WASHINGTON, D.C. – For only the third time in their 110-year history, community colleges are preparing to take a holistic look at their broad and continuously evolving mission with the naming this week of the landmark 21st-Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges.

The commission was appointed by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) and comprises 36 individuals who represent a broad array of constituencies and expertise from education, business, policy and communications. The group will work to examine the challenges and opportunities confronting the nation’s largest and fastest growing higher education sector.

“We have very intentionally selected commissioners who bring diverse viewpoints and backgrounds,” said AACC President Walter G. Bumphus. “That includes a few friendly critics who have consistently challenged community colleges to increase accountability and improve student outcomes.”

Over the next 10 months, the 21st-Century Commission will meet in person and virtually to examine the community college mission in light of current economic realities. President Obama has challenged community colleges to educate an additional 5 million students with degrees, certificates or other credentials by 2020, at a time when beleaguered state budgets have resulted in drastic cuts in state funding to the colleges. The first commission meeting will be held Aug. 12 in Washington, DC.

“We do not intend to be timid or superficial in confronting the hard choices and need for innovative thinking our leaders face in the coming decades,” Bumphus said. “We will focus the collective intellect of the commission on such issues as use of disruptive technologies to speed learning and the redesign of structures, calendars and processes to better match the needs of our increasingly diverse student population. We will also not shy from criticism, such as our perceived need to be all things to all people.”

Guiding the commission’s work will be three nationally-known experts on community colleges who will serve as co-chairs: San Diego Community College District Chancellor Emeritus Augustine Gallego, Cuyahoga Community College President Jerry Sue Thornton, and Dr. Kay McClenny, director of the Center for Community College Student Engagement and former chief operating officer for the Education Commission of the States.

Community colleges currently enroll close to half of all U.S. undergraduates. Enrollments have surged by double digits over the last 2-3 years, reflecting a deep and lingering U.S. recession and persistently high unemployment rate that has caused families to seek lower cost college alternatives and workers to throng to the classroom for new skills or careers.
21st-Century Commission named – 2

The new commission marks the third such effort to realign the community college mission to reflect national needs and changing times. The Truman Commission (1947) challenged higher education to provide universal access based on its belief that then-junior colleges could broaden and further democratize their mission by becoming community colleges. Four decades later, the AACC Futures Commission (1988) set forward a reform agenda designed to strengthen the comprehensive mission the Truman Commission originally proposed.

In addition to the co-chairs named above, members of the 21st-Century Commission include:

- Mr. J. Noah Brown, President & CEO, Association of Community College Trustees (Washington, D.C.)
- Dr. Walter G. Bumphus, President & CEO, American Association of Community Colleges (Washington, D.C.)
- Mr. Kenneth P. Burke, Trustee, St. Petersburg College (Fla.)
- Dr. Gerardo E. de los Santos, President & CEO, League for Innovation in the Community College (Phoenix, Ariz.)
- Dr. Myrtle E. B. Dorsey, Chancellor, St. Louis Community College District (Mo.)
- Dr. Peter T. Ewell, Vice President, National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (Boulder, Colo.)
- Dr. Bernadine Chuck Fong, Senior Managing Partner, Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (Stanford, Calif.)
- Dr. Marie Foster Gnage, President, West Virginia University, Parkersburg
- Dr. Allen Goben, President, Heartland Community College (Normal, Ill.)
- Ms. Kati Haycock, Director, Education Trust (Washington, D.C.)
- Dr. Alex Johnson, President, Community College of Allegheny County (Pittsburgh, Pa.)
- Dr. Christine Johnson, Chancellor, Community Colleges of Spokane (Wash.)
- Mr. Dwight D. Jones, Superintendent, Clark County School District (Nev.)
- Dr. Jane A. Karas, President, Flathead Valley Community College (Mont.)
- Dr. William “Brit” Kirwan, Chancellor, University System of Maryland
- Ms. Jennifer Lara, Professor, Anne Arundel Community College (Md.)
- Dr. Paul E. Lingenfelter, President, State Higher Education Executive Officers (Boulder, Colo.)
- Dr. Michael B. McCall, President, Kentucky Community & Technical College System (Versailles, Ky.)
- Dr. Mark David Milliron, Deputy Director, Postsecondary Improvement U.S. Program, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (Seattle, Wash.)
- Mr. Eloy Oakley, Superintendent-President, Long Beach City College (Calif.)
- Dr. Diana G. Oblinger, President and CEO, EDUCAUSE (Boulder, Colo.)
- Dr. Daniel J. Phelan, President, Jackson Community College (Mich.)
- Dr. DeRionne P. Pollard, President, Montgomery College (Md.)
- Dr. Richard M. Rhodes, President, Austin Community College (Texas) as of Sept. 1, 2011
- Dr. Rod A. Risley, Executive Director, Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society (Jackson, Miss.)
- Dr. John E. Roueche, Professor and Director, Community College Leadership Program, The University of Texas at Austin
- Mr. James T. Ryan, Chairman, President and CEO, W.W. Grainger, Inc. (Lake Forest, Ill.)
- Dr. Randy Smith, President, Rural Community College Alliance (Olustee, Okla.)
- Dr. Mary F. T. Spilde, President, Lane Community College (Ore.)

—more—
21st-Century Commission named – 3

- Dr. John “Ski” Sygielski, President, Harrisburg Area Community College (Pa.)
- Dr. Vincent Tinto, Distinguished University Professor, School of Education, Syracuse University (N.Y.)
- Dr. Philip Uri Treisman, Professor of Mathematics and Public Affairs; Director, Charles A. Dana Center, The University of Texas at Austin
- Dr. Nancy L. Zimpher, Chancellor, The State University of New York (Albany)

###

*The American Association of Community Colleges is a national organization representing the nation's close to 1,200 community, junior and technical colleges and their more than 12 million students (credit and non-credit). Community colleges are the largest and fastest growing sector of higher education.*