon, and the consequences of action moving into the future. It is also advantageous to have comparative examples from community colleges around the country to show how implementation has worked and evolved. Finally, the book clearly shows the importance and power of foundation and association programs in current community college reform efforts. There is no doubt that the insightful discussions offered by this book are ones that scholars in the field should include in their own personal libraries. The book is coherent, well edited, and excellent scholarship.

---

## References

- American Association of Community Colleges. (2012). *Reclaiming the American dream: Community colleges and the nation's future*. Washington DC: AACC.
- American Association of Community Colleges. (2019). AACC Leadership Suite. Retrieved from: <https://www.aacc.nche.edu/events/aacc-leadership-suite/>
- Aspen Institute. (2019). Aspen Presidential Fellowship. Retrieved from: <https://highered.aspeninstitute.org/aspen-presidential-fellowship-community-college-excellence/>
- Bailey, T., Jaggars, S., & Jenkins, D. (2015). *Redesigning America's community colleges*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). 2015b. *Skills beyond school synthesis report*. <http://www.oecd.org/edu/skills-beyond-school/skills-beyond-schools-synthesis-report.htm>
- Raby, R. L. (2016). Global is not the opposite of local: Advocacy for community college international education. In R. L. Raby & E. J. Valeau (Eds.), *International education at community colleges: Themes, practices, research, and case studies* (p. 9-23). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Raby, R. L., & Valeau, E. J. (2018). *Handbook on comparative issues of community colleges and global counterparts*. Dordrecht, The Netherlands. Springer Publishers.
- Stripling, J. (2017). The profession. Characteristics of college presidents. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 24-28.

## About the Reviewer

Rosalind Latiner Raby, PhD, is Senior Lecturer in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Department of the College of Education at California State University, Northridge, USA, where she is also an Affiliate Faculty member for the Ed.D. Community College program.



**Education Review**      **Reseñas Educativas**  
**Resenhas Educativas**

 *Education Review/Reseñas Educativas/Resenhas Educativas* is supported by the edXchange initiative's Scholarly Communications Group at the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University. Copyright is retained by the first or sole author, who grants right of first publication to the *Education Review*. Readers are free to copy, display, and distribute this article, as long as the work is attributed to the author(s) and ***Education Review***, it is distributed for non-commercial purposes only, and no alteration or transformation is made in the work. More details of this Creative Commons license are available at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/>. All other uses must be approved by the author(s) or ***Education Review***. ***Education Review*** is published by the Scholarly Communications Group of the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University.

**Disclaimer:** The views or opinions presented in book reviews are solely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent those of *Education Review*.

Connect with *Education Review* on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Education-Review/178358222192644>) and on Twitter @EducReview