

Old institutionalism part II, The Diverted Dream

EDUC 250B: Organizational Analysis of Higher Education

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Diverted Dream

Chapter 1. CCs and the American Social Order

Opportunity and education

19th Century, mythology about career/status attainment

- ▶ Europe: access to privileged positions largely hereditary/depends on family ties
- ▶ America: the “self-made (white) man”
- ▶ In both Europe and America, education deemed peripheral to success

20th Century, education and opportunity

- ▶ Emergency of giant corporations in the late 19th Century (Chandler, 1977)
 - ▶ contributed to hierarchical labor market
- ▶ Structure of American education system became more hierarchical

By 1920 the outlines of the orderly and highly stratified educational system that remains with us today were already visible. The emergence of a hierarchically differentiated educational system closely linked to the labor market provided an alternative pathway to success in an era when the traditional image of the self-made man ...was becoming less and less plausible (Brint & Karabel, 1989, p. 5)

- ▶ Educational credentials become property that allows holders to make claims on career/social opportunities
 - ▶ Educational credentials track people to certain kinds of jobs

American Education and management of ambition

- ▶ Sociologists often focus on the idea that number of people who want good opportunities exceeds the supply of good opportunities

Since occupying the superordinate positions in such systems provides a variety of material and psychological gratifications not available to those who occupy subordinate positions, the number of individuals who aspire to privileged places in the division of labor not surprisingly tends to surpass ...the number of such slots that are available. In advanced industrial societies, all of which have renounced to ...the ideologies that have historically legitimated the hereditary transmission of positions, this problem of a discrepancy between ambition and the capacity of the opportunity structure to satisfy it is endemic. All such societies face, therefore, a problem in what might be called the management of ambition (Brint & Karabel, 1989, p. 7)

- ▶ Given demand in America for upward mobility, “it is hardly surprising that there has been such a powerful demand from below to expand the educational system. What is perhaps more difficult to understand is the readiness of the state to provide the additional years of schooling demanded by the populace” (Brint & Karabel, 1989, p. 8)
- ▶ Brint & Karabel (1989) (pp. 8-9) argue that “a society that promises its subordinate classes unique opportunities for individual advancement needs to offer well-developed channels of upward mobility.
 - ▶ Implied here is the idea that creating these “channels of opportunity” may be a public-relations effort to appease the dreams of working-class people rather than a genuine effort to provide opportunity

Contradictory pressures facing the community college

On the one hand

the fundamental task of the junior college has been to “democratize” American higher education, by offering to those formerly excluded an opportunity to attend college (Brint & Karabel, 1989, p. 9)

On the other hand

By virtue of its position in the structure of educational and social stratification, the junior college has confronted the necessity of diverting aspirations of students who wish to join the professional and managerial upper middle class, but who are typically destined by the structure of opportunity to occupy more modest positions (Brint & Karabel, 1989, p. 10)

The administrators of elite universities who developed the idea of the junior college did so ...with the hope that it would enable them to divert from their own doors the growing number of students clamoring for access to higher education (Brint & Karabel, 1989, p. 10)

- ▶ In “The ‘Cooling-Out’ Function in Higher Education, Clark (1960) p. 515 states,”for large numbers failure is inevitable and *structured*”

Sociology and the community college

Why has the discipline of sociology taken such a strong interest in the community college?

- ▶ Sociology views the size of the pie (opportunity) as largely fixed and focuses on how privileged actors/groups get bigger slices
- ▶ Educational credentials lay claims to opportunity; but different credentials grant access to different kinds of opportunities
- ▶ Educational tracking leads to different credentials, which leads to different social/labor market opportunities
- ▶ Sociologists (in the 20th century) viewed community colleges as mechanisms of educational tracking (e.g., where students who want a BA are tracked to terminal vocational)

Sociology vs. economics

- ▶ Both sociology and economics acknowledge the existence of hierarchical labor market and an education system that tracks people to different parts of the labor market
- ▶ Economic theory often uncritical of tracking, views it as necessary to prepare students for hierarchical labor market
- ▶ Sociology views tracking (who gets tracked to what) as highly problematic, but extremely likely in capitalist societies based on domination by the privileged

Core ideas of *Diverted Dream*

Competing explanations for terminal vocational mission

The Diverted Dream is an historical analysis of how the terminal vocational education mission came to be institutionalized by community colleges

Explanations Brint & Karabel (1989) are arguing against:

- ▶ “Consumer choice” explanation
 - ▶ Community colleges adopted terminal vocational education programs because they were demanded by students
- ▶ “Business domination” explanation (Marxist)
 - ▶ Businesses think they can earn more profit by outsourcing training of workers to community colleges (and make students/government bear the cost)
 - ▶ Therefore, corporate/business sector demanded that community colleges adopt terminal vocational education programs

Brint & Karabel (1989) develop an “institutional” explanation for institutionalization of terminal vocational education mission

- ▶ focuses on the interests of community colleges and the interests of people leading community colleges

Competing explanations for terminal vocational mission:

More on the “institutional” explanation

Perhaps the model's most fundamental feature is that it takes as its starting point organizations themselves, which are seen as pursuing their own distinct interests (Brint & Karabel, 1989, p. 15)

Much of our analysis will focus on explaining why these administrators chose to vocationalize despite what we shall call the opposition of the student consumer and the indifference of potential sponsors in the business corporations (Brint & Karabel, 1989, p. 16).

In skeletal form, our basic argument is that the community colleges chose to vocationalize themselves, but they did so under conditions of powerful structural constraints. Foremost among those constraints was the subordinate position of the community college in the larger structure of educational and social stratification ...junior colleges were hampered by their subordinate position in relation to that of the older and more prestigious four-year colleges and universities (Brint & Karabel, 1989, p. 15).

Diverted Dream: Some core ideas

Origins of community colleges are very diverse

- ▶ some founded by universities, some founded by high school districts
- ▶ some focused on first two years of college coursework; others focused on remediating high school coursework

Universities realized they wanted to teach freshman/sophomore coursework (cheap)

- ▶ This undermined the CC mission of teaching freshman/sophomore coursework
- ▶ Problem: most CC students wanted to obtain a BA

Unlike “adult education” orgs (Clark, 1956) (not “junior colleges”), junior colleges successfully found a niche when mission of first two years of undergrad coursework was taken away. This niche [or value] they provided was twofold:

- ▶ Terminal vocational education for “semi-professions”
- ▶ A barrier for students who wanted a BA but weren’t “cut out” to attend a university

The meat of *Diverted Dream* is how community college “vanguard” went about institutionalizing this niche

- ▶ This “institutionalization project” took 50 years to bear fruit
- ▶ So the terminal vocational education mission was a “solution looking for problems,” waiting until the 1970s when economic conditions made businesses/labor market and students demand “semi-professions” credentials

Community colleges and the “enrollment economy” (Clark, 1956)

Community colleges have always been centrally concerned about enrollment, enrollment growth

- ▶ Enrollment growth causes public funding to increase
- ▶ Enrollment growth increases probability of survival because society doesn't want to kill an org that so many students depend on

Diverted Dream is about enrollment management

- ▶ Once 4-year institutions didn't want CCs to have freshmen/sophomores, CCs couldn't get sufficient enrollment to survive based purely on transfer function
- ▶ Needed to develop credentials not associated w/ transfer that could provide enrollment for survival
- ▶ Leonard Koos
 - ▶ investigated skill needs of occupations and corresponding training institutions.
 - ▶ believed CCs could find market niche in “semiprofessional” occupations where training requirements higher than the “trades” but lower than BA or the “professions”
- ▶ long-term, CC “vanguard” wanted CC credentials to be prerequisite for these jobs (credentialism, professionalization)
 - ▶ If so, CCs would get steady enrollment from students enrolled in terminal vocational education programs in order to get these jobs
- ▶ “cooling out” function (Clark, 1960)
 - ▶ enroll CC students by telling them they can transfer
 - ▶ cooling out: process by which CCs gradually make CC students that terminal vocational program is a “better fit” for them

Why is *The Diverted Dream* an example of old institutionalism

- ▶ CC “vanguard” sought and achieved institutionalization at the organizational population/field level [rather than org-level]

Took an “old institutionalism” approach to analyzing the process of by which “terminal vocational” mission was institutionalized

- ▶ focused on the actions of small group of “institutional entrepreneurs”
 - ▶ purposeful, self-interested status group that mobilize and build coalitions to institutionalize some practice that benefits the group
 - ▶ “institutionalization projects”: purposeful efforts by some status group to institutionalize some practice at the macro level;
- ▶ institutional entrepreneurs knew they were less powerful than orgs associated with high-status status groups (e.g., , universities, corporate america)
 - ▶ interactions, subservience, development of coalitions with external actors associated with these powerful orgs in order to get support for the CC terminal vocational education mission

Diverted Dream epilogue

Research on effect of attending CC on student degree attainment

- ▶ For students who would otherwise not attend postsecondary education
 - ▶ Positive effects on degree attainment, earnings
- ▶ For students who would otherwise attend a 4-year university
 - ▶ Most rigorous studies find large negative average effects on probability of obtaining a BA (e.g., Doyle, 2009; Long & Kurlaender, 2009)
 - ▶ Recent, cutting edge research by Mountjoy (2018):
 - ▶ starting at a CC reduces probability of getting a BA by 18 percentage points (e.g., from 50% probability to 32% probability)
 - ▶ Caveat
 - ▶ Some community colleges may do better than others; some CC tracks (e.g., honors program) may yield more positive results
- ▶ Consistent evidence that CC students who do transfer to quite well on avg.

Policy support for CCs as engine of BA attainment

American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) powerful professional association/lobbying org

- ▶ Instrumental in institutionalizing the vocational education mission
- ▶ Extremely active in lobbying politicians, policymakers, foundations for resources and favorable treatment

Many states (e.g., CA) explicitly funnel postsecondary enrollment growth to community college sector as means of increasing BA attainment

- ▶ Many big foundations and state policymakers are committed to helping community colleges increase transfer rates

Strong policy support at state-level for for community colleges as an engine of BA attainment

- ▶ Why are policymakers/foundations so committed to helping CCs increase transfer rates despite decades of research finding that starting at a community college decreases probability of obtaining BA?
- ▶ Why not adopt policies that systematically funnel “college ready” students with BA aspirations to start at 4-year university rather than a CC?
 - ▶ is lower costs of CC to state an adequate explanation?
 - ▶ Do efforts by CCs and AACC to lobby policymakers and foundations play a role?

Appendix

Theoretical background: functionalism

What is “functionalism”

Functionalism is a macro-sociological approach to analyzing society that views society as a living organism in which the parts (e.g., systems, organizations) work together/interact to contribute to a “functioning” society

- ▶ Core idea of functionalism
 - ▶ If some process/thing exists in society, it must be because it solves some problem that society faces
- ▶ Popular in the late 19th to mid-20th century; now viewed as a “dirty word” in sociology (e.g., if a sociologist says “that is a functionalist explanation” it is not a compliment!)

Why am I telling you about functionalism?

- ▶ Because some of you have mentioned or asked about functionalism
- ▶ Because organizational actions are often rationalized to the public in functionalist terms (e.g., we adopted X practice to solve Y problem)
- ▶ Creation of degree programs often rationalized in functionalist terms
 - ▶ e.g., I got an MA degree in “comparative social policy”
 - ▶ degree focused on comparing the welfare states (e.g., pension, healthcare, education) of different industrialized countries
 - ▶ I assumed the degree was created because society needed people who knew when/how to incorporate practices from different welfare states

Extreme view of functionalism: Davis & Moore (1944)

Easiest way to understand functionalism is to summarize an extreme statement:
“Some principles of stratification” by Davis & Moore (1944)

Basic research question: why does stratification/inequality exist (e.g., inequality in who goes to which school, who gets which job, etc.)

Basic explanation:

- ▶ inequality exists because a functioning society requires different people to do different sorts of jobs
 - ▶ e.g., some people have to collect trash, some people have to be teachers, some people have to be doctors, etc.
- ▶ Without inequality in access to opportunities, everyone would want the most prestigious, highest-paying jobs and many jobs necessary for functioning society would go undone

In their words (p. 243)

“the main functional necessity explaining the universal presence of stratification is precisely the requirement faced by any society of placing and motivating individuals in the social structure. As a functioning mechanism a society must somehow distribute its members in social positions and induce them to perform the duties of these positions”

“Inevitably, then, a society must have, first, some kind of rewards that it can use as inducements, and, second, some way of distributing these rewards differentially according to positions. The rewards and their distribution become a part of the social order, and thus give rise to stratification.”

Comments/concerns on functionalism

On one hand, certain ideas from functionalism seem true

- ▶ e.g., not everyone can be a lawyer

Functionalism rationalizes hierarchy and social stratification; public policy often explicitly adopts a functionalist rationale

- ▶ e.g., the “California Master Plan” for higher education is based on functionalist logic

Criticisms about functionalism:

- ▶ Assumption that any common practice/process exists because it serves some purpose needed for society to “function”
- ▶ By contrast, “conflict” approaches to sociology assume that practices exist because they served the interests of some group(s) that was powerful enough or big enough to institutionalize the practice
 - ▶ But no reason to believe that this practice serves the broader interest of society

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