

“THE MOVIE WAS GOOD, BUT THE BOOK WAS BETTER.”

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Community Colleges
April 21, 2000 • Volume 10, Issue 15

Should they offer four-year degrees?
By Scott W. Wright

Introduction

As the 100th anniversary of the community college movement approaches, the nation's 1,250 two-year colleges and technical schools face an uncertain future. Enrollments have never been higher, and the schools receive high praise for providing higher-education opportunities and work-force training to all students – regardless of economic or educational background. But as two-year colleges increasingly offer four-year degrees, questions about their educational quality have intensified. Critics warn that by offering baccalaureate degrees, community colleges may be putting higher education out of reach for many Americans while providing, at best, second-rate four-year degrees. To add to the pressure, many urban, two-year colleges are housed in aging facilities needing major renovation.

Overview

High school dropout Michael Miller, 26, became an A student at Baltimore City Community College with the help of Beverly Arah, director of the school's Adult Basic Education program. He plans to become a teacher. (Photo Credit: Community College Week/Ron Aira)

Paul Priest used to don a security guard uniform every day and slog to a job that paid him barely enough to live on – \$13,000. It was just another in a series of dead-end construction, retail and sales jobs he had held after graduating from high school.

Tired of working for so little, he enrolled in a computer programming and network-management program at Northern Virginia Community College in suburban Washington, D.C.

In just three years, the 21-year-old Maryland man has clicked his way through a series of progressively more challenging computer jobs – and nearly quadrupled his salary – all without earning a college degree.

"I'm quite satisfied with the way things have turned out," says Priest, who earns about \$50,000 as a network administrator for aerospace giant Lockheed Martin.

As the United States shifts from manufacturing and heavy

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