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Research Brief of Operationalizing “Internationalization” in the Community College Sector: Textual Analysis of Institutional Internationalization Plans

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In our 2019 paper, [“Operationalizing ‘internationalization’ in the community college sector: Textual analysis of institutional internationalization plans,”](#) we used the textual analysis tool Voyant to dissect three US community college internationalization plans to explore how the foci of those plans differed. While most literature examining internationalization plans focuses on the four-year sector, little was known at the time about how internationalization is operationalized at open access institutions like community colleges. Research on internationalization in the two-year sector is warranted as these institutions serve more than 25% of all students enrolled across the US higher education landscape (NCES, 2020), as well as a disproportionate share of historically minoritized learners. Our study addressed that gap and was guided by the following research questions:

- How do community colleges operationalize internationalization in their strategic plans?
- What terms and/or concepts are used to indicate international efforts?

We developed these questions with a critical lens in mind. Declines in funding for higher education have, over time, forced public institutions to become more tuition dependent, but open access institutions are, given their mission, less able to buffer loss of government funds in this way (Yuen, 2020). A critical orientation compels attention to power imbalance; in a decentralized higher education system with decreasing public investment, how do open access institutions serving many first generation, lower SES, and BIPOC students approach internationalization? How does internationalization function as a process and strategic goal at the institutions that have been de-centered in the internationalization literature and, frequently, in education policy spheres? Key findings of this study included an emphasis on an optimization of existing resources (human, cultural, community, and financial); the need for a typology of open access institution

internationalization plans; and the fragmentation of international efforts at the community college level.

We also indicated the need to consider how educational actors connected to specific community college study options (e.g. state-specific advisory bodies such Arizona's Emergency Medical Services Council, or disciplinary bodies like the International Digital Media and Arts Association (iDMAa)) can best support open access institutions as they develop internationalization plans tailored to their local contexts and the resources at hand. For example, is there an opportunity to engage mid-level units such as district-level "faculty curriculum councils [that] could dramatically enhance internationalization and create faculty buy-in with a relatively modest financial outlay" (McRaven & Somers, 2017, p. 442)? That is to say, while we acknowledge that two-year institutions are embedded in their local settings, district or even state-level groups may also be well connected to stakeholder needs and resource constraints and be in a position to offer consistent guidance and useful resources in at least some areas. Faculty councils, for example, might be in a position to identify texts or instructional tools appropriate to specific programs, and thereby "flesh out what it means to be international and local at the same time" (McRaven & Somers, 2017, p. 444). Such an approach, if used across a given college's departments, could also address the issue of including international content in "core" or required classes, rather than electives alone (Beelen & Jones, 2015). Similarly, community actors may add capacity and direction to community college internationalization efforts.

Moving forward, we recommend applying quantitative textual analysis to parse a larger sample of internationalization plans and imagine that a cross-national sample might well yield interesting results. We understand close attention to local context as a strength of community college internationalization plans and see here an opportunity to investigate the process of plan development, plans themselves, and the implementation of plans with an eye towards community-campus interactions as nests for locally meaningful internationalization.

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