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## Five Myths and Facts about Community Colleges

Joseph Dorairaj\*

### Preamble

In 2014, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), through the University Grants Commission (UGC), set up 102 community colleges throughout India and also launched a Bachelor's programme in Vocational Education in 127 institutions with a total financial outlay of Rs. 329 crores with "the long-term mission of introducing an alternate system of education which will address the yawning gap between post-secondary education and employment, and the daunting task of educating a few million youth in India" ("Community Colleges in India: Challenges Encountered"). Earlier, Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), New Delhi had successfully run community colleges throughout the country, mostly through partner institutions, but these were wound up a couple of years back due to administrative hassles. Even before IGNOU appeared on the scene, there were a few community colleges in South India which reached out to the vulnerable sections of society such as women and the socially excluded with a view to making them employable and bringing them to the mainstream.

### American Community Colleges

The US community colleges are the pioneers and trend-setters in this field and these prototypes have been replicated in different parts of the world, taking the felt needs of the local community into consideration. In the US, community colleges are a huge success. They often serve as the gateway to the American population to higher education leading to a Baccalaureate degree. Templin remarks: "Community colleges already enrol nearly half of all undergraduates today and represent the fastest growing sector of public higher education, even in the face of government budget cuts. They are America's on-ramp to higher education and provide economic opportunity for the majority of immigrant, minority, and first-generation college goers". The US community colleges are known for their open-door policy for they "provide the gateway to higher education for students who may never have even dreamed of going to college" (Bumphus). And the Federal Government has contemplated and charted a series of measures to strengthen community colleges (two landmark documents in this regard are: Reclaiming the American Dream: Community Colleges and the Nation's Future (2012) and Empowering Community Colleges to Build the Nation's Future: An Implementation Guide (2014)).

This writer was part of a delegation that participated in the Fulbright-Nehru International Education Administrators Seminar in the US from 26<sup>th</sup> October to 6<sup>th</sup> November, 2014. The delegation visited

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