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Pandemic Repercussions: The Future of International Education at US Community Colleges

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ABSTRACT

The disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic have both short- and long-term repercussions on higher education. To crystallize these impacts in a sector that was particularly vulnerable to the economic effects of the pandemic, this mixed- methods study explores the intersection of international education and community college responses to the pandemic. Findings indicated that due to the pandemic, community college international education programs faced a reallocation of institutional resources, both financial and otherwise, which shapes the educational opportunities available to students and informs the institutional habitus of the US community college. This study's findings have implications in the areas of international student recruitment, limits to higher education access, and impacts on local and regional communities.

Keywords: community colleges, COVID-19, impact on internationalization, mixed methods

INTRODUCTION

While the COVID-19 pandemic certainly disrupted US international higher education in the short term, essentially eliminating student mobility and costing institutions considerable financial resources in refunded program fees and lost revenue (Martel, 2020; NAFSA, 2020), perhaps the greatest effects of the pandemic on international higher education will be long-term. These effects are likely to include persistent declines in international student enrollment, changes in internationally-focused institutional policies and structures, and permanent modifications to education abroad programs (e.g., Redden, 2021). The community college sector, composed primarily of public two-year institutions, was especially hard hit during the pandemic, suffering general enrollment declines and revenue shortfalls not seen in other sectors of US higher education (Weissman, 2021; Whitford, 2021). To add insult to injury, community colleges also received considerably less emergency relief funding through the CARES Act, passed by the US government to provide financial support for higher education institutions during the crucial early days of the pandemic, an event that foregrounded financial implications yet to come for this sector (St. Amour, 2020). Implications of the pandemic for community colleges generally and their international education programs have the potential to be especially fraught in the future.

The US community college traditionally addresses multiple missions while focusing on the needs of the college's local community. Thus, these institutions often provide a wide variety of programming and learning opportunities, including career-focused and continuing education as well as pathways to more advanced degree programs (Barringer & Jaquette, 2018; Dougherty & Townsend, 2006). Community colleges serve over 11 million US students and, given the open-access nature of their programming, tend to serve student populations that are more diverse than their four-year college and university counterparts (American Association of Community Colleges, 2021; Bailey & Morest, 2006; González Canché, 2018). Although international education programming often sits at the periphery of these institutions and reports lower participation rates compared to similar programming at four-year colleges and universities (IIE, 2020; Raby & Valeau, 2016), current research suggests that community colleges provide an important conduit to international education experience for underrepresented and underserved student populations, including those from minoritized racial/ethnic backgrounds and lower-income households (Whatley, 2021; Whatley & Raby, 2020). These students rely on their institutions to provide resources, financial and otherwise, that allow them to access international education opportunities and subsequent benefits.

The purpose of the current study is to explore the intersection between international education and community college responses to the pandemic, thus highlighting how the pandemic impacted international education in a particularly vulnerable sector of US higher education, and how this impact may endure well into the future. In this mixed-methods study, we specifically explore the allocation of institutional resources, both financial and otherwise, to international education programming. Resource allocation is not only key to the short- and long-term survival of these programs, but also communicates to students and other institutional stakeholders about the college's values and priorities (Massey, 1996). While this work focuses especially on the US community college, it has broad implications beyond this sector, particularly for institutions that serve historically and currently underserved student populations, including technical and vocational education and training institutions (TVETs) located around the globe (Legusov et al., 2021), who may find themselves in an equally financially precarious situation in the context of the pandemic.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study takes as its point of departure the notion that institutions provide resources to their constituents, whether financial or otherwise (Berger, 2000). Within an institution, allocation of resources has clear consequences for students, as these resources contribute both to the educational opportunities available and the extent to which students can take advantage of them (Taylor &

Cantwell, 2018, 2019). The relationship between resources and opportunity structure may be especially salient in the community college context, particularly given the demographics of the student population they serve. Rhoads and Valadez (1996) highlight the multiple missions of the US community college, discussed more in-depth in the literature review section, including vocational education, community education, and provision of credits that students can transfer to four-year institutions. While these multiple missions may help community colleges to serve a more diverse student population, a key component of their open-access character, multiple missions may also translate into uncertainty in resource allocation, given finite resources to go around. That is, the multiple missions of a community college can make it difficult for administrators, legislators, and other decision-makers to decide where to allocate resources and how much to allocate, particularly in times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

The allocation of resources comprises a key component of the organizational habitus that students encounter when they attend an educational institution. According to McDonough (1997), organizational habitus consists of “a common set of subjective perceptions which individuals receive from their immediate environment” (p. 106). When institutions allocate resources to certain institutional functions, such as admissions, academic affairs, or athletics programs, these allocations speak to the institution’s values (Massey, 1996). Students and others who come into contact with the institution subsequently perceive these values and derive worldviews that delimit the full range of educational possibilities that might be available. In this study, our focus is on the allocation of resources to international education, and how this resource allocation shifted in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. In shifting resources towards or away from international education, institutions send students messages about what is valued at their institutions and about what educational experiences are most important to their future success.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Multiple Missions of Community Colleges

For many decades, scholars and policymakers alike have strived to encapsulate the complex mission of US community colleges (Ayers, 2017; Bailey & Morest, 2004; Bragg, 2001; Cohen et al., 2013; Zook, 1947). Most common is perhaps Cohen et al.’s (2013) curricular approach, which defines the community college mission as providing a comprehensive curriculum. The colleges’ curricula include collegiate or academic transfer education; workforce development, developmental education; continuing education aimed at community members, and general or integrative education (Cohen et al., 2013). Bailey and Morest (2004) explain that outside of its academic and transfer core curricular function, the community college also pursues expansions, such as attracting international students and providing English language programs (Bailey & Morest, 2004).

Although the Truman Commission recommended the internationalization of community colleges through enrolling international students, providing education abroad opportunities, and infusing global concepts in the curriculum (Zook, 1947), the most frequent definition of community used at community colleges has largely excluded foreign nationals and the global marketplace (Levin, 2001). Informed by these perspectives, we view the mission of the US community college as three-pronged: Community colleges provide open access to a comprehensive curriculum, including international opportunities, that serves a number of communities, including local, regional, and beyond. This mission drives the financial infrastructure of the college, such as institutional budgets and resource allocation (Bailey & Morest, 2004; Cohen et al., 2013), which in return impacts educational programs and student recruitment strategies.

International Education at US Community Colleges

Community colleges have played an important role in preparing 41 percent of US undergraduate students for a diverse workforce and have been key actors in higher education’s

internationalization efforts (AACC, 2021; Zhang, 2011). These institutions first began to internationalize in the 1960s (Raby, 2020), yet internationalization still often exists at the periphery at many community colleges (Green & Siaya, 2005; Raby & Valeau, 2007). In the decade prior to the pandemic, community college researchers observed an increasing focus on campus internationalization (Raby & Valeau, 2016), coupled with considerable challenges regarding increasing outbound mobility (Raby & Rhodes, 2018) or working to attract and support international students (Falcone, 2019; Zhang, 2016). At many community colleges, internationalization was simply not a priority, as reflected in its lack of inclusion in college policies (Raby & Rhodes, 2018), such as strategic plans and mission statements. As of 2006, approximately one-fifth of community colleges included campus internationalization as a key component of the institution's strategic plan and only one quarter of community college mission statements referenced internationalization (Raby, 2008). The growth of internationalization has also been hindered by a lack of institutional funding for designated departments of international education, resulting in a limited number of education programs being offered (Raby & Rhodes, 2018) and, likely, in a lack of access to international recruitment tools.

This absence of institutional support for international education may be in large part due to the community college mission being perceived as directed primarily toward its local community (Cohen et al., 2013). This perception is perpetuated by ideas such as the internationalization of community college curricula having no direct impact on the jobs that graduates obtain. However, campus internationalization need not be counter to the local mission of the community college (Raby et al., 2014), but can, in fact, contribute to community colleges' "meeting their mandate of preparing students for their future roles in a global economy, where international literacy is a basic skill needed in the workplace" (Raby, 2008, p. 8). In recent years, community college outward mobility has made great strides (Raby, 2019), reaching nearly 8,000 students in 2018-19 (IIE, 2020). Since 2007, the number of community colleges that reported sending students on education abroad programs has more than tripled to almost 300 institutions (IIE, 2009; 2019). Additionally, at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, community colleges enrolled approximately 80,000 international students (IIE, 2020).

Short-Term Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Community College Sector

Community colleges appear to have suffered the brunt of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic's impact concerning campus health, enrollment declines, and budget uncertainties, in part further complicated by already existing financial constraints due to declining state funds (Floyd, 2021; Gardner, 2020). Spring 2021 community college enrollment declined by 11.3 percent compared to the previous spring, dropping another 2 percent from fall 2020. In contrast, spring 2020 to spring 2021 enrollment in bachelor's programs decreased by only 2.2 percent, and graduate enrollment grew by 4.4 percent (National Student Clearinghouse, 2021). The resulting reduction in community college enrollment-based funding was exacerbated by sector-wide state support declining by \$457 million or 2.0 percent between 2020 and 2021 (compared to \$63 million or 0.1 percent in the four-year sector). Funding for community colleges declined in 22 states, with six states decreasing funding by more than 10% (Laderman & Tandberg, 2021).

In terms of international education, like all higher education institutions, community colleges with existing education abroad programs experienced disruptions in services and programming due to health concerns and travel restrictions caused by the pandemic (Martel, 2020; NAFSA, 2020). Students abroad were recalled, and upcoming education abroad programs canceled or postponed through spring 2022 (Cossey & Fischer, 2021; Martel, 2020). Community colleges with international students felt enrollment declines almost immediately. For fall 2020, international student enrollment at community colleges declined by 27 percent, compared to 15 and 21 percent at doctoral and master's institutions (Baer & Martel, 2020).

The current study addresses aspects of the pandemic's impact beyond immediate student mobility restrictions. Specifically, we explore how the pandemic impacted the resources, financial and otherwise, that community colleges devoted to international education during this time of crisis. Reallocation of resources towards or away from international education has the potential to impact the survival and success of these programs well into the future and sends a clear message to students and other stakeholders regarding how international education fits into institutional priorities.

RESEARCH METHOD

The data that we draw from in this exploratory study was collected as part of a larger mixed-methods research project carried out in June and July 2020, the time period immediately following the academic term that the pandemic interrupted, with the broader goal of understanding community college international educators' responses to the pandemic. In this study, we focus on data sources that speak to institutional responses related to the well-being of international education programming generally rather than a specific subfield of international education, such as international student enrollment or study abroad (see Whatley & Fischer, 2022, for an overview of this study's findings related to international students specifically). Our data collection followed an explanatory sequential design consisting of two phases (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). In Phase 1, we collected quantitative data using an online survey instrument (17 participants), involving a random sample of 300 community colleges that reported enrolling international students in the 2018-19 academic year. The study's second phase consisted of interviews with three community college international educators who volunteered to participate in follow-up interviews. Both data sources focused on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on international education broadly, including but not limited to topics surrounding international student recruitment, education abroad programming, and international student services.

Phase 1

The survey data collection instrument that we used for the first phase of our study asked respondents (N=17) for general information about how COVID-19 had impacted international education at their college, namely international student enrollment and programming, education abroad, and the future of international education. Although this is a relatively small sample, this sample size is sufficient for our exploratory study on a new phenomenon (Stouffer & Lazarsfeld, 1937), particularly in the context of a pandemic, which increased the difficulty of collecting data from individuals who were adversely impacted in a number of ways. In this study, we focus attention on this latter section of the survey, which asked participants to select, from their perspectives, the most pressing impacts of COVID-19 on international education, particularly from a resources standpoint. Survey questions were multiple choice and participants were allowed to select multiple responses for a single question if applicable to their institutional context. Participants were also asked to provide short written responses regarding their greatest concerns for international education at their institution, which were then categorized and counted as an additional quantitative measure from our survey. In total, the survey was estimated to take participants no more than 30 minutes to complete. Participants were not compensated for their participation in the survey.

To collect survey data, after piloting and refining our data collection instrument, we identified US community colleges that reported enrolling non-US resident students in the National Center for Education Statistics' Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System in the 2017-18 academic year (the most recent year for which data were available at the time of data collection). We randomly selected 300 institutions from this list and found contact information for the person or office that worked with international students (e.g., the Office of International Education, International Student Life, or the Office of Student Services). We sent an initial recruitment message along with two reminder messages to this contact with an invitation and link to complete

the survey. In total, we received responses from representatives of 17 institutions (please see Whatley & Fischer, 2022 for additional information about our data collection process).

Survey respondents represented institutions in a variety of US geographic regions, including California, Iowa, Michigan, Missouri, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia, and Washington, and worked in international programs of various sizes, with international education offices (or the equivalent) ranging from a single employee to 15 international education employees. Survey respondents selected job titles such as international student advisor (N=8), international student recruitment/admissions administrator (N=8), and lead international administrator (N=8). Other respondents were academic advisors (N=6) or admissions officers (N=6), reflecting the multiple roles that community college employees often fulfill in their professional lives.

Phase 2

We gained broader insights into survey responses by interviewing three participants who volunteered for the qualitative Phase 2 of the study. We combined the two participants with similar institutional characteristics for a group interview and spoke with the third volunteer individually (Creswell, 2013). Interviews were semi-structured, and we took turns asking questions from an interview protocol. This protocol included questions about the impact of the pandemic on the participants' institution at the onset of the crisis, both generally and regarding international education specifically. Questions centered on services provided to international students, the future of international education at their institution, and recommendations for international educators in case of future crises. Scripted questions were supplemented by probes informed by participants' survey responses to draw out detail related to their institutional contexts and individual experiences.

Qualitative data analysis began with transcribing each interview verbatim. We then read each transcript several times before independently coding each transcript twice in an iterative manner. The first round of coding was deductive, informed by our theoretical framework (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In this round, we applied codes related to resource allocation and its corresponding opportunities and communicated values. Next, we coded inductively, which allowed us to identify patterns and themes beyond those of our theoretical framework (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Throughout the coding process, we engaged in several peer-debriefing sessions, which contributed to interrater reliability (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). In the final step, we selected illustrative quotes to support our findings.

Researcher Positionality

Both authors brought with them experiences and perspectives that influenced how they viewed this study's data. At the time of data collection, the first author was a doctoral candidate in a higher education program, conducting dissertation research on US community colleges. Prior, she had enrolled in higher education as an international student from Germany at a US community college. Her professional experience included working with international students in an academic advising capacity and leading education abroad initiatives. During the data collection phase of this study, the second author's professional role included collaborating with community college leaders to conduct research that could be used for decision-making purposes. Although never a community college student or employee herself, she has extensive experience working with community college international educators in a research capacity and has worked in international education for over 10 years.

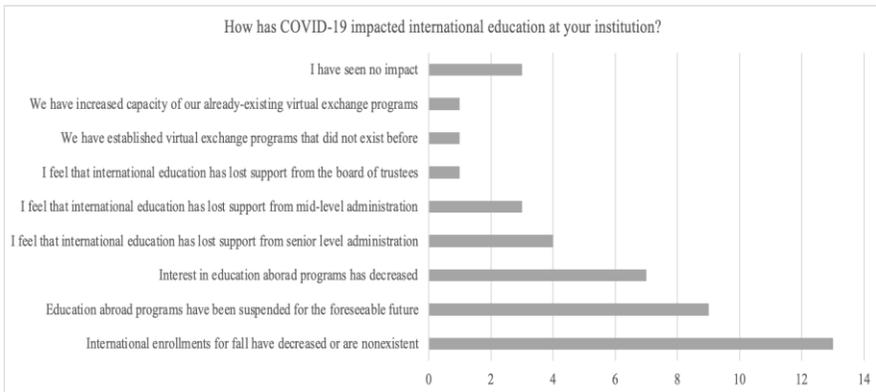
RESULTS

The following sections summarize the results of each phase of our study. We begin with an overview of Phase 1 results, centered on our survey data, and follow with the results of Phase 2, our interview data.

Phase 1

Figure 1 summarizes survey participants' responses regarding how COVID-19 impacted international education at their community colleges. The responses listed on the left-hand side of this figure were provided to participants, and they were allowed to select all responses that applied. The most frequently selected pandemic impact was that international student enrollment for the following fall term (fall 2020) had decreased or was nonexistent (N=13). Participants also selected responses related to education abroad programming with frequency: education abroad had been suspended at these institutions (N=9) and interest in education abroad had decreased (N=7). Some respondents were concerned about lack of support from administration, a key resource for international programs, with four participants concerned about support from senior-level administration, three concerned about support from mid-level administration, and only one participant concerned about support from the board of trustees. Virtual exchange programming seemed to be less of a concern for survey respondents, with only one participant each concerned about establishing virtual exchange programs and increasing capacity of already-existing programs. Three survey respondents indicated that COVID-19 had not impacted international education at their college.

Figure 1 Number of Survey Responses Indicating How COVID-19 Had Impacted International Education at Respondents' Institutions



Our survey also asked respondents about financial resources for international education programming specifically. Eleven respondents indicated that international education was included in the institutional budget for the following (2020-21) academic year, while four responded that it was not (see Figure 2). One respondent indicated that it was currently unclear whether international education would receive financial support in the following year, even though participants completed the survey as the 2019-20 fiscal year was coming to a close for most institutions.

Finally, Figure 3 summarizes survey respondents' written comments regarding what they viewed as the greatest concerns for international education at their respective institutions. Five respondents wrote comments related to international student enrollment, listing issues such as travel restrictions and slow visa processing times. Three respondents were concerned about funding issues while another three were concerned about international student recruitment for the upcoming academic year. Of lesser concern for survey respondents in general was a loss of momentum for international education efforts (N=2), online education (N=1), a decreased willingness on the part

of students to travel (N=1), and avoidance of international students (N=1) (presumably among domestic students, although the survey respondent did not specify).

Figure 2 Number of Survey Responses Indicating Whether International Education Was Included in Institutions' 2020-21 Budget



Figure 3 Number of Survey Responses Indicating Respondents' Greatest Concerns for International Education at their Respective Institutions



Phase 2

Our interview responses added perspective and additional complexity to the survey data. We group our qualitative findings into two broad themes: the short-term impact of the pandemic, and the pandemic's long-term implications for international education at community colleges. The short-term impact included declines in international student enrollment and retention and cancellation or suspension of professional activities and memberships. For the longer term, community college international educators navigate uncertainty about human and financial resources and the impact of the pandemic on recruitment of international students. Interviewees

also stressed that the pandemic's impact on institutional resources redoubled the need for collaborations and partnerships and the critical importance of communicating the value of international education at their institutions.

Short-Term Impact of Pandemic

Short-term impacts of the pandemic include those activities that are affected while the COVID-19 pandemic is ongoing. Interviewees explained that the immediate impact of the pandemic resulted in reduced international student enrollment, retention, and outbound student mobility alongside canceled international recruitment travel and canceled memberships to professional organizations.

Impact on International Student Enrollment, Retention, and Mobility. Similar to our survey data, qualitative responses indicated concern about enrollment of new international students and outbound student mobility, but interviewees elaborated that these concerns also included the retention of current students, which impacted short-term tuition and fee revenue. Interviewees explained that some international students had withdrawn from their institutions and others had deferred enrolment to spring 2021. Lisa, a director-level international educator at a small community college in a city, shared, "we've lost only three so far directly due to COVID. Three people who are like, 'We're leaving. We're not coming back' and that probably wouldn't have happened if [COVID] hadn't happened."

Interview data also shed light on the complex nature of the pandemic's intersection with the 2020 civil rights and political climate in the United States. At a rural community college campus enrolling slightly more than 60 international students, international student coordinator Jenn explained, "I think politics have a lot to do overall with how people are viewing the US and, obviously there's some [immigration] limits happening from the US side too." Interviewees felt that international perceptions of the political and cultural attitude toward immigration and diversity further exacerbated international student enrollment in the short-term. In sum, the pandemic and its associated political fallout substantially impacted institutional efforts to enroll and retain international students. Without these international students to support, many international programs lose the core of their function at the community college.

Impact on Professional Activity and Resources. In the short term, community colleges also pursued a fiscally conservative decision-making strategy. For international educators, this resulted in canceled international recruitment travel and canceled memberships to professional organizations such as NAFSA: Association for International Educators. These budget curtailment decisions were made at the senior-most level. Heather, an associate director for international programs at a large suburban community college, shared,

I was actually supposed to travel [abroad] for a two-week trip at that time...., because that was also when spring recruiting plans were in place...So I remember, I didn't have to make the call, because then our President decided no one's traveling internationally.

At some institutions, funds from canceled recruitment travel were available to repurpose to supplement strained budgets. Lisa was able to award unexpected grant dollars to international students in need due to the pandemic. She explained,

I had a big recruitment thing coming up...And I had gotten a grant from our school's foundation for \$9,000. And I returned it because 'I'm not going to use this, other students are probably going to need it for COVID.' And then I was like 'our students need it for COVID!' I did a pitch to our foundation and asked if we could get that money back to be used for direct support for students because the CARES Act wasn't going to work. They gave it to us.

At her community college, Heather was met with resistance when trying to spend unused recruitment travel funds, as budgets were frozen. She elaborated

I was hoping to use money that I had left over from the spring for all the travel that we weren't going to do. I thought I could use that money to put it towards some digital marketing and some other resources and I couldn't spend anything. So, even my NAFSA membership is gone right now, which is kind of extreme in terms of basic tools for what's needed to stay in the know and stay on top of compliance issues.

Budget freezes also extended to vacant positions. Our survey data indicated suspension and declining interest in education abroad. Heather elaborated that at her institution, this was the case because the education abroad coordinator had been reassigned to another functional area where there was an unexpected vacancy. She explained,

Study abroad, which we were starting to build up, all the momentum behind that got just swept away and so the person overseeing that she's been moved to a completely different unit right now for most of her time, so there's not even an interest in trying to maintain some kind of virtual exchanges or anything like that. We need to fill holes because there's a hiring freeze and there's work that needs to be done in other units to support the students we have.

Heather's remarks betrayed a sense of uncertainty as to whether the education abroad position would become a priority again once the hiring freeze was lifted. Without proper administrative support, it is not surprising that student interest in education abroad, whether virtual or not, would wane.

Long-Term Implications

In summer 2020, at the time our interviews took place, international educators expressed uncertainties about the long-term implications of the pandemic. Jenn noted, "everybody's asking questions and who knows any answers at this point?" There are, however, indications of what is to come for international education at community colleges. Key themes in our interviews concerned with long-term implications included: uncertainty about resources, impact on international student recruitment efforts, the importance of collaboration and consultation, and a critical need to share the institutional value of international education.

Uncertainty about Resources. There was consensus among interviewees that departmental budgets would be uncertain for the foreseeable future. While our survey data indicated that for most institutions, international education was included in the institutional budget for the 2020-21 academic year, interviewees cautioned that budgets would be subject to international student enrollment in the coming terms. Lisa elaborated, "We can probably weather a couple of bad quarters, but I do think after a couple of bad quarters if we start losing money by our very existence...you could get rid of a director...that saves a lot of money." Heather explained that budget uncertainties due to declining student enrollment at the institution in general, both international and domestic, were coupled with a financial impact on sponsored programs at the state department level, such as those for J-1 scholars. Institutions that depend on sponsored programs for teaching and financial support feared the repercussions of those cuts at the federal level. Further, budget freezes and long-term budget declines may lead to higher caseloads for international student advisors as vacant positions are not filled or reassigned to other units at the institution.

Impact on Recruitment Efforts. The pandemic also had long lasting ramifications on recruitment strategies for international students. Two interviewees emphasized that travel and budget restriction had foregrounded the need to consider creative new recruitment strategies. Heather explained that

she had not been able to renew contracts with agents and suggested recruiting students in alternate ways, saying

We're not going to be put back in the budget line in any significant way. I need to start thinking differently about recruiting students...We're starting to see some reports where students would be interested in taking classes online if they knew it was a certain period of time, and it was leading to eventually coming to the US to finish their studies...I think if you could link it to a larger recruitment strategy there could be interest there.

Heather also suggested that her office may start considering recruiting different visa types, beyond F and J. Lisa recommended that community colleges consider flexibility in charging international students in-state tuition, which may support enrollment increases. She expressed her frustration with state policies regarding tuition, saying

If we had more flexibility in what we were charging if the state did decide to have a moral epiphany and say, 'Hey, let's charge in state tuition' or 'let's allow us to have a few more waivers than we normally would.' And just give that flexibility to us and not have to charge these students more than two and a half times what the domestic students are paying, I think that would be a help. The rigidity of the structures and the bureaucracy itself is a limiting factor.

Importance of Collaboration and Consultation. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on institutional resources for international education also foregrounded the long-term importance of collaborations, both across and between institutions. In that vein, Lisa cautioned institutional leaders “to remember to invite the people who work with the [international] students, or the students themselves to the table when you're making decisions, to make sure they have a voice when planning and making decisions, because their needs are so dramatically different.”

In addition to cross-campus collaboration, interviewees also stressed the importance of networking between community colleges as well as developing partnerships and recruiting pipelines with universities. Lisa emphasized,

community colleges [need to] have a way to talk to each other to share best practices...finding out better ways for us to connect across and communicate with each other and not competing. How can we help solve this without competing with each other? Could there be a good way to save international education or help international education? How about we come up with this creative solution that maximizes resources for everyone?

University partnerships may be an additional way to reconsider recruiting strategies for some community colleges. Lisa suggested that community colleges could develop feeder programs that allow international students to enroll first at a community college and then transfer to a regional university, rather than competing with each other for enrollment numbers.

Critical Need to Share Institutional Value of International Education. Finally, our qualitative data provided perspective on a perceived lack of support for international education from college administrators, with clear implications for resource allocation in the future. This lack of support appeared to occur at the intersection of leadership changes and changing priorities, coupled with lost momentum regarding international education broadly. Heather explained:

There's an assumption right now that International isn't busy. We're not busy, because we don't have students and we won't have students. And because we can't do any recruitment that our advisors can take on other tasks and that's not the case right now.

Because of the perception that international education was at a COVID-induced standstill, community college international educators found themselves in the position of having to communicate the value of international education and their department to ensure their survival, which they anticipated would continue well into the future. This discourse included stressing the

value that international students add to domestic institutions, both on a cross-cultural and financial level, as well as appropriating tasks that justify the department's existence. Lisa shared that at her institution students rarely interacted with diverse populations, so international education provided an intrinsic value beyond tuition dollars. She explained:

This is the only exposure someone might get to interact with someone from a different country, and how amazing is that? So it has an intrinsic value and being able to make sure that that intrinsic value is understood and perhaps we are just as important as the library.

The library doesn't make any money either.

Heather shared this conviction and elaborated that her institution had a propensity to equate a department's value with financial contributions, explaining:

We were bringing in money with our sponsored programs which brought us more attention at the table. But now these things are kind of not seen as necessary, in a sense.

And because our student population is already diverse and our teaching staff is already diverse it's like, well, we kind of already checked that box.

Heather compared the necessity to explain international education's worth as a "fight." Her department pursued the possibility of providing services to students of all visa types, including those previously served by other offices, saying "maybe we should be supporting them more officially. We need to find some other roles to play in the college that add value that maybe were done by other offices."

Beyond advocacy on their own college campuses, international educators also stressed the importance of advocacy on the state and national levels. Participants feared that the long-term economic impact of the pandemic may have adverse effects on international education at community colleges into the future. Lisa encouraged college presidents to advocate on behalf of international education with their elected officials, saying,

They can have some sway in keeping international education top of mind when they are able to get the ear of a legislator, maybe percolating that up to the various associations that they're a part of and just being that voice for a population that sometimes does get forgotten about.

Lisa's insight underlined international educator's perceptions that international education has value and is faced with considerable challenges that merit executive-level advocacy at the national level.

Limitations

Although our survey and interview data provide key insight into the short- and long-term implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for community college international education, particularly regarding resource allocation, our results should be interpreted with four limitations in mind. First, participation in our survey data collection was entirely voluntary on the part of participants, and as a consequence our sample may not be representative of the broader community college population we intended to generalize to. Second, also related to our survey data, as our study was focused on the institutions that participants represented rather than on the participants themselves, we do not have extensive demographic data about our participants. As such, we are unable to speak to the extent to which our survey respondents represent a diverse group of individuals. Third, our interview data was obtained from a small sample and may not be transferable to all international education programs at community colleges. However, the trustworthiness of the study is supported by robust sampling methods (Robinson, 2014), a deductive analysis guided by sound theoretical drive (Morse et al., 2006), and strong ethical considerations that considered the vulnerability of our participants during a challenging time for their field. Finally, two interviewees' institutions did not have education abroad programs, so there may be additional pandemic implications that are not considered here.

DISCUSSION

In the context of ongoing uncertainties around the status of international education for US community colleges in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, this study's results speak to the necessity for international educators to implement strategies and policies that will prepare their programs for future disruptions. Our study has important implications for community college leaders and international educators as they consider the impact of both the COVID-19 pandemic and the related economic crisis, specifically on the resources provided to international programming. This allocation of resources has a clear impact on the educational opportunities available to currently enrolled students and also speaks to the educational priorities of the institution in general, which are communicated, whether explicitly or implicitly, not only to current students, but also to prospective students and myriad external institutional stakeholders. While this study takes place in the unique context of the COVID-19 pandemic, our results are broadly applicable to future decision-making regarding resource allocation at US community colleges and other similar institutions worldwide.

Our work supports the notion that the allocation of resources by community college leadership contributes to the educational opportunities available to both international and domestic students (Taylor & Cantwell, 2018, 2019). For the former group, canceled recruitment trips may lead to fewer international students being able to pursue a college credential in the United States for the foreseeable future. Further, canceled professional memberships and higher caseloads for international educators due to reassigned positions may lead to a reduced quality of advising and immigration services for the students who do enroll. For domestic students, the pandemic clearly affects their ability to study abroad, whether virtually or in person, through their community college. Similar to Cossey and Fischer (2021), whose study indicated that 70% of community colleges had no plans to pursue virtual international education, only two of our survey respondents indicated a desire to expand existing or develop new virtual exchange programs as a result of the pandemic. Additionally, for at least one institution, budget freezes also resulted in the reassignment of the education abroad coordinator, resulting in a long-term reduction in education abroad programming offered at the institution, and a lack of pursuit of virtual education abroad options. Our survey data also shed light on decreased student interest in education abroad and lack of support for international initiatives from senior or mid-level administration, which may have implications for the vitality of community college education abroad programming specifically and international education programming generally well into the future.

This long-term reallocation of resources reflects the value community college leaders place on international education, thus communicating to current and prospective students what educational activities are important for their future success (McDonough, 1997). These values impact both professionals and students at the community college. Our qualitative data included discourse regarding the need to 'fight' for positions or departments in support of international education, as well as the ongoing and urgent need to articulate the value that international education can have for community college students. Community college international educators appear to be concerned about their professional existence in the post-COVID environment. For both domestic and international students, these resource-driven values reflect that international education, which was already not a priority at most community colleges (Raby & Rhodes, 2018), may be further pushed toward the periphery in the post-COVID-19 educational climate.

These long-term and short-term repercussions speak to limitations of access to international education broadly. While the disruptions of travel at the height of the pandemic were unavoidable in light of travel restrictions and current health guidelines, the effects of the resulting resource reductions and reallocations may disproportionately affect the future of international education at the colleges where we conducted our study. Our findings suggest that community college international educators are exploring new recruitment strategies to justify their existence, such as recruiting international students for online programs or for four-year institution pipeline

programs. These new recruitment strategies may marginalize those international individuals residing in internet deserts or whose educational goals may not include a four-year degree. Further, our study supports reports that education abroad programming may be impacted into the future (Martel, 2020; NAFSA, 2020), perhaps particularly at community colleges. For example, at one community college, suspended educational abroad travel led to the reassignment of the education abroad coordinator to a non-international function, thereby slowing or even stopping the momentum of program development. In both cases, new international student recruitment strategies and lack of affordable education abroad programs for community college students raise concerns about access, equity, and opportunities for students to participate in international higher education, particularly for the marginalized communities that are often represented in the community college student population.

By extension, pandemic impacts will also be felt by the local and regional communities that community colleges serve - communities that are in many regions supported by a diverse and globalized workforce. This impact on the workforce may be particularly salient, as community colleges' missions are in service to their local communities (Cohen et al., 2013). As a result, community colleges have a responsibility to educate an internationally fluent workforce (Raby, 2008; Zhang 2011), and graduates who have not meaningfully interacted with individuals from other cultures due to a reallocation and reprioritization of resources may be at a disadvantage in the diverse labor market of the future.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to provide a robust examination of the intersection between international education and community college responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our results highlight leaders' concerns regarding internationally-focused programs on their campuses and potential short- and long-term impacts of the pandemic on international education. These findings highlight how the reallocation of resources, both financial and otherwise, due to the pandemic both shapes the educational opportunities available to students and informs the institutional *habitus* of the US community college. However, the implications of our study are not necessarily confined to the community college context. Indeed, numerous institutions in the United States and in other parts of the world experienced similar struggles regarding resource allocation in the wake of the pandemic. Our data support the notion that international education leaders will be contending with the pandemic's impact well into the future.

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