One College Model

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One College Model—A Literature Review

Community colleges are crucial in providing accessible education and workforce development opportunities to diverse student populations. The "One College Model" represents a shift in organizational structure and philosophy, aiming to integrate various departments and programs within community colleges to enhance student success and institutional effectiveness. Key themes emerged from a review of existing literature, which is outlined in this review.

Throughout higher education, the idea of one college model has generated many definitions and perspectives with numerous inconsistencies. In our research, several critical components to implementation appeared throughout the literature: establishing a shared vision and mission, integrating governance structures, facilitating interdisciplinary collaboration, a renewed focus on student support services, and enacting data-informed decision-making processes (Achieving the Dream, 2020; Bladen Community College, 2022; Cintrón, 2021; Fouts & Mallory, 2010; Methvin, 2023). These components will likely seem familiar to anyone with experience working in organizations. These steps (determining common visions, missions, and definitions) are typically part of the early stages of effective change management (Kotter, 2012). While various definitions arose through our literature review and stakeholder interviews, all definitions ultimately point back to the student experience and their success. For this literature review, the one college model is defined as the "strategic alignment of college resources and activities in collaboration with internal and external partners to enhance student success" (Kelley, 2023).

A simplified readiness assessment tool kit was built for college administrators to use as a springboard to begin discussions of the one college model based on our literature review. The toolkit framework is the Bolman and Deal (2017) Four-Frame model: Structural (strategy, how-to), Human Resource (people and their needs), Political (stakeholder agendas, resource allocation), and Symbolic (sense of purpose and significance). The four frames provide a substantial blueprint to begin the brainstorming and decision-making processes needed to evaluate the effectiveness of the transformative one college model.

Structural Frame

Throughout the review, how different community college systems have restructured their various business functions and student experiences was a primary topic. Most system-level discussions focus on local versus state or system control and those changes' cost/benefit relationship (Cintron, 2021; Sesanker, 2022; Mulvey, 2019). Individual colleges highlighted in the literature (Bladen, 2022; Ciancio, 2022; HACC/CPCC Press Release, 2020; Hahn, 2020; Sherrill, 2021; Spriggs, 2020) note the necessary adjustments to their credit and non-credit academics, business, and fiscal services, as well as student services such as admissions, advising, and career services. Bladen Community College defined the one college model as an "organizational structure that combines curriculum and continuing education programs and supports into an integrated system of operation" (BCC, 2022, p. 5). Dr. Janet Spriggs, President of Forsyth Technical Community College, encouraged her fac-

-ulty and staff to "imagine without boundaries" with a vision of the college's future success rooted in the alignment of credit and noncredit programs (Spriggs, 2020). Conversely, the current literature does not provide many suggestions for the best reorganization practices.

Human Resource Frame

Similar in scope to the Structural framework above, the Human Resources framework provides the basis for how the employees, students, and communities play into shifts in organizational practices. In the literature, significant emphasis is placed on changing the expectation that outsiders to higher education understand the language and structure of colleges. In a brief discussion with Dr. Jeff Cox, President of the North Carolina Community College System, highlighted that under a one college model, a "student wouldn't be asked if she were Curriculum or ConEd–like she knows the difference" (Cox, 2023). Dr. Kandi Dedimeyer, President at Central Piedmont Community College, was quoted as saying that at her institution, the same staff will serve students "whether they are seeking a GED, workforce credential, associate degree, or transfer degree" (Hahn, 2020).

Changes in delivery methods, expectations, goals, and structure maintain a significant impact on the faculty and staff responsible for learning new processes. Although organizational charts can easily be adjusted, facilitating change must include the human element. Often, organizational culture, or "silos" as they're often referred to as, may override the best attempts at change. In Leading Change, Kotter emphasizes that leaders should "anchor change" because "change sticks only when it becomes 'the way we do things around here'...until new behaviors are rooted in social norms and shared values, they are always subject to degradation as soon as the pressures associated with a change effort are removed" (Kotter, 2012).

Political Frame

According to Methvin (2023), enacting best practices in student success can be stifled by leadership changes, financial challenges, or the failure to connect across divisions. Boleman and Deal (2017) even describe a "jaundiced view of politics constitutes a serious threat to individual and organizational effectiveness" but that "politics is the realistic process of making decisions and allocating resources in a context of scarcity and divergent interests." Within the one college model, understanding the political landscape of a college as well as the players involved, may be the core step needed to begin conversations about adopting such a model. Various people, departments, groups, and viewpoints have agendas specific to their goals. While some of the goals and agendas are clearly explained, other situations and hidden agendas are likely not well known. Input from various stakeholders is central to the ultimate success of any significant change initiative (Kotter, 2012). In the case of colleges, efforts to unite disparate academic and service areas may prove challenging but necessary (Cinton, 2021).

While individual employees can create difficulty in implementing changes in the human resources frame, the political frame is tied to overall departmental, division, and leadership goals. A primary difference centers around how to orient faculty and staff to change. A person looking at the transition to a one college model from the human resources frame they are primarily concerned with helping someone understand the changes that have been decided. A leader using the political frame is more concerned about the decision-making process and alignment of each group's vision and values. "Constructive politicians know how to fashion an agenda, map the political terrain, create a network of support, and negotiate with both allies and adversaries" (Boleman and Deal, 2017).

Symbolic Frame

Boleman and Deal highlight the symbolic framework as being tied to organizational storytelling (2017), and this is often seen in discussions surrounding student success, whereby the impact of a person, program, or college made in a student's life is broadly shared. In the case of the One College model, the symbolic framework is the holding up of the lofty goals of education: a better life, a better job, and creating better citizens and doing so without barriers. Noted by Central Piedmont Community College's president, Dr. Kandi Deitemeyer, students "should be able to come in one door, get exactly what they need, and proceed without having to understand the complexities and bureaucracy behind the scenes in higher education" (Hahn, 2020).

Disparate student experiences have led colleges to examine the different and often inequitable levels of

services. At Bladen Community College, this led to the creation of a centralized advising model with the development of a one-stop area for student services (BCC, 2022). The student experience highlights the story that a college is sharing, and when the story does not match the experience, neither group is fulfilled.

As each college has its own culture, strengths, concerns, and resources, administrators should be prepared for tough conversations such as the definition of continuing education, organizational structures, and other complex (or taboo) topics. The broader mission of student success informs a shared vision for defining the one college model and colleges change by "integrating evidence-based practices that create inclusive and coherent learning environments and by leveraging a student-centered mission, catalytic leadership, strategic data use, and strategic finance in a robust continuous improvement process" (Methvin, 2023, p. 2).

Recent literature emphasizes the need for comprehensive reform in community colleges by exploring various models, including the one college model, that can enhance student success (Bailey & Jaggers, 2017). One college models are being used as an organizational framework to improve consistency in the student experience, therefore, it is vital to understand which aspects of the institution are essential to be consistent and which can be flexible to meet local needs at each campus (Baar, 2020). Across the nation, leaders at multi-campus community colleges are working toward creating a consistent one college model student experience while balancing autonomy (Baar, 2020).

Many multi-campus community colleges in the United States have adopted a one college model to improve the consistency of the student experience. Dr. DeRionne Pollard (2012), President of Montgomery College in Maryland, explained, "Becoming one does not mean becoming identical." Instead, a one college model has been described as having standard processes, dependable access to services and information, and a uniform curriculum (HACC, 2020; Pollard, 2012). St. Louis Community College in Missouri is another example of a college that operates under the one college model. Four campuses acted as branches of the same tree rather than separate trees.

Multi-State System-Wide Adaptation

In certain regions beyond North Carolina, educational institutions are adopting a "one college" approach to amalgamate their resources. Instead of each campus having its own distinct admissions procedures, there is now a centralized process in place. Instead of each campus having unique admissions protocols, there was one centralized process (Addo, 2016). Dallas County Community College District provides another college that has restructured to a one college model in which the seven separately accredited campuses are unifying under a single accreditation to improve the student experience (DCCCD, 2020). The multi-campus organizational model promotes consistency in the student experience through standard processes, dependable access to services and information, and a uniform curriculum (HACC, 2020; Pollard, 2012). In Connecticut, a new system is merging twelve community colleges throughout the state (2016). Together, the colleges will enroll more than 32,000 students (2016). John Maduko, President of Connecticut State Community College, announced the merger is expected to be completed by the summer of 2023, establishing a "new normal" focusing on student affairs and wraparound services (2016). The Connecticut system emphasizes authenticity with student success in academic and career programming (2016). Anticipated one college model outcomes include improved student retention, increased graduation rates, and enhanced transfer pathways.

Faculty and staff engagement looks different under the structure of a one college model. Achieving the Dream (ATD) highlights recent work in two key teaching and learning initiatives— Engaging Adjunct Faculty in the Student Success Movement and the Open Educational Resources (OER) Degree initiative—yielded deep learning for colleges (2020). Considerable insight into how educators and college leaders collaborated to create new opportunities for professional learning, how educators leveraged evidence-based practices to support student learning and success inside and outside of the classroom, and how institutions reinforced the centrality of teaching and learning to their student success mission through their policies and practices (ATD, 2020, p. 3). This involved changing pedagogy on a scale that required broad effort. Faculty adapted, tested, and refined new approaches to fit campus contexts (ATD, 2020). Faculty work must be understood as part of the larger educational ecosystem. Going

deeper to spur systemic change creates the conditions needed for individual and collective practice transformation (ATD, 2020, p. 10).

In North Carolina, President Kandi Deitemeyer of Central Piedmont Community College stated, "The goal for the one college model is for a prospective student to come into the college, tell us what they are hoping to accomplish in life, and our staff can then guide them (Hahn, 2020). Students should be able to come in one door, get exactly what they need, and proceed without understanding the complexities and bureaucracy behind the scenes in higher education" (Hahn, 2020). CPCC's one college model goal is "that prospective students will walk through the front door of the college and will be served by the same staff through a similar process whether they are seeking a GED, workforce credential, associate degree, or transfer degree" (Hahn, 2020).

Notably, strong community partnerships address equity gaps and support underrepresented student populations. For instance, Bladen Community College (BCC) implemented a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) to benefit students. The deepening connection between the curriculum and continuing education divisions is the starting point for many institutions. Disparate student experiences have led colleges to examine the different and often inequitable levels of services. At BCC, this led to the creation of a centralized advising model with the development of a one-stop area for student services (BCC, 2022). This adaptable holistic advising is underpinned by partnerships that positively impact student pathways and align with the one college model. Community partnerships are the building blocks of BCC's one college model (2022).

System-wide efforts to combine credit, non-credit, and high school equivalency programs under one system-wide structure are needed (Cintrón, 2021). Colleges "transform by integrating evidence-based practices that create inclusive and coherent learning environments and by leveraging a student-centered mission, catalytic leadership, strategic data use, and strategic finance in a robust continuous improvement process" (Methvin, 2023, p. 2). An aim to expand student options and allow various departments to align gives students an understanding of the career and educational options in front of them (Cintrón, 2021). It will enable the colleges within the system to better align their offerings with industry demand (Cintrón, 2021). One of the significant benefits of implementing a one college model is that all community colleges share a standard definition of credentials and a more straightforward process for getting new programs approved at a system college if another system college has already implemented the program. Part of this design merges the various data systems into one, allowing for greater automation and more transparent communication (Cintrón, 2021).

Transforming community colleges to improve student success means redefining institutional transformation as "the realignment of an institution's structures, culture, and business model to create a student experience that results in dramatic and equitable increases in outcomes and educational value" (Methvin, 2023, p. 2). ATD (2020) released an Equity Toolkit to begin this transformation process. ATD declared that decision-making should be systematic (2020). The Equity Review Tool is a three-page guide to help institutions hold discussions, engage stakeholders, and use equitable, planning, and reflective practices (ATD, 2020). ATD defined key terms as equity, historically underserved students, student success, and opportunity gap (2020). Guiding questions are provided for exploration, data collection, and final decision-making. Ultimately, ATD (2020) aimed to help community colleges help their students achieve their goals and address biases by infusing equity. In the end, additional tools are needed to assess readiness for a one college model.

Challenges

While numerous institutions report the benefits of the one college model, several challenges exist in its implementation. Hurdles include resource constraints, resistance to change, lack of effective communication, bureaucratic obstacles, attaining faculty buy-in, and leadership voids. Much of the criticism of the one college model structure centers around large-scale, system-wide consolidation, as is taking place in Connecticut's Community College System (Sesanker, 2022). Decisions on mass consolidation may be predicated on major resource constraints (Sesanker, 2022). Conversely, this paper focuses on the singular adoption of one college model by individual institutions.

According to a recent survey by Modern Campus (2023), results indicated that continued support and development of Continuing Education remains a

priority for 71% of college administrators. Revenue was cited as the primary factor at 90% of institutions surveyed (Modern Campus, 2023). However, 60% found that Continuing Education is not well integrated into college offerings (Modern Campus, 2023). Over half felt that Continuing Education was not sufficiently staffed to meet institutional goals (Modern Campus, 2023).

Any large-scale change is often only possible to enact with some adversity (Kotter, 2012). The blending of departments which may occur during a one college model implementation, requires changes (Cintrón, 2021). While some support the model, others quickly oppose it because complex changes are often necessary (Ciancio, 2022). For Front Range Community College, disunity was at the forefront, as evidenced by communication and procedural differences across the various campuses (Ciancio, 2022). In the Louisiana Community and Technical College System, cross-departmental presents the biggest challenge to the one college model (Cintrón, 2021). Before implementing the one college model, departments had not worked closely together (Cintrón, 2021). In broader research on student success, Methvin (2023) lists failure to connect across divisions as a barrier to student success. Bureaucratic issues include the delicate balance of prioritizing both autonomy and local needs across multi-site campuses while implementing one college model (Baar, 2020). Colleges must work to recognize unique campuses and programs during a one college model reorganization (Baar, 2020).

As outlined in Achieving the Dream's Teaching & Learning Toolkit (2020), "faculty work must be understood as part of the larger educational ecosystem" (p. 10). In a recent webinar hosted by Ahluwalia (2023), all panelists acknowledged faculty buy-in is considered a challenge. Potential job loss remains a tangible possibility during the one college model transition, as demonstrated at Central Pennsylvania Community College (HACC/CPCC Press Release, 2020). Positions may be eliminated under the one college model as they were at CPCC (HACC/CPCC Press Release, 2020). While it may not alleviate issues with buy-in, CPCC encouraged faculty and staff to reapply for newly created positions, as stated in the (HACC/CPCC Press Release, 2020).

Future research should measure the long-term impact of the model. As the model is in its infancy, no current research addresses its impact. The efficiency of the one college model should be measured in terms of ROI pre and post-implementation at campuses of varying sizes and locations. The effectiveness of the one college model must be gauged across various institutional contexts. Technology must be noticed, not overlooked, in future studies. Ahluwalia (2023) notes that technology applied to traditional curricula may not apply to the Continuing Education sector.

Introduction to One College Toolkit & Acknowledgements

This literature review would not have been possible without a graduate group internship project through NC State's Community College Leadership program. What started off as an internship developed into a larger project and conversation with the NC Community College System Office to create a tool to benefit all the great 58 community colleges. Specifically, we would like to thank JW Kelley for his guidance and mentorship during the course of the project. Our original project team was made up of nine doctoral students. The main project deliverable includes the one college toolkit accessible here. College leadership wishing to implement a one college model can begin by defining the term, considering resources, garnering support, assessing readiness, and launching the model. Although the toolkit contains a series of steps to consider when introducing a one college model, it can be tailored to fit unique campus needs. In conjunction with the toolkit, we hope this literature review equips campus leadership for the successful long-term implementation of the one college model.

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Authors' Note