

**THE TWO-YEAR COLLEGE: AN HISTORICAL SKETCH OF THE NATIONAL AND REGIONAL SCENES**

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**ABSTRACT**

Currently, we are in the developmental stages towards realizing the American dream of equal educational opportunities for all. Appropriately, the fastest growing institutions of higher education in the United States are the comprehensive public community colleges. A brief historical review of the factors which lead to the establishment of the public community college with emphasis upon developments in the southeastern region is included.

**HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

The greatest impetus toward the establishment of public community colleges developed during the period from 1888 to 1900. In 1888, President Charles Eliot of Harvard, addressing a meeting of the National Educational Association, initiated discussion of educational alternatives which would economize the time a student spent in occupational preparation. Eliot noted that a student beginning his studies at age nineteen would be twenty-six before finishing graduate school. It was felt that twenty-six was too late for a student to become capable of supporting himself (Kelley and Wilbur, 1970).

Although the idea of a junior college<sup>1</sup> did not originate with him, William Rainey Harper, the President of the University of Chicago, gave the idea enduring appeal. Harper suggested partitioning the college education into upper and lower divisions. A lower or junior college with an identity of its own might attract students who otherwise would never attend college. Students would have the convenience and respectability of attending college as well as the option of terminating their college career at the end of two years. Such a restructuring appealed to the graduate and professional schools, which anticipated that the revisions would be reflected in a highly select student body, capable of more advanced work (Brubacher and Rudy, 1968).

Most authorities agree that the first public community college was established, and modeled in accordance with this rationale, in Joliet, Illinois, in 1901. In addition to influencing the establishment of private junior colleges prior to 1901, Harper is therefore credited as being influential in the establishment of the public junior college in Joliet.

From their beginning in 1901, public community colleges increased in numbers very slowly for several years.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The terms "community college", "junior college" and "two-year college" are used interchangeably in this article.

<sup>2</sup>For a more detailed statistical review of enrollment trends, the reader is referred to F. C. Bell's article in this issue.

<sup>3</sup>Detailed report of the developments in Tennessee are included in F. C. Bell's article in this issue.

It was not until 1930 that a state came to the forefront in community college development. By 1930, California had thirty-four public community colleges with a total enrollment of approximately 15,000 students—about one-half the total national community college enrollment (Monroe, 1972).

During the period 1920-1948 several major events, designated as influential in the development of the public community college, occurred. Among these were: (1) the establishment of the American Association of Junior Colleges as an agency to explore the possibilities of occupational programs in community college curricula; (2) the establishment of state agencies under the Smith-Hughes Act for the development of occupational programs; and (3) the recognition on the federal level of the need for occupational training, in response to the unemployment conditions of the 1930's. Pervasive themes throughout this period were the recognition of the need for occupational training and the recognition of the viability of the community college as an institution capable of meeting these needs.

Currently, we are in the developmental stages of realizing the dream of equal educational opportunity for all. The fastest growing institutions of higher education in the United States, moreover, are the comprehensive community colleges. The rate of growth has been almost exponential, and may certainly be described as explosive. The staff of the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education projects the need for 230-280 new community colleges from 1970-1980, with a projected enrollment in public two-year colleges as high as 5,017,000 by 1981 (Medsker and Tillery, 1971; American Association of Junior Colleges, 1972). To an extent, the fulfillment of the American dream might well be realized in the comprehensive public community college.

**REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS**

For the purposes of this review, the discussion of regional developments will be limited to a selection from those states accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. These states include Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee,<sup>3</sup> Texas, and Virginia.

The growth of the community college evidenced on the national level is paralleled by development in the southeastern region as indicated by enrollment, faculty and administration data (American Association of Junior Colleges, 1972). Table 1 includes these dimensions of community college development for the eleven states in our region as of 1971.

**TABLE 1: Summary of administration, faculty and student body population statistics of public junior colleges in the southeastern region, 1971-1972**

State	Number of Colleges	Enrollment	Faculty	Administrators
AL	18	24,967	1,134	163
FL	27	120,809	6,111	857
GA	13	25,249	1,071	176
KY	16	13,104	695	70
LA	7	9,106	415	50
MS	18	23,715	1,305	182
NC	54	53,193	3,742	732
SC	21	20,812	1,151	200
TN	11	11,622	678	111
TX	47	122,723	5,812	572
VA	21	36,538	1,757	299

Although the southeast region has been relatively slow to develop community colleges, it has not been without its pacesetter states. Medsker and Tillery (1971) cite seven pacesetter states on the national level in community college development. Among these, Texas and Florida are from the southeastern region. Table 2 includes 1967 enrollment figures for the seven pacesetter states. As indicated, total enrollment and percentage enrollment of Texas and Florida reflect the national trend.

**TABLE 2: Total community college enrollments in the pacesetter states nationally, 1967**

State	Number of Colleges	Total Enrollment	Average Enrollment per Institution	Percent of 18-24 yr. Population Enrolled
California	87	540,920	6,000	25
Florida	27	81,259	3,010	13
Illinois	41	84,911	1,060	9
Michigan	28	79,817	2,850	9
New York	39	132,671	3,400	8
Texas	42	77,276	1,840	6
Washington	22	68,003	3,100	19

Texas and Mississippi were leaders in the initial establishment of public junior colleges. For example, the first permanent public junior college was founded in Texas in 1922<sup>4</sup> (Smith, 1968). Legislation enacted in 1922 in Mississippi provided that any county agricultural high school located not less than twenty miles from a state college could add the freshman and sophomore years of college work (Johnston, 1968).

An examination of the development of junior colleges in other Southern states reveals that growth flourished primarily during 1950-1970. In 1963, the Alabama legislature approved acts providing for an Alabama Trade School and Junior College Authority. Initially, it was anticipated that ten institutions would be established. However, Alabama now has twenty junior colleges. From 1957-1965, twenty-one new community junior colleges were authorized in Florida. Georgia, with the enactment of The Junior College Act of 1958, authorized local communities to operate and develop junior colleges with the assistance of state funds for operating

<sup>4</sup>Hardin College organized by the Wichita Falls Independent School District.

expenses. Georgia now has community colleges within commuting distance of 90% of the state's population. North Carolina, with community colleges within commuting distance of 95% of the population, is continually emphasizing basic and occupational education for adults and second-chance opportunity for college-level studies through the open-door policy. Virginia passed The Community College Act of 1966 which changed the State Board for Technical Education and the State Department of Technical Education to the State Board for Community Colleges and the State Department of Community Colleges, respectively. A rapidly developing state system of comprehensive community colleges resulted from this legislation. In less than three years, Virginia developed a community college system which included 13 operating institutions enrolling over 16,000 full- and part-time students (Boozar, 1969; Christian and Wattenbarger, 1967; Downs, 1968; Graham, 1969; and Williams and Hamel, 1969).

**SUMMARY**

The growth and development of the public community college in the United States challenges the imagination. Community colleges seem to be a permanent innovation in public education. National, as well as regional trends, indicate that they provide a diversity of programs coupled with numerous additional utilitarian features that make them attractive to thousands of students seeking postsecondary education.

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