HALE Comprehensive Exam: Part One Section A

(Assigned code)

A. The study of organization and leadership in higher education makes initiating and responding to change an essential theme. Write an essay in which you offer an account of how one sector of postsecondary education (e.g., research universities, comprehensive universities, community colleges, liberal arts colleges, minority serving institutions, or corporate and/or institutional training programs) has changed in the past twenty-five years. Your essay should: a) Specify what aspects of the institutions in the sector you think have shown the most change and the least, and why; b) Describe the role of institutional leaders in these changes; and c) Include an account of policies or initiatives, and the role of leaders in implementing them, you think most necessary to improving the performance of the sector you have chosen in the years ahead, recognizing the changes already made that you have discussed.

Introduction

Regarded as a distinctly American and innovative form of higher education (Altbach, 2001; Boggs, 2004; Thelin, 2011), community colleges have served an important role within higher education since the start of the twentieth century. Their time honored commitment to serving as an entry point to higher education for the underserved (Thelin, 2011) has helped community colleges become the largest sector of higher education within the United States (Boggs, 2004). With relatively low prices, less strict admission requirements, and convenient locations, they provide viable options for many students to which more selective and elite institutions are not an option (Baum, Little, & Payea, 2011). George R. Boggs (2004), President of the American Association of Community Colleges, argues "beyond their primarily local focus, community colleges increasingly are viewed as a national network and key national resource" (p. 8). It's an argument that has been made by American Presidents, from President Truman's Commission Report on Higher Education devoting "substantial attention to the public community college as an institution crucial to ensuring universally accessible post-secondary education" (Thelin, 2011, p. 269), to President Obama calling for community colleges to produce an additional 5 million graduates by 2020 (White House, 2014). While community colleges have longed served the purpose of increasing access to higher education, they have seen a number of changes during the past twenty-five years. In this paper I will discuss enduring aspects of

community colleges, changing aspects of community colleges, role of institutional leaders, and policies and initiatives to improve community college performance in the years ahead.

Enduring Aspects of Community Colleges

The following are a few aspects of community colleges that have endured, or in other words, have changed very little over time: open admissions policies, focus on teaching, and low institutional status.

Open Admissions Policies

An enduring and distinguishing feature of community colleges is their openness and willingness to serve underrepresented populations. The majority of community colleges have open admissions policies (Altbach, 2001; Boggs, 2004; Hagedorn, 2010; Lattuca & Stark, 2009; Thelin, 2011), which means their doors are essentially open to any and all who want to pursue a higher education. Due to their open-door admissions policy, community colleges are often described as "the people's or democracy's colleges and are widely credited with opening access to higher education to the most diverse student body in the history of higher education" (Boggs, 2004, p. 8).

One feature of community colleges' open door policies is less strict admission requirements as compared to other types of higher education institutes. For example, whereas elite liberal arts colleges carefully select students from a large pool of applicants (Keohane, 2001), community colleges often allow students without a high school diploma to take courses (Thelin, 2011).

Community colleges are also a more affordable option as compared to other institutional types. Average tuition and fees for a fulltime student attending a public community college during 2010-11 was $2,713, whereas the average for attending a public four-year institution was

$7,605 (Baum, Little, & Payea, 2011). The affordability of community colleges provides students looking to transfer to a four-year institute a low-cost option for completing their first two years of study (Altbach, 2001), and also affordable local opportunities for work training (Boggs, 2004). The affordability of community colleges makes them an open and accessible form of higher education to those who cannot afford attending more elite and selective institutes, such as research universities and liberal arts colleges.

Focus on Teaching

Another aspect of community colleges that has changed very little is their focus on teaching. Community colleges are very teaching-oriented, and there is the expectation for faculty to spend much of their time interacting with students (Lattuca & Stark, 2009). A characteristic of community colleges' commitment to teaching is faculty members who "concentrate on teaching to the exclusion of scholarly activities" (Townsend & Rosser, 2011, p. 8). Whereas faculty at research universities are often expected to spend at minimum half their time engaged in research, resulting in teaching loads of only four to six hours per week, community college faculty spend about fifteen to twenty-one hours a week teaching (Clark & Clark, 2008).

Low Institutional Status

Even though community colleges serve an important role in higher education they do not command the high level of respect from the public as do other types of institutes. At the top of the American higher education hierarchy are the research universities, which are highly valued for their leadership in research (Altbach, 2001). Professor and higher education historian, John Thelin (2011) has expressed frustration with influential higher education scholar Alexander Astin's view of community colleges not being real colleges. Hagedorn (2010) points out

"community colleges entered the postsecondary sphere as 'marginal' institutions" and "have retained the status of a disconnected underclass of institutions" (p. 189). As a result, community colleges have often been the subject of hurtful humor within the greater academic community and general public (Hagedorn, 2010).

Changing Aspects of Community Colleges

The following are several aspects of community colleges that have changed quite a bit during the past twenty-five years: increased use of part-time faculty, increased use of technology, increased need for remedial education, and the increased offering of undergraduate degrees.

Increased Use of Part-Time Faculty

While the presence of part-time faculty has long been part of all institutional sectors (Clark, 2011), the use of a part-time faculty has grown "greatly during the last two decades as a form of mobile and inexpensive labor" (p. 27). Levin, Kater, and Wagoner (2006) describe it as "both strikingly and significantly, over the past thirty years, part-time instructors have become the majority of community college faculty" (p. 81). Meanwhile, Clark (2011) describes the use of part-timers as a "deteriorating situation for staff in community colleges" (p. 27), due to the marginal institutional influence part-time faculty typically possess.

While the use of part-time instructors provides college leaders with a flexible and inexpensive workforce, it also presents a number of challenges (Umbach, Lattuca, Museus, Hartley, & Melguizo, 2011). One such challenge pertains to the *Learning Revolution*, which is rapidly spreading across all sectors of education (O'Banion, 2011). O'Banion (2011) argues, "the community college has become the most visible crucible in which the concepts and practices of this revolution are being forged" (p. 166). In order for this revolution to be effective teachers need to become designers of learning environments and apply the best active learning

methods (Barr & Tagg, 1995). Part-time faculty likely will not have the time, resources, or institutional commitment to make such a paradigm shift, or at least not as effectively as a more stable fulltime staff likely would.

Increased Use of Technology

Another change in community colleges pertains to their increased use of technology. Technology has seen widespread use throughout higher education largely due to the changing nature of students. Students today often "come to school powered-up and wired with the newest technologies available" (Roblyer, McDaniel, Webb, Herman, & Witty, 2010, p. 134), and they "expect to be able to work, learn, and study whenever and wherever they want to" (Johnson, Adams, & Cummins, 2012, p. 4). Thirty-two percent of students in higher education take at least one course online resulting in 6.7 million students enrolled in online education (Allen & Seaman, 2013). The Obama Administration has called on community colleges to develop more online course materials, such as interactive tutors and simulations (White House, 2014). For the over two-thirds of community college students attending part-time, while also working or raising a family or both (Hagedorn, 2010), online courses provide a flexible and convenient learning opportunity.

Another factor contributing to the increased use of technology is the pursuit of cost-savings and efficiencies. Digital technologies change the very nature of work itself (Bastedo, 2012). If not readily apparent by the title of its report, *Transforming American Education: Learning Powered by Technology*, the U.S. Department of Education (2010) clearly sees technology as a means of changing the nature of education. The report claims that although most American organizations make improving productivity a daily focus, "education has not, however, incorporated many of the practices other sectors regularly use to improve productivity

and manage costs, nor has it leveraged technology to enable or enhance them" (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, p. xiv).

Increased Need for Remedial Education

The open admissions policies of community colleges, discussed earlier, have resulted in accessible higher education opportunities for the most diverse student population in the history of higher education (Boggs, 2004). Their open-door policy has also resulted in a heavier burden of remedial education needed by students than found at institutions higher up in the institutional hierarchy (Clark & Clark, 2008; Lattuca & Stark, 2009). Over two-thirds of recent high school graduates arrive at college in need of remedial education (Umbach, Lattuca, Museus, Hartley, & Melguizo, 2011). The inadequate high school preparation many students receive represents an obstacle to effective teaching and learning at the college level (Immerwahr, 2002).

In recent years, community colleges have struggled with meeting the demand of increasing numbers of students in need of remedial education (Boggs, 2004). Clark (2011) describes the effects of remedial education on the teaching task at community colleges as being "closer to secondary-school, particularly during the first year of college, than what is found in selective universities" (p. 25). The burdens of remedial education within community colleges not only affect institutional prestige, often resulting from lower graduation rates as compared to elite institutions (Lax, 2012), they also affect the enthusiasm of faculty faced with teaching often-unprepared students (Tinberg, Duffy, & Mino, 2007).

Increased Offering of Undergraduate Degrees

Another recent change in community colleges pertains to the number of institutes offering undergraduate degrees. Michigan recently became the twenty-first state to grant its community colleges legal authority to issue bachelor's degrees (Fain, 2013). Eight years prior to

Michigan's legislative action, only eleven states granted such legal authority (Fain, 2013). The recent increase in the number of community colleges approved to confer baccalaureate degrees makes defining what a community college is even more challenging (Hagedorn, 2010).

Hagedorn (2010) argues, "the emergence of the community college baccalaureate threatens to blur the thickest border separating the 2- and 4-year sectors—the awarding of the bachelor's degree" (p. 199). Proponents of community colleges offering bachelor's degrees state they will only offer degrees where needed to meet unmet needs (Fain, 2013). However, advocates of four-year universities are concerned about duplication of efforts potentially resulting from two-year colleges also offering bachelor degrees, and also view it as likely being harmful to collaboration efforts between two and four year institutes (Fain, 2013). Meanwhile, uncertainty exists as to whether or not four-year degrees offered by community colleges will be viewed as having the same legitimacy as those offered by traditional four-year institutes (Hagedorn, 2010).

Role of Institutional Leaders

The changes discussed in the prior section present community college leaders with a variety of challenges and opportunities. How college leaders respond to the changes will determine whether they have a positive or negative impact on their institutions and the quality of education they offer.

Unlike at the top of the higher education institutional hierarchy where faculty leadership and governance are strong, community colleges are very managerial, and instructors at such institutions often feel they have little authority (Clark & Clark, 2008). An affect of the managerial approach to governance is the move towards utilizing more adjunct faculty, which in turn limits or removes all together the faculty from governance (Giroux, 2002).

As discussed earlier, community colleges have experienced a large increase in the number of part-time faculty employed (Levin, Kater, & Wagoner, 2006), resulting in a detrimental effect on faculty (Clark, 2011). To college leaders, the use of cheap and flexible part-time labor may seem like a good idea, given community colleges often need to quickly incorporate program and instructional practices demanded by local industry (Lattuca & Stark, 2009). It is reasonable for community colleges to utilize part-time faculty to an extent in order to remain responsive to their communities, but an overreliance can result in a faculty feeling exploited and demoralized (Giroux, 2002). Community college leaders must also consider the impact part-time instructors have on the academic planning, a question that remains unanswered (Lattuca & Stark, 2009).

Community college leaders will play an important role in determining and supporting the overall mission of their institutes. As more and more two-year colleges begin to offer bachelor degrees, institutional leaders will have to consider if the new degree options will negatively impact support for students requiring special assistance (Hagedorn, 2010). As leaders push their institutions in new directions, such as more innovative use of technologies, they will have to ensure incentives align with goals or else risk employees shirking their responsibilities in achieving them (Lane, 2012). To effectively teach the growing number of online students requires technical skills that are likely new to educators (Collins & Halverson, 2009; Tennant, McMullen, & Kaczynski, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Faculty not only need to become literate in multiple media formats, but also need to be able to foster such digital literacy in new ways of teaching (Brown, 2006). Community college leaders can and should play a key role in making sure faculty have the resources and incentives needed to be successful.

Hagedorn (2010) believes "community colleges and their students will be best served by breaking out of the underclass status and entering that of respected co-existence within the postsecondary sector" (p. 194). The change in status Hagedorn desires for community colleges is likely not to come from a single leader or small group of leaders, but instead from a concerted effort across the community college sector. Levin, Kater, and Wagoner (2006) argue, "community college leaders at the institutional, state, and national levels as well as policymakers and legislators need to include community college faculty as colleagues in their deliberations and actions that influence the community college and its students" (p. x).

Policies and Initiatives to Improve Performance in the Years Ahead

Community colleges and their leadership face a multitude of challenges. Some of those challenges are a result of policies and initiatives aimed at improving performance in the coming years. These policies and initiatives, if properly implemented, could lead to improvements, but if improperly implemented could lead to undesired outcomes. A few policies and initiatives focused on improving performance in the years ahead are a culture of assessment and accountability, call for increased collaboration among institutes, and improved transfer and articulation agreements.

Culture of Assessment and Accountability

For over thirty years now, "state and federal policy makers have increasingly pressured higher education to create a culture of evidence and, specifically, to account for student learning" (Shavelson, 2007, p. 26). For example, President Obama has charged states with developing standards and assessments to measure 21st century skills, and to leverage technology in enhancing the quality and efficiency of higher education (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

While measuring performance is not inherently bad, the result of doing so may have unintended consequences. For example, an overemphasis on graduation rates may result in colleges admitting only students who are well-prepared to succeed, and serve as a distraction to focusing on the needs of increasingly diverse student population (Ruppert, 1997). Lax (2012) is concerned that an arbitrarily selected performance measurement, such as graduation rates, fails to take into account the diversity of community college student bodies and the diversity of learning goals.

Astin (1993) states, "clearly, traditional assessment practices in American higher education do not adequately reflect the multidimensionality of student outcomes" (p. 41). Student success at community colleges has multiple definitions, such as completing a degree, earning a certificate, and even simply completing a single course (Hagedorn, 2010). Identifying, agreeing on, and assigning priorities to complex learning outcomes, along with communicating those outcomes to government and the public, are very difficult tasks (Schmidtlein & Berdahl, 2011). However, if community college leadership wants to ensure all that their institutes and students accomplish are reflected in assessment practices they must not shy away from such tasks.

Call For Increased Collaboration Among Institutes

State funding of higher education has been shrinking for quite some time (Boggs, 2004; Diamond, 2006; Immerwahr, 2002; Staley & Trinkle, 2011). As a higher education is viewed more as a personal and private investment (Boggs, 2004), state policymakers have "argued that students and their families should pay more of the cost of higher education" (p. 10). Decreases in public funding could and should result in different institutions being more inclined towards sharing resources.

Hagedorn (2010) has called for the sharing of technology resources and facilities between two and four year institutes to save money. The U.S. Department of Education (2010) views collaborative efforts across districts and states as one of the means to effectively leveraging technology to improve education. To help ensure the needs of their diverse student population continue to be met and their doors remain essentially open to all, community college leaders will have to carefully balance any cost efficiencies gained with any negative effects resulting from such actions.

Improved Transfer and Articulation Agreements

In recent years there has been a reemphasis of the role community colleges provide students wanting to transfer to four-year institutes (Altbach, 2001). Hagedorn (2010) has called for a "transfer policy redo" (p. 209). She also calls for articulation agreements to be written to reflect the flow of transfers from two-year to four year institutes and also the reciprocal (Hagedorn, 2010). Even clearly stated articulation agreements are only valuable if students are aware the agreements exist and have easy access to them (Hagedorn, 2010). The national college completion push has placed more pressure on community colleges to produce graduates (Fain, 2013). Clearer and more effectively disseminated transfer and articulation agreements could help increase the number of college graduates both community colleges and four-year colleges produce.

Conclusion

Since their inception at the start of the twentieth century, community colleges have been providing higher education opportunities to those who more costly and selective higher education institutional types are not an option. Unfortunately, community colleges do not command anywhere near the same high level of respect the top research universities and liberal

arts colleges do. Their inferior status is largely due to their focus on teaching and open admissions policies. Over the past twenty-five years or so, community colleges have experienced a number of changes, including an increased use of part-time faculty and technology, an increased need for remedial education, and the adding of undergraduate degrees to their academic offerings. The community college leadership, while quite managerial in nature, will likely be able to more effectively react to the changes occurring within their institutes if they include college faculty as colleagues in their decision making process. Policies and initiatives, such as accountability measures, collaborative efforts, and improved articulation agreements, are being put forth to improve the performance of community colleges. To ensure the policies and initiatives have their intended effect, institutional leadership must take an active role in ensuring performance gains are not offset by negative effects to quality and access.

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HALE Comprehensive Exam: Part One Section A

(Assigned code)

Since the 1990s many leaders of higher education have embraced what is often called the "learning (or learner-centered) paradigm," the focus to be given to the experience, cognitive abilities, curricular interests, and instructional preferences of students rather than to the authority and favored teaching methods of the faculty. Write an essay exploring: a) The conditions of higher education that have made the "learning (or learner-centered) paradigm" an appealing reform idea; b) How the new “paradigm" has been implemented in traditional and virtual classrooms; c) The arguments for and against reform of this kind; and d) Your own position on the reform “paradigm” and why you hold it.

Introduction

During the Colonial period through the mid-1800s teaching and learning focused on rote memorization and the recitation of facts (Thelin, 2004). From the mid-1800s until the 1990s occasional adjustments were made to instructional processes, but few significant changes were made in terms of the overall teaching and learning philosophy of colleges and universities (Lattuca & Stark, 2009). Beginning in approximately the 1990s and continuing to the present day there has been an increasing emphasis on moving from a teaching-centered environment to a learning-centered environment within the higher education community (Lattuca & Stark, 2009). The learning paradigm maintains as its purpose “not to transfer knowledge but to create environments and experiences that bring students to discover and construct knowledge for themselves” (Barr & Tagg, 1995, p. 15). In this paper I will describe some of the conditions of higher education that have led to a shift toward the learning paradigm, indicate how the learning paradigm has been implemented in traditional and virtual classrooms, provide an overview of some of the arguments for and against the learning paradigm, and conclude with my personal opinion about the shift toward a learning paradigm at colleges and universities.

Conditions Leading to a Learning Paradigm

Although higher education is an industry steeped in history and tradition, some recently changing conditions have made it more appealing for colleges and universities to move toward a learning paradigm. Some of the conditions causing a shift toward the learning paradigm are: (a) a changing economic and global environment, (b) an increasing number of educational options and competition for students, and (c) a diversifying student population.

Changing Economic and Global Environment

"The traditional architecture of education was designed in an earlier time to meet the needs of an agrarian and an industrial economy; it was not designed to improve and expand student learning" (O'Banion, 2010, p. 167). Today, economic competitiveness in a globalized society, rapid technological changes, and a move toward a knowledge-based economy have resulted in the need to prepare a different type of student for the future workforce (Flynn & Vredevoogd, 2010; Lattuca & Stark, 2009). In the past, students could learn a specific set of skills in one field and make a career in that specific area. Today, employers seek students with greater critical thinking and problem-solving skills and the ability to integrate materials across disciplines (Association of American Colleges & Universities, 2010). These societal changes have caused colleges and universities to rethink their traditional teaching methods. Bok (2006) argued that "instructors need to create a process of active learning by posing problems, challenging student answers, and encouraging members of the class to apply the information and concepts in assigned readings to a variety of new situations" (p. 117), all of which are consistent with the learning-centered paradigm. Given the role higher education institutions play in society in preparing future members of the workforce, changing economic conditions make implementing the learning paradigm an appealing reform for colleges and universities.

Increasing Educational Options and Competition for Students

Another factor that has contributed to a shift toward a learning paradigm is the increasing number of educational options available to students, which results in a competition for students. Lattuca and Stark (2009) argued that American higher education has "experienced a long-term trend toward diversification of institutions" (p. 23), most recently with the increasing number of for-profit institutions and online education providers. This has been particularly true in the last couple years with a rapidly increasing number of institutions offering massively online open courses (MOOCs). MOOCs are typically free courses offered by institutions that allow anyone to access traditional course content offered at those institutions (Pappano, 2012). As the number and types of educational institutions increases, the competition to attract students increases as well (Lattuca & Stark, 2009). Poindexter (2003) argued that increasing competition places more pressure on institutions to improve their teaching styles, which makes the learning paradigm an attractive reform option.

Diversifying Student Population

Along with the increasing competition for students, the type of student that institutions are competing for is changing. "American colleges and universities today probably have a wider and more varied mix of students than any system of higher education in the world" (Tagg, 2003, p. 41). Today, students are older, attend school on a more part-time basis, and are more ethnically diverse than in the past (Zusman, 2005). As a result, higher education institutions need to develop programs and teaching methods that take into account the contemporary needs of students of all different ages, genders, and ethnicities (Flynn & Vredevoogd, 2010; Lattuca & Stark, 2009). For example, Kelly & Strawn (2011) argued that older students often must juggle

work, school, and family obligations, which impacts their learning experiences. Higher education institutions seeking to accommodate a diverse student body must be cognizant of who their students are and take students' unique needs and interests into account in developing a curriculum and teaching strategy (Lattuca & Stark, 2009). The learning paradigm emphasizes the needs and interests of students, which makes it an appealing option for institutions adjusting to a diversifying student body.

Implementation of the Learning Paradigm

The learning paradigm involves shifting the focus from the teacher to the student. This shift can be implemented in a variety of ways. In this section I highlight some of the ways the learning paradigm is being implemented within traditional and virtual classrooms.

Traditional Classrooms

One of the ways the learning paradigm is being implemented in the traditional classroom is by moving away from the traditional lecture format that has historically been the dominant instructional process utilized at colleges and universities. The learning paradigm places more emphasis on interactive learning environments where the student plays an important role in the classroom setting (Tagg, 2003). Although lectures are still common in many classroom settings, changes have been made to make lectures more interactive (Lattuca & Stark, 2009). For example, Fredrick argued (1986) lectures could be made livelier through the inclusion of demonstrations, alternating short lectures with discussion, or allowing questions and participation during lectures. Each of these methods engages the student directly in the learning process instead of the student sitting as a stale bystander.

Another variation on the traditional lecture format of teaching has been implemented through a phenomenon known as "flip-the-classroom." In a "flipped" classroom, the professor provides students with access to a recorded lecture prior to attending class and then utilizes the class period to engage in discussions or simulations related to the course content (Kolowich, 2011). Although the lecture still exists in some form, the time students spend in the classroom with their peers and the instructor becomes more interactive and is intended to encourage more active participation in the learning process. Engaging students more directly with the course material also encourages students to think more critically and deeply about the course content. Part of the learning paradigm involves students obtaining the ability to think more critically and take ownership for their learning (Tagg, 2003). By shifting the emphasis of instructional processes toward more active learning methods, students develop different cognitive skills and abilities than they would in the old teaching-centered paradigm.

It is also vital to recognize that the full implementation of a learning paradigm combines classroom experiences with considerations of the curricular interests and overall collegiate experience of students. There has been considerable "growth in the number and variety of programs, majors, and degrees over time" (Lattuca & Stark, 2009, p. 49). This growth in curricular options has resulted in students having more choices about what courses to take and how to structure their degrees to best fit what they want to get out of their educational experience. In a learning paradigm, students are also encouraged to become involved in co-curricular activities through student organizations, learning communities, and experiential learning opportunities (Tagg, 2003). The combination of greater curricular choice and co-

curricular opportunities provide students with more ownership of their educational experiences and aligns well with the goals of the learning paradigm.

Virtual Classrooms

Online course enrollments now account for 20% of all collegiate enrollments and an additional one-fourth of courses utilize some type of course management software system (Lattuca & Stark, 2009). Virtual classrooms are now an important aspect of how colleges and universities implement the learning paradigm. Instructional methods in virtual classrooms often place the student at the center of the educational experience. Instead of following the traditional lecture format of most face-to-face classroom experiences, online courses utilize a high degree of electronic discussions and questioning (Steinbronn & Merideth, 2008). This places the student in a position of responsibility for his or her own learning environment and shifts the focus from the teachers' preferences to the students' preferences for learning.

Another way the learning paradigm is implemented in virtual classrooms is through the amount of information made available to students. In virtual classrooms students are able to utilize online platforms to seek out their own knowledge at a rapidly increasing pace and that information is often endless (Brown, 2006). This allows students the opportunity to pick and choose what is most important for them to read and review. Instead of the instructor being the gatekeeper of all knowledge, students become equal partners in learning and discovering new information. The large amount of information available to students in virtual classrooms also helps students learn new cognitive skills in terms of being able to think critically about what is important to learn, self-regulate how much information they seek, and make sense of the material they discover (Herrington, Oliver, & Reeves, 2003).

Finally, the implementation of the learning paradigm in the virtual classroom involves changes in curricular choice and the overall experience for students. MOOCs specifically provide students with an opportunity to explore more subject matters in a different setting than has typically been available to them (Pappano, 2012). Students can enroll in courses free of charge and learn about new topics and gain new skills; the ultimate iteration of curricular interests being crafted by students themselves. Online learning environments also lend themselves to greater interaction between faculty and students outside of the classroom. Instead of students only interacting with professors during physical class periods, students in online courses typically interact with professors on a more regular basis through email communication and course management systems (Lattuca & Stark, 2009). This encourages students to take a more active role in their overall educational experience and interact with professors in a different context than they would in a traditional classroom setting.

Arguments For and Against the Learning Paradigm

Although the learning paradigm is gaining traction within higher education institutions, it is not universally accepted. This section explores some of the arguments for and against the learning paradigm.

Arguments for the Learning Paradigm

One of the rationales for the implementation of a learning paradigm is that it can often increase students' motivation when their needs and interests are considered. Lattuca and Stark (2009) argued that "few instructors systematically consider learner's needs, abilities, and goals as they develop courses. Yet research on learning suggests this is a critical dimension of effective curriculum design" (p. 145). In the learning paradigm, instructors are encouraged to consider the

unique needs of their students and consider how instructional processes and assignments align with students' backgrounds, experiences, and future goals (Tagg, 2003). By taking students' interests into account and potentially increasing students' motivation levels, the learning paradigm may improve learning outcomes among students. In an era of increasing calls for assessing and improving student learning (Ewell, 2006; Shulman, 2007), increasing students' motivation to learn is a good first step to enhancing learning outcomes.

Another argument in favor of the learning paradigm is that it increases focus on critical thinking and application instead of the memorization of facts. Bok (2006) argued that "faculty members agree almost unanimously that teaching students to think critically is the principal aim of undergraduate education" (p. 109). Yet in teaching-centered paradigms, lectures and memorization replace deep thinking. In the learning paradigm, students take part in problem-based learning, simulations and performances, and receive continual feedback to help them improve through the "ongoing, mindful conversation with the materials of problematic situations" (Tagg, 2003, p. 163). By providing more engaging and complex learning opportunities for students, the learning paradigm better prepares students for the workforce of the future by focusing on developing their critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Finally, the learning paradigm not only helps improve student-learning outcomes, it can also positively contribute to students' retention. Tinto (1993) argued it is important for students to feel integrated academically and socially while attending college. In the learning paradigm, an increased focus on students' interests and creating a more engaging learning environment contribute to students' academic integration. Additionally, a true learning paradigm includes learning beyond the classroom setting through co-curricular activities (Tagg, 2003).

Participation in co-curricular activities can help students socially integrate with their peers and positively contribute to persistence in college (Tinto, 1993). Although the learning paradigm is primarily viewed as a strategy to improve student learning, it may also help institutions' overall retention efforts.

Arguments Against the Learning Paradigm

Although there are many arguments in favor of the learning paradigm, there are also arguments against the learning paradigm. First, not every student may be comfortable in a learning paradigm environment. For example, some students may be uncomfortable taking a more active role in their learning experience. Dirkx and Smith (2004) argued that some students are uncomfortable with the power shift from the professor to the student in collaborative online learning environments. Similarly, students may feel uncomfortable in traditional classroom settings when called upon to be more actively engaged. Lattuca and Stark (2009) argued that discussions might be intimidating to some students. The learning paradigm may be beneficial for some students, but other students may feel uncomfortable in such an environment.

A second criticism of the learning paradigm is that it may diminish the importance of content mastery. Pratt and Collins (2012) identified five teaching perspectives. One of those perspectives, the transmission perspective, emphasizes mastery of specific course content distributed from the instructor. Individuals subscribing to the transmission perspective of teaching might be less likely to accept the learning paradigm's student-centered focus. Furthermore, the learning paradigm's shift from lecture-based teaching to more discussion-based teaching may result in less content being covered. Lattuca and Stark (2009) argued that discussions "are typically less efficient than lectures in presenting large bodies of

information" (p. 200). Students in introductory courses may not receive enough content as a base of information for subsequent courses if less information is covered in a more interactive, but also less efficient learning paradigm environment.

A third criticism of the learning paradigm focuses on practicality. Although the learning paradigm may espouse an ideal set of standards for how to make learning more student-centered and engaging, it is often difficult to implement effectively. Many faculty members are not specifically trained in how to teach during graduate school and end up following the teaching methods of their former professors (Lattuca & Stark, 2009). This results in professors in a learning paradigm environment being asked to teach in a manner that is unfamiliar to them (Hartman, Dzibuan, & Brophy-Ellison, 2007). Although some might argue that it does not hurt to attempt to try new teaching methods, the opposite may be true. Christensen (1991) argued that discussion-based teaching can be difficult to manage and if not done effectively can end up doing more harm than good. In order for students to receive the full benefits of the learning paradigm, professors need more training and development in new teaching pedagogies (Steinbronn & Merideth, 2008). Although some may argue vehemently for the benefits of a learning paradigm, an argument against the learning paradigm is that there are not enough professors trained to teach effectively in this manner.

Personal Position

I believe the learning paradigm is a positive development within the higher education community. The national and global economies are changing, requiring students to develop new skills (Flynn & Vredevoogd, 2010). In light of these changes, higher education institutions must take proactive steps to prepare students for the workforce of the future. I believe the learning

paradigm is better suited to prepare students than the teaching-centered paradigm, but appropriate steps must be taken to ensure the learning paradigm is implemented effectively. This section describes my reasons for supporting the learning paradigm and issues that should be considered in implementing this paradigm.

Tagg (2003) argued that "to whatever extent students see learning tasks as chosen and as relevant to their personal goals, they are more likely to embrace those tasks and learn to enjoy them" (p. 132). The positive aspects of the learning paradigm begin with the fact that the learning paradigm, due to its focus on student interests, helps improve the motivation of students. Once students are motivated to learn, it is often easier to engage them with course material. Subsequently, professors can challenge students to think more critically and contemplate complex problems and scenarios (Tagg, 2003). Students will no longer be able to learn one set of specific skills and make an entire career based upon those skills. The learning paradigm helps arm students with the necessary skills and abilities to be successful in a changing global and economic environment.

Although I support the learning paradigm, there are certain considerations that I believe must be made before universally accepting this paradigm. First, it is important to recognize that different students have different capabilities and expectations for what they want to receive from their educational experiences (Tagg, 2003). It is important to recognize that some students may prefer to learn in a more traditional setting with the professor lecturing as an authority figure. If implemented, I believe the learning paradigm needs to appropriately consider how to balance teaching methods to accommodate all students' interests. Second, there is a certain amount of content that must be mastered for students to develop a base of knowledge for subsequent

courses, particularly in fields such as medicine and engineering. The learning paradigm may be beneficial to help students think through complex problems and develop critical thinking skills, but traditional teaching mechanisms may still be necessary to cover large amounts of basic content in introductory courses. Finally, many professors are not trained in innovative teaching pedagogies (Lattuca & Stark, 2009). It may be difficult for some professors to effectively implement a learning paradigm if they are not provided appropriate training in how to utilize engaging teaching methods. Overall, I believe the learning paradigm holds great promise for improving the quality of learning within higher education, but one must also account for the paradigm's shortcomings in order to effectively implement it within colleges and universities.

Conclusion

Since the 1990s the learning paradigm has begun to replace the teaching-centered paradigm within the higher education community. The rise of the learning paradigm can be partly attributed to a changing national and global economic environment, increasing educational options and competition for students, a diversifying student population, and increasing calls for accountability at college and universities. As a reaction to these factors, the learning paradigm has been implemented in a variety of ways in both traditional and virtual classrooms. Specifically, the learning paradigm has shifted the focus from lectures to more engaging teaching pedagogies, emphasized critical thinking skills over rote memorization, and focused on students' entire collegiate experience inside and outside the classroom. Although there are many benefits to the learning paradigm such as improved motivation within students and greater academic and social integration, there are also some arguments against the learning paradigm being implemented. Arguments against the learning paradigm include its potentially intimidating

nature to students not prepared to be as actively engaged in their learning experience and the lack of preparation for faculty to effectively teach in new and innovative ways. Overall, the learning paradigm holds great promise for the future of higher education as long as its shortcomings are considered and accounted for while being implemented.

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