

Virginia Community Colleges:
The Expanding Role and Low-Income Virginians

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Poverty and lack of capability in America are in part caused by lack of access to post-high school education. On average, each additional year of schooling or training results in a return on investment of 11-15% (Turner). Low socio-economic status families face daunting challenges in the modern economy. Costs of traditional college are rising at a time when a post-high school education is viewed as increasingly important to holding a middle-class job. Community colleges work to address this problem through two roles: providing low-cost education to students who wish to continue to a higher educational institution and providing career and vocational training to individuals going into a specific trade or craft. Historically, community college has balanced these two roles, fluctuating only marginally between an emphasis on each. Recently, community colleges across the country, and specifically in Virginia, have altered policies to focus more significantly on community colleges' transfer role, providing a pathway toward four-year state institutions. Examining the Virginia community college system and its balance of these two roles provides a case-study approach to the examining modern community college and its place in the provision of services to the low socio-economic status population.

In both of its roles community college provides specific benefits to low-income families and individuals. But the question remains whether vocational programs may provide greater benefit for low-income students and communities than transfer into a four-year college. Additionally, is the increased emphasis on completing a college

education that results from community college's shift towards transfer the most effective education for the low-income communities historically served by community college?

Community college has a history of reacting to the needs of the state and its people. This has resulted in a set of broad, often contradictory programs within community college (Bragg; Alfonso). As attitudes and educational needs shift, the role community colleges have played in Virginia's education network has altered as well. Community colleges' shift toward the transfer role has moved valuable time and resources from vocational students to a new transfer-oriented demographic. It remains crucial that Virginia's community college system, while rapidly changing, maintains its commitment to serving the underprivileged and low-income individuals of the state.

In order to examine the historical role of community college it is helpful to begin with a national perspective on community college policy. Community college first began expanding in the United States from 1944-1947, directly after World War II (Kane et al. 64). During this early period, community college focused primarily on transfer opportunities for students looking to attend four-year colleges. Then, between 1970 and 1990s, community colleges expanded into vocational and career training by increasing part-time enrollment and adding vocational programs. Community colleges transformed into centers of career training for workers seeking to upgrade their skills (Kane et al. 1999, 64). This change of focus caused tremendous growth in community colleges from the late 1970s to 1995. Enrollment of part-time students caused a 222 percent increase in community college enrollment nationally (Kane et al. 1999, 65). Community college programs provided specific services and benefits to low-income individuals; services

included coordination with local employers along with night and weekend classes for working students. Today, there are over 1,100 community colleges in the United States that enroll over 5.3 million students and account for 45% of all first time college entrants (Bragg).

Recently, community colleges have begun changing course once again. As completing a college education has become viewed as increasingly important, states including Virginia, have begun to move to a system in which students pursuing a baccalaureate degree can take their first two-years of classes at a local community college before moving to a four-year university to complete the degree. This shift has resulted in positive and negative changes for the low-income student population traditionally served by community college.

Community colleges have a broad double mandate. In the state of Virginia the community college system's formal mission statement includes the provision of training programs and additional pathways to college (NOVA). From a policy perspective, this double mandate presents challenges to community colleges serving the populations most in need. Institutions have to balance work force education for students who never intend to enroll in higher education along with students who proceed toward professional degrees. The combination of these two programs in one institution has led to difficulties with community colleges fulfilling their obligation to their communities.

The double mandate also presents a problem with the assessment of community colleges' success. By operating with two often-conflicting roles, if one program enjoys greater enrollment or success, another program will likely face lower enrollment, funding,

and support from community college administrators. For example, when examining the percent of all students who enroll in community college, only sixteen percent of students complete an associate's degree (Kane et al. 1999, 76). Statistics like these might seem to indicate failure of the community college system to the general public, but in reality these statistics reflect a deeper complexity to community college functioning and policy that makes study and analysis difficult. The number who does not complete an associate's degree includes both technical program's enrollees and those transferring to a four-year program before completing the associate's degree. Transfer or being hired, rather than the completion of the degree, in many cases is an indication of success.

When examining the combined effect of both activities, community colleges provide a positive benefit to society. Regardless of whether an individual completes an associate's degree at a community college, completes a future transfer to a four-year institution, or completes as little as one credit while enrolled in a community college, community colleges have statistically significant results for increased future earnings (Kane 1995, 611). Kane finds that community college and four-year programs have similar returns per credit hour when controlling for student ability and family backgrounds. These statistically significant results exist no matter how short of a period an individual enrolled in the community college (Kane 1995, 611). The average person who attended a two-year college earns ten percent more than the individual who with no college education, even without earning an associate's degree (Kane et al. 1995, 610). Community colleges are often discounted and criticized by observers and researchers due to their high attrition rates, but Kane demonstrates that even with high attrition rates, community colleges generate positive returns for their students. Additionally, community

colleges cannot only be judged on attrition rates due to the short-term nature of their vocational programs and their students.

Kane demonstrates that community colleges as a whole have long-term positive effects on their students. This paper develops a more specific examination and looks into the benefits and drawbacks of each focus of community college with respect to the achievement and success of low-income residents of Virginia.

Community colleges most unique role includes providing specific services and benefits to low-income individuals who may be on the cusp of poverty. The combination of the community college system's two tiers of service provides an opportunity for low-income individuals to access additional education or workforce training that can keep them from falling into poverty.

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Community colleges low costs make them an important resource for low-income residents of Virginia. In the 2011-2012 school year Northern Virginia Community College cost a Virginia resident 137.75 (NOVA) per credit hour. In comparison, the University of Virginia cost 308.00 per credit hour for Virginia residents (UVA Student Financial Services). This difference in costs makes the transfer function provided by community colleges a lifeline for some low-income students.

Community colleges convenient locations and flexible scheduling make them an important access point for low-income individuals to higher education (Bailey). Community colleges offer night and weekend classes for working individuals to expand their education. In Virginia, there are 23 community colleges in the state, (VCCS) located

in every major population area [Map 1]. There are only 15 state public institutions (SCHEV). This accessibility and variety in choice of community college makes them a crucial resource for low-income individuals.

In its first role of vocational and career training for individuals currently in the workforce, community college provides services for workers to learn a skill or trade to make themselves more competitive in the workplace. This function of community colleges provides an exceptional benefit for low-income individuals. First, it allows individuals who do not intend to pursue a four-year college degree to learn a craft or trade that could enable them to earn a higher salary and make them economically self-sufficient. Second, this role allows individuals who suffer a setback or layoff in the workplace to return to college in order to increase their education and skillset to make themselves more competitive in the job market. This service provides enormous benefit for low socio-economic status individuals with only a short-term commitment.

In its second role, community colleges enable completion of an associate's degree and rapid and easy transfer to a higher baccalaureate institution. This process allows for any individual to complete two-years of classes at a community college where costs per credit hour are significantly less and then transfer to a four-year institution to complete a bachelor's degree. This process has special significance for low-income students because it allows them to complete two-years of college education at minimal cost, remain in their hometown to minimize room and board costs associated with college, and to work part-time while completing two-years of schooling.

Virginia's community colleges have a significant impact on educating the state's low-income population. Three-fifths of all low-income and minority students in Virginia's public colleges and universities previously attended a community college (SCHEV). Currently, Virginia community colleges are failing to provide the best services for these low-income and minority students that rely the most on their services. The expansion of the transfer function has led to cuts in funding for vocational programs (Bailey), and in 2010, 19% low-income and minority students transferred to state four-year colleges compared to 28% of other students in Virginia community college (VCCS).

This shift in offerings at community college toward transfer programs has occurred across the United States as a bachelor's degree has become viewed as increasingly important to holding a steady, well-paying job. This shift is especially evident in the state of Virginia. From 1966 to 2002 a greater number of Virginia's community college students enrolled in career training programs than transfer-oriented programs. Since 2002, the number enrolled in transfer programs grew gradually through 2008 and then increased to the point in 2011 where almost twice as many Virginia community college students were enrolled in transfer programs as career training programs [Table 1] (VCCS). The exponential increase post-2008 is likely the result of state policy changes. At the same time this growth in transfer has occurred, career-technical enrollees system-wide has remained flat at about 5,000 per year [Table 2] (VCCS). This change indicates that the transfer function is likely attracting a new demographic of students to community college, not drawing students out of vocational programs and into transfer programs or serving the same population of low-income students historically served by community college.

The shift in community colleges away from vocational education has occurred in part because of state budgetary restraints. Vocational programs are more expensive for community colleges to operate. In Texas the average social sciences class cost \$4.03 per contact hour compared to \$5.26 for auto repair and \$9.08 for dental hygiene (Bailey). As a result of state budget crises in the mid 2000's, states cut back disproportionately on vocational program compared to transfer programs (Alfonso).

The 2005 Restructuring Higher Education Act quickened the shift toward transfer in Virginia's community colleges. This Act had an effect on the entire higher education market in Virginia including both community colleges and four-year universities. One of its primary missions included expanding access to selective four-year colleges to low-income individuals in exchange for greater independence from the state for four-year colleges. As part of this policy, state four-year institutions agree to expect lower future state funding (Turner; Virginia Legislature). In order to make up for this shortfall, state institutions were allowed to raise the sticker price of attending so long as they provide additional opportunities and aid for low-income individuals (Turner). This policy was combined with expanding admissions access to low-income individuals at selective state institutions (Turner). The most significant section to this policy for community colleges is the implementation of guaranteed admission articulation agreements at a state level. This program provides benefits to specific low-income families with children seeking a four-year degree, but it also provides benefits to upper middle-class students by providing them a second chance at attending a selective four-year college.

At this time there has been little scholarly work analyzing the effect of this 2005 policy change. One researcher, Sarah E. Turner examined the Act while it was still being finalized in the Virginia state legislature. Turner's work speculates on the effects the Act will have; she is optimistic about the future of cooperation between Virginia community colleges and the state higher educational institutions, and the effect the Act will have on the low-income community college population of Virginia.

This Act takes measures to address the current underrepresentation of low-income students at the University of Virginia and other selective public institutions. In 2002, the entering class at UVA had only 6% of families with incomes below \$30,000 and over 60% with incomes greater than \$100,000 (Turner). At UVA, the creation of the AccessUVA plan begins to address the problem of underrepresented low-income students on campus by guaranteeing students below 150% of the poverty line will have student loans replaced with grants, and by capping the amount of expected debt for middle-income families at the cost of education for one year (Turner). The AccessUVA program also provides an initiative to increase college recruitment of low-income students by increasing admissions visits to underrepresented high schools (Turner). These components of the Act should help to expand opportunities in higher education to low-income Virginians.

Turner does not examine the additional aspect of the 2005 Act, which increases the ease of transfer from Virginia community colleges to state public institutions by guaranteeing admissions and junior standing to individuals who obtain an associate's degree and meet a GPA requirement for the state university while at a Virginia community college (VCCS). There is currently no specific data on the effects and success

of the AccessUVa program, but data from the Virginia community college system shows a doubling of students enrolled in transfer programs from 2001-2009 [Table 3] (VCCS). This does not provide details on how the program impacts low-income students, but it does show the program is leading community colleges to attract a new demographic of students.

This Act does not solve the problem with Virginia's community college double mandate, but it does advance the ability for low-income individuals to gain access to a baccalaureate degree. At the same time, this policy provides a second change for upper middle-class students to gain admission into selective four-year institutions.

In addition to the 2005 Act, Virginia provides additional support for community college graduates seeking to complete a four-year degree. The Virginia two-year college transfer grant, instituted by the Virginia General Assembly in 2007 awards \$1,000 per year when students graduate with an associate's degree and transfer full-time by the following fall to a Virginia four-year college with a 3.0 GPA and an expected family contribution less than \$8,000 (VCCS). Since 2008, Virginia has given out over \$1.44 million to more than 1,100 low-income students (VCCS).

The motivation for the policy change towards transfer is two-fold. There is an increased need to help students achieve a baccalaureate degree, which has become viewed as necessary for holding a full-time, stable job. Second, the state of Virginia needed to react to a budget shortfall that coincided with exponentially increasing applications to its state flagship universities (Turner). By allowing students to complete two years in community college, state universities can manage applications, enrollments,

and costs more effectively in order to save state dollars and prevent overcrowding in state institutions.

If it achieves its goals, the 2005 Act and its guaranteed admissions component should expand access to the upper-tier public institutions to low-income students who would not traditionally be able to attend the university. The Act will increase access for low-income students both by reducing cost based on financial need and by guaranteeing student transfer from community college to state universities.

This new policy could, however, create a situation of adverse selection. The policy allows any individual regardless of income or background who completes an associate's degree at a community college and who meets a minimal GPA requirement to be guaranteed admissions into selective public institutions including UVA and William and Mary. Students will be guaranteed admission regardless of the traditional factors in college admission: high school record and standardized tests scores. This could provide a benefit for upper income individuals who cannot immediately be accepted into top-tier state universities. These individuals could make up the majority of students gaining admission to top-tier state universities through this program instead of the program serving the state's underprivileged and low-income demographic.

The state of Virginia does not provide data that breakdown the demographics of enrollees by individual community college or by transfer cohort. This data would enable an examination of whether this 2005 policy change has resulted in more or fewer low-income students enrolling in four-year state universities. Data on student enrollment changes since the initiation of this policy would help to further examine its effects on

low-income students. The state also does not provide data on the demographics and family financial background of students taking part in and successfully completing the guaranteed admissions transfer from community college to four-year colleges. Data like these could be used to determine whether the program really provides benefit to the low socio-economic status individuals traditionally serviced by community college, or whether the implementation of the policy has increased middle- and upper-class enrollment in community colleges to take advantage of the guaranteed admissions transfer program.

The policy provides benefits to low-income students seeking a four-year degree, but because the majority of increased transfer enrollment is coming from northern-Virginia suburbs, [Table 4] rather than rural community colleges, the policy is likely having a disproportionate benefit on more wealthy students seeking a second chance at a four-year degree. While providing a second chance to some students is not a negative result for the policy, the popularity of the program with upper-income students could deplete funds for other community college programs including vocational programs that disproportionately enroll greater numbers of low-income students.

The few data that are available at the state level allows for an examination of the trends in community college enrollment in addition to the challenges faced by community colleges and their students. Leading up to, and following the implementation of the 2005 policy, community colleges in the state of Virginia experienced tremendous growth in enrollment. Even with this increased enrollment, there is significant disparity between size and programs offered at Virginia's 23 community colleges. In the Fall-2007 cohort Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA) had 4598 students, which is a significant

growth from 1197 in the fall-1997 cohort. Overall, NOVA claims to have more than 75,000 students, including full-time and part-time enrolled as of Fall 2011 (VCCS). Comparatively, Eastern Shore community college had an enrollment of 86 in its Fall-2007 cohort (VCCS). This difference in enrollment sizes of Virginia's community colleges is likely a contributing factor to the differences in institutional focus between transfer and vocational programs among community colleges.

The disparity between colleges could contribute to differences in outcomes for low-income students by community college of origin. Due to their location and student-demographics, some community colleges place a greater emphasis on career training rather than college transfer. For example, Dabney S. Lancaster Community College in Clifton Forge, Virginia offers programs in culinary management, forestry management, wood technology, wind turbine service, welding, urban forestry, and truck driving (DSLCC). These programs are directly applicable to a job. Community colleges located in more urban, highly educated and wealthier regions of the state are likely to have a much greater transfer-track enrollment compared to the more rural community colleges. For example, Northern Virginia Community College offers a more limited selection of vocational classes including: Microsoft Excel, retirement planning, photography, business writing, and web design (NOVA). These classes are more oriented toward an older, currently employed demographic.

Examining individual community college data in Virginia provides a detailed look at the differences in trends in enrollments in large urban-based community colleges compared to small rural community colleges. Northern Virginia Community College, the

largest in the state, experienced a large increase in students enrolling in the transfer track in the previous six years [Table 4]. At this same time enrollment in vocational programs remained flat [Table 4]. It looks as though this increase in transfer enrollment does not come from students choosing transfer over vocational programs. This indicates that the increased focus on the transfer program in Virginia community colleges is attracting new students, not historically served by community college, into the community college system. Blue Ridge Community College, a small rural community college in Virginia, shows a slightly different trend. Blue Ridge data shows a significant increase in enrollment in transfer programs in the previous six years, but with an increase in vocational enrollment in the same time frame [Table 5]. This again indicates that the transfer program is attracting new students into community college, not drawing students out of vocational programs and into transfer programs.

The main differences present in the data from Northern Virginia and Blue Ridge Community College show that vocational enrollment has continued to grow at Blue Ridge [Table 5] while it leveled off and marginally dropped at Northern Virginia [Table 4]. This indicates that while transfer programs are important at both rural and urban community colleges, there seems to be more of a focus on vocational programs in rural community colleges.

Because the increased focus on the transfer program is attracting new students to community college who have not been traditionally part of the system, these students are less likely to be low-income or minority students who traditionally have enrolled in community colleges in high numbers. Community colleges are tapping into a new demographic to increase the number of services they provide. This expansion in students

served by Virginia community colleges may be taking institutional focus away from the low-income students who have historically enrolled in community college.

The rapid change in student behavior that followed the 2005 policy change demonstrates that this policy has a significant impact on the educational focus of community colleges in the Virginia. As the college transfer track continues to grow, financial resources and institutional focus are likely being drawn away from career and vocational training and moved toward programs tailored toward college transfer. For the 2013 and 2014 budget the State of Virginia Allocated \$22.1 million to supporting the 2005 Act, “encouraging more graduates in sciences, technology, engineering, math, and healthcare fields, as well as supporting underrepresented students to graduate from higher education institutions” (Commonwealth of Virginia). At the same time, only \$2 million in additional funds is allocated to funding “non credit courses at community colleges that enhance workforce development” (Commonwealth of Virginia).

As part of this shift in focus, the population primarily served by community college may be changing as well. Traditionally, community colleges have served a specific low-income demographic that faces challenges with attending college or with working a full-time well-paying job. The implementation of this new policy in Virginia has expanded the net from which community colleges traditionally attract students and led to significantly increased enrollment. This has likely led to increased middle- and upper-class enrollment from students who do not traditionally enroll in community college. These students are likely attracted by community college’s low costs and flexibility along with the ability to be guaranteed admissions into a selective state university. While this increased attention on student transfer may provide some benefit to

some specific low-income students, I suspect it is also drawing attention away from the population traditionally served by community college in addition to drawing attention away from the vocational programs that have traditionally and most effectively served low-income residents of Virginia.

Currently, neither the Virginia Community College System nor the State Council for Higher Education in Virginia provides data that breakdown community college transfer students by demographic such as age or family income. If this data were available it would enable a more detailed examination as to what student demographic group is primarily being served and benefitting from Virginia's focus on transfer.

There are significant negatives to community colleges increased student base and its expanding basket of programs. Community colleges are inherently different from their four-year counterparts and should not be viewed as an alternative to four-year institutions.

Community colleges are most importantly different from four-year institutions because they are not selective (Bailey, 4). Grubb (1996) argues that community colleges are “not academic institutions even when [many students transfer] to four year college” (Grubb via Bailey). Community colleges cannot choose who to admit and who not to admit; this means community colleges have to prepare for a wide variety of student skill-sets and needs. For students intending to complete a college degree, community college is not the best option (Grubb via Bailey). Community college's focus on the transfer track draws program and administrative attention away from the unique vocational function of community college (Bailey, 4) and the low socio-economic status students traditionally served by community colleges.

Even at the state level, there is specific evidence that community colleges are not the best choice for individuals planning to complete a baccalaureate degree. Data from the Virginia community college system show that while a majority of students who enroll in community colleges plan to transfer to four-year colleges; the majority of students do not complete the associate's degree before leaving community college (VCCS). In order to be guaranteed transfer and admissions into a four-year college in Virginia, a student must first complete two years of community college and obtain an associate's degree (VCCS). This indicates the college transfer is not the best path for every student in Virginia community colleges, and many could be just as well served through enrolling in a functional vocational program.

As is the case with the majority of students in Virginia, if a student is only going to be able to attend community college for one year, and not complete an associate's degree, the student would be better served by enrolling in a technical or vocational training program at the community college than a transfer oriented program in the same community college. In a transfer-oriented program the individual would learn skills for college that are not directly applicable in the job market, while in a career training or vocational program the individual could learn skills directly applicable on a job.

Bailey et al. exhibit that community colleges' ever expanding mission arises from complexities associated with institutions funding. Funding for community college relies both on enrollment and on rates set by the state legislature. As community college administrators look for additional revenue sources, expansion into additional non-core programs provides the quickest opportunity (Bailey, 35). This incentive to expand outside

of core programs draws attention away from programs that traditionally help low-income students.

The four-year college education currently being pushed by community colleges with the expansion of the transfer function may not be the best path for all individuals. In the 1990's vocational education in high school and community college started to be phased out as "educators prepared students to become 'knowledge workers' (Crawford). In California, three-quarters of high school vocational programs have disappeared since 1980 (Crawford). "Tom Thompson, of Oregon's Department of Education says there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that one of the fastest-growing segments of the student body at community colleges is people who already have a four-year degree and return to get a marketable trade or skill" (Crawford, 12).

The modern education system's increased focus on college attendance has led to a gap in the current labor market. Industrial companies with jobs for skilled workers are having trouble filling full work schedules and fulfilling all their company's orders due to the lack of skilled workers (Lerman). Current data estimates that as many as 600,000 skilled jobs remain unfilled due to the shortage of technically skilled workers. These are well paying jobs that employ machinists, welders, and aircraft manufacturers (Lerman). Building relationships with local businesses is key to community college's success as a vocational institution; in order to maintain these relationships community colleges' must continue to commit money, time, and employees to vocational programs (Bailey, 16). Now that enrollment in transfer programs has doubled that of vocational programs the core functions of vocational programs receive less attention from community college administrators and policy makers (Bailey).

The shortage of skilled workers in today's economy is due to both the increased focus on college-level coursework at a high school and community college level (Lerman). Schools across the board are placing less emphasis and resources into vocational and trade programs. Schools increasingly theoretical and academic educational focus prevents students from learning employability skills, including communications, problem solving, taking instruction, and learning from experience. Without these skills workers may experience difficulties fitting into the workplace (Lerman; Bailey).

Vocational programs have long been effective in the European educational system. Germany provides an example of a functional vocation education system that can support a strong manufacturing sector in a developed economy. Seventy-five percent of Germans between 15 and 25 undergo apprenticeships in order to enhance their job prospects after graduation from secondary school or college (Uthmann). The aspect of apprenticeship programs in Germany that make them most successful is that they are well respected by both businesses and German people (Uthmann). The German model that includes significant relationships between higher education and businesses offers a model for American vocational programs to follow.

The appropriate time to begin vocation training in American community colleges is in high school. By first providing students vocational experience in high school, when a student makes the decision to attend or not to attend college, he/she can make the decision with another career or lifestyle in mind. Many Americans oppose vocational tracking in high school. But, there is a current problem in which the majority of students who enroll in college never graduate, and "failure to graduate from college may leave [an

individual] without the technical skills to make [him or her] valuable in the hard-nosed labor market” (Shipler). The United States has allowed vocational training in high school and community college to lag, which has led to a “weakness in the middle-skill area” (Shipler). “A revival of vocational education in high school and a network of apprenticeships for those who don’t go to college” would provide opportunities to the majority of Americans who do not complete a college degree (Shipler).

While vocational programs provide great benefit to low-income students, policy makers need to be careful when dealing with vocational programs in high school. Policy makers and school administrators need to make sure that as vocation programs expand in the United States they do not become a go-to for low-income students to the point that the majority of low-income students are automatically shuffled into vocational programs (Pincus). In high school students should be introduced to both vocational and college preparation programs in order to provide the students with options after completing high school. This avoids some of the problems with students in European educational system being placed on a single track at a young age.

While there is a place for beginning vocational programs in high school, community college is the best location for strong, developed vocational programs. In order to renew their commitment to the low-income communities in Virginia, community colleges must place greater resources and emphasis on vocational opportunities. In many respects, these programs can be just as beneficial for students as completing a college degree.

Not every student or individual is best served by completing a four-year college education. For much less initial cost, an individual who completes training in a skilled trade can achieve a middle-class lifestyle of equal success to the majority of college graduates (Lerman). Community colleges' increased focus on college transfer is taking attention from traditional community college students and vocational programs.

In order to deemphasize the importance placed on a four-year college education in community colleges and to better serve the low socio-economic status individuals of Virginia, community colleges' should reevaluate their entire structure and mission. A separation of traditional community college programs focused on transfer and community college programs focused on vocational and career training might be beneficial to both policy makers and community college students. Separating institutions based on these two policies would allow each institution to focus fully on its core mission (Bailey). This change could be mutually beneficial to both community college transfer and vocational students.

Community college's broad double-mandate presents problems both from a policy and administrative perspective. Community colleges have difficulty balancing this double mandate (Bailey). As energy and resources move toward one program they move away from the other (Bailey, 4). Success and failure of each program relies on the functioning of the competing program. From a policy perspective, dividing community colleges transfer and vocational programs into two distinct institutions would allow for greater focus on the programs core functioning and success (Bailey). From a students perspective this division would allow for students direct needs to be met more efficiently.

Students would still have the ability to choose from either program, but by separating the institution, teachers and administrators would be able to focus on their core goals and provide better, more complete services to students.

Separation of the two programs would allow for students who enroll in a specific program to be surrounded by similar students and motivated to succeed in their specific program. With all programs under one-roof as they are today, there are conflicts among the wants and needs of constituencies (Bailey):

Eighteen-year-old students with baccalaureate aspirations might want a collegiate environment with semesters, liberal arts classes, and extra-curricular activities ... business leaders and older workers want much more focused technical or occupational preparation that is not wedded to semester schedules or collegiate educational norms. For these groups, extra-curricular activities and other trappings of college life are irrelevant (Bailey, 34).

In addition, career and vocational programs could make the investment to create apprenticeship programs and expand facilities to include more advanced hands-on training in vocational and career specific skills that employers desire. Vocational programs rely on the ability of community college teachers and administrators to maintain relationships with local businesses for training and hiring purposes (Bailey). Community colleges also need to be able to commit substantial funds and resources to purchasing equipment and materials for vocational program. This can be more efficiently and effectively managed if the institution focuses on one specific role.

At the same time, the institutions focused on student transfer can focus on preparing graduates for college and maintaining relationships with college admissions representatives and administrators. This role takes significant time; administrators have to

walk students through the college application process, host college visits, and ensure that students complete the correct courses and specific credits required to transfer to each unique institution.

Currently, community college has too expansive of a mandate. By balancing both college transfer and career/vocational programs, community colleges are unable to provide full services or functioning in either program. Moving forward, community colleges should address this failure by splitting up each colleges vocational training program and transfer program. Only once each program can get the full attention of community college administrators, policy makers, and educators, each provide the best services to its students.

The community college system in Virginia has experienced a generation of change. Recently, with the implementation of a statewide guaranteed admission policy, community college has expanded upon the base demographic from which it traditionally attracts students. This change has implications for both the services offered and students traditionally served by community colleges. Expansion has drawn attention away from vocational programs and the low-income students historically served by community college. Community colleges expansion into the transfer role provides positives for both low-income and more well off students, but its integration into traditional community college presents problems for traditional community college students and vocational programs. In order to maintain its commitment to low-income students, community colleges should divide their vocational and transfer-oriented programs into two distinct

institutions. This would allow each program to more efficiently provide the best services to the specific demographic it serves.

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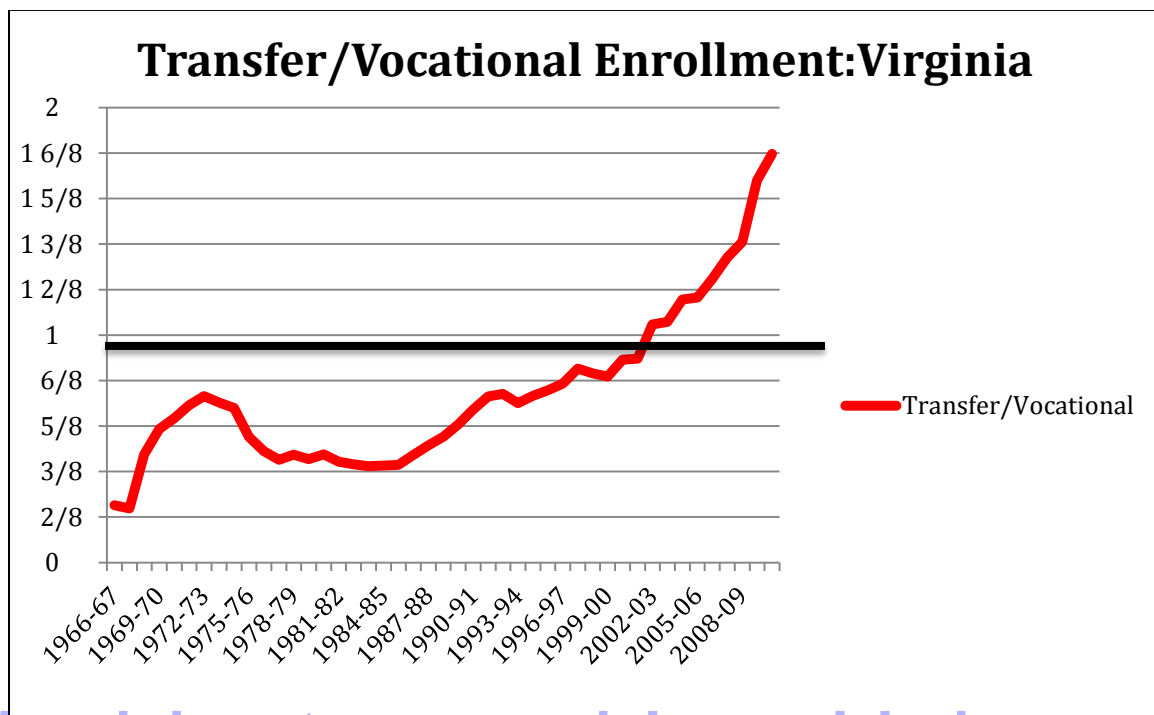
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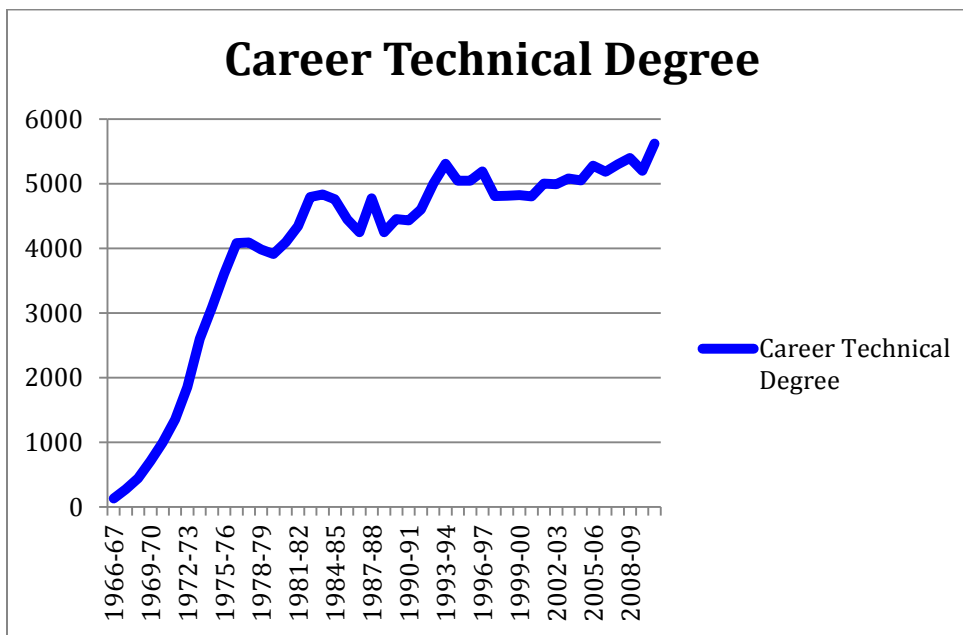
Appendix:

Table 1: VCCS System Transfer Awards/Vocational Enrollment



Source: Virginia Community College System

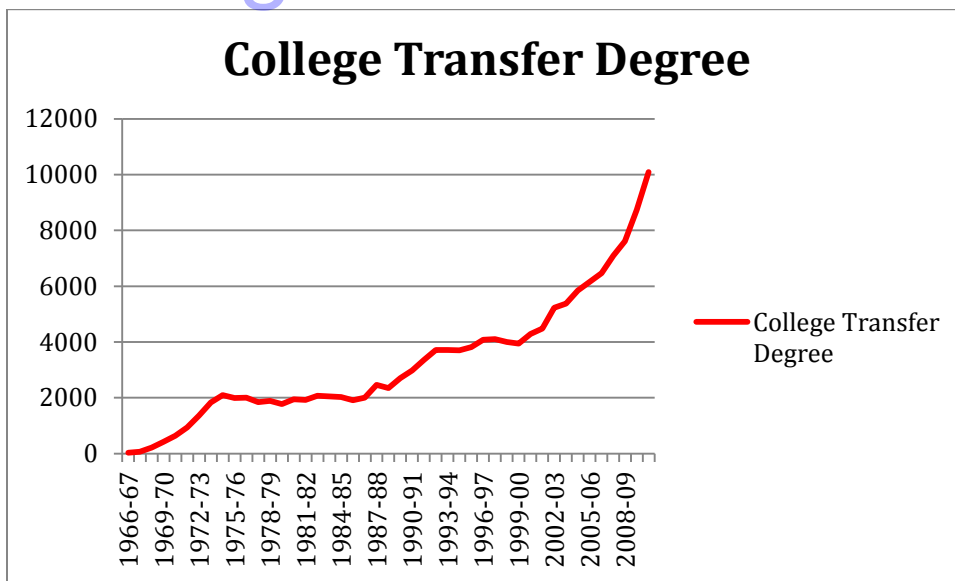
Table 2: VCCS System Technical Degree Awards



Source: Virginia Community College System

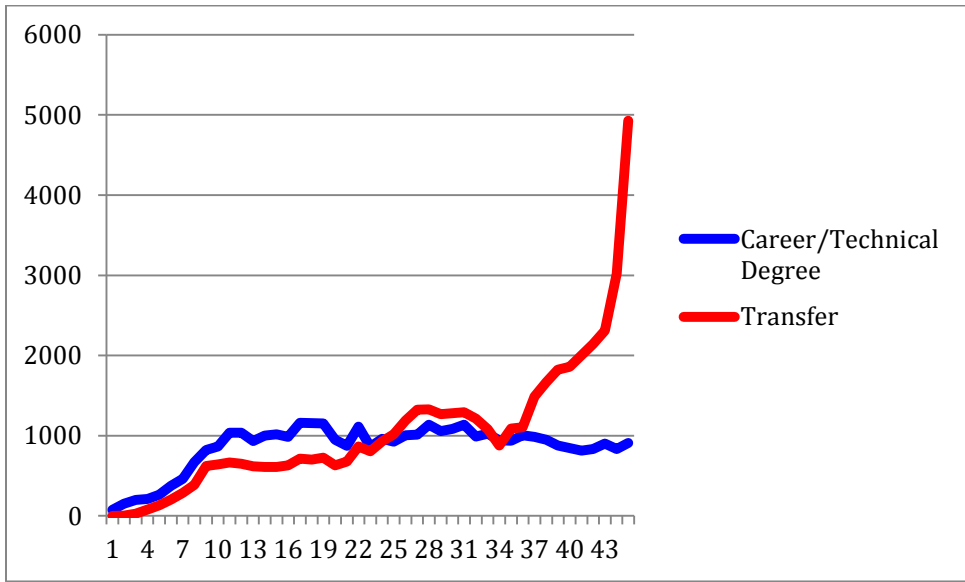
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Table 3: VCCS System Transfer Degree Awards



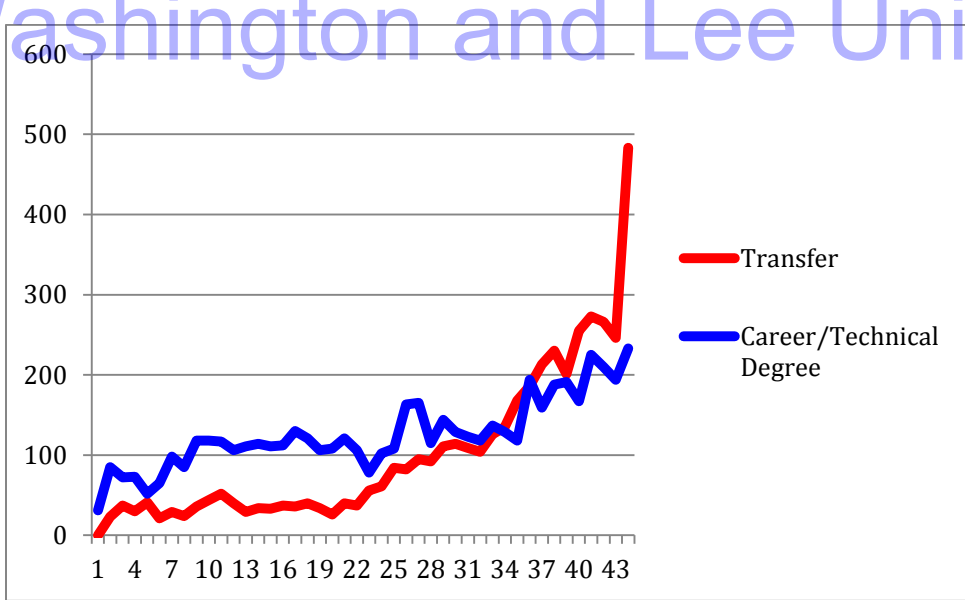
Source: Virginia Community College System

Table 4: Northern Virginia Community College Graduate Awards 1966-2011



Source: Virginia Community College System

Table 5: Blue Ridge Community College Graduate Awards 1966-2011



Source: Virginia Community College System

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Map 1:



Source: Virginia Community College System
<http://www.vccs.edu/CollegeLocator/tabid/201/Default.aspx>

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