

COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND BRANCH CAMPUSES; ALTERNATIVE MODELS

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Diversity is still a loaded word for many while increasingly becoming a desirable if not sought after condition by others. When the *New York Times Magazine* has advertising supplements touting the merits of diversity in corporate America (Sunday, September 6, 2009), we should assume a societal shift. Still within the academy many are quick to point out that at their institutions they aren't just seeking diversity in their ranks rather, they are designing "diversity and excellence", "demographic and intellectual diversity" or "critical diversity". These concepts are all great, however, the fact remains our profession is not diverse and neither are the majority of our programs. So where is everybody? The answer is the community college.

Community colleges have done an amazing job of welcoming all the high school graduates who are not quite ready for university, of re-training older workers, of allowing students to enroll in a wide range of courses until they identify their major or find their path. In other words, they are flexible, while most of our university programs are rather inflexible. Community colleges are inexpensive. For example, my local community college still charges \$41.00 per credit for general education courses and \$3.00 per credit for technical (architecture) courses. A student can complete an associates degree for a few thousand dollars, and workforce training courses are often free. Additionally, many of the community colleges long ago recognized that if they were truly going to reflect and promote the demographic of their community, their faculty needed to learn how to interact with and teach students who are culturally and economically diverse.

It is important, however, to address the elephant in the living room: most architecture-type programs at community colleges have evolved from the community college's original missions to train a workforce. It is because of this that our kindred community college programs were and sometimes still are skills based and thus called "drafting programs". Many of the original faculty within these programs were draftsmen or practicing architects who

developed courses designed to train their students to move directly to the local offices and upon occasion to a university architecture program. This profile has changed, however, unfortunately the perception of the quality of architectural education that students receive at the community college has by and large not.

Let me digress and explain how the accredited architecture program at Woodbury University in Burbank, California partnered with the community colleges in San Diego, California to model a dynamic, diverse, public-private partnership. Twenty years ago Woodbury University's program in Burbank was populated primarily with entering freshman. Over the next five years, the program was approached by various community college faculty who were interested in exploring facilitating student transfers from their programs to Woodbury's. It became immediately clear to the Woodbury faculty, I among them, that the community college programs varied widely in their student preparation. Depending on the faculty in place, sometimes the students had excellent skills but knew nothing about design, in other cases, the students were very well prepared. We all, however, were impressed by the diversity in the student populations at the community colleges and decided that it was desirable to mix in different student profiles. This decision led us to convene bi-annual meetings of community college faculty to discuss curricula, articulation, etc. We realized that there were natural synergies with some programs and not with others, however, in all cases we built mutual respect and understanding of our institutional missions.

It was in those meetings that the Woodbury faculty also met community college faculty from San Diego who had strong ties to the professional community. At the time there was not an accredited architecture program in San Diego and these faculty and professionals requested that Woodbury consider establishing a program there. Working in a very close partnership with Mesa Community College, Woodbury, a private university, designed a 2+3 articulated program that allowed and

encouraged students to save thousands of dollars by enrolling in all their lower division courses at Mesa and then transferring these credits into a 5-year professional program.

Perhaps this all seems easy and obvious, but there are still very few programs that not only transfer students into their programs, but transfer them into third year. More importantly, this requires that the senior university faculty work side-by-side with the community college faculty to ensure quality and parity in their vision and teaching. In this case both the Woodbury University and Mesa Community College administrations agreed to allow their students to enroll in studio courses that were held in the same studio building, thus blurring the identities of the community college and senior university faculty and students. This simple act of "bridging" enhanced student performance, enabling the community college students to easily transition into Woodbury University's professional degree program.

The previous anecdote describes one of many ways to develop a diverse student body; there are many paths. For example my current institution, the University of New Mexico (UNM), has built branch campuses in the various quadrants of the state. These campuses are designed to reach rural populations of Native-Americans, Hispanic, African-American and economically challenged students to again allow them to receive two years of their university education in place, before they relocate to the main urban campus. Upon being admitted to UNM's Architecture Program they encounter studio and lecture courses that often engage their communities and cultural ways; thus facilitating the student's reflection between their culture and that embedded in the academic traditions of architecture.

In order for Architecture Programs to succeed at diversity they will have to identify why they have failed, as well as which schools and programs have succeeded and why. My suggestion, visit your local community college.