Charter Building and Labor Market Contacts in Two-Year Colleges

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How do unselective schools that serve disadvantaged students get employers to recognize their graduates' qualifications? This study examined whether low-status colleges (whose credentials may not be widely understood) rely on the traditional college charter or engage in charter-building activities to get employers to recognize students' value. Examining occupational programs in public and private two-year colleges, the authors found that both types of colleges do similar activities but do them differently. While these community colleges act as if additional action is not required, these private two-year occupational colleges actively engage in charter-building activities, mediating the hiring process by conveying students' qualifications through trusted relationships and aiming to place all their graduates, including many disadvantaged students, in jobs. The authors speculate that charter building identifies previously ignored issues and may suggest ways that low-status schools can make hiring into an institutional process in which students' lower social backgrounds have a less-negative influence.

To understand the attainments of disadvantaged students, one must study the institutions that they attend and the ways in which these institutions confer value to their students. How do schools get employers to recognize the value of their degrees and the qualifications of the students who possess these degrees? Most students enter college to improve their job prospects (Grubb 1996), but it is not clear how colleges accomplish this goal. The question is especially puzzling for low-status colleges, including community colleges, which confer lower-status associate's degrees and often enroll low-achieving students, including many from low-income backgrounds (Deil-Amen and Rosenbaum 2003; U.S. Department of Education 2001).

While human capital theory contends that colleges train students in the skills that the labor market rewards (Becker 1975), institutional theory contends that schools have their primary influence as an institutional system with the authority to create bodies of knowledge and categories of personnel and then to designate graduates as legitimate occupants of these categories (Meyer 1977). Schools are an ideal example of highly institutionalized organizations, in which rationalized formal structures "present an acceptable account of organizational activities, and organizations gain legitimacy, stability, and resources" (Meyer and Rowan 1991:54). In such elaborated institutional environments, resemblance to the societally accepted form, rules, and structures of a "college" confers to organizations "social *charters* to define people as graduates and as therefore possessing distinctive

rights and capacities in society" (Meyer 1977:59). The charter model recognizes that employers cannot see many important skills through direct inspection. Rather, employers assume that skills exist because colleges have the legitimate authority to represent this acquired learning in the form of degrees or credentials.

This foundation of legitimacy is crucial for the status-allocation process (Brint 2003). Societal members accept educational credentials as legitimate signals of enhanced value and treat graduates accordingly. Credentials operate in modern society as taken-for-granted institutionalized rules that guide hiring decisions and behaviors (Meyer 1977:65). Employers hire graduates because they accept the degrees as a valid representation of skills and competencies that are *assumed,* rather than *demonstrated*. Thus, in a society in which employers consider educational credentials legitimate, college graduates can gain access to jobs that nongraduates cannot.

However, the legitimacy of educational credentials is not always as automatic as institutional theory presumes. Research has shown that employers often mistrust the value of a high school diploma (Miller and Rosenbaum 1997; Murnane and Levy 1996; Neckerman and Kirshenman 1991). Brown (2001) questioned the authority of credentials, such as high school diplomas, technical certificates, subbaccalaureate degrees conferred by two-year colleges, and "lower-prestige" college degrees, among employers, and Bills (1992) suggested that employers use alternate criteria to evaluate job applicants for lower-level bureaucratic jobs.

This article extends Meyer's (1977) insightful concept of the social charter and applies it to specific subbaccalaureate postsecondary contexts—two-year public community colleges and private occupational colleges. Some evidence suggests that the associate's degree does not have a general charter like the bachelor's degree. Although an associate's degree conveyed an earnings advantage over a high school diploma in 1990, the benefits to the associate's degree were significant in only 3 of 11 different majors for men (and 4 for women), while the bachelor degree's advantage was significant in 9 of 11 majors

for both men and women (Grubb 1996:95). The associate's degree may have recognition in a few fields, not all, so the charter may be field specific. This variation in the value of the associate's degree across fields raises the disturbing possibility that staff at these colleges may mistakenly act as if they have a recognized charter, when, in fact, they do not.

This article also takes a new perspective on the common view that community colleges have strongly shifted toward occupational education. Although this seems to be the conclusion of Brint and Karabel (1989), their study also noted "the curious lack of interest of 'career-oriented' community colleges in developing ties with local employers or studying their skill needs" (cf. Brint 2003:25). This study examines occupational program staff's reports about their own behaviors on a day-to-day basis, not just community college presidents' reports about institutional agendas, priorities, and goals.[1] Rather than accept administrators' statements of their colleges' missions, we examined what activities staff actually engage in to get employers to recognize their students' value and how they regard these activities. We found different approaches in the two types of colleges, which suggest different models of the process. This study extends Brint's (2003) observations and supports doubts about whether community colleges' efforts have resulted in the increased legitimacy of their credentials or improved knowledge about how to coordinate their programs with the needs of the labor market (Dougherty 1994). Indeed, our study suggests an irony in Brint and Karabel's account. Despite the shift toward occupational programs, their research observed few efforts by community colleges to develop *specific* institutional linkages with *specific* employers and no consistent collegewide plan for school-employer interactions. Our research suggests that the occupational colleges that we studied—the ones that have developed legitimacy among employers—may be shaping a market niche that has been left neglected by the unfulfilled promise of community college occupational education.

This article is part of a series of studies that have examined alternative models of school-

ing. While other studies have examined cultural capital institutional prerequisites (Deil-Amen and Rosenbaum 2003), information prerequisites (Person, Rosenbaum, and Deil-Amen forthcoming), and cultural capital instruction (Deil-Amen 2003), this study explored relations with the labor market.

TWO MODELS

If employers cannot see applicants' skills and abilities through direct inspection and do not necessarily trust all the information they receive, then they must rely on authoritative information, and the crucial question is how information comes to be authoritative and trusted. This article considers two models of the school-to-work transition that suggest two different processes that colleges can use to give authority to the information they convey about their students.

First, colleges can rely on the traditional college charter. Meyer (1977) described four-year colleges as possessing social charters, institutional authority to allocate graduates into personnel categories. As he noted, the amazing fact about the bachelor's degree is that its charter is widely recognized for any college as long as the institution takes a similar form and performs activities that are similar to those of traditional colleges. Since community colleges are designed to provide the equivalent of the first two years of four-year colleges, staff can engage in activities to emphasize this resemblance and presumably gain the resulting authority from the traditional college charter. Such activities include accreditation, the organization of departmental and administrative units, the credentials required of faculty, and the form and content of instruction.

We call the second model the "charter-building model." Instead of adopting the traditional college charter, colleges can build a new one. Although colleges must provide information about their students' qualifications (Stigler 1961), it is not certain that nonelite colleges, whose legitimacy is more questionable, can simply rely on the standard college charter and expect employers to hire their graduates. When colleges lack a well-recognized traditional structure, elite status, or type of degree that differs from the traditional four-year bachelor's degree, how do they establish a recognized charter that gives authority to the information they convey about students? While we agree with economists' emphasis on information, we contend that information must be trusted as authoritative, and we examine whether schools take actions to build and enhance their institutional charters to convey authoritative and trustworthy information. Authoritative information is particularly problematic for most two-year colleges, which are unselective institutions that are trying to signal that graduates possess valuable qualifications.

While Meyer did not consider how charters are created or sustained, Persell and Cookson's (1985) study of the relationship between prep schools and colleges provides an excellent example of the way charters are maintained and enhanced by *relationship-building activities*. Elite boarding schools give their graduates distinctive forms of access to Ivy League colleges through face-to-face interactions, close social relationships, extensive exchanges of information, and "bartering" (negotiation) between the school advisers and Ivy League admissions officers. However, even elite prep schools do not have automatic access; they must take extensive actions to maintain their charters with selective colleges. Presumably, less-elite schools, like the two-year colleges we studied, may have an even greater need to enhance their charters through relationship building between college staff and employers, but it is not certain that they do so.

While personal-contact influences on hiring have long been emphasized, *institutional* networks have recently been noted (Granovetter 1995:162–69). In Germany and Japan, schools' institutional contacts help youths gain access to good jobs (Brinton 1993; Hamilton 1990; Osterman 1988). Some American vocational education teachers form similar linkages (Rosenbaum 2001). In each case, reciprocity (a sense of obligation on which both parties can depend) makes information and transactions dependable because each party trusts that the other values their relationship and will not risk losing it

for short-term gain (Coleman 1988). Unlike Coleman's examples, in which context emerges from ethnic ties (e.g., El Khalili market in Cairo), such relationships may also be created if school staff convince employers that they can depend on their evaluations (Rosenbaum 2001:248).

A review of research proposed that schools may build preferential access to employment (enhanced charters) by forming relationships that ensure employers of a dependable supply of graduates, dependable types of graduates, and a dependable quality of graduates (Kariya and Rosenbaum 1995). Extending the charter model, this typology suggests ways in which schools can build and enhance institutional charters. If their graduates are to gain recognition and receive preferential treatment, low-status colleges cannot just provide information, they must convince employers that the information they provide about students' qualifications is dependable by creating trusted relationships through which information is conveyed. Since disadvantaged and minority job applicants have less access to good jobs through personal contacts than do other students (Granovetter 1995; Lin, Ensel, and Vaughn 1981; Peterson, Spaorta, and Seidel 2000; Wegener, 1991), and these low-status colleges tend to enroll such students, institutional contacts may reduce this gap.

While Brint and Karabel (1989) considered transfer to bachelor's degree programs as the main source of upward mobility, we concur with Brint's (2003:23) reconsideration of occupational associate's degrees:

> New evidence does suggest that we were wrong to consider community college vocational education as "the bottom rung" of higher education's tracking system. Economic rewards tend to be greater for vocational students than for academic students, if they complete the associate's degree, and vocational students are now as likely as academic students to transfer to four-year colleges.

Although transfer to bachelor's degree programs is a laudable goal, when three quarters of community college students do not go on to pursue bachelor's degrees (Dougherty 1994; Grubb 1996), "promises of upward mobility are . . . not very often realized" (Brint

2003:25), and other goals must be considered. This study examined two different types of subbaccalaureate colleges that exist in a vague, poorly understood, position: beyond high school, yet less than four years of college. This is now a major part of higher education, with over 40 percent of new college students entering two-year institutions (Bailey 2002). Do these colleges act as if they are faithfully relying on the traditional college charter, or do they take steps to build and enhance their social charters? Are these charters enhanced through institutional contacts, and, if so, what actions are taken to initiate contacts and convince mistrustful employers that these credentials are valid representations of competence?

SAMPLE AND METHODS

This research used a case-study format with interviews, analysis of written materials, and observations. In a large midwestern city and surrounding suburbs, seven *community college* campuses and seven private *occupational college* campuses (four for profit and three nonprofit) were selected because they serve the same labor market and offer comparable occupational programs in two or more high-demand fields. A list of the programs studied shows that they are highly comparable (see Table 1). Across all colleges, we conducted one-hour interviews with 113 college staff—specific program chairs, career services staff, occupational deans, and other administrators, as detailed in Table 2.[2] The interviews were semistructured, covering the same topics across different schools and types of programs. Questions were open ended to allow for in-depth explanations.

Nationally, only 4 percent of two-year college enrollments are in private colleges, and few private colleges offer associate's degrees (Bailey, Badway, and Gumport 2002). Two-year technical and business colleges that are similar to the occupational colleges in our sample are found in most large cities and are widely advertised in local media. Our occupational colleges are private colleges that passed similar accreditation standards as community colleges and offer associate's

Table 1. Selected Majors and Programs of Community Colleges and Occupational Colleges

Program or Major	Community Colleges	Occupational Colleges
Business	Business, accounting, management	Business administration, accounting, management
Secretarial	Administrative assisting, technology, executive secretary	Administrative assisting, office technology, legal office assistant/paralegal, court reporting
Computer	Computer information systems, architectural drafting, and computer-aided drafting	Computer information systems, information technology, business computer programming and networking, computer-aided drafting/design
Electronics	Electronics and computer technology, mechanical engineering technology	Electronics, computer and electrical engineering, technology

degrees of a similar quality to the community colleges we studied and in the same occupational fields. As such, they are comparable to community colleges, but dissimilar to 94 percent of for-profit schools, which offer no degree above a certificate (Apling 1993).[3]

Although this article reports their strong focus on job-placement activities, occupational colleges have some disadvantages. They are smaller than community colleges and offer fewer programs and a more limited general education curriculum. They are less devoted to the preparation of students as informed and cultured citizens because of their focus on occupational preparation, and the faculty composition reflects this organizational mission, with a majority of the faculty composed of adjuncts with extensive professional experience in the fields they are teaching. In addition, these schools require students to declare their program at entry. Career exploration is severely limited, generally within the confines of an occupational field. Changes of major are possible, but may lengthen the time it takes to complete a degree. Transfers to bachelor's degree programs are possible, but usually only to certain programs and colleges. Receiving no public

subsidy, these private schools have much higher tuitions than do community colleges, but loans and grants permit low-income students to afford them, since they are extremely proficient in helping students navigate the onerous financial aid process. Because their students graduate more quickly and get skill-relevant jobs, one analyst concluded that these schools may be as cost-effective as low-tuition community colleges (Wilms 1974), but the issue has not been examined recently.

We do not infer that private colleges are better than public ones or that they should replace them (which is inconceivable, given their small number). Not only did we select an unusual group of private colleges (which met the same accreditation standards as community colleges), but our topic does not illustrate some of the public colleges' strengths: low tuition, small classes, dedicated instructors, a variety of course offerings, flexibility of scheduling, and so forth. In particular, the community colleges offer a much broader and richer liberal arts curriculum and have worked extensively to ensure the transferability of their courses to four-year colleges. Although we are impressed with many

Table 2. Characteristics of the Research Sample

	Median Number of Students	Median Number of Faculty	Mean Tuition	Interviews		
				Advisers/Career[a]	Administrators[b]	Program Chairs[c]
Community colleges	8,329	331	$3,571	14	16	22
Occupational colleges	937	54	$25,601	21	16	16

[a] Academic and career advisers and counselors, job placement/career services staff, faculty, or deans/directors.
[b] Any other administrators or administrative faculty.
[c] Interviews with chairs of health programs were omitted from this article. Interviews with business/secretarial chairs at community colleges and occupational colleges totaled 12 and 6, respectively. Interviews with computer/electronics chairs totaled 10 at each type of college.

aspects of community colleges, this article considers their handling of labor-market access in *occupational programs*—a situation that raises some concerns.

Despite differences in sources of funding, levels of tuition, and size, the two types of colleges have many similarities. Compared to other colleges, both are regarded as relatively low-status institutions, have lower admissions requirements, offer lower-status degrees, and have relatively few graduates who attain four-year degrees. Both have many students from lower- or working-class backgrounds (Dougherty 1994; Grubb 1996). Students enter both types of colleges seeking access to jobs in the primary labor market, and our survey of over 4,300 students in these colleges confirmed the findings of prior research (Grubb 1996) that students in both types of college are from similar low social and economic backgrounds, have low high school achievement, and have similar goals.[4]

How representative is our sample? Our occupational colleges are *not* typical: only 6 percent of private for-profit colleges are accredited to offer associate's degrees (Apling 1993). These private colleges are not a random sample; they offer some of the best programs in these fields and may be considered to represent an *ideal type* that illustrates contacts with employers and provides a new perspective on how two-year colleges can operate. While prior analysts (Brewer and Gray 1999; Grubb 1996) speculated about the possibility of institutional linkages between community colleges and employers, occupational colleges report actual linkages.

As with most qualitative studies, we cannot prove the typicality of our community colleges, and doubts could be raised about the transfer emphasis in these colleges, especially given Brint and Karabel's (1989) finding that occupational goals dominate the stated missions of community colleges. However, our community colleges are similar to others on this issue: 50 percent of the students in our community colleges are enrolled in transfer programs, and the average for the entire state is also 50 percent (Illinois Board of Higher Education 2002, Table VI-2).[5] Moreover, our findings are compatible with

studies of administrators in 18 community colleges nationally (Cross and Fideler 1989) and a national sample of 1,725 faculty in 92 community colleges (Brewer 1999), which reported that administrators and faculty are nearly evenly split in their ranking of transfer (general education) and workplace preparation as the top institutional priorities. Our community colleges do not seem atypical on this key issue, but some may differ.

Ultimately, our findings must be judged in the context of other studies. We shall repeatedly note the ways in which our findings extend two previous studies of college-employer interactions: Brewer and Gray's (1999) national survey and Grubb's (1996) research in four cities. However, our aim is to go beyond their economic emphasis on constraints on resources. Regardless of empirical frequency, we introduce a sociological conception and describe previously unnoticed processes about the ways in which schools relate to the labor market.

FINDINGS

Although one may ask staff to talk about the college charter, such talk is often abstract and unrelated to behaviors. We took an alternate approach; we looked at reported *behaviors*. Staffs' view of their institution's charter is reflected in their actions, and institutions with different charters may handle the same activities in different ways.

The following analyses compare occupational chairs at community colleges with similar staff at occupational colleges. As we note later, we found that many of the community college staff reported that they rarely initiate interactions with employers, see little benefit from such interactions, and believe that employers respond to their graduates' degrees. These practices seem to parallel those of most four-year colleges—*focus on instruction and accreditation and let the degree speak for itself*. To their credit, these community colleges devote much energy to maintaining their programs' accreditation, hiring competent faculty, and ensuring the transferability of their classes to four-year colleges. Like Dougherty's (1994) explanation of the

often-contradictory multiple functions of community colleges, we found that the lack of attention given to relationships with employers may reflect these institutions' need to establish priorities among their missions.

In contrast, we found that at occupational colleges, whose missions are much more limited and whose survival depends on the job-placement success of their graduates, the staff reported using interactions with employers to build trusted institutional relationships and to convince employers of their graduates' competence. Although both types of colleges provide similar activities (employer advisory boards, career services, job placement, and occasionally reactions to labor market outcomes), they approach them in different ways.

Advisory Boards

To have preferential relationships with employers, colleges must be seen as providing a dependable type of graduate who meets employers' needs (Kariya and Rosenbaum 1995). Advisory boards are a way that colleges can exchange information with employers—to get information about employers' needs, to get feedback from employers about the content of their programs, and to inform employers that their graduates have dependably appropriate skills. Advisory committees provide a good example of the use of contacts with employers. The state requires each community college to convene an advisory committee before it starts a new occupational program, and some community colleges require annual meetings of advisory committees. However, what is written on paper differs substantially from what we found in reported practices.

Prior studies found that community colleges have infrequent, short advisory meetings, and little time is spent preparing for them. Staff use advisory boards to get general information, not to build relationships, asking "whether there will be employment opportunities in an occupational area, not whether local employers will hire [their] graduates" (Grubb 1996:179–80). Brewer and Gray (1999) also noted that advisory boards sometimes meet nonregularly and with little

purpose. Both studies blamed limitations on time and constraints on resources and urged reforms to provide more resources and staff time.

While constraints on time and resources limit these activities, as economists have noted, the institutional priorities of faculty and staff are also a key factor. These community colleges delegate these duties to already overburdened staff, who tend to view advisory boards as a low priority. Nearly all the chairs of the community colleges whom we interviewed in every occupational program category in the study—the individuals responsible for making programs effective—reported that advisory committees are low on their long list of duties, and the requirement is only that the meeting take place, not that any consequences follow from the meeting.

Just as four-year colleges get a recognized charter by performing traditional college activities (Meyer 1977), most of the chairs of the community college programs emphasized the same activities as traditional colleges. They stressed the value of their degree and buttressed its value by devoting a great amount of energy to the accrediting process. The primary duties of these overburdened program chairs, who perform multiple roles, are to make sure they have adjunct faculty to cover courses and service tasks every term (a tremendous, almost full-time job) and to meet accreditation requirements, budgetary constraints, and reporting requirements.[6] Many also teach one or more courses, and some teach up to four classes each semester. Most reported that they devote little effort to relationships with employers, and they rarely expressed regrets about these limited efforts. Resources are clearly not the only issue. None of the program chairs whom we interviewed suggested that they would devote more time to interactions with employers or hire additional staff to do so if they were given additional resources.

There was *some* variation. A few program chairs, particularly those in the more applied technology programs, said that they do value the interactions, but they lack organizational support and are limited by time constraints, consistent with a resource-constraint explanation.

However, most of the program chairs have minimal goals for these boards—to convey general information about the skills that employers look for and to provide reactions to their curriculum requirements. In one program, when a business department chair, who had taught at the school for 25 years, was asked where his students get jobs, he replied, "I'll be very candid with you and say I don't know." His program had not met with an advisory board in many years, and, prior to our interview, he had not thought much about it. At another community college, a career dean admitted: "We're supposed to have an advisory board. I don't know if we do . . . we have people that we call; . . . but I don't know how active [the board] is."

At least one program chair in three community colleges reported that the programs have advisory committees on paper, but the committees had not met in the past year or more. For example, when asked whether the department had an advisory board, a chair of a Computer Information Systems program admitted his doubt about the need for such a meeting, saying that "anecdotal" information was sufficient. He added:

> [We] . . . had one a few years ago. I am now told that I will have one again. . . . An advisory council, if it's done locally, would just be five of my best friends . . . director of programming here, manager of software support there. Just go call five of my friends, and we'll have a lunch.

Constraints on time and resources may be influences, but they cannot explain the program chairs' choice of advisory board members. In creating the boards, instead of selecting employers who could hire their graduates, the program chairs either ask friends or follow the lead of high-level administrators, selecting executives from large, prominent firms, although these executives may have no say over hiring and their firms may not hire locally or at the associates' level. None of the seven community colleges makes an effort to include executives who hire graduates on collegewide advisory boards. At the program level, half the programs (11 of 22) have advisory boards that consist mainly of employers who do not hire their students. Four pro-

grams chairs (18 percent) rely mainly on friends and informal networks, and another four (18 percent) rely primarily on adjunct faculty as employer advisers. Three chairs (14 percent) admitted that they have no functioning advisory committee at all.

Moreover, few colleges have procedures to monitor quality or to try to ensure it. Sometimes, even if the board exists, it is fragile, resting on the voluntary efforts of a single program chair, and it may not confer any lasting charter to the program. As an administrator noted, relationships with employer advisers begin "through a very strong individual, a director, a charismatic person . . . and if that individual goes away, it can have serious impacts." While many people noted that the maintenance of contacts often depends on single individuals, no one we interviewed suggested that this is a serious problem or has taken steps to build broader institutional support for contacts. Indeed, many program chairs reported that they rely almost exclusively on their adjunct faculty, a self-selected, unrepresentative sample who rarely do hiring.

Few program chairs reported that meetings of advisory boards require any preparation. The chairs reported entering these meetings with no pressing questions and not using this time to build relationships with employers. The meetings are brief, often shorter than originally planned. If employers use a new software program or a new technique, that program is discussed, but such changes are rare and quickly noted. The program chairs seek general reactions to their curriculum, not to prior graduates' performance, and some reported that the information they receive is not useful. One may expect that the chairs of occupational programs at large community colleges would be the ones who are the most interested in interacting with employers, yet they showed little concern about the ineffectiveness of these meetings for getting detailed information about employers' needs or building relationships.

The dean of instruction at one community college was one of the few respondents to see a problem, but he lacked a vision of how to improve these committees:

Advisory boards meetings . . . are nothing more than feed fests because nothing comes out of them. The institution doesn't ask the right questions, or the people represented around the table have no answer or clue as to how to help the college and the program grow.

Moreover, many faculty and administrators at community colleges believe that employers should not have such a direct role. They fear that employers want a curriculum that is tailored to meet their specific companies' needs, which contradicts the colleges' mission to provide a broader set of skills. The dean of a community college voiced her concerns as follows:

Community colleges get slammed by the Chamber [of Commerce] . . . about how we're not preparing people for the job market. . . . Well, that might be true because we're not preparing somebody to work in "Joe's" company. . . . No, I can't teach . . . somebody how to do everything at your business, so . . . you don't have to train them. [Employers must] understand what the role of the educational institution is. . . . Not everybody in the business community gets that.[7]

In contrast, at the seven private occupational colleges, all the staff reported an interest in exchanging information and in convincing employers that their programs serve employers' specific needs. They want their advisory boards to facilitate a systematic flow of information *from* employers about their hiring needs and *to* employers regarding the qualities that their programs' graduates possess to meet employers' needs.

These staff also believe that advisory boards create personal relationships that make information trustworthy. Unlike our community colleges, where contacts with employers usually reside in a single program chair, all these occupational colleges try to make collegewide contacts, often including college staff from several programs in advisory meetings. Administrators at *all* seven occupational colleges reported that job placement staff are present at program advisory meetings so they can meet recruiters and learn their specific needs.

In all seven occupational colleges, the administrators reported that they solicit

employers' reactions to how prior graduates have met employers' needs and advanced over time. They also reported that they use employer advisory committees to learn what these employers expect from job candidates and to convince employers that the school strives to meet their needs and values their relationship. Their reports resemble Persell and Cookson's (1985) "chartering and bartering." Although the needs of the labor market and school staff will change over time, the respondents at the occupational colleges reported that they try to build enduring institutional relationships with specific employers that will give their schools a recognized charter in certain fields.

In all seven occupational colleges, the job-placement administrators reported that advisory boards are one of their main job duties. They select employers they believe can provide their graduates with jobs with good pay and opportunities for advancement. Indeed, one administrator reported avoiding a well-known Fortune 500 firm that offers only low-skilled, dead-end jobs to the school's students. Although their advisory boards cannot include all employers who hire from their programs, the administrators at all seven occupational colleges reported that they select ones that offer the best jobs and rotate among these employers in successive years. Unlike community colleges, occupational colleges use these meetings to learn individual employers' specific needs, form trusted relationships between recruiters and the colleges' job placement and program staff, and ensure recruiters that the colleges can be trusted to respond to their needs. While community colleges pile the tasks of advisory committees onto already overcommitted program chairs, for whom other tasks are a higher priority, occupational colleges make advisory committees the top priority for certain staff.

Career Services

For colleges to have an effective charter, employers must recognize the value of the colleges' graduates (Kariya and Rosenbaum 1995), which requires that students present themselves effectively. Both types of colleges use career services offices to assist students

with these activities, but these offices operate in different ways.

Like four-year colleges, all the community colleges have career services offices, which inform students how to show their value to employers by effective résumés, job searches, and self-presentation, usually through optional courses, workshops, or the use of computer software. They provide general information (e.g., the format of résumés and interviewing etiquette) and administer career-interest and aptitude tests. However, at all seven community colleges, the administrators reported that career services does not give specific information about which employers to visit or what skills the specific employers value. These offices post job openings on a bulletin board or computer, much like the listings in newspaper want ads.[8] These offices are not responsible for supervising students' job-application process.

At all seven community colleges, the administrators stressed that these offices are severely limited and serve less than 20 percent of the students. All have only a few staff who serve both residents of the community and students, and given the recent policy mandate to serve clients on Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, the emphasis is on residents of the community and jobs that do not require degrees (Jacobs and Winslow 2003; Shaw and Rab 2003). One manager of career services reported that the "ratio between students . . . and community residents using the career counselors . . . is 75 percent community, 25 percent students." Furthermore, services are student initiated at all these community colleges. Like Grubb (1996), we found that meager resources prevent career services offices from serving a substantial portion of students or from collecting much information on the labor market. However, their limitations are not solely due to poor resources.

These offices seem designed to be peripheral. Just as health services offices serve only sick students, career services offices serve only the few students who realize they need the services, not those who do not realize their need. The administrators reported that many students may not know about these offices, since they are not widely promoted. Career

services offices also tend to be spatially peripheral—usually located in an obscure, hard-to-find part of the campus. At all seven community colleges, the career services offices are spatially distant or not visible. At one college, the office is on the third floor, around the bend and down a dark hall. At another, it is poorly marked; there is one little sign that is hard to see. As one career counselor noted:

> We are really tucked away here. The action . . . is all at the other end of campus: the classroom buildings, the library, the bookstore. The students are not here, and on top of it all, we're here on the third floor, in the corner, behind the financial aid office and health services. . . . We're just not in a high-traffic area. . . . If we were located somewhere else, . . . we'd never be able to handle the flow.

Even faculty members do not always understand what these offices do. When asked how students get information about jobs, the program chairs at several community colleges said, "the career office must do that," and they said that they referred students to it. However, visiting these career service offices, we learned that they lack any information about the *local* labor market. They provide general information about styles of résumés, interviewing, and career-interest inventories, but they assume no responsibility for providing job information or placement.

In contrast, at all seven occupational colleges, job placement is considered a central function of career services. In fact, some of the offices are labeled "Job Placement Office," and they are a high priority. All are located in high-traffic areas. At all but one of the occupational colleges, the career services offices are visible from the main entrance, and students are required to use them (except by special petition). At these occupational colleges, staff help every student craft a résumé. They know the employers' specific needs and what skills and experiences each occupational program provides to meet these needs. Although community colleges give a few students general advice on preparing résumés (some boast that they have software for creating an attractive layout), the staff at occupational colleges meet each student and

tell them what local employers in their field want to see in a résumé, which of their courses and skills meet the employers' needs, and how to present these skills and courses in a résumé and in interviews. In addition, they supervise the job-application process for every student. If a student fails to get a job offer, the staff will sometimes ask employers how the student did in an interview to understand the student's interviewing skills and to gain a better understanding of the employer's needs.

The job-placement staff at the occupational colleges meet with each student and use this knowledge to help match students to employers who are looking for candidates with their particular qualities. This process is beneficial to students, employers, and the colleges' reputation. Although we never heard about this matching process at the community colleges, the job-placement staff at all seven occupational colleges reported that a student's poor presentation can harm the college's reputation. Several of the occupational colleges try to direct student-employer contacts in ways that will ensure access to their students in the long run. As one respondent noted:

> We [normally try] to build a relationship with [an employer] to build more in-roads for our graduates . . . it is great to work with this company, you always know that they'll have these positions available, so let's try to impress them with this group of candidates that we send them. Then . . . they come back again, or next time, they just automatically fax the position to us.

When this job-placement director was asked how the job-placement staff figure out which students will impress certain companies, she replied:

> We know each student well, so it'd be a good fit. Like this student, they really have good communication skills, they have a good GPA, they seemed motivated when we met them, I really think that for this position, they're a good candidate. This company has a really good chance of liking this candidate.

Asked what happens if they send a student who does not meet the employers' needs, she explained that employers sometimes under-

stand, but sometimes they refuse to hire any more students.

The community colleges cannot prevent students from sending out poor résumés for inappropriate jobs. However, the occupational colleges control the job-application process and believe that it reduces the chances that any student will make a serious mistake that will harm the school's legitimacy.

Job Placement

For colleges to have effective charters, employers must trust colleges to provide dependable evaluations. At the seven community colleges, the staff act as if employers trust their colleges' degrees as recognized charters that certify the quality of students. However, this is not a passive process. All the program chairs reported that they engage in many actions to make their degrees dependable, actions that show that they fit the traditional college charter. They design courses to meet the requirements of accrediting associations and devote much time to satisfying the criteria for accreditation. Visits by accrediting associations consume an enormous amount of energy before and during the visits. The colleges and each of their programs gear up many temporary committees to address each aspect of accrediting, and these committees meet many times for one or two years prior to an accrediting visit. A battlefield atmosphere hangs over the campus around the time of these visits, and the risk of nonaccreditation is viewed as a challenge to the charter of occupational programs. With these actions, the community colleges show their isomorphism with the institutionalized rules and formal structures that are necessary to "maximize their legitimacy" and fit the traditional college model (Meyer and Rowan 1991:53).

In contrast with their extensive accreditation efforts, community colleges devote little effort to job placement. No centralized full-time job-placement function exists for graduates, and offices that do some job placement usually focus on part-time work for enrolled students (often in low-skilled jobs).[9] Some heads of programs (9 of 22, or 41 percent) reported that they are active in helping some students get jobs, but none said that this is a

formal duty, and it is often haphazard. Our findings resemble those of a prior national survey that found that 39.4 percent of the faculty reported that they often provided assistance to students who were seeking employment, 39 percent reported that they had time to develop or maintain contacts with employers, and most believed that "other people in this college have responsibility for developing links" (Brewer and Gray 1999:405; see also Brewer and Gray 1997). Similarly, Grubb (1996:180) found that "the majority of instructors seem to do little placement" and attributed this situation to the shortage of time among overburdened faculty.

At all seven community colleges, the chairs of almost every occupational program reported that job placement is not a formal responsibility, and while some help a few students, most said it is a low priority.[10] Many admit that they do not have time for anything beyond teaching and staffing duties, regardless of their job descriptions. However, constraints on resources are not the only limitation. In our study, the chairs of community college programs reported that they respond to employers' telephone calls if they are not too busy. However, most do not see this as a valuable use of their time—they handle the calls quickly, and few reported using calls to build relationships or initiating calls to employers for a student. Most department chairs do not view job placement as part of their duties, some emphatically deny that it is part of their duties, and several expressed resentment at employers' requests for names of qualified students. They think it is inappropriate to be asked to be "employment agencies" or "headhunters," since doing so interferes with what they consider their primary goal of providing degrees. The comments of one program chair exemplify this view:

> I've got mixed feelings about dealing with a lot of employers and just feeding people to them. . . . They expect you to be a free headhunter. . . . I don't have the kind of time that I can interview all my students and find someone that's appropriate for that particular job. . . . Sometimes I'll just . . . give the employers a list of students that I think might qualify and let them deal with it. Other times, I may not respond.

While job placement is not a formal duty for anyone in community colleges, all the occupational colleges devote much energy to job placement. One college has 7 full-time professional and 3 support staff serving about 600 graduating students, and another has 6 full-time professional and two support staff serving about 700 graduating students. A large college has 26 full-time staff serving about 3,000 students. Three colleges have 1 full-time professional staff and 1 or 2 clerical staff who are solely responsible for job placement, serving 90–122 graduating students. *Every* one of these occupational colleges has full-time professional staff and clerical support staff who are solely responsible for job placement, with ratios ranging from 60 to 122 students per staff person.

The same kinds of requests from employers that are sometimes resented at community colleges are actively encouraged at occupational colleges. Unlike community colleges, all these occupational colleges emphasize job placement, and the staff engage in many activities to build relationships with employers.[11] They engage mainly in relationship-building activities, which create a charter for the schools' relevant programs as dependable providers of skills that recruiters value. They actively initiate contacts, create a responsive procedure, provide information and applicants who are appropriate to particular employers, and *develop trusted personal relationships* with recruiters in several ways.

First, they *initiate contacts*. At all these occupational colleges, placement staff make contact with employers. They attend meetings of the Chamber of Commerce, telephone employers, visit workplaces, and make contacts at job fairs. As one placement director reported: "You'll pretty much always find [one of our] placement coordinators at [Chamber of Commerce] events."

Second, they strengthen relationships through *systematic responsiveness*. All these occupational colleges stress that they respond quickly to employers' requests and tailor their recommendations to employers' specific needs. The placement staff at three colleges emphasized their responsiveness:

> Employers . . . [are] repeat customers. . . . We don't charge any fees. We're really fast, . . .

and as soon as the job request comes through, we know exactly what résumés to send in. So it's very fast. We get lots of students who tell us, " . . . the calls [from employers] are so many."

> Some companies just love us . . . [they] just call up and say, "This new accountant position opened up. Can you get me 10 résumés in 10 minutes, and we can. . . . They'll have three interviews set up with three graduates from the accounting program tomorrow. So, some companies are just like, "Oh, my gosh, I found the way to recruit." We're just one of their regular methods.

> Our response to employers is critical; the rapidity with which we can respond to a job lead gives us a real edge. . . . Community colleges, . . . they're still snail-mailing. . . . We get a lead, [and] we respond immediately.

Third, these occupational colleges convey *appropriate information*. Although none of the community colleges oversees the job-application process, the job-placement staff at all these occupational colleges assess employers' needs, systematically organize and package information on applicants, and send out appropriate résumés in response to job openings. When employers send them a job description, the placement staff send out appropriate résumés that meet the job qualifications, as the staff at two colleges reported:

> Placement dean: [Our job is] to make sure that . . . their paperwork is fine [and] their résumés meet all the [employers'] standards, to make sure their résumés get sent out every time there's a lead. . . . So we have like a tickler file of each major who's seeking [a job]. The jobs come in, and we code them by major, and then we take the résumés and fax them.

> Placement staff: They'll give us a job description. We'll enter it into our database. From there, all the coordinators can see which position is available, and then they can refer people who seem like a good fit . . . if they want them in quicker, . . . [we respond] within the hour.

Instead of just bulletin-board postings, the job-placement staff help recruiters do their job by channeling appropriate and timely information.

Finally, the job-placement staff *develop per-*

sonal relationships with recruiters and promise them appropriate and trusted information. While the community college staff give low priority to employers' requests, the occupational college staff work to build relationships. Occupational colleges make sure that their job-placement staff meet recruiters and learn their specific needs in advisory board meetings and that they continue to build these relationships, as the placement directors at two occupational colleges reported:

> We talk one on one with companies . . . about what they're looking for in candidates . . . so then we can [select and] coach our candidates.

> We usually work one on one [with recruiters], and so . . . we try and keep it very simple. . . . They only work with Chris, and . . . when this company calls, they always get Chris.

At all seven occupational colleges, the job-placement staff work on a personal basis with recruiters. They meet in advisory meetings, where they ask employers about their specific needs. They show their schools' commitment to serving employers' needs and to sustaining the relationship by initiating calls to ask employers if they are satisfied with the graduates' performance. Of course, these calls also help them learn about further openings.

On this last dimension, we found some variation. The relationship is stronger and more specialized at the larger colleges. At the three largest occupational colleges, the job-placement staff learn employers' specific needs by working with employers in a few occupational fields, and at these colleges, they get to know employers' needs, even technical details, well. The job-placement staff create personal relationships that are based on reciprocity of mutual benefit between schools and recruiters, the kind of mutual obligation that creates social capital (Coleman, 1988). When they know an employer's particular needs, they can select students who are a good fit for the employer and inform the employer of desirable personal attributes that are difficult to assess in job interviews. Even when they do not specialize, they make it clear that their job is to satisfy employers, so employers can trust that they seek to form lasting relationships, and their

recommendations will be dependable. All these seven occupational colleges reported that they have long-term relationships with some employers.

Responding to Labor-Market Outcomes

Perhaps the best indication of the difference between the two types of colleges is their reactions to students' labor-market outcomes. The community colleges are not involved in students' transition to the labor market. Students are expected to find their own jobs. When asked what jobs students take, the chair of a Department of Computer Information Systems said:

> I was afraid you were going to ask me these questions. . . . You know that old song by Tom Lehrer about Werner Von Braun [the Nazi scientist who worked for the United States after World War II] . . . "I shoot em' up and I don't know where they come down." My job is to shoot em' up, not where they come down. In theory, a student that does not go on to a four-year degree is going to get a beginning job, probably with some business, probably a small office, where they use computers. . . . But you know, this is only hearsay-type stuff. I don't know how to collect the data for this.

None of these community colleges has a staff person who is specifically in charge of deciding where students will land in the labor market or even anyone who knows what jobs the students get or whether they get jobs. These community colleges, like those studied by Grubb (1996), do not collect systematic information on graduates' jobs, so they do not have systematic information on the graduates' outcomes. Their main responsibility is to confer credits and degrees and the accompanying skills that these degrees represent. The transition to the labor market is considered a separate task that each individual student encounters.[12] However, if some program chairs informally learn that their graduates with associate's degrees fail to get appropriate jobs, their charter conceptions are challenged, but they still do not initiate actions in the labor market. Some chairs of business and accounting programs reported that local employers do not value the associate's

degree, but they do not try to convince employers of its value or to use their advisory committees to improve placements. Instead, they assume or "hope" that the labor market will respond to another degree. The chairs of the business programs at five community colleges mentioned that they encourage associate's degree students to get a different credential—a bachelor's degree or a one-year certificate. They shift their emphasis to another charter, and they de-emphasize or even phase out their associate's degree.

In the same fields, these occupational colleges work hard to find or "create" a labor-market demand for their associate's degrees. All seven occupational colleges collect follow-up information on graduates, and every placement office provided us with actual placement rates.[13] The staff identify and contact local employers in relevant fields, try to convince them to try their students, and carefully select especially good students to confirm their promises to *new* employers, so that employers will return with more job offers the next year. They try to convince employers that any student who earns a degree has the qualifications that the employers need. The staff reported that sometimes they can convince employers to give preferential consideration to their graduates. In the same fields (e.g., business and accounting) in which the staffs of community colleges shift to a different credential, the staffs at occupational colleges try to increase the demand for their associate's credential.

CONCLUSION

Despite previous researchers' description of the shift toward occupational education in the nation's community colleges (Brint and Karabel 1989; Dougherty 1994), that research noted some curious ways in which the transformation was incomplete (Brint 2003). Extending these observations, this article has described two different approaches to labor-market entry and has posed theoretical dilemmas in practical terms.

Like Meyer's (1977) model, these community colleges act as if they have a traditional college charter. They consider their main task

to be to confer accredited degrees, and they work extremely hard to meet the demands of accreditation to show their "isomorphism with institutionalized rules" and fit with the traditional college model (Meyer and Rowan 1991:55) so they can continue to confer associate's degrees. They believe that additional actions are unnecessary for the labor market to recognize the value of their graduates, and they do not relate actively to employers, reporting indifference and sometimes even resentment about employers' requests. Despite their mission, the occupational programs at these community colleges do not engage in charter-building activities with employers.

Whereas Meyer (1977) de-emphasized agency and did not indicate how charters may be constructed, we have discovered actions that low-status private occupational colleges take to try to build charters in certain occupational fields. Although these colleges also offer accredited degrees (as do community colleges), the staffs of occupational colleges spend much time and energy in activities that they believe create trustworthy institutional relationships with employers and provide access to employers' job networks for all their students. We could not ascertain if they are correct, but they clearly believe that charter enhancement is a way that low-status colleges can improve their graduates' occupational attainments.[14]

Personal contacts have often been studied, but institutional linkages have not (Granovetter, 1995). Some faculty members at community colleges have personal contacts with employers; however, these contacts are not formally required or systematically used for institutional purposes. In contrast, all the occupational colleges devote explicit institutional attention to such contacts, make them a formal responsibility of several personnel, and require their placement staff to take additional steps to strengthen the linkages and turn them into institutional charters. These two patterns correspond to different implementations of the occupational mission in the same fields. We found that all seven occupational colleges engage in certain activities that are not present in *any* of the seven community colleges,

and these activities permit the staff to learn employers' specific needs, to shape the signals conveyed about students, to provide information in trusted relationships, and to try to generate a demand for their graduates. While these community colleges leave students to their own devices in searching for jobs, all the occupational colleges supervise the job-application process of all students at every stage. Instead of relying on labor-market reactions, these occupational colleges actively manage their contacts with the labor market.

While family contacts help advantaged youths (Granovetter 1995), charters help students from all social backgrounds (Meyer 1977). The administrators at all seven occupational colleges reported providing job help to *all* students, including their many low-income or minority students, just as the charters of prep schools benefit the schools' low-income students (Persell and Cookson 1985). The occupational colleges' high job-placement rates of over 90 percent include a large number of low-income and minority students. At these colleges, the hiring process is controlled by institutional processes, so it may be less affected by individual students' mistakes or social backgrounds (Deil-Amen and Rosenbaum, 2003). Although disadvantaged youths rarely have access to job networks and are avoided by employers (Moss and Tilly 2000; Neckerman and Kirschenman 1991), these administrators asserted that the colleges' charter-building activities may overcome employers' preconceptions, providing all students with access to jobs.

This article has reported processes, not outcomes like completion rates, labor-market outcomes, or employers' reactions.[15] It has not addressed the diverse missions and obligations of community colleges that justify imposing additional required courses (e.g., in government) or spreading existing resources to serve additional purposes (training and job placement of nonstudents), obligations that may impose sacrifices of time and resources on disadvantaged students in occupational programs. To increase comparability, in both sets of colleges we studied only occupational programs that state an explicit goal and attract students because of that goal, and we

examined how these two similar programs approach that goal. We studied a select group of occupational colleges (which may represent ideal types). We cannot prove the generalizability of the community colleges in this study, yet we have noted many comparisons of our findings with prior studies.[16]

Although sources of funding explain some differences,[17] they do not explain the way in which colleges seek to build their legitimacy. It is remarkable that occupational colleges' descriptions match the sociological model of charter building suggested by Persell and Cookson (1985). These colleges provide information about students' skills, as economists have suggested, but they also try to build a charter that they hope employers will trust to provide dependable information and a dependable supply, type, and quality of students.

Although staffs' reports of these different models can be distorted, it is hard to dismiss some findings: the central locations of job-placement offices, the required use of career advisory offices, and the carefully developed job-placement model. If this model is a fiction, it is a highly detailed one (we saw no evidence to contradict these accounts and much evidence to support them). While none of the seven community colleges has anyone whose primary responsibility is to place students in jobs, *all seven* occupational colleges have several full-time job-placement staff, serving 60–122 students per staff member. These differences reflect different resources, but also different conceptions about how college can relate to the labor market.

In community colleges, the limited actions do not just reflect constrained resources; they also suggest a different conception. Even when chairs of programs spend time inviting employers to advisory meetings, they often chose prominent employers who enhance their programs' perceived legitimacy, not necessarily ones who hire their students. Even when they spend time in meetings of advisory boards, they often do not use this time to build relationships with employers. Even when they answer employers' telephone calls, they give low priority to these calls and even resent them. Even when they provide career services, the peripheral location of

these services at all these public colleges suggests that other processes are at work besides constraints on resources.

The staffs of community colleges view charters as an attained status, arising from conformity to institutional forms and practices like Meyer's (1977) charter. In contrast, we found that the staffs of occupational colleges view charters as requiring ongoing processes. These are two conflicting models of legitimacy, and their effectiveness may depend on institutional and external conditions.

Further research is needed to explore these two models. The former model works for high-status schools that attract high-status (or high-achieving) students. For these schools, a charter may be an enduring status. However, does it work for low-status community colleges or even for four-year colleges that confer bachelor's degrees but are unselective? For low-status schools, especially if they serve disadvantaged students, a charter may be precarious, easily damaged, and difficult to maintain. Moreover, a charter that promises responsiveness to the labor market requires constant maintenance if the labor market is constantly changing in the composition of jobs, the demand for skills, and personnel who are responsible for hiring. Even after a charter has been built, it requires continuing action to maintain it.

Further research is also needed to explore the conditions that affect the operation of these two models. Under what circumstances do high-status schools possess secure charters? Are there any conditions that could erode the charter of Ivy League colleges; for example, if students were perceived as spending all their time partying or protesting, would employers still value their degrees? Under what conditions can low-status colleges rely on accreditation to confer access to the labor market on their graduates? Perhaps, in Germany and Japan, where professional organizations specify clear criteria for competence in many occupations, the reliance on accreditation may confer greater legitimacy (Rosenbaum 1992). Can these models be applied to other kinds of training institutions? For instance, research has found that job-training programs for disadvantaged youths

have mixed or negligible benefits, even in programs that offer high-quality training (Bloom et al. 1992; Cave and Doolittle 1991). Does their effectiveness depend on unmeasured aspects of training or on charter-building activities that give authority to the information they convey about their participants? The charter concept helps to identify previously ignored issues that may have practical consequences.

NOTES

1. We use the term *staff* to describe a range of faculty, administrators, and program heads (e.g., chairs, coordinators, and deans). Although Brint and Karabel (1989:300-03) noted that chancellors, presidents, and deans emphasize occupational programs, the research is vague about implementation by staff, and Brint and Karabel (1991) noted that faculty resist attempts at occupationalization.

2. Our eight interviews with health programs are excluded from this article because these programs' procedures are largely determined by state licensure requirements, not college discretion. Such regulations seem unlikely outside the health field (Grubb 1996). Indeed, health programs are highly dissimilar to other community college programs, as Grubb also noted, and they resemble private occupational college programs.

3. Three of the seven occupational colleges also offer applied bachelor's degrees in the same fields. Three of the colleges are nonprofit, but research has not documented the prevalence of nonprofit occupational colleges.

4. The survey was administered to students in class, and the response rate approached 100 percent. Classes were selected to target a cross section of credit-level students in comparable occupational programs across both types of colleges. The survey asked about the students' goals, background, attitudes, experiences, course-taking patterns, and perceptions. In our community college and occupational college samples, similar proportions reported that their parents' incomes were less than $30,000 (41 percent, 45 percent) and that their parents had less than a bachelor's

degree (83 percent, 89 percent); similar proportions also reported that they had high school grades of Cs or lower (25 percent, 28 percent) and that they were in college "to get a better job" (70 percent, 80 percent).

5. If this figure seems high, the Beginning Postsecondary Students national survey indicated that 71 percent of community college students expect a bachelor's degree or higher (U.S. Department of Education 2001:27). Caution is warranted here because the state's reporting standards leave room for interpretation and Illinois lacks verification procedures. Also, we acknowledge that states may differ, particularly because states like Illinois have a history in which their community colleges developed from a strong junior college transfer-oriented foundation, whereas some other states have community college systems that evolved from two-year vocational schools into comprehensive community colleges that now include transfer among their many functions.

6. When asked about his job responsibilities, one program coordinator for a management program replied: "I identify and stock the entire staff. . . . I have to schedule classes, supervise faculty, the part-time faculty. . . . If I knew I'd have this question, I would have gotten my list of things I'm *supposed* to do. This is what I *actually* do."

7. This ambivalence is further aggravated by contract education. The fear of employers meddling disturbed some faculty and program chairs of community colleges.

8. Career services staff assume that students can figure out which jobs match their qualifications or plans, perhaps a dubious assumption. We found that many students had a poor understanding of job qualifications. One student reported that he took a job at Blockbuster because he wanted a career in the film industry.

9. Contract education and workforce development appear to be exceptions, but neither focuses on regular college students. Like 90 percent of the community colleges (Dougherty and Bakia 2000), all those in our study offer contract education, but it is usually available only to a firm's employees and has little impact on other programs, as Grubb (1996) noted. Similarly, two of the communi-

ty colleges in our study, like many across the United States, have workforce-development offices to provide job-training and job-placement services for anyone in the community (Jacobs and Winslow 2003; Mazzeo, Rab, and Eachus 2003; Shaw and Rab 2003). They emphasize residents of the community more than students, and most jobs appear to be unskilled, requiring specific short-term training. At both colleges, with enrollments over 8,000 students, these offices have a single professional staff person and two clerical staff to serve students and community residents. If these offices were increased in size, focused on college students, and aimed at appropriate jobs, they might have the potential to create institutional linkages for the colleges' graduates. As it is, both contract education and workforce development seem to divert resources from more traditionally enrolled students, including low-income students.

10. In this respect, these community colleges resemble four-year colleges, but they differ from graduate schools of universities (especially business and engineering schools) and doctoral programs, which have many job-placement activities. Yet, like doctoral programs, community college placements are done through contacts with individual faculty members, not professional placement staff.

11. Three occupational colleges call the office "career services," and the others call it "job placement," yet all these offices provide *both* student advising and job placement. In contrast, the community colleges call this office "career services," but none does job placement for graduating students.

12. Although information is collected at the state level every few years for graduates of specific programs, the program chairs at each individual college lack knowledge of these data.

13. They reported 90 percent to 97 percent job placements, mostly in relevant fields, claims that rise and fall with the economy, but have remained higher than 85 percent for many years. We have the detailed placement data for two of these colleges (including the college with the most disadvantaged students) that support their claims. Moreover, all staff support these claims and describe activi-

ties that seem likely to be effective. If these schools' job-placement rates were much lower, it would endanger the schools' eligibility for their students to receive federal loans and harm recruitment. Given their strong concerns with cost-effectiveness, private and for-profit colleges would probably not continue these activities if they were ineffective. However, their effectiveness in placing students in jobs is not our contention.

14. These occupational colleges do not create special deals with individual employers ("clientism"). Indeed, many diverse promises to specific employers would be difficult to maintain, and competing claims for the "best students" would be hard to reconcile. Instead, private colleges engage in activities that enhance the recognition of the value of the degree. Although these low-status colleges do not claim to confer distinctive training, they claim that their students reach agreed-upon standards for the associate's degree and that the colleges can be trusted to certify quality. Wanting employers to return next year, these colleges do not cut corners in conferring the degree. We cannot rule out clientism, cutting hidden deals, yet aside from the unstated "deal" for the first time a good employer hires from the school or for the year after a good employer has hired a bad recruit, no one noted such deals. The general process is a more universalistic process that occurs through the degree. These colleges build charters by developing social capital and using it to reinforce the value of the degrees they confer.

15. Regardless of the effectiveness of personal and institutional contacts, they may have different implications. However, one study (Rosenbaum 2001) found that high school vocational teachers' personal contacts with employers are not recognized by the institution, do not extend beyond the students who are known by a particular teacher and certainly not to other programs, and teachers believe they would not persist if the teacher departed. Indeed, high school teachers' personal contacts do not have the same charter-building qualities for the institution as the contacts we observed in these occupational colleges.

16. For instance, if some community colleges build strong contacts with employers,

they would differ from those in our sample, but they would also differ from those in prior studies (Grubb 1996), including most of Brewer and Gray's (1999) national sample. Our study replicated Grubb's findings that advisory boards, career services, and job placement are weak, not active, and poorly connected to labor markets. Like Grubb, we found modest job-placement efforts, poor information about labor-market outcomes, and career advisers who "admitted virtual ignorance about employment opportunities" (Grubb 1996:183). Are we being too rosy about the strong job-placement activities at these private colleges? Tom Bailey, the director of the Community College Research Center, no advocate of for-profit colleges, and his colleagues (Bailey et al. 2002) noted some of the disadvantages of these colleges (which we noted earlier). But on the basis of several interviews at one for-profit college, they praised many aspects, including job placement, which they thought could benefit community colleges. We have presented a more detailed analysis of these processes here.

17. We are contrasting colleges that get funding from different sources. Community colleges receive funding from local and state taxes if they remain accredited, so great institutional efforts are devoted to accreditation. However, the seven occupational colleges we studied also devote great effort to accreditation. While both types of colleges report occupational goals, these private occupational colleges depend on federal student loans, which are contingent on less than 25 percent of their loans being in default (which probably reflects graduates' earnings). Reducing loan defaults is of vital concern to occupational colleges (defaults do not affect community colleges). In addition, students' perceptions of the success of job placements may be important in both types of colleges, but they are fundamental to occupational colleges that get funds from students by promising job outcomes.

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