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November 29, 2006

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**CCRC TO RELEASE GROUNDBREAKING BOOK ON
CHALLENGES FACING COMMUNITY COLLEGES**

**-- *Shrinking State Support, Immigration, Population Growth and Economic Trends
Drive Change at America's "Open Door" Institutions* --**

November 20, 2006, New York, NY -- The Community College Research Center (CCRC), the leading independent authority on the nation's 1,200 community colleges, today announces the publication of *Defending the Community College Equity Agenda*, the most in-depth look to-date at the challenges confronting community colleges.

The book will be available for purchase through Amazon.com and Hopkins Fulfillment Service on December 1st, 2006. It will be available in bookstores on December 26th, 2006.

The volume, edited by Dr. Thomas Bailey and Dr. Vanessa Smith Morest, both of CCRC, examines the economic, political and social challenges that have made it increasingly difficult for two-year institutions, despite the commitment and dedicated work of their faculty and staff, to ensure that all students have an equal shot at college preparation, access and success. Central to these challenges is the loss of state funding, which has not only caused an increase in tuition rates for students, but has also made it difficult for colleges to maintain the teaching and services necessary for their growing and increasingly diverse student body.

"Today's community colleges operate in a drastically different environment than they did even a decade ago," said Dr. Bailey, director of CCRC and author of several of the book's chapters. "The conversation has shifted away from focusing primarily on getting students into the doors of community colleges. While we still have work to do on access, colleges now need to focus on improving the success of those students. This may seem like a simple idea, but it represents a radical shift since most colleges are funded and judged on the basis of enrollments rather than the educational and employment success of their students."

Currently enrolling over 10 million credit and non-credit students every year, community colleges are the critical entry points to higher education and economic opportunity for almost half of the nation's college students and a disproportionate share of low-income, minority and academically unprepared students. Community colleges have historically

operated according to an “open-door” mission, providing college access to a range of students, many of whom attend part time.

The increasing link between higher education and economic prosperity has heightened interest in the potential contribution of community colleges to an educated workforce. At the same time, demographic factors, such as immigration and a growing population of young people, are reshaping the realities of delivering postsecondary educational opportunity in the nation’s two-year colleges.

Drawing on research derived from the real life experiences of 15 community colleges nationwide, the book examines trends including:

- The increasing emphasis on performance accountability at community colleges;
- The ongoing problem of weak academic preparedness;
- The opportunities and challenges of online education; and
- The growth of for-profit institutions.

Some of the book’s major findings are:

- Performance accountability systems developed over the last few years have not yielded better performance at community colleges, and they have often been weakened and rolled back due to political opposition.
- Weak academic preparation of a majority of community college students continues to be the most challenging problem facing community colleges. Colleges use a wide variety of policies to address this problem, yet there is very little research that indicates which approaches are most successful.
- There is little evidence that for-profit institutions are threatening the enrollments of community colleges.
- Community colleges are enthusiastically expanding online offerings and some students are gaining access to college through online education. However, many colleges focus more on the technological aspects of online education than on the educational issues that affect how well students learn the material covered in online courses.

Bailey concludes: “We count on community colleges to provide a successful college experience to a wide variety of low income, minority, first generation and academically underprepared students. Yet funding and financial aid policies, accountability systems, trends in online education and workforce development strategies can actually serve to *weaken* this mission.

“Moreover, the developmental education, student services and student counseling programs designed to meet the needs of students facing academic, social and economic barriers often lack the resources and coordination needed to be effective. Progress by the staff and faculty—the majority of whom are dedicated to advancing the community college equity agenda—is accomplished only by swimming upstream against the prevailing current of policy and institutional practice. Real change can only occur when policymakers, local communities and community colleges work together to put the best research to good use.”

The book offers several recommendations for community colleges, among them:

- Colleges must think of reform in terms of broad institutional policy that changes the fundamental way a college operates, rather than pursuing a more typical approach of initiating discrete, small-scale programs targeted at a limited number of students.
- Colleges must design and use better data systems to track student progress to understand how students move through college and to recognize the points at which they face the most serious barriers.
- College operations and incentives currently emphasize enrollments. This should be changed so that funding, accountability systems, professional development, human resource policy and program planning and coordination are also explicitly designed to promote student progress and success.
- Colleges use an often bewildering variety of approaches to developmental education and student services, but they need a much better understanding of which strategies are most effective.
- Colleges need to focus more on how well students learn through online education programs.

“This book is a must-read for anyone interested in making our community colleges more effective, and, given the difference a college degree can make, that should be everyone,” said George Boggs, president of the American Association of Community Colleges. “It’s important to maximize the contributions that community colleges can make to our economy and the progress of our country.”

For more information on the book, including a fact sheet, recommendations derived from the book and other materials, please visit <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu>. The book (ISBN 0-8018-8447-0, hardcover, \$45), published by Johns Hopkins University Press, can be ordered from the Hopkins Fulfillment Service at 1-800-537-5487 or by visiting www.press.jhu.edu (mention or enter the code **NAF** to receive a 20% discount).

For review copies, contact Kate Roberts or Jennine Meyer at 914-833-7093 or Kathy Alexander at 410-516-4162 (Johns Hopkins University Press).

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CCRC is the leading independent authority on the nation’s more than 1,200 two-year colleges. CCRC was established in 1996 by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, and is housed at the Institute on Education and the Economy (IEE) at Teachers College, Columbia University.