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Century Foundation Convenes National Task Force to Recommend Ways to Strengthen Community Colleges

Panel Will Seek to Address Growing Racial and Economic Divide between Two- and Four-Year Institutions

February 2, 2012—As the United States seeks to restore its role as the world’s leader in higher education, there is a renewed emphasis on increasing graduation from two-year institutions. Most recently, President Barack Obama described the important role of community colleges in his State of the Union address.

The Century Foundation is assembling a task force of distinguished individuals from two-year and four-year institutions, scholars of higher education, and representatives of the business, philanthropic, and civil rights communities to consider strategies to strengthen community colleges. The group will be co-chaired by Anthony Marx, president of the New York Public Library and former president of Amherst College, and Eduardo Padrón, the president of Miami Dade College.

The Task Force on Preventing Community Colleges from Becoming Separate and Unequal, which is supported by the Ford Foundation, will address an issue that has remained below the radar screen in national and regional discussions over improving college access and completion: just as community colleges are being asked to do more than ever before, the racial and socioeconomic divide between two- and four-year institutions is growing.

“Community colleges should be open to, and attractive to, students of all economic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds,” said Padrón. “While two-year institutions must always provide access to low-income and working-class students, community colleges need to find ways to recruit middle-class students as well, or the political and financial support for the two-year sector will continue to decline.”

The larger issue, Marx suggested, is this: “Will higher education reduce or exacerbate the growing economic divide in this nation?” He continued, “If the better funded four-year sector caters to wealthier white students, while community colleges lose funding to educate low-income and minority students, the two-year sector will remain separate and unequal.”

Janice Nittoli, the president of The Century Foundation, said that Padrón and Marx were a perfect team to lead the task force. “Eduardo Padrón has been a brilliant and innovative leader of the nation’s largest institution of higher education,” she said, “and Tony Marx, as president of Amherst, has been the conscience of the four-year sector, helping to put the issue of socioeconomic diversity and community college transfers on the national agenda. He is showing that same commitment to increasing access to our

cultural and learning institutions in his leadership role at the New York Public Library. We're thrilled to have the two of them co-chair this new task force."

Jeannie Oakes and Douglas Wood of the Ford Foundation said the task force was an important step. "There's a stratification trend in higher education around the world," Oakes said. "This task force will help bring that trend to light, document the challenges associated with it, and recommend ways that institutions can overcome it." Added Wood: "The two-year sector educates an increasing number of American students. It's essential that we find ways to strengthen it so that these students have more opportunities, not fewer."

The Task Force will have its first meeting on February 17, 2012. The meeting will include a special presentation by U.S. Under Secretary of Education Martha Kanter. The Task Force will also hold meetings in May and September, after which it will issue a report with recommendations and background papers.

Richard D. Kahlenberg, a senior fellow at The Century Foundation and the author of several volumes on inequality in both higher education and K-12 schooling, will serve as executive director of the Task Force. He commented, "It's disturbing to see that just as elementary and secondary education are becoming increasingly segregated by race and income, the same thing is happening in higher education. The Task Force members have a considerable wealth of experience and wisdom, and I look forward to working with them to assemble recommendations on how to strengthen the community college sector."

A list of Task Force members can be found below.

The Task Force on Preventing Community Colleges from Becoming Separate and Unequal is the latest in a long series of groups that The Century Foundation has assembled on important public policy issues such as election reform, elementary and secondary education, and U.S. policy in Afghanistan.

The Century Foundation is a progressive nonpartisan think tank. Originally known as the Twentieth Century Fund, it was founded in 1919 and initially endowed by Edward Filene, a leading Republican businessman and champion of fair workplaces and employee ownership strategies, all with an eye to ensuring that economic opportunity is available to all. Today, TCF issues analyses and convenes and promotes the best thinkers and thinking across a range of public policy questions. Its work today focuses on issues of equity and opportunity in the United States, and how American values can be best sustained and advanced in a world of more diffuse power.

For media inquiries about the Task Force, contact Christy Hicks at (212) 452-7723. For more information on The Century Foundation and its work, please visit www.tcf.org. You can keep up with the latest news from Century by signing up for our [mailing list](#), following us on [Twitter@tcfdotorg](https://twitter.com/tcfdotorg) and joining our [Facebook](#) page at www.tcf.org.

The Century Foundation is a progressive think tank, founded in 1919 and initially funded by Edward A. Filene. With a strong legacy of research and analysis aimed at addressing a range of important issues related to U.S. economic and social policy and international affairs, its work today focuses on issues of equity and opportunity in the United States, and how American values can best be sustained and advanced in a world of more diffuse power. With offices in New York City and Washington, D.C., The Century Foundation is nonprofit and nonpartisan.

CENTURY FOUNDATION
TASK FORCE ON PREVENTING COMMUNITY COLLEGES FROM BECOMING SEPARATE AND UNEQUAL

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