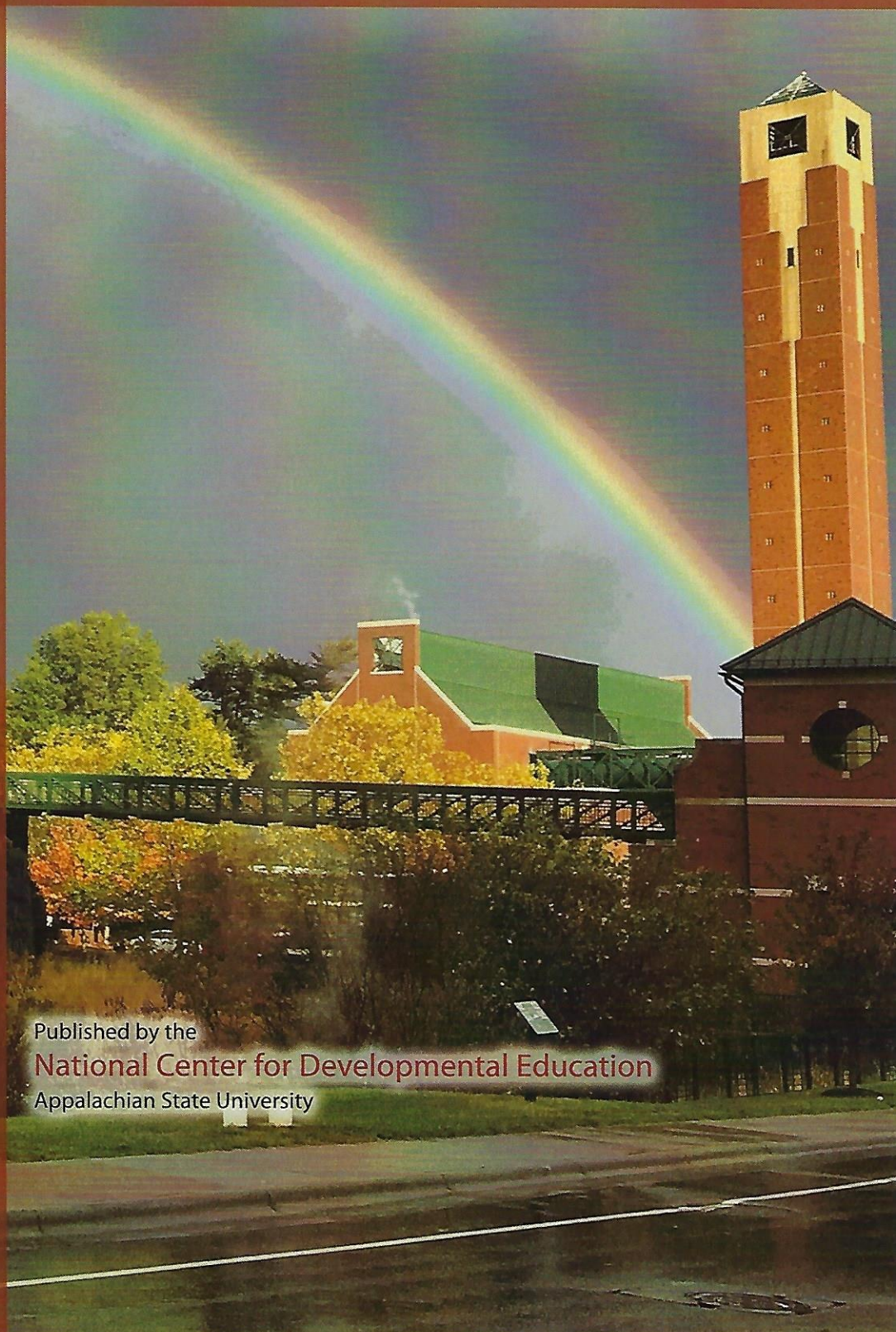




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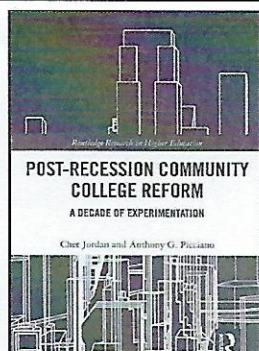
Book Review:

Post-Recession Community College Reform: A Decade of Experimentation

Review By Michelle A. Payton

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Historically, community colleges have been places for students of many backgrounds to realize education goals. Many institutions are making attempts to increase persistence, and the authors of *Post-Recession Community College Reform: A Decade of Experimentation*, Jordan and Picciano, dove deep into the multifaceted methods of how six states restructured developmental education, student advising, degree programs, curricula, and other strategies for students to progress. The authors shared, “The purpose of this book is to analyze and evaluate several key community college reform programs that emerged.... Initiatives in [six states]... will serve as the basis for this analysis and evaluation” (p. 13). This well-researched text and its evaluation of reforms across the United States will help those who have a seat at the table to formulate plans that contribute to the success of diverse student populations.

The California Community Colleges Online Education Initiative chapter provided learning information that dated as late as 2017. The authors shared data on the first 5 years of the OEI (Online Education Initiative) that included the reasons why they moved forward; when and how the new initiative was explored; the challenges that surrounded building infrastructure; and buy-in strategies with students, faculty and policy makers connected to new content, courses, and programs. Learning included the need for significant start-up resources, strides on enrollment, and an unchanged performance gap for racial groups.

The City University of New York (CUNY) network ASAP and Guttman Community College chapter covered several reformation concepts. Restructuring strategies addressed the Pathways Initiative (standardized credits), pedagogy redesign, and prematriculation programs; the many challenges students have balancing work, school, and being enrolled part-time (ASAP); and approaches to developmental skill building for students with the lowest completion rate (Guttman Community College). Although Pathways, pedagogy, and prematriculation programs were a part of the CUNY answer, research revealed that there were more deterrents than simply academic preparation, so the ASAP approach was tested in six CUNY campuses. Eventually, ASAP included a small sample of developmental students and found wraparound resources—intensive advising, financial incentives, and streamlining processes—were important for persistence. But a gap remained for students who were most at risk. Guttman Community College entered the mix, and an interdisciplinary,

integrative curriculum was tested. There are glimpses into student success in many instances with all three models, but work is still in progress to achieve a balanced approach to serve multiple levels of students.

In Tennessee the Governor attained permission to use state lottery funds to pay for student tuition across the community and technical college network. The program was designed to fill gaps that included postsecondary education becoming untouchable for low-income students of color and the state labor market needing a more educated workforce. This chapter shared how the program was realized in 2015, promoted increased enrollment, but resulted in low persistence due to the lack of academic and support systems to address whole students’ needs.

Florida underwent a legislative directive (SB 1720) approved in 2013 requiring all 28 locations in the Florida College System (FCS) to execute a new developmental education program by Fall 2014. As part of the Fall 2014 execution, remediation courses became an option for students, even if they were assessed as needing the coursework. This chapter detailed the execution of the initiative; FCS senior administrators summarized in a 2017 survey: “the percentage of administrators who agree or strongly agree that SB 1720 has been effective decreased from 74 percent in 2015 to 39 percent in 2017” (p. 112). Research continues around the Florida reforms, but administrators are suggesting wrap-around support systems: financial, advisement, counseling, and other services should be included.

Initial data was shared on Connecticut and Wisconsin’s initiatives centralizing authority to save money. In Connecticut, it was proposed that 12 community colleges merge boards and systems offices. Connecticut planned to reduce presidents, a vice-chancellor, administrative positions, and eliminate campus financial and academic officers. A one-year merger would have resulted in re-accreditation taking 5 years, so the merger is moving more slowly to realize savings while maintaining academic credentials. In Wisconsin, enrollment numbers per 13 public community colleges ranged from 290 to 1350 plus headcount, with 10 having a headcount under 1000. Lawmakers mandated a \$250 million reduction in funding, and this resulted in the 13 two-year colleges moving under the umbrella of various four-year institutions. Evaluations of these mergers are not available since both are still taking place.

Students of many backgrounds meet their educational goals at community colleges, and the six states covered in this book provided examples of state-wide initiatives intended to effectively support such goals. If underserved and underprepared populations are important parts of the student mix for institutions, research points to developmental education and wrap-around strategies adding value. There are no simple answers, no one approach provides all the answers, and it takes bold leadership to make radical alterations; there are many lessons that can be applied from a variety of institutions. What is true across the United States, however, is the clear gap of inequality in postsecondary education and the need for community colleges to play a role in remedying it. The parting words of the authors are, “We believe that our book provides examples of possibility; we hope that it offers a framework for continued inquiry and discussion” (p. 149). This book, certainly, delivers insight into many possibilities.

