

# The Impact of the Second on Community Colleges

President Barack Obama is no stranger to criticism. He has been demonized by some of his opponents, and even a segment of his most ardent supporters has expressed disappointment with some aspects of his first four years in office. Although he has, from the start, been a champion of education, some supporters have mixed feelings about what he has done and might still do in terms of four-year institutions. However, when it comes to community colleges, the praise for what Obama has done and what he will continue to do, at least from the four minority educators interviewed for this article, is expansive and unqualified.

“Before Obama came to power, it was hard to find articles on community colleges even in mainstream educational publications,” says Eduardo J. Padrón, Ph.D., president of Miami Dade College in Florida. “But Obama put community colleges front and center in the national spotlight. He validated our work and helped us not only with federal programs but also with attracting the attention of corporations. For the government grants we have received from sources such as the departments of Education and Labor, important as they are, cannot do it alone. We need to work with corporations to provide real solutions by creating real jobs for the marketplace.”

Padrón reports that the eight campuses of Miami Dade College have 176,000 students, about 70 percent of whom are Hispanic. “We enroll and graduate more minorities, including Hispanics and African-Americans, than any other institution in the United States,” he says.

The school has grown to include four-year college degrees, so students are prepared for both the immediate labor market and to move on to higher education. “I arrived in this country as an immigrant teenager from

Cuba, and the only institution that gave me access and opened the door for me was what was then called the Dade County Community College,” recalls Padrón.

Padrón went on to earn his Ph.D. in economics from the University of Florida, went to Miami Dade to teach economics, climbed up the administrative ladder, was president of one of Miami Dade’s colleges for 15 years, and then of the entire institution for the past 17 years. Padrón has been recognized through a wide array of local, national and international awards. He has been appointed to positions of prominence by the past six presidents, most recently by Obama as chairman on the White House Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans.



Eduardo J. Padrón, Ph.D., president, Miami Dade College (Fla.)

“Community colleges are truly an American invention, a way to provide the average person access to both the job market and higher education,” Padrón says. “President Obama has truly put community colleges on the map, and I believe his support will only grow during his second term, in a way that will make not only Democrats but also Republicans very happy.”

“I really believe that President Obama’s policies for community colleges have been very positive, to attract our young people and retrain our adult residents so they may enter the work force as soon as possible,” says Pete Campos, Ed.D., president, Luna Community College, near Las Vegas, N.M. “This is a significant trend across the country, but it is especially important here in northern New Mexico, where 80 percent of the population is

Hispanic, living in small communities, with a high level of poverty.” Campos reports that Luna’s current enrollment is 2,790, of whom 2,158 or 77.3 percent are Hispanic.

Campos began taking advantage of Obama’s support of community

# Obama Administration

by Michael J. Major

colleges right at the start of his first administration. “For the past four and a half years, we have worked diligently to develop our goals and become eligible for Title V and other grants, and we have been successful,” Campos says.

A special focus has been high school dropouts that the school has been able to train and to which the school provides the necessary skills to become carpenters and work in other trades. At the same time, the school has reached back into the educational pipeline to provide dual education, enabling students to earn credits for both high school and community college simultaneously.

“This allows the student the vocational training to go directly into the work force or to go on to higher education, from an MA to an M.D.,” Campos explains. “We have one young woman, who, as a single mother, went through this program then went on to complete both her BA and MBA.”

Given this large portion of the immigrant and migrant population for whom Spanish is the primary language, English as a second language (ESL) is also given a special focus. “Students receive an education in the most understandable way,” says Campos. “They are taught the subject in Spanish so they can learn it quicker, then learn how to translate it as they become more proficient in English. Add a bilingual education to affordable tuition and you create opportunities for youth which were nonexistent before.”

Campos adds that these programs dovetail into the controversy of so many immigrants being deemed “illegal,” being deported back to Mexico, their children who were born here having their families wrenched from them. “Once young people are introduced to a program they can comprehend, to see that they can take care of their own housing, transportation and educational needs, they

are motivated to work hard to send money to their families in Mexico and/or bring them back here.”

Campos started out in the restaurant business with his father. He began his career in education as a teacher and counselor for migrant students, went on to complete his education, became an accomplished educator and

administrator, published numerous articles in various journals, became a leader in many community organizations, was elected mayor and then state senator for 22 years. “If we didn’t have this presidential support and federal concentration of funds, the country would not recognize the importance of community colleges and our ability to get both young people and adults educated and into the work force in the shortest amount of time,” Campos says.

To move from a small rural area to a major city, Chancellor Cheryl Hyman, City Colleges of Chicago, reports that, against the background of a 26 percent Hispanic population in Chicago, the seven colleges of her institution across the city are made up of 38 percent Hispanics out of the overall student enrollment of 120,000 students.

Hyman repeats the high praise the others have accorded Obama for his ongoing support of community colleges, noting that “the president has promised over the next four years to cut tuition in half and add two million workers from community colleges to the work force.”

Hyman adds, however, that though much remains to be done, much already has been done, but “an amazingly high number of people aren’t aware of the jobs that are

available out there, and many leaders are not taking advantage of that. Most every day, someone tells me he can’t find a job because no one is hiring. But there is a lot of hiring going on in key fields, and it is up to institutions like ours not only to prepare students for the job market, but



Pete Campos, Ed.D., president, Luna Community College (N.M.)



Cheryl Hyman, chancellor, City Colleges of Chicago (Ill.)

also to get the word out that there are jobs out there and the opportunity will continue to grow.”

To this end, Hyman has worked with Mayor Rahm Emanuel on a number of innovative programs. For instance, says Hyman, “In December 2011, Mayor Emanuel and I identified six major industries where 80 percent of the jobs will come from, nationally, but especially in our region. We at City Colleges are working to align our courses so what we train our students in will be reflective of the demand.”

Also, says Hyman, the institution is realigning its curriculum so that adult education students will be trained to meet the demands. The reason is that adult education students comprise about 32 percent of the Hispanic student body, and most of them require ESL instruction.

Added to this is the College to Career (C2C) program, which will focus individual colleges in specific areas: health care; transportation, distribution and logistics; business professional services and entrepreneurial leadership; information technology; advanced manufacturing; and culinary and hospitality services.

“In order for all of this to succeed, we have to work as a community college to strengthen the pipeline all the way from K-12, with dual enrollment and credit for both high school and college courses, with the oppor-

tunity then to immediately join the work force or move up higher on the educational ladder.”

Hyman, an African-American, grew up on Chicago’s west side, received her associate degree at a City College, got a BS in computer technology from the Illinois Institute of Technology, then two master’s degrees, the first in government from North Park University, and an MBA from Kellogg at Northwestern University. She worked for 14 years as vice president of strategy at Commonwealth Edison before coming to her present position.

“We are working closely with both local and national organizations,” says Hyman. “Our goal is to create more than 500,000 new jobs in the Chicago area over the next decade.”

Obama’s initiatives even have a significant benefit in a town with a relatively small number of Hispanics.

At North Idaho College, Manuelita (Lita) Burns, Ph.D., vice president for instruction, reports that of the school’s 6,500 students, just 5 percent are Hispanic. Its demographics, including small numbers of African-Americans, Asian-Americans and Native Americans, are reflective of northern Idaho in general.

Many of the Hispanic students in the surrounding rural area are from immigrant or migrant families. Burns cites three main ways in which Obama’s policies are opening doors for those students that otherwise would be shut.

“A key way is through the expansion of the American Opportunity Tax Cut, which allows many Americans, especially first-generation Americans, access to affordable college education in their living area,” Burns says. “We’ve used the Hope Scholarship tax credit more often, which is more directed at community colleges.”

Burns also refers to the Reinvestment Act as very supportive of their work. “For example,” she says, “we’ve received and used funding from this act to establish outreach centers to provide access to technology for students in rural Idaho, many areas of which have only dial-up Internet. With this technology, they can take online classes when their work prevents them from coming to classes on campus.”

Finally, Burns notes the Trade Adjustment Community College and Career Training Act, from which, she says, “We’ve received a couple of grants which will actually assist people in getting back to work.” Burns explains that Idaho is, overall, a financially stressed state, trying to make up in tourism what it has lost in its traditional fields of timber, mining and, to some degree, even agriculture. “Aerospace is big, of course, in western Washington, but has moved to eastern Washington, so it will only be a matter of time before it reaches Idaho. So we’ll have students trained to get in on the ground floor of this industry.”

Burns, a native of Wyoming, received her BS in nursing at the University of Wyoming, an MS in nursing from the University of Colorado, and her Ph.D. in leadership studies at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Wash. She spent her career as a nurse, then nurse educator, working her way up to dean. She started her present position in August 2012.

In summation, the impact of Obama’s second administration on community colleges in general, and in the Hispanic population in particular (not to mention the economy as a whole), promises to be a continuation of his first four years, but even better.

