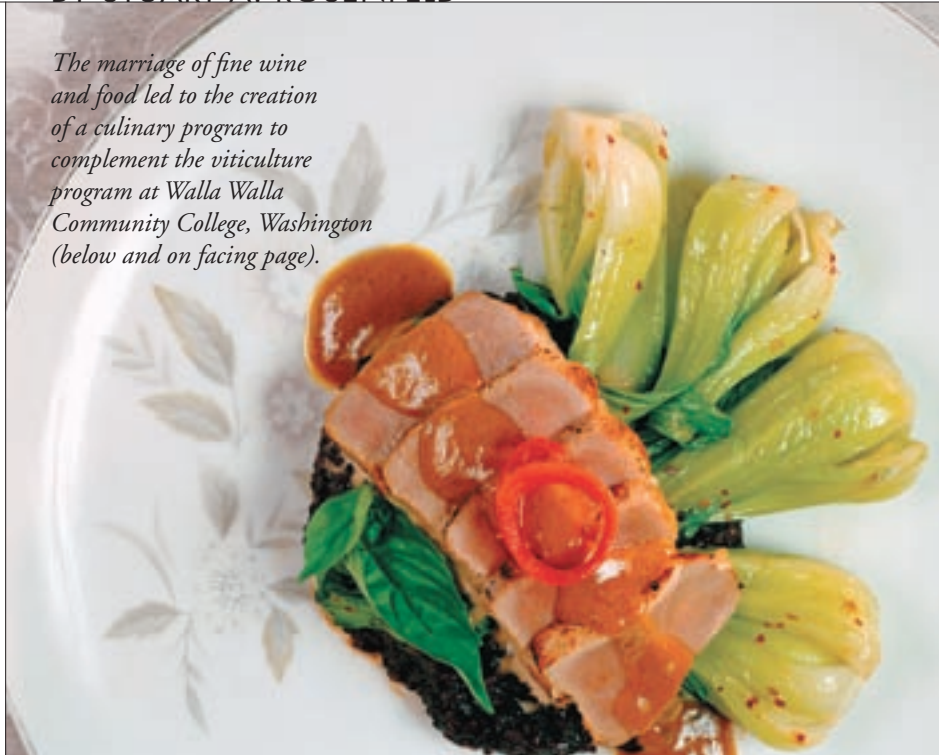


BY STUART A. ROSENFELD

The marriage of fine wine and food led to the creation of a culinary program to complement the viticulture program at Walla Walla Community College, Washington (below and on facing page).



Community colleges have become many things to many people over their century-long transformation from junior colleges into comprehensive learning environments. They have been able and willing to take on missions and serve people that other sectors of education could not or would not. Today they have become well known for their efforts in delivering education and training, supporting industrial development, and serving all—including the poorest, newest, and underachieving segments of the population—all with workmanlike efficiency.

Despite their achievements, few think of community colleges as bastions of creativity or particularly “cool” places. Effective, yes, but they are not places with strong reputations for the arts, culture, or being “hip.” And they are not likely to attract alumni, retirees, and knowledge-intensive companies. Whereas universities are expected to anchor creative milieus and attract talent, community colleges are expected to be efficient and utilitarian. They offer convenience and value to students and companies, an easy commute to acquire skills and credits, or simply a place to pursue personal interests.

Yet many community colleges are, in fact, unassumingly becoming places students and communities look to for leisure and creative and cultural activities, and they are becoming institutions of choice to qualify for growing creative occupations and industries. An increasing number of community colleges, particularly in small cities and rural areas, have large community or regional theatres and museums on campus. They also host writers’ workshops, craft shows, festivals, and concerts. Many now offer occupational and transfer programs in the arts, graphic design, architecture, crafts, film and video, animation, and other “creative class” careers.

Why have community colleges’ contributions to the arts, culture, and creativity in the community and economy received so little notice? Perhaps it’s because community colleges have been *so* successful in preparing the nation’s workforce, *so* proficient in serving businesses, and *so* good at improving access to higher education that their civic and cultural contributions have been overlooked and underappreciated.



Crafting a New Strategy

If community colleges have been so successful within the niche they’ve established, why change? The main argument is that the economic landscape has changed. The manufacturing base that covered much of non-metro America in the 1970s and 1980s is now moving to less developed nations with lower costs. Sectors most likely to grow are those that can find special competitive advantages or niche products that depend on creative talent, are linked to local culture, or have a recognized and valued brand.

The arts and design contribute to competitive advantage in three ways. The first is direct, through people and companies that produce or use art and design—for example, artists, performers, architects, publishers, graphic designers, and advertising agencies, and those that produce films and videos, leisure software, and ornamental woodwork. The second is embedded, by using artistic content or design in products or services to create competitive advantage. The third is induced, through amenities and other distinguishing local features, often linked to arts and culture, that attract talented people and companies. Where creative enterprises concentrate, they constitute a “creative cluster”: the similar and complementary firms in a region plus the companies, institutions, and associations that support them—including community colleges.

The College of the Redwoods in Eureka, California, operates at the center of such a creative cluster. Its fine woodworking program with its own “elephant and chisel” brand has a national reputation and provides the spark of creativity that

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institutional enrichment. Increasingly, they are seen as assets that can:

- give companies new competitive advantages;
- add to community and cultural resources/amenities;
- educate and support artisans;
- attract non-traditional learners that have underappreciated creative talent;
- improve learning outcomes and students' labor market value.

However, colleges still must convince students and parents who want practical skills for conventional career paths that have worked in the past that creativity is a quality that will produce economic outcomes. The direct value is only partially documented by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in higher than average projected growth rates for occupations such as graphic designers, interior designers, and video editors. Focusing only on occupational titles misses the value to employers of imagination and creative forms of expression.

It was a new and more competitive environment for regional development that led RTS and the Trans-Atlantic Technology and Training Alliance to organize a conference in November 2004 on "community colleges in creative economies." The conference was organized by Regional Technology Strategies, Inc. in partnership with HandMade in America, the North Carolina Community College System, and the University of North Carolina Office of Economic and Business Development. The Trans-Atlantic Technology and Training Alliance is an international consortium of community and technical colleges co-managed by RTS, Inc., in North Carolina and CIRIUS in Denmark that regularly share information and knowledge and test new ideas (www.rtsinc/TA3).

Nearly 140 leading representatives of community colleges, economic development offices, arts councils, and government agencies, as well as businesses, artists, and crafters, met in Asheville, North Carolina, to discuss ways that community colleges do or can support creative economies (<http://www.rtsinc.org/Asheville>). The conference was organized around three general themes: (1) embedding arts,



design, and culture into the curricula and college to help students learn and earn a living; (2) supporting the business of arts and design to make local companies more competitive and entrepreneurial; and (3) delivering arts and culture to the community to make communities more desirable and attractive places to live and work.

North Carolina Community College System President Martin Lancaster emphasized the importance of arts and culture to creativity, college, and com-

munity in his opening remarks. "We [in the community colleges] must cultivate the spark of creativity that everyone has and turn it into the habit of originality... In community colleges, we must also commit to recognizing that the exercise of creativity is in itself a legitimate way to make a living... In our community colleges we must support artists and thinkers in their work. We must teach the arts across our curriculum." Echoing President Lancaster's theme, Marion Coy, director of Ireland's Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT) stated "We're not just in the business of building skills but in building people with dreams."

Embedding Art and Design

Artistic talent is turning out to be a decided advantage on the part of employers who increasingly want the right-brain skills associated with the arts. The connection between art and technology is



most obvious in the fast growing digital industries, such as new media, film and music, Web-based advertising, and animation; but it's also valued by manufacturers. Munro Shoes in Hot Springs, Arkansas, one of America's last surviving shoe companies, produces specialty shoes and accessories that incorporate art for a loyal, high-end customer base. In addition, artists work with employees to paint murals on the walls creating a visually pleasing and productive work environment.

(continued on next page)

Building an Economy on Tradition

In an Appalachian mountain region of Kentucky with few economic prospects, residents turned to their most prized assets—their rich endowment of talent in the arts, music, and handcrafts—and their community college. Hazard Community College purchased the historic Hindman High School and turned it into a Kentucky School of Craft "to train people to start and expand craft and craft related high quality works based on the regional traditions of design and workmanship." The college offers degree programs and short-term training in five areas—wood, jewelry/metals, ceramics, fibers, and blacksmithing—all with emphasis on business and entrepreneurial skills. It involves youth through a two-week summer Appalachian Adventure Art Camp. The facility also hosts a business enterprise center, studio residency program, and cooperative studios. As a result, the region is able to give youth new options to connect to the community and become leaders who can sustain it for years to come.



New Kentucky School of Crafts, Hazard Community College, Hindman, Kentucky.

Delivering arts and culture to the community

Community colleges should be, and in some places already are, contributing to—or even leading the way in—building cultural awareness and creative communities. The best of the colleges have helped reinvent and redesign their communities and rebuild their economies. Moraine Valley Community College in Illinois has a Fine and Performing Arts Center, an art gallery, and an atrium to showcase stu-

dent, staff, and community art. It serves as a cultural center for the southwest suburbs of Chicago. Sierra College in California has a natural history museum, a nature trail, the Center for Sierra Nevada Studies, the Ridley Art Gallery, and a theater. It features annually a cabaret series, madrigal feast, spring festival, and prism concert. Independence Community College's William Inge Center for the Arts in a small Kansas town has become a regional hub for playwrights, performers, and directors.

Southeast Community College in Harlan County, Kentucky, uses the arts to raise cultural awareness, teach skills, generate pride in place, and overcome some of the social problems that have prevented economic growth. Its "scanning bees" preserve digital images of historical photographs and have created exhibitions of photos and paintings celebrating mountain women. In partnership with the Kentucky Arts Council, the college sponsored community residencies with muralists and creative writers. During the first 15 months, 900 citizens took part in at least one residency.

runs through much of the area's manufacturing. Greenfield Community College in rural western Massachusetts is on the fringe of what is becoming a major creative enterprise cluster. With 930 students in its arts courses and 800 alumni living in the area, the college serves as a pipeline for creative sub-cultures. Graduates of Montgomery Community College's clay

programs near Seagrove, North Carolina, have grown the area's historic pottery cluster from a dozen or so potteries in the 1970s to more than 100 today.

As evidence of the advantages associated with creativity reaches economic developers and policy-makers, it is causing community colleges to take notice and view the arts and design as more than



Walla Walla Community College's Center for Enology & Viticulture.

Community college programs that combine arts with technology are also able to attract a wider range of students and produce better technicians and more imaginative problem solvers. Bellingham Technical College (BTC) in Washington uses art to teach welding skills and teamwork, as well as to generate new economic opportunities by turning manufacturers' attention to design. The college's vision is to make Bellingham the Northwest's center for welded metal sculpture and creative design in metal manufacturing. GMIT's Furniture College in Ireland combines technical skills with art and design in an effort to revive Ireland's furniture industry. Its talented students produce fine furniture that is exhibited and sold across Europe.

Addressing the Business Imperatives

Many artisans study their specialty but neglect the business skills they need to earn a living from their talents and passions. Community colleges are beginning to recognize the importance of business skills to artisans. At Montana State University's College of Technology-Great Falls, TRACE (Transforming Regional Artisans into Creative Enterprises) helps artisans improve their business and marketing skills so they can be more successful without leaving the state, integrating arts and design with arts marketing, creative entrepreneurship, Montana ways, and Internet essentials. Haywood Community College in Waynesville, North Carolina has integrated a proven national entrepreneurship curriculum called REAL Enterprises into its crafts programs and runs a summer boot camp to teach business skills to artisans.

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Learning and Innovation Networks

CraftNet, the New Media Arts and Entertainment Network, and WineNet are international alliances of rural community colleges, formed under the sponsorship of RTS, to learn from one another, share ideas and innovate. CraftNet is 12 colleges that have built or are building strong programs to support craft based enterprises. Its U.S. members are the following community colleges: Santa Fe in New Mexico, Hocking in Ohio, Hazard and Southeast in Kentucky, Haywood and Mayland in North Carolina, MSU-Great Falls in Montana, Southwest in West Virginia, and Patrick Henry in Virginia. Members meet, develop individual and collective plans, visit each other (including, last year, a study tour to member colleges in Pontypridd, Wales, and Plymouth, England). Their activities inspired the Asheville conference. The New media Arts and Entertainment network is a group of urban colleges working on better defining the field and its career paths, attracting nontraditional learners, and designing a student-organized international virtual world music and/or film festival.

Designs for Creative Colleges

A number of action steps emerged from the conference and discussions, presented below with examples drawn from existing practice. They assume that the arts, design, and culture represent not just a measure of quality of life but also business opportunities, competitive niches, and local amenities that attract talent, tourists, and firms.

1. Incorporate art and design in technical and commercial programs.

Industrialized nations may have to return to their traditional niches in novelty and design and target markets where aesthetics, not price, is the decisive factor for consumers. This means that the workforce ought to have the skills needed to produce highly crafted or designer goods and creative services.

2. Teach business and entrepreneurial skills in creative occupation programs.

The creative sector is dominated by independent artists, freelancers, and consultants and by micro-enterprises. In response, community colleges should introduce more business education into their programs and develop business support programs for graduates.

3. Provide business services to craft-based enterprises and artistic services to mass market enterprises.

Creative enterprises may need help in areas where they lack expertise. These may include solving technical production problems, purchasing supplies, marketing, designing and supporting Web sites, raising capital, or simply finding partners. Technical programs working with manufacturers can link those who need help with design with local companies or student interns.

4. Find innovative ways to attract and support non-traditional and re-entering students.

Many of the programs in the arts, design, and creative occupations are overwhelmingly populated by non-traditional students—defined by age, educational background, socio-economic status, or ethnicity. Young and marginalized populations can be attracted to programs that can quickly connect to their interests and artistic talents.

5. Partner with arts and cultural organizations to reach out to the community.

In small cities, many community colleges are in the only arts and cultural venues within easy driving distance; in other places they provide outreach and added depth. Bucks County Community College in Pennsylvania has a 48-foot-long artmobile that takes art into the community and public schools.

6. Define economic opportunities, skill requirements and pathways for successful careers in the arts and design.

Occupations and economic opportunities associated with many of the creative enterprises are unconventional and under-documented yet have the potential to attract and retain non-traditional learners. There is a need to define the occupations in terms of content, industry context, competencies, and educational qualifications; measure demand; and document entry points and career paths.

7. Support professional development and learning networks.

Professional development and opportunities to interact with peers, and study benchmark programs are especially important for creative occupational programs where there are greater variations, fewer standards, and less documentation of practices.

8. Designate specific colleges as lead institutions, or "cluster hub" for arts and arts-based industries.

In many states and nations that have adopted clusters as organizing frameworks, community colleges are considering models to fit those frameworks. Many colleges have already become de facto "cluster hubs" in order to meet the needs of major clusters with demanding members. The Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising (FIDM) serves Los Angeles' international craft and media industries with programs in fashion, graphic design, interior design, and entertainment.

9. Establish internship programs with artisans and industry.

The arts, crafts, and design lend themselves particularly well to apprenticing, learning from masters, and learning from one another, yet federally funded

Table 1: Sample benchmarks for support of creativity.

• Percent of total resources allocated to arts and design
• Number of arts or design-related programs available
• Percent of class hours in arts or design in technical and commercial curricula
• External or community programs in arts sponsored by college annually
• Percent of graduates in programs for "creative" occupations
• Release time and resources for faculty learning and development
• Number of nontraditional students enrolled in creative programs and retention rates
• Extracurricular activities of students and faculty in arts

apprenticeship programs do not yet recognize these fields.

The "Cool" Community College

It does not take special insight to predict that creative expression will be one of the larger sources of growth and advantage in the U.S. In a global economy, industrialized nations with high costs will have to find new advantages. While industries that use advanced technologies, rely on R&D, and find niche products that are not easily imported are the most obvious targets, cultural tourism, creative services, and crafted products will also become significant sources of growth.

How can community colleges respond to this new and less familiar source of economic opportunity? Will they be able and willing to adapt to the needs of companies that depend on originality and new forms of expression? Colleges and college systems that do may take on some of the following characteristics, and Table 1 provides some guidelines for colleges to measure their progress.

- Systems will understand the economic and skill development potential for arts and design and integrate that knowledge into plans and priorities.
- Students in technical and commercial programs will be encouraged—and in

some programs required—to take applied arts or design courses.

- Students who wish to use their creative talents to earn a living will be encouraged and supported with programs that include not only studio techniques but also business and entrepreneurial competencies, marketing, and networking skills.
- Interests in arts and design will be used to attract non-traditional learners into college programs that reward untapped talents and encourage students to pursue career pathways that value arts and design.
- The community college will work hand in hand with local arts councils, design centers, and economic development agencies to bring cultural and recreational attractions to the community.

Looking to industries that produce and use arts and crafts is still a risky path to take for economic development if viewed in isolation. But if matched with parallel investments in compatible knowledge intensive industries that appreciate the arts or that thrive on design, it may be the most promising path. Those that most effectively integrate the arts and design into their programs, pedagogies, and institutional culture are likely to have a positive influence on the future of their students and communities.