The #EndCCStigma Project
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Community colleges have long been stigmatized within the United States (US). The notion that community college is somehow not real college is inaccurate and elitist. To be sure, community colleges serve many of the most marginalized persons seeking postsecondary education in the US: formerly incarcerated students, students with disabilities, Black, Latinx/a/o, and Indigenous students, students living in generational poverty, and student single parents. And these institutions are places of possibility, which is why they have been referred to as *democracy's colleges* and *the people's college*. Meaningful and tangible social justice work–work that literally changes students' lives–unfolds within these institutions every day. Yet the negative stigma persists.

Taking the lead from Dr. Steve Robinson, now President of Lansing Community College, who created the #EndCCStigma social media campaign, I have incorporated an #EndCCStigma Project into EDCC 640, *The Community College*, a course I regularly teach at Ball State University. This course is populated by both master's and doctoral-level students. It is a required course within the Ed.D in Higher Education and the Graduate Certificate in Community College Leadership. It is an elective within the Master of Arts in Student Affairs Administration in Higher Education. The course is offered in an asynchronous online format through Canvas. Optional, synchronous, and virtual opportunities are presented to students via Zoom as well. Examples include: recorded one-hour class sessions, which students may attend or view at a later time and serve as a proxy for recorded lectures; office hours; and individual meetings. Students work on their #EndCCStigma Projects during the end of the semester. Throughout the first half of the course, students complete readings, weekly homework assignments (see screenshot one, from Canvas), and what I term the State Profile Project (see screenshot two, from syllabus). We use the sixth edition of Cohen et al.'s (2014) *The American Community College* as the foundational text, which is augmented with contemporary journal articles, book chapters, and multimedia pieces. These readings, learning tasks, and products scaffold toward the #EndCCStigma Project. As students learn about community colleges, they begin to understand the important role these institutions play within US higher education–and US society more broadly. Concomitantly, the learning (and unlearning) compels them to act. The #EndCCStigma Project provides a dedicated space for that action.

Students in this course–many of whom readily admit to initially harboring these negative stigmas about the sector and then grappling with them–actively do the work of destigmatizing community colleges through this work. The purpose of the project is for students to consider how they might contribute to ending—or at least ameliorating—community college stigma. The project is completely self-styled and self-directed, and intensive feedback is provided throughout the process. There are three parts: proposal, project update, final project. Some recent student examples include, but are not limited to, blog posts, children's books, magazine spreads with photographs and an accompanying article, podcasts, toolkits for high school counselors, and infographics. Students are encouraged to build projects that can live beyond the course as well as engage in meaningful work they can add to their resumes or CVs and/or discuss during employment opportunities.

While I provide students with examples within the syllabus and support throughout the process, the start is necessarily messy. This is a good thing; it is emblematic of how most open-ended projects commence. Students' proposals are often unrefined and unspecific, but they give us a starting point. There are no page parameters for any of the project components. Students are encouraged to do thorough work, however. In addition, while I do not use ungrading per se (see Blum, 2020), my approach is similar. I use formative assessment strategies meant to help students focus on learning rather than on grades (e.g., students receive full points if they complete any given assignment along with substantive feedback that helps them improve during the next phase of the work). Screenshot 3 includes example feedback provided to a student based on their proposal, which was aimed at highlighting the educational experiences of current medical doctors who had attended a community college. While encouraging students' ideas, I provide both sharp and subtle feedback to help them refine as they go. There are also opportunities for students to extend work in this course into others and even use the project as a foundation for theses and dissertations. Similar feedback is provided to students on their project updates.

Final projects are due at the end of the semester. In addition to delivering their final projects, students must also include a self-score and a one-paragraph rationale for that score. Self-evaluation at this stage gives students space to reflect on their work and offer a candid summative assessment. The insights shared here are invaluable. Students usually comment on both the substance of the project (e.g., "More detail could have been added here.") and their efforts (e.g., "Given what I was dealing with at the time, this was the best work I could do."). Students' self-scores become their final scores, and I, again, give feedback on their final projects.

Student course evaluations are very positive (see screenshot 4), and their work within this project provides evidence that the following learning outcome is met: *students will think critically about the stigma associated with community colleges as well as destigmatization strategies* (from syllabus). For example, see this blog post written by Abby M. Biernacki, a former student, published by the Office of Community College Research and Leadership at the University of Illinois. Another example comes from Sonina Hernández Mikkelsen, who created a series of podcasts. One student built out a prototype for a tabletop role-playing game focused on community college-going to further deepen his interest in game-based learning and the theories supporting it. Overall, this project has been effective in contributing to students meeting the learning outcomes of the course. Students have agency and are encouraged to think big and beyond the confines of the course. Furthermore, the project is also a site of resistance, creativity, self-expression, and deep (un)learning.

References

Blum, S. D. (Ed.). (2020). *Ungrading: Why rating students undermines learning* (and what to do instead). University of West Virginia Press.

Cohen, A. M., Brawer, F. B., & Kisker, C. B. (2014). *The American community college* (6th ed.). Jossey-Bass.

WH3
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Draw-a-Community-College-Student Test (DACCST) [HAVE SO MUCH FUN WITH THIS!]

This week's homework assignment was inspired by the classic Draw-a-Scientist Test (DAST). Feel free to Google for details and background information on the DAST. No artistic skills are necessary here, however!

Take out a piece of paper (or use a digital tool) and simply draw a community college student. You may add a caption and/or annotate the drawing in any way you like. Have (all the) fun with this! Take a picture of or scan your drawing, and add it to your post.

Then, write one paragraph detailing your approach and process related to creating the drawing.

B) State Profile Project (SPP). (Four Parts) (160 points total)

Overview. The purpose of this project is to understand, write about, and share how a particular state *does* community colleges. Put differently, you will be exploring the community college *landscape* of a particular state in a broad sense. You will either select or be assigned to one of the 50 states (actually 49—IN is *off limits*). This project consists of the following parts: (1) a five-page executive summary on how your state "does" community colleges (i.e., the community college landscape within your "state"), (2) a conversational and informational interview with a community college administrator, staff member, or faculty member currently working in "your" state and a short essay on that interview, (3) an infographic that displays the most important information from your executive summary, and (4) a short multi-media presentation of your state's landscape. This is a great place to start looking: https://www.aacc.nche.edu/college-finder/ Additional resources include https://shef.sheeo.org/state-profile/ and https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/ Also, Google is your friend here. Use this Google Form to indicate your state preferences: https://forms.gle/UYaTgbm5YvQLBmAXA

The ideas for the project outlined here are very exciting, [student]! I have a few pieces of feedback for your consideration—

+ THIS IS A VERY COOL IDEA!

+ Lots to think about here. What if you focused on doctors practicing within the state of Indiana? That would lead to a natural connection to mentorship with Ivy Tech students.

+ What if instead of traditional interviews, you did short films/videos featuring each doctor? This could easily be accomplished via Zoom recording + some editing.

+ LOVE the Rx pad idea!

+ LOVE the mentorship program idea. Consider reducing the meeting frequency to once per month at minimum. Consider a whole-group meeting at the end of the year! The matching process will be key. I encourage you to reach out to [another student doing related work].

+ Look at that GANTT chart! <3

+ This project could "start" in this class and "continue or end" in EDCC 698 this summer! Also, if you actually carry this through, I smell a dissertation, which might serve as one form of evaluation for the project.

Please reach out if you have any questions!

Please provide any additional written comments on the strengths and weaknesses of the course. You may comment on such things as the use of assignments, text(s), exercises, exams, etc.

The syllabus was extremely detailed. My perspectives on community colleges and higher education overall are expanding. This class opened my eyes to the ways in which community colleges are foundational, accessible, equitable, and often forgotten.