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The Institutional Vision of Community Colleges

Assessing Style as Well as Substance

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Providing an accessible and adaptable education has become an increasingly daunting task for community colleges. Administrators must formulate adaptive strategies as well as purposefully articulate them. A content analysis of the mission and vision statements from a nationwide sample of community colleges was performed, and key linguistic components found to constitute a well conceived, viable, and easily diffused institutional vision were isolated. The prevalence of these components in comparison to other types of academic institutions is discussed.

Keywords: *institutional vision; mission statements; community colleges; computerized text analysis; rhetoric*

From their inception, community colleges have been a critical point of entry to higher education for many Americans (Ayers, 2002b; Cohen & Brawer, 1996; Dicroce, 2005). Currently, about 1,000 public community colleges nationwide enroll nearly half of all undergraduates. Operating under an open-door admissions policy and a common mission of providing an accessible, adaptable, and affordable 2-year education (see Shannon & Smith, 2006), these schools also enroll a disproportionate share of low-income, minority, and academically unprepared students (Bailey & Smith, 2006).

Providing an accessible, adaptable, and affordable education to this diverse population has become an increasingly daunting task. Many of today's social, political, economic, and technological revolutions have advanced educational needs and priorities that differ greatly from those of the recent past (American Association of Community Colleges, 2006; Bragg, 2001). Growing enrollments in community colleges and crucial

economic and workforce development pressures have been met with diminishing state budgets (Cejda & Leist, 2006; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). A greater emphasis on outcome-based accountability has generated assessment costs and additional workload responsibilities for administrators, educators, and student support services (Ashburn, 2007; Bragg, 2000). Increasingly aggressive competition from for-profit institutions, many of which are specifically targeting students attending 2-year schools, are threatening the very existence of the community college (Farrell, 2003; Kelly, 2001; McQuestion & Abelman, 2004; Morey, 2004).

To survive these and other challenges, suggest Hill and Jones (2001), successful community college leaders must invest in organizational renewal and in a reinterpretation of the mission, philosophy, functions, and modus operandi of the institutions they serve. Indeed, redesigning community colleges to meet changing needs and expectations has long been identified as a top management priority (Alfred, 1998; Boone, 1992; Cross, 1985; Shearon & Tollefson, 1989) and as a basic expectation for community college presidents and their leadership teams (Baker & Upshaw, 1995; Carlsen, 2003; Gleazer, 1980). Bailey and Smith (2006) suggest that community colleges must think of reform in terms of broad institutional policy that changes the fundamental way a college operates, rather than pursuing discrete, small-scale programmatic changes. "Without a strategic mission," notes Ayers (2002b, p. 12), "there exists the possibility that community colleges . . . may continue to focus their resources on programs and services that have outlived their relevance." In fact, the most successful community colleges are "those that have developed a well-defined mission and a shared vision of the future" (Boggs, 1995, p. 71). "A clear mission," notes Morphew and Hartley (2002, p. 457), "helps distinguish between activities that conform to institutional imperatives and those that do not. A shared sense of purpose has the capacity to inspire and motivate those within an institution and to communicate to external constituents."

Institutional Vision

According to Senge (1990, p. 3), learning organizations are "where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together." For this to happen, it is argued, organizations

need to “discover how to tap people’s commitment and capacity to learn at all levels” (p. 4). Colleges and universities are very much learning organizations, and institutional vision is the means by which aspirations are identified, commitment is established, and expectations are reinforced (see Fox, 2003; Fox, Scheffler, & Marom, 2003; Pekarsky, 1998). Vision defines the kinds of educated human beings the academic institution is attempting to cultivate (Abelman & Molina, 2006) and recognizes the skills, sensibilities, attitudes, and understandings students should be acquiring during their education (Fox, 1997).

For most colleges and universities, the declaration of its institutional vision takes the form of a mission statement, a vision statement, or both, that are created by administrative leaders—that is, a president, chancellor, or board of trustees. According to Morphew and Hartley (2006), these statements have become ubiquitous in higher education, and strategic planning is predicated on their formulation (see also Wagener & Smith, 1993). Mission statements typically define the physical, social, fiscal, and political contexts in which the institution exists. Vision statements complement these characteristics, but transcend them as well. They form a set of aspirations for enhancing the quality of higher education that are distinctive, coherent, and appealing (Marom, 1994; Miller, Bender, & Schuh, 2005). The mission statement “is about the here and now,” suggested Lewis (2005, p. 5), “but vision describes the future.” Although the mission statement is often revered as a historical text (see Banta, Lund, Black, & Oblander, 1995; Bryson, 2004; Marom, 2003) and displayed as a recruitment and marketing tool (see Kirp, 2003; Murphy, 1987; Welton & Cook, 1997), a vision statement is a living document (Abelman & Molina, 2006; Baum, Locke, & Kirkpatrick, 1998; Fox, 1997) that is intended to be employed. It has been suggested by Hartley (2002) that mission statements reflect the realities of their institutions’ environments, whereas vision statements drive these realities.

More than 80% of all colleges and universities have made major revisions in their declarations of institutional vision within the last decade (see Association of American Colleges, 1994; Birnbaum, 2000) in response to new challenges and an increasingly competitive marketplace. Realizing “the merit of the mission statement as a leadership strategy” (Ayers, 2002b, p. 15), community college administrators have been at the forefront of revision initiatives. Levin (2000) observed that, during the 1990s, forces of globalization compelled community colleges to meet the needs of business and industry. As a result, missions and mission statements transitioned

from a focus on facilitating individual and community development to a focus on economic development and workforce preparation. Ayers (2002a, 2002b) and others (Bragg, 2001; Dougherty & Townsend, 2006; Hegeman, Banning, & Davies, 2007; Levin, 2000; Vaughan, 1997) found that, despite the differences that exist across institutions, community colleges tend to generate institutional visions with consistent themes across a dual focus.

The first focus consists of formal educational programming, or the college's enduring, stable, educational core. It is this core that confirms the validity of the community college as an institution of higher education and connects its specific mission to that of community colleges in general. The second is the periphery of the institution. The periphery is the boundary between the college and the community it serves, "where the community college intersects with its community and joins with other organizations, agencies, and institutions to identify and resolve broad-based issues that affect individuals and their communities" (Vaughan, 1997, p. 38). Despite the fact that roles and priorities of community colleges vary from community to community, Ayers (2002b) found that "access, workforce and economic development, comprehensiveness, responsiveness, and quality emerged as clear themes of [contemporary] community college mission statements" (p. 28).

Although the focus and substance of institutional vision have been analyzed, little attention has been paid to the manner in which this information is communicated to stakeholders within and outside the academic community. As Ayers (2002b) suggested, "Community college leaders must not only formulate adaptive strategies if their schools are to respond to learner needs in this rapidly changing environment, they must also carefully and purposefully articulate these strategies" (p. 28). Doing so may improve communication among campus constituents, improve communication between administrators and the faculty, and allow the academic mission to be more central to the way the institution conducts its business (Guy-Sheftall, 2006). Indeed, there is general agreement (see Shearon & Tollefson, 1989; Vaughan, 1991, 1997) that shared vision and clarity of purpose are essential for community college effectiveness. Nonetheless, the exploration of the style of presentation has been superseded by a concern over subject matter. The purpose of this study is to assess the verbiage of institutional vision at community colleges and address how mission and vision statements can best serve as guiding, governing, and promotional documents. The study method is similar to the approach used by the same

authors in an analysis of mission statements at historically Black colleges and universities (Abelman & Dalessandro, in press).

The Verbiage of Institutional Vision

A “well conceived vision,” according to Pekarsky (1998, p. 280), is “an informing idea that is shared, clear and compelling.” It is *shared* by the critical stakeholders—students, faculty, and staff—and unifies their vision of the institution with that of the upper administration or executive body that wrote it. A *shared* statement has the capacity to inspire and motivate those within an institution and to communicate its characteristics to key constituents (Hartley, 2002). As Meindl (1990, p. 159) noted, institutional vision is a “rich web of negotiated meanings and contextual variables” between leaders and their cohorts. A vision must be *clear* and concrete enough to offer genuine guidance in making educational decisions and setting priorities on all levels of the learning community (also see Senge et al., 1999). A *clear* vision helps organizational members distinguish between activities that conform to institutional imperatives and those that do not (Morphew & Hartley, 2006).

An institutional vision that is *compelling* generates an enthusiasm among the stakeholders and stimulates them to transform vision into a pattern of meaningful activity (see Baum et al., 1998; Kirkpatrick, Wofford, & Baum, 2002). Bligh, Kohles, and Meindl (2004) have suggested that a compelling message is one of optimism and inspiration. Similarly, George (2000) noted that the ability to generate and maintain optimism is one of the essential components of effective leadership and vision in a learning community. Optimism in messages from administrative leaders, note Kelloway and Barling (2000), directly enhances organizational outcomes, particularly during times of transition, uncertainty, or turbulence (see also Bunker, 1986; Hart, Jarvis, & Lim, 2002; Pillai & Meindl, 1998).

Communication scholars have discovered that for any innovative, pioneering, or motivating idea such as institutional vision to be generally accepted, readily adopted, and widely distributed to others by its stakeholders, it must possess components above and beyond Pekarsky’s notion of *shared*, *clear*, and *compelling*. Rogers (2003, 2004) and others (e.g., Deffuant, Huet, & Amblard, 2005; Valente, 1995; Vishwanath & Goldhaber, 2003; Wejnert, 2002) have found that four additional attributes are salient and powerful predictors of adoption and diffusion: *relative advantage* (e.g., Can the ideas or innovations be successfully transformed into general

or specific actions that generate benefits?), *complexity* (e.g., Are the desired outcomes of the ideas or innovations solid and concrete?), *compatibility* (e.g., Are the desired outcomes of the ideas or innovations suitable and appropriate to the target audience?), and *observability* (e.g., Are the desired outcomes of the ideas or innovations practical and pragmatic?).

Collectively, the existence of these linguistic components in innovative, pioneering, or motivating messages have served to explain the effectiveness of national health care communication campaigns (see Greenhalgh, Robert, Macfarlane, Bate, & Kyriakidou, 2004; Haider & Kreps, 2004), public policy programs (see McLendon, Heller, & Young, 2005; Valente, 1993), crisis management initiatives (see Bligh et al., 2004), political persuasion (see Emrich, Brower, Feldman, & Garland, 2001; Holladay & Coombs, 1994), and business and marketing strategies (see Mahajan, Muller, & Bass, 1990; Sevcik, 2004). To date, a limited but growing body of research has analyzed the linguistic components of institutional vision in higher education. None of it has included community colleges.

Early work by Chait (1979) reported that the verbiage of institutional vision at most schools tended to be vague and vapid. After all, asked the author, "Who cannot rally around 'the pursuit of excellence' or 'the discovery and transmission of knowledge'?" (p. 36). According to Morphew and Hartley (2006), these statements now serve as icons that communicate with stakeholders who have specific expectations of colleges and universities and that "have important legitimizing roles, both normatively and politically" (p. 468). Abelman, Dalessandro, Janstova, Snyder-Suhy, and Pettey (2007) found that vision and mission statements at academic institutions appear to serve different, albeit highly complementary functions. Although mission statements are prevalent across most academic institutions, only one third of all 4-year colleges and universities possess actual vision statements. Private schools in general and private schools that have a religious, military, or tribal affiliation in particular are more likely to have vision statements than other types of institutions.

Morphew and Hartley (2006) found that the rhetorical flavor of mission statements for public and private colleges and universities tends to differ, emphasizing the distinct challenges faced by these types of institutions (also see Boerema, 2006). Abelman, Dalessandro, et al. (2007) also found that mission statements tend to be less clear and less compelling than vision statements and that the desired outcomes expressed in mission statements are less pragmatic than those expressed in vision statements.

Conversely, mission statements tend to be longer and more complex, employing language that reflects more movement and change than vision statements and emphasizing (to a greater degree than vision statements) the implementation of ideas. Research examining private, for-profit proprietary colleges and universities, such as the University of Phoenix, has found that institutional vision tends to be driven by an outcome-oriented, highly pragmatic mission statement rather than by the highly compelling vision statements typically employed by traditional private institutions (Kinser, 2006). Danner (2005) noted that “For-profit universities are very innovative and entrepreneurial,” and that their mission statements “tend to offer education that is convenient, accessible and relevant to what consumers and employers want.” Abelman, Dalessandro, et al. (2007) concluded that a well-conceived, carefully crafted mission or vision statement can and should be a powerful and useful communication tool for all types of colleges and universities.

The research reported here provides a comparative base-line measurement of the inspirational and pragmatic rhetoric in declarations of institutional vision at public community colleges, traditional 4-year colleges and universities, and proprietary institutions. By doing so, this content analysis reveals the current state of utility of institutional vision in community colleges, determining whether these schools are keeping pace in an increasingly competitive marketplace and using institutional vision to their best advantage during a time of turbulence and change. To this end, the following research questions are posed:

1. What constitutes institutional vision in higher education at community colleges as compared with other types of academic institutions?
2. To what extent are expressions of institutional vision in community colleges in possession of the linguistic components that facilitate acceptance, adoption, and wide diffusion by stakeholders?

The literature on the diffusion of innovations suggests that the nature of the institution’s social system—in particular, the size and complexity of its infrastructure—influences what is perceived to be innovative (see Rogers, 2004; Wejnert, 2002) and, thus, whether or not that innovation will be accepted, adopted, and relayed to others. Similarly, it has been suggested that an academic community’s awareness of and access to any formal declarations by its leadership may be a function of the nature of the institution (Rozycki, 2004; Velcoff & Ferrari, 2006). This includes the

size of its student enrollment (see Kuhlmann, 2004), its academic mission (e.g., highest degree granted; see Ayers, 2002b; Baldwin, 2005) and its mode of operation (e.g., public or private; see Boerema, 2006; Bryson, 2004). As such, the following research question is posed:

3. Is there a relationship between the nature of an institution (e.g., academic mission, size, region, mode of operation) and the linguistic components of its institutional vision?

Method

Using the Carnegie Foundation's Classification of Institutions of Higher Education as a guideline, a stratified, random sample of 30 public community colleges (see Appendix A), 30 proprietary colleges and universities (see Appendix B), and 30 schools each from public and private doctorate-granting, master's-granting, and baccalaureate-granting colleges and universities (see Appendix C) were selected from a population of all U.S. and Canadian institutions of higher education. This resulted in a total sample of 240 institutions. The composition of the sample of institutions can be found in Table 1.

Unit of Analysis

A school's web-based representation of its institutional vision served as the unit of analysis for this investigation. This information was accessed and downloaded from each school's Web site by four trained coders. This was accomplished by searching the home page for direct links to mission and vision statements. If none were accessible, the institution's search engine was utilized by typing "vision statement" and selecting the option that contained the institution's vision statement. After the initial search, an additional search for "mission statement" was conducted. As with the previous search, the mission statement was included in the analysis. If no vision or mission statement could be found through the Web sites, electronic versions of school catalogs were accessed and searched. All searches were duplicated for quality control and intercoder reliability exceeded .95 across all Web sites. The text of each school's institutional vision statement was classified as a "mission statement," as a "vision statement," or as containing "both a mission and vision statement" by a team of two coders.

Table 1
Sample Composition

	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Institution type		
Community colleges	30	12.5
Public baccalaureate granting	30	12.5
Private baccalaureate granting	30	12.5
Public master's granting	30	12.5
Private master's granting	30	12.5
Public doctorate granting	30	12.5
Private doctorate granting	30	12.5
For-profit institutions	30	12.5
Campus enrollment		
Less than 1,000	45	18.75
1,000 to 2,499	64	26.66
2,500 to 4,999	47	19.58
5,000 to 9,999	47	19.58
10,000 to 19,999	23	9.58
20,000 to 29,999	9	3.75
More than 29,999	5	2.08
Region		
Northeast	39	16.25
Mid-Atlantic	29	12.08
Mid-South	22	9.16
Southeast	21	8.75
Great Lakes	42	17.50
North Central	19	7.92
South Central	24	10.00
Northwest	16	6.66
Pacific	14	5.83
Rocky Mountain	14	5.83

Note: *N* = 240.

Computerized Content Analysis

The text of each school's institutional vision was processed through DICTION (Version 5.0), a text-analysis software program that codes and compares content using social scientific methods for determining the linguistic elements in a verbal message. DICTION uses 33 predefined dictionaries, containing more than 10,000 search words, to analyze a passage and compares texts to norms created through the analysis of 22,027 texts of various sorts written over a 50-year period. The construction of DICTION dictionaries was based on careful attention to linguistic theory (see Boder, 1939; Easton, 1940; Flesch, 1951; Hart, 1984a, 2001; Johnson, 1946;

Ogden, 1960). These dictionaries are expressly concerned with the types of words “most frequently encountered in contemporary American public discourse” (Hart, 1984b, p. 110). All of the dictionaries contain individual words only, and homographs are explicitly treated by the program through statistical weighting procedures, which are intended to partially correct for context (Hart, 2000a, 2000b). DICTION conducts its searches by computing “scores” based on these dictionaries that highlight five key semantic features (*Commonality, Optimism, Certainty, Activity and Realism*). These features are thought to capture the major tonal aspects of a text.

The researcher can also create up to 10 customized dictionaries that can be adapted to specific research needs. On the basis of a thorough examination of the words included in each DICTION dictionary, we examined six constructs that corresponded with what Pekarsky (1998) identified as *shared, clear, and compelling* and with what Rogers (2004) and his colleagues defined as *relative advantage, observability* and *complexity*. One relevant attribute from the literature, *compatible*, could not be measured by the software, because the construct is based on highly subjective and contextual information that cannot be coded by computer. Because each construct is measured using a different formula composed of different dictionaries, their respective DICTION scores per se are not comparable. Instead, comparisons relevant to the mean scores of each construct can be made. Each linguistic construct, along with its DICTION formula and examples of key words employed to compute scores can be found in Appendix D.

Results

The first research question addressed the composition of expressions of institutional vision at community colleges. Of the 30 community colleges in the sample, each (100%) presented a mission statement as part of its institutional vision, and 20 institutions (66.7%) also presented a vision statement. Of the 30 proprietary colleges and universities in the sample, 29 presented a mission statement as part of its institutional vision (96.7%). Of interest, the institutional vision of only four proprietary schools (13%) contained a clearly identified and labeled vision statement.

Of the 180 colleges and universities in the comparative, 4-year institution sample, 172 (95.6%) presented a mission statement as part of its institutional vision, and 70 schools (38.8%) contained a vision statement, 6 of

which were stand-alone documents without an accompanying mission statement. A significantly greater proportion of community colleges provided vision statements than did doctorate-granting (43.3%), baccalaureate-granting (31.7%), and master's-granting (26.6%) institutions.

The second and third research questions inquired about the linguistic components of these expressions of institutional vision. To investigate DICTION score differences in the expressions of institutional vision across community colleges, proprietary schools, and traditional 4-year institutions, a series of one-way analyses of variance were conducted. The means, standard deviations, and range for DICTION scores for each of the linguistic components, on which these analyses and other points of comparison are based, can be found in Table 2.

Several statistically significant differences ($p \leq .05$) in the linguistic components of the composite institutional vision were found. The institutional vision presented by community colleges was considerably more *shared*, $F(1, 208) = 29.43$, more *complex*, $F(1, 208) = 27.52$, and possessed greater *observability*, $F(1, 208) = 22.33$, than that of 4-year institutions. Similarly, the institutional vision presented by community colleges was considerably more *shared*, $F(1, 60) = 18.78$, more *complex*, $F(1, 60) = 12.58$, and possessed greater *observability*, $F(1, 60) = 20.52$, than that of proprietary schools. The institutional vision of community colleges was also found to be significantly less *clear*, $F(1, 208) = 18.18$, than 4-year institutions and less *compelling*, $F(1, 208) = 19.42$, $F(1, 60) = 32.76$, than both 4-year and proprietary institutions, respectively. No significant differences were found based on institution size or region.

When compared specifically with other types of public schools, the institutional vision presented by community colleges was significantly more *shared* than doctorate-granting, $F(1, 60) = 19.36$, master's-granting, $F(1, 60) = 28.65$, and baccalaureate-granting, $F(1, 60) = 34.05$, institutions. It also possessed significantly greater *observability* than did the institutional vision of doctorate-granting, $F(1, 60) = 28.27$, and master's-granting, $F(1, 60) = 18.75$, institutions. There were no significant differences in *complexity*, *clarity*, or how *compelling* the institutional vision is when compared with all other types of public institutions.

In an effort to best assess the desired linguistic components within mission and vision statements, these documents were isolated and extracted from the composite expression of institutional vision. They were then independently subjected to content analysis. The means, standard deviations, and range for DICTION scores for each of the linguistic components in

Table 2
Institutional Vision: Mean DICTION Scores: Institutional Vision

Linguistic Component	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range	
			High	Low
<i>Shared</i>			63.96	40.68
Community colleges	53.4	3.27		
4-year colleges	48.2	3.56		
Proprietary institutions	51.2	3.77		
<i>Clarity^a</i>			4.98	6.55
Community colleges	6.1	0.32		
4-year colleges	5.8	0.43		
Proprietary institutions	6.0	0.28		
<i>Compelling</i>			75.81	50.99
Community colleges	51.1	3.15		
4-year colleges	54.8	3.27		
Proprietary institutions	55.8	2.41		
<i>Complexity</i>			54.96	34.77
Community colleges	49.7	4.62		
4-year colleges	46.7	4.87		
Proprietary institutions	48.5	4.71		
<i>Relative advantage</i>			55.59	33.93
Community colleges	43.6	3.83		
4-year colleges	43.3	5.76		
Proprietary institutions	46.3	3.62		
<i>Observability</i>			54.49	11.16
Community colleges	48.1	2.74		
4-year colleges	42.4	3.35		
Proprietary institutions	46.0	2.90		

a. Low score is equivalent to a high degree of clarity.

mission statements and vision statements can be found in Tables 3 and 4, respectively.

The mission statements employed by community colleges were found to be significantly ($p \leq .05$) more *shared*, $F(1, 208) = 27.21$, $F(1, 60) = 23.19$, and more *complex*, $F(1, 208) = 15.87$, $F(1, 60) = 23.52$, than those of 4-year institutions and proprietary schools, respectively. They possessed greater *observability*, $F(1, 208) = 20.48$, and *relative advantage*, $F(1, 208) = 16.72$, than their 4-year counterparts. Mission statements for community colleges were also less *clear*, $F(1, 208) = 26.55$, than those for 4-year institutions and less *compelling*, $F(1, 208) = 18.23$, $F(1, 60) = 19.55$, than these other types of institutions.

When compared specifically with other types of public schools, the mission statements of community colleges were significantly more *shared*,

Table 3
Mean DICTION Scores: Mission Statements Only

Linguistic Component	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range	
			High	Low
<i>Shared</i>			68.21	19.90
Community colleges	52.6	3.73		
4-year colleges	48.3	4.48		
Proprietary institutions	50.6	4.33		
<i>Clarity^a</i>			5.27	6.74
Community colleges	5.9	0.38		
4-year colleges	5.5	0.52		
Proprietary institutions	6.2	0.32		
<i>Compelling</i>			78.01	49.57
Community colleges	42.9	3.69		
4-year colleges	56.7	4.78		
Proprietary institutions	52.8	2.95		
<i>Complexity</i>			60.97	33.93
Community colleges	45.2	5.03		
4-year colleges	41.2	5.27		
Proprietary institutions	44.8	4.81		
<i>Relative advantage</i>			58.20	33.93
Community colleges	44.3	3.65		
4-year colleges	41.2	11.92		
Proprietary institutions	44.8	3.58		
<i>Observability</i>			56.25	35.93
Community colleges	46.5	3.15		
4-year colleges	42.2	4.17		
Proprietary institutions	46.2	3.04		

a. Low score is equivalent to a high degree of clarity.

$F(1, 60) = 23.21$, and had greater *observability*, $F(1, 60) = 28.43$, than doctorate-granting institutions only. There was greater *relative advantage* in these statements than those of public doctorate-granting, $F(1, 60) = 26.42$, master's-granting, $F(1, 60) = 22.32$, and baccalaureate-granting, $F(1, 60) = 28.67$, institutions. There were no significant differences in *complexity*, *clarity*, or how *compelling* the institutional vision was when compared with all other types of public institutions.

The vision statements employed by community colleges were found to be significantly ($p \leq .05$) more *shared*, $F(1, 208) = 32.65$, *complex*, $F(1, 208) = 29.32$, *compelling*, $F(1, 208) = 34.87$, and possessed greater *observability*, $F(1, 208) = 28.98$, and *relative advantage*, $F(1, 208) = 14.77$, than their 4-year counterparts. The vision statements employed by community

Table 4
Mean DICTION Scores: Vision Statements Only

Linguistic Component	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range	
			High	Low
<i>Shared</i>			66.70	37.81
Community colleges	54.4	4.37		
4-year colleges	44.2	6.98		
Proprietary institutions	46.4	7.55		
<i>Clarity^a</i>			4.98	6.06
Community colleges	5.4	0.48		
4-year colleges	4.6	0.67		
Proprietary institutions	5.3	0.62		
<i>Compelling</i>			75.19	51.71
Community colleges	58.8	4.44		
4-year colleges	52.7	5.12		
Proprietary institutions	58.8	6.47		
<i>Complexity</i>			56.90	37.13
Community colleges	49.4	4.44		
4-year colleges	43.1	4.97		
Proprietary institutions	39.7	3.08		
<i>Relative advantage</i>			52.02	24.41
Community colleges	39.3	9.45		
4-year colleges	36.6	14.22		
Proprietary institutions	25.0	4.28		
<i>Observability</i>			71.47	38.78
Community colleges	46.1	5.22		
4-year colleges	44.8	5.91		
Proprietary institutions	45.6	6.99		

a. Low score is equivalent to a high degree of clarity.

colleges were also found to be significantly more *shared*, $F(1, 60) = 28.54$, *complex*, $F(1, 60) = 31.97$, and possessed greater *observability*, $F(1, 60) = 19.21$, and *relative advantage*, $F(1, 60) = 24.56$, than proprietary schools. They were also significantly less *clear*, $F(1, 208) = 21.34$, $F(1, 60) = 11.73$, than those found at traditional 4-year or proprietary institutions.

When compared specifically with other types of public schools, the vision statements of community colleges were significantly more *shared* than those of doctorate-granting, $F(1, 60) = 12.43$, and master's-granting, $F(1, 60) = 24.41$, institutions, more *complex* than those of master's-granting, $F(1, 60) = 27.21$, and baccalaureate-granting, $F(1, 60) = 29.33$, institutions, and more *compelling* than doctorate-granting, $F(1, 60) = 19.54$,

master's-granting, $F(1, 60) = 22.34$, and baccalaureate-granting, $F(1, 60) = 29.67$, institutions. They also possessed greater *relative advantage* than the vision statements of public master's-granting, $F(1, 60) = 19.82$, and baccalaureate-granting, $F(1, 60) = 25.57$, institutions, and greater *observability* than the vision statements of public master's-granting, $F(1, 60) = 26.95$, and baccalaureate-granting, $F(1, 60) = 17.43$, institutions. There were no significant differences in *clarity* when compared with all other types of public institutions.

To determine if the linguistic components of vision statements and mission statements for community colleges were significantly different, a one-way multivariate analysis of covariance was conducted. The dependent variables included the six predefined linguistic components, with the expression of institutional vision (mission or vision) as the independent factor. Significant differences in mission statements and vision statements on the dependent variables were found (Wilk's $\Lambda = .65$, $F = 29.75$, $p = .01$), with vision statements being more *shared* ($p = .001$), *compelling* ($p = .001$), and *complex* ($p = .01$). Mission statements for community colleges tend to have greater *observability* ($p = .01$) and *relative advantage* ($p = .001$). In addition, there tends to be more words in the mission statements of community colleges than there are in vision statements ($p = .01$).

Discussion

Institutional vision is a philosophical template—a concept of what, at its best, a college or university is like and the kinds of educated human beings that the institution is attempting to cultivate (Abelman & Molina, 2006; Marom, 1994). It reflects the nature of the learning community within the college or university and defines the institution's perceived purpose, priorities, and promises. "Institutional vision," notes Morphew and Hartley (2006, p. 457), "helps distinguish between activities that conform to institutional imperatives and those that do not . . . and serves to inspire and motivate those within an institution and to communicate to external constituents."

The communication science literature suggests that for any innovative, pioneering, or motivating idea such as institutional vision to be generally accepted, readily adopted, and widely distributed to others by its stakeholders, it must be *shared*, *clear*, *compelling*, and *complex* and possess *relative advantage* and *observability* (Pekarsky, 1998; Rogers, 2003,

2004). This investigation has provided benchmark scores on each of these linguistic components as they apply to the institutional vision of a stratified random sample of community colleges, in comparison with traditional 4-year institutions and proprietary schools.

The findings suggest that the "open door" philosophy that has long been embraced by community colleges and that, according to Vaughan (2005, p. B12), is "the corner-stone of the community college mission," is still a mainstay in their institutional vision. These documents strive to attract and unify a highly diverse academic community and align student and institutional views of the college experience (*shared*). They do this by providing language that offers a set of common values and objectives intended to generate easily obtainable (*observability*), pragmatic, and concrete outcomes (*complex*). These characteristics are significantly more prevalent in the institutional vision of community colleges than they are in the institutional vision of traditional public and private 4-year colleges and universities and in the highly customer-service oriented for-profit institutions. The names of the community colleges that rated highest on each of the six linguistic constructs explored in this investigation can be found in Table 5.

Of interest, the institutional vision of community colleges is not very *compelling*. It lacks language intended to generate an enthusiasm among stakeholders and stimulate them to transform institutional vision into a pattern of meaningful activity (Baum et al., 1998; Kirkpatrick et al., 2002). It lacks optimism (Bligh et al., 2004), which George (2000) and others (see Kuh, 2001; McClenney, 2007; Senge, 1990) suggest is an essential component of engagement in a learning community in general and in community colleges in particular. According to Abelman and Molina (2006), students, faculty, and staff are more likely to be aware of institutional vision statements that are compelling documents.

Although the institutional vision of most community colleges in the sample is not compelling, a dissection of its key components suggests that many vision statements within the composite documents are. However, unlike the compelling vision statements of traditional 4-year institutions, the vision statements of community colleges do not offer lofty, motivational incentives that encourage students to stretch their expectations and aspirations. They are more in line with the vision statements of proprietary schools, which push market-driven outcomes or emphasize the prospects for employment over academic preparation. Although the vision statements

Table 5
Top Three Community Colleges, by DICTION Scores

Linguistic Components	Top Three Community Colleges	DICTION Scores
Shared	Arapahoe Community College	58.13
	Tunxis Community College	57.93
	Tri-County Technical College	56.67
Clarity	Diné College	5.28
	Kent State University—Salem Campus	5.34
	Community College of Allegheny County	5.56
Compelling	Tri-County Technical College	60.07
	Des Moines Area Community College	59.47
	Arapahoe Community College	58.97
Complexity	Seminole Community College	54.73
	Community College of Allegheny County	54.71
	Rockingham Community College	54.58
Relative advantage	Cuesta College	49.75
	Blue Mountain Community College	49.33
	Collin County Community College District	49.18
Observability	Middlesex County College	51.15
	Community College of Allegheny County	51.13
	Patrick Henry Community College	48.43

of many community colleges emphasize preparing students for careers (also see Bailey, 2001; Bailey, Badway, & Gumpport, 2002), these statements identify career preparation as only one objective among others rather than as the primary focus (Ayers, 2002b; Levin, 2000; Vaughan, 1997) and do not present this objective as aggressively as do the statements developed by for-profit institutions. When revising their institutional visions, community colleges should continue to include compelling vision statements as part of the document, and attention should be given to infusing mission statements with more compelling language.

This investigation also determined that the institutional vision of community colleges is not very *clear*. DICTION's *Clarity* score, according to Hart (2000b, p. 47), is "a simple measure of the average number of characters-per-word and convoluted phrasings that make a text's ideas abstract and its implications unclear." *Clarity* generates a low score on this measure. *Clarity* facilitates the provision of genuine guidance in making educational decisions and setting priorities on all levels of the learning community (Morphew & Hartley, 2006; Senge et al., 1999).

The lack of *clarity* in the institutional vision of community colleges—resulting from a lack of *clarity* in both mission and vision statements—helps explain why Abelman, Atkin, Dalessandro, Snyder-Suhy, and Janstova (2007) found that student support services at community colleges are less likely than those at other types of schools to use institutional vision statements to guide their operations or train their personnel. This was particularly true for academic advising units. Bolstering the *clarity* of these statements—that is, making the language more accessible and less convoluted—would increase their potential to penetrate the academic community and serve as more comprehensible, useful, and governing documents. Pekarsky (1997, p. 278) observed that “limited energy and skepticism often conspire to make educators far less eager to step back and reflect on the basic aims of the enterprise they are engaged in.” A clearer and more compelling institutional vision could potentially inspire greater reflection. It could also facilitate program assessments and evaluations of institutional effectiveness by more clearly and concisely delineating key educational outcomes (see Skolits & Graybeal, 2007; Todd & Baker, 1998).

This investigation confirms the observation that vision and mission statements serve different, albeit highly complementary functions (Abelman, Dalessandro, et al., 2007). Mission statements are often revered as historical texts (see Banta et al., 1995; Bryson, 2004; Marom, 2003) and displayed as recruitment and marketing tools (see Kirp, 2003; Murphy, 1987; Welton & Cook, 1997). Vision statements are living documents (Abelman & Molina, 2006; Baum et al., 1998; Fox, 1997) that are intended to be employed. Community colleges were found to be significantly more vision-driven than public doctorate-granting, master’s-granting, and baccalaureate-granting institutions. They were also more likely to have vision statements than private schools, including those that have a religious, military, or tribal affiliation and that were reported to be highly vision driven (see Abelman, Dalessandro, et al., 2007). Community colleges are also more vision driven than for-profit institutions. In short, community colleges do a better job than other academic institutions in grounding educational outcomes and benefits in concrete actions that are to be taken by students. They form a set of aspirations for enhancing the quality of higher education and, notes Lewis (2005, p. 5), “describe the future.”

Current trends in higher education make these observations about institutional vision particularly poignant. It has been suggested that the nonprofit

academy has become increasingly embedded in the marketplace (Newman, Coururier, & Scurry, 2004; Potts, 2005), and concerns over the commercialization of traditional higher education and “the encroachment of bottom-line thinking into domains of inquiry” (Holberg & Taylor, 2005, p. 167) have been raised. More and more, institutional decision making is influenced by the growing presence of profit-making activities (Bok, 2003; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Farnsworth (2006) specifically itemized four lessons that community colleges can learn from the business model of for-profit institutions. This and other investigations suggest that the institutional vision statement is the best barometer of potential shifts in school priorities and perceptions of students. Expressions of institutional vision tend to have a long shelf life, serving as perpetual reminders of an institution’s unique identity and legacy (Abelman & Molina, 2006). However, they are occasionally revisited or revised to reflect an ever-changing world and the new challenges and opportunities facing higher education in general or individual institutions in particular. When compared to the research literature, this investigation suggests that, although grounded in highly pragmatic outcomes, community colleges have not compromised their mission of open access to a diverse population. Their mission and vision statements are the most *shared* of all public and private institutions. Future assessments, using DICTION or other software packages, are highly recommended.

Limitations

Morris (1994) and West (2001) pointed out a number of advantages of computerized content analysis. They include (a) perfect stability of the coding scheme, (b) explicit coding rules yielding comparable results, (c) perfect reliability (freeing the researcher to focus on issues of validity, interpretation and explanation), (d) easy manipulation of the text to create output such as frequency counts and key-word-in-context listings, and (e) the ability to easily uncover co-occurrences of important concepts. In addition, Bligh et al. (2004) and Neuendorf (2002) suggest that computerized content analysis facilitates the analysis and comparison of large volumes of data much more easily and less expensively than using human coders.

Despite its strengths, a number of limitations of computerized content analysis have been described as well (see Morris, 1994). These include

(a) a lack of natural language processing capabilities (including difficulties with ambiguous concepts and the loss of broader contextual cues), (b) an insensitivity to linguistic nuances such as negation and irony, (c) the inability of researchers to provide a completely exhaustive listing of key words, (d) the inability of software to resolve references back and forth to words elsewhere in the text, and (e) the danger of word crunching, or transforming rich meanings into meaningless numbers. In addition, the methodology presented here can produce a sterility of analysis (see Hart, 2000a, 2001; Winter & Stewart, 1977) and, as such, it is important to note that DICTION scores merely provide an objective measuring stick.

According to Alexa and Züll (1999), DICTION is specifically designed for elucidating the rhetorical characteristics and style of political discourse. To use DICTION, the user must accept the theoretical, categorization, and scoring assumptions it makes. Although DICTION has been promoted as an all-purpose program designed for use with any sort of English-language text, the norms that come with the program are based largely on political and mass media text materials.

Appendix A

Public Community Colleges in Study Sample

Arapahoe Community College	Kent State University–Salem Campus
Bishop State Community College	Metropolitan Community College
Blue Mountain Community College	Middlesex County College
City Colleges of Chicago–Malcolm X College	Mid-South Community College
Cloud County Community College	Mount Wachusett Community College
Collin County Community College District	New Hampshire Community Tech
Community College of Allegheny County	New Mexico State University–Carlsbad
Corning Community College	Normandale Community College
Cuesta College	Patrick Henry Community College
Des Moines Area Community College	Rockingham Community College
Diné College	Seminole Community College
Frederick Community College	Tri-County Technical College
Georgia Military College–Augusta	Tunxis Community College
Grand Rapids Community College	University of Wisconsin–Barron County
Highline Community College	Western Wyoming Community College

Appendix B

For-Profit Institutions in the Study Sample

Academy of Art University	DigiPen Institute of Technology
American InterContinental University (Houston)	Five Towns College
Argosy University (Chicago)	Illinois Institute of Art
Art Institute of California (San Francisco)	Institute of Production and Recording
Art Institute of Houston	International Academy of Design & Technology (Las Vegas)
Art Institute of Pittsburgh	ITT Technical Institute (Chantilly)
Berkeley College (Garret Mountain)	Laboratory Institute of Merchandising
Briarwood College	Miller-Motte Technical College (Wilmington)
Brown Mackie College (Cincinnati)	Northwestern Business College
Bryant & Stratton College (Rochester)	Strayer University (Charlotte)
Capella University	TESST College of Technology
Cardean University	University of Phoenix (Seattle)
Colorado Technical University (CO Springs)	Virginia College (Birmingham)
Denver Career College	Walden University
DeVry University (Chicago)	Western International University

Appendix C

General Sample Institutions

Private baccalaureate-granting institutions

Anderson College	Mount Ida College
Bethune-Cookman College	Mount Olive College
Corcoran College of Art & Design	Mount Union College
Dean College	North Carolina Wesleyan College
Elizabethtown College	Northland College
Emily Carr Institute of Art & Design	Peace College
Grand View College	Ringling School of Art and Design
Hartwick College	Robert Morris College
Hobart and William Smith Colleges	Saint Olaf College
Holy Cross College	Saint Paul's College
Huston-Tillotson University	Shorter College
Illinois Wesleyan University	Stonehill College
Lafayette College	University of Northwestern Ohio
Macalester College	Wartburg College
McPherson College	Wilberforce University

(continued)

Appendix C (continued)

Private master's-granting institutions

Bennington College	LeMoyné College
Clarke College	Marian College
Columbia College Chicago	North Central College
Converse College	Olivet College
Curry College	Quinnipiac University
Dominican University of California	Rider University
Drury University	Rosemont College
Edgewood College	Saint Joseph's College
Emmanuel College	Saint Lawrence University
Franklin University	Saint Thomas University
Gannon University	Southern California Inst. of Architecture
Indiana Wesleyan University	Thomas University
International College	Union University
John Brown University	Washington College
Laurentian University	Wingate University

Private doctorate-granting institutions

American University	New York University
Arcadia University	Northwestern University
Brandeis University	Nova Southeastern University
Brigham Young University	Regis University
Clarkson University	Rochester Institute of Technology
Drake University	Saint Mary's University of Minnesota
Drexel University	Smith College
Elon University	Springfield College
Johnson & Wales University	Tulane University
Liberty University	University of Denver
Long Island University—C.W. Post Campus	University of Miami
Loyola Marymount University	University of Notre Dame
Loyola University of Chicago	University of Regina
Marquette University	University of Rochester
Mount Saint Mary's College	Western New England College

Public baccalaureate-granting institutions

Brandon University	Oregon Institute of Technology—Portland
California State University, Channel Islands	Penn State University—Lehigh Valley
Chipola College	Pennsylvania College of Technology
Concord University	Purdue University—North Central
City University of New York—York College	Red River College
Dalton State College	Saint Mary's College of Maryland
Fairmont State University	State University of New York—Delhi
Kansas State University—Salina	United States Coast Guard Academy
King's College	University of Maine—Augusta
Lewis-Clark State College	University of Montana—Western
Macon State College	University of Pittsburg—Johnstown
Miami University—Hamilton Campus	University of South Carolina—Beaufort
Missouri Western State University	University of South Florida—Sarasota
Nipissing University	Utah Valley State College
West Virginia University—Parkersburg	

(continued)

Appendix C (continued)

Public master's-granting institutions

Arkansas Tech University Bowie State University Bridgewater State College California State University, Dominguez Hills The College of New Jersey City University of New York—Hunter College Evergreen State College Fort Hays State University Georgia College & State University Indiana University Northwest Minnesota State University—Moorhead Missouri State University Montana State University—Northern Montclair State University Ohio University—Lancaster	Saginaw Valley State University San Jose State University Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania Sonoma State University Southern Oregon University State University of New York—College at Purchase University of Alaska—Anchorage University of Arkansas—Monticello University of Maryland—University College University of North Carolina—Wilmington University of Tennessee—Chattanooga University of Wisconsin—Stout Weber State University—Davis West Texas A&M University Western Washington University
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Public doctorate-granting institutions

Alabama State University Bowling Green State University East Tennessee State University Eastern Michigan University Florida International University Grand Valley State University Kansas State University Mississippi State University Northern Arizona University—Phoenix Oklahoma State University—Tulsa Rutgers State University—New Brunswick Texas Southern University University of Arkansas—Little Rock University of California, Berkeley University of California, San Diego	University of Colorado—Colorado Spring University of Illinois—Chicago University of Illinois—Urbana-Champaign University of Iowa University of Massachusetts—Boston University of Massachusetts—Dartmouth University of Missouri—St Louis University of North Carolina—Chapel Hill University of Pittsburgh University of South Florida University of Vermont University of West Georgia University of Wisconsin—Madison Wichita State University Wilfrid Laurier University
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Appendix D

DICTION Constructs, Formulas, and Sample Words

Shared = (Centrality + Cooperation + Rapport) – (Diversity + Exclusion + Liberation)

Centrality (e.g., basic, innate, paradigm, standardized, expected)

Cooperation (e.g., unions, partner, sisterhood, mediate, teamwork)

Rapport (e.g., congenial, approve, tolerant, equivalent, consensus)

Diversity (e.g., contrasting, nonconformist, unique, individualistic, extremist)

Exclusion (e.g., displaced, outlaws, privacy, discriminate, loneliness)

Liberation (e.g., autonomous, radical, eccentric, liberty, freedom)

(continued)

Appendix D (continued)

Clarity = – (Complexity)

“A simple measure of the average number of characters-per-word and convoluted phrasings that make a text’s ideas abstract and its implications unclear” (Hart, 2000b, p. 47). Complexity borrows Flesch’s (1951) notion that convoluted phrasings make a text’s ideas abstract and its implications unclear. *Clarity*, then, is the opposite.

Compelling = (Praise + Satisfaction + Inspiration) – (Blame + Hardship + Denial)

Praise (e.g., dear, delightful, mighty, successful, conscientious)

Inspiration (e.g., faith, honesty, self-sacrifice, courage, wisdom)

Satisfaction (e.g., cheerful, happiness, pride, excited, courage)

Blame (e.g., repugnant, blood-thirsty, weary, nervous, offensive)

Hardship (e.g., killers, bankruptcy, enemies, injustice, error)

Denial (e.g., aren’t, shouldn’t, not, nobody, nothing)

Complexity = (Tenacity + Leveling + Collectives + Insistence) – (Numerical Terms + Ambivalence + Self-Reference + Variety)

Tenacity (e.g., is, am, will, shall, he’ll)

Leveling (e.g., everybody, everyone, always, inevitably, absolute)

Collectives (e.g., crowd, team, humanity, country, world)

Insistence (all words occurring three or more times that function as nouns or noun-derived adjectives are identified and then calculated)

Numerical terms (e.g., one, tenfold, multiply, percentage, tally)

Ambivalence (e.g., allegedly, perhaps, almost, vague, hesitate)

Self-reference (e.g., I, I’d, mine, myself, my)

Variety (ratio that divides the number of different words by the total words)

Relative Advantage = (Aggression + Accomplishment + Communication + Motion) – (Cognitive Terms + Passivity + Embellishment)

Aggression (e.g., explode, conquest, violation, challenging)

Accomplishment (e.g., finish, proceed, leader, manage)

Communication (e.g., listen, read, speak, translate, chat)

Motion (e.g., lurch, circulate, momentum, wandering)

Cognitive terms (e.g., learn, consider, psychology, re-examine, estimate)

Passivity (e.g., tame, submit, yielding, silence, inhibit)

Embellishment (ratio of adjectives to verbs)

(continued)

Appendix D (continued)

Observability = (Familiarity + Spatial Awareness + Temporal Awareness + Present Concern + Human Interest + Concreteness) – (Past Concern + Complexity)

Familiarity (e.g., this, that, across, over, through)

Spatial awareness (e.g., abroad, locale, Poland, fatherland, disoriented)

Temporal awareness (e.g., century, instant, nowadays, spontaneously)

Present concern (e.g., touch, govern, make, meet)

Human interest (e.g., he, ourselves, them, cousin, friend)

Concreteness (e.g., mass, compact, outcome, objective)

Past concern (the past tense forms of the verbs contained in the present concern dictionary)

Complexity (the average number of characters per word)

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