

Implementation of a Civic Engagement Community Change Model by a Community College through the Integration of Technology and Social Media as a Strategic Element

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Abstract

Historically, the role of the community college has been to serve the non-traditional student. Today's community college is confronted with the challenge that it is failing to attract and graduate in appropriate numbers that non-traditional student, commonly referred to as coming from an underserved or marginalized community, usually referencing poor communities of color. In spite of a general diminution of law and policies providing a remedy for past exclusionary practices, higher education understands that as a matter of equity it has an obligation to provide educational opportunity to the marginalized community. This obligation traditionally has also required the college to be responsive to the needs of the community. The purpose of this paper is threefold: to propose that a college's responsiveness to community now needs to include addressing the conditions that contribute to its marginalization; to posit the civic engagement community change model as the vehicle for the college to develop the kind of collaborative and mutually beneficial relationship with the community that will catalyze curative change; and to underscore the necessity of integrating the use of technology as a strategic element in the development and implementation of the college's civic engagement initiative. Successful implementation of a civic engagement

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community change model will result in a greater number of graduates from that community, as well as spur the development of a more cohesive, stable and civically engaged community.

Keywords: Community college and civic engagement, community college and community change, civic engagement community change model, community college-marginalized community collaboration, technology and civic engagement, technology and community change, equity and the underserved student, equity and community change, marginalized community development, technology and community development, community college responsiveness to community needs.

Introduction

The historical mission of the community college has been to serve the non-traditional student; however, she/he may present himself/herself, with the objective of imparting to the student the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in contemporary society. Today's community college is confronted with the reality that it is failing to attract, much less retain and graduate, in appropriate numbers that category of non-traditional students commonly referred to as coming from underserved or marginalized communities (Diem, 2015). More often than not this is a reference to poor communities of color, where the exclusion or marginalization has been primarily, but not exclusively, driven by racial or ethnic prejudice and/or discrimination (Diem, 2015). The situation with regard to accessing and admitting these students has been exacerbated by the waning influence of affirmative action as a matter of law and of policy, as there has been a general diminution of the federal effort to provide a remedy for past exclusionary practices or

policies, especially as concerns higher education (Baber, 2015). Higher education, to its credit, notwithstanding the almost total demise of affirmation action, remains steadfast in its understanding and acceptance that as a matter of equity it continues to have an obligation to the nation's underserved and marginalized communities.

Indeed, higher education seems to understand that in order for these communities to maximize the realization of their potential and achieve socioeconomic "success," their challenges regarding the development of human resource capital and the building of their collective community capacity must be addressed (Baber, 2015). Addressing those challenges is a task that remains squarely within the parameters of the traditional mission and role of the community college. However, today the task of addressing those challenges goes beyond the college merely serving as an institution for the education of the underserved student. The college today, as a matter of equity, needs to go beyond the traditional methods of linkage with the community, for example, community-based practicums, and strive to serve as a focal point and engine for curative community change. The college needs to work collaboratively with the marginalized community to alleviate those conditions and circumstances that continue to plague it, and which make it more difficult for the college to attract and graduate its students (Baber, 2015). This college-community collaboration to mutually beneficial results for both parties should be founded on an enhanced pedagogy of service learning, with a focus on community change through civic engagement.

The community college, because of its history and mission, is the institution of higher education most suited for the development and implementation of the civic engagement community change model. Moreover, in keeping with its commitment to be responsive to the community and its history of innovation, the community college is best positioned to develop the kind of

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collaborative, comprehensive and mutually beneficial relationship with the community that will catalyze and sustain curative change. Technology and social media are strategic elements in the community college's development and implementation of the civic engagement community change model.

The Suitability of the Community College

To accomplish its mission of reaching and educating the non-traditional student, the community college has traditionally focused on three different areas: access to higher education; equity; and responsiveness to community needs (Troyer, 2015).

Access to higher education and equity

Operating within this framework and its mission regarding the non-traditional student, the community college had been in the forefront of innovation and change. Consider, for example, open admissions. The contemporary community college honors that tradition even as it struggles to reach and offer its services to the residents of marginalized communities.

More specifically, today's community college understands and accepts that if it is to be effective over time in retaining and graduating the underserved community student, the college as a matter of equity must provide that student with academic and other supports, including, but not limited to, developmental and remedial courses, technical support and the tutoring services necessary to make them college ready (Jones, 2016). The college should also provide the student with the psycho-emotional supports necessary for him/her to successfully bridge the educational readiness gaps fostered by the community conditions that contributed to the student's past marginalization (Potts & Bierlein Palmer, 2014). Addressing these readiness gaps, although generally applicable to the customary non-traditional student served by the community college, is especially true for

those students whose past marginalization was in whole or in part due to racial or ethnic discrimination (Jones, 2016).

When the latter is the case, equity imposes an additional mandate, one meant to minimize the possibility of the underserved student quickly separating from the college. Equity requires that the college become more institutionally sensitive and user friendly as concerns the specific historical issues of marginalization of this particular underserved student subset. The college will need to recognize that for the underserved student whose past marginalization was in whole or in part due to racial or ethnic prejudice and discrimination, there exists either consciously or subconsciously a sensitivity to again being victimized by such prejudices or discrimination. This sensitivity could easily morph into a hypersensitivity if the college is a majority population institution where the underserved students' presence is minimal or glaring. Operationally, achieving the institutional sensitivity translates to the college personnel, individually and collectively, going beyond simple recognition of the evident diversity presented by these students to embracing their inclusion through the creation of a welcoming, culturally sensitive and equitably participatory educational environment (Kisker, Weintraub, & Newell, 2016). It will be necessary from the start of these students' college experience, that the college, by word and deed, during all bureaucratic processes and interactive junctures, demonstrate that its objective is full participatory integration of these students into the college community rather than their mere statistical representation. Failure of the college to do so, or perception by the students of tokenism or racially-ethnically based isolation on campus could easily lead to the early separation of these students from the college. Equitable participatory integration and inclusion of these marginalized students by the college is the groundwork for solidifying their initial

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retention, which in turn lays the foundation for any civic engagement-community change model being considered by the college.

Responsiveness to community needs

The third component of the community college mission, responsiveness to community needs, is presently best exemplified by the programs and practices that the community college provides to promote the development of both individuals and the communities to be served (Troyer, 2015).

Examples of these programs and practices are service-learning courses, community-based practicums, community-service projects or days inclusive of the current integration within these programs and practice of technology and social media, especially as a way to facilitate or promote engagement with the community (Watson-Thompson, 2015). However, within the context of a college-community collaboration to foster and promote changes in an underserved community, the responsiveness to individual and community development requires a more comprehensive and permanent linkage than the limited contact provided by a service learning course or practicum site.

The Civic Engagement Community Change Model

The Civic Engagement Community Change Model envisions the development of a mutually beneficial, collaborative relationship between a college and the underserved community or communities to which it has a connection. For each of the parties, a principle objective of the collaboration should be for the college to reimagine its self-identification from that of being primarily an insular institution of higher learning to an identification as community embedded asset in possession or control of a storehouse of knowledge, expertise and resources. Moreover, an identification as a community asset which, if joined with other community assets, and

harnessed for community change, could be the basis of a mutually beneficial relationship grounded in community improvement (Deggs & Miller, 2013). The community improvement goals and objectives would be toward curative changes to the conditions and circumstances that have contributed to the members of the community being underserved and marginalized particularly if those circumstances include race-ethnic based prejudice or discrimination. The civic engagement community change model builds and expands on the already proven service-learning pedagogy (Barnhardt, 2015) in that it will require the active engagement of students, especially students who are members of the marginalized community to which the college is connected and directing its efforts, at community sites as course or project requirements. However, the model goes beyond the service-learning pedagogy in that the course or project will be part of a broader, more permanent community change initiative that has been jointly developed, and is being jointly implemented, by the college and the affected community as co-equal partners.

Commitment of the college administration and governance

This broader, long-term plan may require the commitment and involvement of the college administration and governance as well as its students. Entering into, as well as maintaining, the relationship with the connected marginalized community may require a purposeful and deliberate consideration by college leadership that may necessitate a re-interpretation of the college's mission and vision. The development and integration of community-civic engagement in connection with a program of community change under an expanded college mission presents a complex and challenging task for a community college (Kisker, Weintraub & Newell, 2016). The college administration and governance may need to formally recognize that there are legitimate and compelling reasons to pursue both the successful substantive education of current

students who come from marginalized communities while simultaneously serving as a committed partner with the community as a catalyst for long-term positive change (Finley, 2016).

The college administration and governance will need to have faith and perseverance, notwithstanding the college's immediate real-world pressures, that continued engagement in the aforementioned parallel processes will assure that a greater number of students from the community targeted for improvement will not only choose to attend the college in the future, but that these future students will also be better prepared and more committed to successful achievement of their individual educational objectives. This will be due in part to either the individual's or a partner's perception of a substantive beneficial relationship between successful completion of their studies at the college and the return of positive benefits to the community – a source of motivation for many potential students from underserved communities.

Presently enrolled students from marginalized communities, as well as future students, will be motivated to enroll and complete their degree programs of study because they share a bifurcated intent with regard to being in college. These students, like most students, want to succeed socially and financially as concerns their personal career objectives. However, these students also harbor a desire to contribute in the future to the amelioration of those negative community factors and conditions that they either had to endure or that they perceived as obstacles to others from the community obtaining a college education, or to advance community progress and development. In short, these students harbor a motivation to “give back” to their community, which needs to be recognized. For today's students, this “give back” motivation is exemplified and fulfilled by their studying to be police officers, social workers, teachers, nurses or other

professionals who they perceive as being able to work directly with the community to address the negative conditions that exist or the consequences of those conditions.

The civic engagement community change model recognizes and validates the “give back” motivation of present day and future students. The model is intended to address those circumstances that have contributed to the student’s marginalization, especially if the circumstances included racial or ethnic discrimination or prejudice as a defining factor. The model provides a pathway for the student to “give back” in a direct and concrete way that will contribute over time to the development of a stronger community less affected by the circumstances and conditions that impacted negatively on his/her ability to access a college education. Within the framework of the model, the college will also provide the marginalized student with the general educational and major-specific skills, knowledge and aptitudes that the each will need to be personally successful in their future academic and career pursuits. In short, the civic engagement community change model institutionalizes the bifurcated approach to the marginalized student’s motivation.

In addition, for the model to succeed, the college will also have to tailor its activities to meet the socioeconomic needs of the students and the marginalized community being served (Chenneville, Toler & Gaskin-Butler, 2012) as well as customize its activities to the experiential learning level of the community (Freeland & Lieberman, 2010).

Yet for college to be most effective and efficient with regard to meeting its obligations under the bifurcated approach, if not regarding all of the efforts flowing from its civic engagement community change initiative, the college will have to incorporate technology and social media as part of its planning and implementation strategy.

Incorporation of Technology and Social Media Essential to the Development and Implementation of the Civic Engagement Community Change Model or Initiative

Today's student, and presumably tomorrow's student, as well as any younger member of a college's attendant underserved community, are very much attuned to the use of technology and social media. The age of the manually posted, hard-copy flier and time-encumbered telephone communication has given way to the age of real-time digital and visual communication. Use of the internet and social media has increased exponentially during these first twenty years of the 21st century (Delacruz, 2009), and there is no reason to believe that usage will decrease or that the variety and formats of technology and social media will diminish.

Social change and civic engagement activities have been enhanced and transformed through the application and utilization of digital technology and social media while simultaneously being freed from the previous limitations of resources, distance or geography. Social media has transformed the way in which individuals engage with political ideas and campaigns. Social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and You Tube, among many others, have been responsible for effective and powerful political campaigns (Brush & Saye, 2008), for communities claiming their respective rights and finding their voices (Cantor, Englot & Higgins, 2013), and the dissemination of information, perspectives and viewpoints, sometimes controversial or negative, concerning pressing or pending social issues (Delacruz, 2009). Indeed, technology and social media have reinvented how individuals and their corresponding communities respond to or engage with issues affecting the society in general or their sliver of society in particular.

The collaborative joint venture that is the civic engagement community change model presents a unique opportunity to utilize multiple forms of technology and social media at every stage of the model's planning, development and implementation. As the models will vary from college to college, the forms and technology that will be utilized will also vary. However, there will be some commonalities including the development and consensus by the parties regarding what technologies will be utilized, for what purposes, to what extent and for how long. The "baby steps" of the required college-community collaboration regarding the civic engagement community change model could very well be decisions regarding the use of technology or social media to inform the community of the venture, to identify the factors contributing to the community's marginalization, or to determine its socioeconomic needs (Chenneville, Toler & Gaskin-Butler, 2012) or its level of experiential learning (Freeland & Lieberman, 2010).

A website dedicated to the college initiative, with links to the websites or Facebook pages of the college, community partners or students, may be the best way to share up-to-date information about model-related activities and developments. It may also become the primary and most effective mode of disseminating information about the project, as well as facilitating communication among all the involved parties: the college, the students, the community partners and members. Twitter may become the best way for model participants to address in almost real time issues or events relevant to civic engagement or community change impacting on the community or the college.

Beyond the planning stage of the civic-engagement community change model, the use of technology and social media platforms as organizing tools in and of themselves, or in conjunction with on-the-ground organizing efforts concerning the factors that continue to contribute to a community's marginalization, is critical. Groups of all political stripes from the

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Black Lives Matter Movement to the White Nationalist Movement have strategically and successfully utilized technology and social media to educate, inform or motivate their members and/or to attract and inculcate new members regarding their respective causes and projects.

There is no limit to the type or modality of technology or social media that the college or the community can devise and utilize in the development of its civic engagement initiative, or as a part of the subsequent college-community campaigns to address the factors contributing to a community's marginalization. Some of the ideas that have been floated in conjunction with development of a community change model initiative or organizing campaign include:

- community mapping of various types
- asset-based community development analysis
- virtual community planning and development
- Issue-based computer programs for planning, research or assessment purposes
- blogs and/or podcasts and/or list-serves
- participatory electronic consensus building, nominations and voting
- app and game development concerning targeted issues
- digital participatory cell-phone based voter education
- community-based electronic interactive informational/news kiosks or bulletin boards
- participatory action research and feedback mechanisms
- customized software development
- video/film and animation production (various types for social media distribution: You Tube)

- website development
- text and instant messaging for alerts and real time activity coordination
- customized and/or focused use of digital platforms: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tumble, Digg and other current or future platforms.
- smart board and smart classroom utilization for academic and community education or training

The quantity, quality and extent of the use of technology and social media will vary from college to college and it will be tailored to the goals, objectives and reality of the college and the needs of its attendant community or communities. The impact of technology and social media on an initiative or campaign concerning community change cannot be underestimated.

In the hands of today's, or tomorrow's tech-savvy students and community members, even in communities where accessibility may be limited because of hardware or software issues, the use of technology and social media may be the most important tool for catalyzing or supercharging community change through community activism or mobilization. The incorporation and use of technology and social media in the development and implementation of a college's civic-engagement community change model is not optional. Failure to do so, or to minimize its utilization, is to jeopardize the initiative's reach and effectiveness concerning both the impact on the underserved student from a marginalized community, and the changes sought to be accomplished with and within that community.

Conclusion

Today's community college may be the key to catalyzing the type of change in marginalized and underserved communities, primarily poor communities of color, that addresses the conditions and circumstances that continue to contribute to the community's marginalization. Building on its history of serving the non-traditional student and its penchant for innovation, the college, by becoming an equal partner with the community in a joint venture to stimulate community change through civic engagement and the integrative use of technology, should reap the benefit of more and better committed students attending and graduating from the college. Simultaneously, the community will reap the rewards of becoming a more cohesive and stable community able to define its own voice and development. This is a triple win situation as the college, the community and society in general will all be short-term and long-term beneficiaries of the civic engagement community change model.

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