

## GRCC Environmental Scanning Report

## January 2013

### Prepared for Strategic Leadership Team and the Board of Trustees

This quarter's report will focus on the changes and issues education is and will face in the future. Every article summary has a link to the actual article so that you may read in its entirety. Each section will contain several article summaries as well as Possible Implications based upon the summaries. The report begins with an interesting view on New Year's Resolutions which nicely introduces the topic of education.

### New Year's Resolutions

**Summary:** The New Year's resolution is such an interesting, inspirational concept. The fact that we've institutionalized a specific time of year to be introspective and reflect on how we lived our last 12 months of life is a pretty incredible thing — definitely an institution to respect and make a priority as we ring in 2013.

**res·o·lu·tion** / ,rezə'looSHən/

**A firm decision to do or not to do something.**

To be fair, this word does not *necessarily* mean to make a decision about doing a new action, but I feel as a global society we pressure ourselves to acquire as many valuable skills (whether for work, life, or otherwise) as we possibly can. Alternative learning concepts are booming in the web-space and continue to gather supporting communities and huge traction all over the world (check out these examples: [Skillshare](#), [Udemy](#), [CodeAcademy](#)).

I pose to you this question. Why must we “do or do not?” Why not try to improve upon the foundations of what we built last year? Why not “develop” instead of “resolve?” Or, resolve ourselves to develop? I propose a permanent *from-now-until-the-world-actually-ends* New Year's resolution: continual self-development of skills. Improve your *foundation* and focus on things you are good at instead of trying to do new stuff every year. [Thinking Differently About New Year's ResolutionsScoop.it](#) Blog, by Clair, 12-31-2012.

**Possible Implications:** Granted one might want develop a new skill in the New Year and the idea of development does not preclude doing just that. However, what is interesting is that the idea of developing or perfecting an already acquired skill has implications for Continuing Education. Promotion of personal development courses that improve existing skills and/or knowledge might produce some interesting course offerings. The problem is that our current model of courses requires that we have a minimum number of students for a course to actually be offered.

Enter the alternative learning concepts currently found on the web: **SkillShare** has a variety of courses available that allow the learner to improve existing skills or learn new ones through their on-line interface. The interesting thing about the model is that the cost to the learner is based on buying a ticket which made the cost about \$15 for any given course. Once the instructor has sold enough tickets the course begins. **Udemy** has traditional courses, such as Beginning and Intermediate Excel for a set price again using the web as the method of delivery. **CodeAcademy** offers the learner the opportunity

to learn and write computer code interactively. The pricing for a wide variety of Internet and Applications languages was not evident, but the delivery of the courses looked interesting. There seemed to be ample time to practice writing actual code.

**Key ideas:** Offering self-improvement courses and Thinking Differently About the Way We Deliver Courses.

## Obstacles to College Success for Low-Income Students

**Summary:** This article tells the story of 3 girls from low income families who through Outward Bound and perseverance graduate from a Galveston High School with honors only to find multiple barriers to college success. Article quotes below illustrate the increasing success gap between low income and affluent students.

- Low-income strivers face uphill climbs, especially at Ball High School, where a third of the girls' class failed to graduate on schedule. But by the time the triplets donned mortarboards in the class of 2008, their story seemed to validate the promise of education as the great equalizer.
- Four years later, their story seems less like a tribute to upward mobility than a study of obstacles in an age of soaring economic inequality. Not one of them has a four-year degree. Only one is still studying full time, and two have crushing debts. Angelica, who left Emory owing more than \$60,000, is a clerk in a Galveston furniture store.

Each showed the ability to do college work, even excel at it. But the need to earn money brought one set of strains, campus alienation brought others, and ties to boyfriends not in school added complications. With little guidance from family or school officials, college became a leap that they braved without a safety net.

- The story of their lost footing is also the story of something larger — the growing role that education plays in preserving class divisions. Poor students have long trailed affluent peers in school performance, but from grade-school tests to college completion, the gaps are growing. With school success and earning prospects ever more entwined, the consequences carry far: education, a force meant to erode class barriers, appears to be fortifying them.
- “Everyone wants to think of education as an equalizer — the place where upward mobility gets started,” said Greg J. Duncan, an economist at the University of California, Irvine. “But on virtually every measure we have, the gaps between high- and low-income kids are widening. It’s very disheartening.”
- Thirty years ago, there was a 31 percentage point difference between the share of prosperous and poor Americans who earned bachelor’s degrees, according to Martha J. Bailey and Susan M. Dynarski of the University of Michigan. Now the gap is 45 points.

- Likely reasons include soaring incomes at the top and changes in family structure, which have left fewer low-income students with the support of two-parent homes. Neighborhoods have grown more segregated by class, leaving lower-income students increasingly concentrated in lower-quality schools. And even after accounting for financial aid, the costs of attending a public university have risen 60 percent in the past two decades. Many low-income students, feeling the need to help out at home, are deterred by the thought of years of lost wages and piles of debt. [Poor Students Struggle as Class Plays a Greater Role in Success - NYTimes.com](#), By JASON DePARLE Published: December 22, 2012.

### **Student Loans on the Increase**

**Summary:** Further confirmation of the rising cost of education.

- GRAND RAPIDS, MI -- As the price of college tuition continues to spiral upward, parents are increasingly shouldering the burden of their children's education, a trend that's leaving them swamped by debt as they approach retirement.
- The average amount borrowed by parents through a federal student loan program has grown by half or nearly doubled over the past decade at colleges and universities in West Michigan, according to data from the U.S. Department of Education. [As tuition soars at West Michigan colleges, so do loans taken out by parents to finance their children's education | MLive.com](#), By Brian McVicar | bmcvicar@mlive.com , November 05, 2012

**Possible Implications:** The articles above point to the increasing cost of education. Community Colleges are in a unique position because cost compared to that of public or private four-year colleges and universities is much less. However, times have changed and lower income students are more likely to be unsuccessful in their attempt to obtain a college degree. There are several lessons that can be learned from the experience of the three girls from Texas. Just because a lower income student excels academically does not mean that they will be able to maneuver the barriers of higher education. Care should be taken to establish support for these students beyond programs like Outward Bound. Particular attention should be paid to the Financial Aid aspects of a lower income student's college journey.

**Key Ideas:** Education is not necessarily the path to affluence; Barriers for low income students; Cost of education increasing.

### **Massive Open Online Courses**

**Summary:** Massive Open Online Courses, (MOOCs) are starting to emerge as a free source of high-quality courses. The articles below highlight some of the features and issues that surround MOOCs.

Teaching [Introduction to Sociology](#) is almost second nature to Mitchell Duneier, a professor at Princeton: he has taught it 30 times, and a textbook he co-wrote is in its eighth edition. But last summer, as he transformed the class into a free online course, he had to grapple with some brand-new questions:

Where should he focus his gaze while a camera recorded the lectures? How could the 40,000 students who enrolled online share their ideas? And how would he know what they were learning?

In many ways, the arc of Professor Duneier's evolution, from professor in a lecture hall to online instructor of tens of thousands, reflects a larger movement, one with the potential to transform higher education. Already, a handful of companies are offering elite college-level instruction — once available to only a select few, on campus, at great cost — free, to anyone with an Internet connection.

Moreover, these massive open online courses, or MOOCs, harness the power of their huge enrollments to teach in new ways, applying crowd-sourcing technology to discussion forums and grading and enabling professors to use online lectures and reserve on-campus class time for interaction with students.

The spread of MOOCs is likely to have wide fallout. Lower-tier colleges, already facing resistance over high tuition, may have trouble convincing students that their courses are worth the price. And some experts voice reservations about how online learning can be assessed and warn of the potential for cheating. [College of Future Could Be Come One, Come All](#), **The New York Times**, By TAMAR LEWIN, November 19, 2012,

### MOOCs impact on Higher Education

**Summary:** From Clay Shirky's Blog. Clay Shirky is a writer, consultant and teacher on the social and economic effects of [Internet](#) technologies.

- “The fight over MOOCs is really about the story we tell ourselves about higher education: what it is, who it's for, how it's delivered, who delivers it. The most widely told story about college focuses obsessively on elite schools and answers a crazy mix of questions: How will we teach complex thinking and skills? How will we turn adolescents into well-rounded members of the middle class? Who will certify that education is taking place? How will we instill reverence for Virgil? Who will subsidize the professor's work?”
- “That's because in the US, an undergraduate education used to be an option, one way to get into the middle class. Now it's a hostage situation, required to avoid falling out of it. And if some of the hostages having trouble coming up with the ransom conclude that our current system is a completely terrible idea, then learning will come unbundled from the pursuit of a degree just as as songs came unbundled from CDs. If this happens, Harvard will be fine. Yale will be fine, and Stanford, and Swarthmore, and Duke. But Bridgerland Applied Technology College? Maybe not fine. University of Arkansas at Little Rock? Maybe not fine. And Kaplan College, a more reliable producer of debt than education? Definitely not fine. [Good Read: MOOCs Take on the 1 Percent | MindShift](#), 12-7-2012.

 Source: [SHIRKY](#)

### MOOC's impact on Higher Education

**Summary:** An alternative point of view concerning MOOCs.

- Last year, leading lights in for-profit and nonprofit higher education convened in Washington for a conference on private-sector innovation in the industry. The national conversation about dysfunction and disruption in higher education was just heating up, and panelists from start-ups, banking, government, and education waxed enthusiastic about the ways that a traditional college education could be torn down and rebuilt—and about how lots of money could be made along the way.

- "Those who can afford a degree from an elite institution are still in an enviable position," wrote the libertarian blogger Megan McArdle in a recent *Newsweek* article, "Is College a Lousy Investment?" For the rest, she suggested, perhaps apprenticeships and on-the-job training might be more realistic, more affordable options. Mr. Aoun, in his *Globe* essay, admitted that the coming reinvention could promote a two-tiered system: "one tier consisting of a campus-based education for those who can afford it, and the other consisting of low- and no-cost MOOC's." And in an article about MOOC's, *Time* quotes David Stavens, a founder of the MOOC provider Udacity, as conceding that "there's a magic that goes on inside a university campus that, if you can afford to live inside that bubble, is wonderful."
- "The tougher road is going to be for the people who wake up after high school and say, I should get serious about learning," Mr. Archibald says. "It's going to be tougher for them to maneuver through the system, and it is already tough."

That's one reason economists like Robert B. Reich argue for more investment in apprentice-based educational programs, which would offer an alternative to the bachelor's degree. "Our entire economy is organized to lavish very generous rewards on students who go through that gantlet" for a four-year degree, says the former secretary of labor, now a professor of public policy at the University of California at Berkeley. As a country, he says, we need to "expand our repertoire." But it's important that such a program not be conceived and offered as a second-class degree, he argues. It should be a program "that has a lot of prestige associated with it."

- Here's the cruel part: The students from the bottom tier are often the ones who need face-to-face instruction most of all.
- Getting them to and through college takes advisers, counselors, and learning-disability experts—a fact Ms. McGuire has tried to convey to foundations, policy makers, and the public. But the reinvention conversation has had a "tech guy" fixation on mere content delivery, she says. "It reveals a lack of understanding of what it takes to make the student actually learn the content and do something with it."

Amid the talk of disruptive innovation, "the real disruption is the changing demographics of this country," Trinity's president says. Waves of minority students, especially Hispanics, are arriving on campus, many at those lower-tier colleges, having come from schools that didn't prepare them for college work. "The real problem here is that higher education has to repeat a whole lot of lower education," Ms. McGuire says. "That has been drag on everyone."

- Siva Vaidhyanathan, a professor of media studies and law at the University of Virginia and a frequent commentator on technology and education, believes that some of the new tools and innovations could indeed enhance teaching and learning—but that doing so will take serious research and money.

In any case, he says, the new kinds of distance learning cannot replace the vital role that bricks-and-mortar colleges have in many communities.

"To champion something as trivial as MOOC's in place of established higher education is to ignore the day-care centers, the hospitals, the public health clinics, the teacher-training institutes, the athletic facilities, and all of the other ways that universities enhance communities, energize cities, spread wealth, and enlighten citizens," he says. "Not only is it not about the classroom, it is certainly not just about the

direct delivery of information into people's lives. If that's all universities did, then publishing and libraries would have crushed universities a long time ago."

Unfortunately, Mr. Vaidhyanathan says, the discussion of college reinvention represents a watering down of higher education's social contract—a process that has been in the works for decades. "What it is going to take to reinvigorate higher education in this country," he says, "is a strong political movement to champion research, to champion low tuition costs as a policy goal, to stand up against the banks that have made so much money lending for student loans, and to reconnect public institutions to their sense of public mission." [The False Promise of the Education Revolution - College, Reinvented - The Chronicle of Higher Education](#), By Scott Carlson and Goldie Blumenstyk, December 17, 2012.

**Possible Implications:** The controversy about Massive Open Online Courses will continue. Given the current perception that higher education is just too expensive, the attraction to MOOCs seems logical. Eventually, there has to be some way of making money from these courses, but the economies of scale make MOOCs a less expensive alternative to higher education. New technologies that improve the interaction between faculty and student are emerging. A review of courses at [Coursera](#) (A popular source for MOOCs) found that these courses would attract higher level independent learners that need little face-to face contact. Community colleges are likely to fill the niche' for students wishing to have that face-to-face contact. However, some community college students may be attracted to "star" professors if the courses appeal to their current goals. Finally, a way of gaining a certificate or proof of achievement will have to be implemented so that employers know what knowledge and skills a prospective employee possesses.

**Key Ideas:** Free source for college courses; possible impact on enrollment; Face-to-Face versus on-line learning controversy.