



2008 TYCA “Fame and Shame” Award Winners

The Two-Year College English Association (TYCA) has announced the winners of the Public Image of the Two-Year College “Fame and Shame” Awards.

FAME AWARD

The 2008 TYCA Fame Award went to Gail O. Mellow, President of LaGuardia Community College, New York for the position she took on community colleges at the annual meeting of the American Council on Education—a council that represents all public and private two-year and four-year colleges and universities.

As Scott Jaschik reported in “Call for Equity for Community Colleges” in the February 11 edition of *Inside Education*, Mellow explained that “American higher education ‘is not sustainable,’ and risks a growing detachment from reality if it does not come to grips with the needs of community colleges and the way higher education and government consistently mistreat the sector.” Highlights of her introductory talk at the annual meeting of the American Council on Education include comments such as:

- “We must stop giving community colleges straw and expecting spun gold.”
- “The fact is that what happens to community colleges affects all of higher education. As higher education leaders, we have allowed the baccalaureate and community college systems to develop separately and unequally, with tenuous points of integration and inadequate financial support.”
- Community Colleges “embrace a radically inclusive student body,” an open door for all those seeking a higher education.
- “We are therefore funding those students most prepared to go to college at rates well above those who need the highest level of support.”
- “Community colleges are not just the junior version of four-year colleges. To understand community college success—or lack thereof—we must find a new way of measuring outcomes. Everyone wants to look at graduation statistics— and I do, too. But without other measures it subverts the real contribution of a community college.”
- Jaschik relates that, “Mellow also noted that community colleges deserve praise, not criticism, when they successfully offer remedial education—even if the student doesn’t reach college level or graduate.”
- “This doesn’t imply a backing away from the standard of graduation with an associate’s degree, but it realistically incorporates the progressive reality of education that seeks to move adults ahead step-by-step.”

In concluding her address, Mellow informed attendees at the American Council on Education's Robert Atwell Lecture that she was in the midst of writing a paper on community college issues for New York officials—issues that they may have overlooked or insufficiently considered. She further insisted that, "States must not assume that it is 'an either/or situation' with regard to supporting community colleges and the rest of higher education.

SHAME AWARD

The 2008 Shame Award went to "Schools Don't Do Enough to Help Kids Get into 4-year Colleges, Study Says," an article by Carlos Sadovi in the March 13, 2008 edition of the *Chicago Tribune*. The article asserts that, "A large number of Chicago public high school students 'sell themselves short' by attending two-year colleges or vocational schools when they could go on to four-year colleges, a new report says."

Sadovi frequently quoted a study called "From High School to the Future: Potholes on the Road to College," a piece that equated education in a community college to a "pothole" in the road of a real education at a four year college or university. While he's not one of the study's authors, Sadovi's article in the *Tribune* reinforced and perpetuated negative images of two-year colleges as well as the faulty notion that people only attend a two-year college as a last resort.

- According to Sadovi's article and the study he refers to, high schools are not doing their job since "many students simply gave up trying to go to four-year colleges, discouraged or intimidated by the application and financial-aid processes." He further notes:
- "Researchers found that teachers and school culture had more influence than parents did on whether students went on to four-year colleges," suggesting that High Schools have a greater responsibility to students to get them in four year colleges as opposed to higher education—which would include community colleges.
- Again and again, the author alludes to the report repeating that "students tended to sell themselves short" by attending two-year colleges for their lower division course work, implying that the only "real" institution of higher education would be a four-year college or university (e.g., "Most of our CPS kids are going to colleges well below the colleges they are qualified to attend," Roderick said. 'You go with what you know. This sends precisely the wrong message to students. If you are going to tell them they need to work hard to go to college, you have to have that work pay off.'")
- Sandovi also cites Melissa Roderick—lead author of the study—noting that while her study only focused on Chicago students, it could just as well apply to "any school system in the United States." In other words, students who go to two-year colleges in every school system and in every state are "selling themselves short" of a quality education.

While the study focused on Chicago students, Melissa Roderick, the study's lead author, warns that the study could apply to "any school system in the United States." To steer students away from two-year colleges, 27 high schools now employ "post-secondary coaches" to help fill out forms for four-year colleges and thereby avoid "potholes"—community colleges—as one seeks a higher education.