

Presentation by Professor Dean Murakami to the Plenary Session of the Binational Conference (Carson, Calif.) on December 2, 2017

[Professor Murakami is president of Los Ríos College Federation of Teachers AFT 2279 and vice president of the Sacramento Central Labor Council.]

For many years, public higher education has been exploited by private enterprise in two ways. There are the profiteers of higher education. These are the for-profit colleges that receive over \$16 billion in federal aid. They exploit some of our most vulnerable students, have them go into great financial debt with loans they often can't repay, all for their own profit. Many of these for-profit colleges are headed by CEOs who make millions of dollars in salary and benefits funded by federal tax dollars.

There are also the corporate reformers. Corporations and other big money interests have decided to use public higher education to serve their workforce needs. Instead of doing their own traditional workforce training, corporations have turned to the community college to more of the career technical training. As a result, corporate lobbyists have used their political influence to pressure community colleges to turn out more CTE programs and students graduating with certificates.

In addition, corporate interests have used their influence to have the colleges and universities graduate more students with BA, MA, and Ph.D. degrees to fulfill their need for workers that require more education and highly technical skills. They have focused their efforts to reshape higher education into their own business model perspective. So now we have many super rich foundations and organizations funded by business that want to design higher education to meet the needs of the 1%.

- * Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
- * Koch Brothers
- * Lumina Foundation
- * William & Flora Hewlett Foundation
- * James Irvine Foundation
- * The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation
- * Ahmanson Foundation
- * The Walton Family Foundation
- * The Weingart Foundation

That is a lot of corporate influence that will guide the future of higher education. The question is whether faculty and faculty organizations are willing to accept the direction the corporate foundations are leading the community colleges, and if not, do they have the ability to change that direction?

Corporations have a fundamentally distinct philosophy about higher education, namely that it should be designed to meet the employment needs of industry.

- * EDUCATION MUST BECOME ECONOMIC SPECIFIC
- * CONSUMERS OF EDUCATION RATHER THAN STUDENTS OF EDUCATION
- * INCREASE THE NUMBER OF TRANSFERS, DEGREES TO SUPPLY JOBS FOR CORPORATIONS
- * INCREASE CERTIFICATES THAT DIRECTLY LEAD TO JOBS
- * SOCIAL OR CULTURAL BENEFITS OF EDUCATION ARE A WASTE OF MONEY
- * PERFORMANCE BASED FUNDING
- * STREAMLINE EDUCATION TO MAKE IT THE CHEAPEST POSSIBLE
- * COMPETENCY BASED EDUCATION
- * REMEDIAL EDUCATION A WASTE OF MONEY

This has led to a number of higher education programs designed to meet the needs of industry.

2009 President Obama set a goal of 1.5 million more college graduates with BA degrees by 2020.

Community College League of California set the goal of one million more degrees/certificates by 2020.

California State University Chancellor Tim White set a goal of graduating 100,000,000 more BA degrees by 2035.

While laudable, these goals have critical unintended consequences that are detrimental to the purpose of community colleges. First, this sets graduation rates for degrees and certificates as the primary purpose and performance standard for higher education. This is extremely problematic in an open access and multi-missioned institution like community colleges where students have many different reasons for attending beside a degree and transfer to a four-year school.

Over the past several years, an inordinate amount of time and money has been focused on certificates, graduation, and transfer. We've had to deal with proposals such as:

- * Two-tiered student fees,
- * MOOCs,
- * Accelerated Learning College,
- * Student Success and Support Program,
- * Strong Workforce,
- * Performance Based Funding
- * BA Degrees in community colleges,
- * Achieving the Dream,
- * Guided Pathways
- * College Promise programs,
- * AB 705 (IRWIN)
- * Project FLOW to name just a few.

Hundreds of millions of dollars have gone to these programs. However, the reality is that less than 25% of community college students will get a degree and/or transfer to a four-year college. That means all these millions of dollars are focused on 25% of the students. In addition, these programs focus on students who are full time and are academically prepared to take transfer level classes in English and math. These students tend to come from higher-income families and a small percentage of them are of color.

What about the other 75%? Aren't they equally important? Shouldn't we also focus on their goals, if not more so? Because corporations are so focused on their employment goals, students who do not obtain a degree or certificate represent a waste of societal time and taxes. Therefore, this leaves the less fortunate to be inadequately served. Should community colleges be primarily designed to help the privileged few or should it be for everyone?

This corporate exclusionary vision of higher education is one of the most critical battles we face for equity in community colleges today. Yes, this is a fight for equity!

As a professor from community colleges, we serve students with an incredible array of backgrounds and visions for their future. It does not matter whether a student is rich or poor; black, white, yellow, brown, or red; immigrant or native-born; documented or not; college ready or not; skilled or not; smart or not. We are there to help everyone improve their lives.

Many of our students may not have college graduation as their educational goal, or they may fall short of it, but their dreams and aspirations should be just as important as those who eventually earn their Ph.D. The other 75% of community college students will continue to be a part of our community, and many will work in local small businesses which collectively are just as important to our economy as any corporation. Many will be extremely successful. That is why we need to fight for every dream, every aspiration, and every goal, for each one of our students.

We want all students to be successful, but the corporate reformers and our community college system has failed to recognize some of the most critical barriers to our student's success, including:

- * Poverty
- * Joblessness
- * Food Insecurity
- * Homelessness
- * Drug & Alcohol Abuse
- * Abusive and/or Violent Environment
- * Lack of Child Care

Mental Health (anxiety disorder, depression, PTSD, suicide, schizophrenia, traumatic brain injury, etc.)

If we truly want to move the needle on student success, we must find the resources to address these societal, health and mental health issues. We can no longer pretend that colleges and universities can be an ivory tower, isolated from the societal and community problems surrounding them.

We want all students to be successful, but that starts with a broader understanding of success, to include being successful academically, psychologically, and socially. In this way, colleges can improve society in so

many ways, where everyone is valued, and knowledge is appreciated beyond the statistics of certificates, degrees, and transfer.

Lastly, I have to say, we have a white house that does not make any of this any easier. They support the corporate reform agenda and for-profit colleges that exploit students. The GOP tax plan increases taxes on students and teachers, and makes college more expensive all to give tax breaks to the rich and increase the deficit by \$1.5 trillion. The president's anti-immigrant and racist policies hurts education, business, and the economy.

I teach at community colleges and I can feel the anxiety and tension in my students. Immigrant students who are documented, undocumented, daca students, and dreamers. These students are not re-enrolling in school, many immigrants are no longer going to work...the fear of deportations are having such a negative impact on our community. If these immigrants no longer come to work or go to school you are relegating them to a life of poverty that can last generations. Deliberately segregating a part of the community to poverty is just plain morally wrong.

In the United States we have over 1 million foreign students in college. Unfortunately, college applications from foreign countries are way down this year all because of the president's anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies.

It is clear that this White House doesn't understand the immigrant story and the critical role immigrants play in our economy.

Did you know that 40% of the fortune 500 companies in America were started by immigrants? In the Silicon Valley 68% of the new tech start-up companies were started by immigrants. What do Uber, Tesla, Space-X, Instagram, WhatsApp, Google, eBay, Yahoo, and AppDynamics have in common? They were all founded by immigrants!!!!

We have to realize the value immigrants contribute to our society, culture, and economy. The better we incorporate immigrants into the California culture the better it will be for everyone. That's why the president's racist policies are going to kill our America's economy along with his plan to destroy public education, the middle class, and labor unions.

That's why we need to fight for a better America. We need to fight for a better Canada. And we need to fight for a better Mexico. We have a long road to travel before we get to a place where our economies are working for everyone.