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**EXPLORING THE CULTURAL IDENTITY OF  
COMMUNITY COLLEGES IN APPALACHIA**

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This is an examination of the cultural identity issues that affect community colleges in rural Appalachia. Appalachia has a distinctive cultural identity that is comprised of ideas and attitudes that isolate the people in the region from the rest of America. This identity must be understood, so that community colleges can be effective agents of educational and economic change in the region. Community colleges must know how Appalachians think about themselves, how those ideas relate to their own identity in the region, and how to shape their identity to be effective agents of change for their constituents. By adopting a “town-based” identity, community colleges can support and challenge the beliefs of their constituents, and help them improve their condition.

This report has six sections. The first introduces the topic of Appalachian needs and conditions, the second focuses on the cultural identity of this unique rural region, and the third concerns the identity of the community college. The identities of the region and institution are related to different approaches to community change in the fourth section, and the fifth part of the paper involves ideas that fit a “town-based” identity for community colleges that can support and challenge entrenched Appalachian beliefs about

affiliation, achievement, and prudent decision-making. The final section of the paper describes some measures that community colleges should take to implement these ideas as town-based institutions that improve conditions in Appalachia.

### The Need to Improve Higher Education in Appalachia

Appalachia is a geographic region covering 200,000 square miles. It includes all of West Virginia and parts of Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia (OACHE, 2006). A fourth of the counties in this region suffer 150% of the national unemployment rate, and per capita earnings that are two-thirds or less than the national average. These counties have been in this condition for more than forty years (Wood & Bischak, 2000).

The Central region of Appalachia (Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia) contains most of its economically distressed counties, and it is one of the poorest and least educated areas in the country. About 10% of its women and men are college graduates. Fewer residents work full time, and full-time employees earn far less than their counterparts in the northern and southern regions of Appalachia. They even get less from welfare, because their states have smaller budgets than states that have urban communities (OACHE, 2006).

Appalachia offers one of the oldest and densest rural cultures in America. The landscape makes it so. Most of the territory of rural America is in open sky states, but mountains form the mentality of the “other” rural America; the culture is closed in and undiluted like a can of concentrated juice. An Appalachian praises a person who is “mountain,” because the adjective acknowledges one’s home-grown “qualities such as self-respect, humility, self-reliance and independence *vis-à-vis* the outside. Mountain traits are valued all the more because they are seen as being at odds with the insiders’ stereotypes of urban and suburban life in other parts of the United States” (Gottlieb, 2001, p. 266). A person who wants to move up and out of the region has “lost the mountain.” He or she can never be trusted, because a mountain person is dedicated to protecting the environment and culture of the region (Staley, 1998, cited in Gottlieb, 2001).

This “other” rural America was the *Other America* (Harrington, 1964) that spurred the social reform programs of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. It still is. Appalachia retains its otherness because it has not shared in the overall success, affluence, progress, and modernization of the rest of the nation (Eller, 1993).

Education is supposed to be the remedy for poverty. Wood and Bischak (2000) correlated educational attainment rates with the ability of Appalachian counties to move out of their time-worn, economic distress. Manufacturing, mining, and natural resources jobs have given way to human capital ones, such as health services and retail. Since employment in the health sector requires higher levels of training and education, the link between educational attainment and success on the job market is reinforced (Crowther, Lykins, &

Spohn, 1992). John Haaga's (2004) research report, *Educational Attainment in Appalachia*, describes the implications of education regarding socioeconomic change. Haaga asserts that persistence and success in academics lead to an increase in specific skills, general knowledge, ability to acquire new skills, and other characteristics valued by employers (2004).

The facts are in place, but Appalachians are suspicious of institutions that are "learning [young people] to leave" (Howley, 2006) They distrusted compulsory public education until the early twentieth century, because schools socialized youth to urban ideas. Families and churches were supposed to do that (Garasky, 2002). Higher education might be the same ploy, modern America's way to give their youth "non-Appalachian identities" so that they can "escape particular places and ascribed statuses en route to ever changing occupational careers wherever their geographic origin" (DeYoung, 1995, p. 294).

### The Cultural Identity of Appalachia

"Cultural identity" is another name for "ideology," a set of beliefs and assumptions that represents the essential nature of the group and directs its activities (Mannheim, 1954). In this case, the groups are residents of Appalachia and representatives of community college education. Hegel wrote about a dialectic between old (thesis) and new (antithesis) ideologies that leads to a new synthesis of ideas (Mannheim, 1954). Appalachia represents some of the oldest beliefs in America; the community college represents modern assumptions about public higher education, and the region needs a synthesis of old and new that improves the lives of its people and institutions.

"Culture" is used more often than "ideology" in contemporary books about higher education (e.g., Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Birnbaum, 1988), but the meaning is the same. Birnbaum (1988) called culture the social glue that holds people together, and shapes their behaviors and expectations. The cultural identity of rural Americans is revealed through what they do. To illustrate, it influences the ways they overcome problems of distance; the methods they use "to till the land, raise cattle, build their houses and produce artifacts;" the place-conscious signs and symbols, "landscapes and monuments they associate with their egos;" and the "marks they imprint on landscapes," their buildings and other physical evidence of their beliefs (Claval, 2007, p. 156). It is important to note that these signs of ideology represent "what is not innate in human beings [but what] has been passed down from older people or acquired through personal experience" (Claval, 2007, p. 157). Ideas change when experiences change.

Scotch-Irish immigrants settled Appalachia during the 1700's (Caudill, 1962), and the region's cultural identity is based on their ideas. The pioneer history of their region makes Appalachians proud, but the parody of their history mocks them: "Movies, television, comic strips, and postcards (that) feature the lanky, gun toting, grizzle bearded man with a jug of moonshine in one hand and a coon dog at his feet, the archetypal

patriarch of the mountains” (Algeo, 2003, p. 30). In reality, the region includes both “coal and culture;” it is part dingy and part elegant, as a recent book title attests. *Coal and Culture* (Condee, 2005) is the story of opera houses that dotted the region between the 1870’s and the 1920’s. Most of them are gone, but Appalachia remains a vital source of American music, language, and crafts (Sullins, et al., 1987).

Appalachia shares home, place, and community values with other rural regions in the nation, but the age, density, and implications of these values come from the mountains instead of the open sky. Gottlieb (2001) calls home, place, and community “the cultural repertoire basis of West Virginian models of reality” (p. 346 ), and Jones (1994) expanded this troika of governing beliefs into a set of 10 Appalachian values: Religion; independence, self-reliance and pride; neighborliness; family; personalism; humility and modesty; love of place; patriotism; sense of beauty, and sense of humor. “Everything in Appalachia (is) based on these mountain values: Whatever work is done must be done with the recognition that Appalachian culture is real and functioning” (p. 9-10).

Appalachian values represent the cultural identity of a pre-modern folk community (Tonnie/Loomis, 1957, Redfield, 1965). Natural law predominates. Parents rule children; elders govern the tribe, and poverty is part of God’s plan. Some residents might believe that reading the book of Job is more beneficial than trying to change the region. Jones (1994) wrote that a fatalistic religious attitude makes many Appalachians accept their lot in life: “What will be will be,” so why try to change things?

The Appalachian community is an extended family, and one person’s behavior impacts everyone else. The community can be proud, but individuals must not be uppity. “Don’t get above your raising” is a vernacular command to be modest and not put on airs (Jones, 2006). An uppity person raises herself above, and therefore outside, the other members of the family. Communal relationships are personal, equal, and accepted, even when they are eccentric.

“Don’t get above your raising” contains a warning about social advancement as well as individual change. Independent, hasty, and externally-driven changes jeopardize the fundamental identity of the community. The Appalachian community is a molecule instead of an aggregation of atoms; each resident is connected to the others in space and time. Outside ideas should not control its physics.

### The Cultural Identity of the Community College

Higher education has several cultural identities. To illustrate, the historical “ivory tower” of higher education is small, steadfast to tradition, and set apart from the rest of society. But while a few private, and often religiously-affiliated colleges still uphold this set of beliefs, most public institutions of higher education embrace an identity that is alien to the ivory tower. They try to be adaptive instead of autonomous, quick-to-change instead of traditional, diverse instead of homogeneous, material instead of moral, and

cosmopolitan instead of rural. Like comprehensive public schools, these comprehensive colleges and universities are components of modern society instead of enterprises unto themselves.

Both of these identities have influenced the community college (Young, 1977). It started out as a “junior” version of the ivory tower, and the junior college offered freshman and sophomore courses that filtered students into or away from four-year institutions. Arthur Cohen (1969) wrote that this role gave the community college a “iversity” complex, that was revealed in inappropriate faculty roles, teaching methods, academic departments, and even “college gothic” architecture. Despite its attempts to emulate its Alma Mater, “junior” could never attain equality with the baccalaureate institution. Its students, faculty, and curricula would always be ranked as the “second best” in higher education (Zwerling, 1976).

Some private junior colleges maintain this identity, but public community colleges are committed to the identity of the rest of public education. Many urban and suburban colleges were established and funded through school districts until the 1970’s, so their identity was rooted in public secondary education (Young, 1977) as well as higher education. The identity was affirmed by the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944 and the Truman Commission of 1947. In 1950, Jesse Parker Bogue wrote the first book entitled, *The Community College*, and the public identity of community colleges strengthened in the 1960’s and early 1970’s. The number of community colleges doubled at the same time that “Great Society” federal programs promised abundance for everyone; “third world” student activists (Keniston, 1968) demanded access to that abundance, and baby-boom enrollments made the ivory tower succumb to the multiversity. Four year colleges and universities gave up their cloistered identity, in order to be “more like the totality of civilization as it has evolved and more an integral part of it” (Kerr, 1964, p. 41).

The community college followed suit. Levinson (2005) wrote that the “concept of the multiversity was a prophetic statement about the comprehensive community college at the turn of the twenty-first century. Community colleges provide access to a population formerly excluded from higher education. Certainly, when one examines the historical origins of higher education in the United States and looks at the way access to college is tightly regulated in most advanced industrial societies, the U.S. community college stands out as a cauldron of opportunity to students for whom education historically has been out of reach” (p. 6).

Junior colleges started in major cities in the early 1900’s, but the public ones were called community colleges when they came to mid-sized cities during the early 1960’s, towns and suburbs in the late 1960’s, and rural areas at the start of the next decade. These colleges were socially-enmeshed educational institutions by the time they reached the hills of Appalachia, but despite their pejorative moniker as “high schools with ash trays,”

these institutions added a dash of status to the region. “Democracy’s *colleges*” were part of the rural scene.

*The rural community college*

Community college educators are familiar with rural communities. Forty-five to 69% of their colleges are rural, as are a third of all the community college students in the nation (Katsinas & Hardy, 2004, Katsinas, 2003). About a quarter of these colleges are located in economically distressed communities (Higuera, 1997), and their plight was highlighted in recent editions of the *Community College Journal of Research and Practice* (September 2006) and *New Directions in Community Colleges* (Spring 2007). Both publications acknowledged the:

‘low population density, low total populations, low per-capita income, low levels of educational attainment, slow job growth, high poverty, high unemployment, and high rates of illiteracy’ (Gillet-Karam, 1995, p. 43) that make rural America: a “threadbare fabric ... stitched together with: ... fewer people, low or declining populations, relatively low average incomes (linked primarily with agricultural and extractive industry sector jobs), a shortage of alternative jobs, little or no public transportation, stores closing on Main Street, and poorer provisions of services and facilities” (Richardson, 2000, p. 1).

The publications showed, as well, the intentions of community college educators to improve their communities. To illustrate, the national Rural Community College Initiative brought together “colleges in some of America’s most severely distressed rural areas.” The initiative supports “programs that increase access to higher education for traditionally underserved and disadvantaged populations and that foster economic development in rural areas” (Garza & Eller, 1998, p. 31, 32).

To do this, the Rural Community College Initiative advocates the fulfillment of the socially enmeshed identity of community colleges to overcome the “alien” and “forbidding” identity and ideas of higher education (Garza & Eller, 1998). This could not be done through:

“passive accessibility ... but [by] engaging in active, aggressive outreach, counseling, support, and job placement; building partnerships with secondary schools; recruiting high school drop-outs, welfare mothers, and other disadvantaged adults and youth for college programs and establishing programs that enable them to succeed; ensuring that adult literacy programs are accessible, of high quality, and helpful in preparing adults for the workplace; acting as a one-stop center that provides or refers students to all the educational, employment, and training services that an unemployed adult or youth may need; building partnerships with universities to ensure that community college students can transfer successfully; and offering distance learning opportunities” (p. 31).

Something must be offered to everyone. Rural college presidents support this notion, too. They call their colleges “the crown jewels of their communities. They reflect and showcase the values of the local populace and offer hope for an improved quality of life” (Leist, 2007, p. 315). These crown jewels are often the only “game in town,” and they offer “all things to all people” in proportion to their remoteness (Cavan, 1995).

### Relating the Colleges to Regional Change

Successful rural community colleges rely on more than the offering of omnibus courses, activities, and cultural programs. They rely on their ability to relate their ambitions, people, and programs to their surroundings, or in other words, on their ability to be culturally relevant colleges. From the outset, they need to understand their own beliefs or cultural identity, the cultural identity of their constituents, and how these identities are connected to different models of community change. Then the colleges can begin the team building, risk taking, and confrontation of the entrenched ideas of their constituents (Eller, Martinez, Pace, Pavel, & Barnett, 1999) that can lead to successful change.

### *Models of community change*

The five models of community change are social planning, community organization, community action, community development, and social extension. The roles of official agencies vary in each of them (Thomas, 1993). Most of the federally funded programs of the 1960’s were based on social planning and community organization models. Social planning requires a formal assessment of community needs and the systematic planning of strategies to meet them. Community organization relies on official agencies, including state and national ones. Both of these approaches come from the top down, while community action comes from the bottom up. Community action pits the residents of underserved regions against the aristocratic agencies that have abused them. Community development is another neighborhood approach to problem-solving and self-representation, but it approaches change through negotiation instead of confrontation. The fifth form of community change, social extension, builds community change like any large scale grocer starts a new store. Large social agencies build branches in the local area, and augment their standard services with local selections that are marketed for local consumption.

The cultural identity of community colleges affects their ability to adopt most of these approaches to regional change in Appalachia. Two approaches, social planning and community organization, are managed by large political enterprises. Federal, state, and other outside political agencies are distrusted in Appalachia, so community colleges that adopt these approaches will affirm their cosmopolitan cultural identity and alienate many of their constituents. Despite the strength of their Appalachian identity, people are few and far between in the mountains, so community colleges that were connected hip and bone to their region’s identity could not amass enough constituents to make the community action approach successful. Community colleges can influence regional

change as “social extension” agencies that are formally connected to society outside Appalachia but center their services and staff on the rural community. In addition, these colleges can be part of community development efforts, so long as they downplay their status in the change process and right-size their relationships with the region.

*Down-playing status:* Rural community colleges need to show that their cultural identity is intimately connected with the identity of the community they allege to serve or represent to others. Community residents—including most rural community college faculty—have outlasted all the administrators who came to town like Harold Hill in *The Music Man*, promised them seventy-six trombones, and could not deliver any. These residents regard the decades-old closing of a mine or mill as today’s news, so they are not likely to trust the improvement of their communities to come-and- go outsiders, even when the outsiders bring fancy promises, lots of programs, and new facilities to the area.

Community organization approaches failed in Appalachia because they were too formal and too foreign. Community residents could not relate to them. As Heffron (2000) noted: “Community and organization, we are learning, are not always the same thing, and may not even be compatible with one another as social aggregates. ... Although public policies require organizational cooperation, their real strength lies in their appeal to the individual and, in fact, to as many individuals as possible” (p. 492). Garza and Eller (1998) added that rural community colleges assist effective community development when they are an “integral part of the whole community and do not necessarily rely on community organizations and agencies, because organizations and agencies serving distressed rural communities often have little historical experience of working together and creating sustainable partnerships” (p. 39).

*Right-sizing relationships:* The rural community college has to right-size its relationship with the community. It must talk about change in down-to-earth language that down-to-earth community people can embrace. It cannot succeed if the college acts like a mainstream savior of the downtrodden in Appalachia or any other rural region. Any developmental psychologist would call that over-challenge, and its only outcome is fight or flight. Over-support does not work either. The rural community college cannot cut or dismiss its connections to external agencies if it wants to make things better for its constituents. Rural communities are isolated enough, and too many residents are resigned to being meek and the poor until they finally inherit the earth.

Developmental psychologists tout a balance between challenge and support. Growth does not occur when an individual is over-challenged or over-supported. Developmental interventions take place somewhere in the middle of those extremes. Some call it a plus-one position (e.g., Kohlberg, 1972). Community colleges might adopt a similar approach. For example, Valadez (2000) conducted a study of African American women at a rural community college, and concluded that “The challenge of educational institutions is to contest the understandings that have reinforced social and cultural barriers and, at the same time, take advantage of those resources and understandings that would propel these

women toward action that would lead to constructing a path out of poverty” (p. 231). If rural community colleges just embrace the cultural identity of their constituents, they might be loved but they will not be admired. Nothing will get better. If they sponsor cosmopolitan ideals, they will alienate themselves from those they wish to help. Nothing will get better. So where are the ideas in the middle that balance challenge and support, and promote positive community change? They are not expressed in many books about higher education, so different sources must be consulted.

### Town-sizing the Identity of the Community College

Higher education has two primary cultural identities, one as a distinct community—the ivory tower of classical thinking—and the other is embedded in the chaos and complexities of modern society—the comprehensive “multiversity.” Clark Kerr (1965) coined the term, multiversity, more than forty years ago, and he referred to this type of institution as a “city” that had supplanted the rural “villages” of liberal arts colleges. He argued on behalf of the city as fervently as others have argued for the village (e.g., Hutchins, 1936).

Sociologists have contrasted city and village viewpoints for many years (e.g., Tonnies/Loomis, 1957), and Appalachians affirm the differences when they distrust the motives of any outsiders, especially those who come from urban America. What about the community college? It can try to down-size and right-size its relationship with its constituents, but can it find an identity that lessens the inherent challenge of its “city” one? Such an identity would have to fall between the extremes that over-challenge or over-support Appalachian traditions. It would have to be “town-based.”

While sociologists have written about towns and suburbs as much as villages and cities, they have not described a distinct “Middletown” (Lynd & Lynd, 1982) set of ideas that Appalachian community colleges could use to right-size its identity and operations. Only one economist, Dierdre McCloskey, seems to have provided a framework for this town-based identity for community colleges. Like many other authors, she has contrasted the values and ideas of rural and urban social groups, but unlike her counterparts, McCloskey believes that these ideas are partners instead of polarities, and that a different set of ideas exists that contains the best of both.

McCloskey (1994, 2007) has detailed the economic and social beliefs of the American middle-class. Middle-class Americans are neither poor nor rich, pure blue-collar nor white collar. They are America’s bourgeoisie whose homes and thoughts can be found in towns and suburbs instead of farms or big cities. McCloskey has focused on “bourgeois virtues” in her books and articles, but they will be considered “town-based virtues” for the purposes of this report.

*The bourgeois slant*

McCloskey (1994, 2007) recognized that the term, bourgeois, has been attached to the notion that greed-is-good for 150 years instead of the philosophy of communal enterprise. The philosophy extols the virtues of: pride of accomplishment, reliability, honesty, sociability, enterprise, foresightedness, humor, respect, modesty, consideration, responsibility, prudence, thrift, affection, and self-possession. McCloskey's list resembles Jones's (1994) list of ten Appalachian values: Religion; independence, self-reliance and pride, neighborliness, family, personalism, humility and modesty, love of place, patriotism, sense of beauty, and sense of humor. However, the conceptions of affiliation, pride, and prudence are configured differently.

People in Appalachia might connect their affiliations to ideas about faith, hope, charity, benevolence, fairness, reverence, duty, and service (McCloskey, 2007). Bourgeois affiliations are guided by prudence more than faith. The residents of towns recognize that that they must be sociable, reliable, honest, modest, and considerate to neighbors. However, they are not absorbed by their neighbors, just engaged with them. Their sense of altruism excludes martyrdom and includes egoism. To illustrate, the mom and pop store in town offers the neighbors discounts and long-term credit, even though it recognizes the loss of short-term profits. Its generosity is calculated and not sacrificial, because the store wants to build neighborhood connections that boost its long-term chances of survival.

McCloskey distinguished a middle class person's pride of accomplishment from a rural person's pride of service for no gain. The former encourages enterprise and the latter discourages it. In fact, hard work for no apparent rewards has turned some Appalachians into fatalists who do not believe that they can change their economic condition (Jones, 1994). What will be, will be. Middle class people expect rewards in proportion to their labor, and they expect to work on mental projects instead of manual ones, such as: "dealing, managing, advising. It is verbal work, the speaking of ideas, the calculating of amounts" ( p. 75). Towns can be built on those expectations.

McCloskey wrote that prudence is a primary bourgeois virtue, and it grows in importance with the size of any endeavor. Its partner is thrift, which is similar to a villager's ideal of frugality. However, a rural Appalachian might relate financial extravagance to immoral individualism. Middle class Americans view thrift differently. Wastefulness is not evil. It is just short-sighted and imprudent.

Applying these Ideas to Appalachian Community Colleges

The town-based community college takes on some of the attributes of a "mom and pop" operation. It has town-based ideas about relationships, performance, and prudence. The store is a home-owned, home-grown enterprise where kids and grown-ups can pick up a cultural event or a program in auto mechanics. Patrons get something they need, and the

staff know how to stay in business. The college does not offer all things to all people, because the work would not bring adequate rewards (McCloskey, 2007), and thrift demands that they do not glut the college with programs and services.

*A Locally “owned” Enterprise that Rewards Good Work*

The successful Appalachian community college must work to make its constituents feel like they own it: “Having constituents refer to a campus as their college or university is obviously a desirable condition. Rural community colleges routinely enjoy such notoriety. External constituents in a rural setting often refer to the local two-year institution as *their* college (emphasis added) and take great pride in its many contributions to the community and the surrounding area” (Leist, 2007, p. 306). Patrons view a college differently than passers-by and owners are invested in institutional success more than patrons.

*Hiring administrators and faculty with a local mindset:* During the 1960’s, community colleges grew at the rate of one new college per week. Now, the baby-boom administrators and faculty of those colleges are retiring. New people will need to be found, and then trained, to deal with the special challenges of rural higher education.

The leaders of rural colleges usually come from rural areas, and this localizes the identity of the college in the mind of the community. Cejda and McKenney (2000) found that 55% of the Chief Academic Officers [CAOs] at 369 rural colleges had spent their entire careers in the states where they were working, and “few individuals assume CAO positions who are not already employed by a rural community college” (Allen & Cejda, 2007, p. 265). Over half received two or more promotions within the same institution.

All higher education institutions want to hire administrators who understand their particular circumstances. Private institutions want leaders who have worked in these types of colleges; urban institutions want urban experience, and rural community colleges want leaders with rural backgrounds (Leist, 2007): “Often referred to as rural roots, this phenomenon signals that a person has grown up in—or gained some exposure to—a rural community and its culture. While certainly not a prerequisite for securing a rural community college presidency, possession of these roots—or some knowledge of rurality—can help a president deal with issues involving external constituents” (p. 319).

Such presidents can be hard to find, and some candidates with rural roots might not have enough commitment to be successful. The successful president must not just understand rural culture, he or she must embrace it with “great passion, authenticity, energy, and the constant giving of one’s self for the greater good” (Leist, 2007, p. 313). Émigrés can land a job because of their rural roots, but they might jump at an opportunity for an urban or suburban presidency as soon as it became available (Leist, 2007).

*Using and rewarding locally-grown talent:* “Local” administrators and faculty can support as well as challenge residents who view the college as an alien enterprise, but these staff will be grown more often than found. Rural community college budgets make it difficult to attract faculty from the outside, and their communities do not have enough amenities to attract young, professional adults. The lack of housing, schools, and job opportunities has driven many indigenous young professionals out of the region, already. Finally, few residents of Appalachia represent the diversity of the nation’s post-boomer generation. Cities should be more attractive to ethnically diverse people who qualify for community college employment.

The task is huge. Even if all the cabinet officers at all the rural community colleges in America ascended to their positions through internal promotions, they would still be just a handful of people at each of those 736 institutions (Katsinas, 2003). Thousands of middle managers, counselors, and faculty are nearing retirement. Many of their replacements will have to come from within the college and region. These new appointees will bring community experience to the college, but they might need updated skills and adequate knowledge about the purposes, structures, and students of the ‘colleges.

*Starting from the ground up:* Some local replacements might have an associate’s degree at best, and they might not need much more. Classified staff do bourgeois work—verbal work—that is integral to college operations. For example, the first people students meet in any office are usually secretaries and receptionists, and they offer more accessible—and sometimes more accurate advice—than the professional staff they work for. The college with town-based values rewards the enterprise of staff, so it might turn one professional retirement into two-semi professional positions for staff advisors.

Students can work for rewards, too. At-risk students need mentors, but part-time faculty are not around after class, so they cannot fulfill that necessary role. Full-time, successful students are the only source on tap. These student mentors could gain work-study benefits from this service, and increase their skills as well, because the person who teaches once is supposed to learn twice. The town-based community college rewards students who help it turn at-risk students into successful ones. It is prudent to do so, and it does not cost much.

*Growing Faculty:* Only 20 percent of Appalachia’s adults have college degrees of any kind, which is seven percent below the national average for adults between 25 and 65. (U.S. Census, 2000 cited in Latimer & Oberhauser, 2005). Thus, few Appalachians can meet the master’s degree “standard” of community college educators in the rest of the nation. In addition, Appalachian adults are older on the average than their counterparts in other regions of the country, so people with degrees might have obsolete knowledge and skills. Part-time faculty might have the most current skills and knowledge available to the college, but who would replace them? The demographics of Appalachia are unlikely to yield sufficient numbers of qualified faculty to traverse mountain passes for part-time employment every day.

Part-time faculty have technical skills and “real world” experience that students want, but only a few understand curriculum management and design, instructional methods, and student concerns to the degree that is needed for leadership in any community college. Even if they know the ins and outs of “their” college, these local employees would still need professional development in order to find, understand, and adapt educational practices elsewhere to the particular needs of the students in their region.

*Part-time faculty:* Many full-time retirees will not be replaced by full-time faculty. Part-timers will fill the instructional gap. More than 60 percent of the faculty in community colleges are employed part-time (Leslie and Gappa, 2002). They cost less than full-time faculty, they can be hired or fired in response to student enrollments, they bring real world experience into the classroom, and some of them are happy to get the income and prestige of working in a college environment (Banachowshi, 1996). Their numbers should continue to grow as community colleges face staffing challenges by baby-boomer retirements, tightening resources, and the development of new programs (Gappa & Leslie, 1993).

It is important to reward the enterprise of part-time faculty with benefits or other incentives that advance their involvement in the college. Part-time faculty have more contact with rural two-year college students in general, and at-risk students in particular, than full-time faculty. They teach developmental education, entry-level academics, and vocational courses at their institutions. They need to know the breadth and depth of the college culture in order to orient their students to it. Familiarity with the outside community is not enough. Local hiring without institutional understanding is mere “inbreeding, [a practice] that can create a stagnant environment” (Allen & Cejda, 2007, 267).

### Exercising prudence

Rural community college administrators know more about their need for thrift than any professor writing from a university desk. Still, most of the choir of writers about the rural community college love the hymn, *All Things to All People*, (e.g., Cavan, 1995) and few extol the virtue as well as the fact of economizing operations. An axiom of prudent thinking is that colleges that promise all things to all people are not doing anything special for anyone in particular.

Many virtuous intentions end up in imprudent outcomes. “Store front” sites exemplify one of them. Some rural community colleges have created these sites in isolated corners of their isolated districts so that they can reach out to all the people they might serve. Garza and Eller (1998) wrote that the strategy “to increase distance, or off-campus, learning opportunities ... [is to] improve access for remote communities. Geographic distance and insufficient transportation often make it difficult for rural individuals with family and work responsibilities to pursue higher education” (p. 36). They also noted a weakness: “Branch campuses and extended campus centers can provide basic education and core

coursework, but their range of offerings is often limited” (p. 36). External sites offer part-time programs through part-time faculty to part-time students. The results fail to satisfy rural or town based interests. They are ephemeral and expensive innovations that require a great deal of sacrifice without comparable rewards. If being all things to all people produces nothing to anybody in particular, then trying to be everywhere without sustained support for anybody worsens the problem.

Another example is telecommunication technology, which Garza and Eller (1998) saluted as a way for the rural community college to improve the delivery of a broad curriculum. The situation might differ in mountain regions such as Appalachia. Technology requires equipment, signals, and programs to fulfill its promise, and while many students can afford some sort of computer, high speed internet access is necessary for on-line education. It requires an expensive connection that is hard to find in mountain terrain.

Even if a signal is found, the rural community college student is hard pressed to find programs that fit her learning style and interests. Just as the bulk of many on-campus, applied science programs is taught in conventional classrooms with minimal equipment, most on-line courses offer traditional formulations of general content that require traditional academic skills for success, even when the content is problem-based. The most isolated students in rural Appalachia have the least-developed academic skills and interests at their colleges. They will not find real hands-on learning on-line, just distant-feeling distance education and maybe some directions to campus if they need any assistance with the courses.

### Conclusion

In 2000, John Heffron wrote:

trust and cooperation are in constant flux [in modern society], the product of unstable social forces the control over which, planning elites often claim, must fall variously to government, business, and enlightened social scientists. ... [G]roup ties and affiliations are a matter of individual choice, driven less by communal obligations than by considerations of the marketplace, non-market value preferences, or abstract notions of duty to society and the state (p. 478).

Heffron argued, as well, that the social capital of modern society could not be renewed through community traditions such as those that characterize the cultural identity of Appalachia. Instead, society would have to exploit “the very qualities of modern life that threatened to undermine the old structures” (p. 477), if it was going to overcome the way it isolates individuals.

This paper has been an initial probe of the cultural identities of Appalachia and community colleges, and of the conflicts between those identities that affect the region and their institutions. The conflicts limit community college efforts to be agents of

community change. At best, they can be social extension agencies that mediate local and cosmopolitan interests, but their efforts will fail if community colleges do not find and affirm a new identity that fits this purpose. They cannot parrot the “village” or “city” identities of other institutions and regions, because these are, respectively, too supportive of tradition and too challenging with change for success. A town-based identity would fall between these extremes, and its conceptions of affiliation, achievement, and prudence might benefit and guide community college employment, promotion, and outreach practices.

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