Conferring Community College Baccalaureate Degrees:

Issues Relevant to the Decision

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Presentation Agenda

- Background & Context
- Purpose of the Study
- Research Design
- Findings & Implications for community colleges
- Strategic Decision Making Model
Background & Context of Research Topic

- U.S. standard of living hinges on educated and highly skilled populace
- President Obama’s graduation initiative
- Due to recession and increased demands by all stakeholders, community college are frequently facing tougher and more complex decisions
- One of these decisions is “Should the community college offer baccalaureate degrees”?
- Little is known about the process community college leaders use for deciding to confer baccalaureate degrees
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to discover insight into the variety and magnitude of factors that influence the community college decision to confer baccalaureate degrees.
1. What catalysts induce community colleges to revisit their mission priorities to investigate conferring baccalaureate degree(s)?

2. What issues are identified as crucial to the decision pursuant to offering a baccalaureate degree?

3. How and in what ways is the decision process undertaken in community colleges considering conferring baccalaureate degrees?
Research Design

- Qualitative Research Inquiry
- Single case study situated in the Interpretive Paradigm
- Purposeful sampling, with maximum variation
- Data collection, sequential & multi method
**Conceptual Framework**

Levin’s (2001) four domains of global influence on community colleges provide *a priori* themes:
- Political
- Economic
- Cultural
- Technology/Communication

**Strategic Planning**
- Mission
- Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
Site Selection

Site required inclusion of those community colleges that undertook the complex decision process as whether or not to offer baccalaureate degrees.

Maximum variation required half the study sites to have decided in favor of offering community college baccalaureates and half to decided against.
Map Site Locations in Study
Data Collection Protocol

Multi-method sequential data collection

- Site/Participant selection
- Participant/Site demographic & data survey
- Face-to-face interviews
- Archival documents
- Factors Relevance survey (Likert scale)
What catalysts induce community colleges to revisit their mission priorities to investigate conferring baccalaureate degree(s)?

- Originated outside the college through “sensing networks”
- Primary catalyst: Workforce Education
- Secondary catalyst: Baccalaureate in Career & Technical fields are outside the university’s academic portfolio
- Tertiary catalyst: Professional associations increase degree requirements
Findings

What catalysts induce community colleges to revisit their mission priorities to investigate conferring baccalaureate degree(s)?

- University academic portfolios are selective; not supporting all community baccalaureate demands

- **First-Movers:** new designation for colleges that take on the challenge of new opportunities such as changing college authorization which is required to confer baccalaureate degrees
Implications

- New strategic opportunities often arise from catalysts outside the strategic planning process.
- Sensing networks are important for revealing strategic opportunities.
- New opportunities need to be assessed against mission, therefore, mission might be changing.

*Presidents determine an opportunity is credible.*
What issues are identified as crucial to the decision pursuant to offering a baccalaureate degree?

- Decision is an ad-hoc process
  - Process depends on who is sitting at the table
  - Factors are only identified along the way
- Highest influence on decision
  - Program quality
  - Trustee support and Presidential leadership
  - Community perception
- Lowest influence on decision
  - Moving university partners to competitors
Each college has its own culture and climate... so what is important to one may not be important to another

Significance of decisions, specific factors and issues are situated in the context of the community college

Identified Critical Factors serve as decision “gates” for the decision process ...... essentially stopping the process at a “terminal gate”

President’s agenda and risk tolerance influence the importance of issues encountered in the decision process
Findings

Does the prominence of specific factors influence the outcome of the decision to offer a baccalaureate degree?

- No single or combination of factors determined whether to offer community college baccalaureates
- No existing model or assessment tool to ensure nothing gets overlooked or missed
- Factors which led to a decision can change over time
There is no decision “silver bullet”: critical factors are situational & contextual

Leaders could improve outcomes by using standardized decision process tools, models and methods

Nothing is so constant as change: therefore decisions should be open to reconsideration

A poor leader is one that sticks to the complex decision outcome no matter what because it was made
Findings

How and in what way is the decision process undertaken in community colleges considering conferring baccalaureate degrees?

- Decisions are contextual influenced by the President, the college culture and the situational environment
- Ad-hoc decisions processes invite potential errors and omissions
- Complex decisions are taken on without consideration of how leaders will graciously exit when conditions dictate; thus leaders may become too invested
- Decisions about new opportunities occurred outside the strategic planning process
- *First Movers* experienced a heavier dose of political maneuvering
Implications

- Remain attuned to new opportunities
- Foster *Sensing Networks* to identify emergent opportunities
- Community colleges who rely on ad-hoc decision process assume more risk
Implications

Strategizing and establishing an exit strategy must be an integral part of decision done at the onset of any complex decision process.

*Leaders who take on strategic decisions without adequate planning do so at their own peril.*
Complex Institutional Decision Model

- Ad-hoc decision process is open to missing items
- Overlooked items have negative consequences
- Defines exit strategy to avoid
  - Losing face
  - Sticking with decision too long
Three step process → leading to a decision

- Emergent Concept (amorphous strategic opportunity)
- Strategic Fit
- Critical Evaluation

3 Decision Gates allow expeditious termination

Pre-determined Exit Strategies define actions to take when terminating process

Standardized Process Checklist
Strategic Decision Model

COMMUNITY COLLEGE ENVIRONMENT

Sensing Networks

Emergent Concept
(amorphous strategic opportunity)

Strategic Fit
- Mission
- Organizational Preparedness
- Environmental Consistency

Critical Evaluation
- Decision Domains
- Political
- Economics
- Technology
- Cultural

Final Decision

Alliances

Emergent Gate
Strategic Gate
Evaluation Gate

Exit Strategy:
- Framing
- Reuse
- Restart
- Defer & Adjust