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Communiqué

TDA/LH Martin Institute Tertiary Mission to US Community Colleges

***Government funding supports 17 US states offering Community College Degrees
in skill shortage areas.***

What are the implications for Australian public policy?

TAFE Directors Australia and the LH Martin Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Management, University of Melbourne, have completed an eight-day Tertiary Education Mission to American Community Colleges.

The Tertiary Mission was hosted by the American Association of Community Colleges and the US Community College Baccalaureate Association. It included network meetings with the US League for Innovation in the Community College, and roundtables and briefings in Florida - the inaugural State which legislated to allow Community College degrees. It also included discussions led by Florida's Department of Education Baccalaureate division, and Deans and Presidents of 10 of the 18 Florida Colleges offering degrees.

A key finding from the Australian Tertiary Mission was the extent to which US Community Colleges were being granted legislative authority to offer four-year degrees – and the rapid growth of these degrees within and across US states. Seventeen states have legislated to allow Colleges to offer degrees, and some 180 Colleges across the 1,200 American Community Colleges are now allowed to offer one or more degrees.

Further findings were:

- **GOVERNMENT FUNDING OF DEGREES** – State and city funding provide the main source of funding for the cost of College degree courses. Student tuition fees with loan support provide the balance of course funding.
- **WORKFORCE SKILL SHORTAGES DRIVING GROWTH** – Community Colleges that gain legislative support to offer degrees are required to demonstrate how the new degrees support skill shortages being experienced in the community and/or region.

- **NURSING & HEALTH SCIENCES, ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGIES AND TEACHER EDUCATION** – Enrolment focus is dominant in skill shortage areas across nursing and health and allied health sciences, engineering and ICT technologies, digital media and TV media production, and teacher education. In the case of nursing, the American nursing professional bodies have given support for nursing degrees in Community Colleges.
- **EDUCATION COURSE COMPLETIONS AND EQUITY IMPORTANT ISSUES IN CASE FOR COLLEGE DEGREES** – The Obama Government agenda '*Achieving the Dream*', which seeks to double the number of America's graduates, and its emphasis on student course completions of Community Colleges across equity groups, are key criteria for Federal funding, and provide an important educational context for the US states supporting Community Colleges offering degrees.
- **ACCREDITATION REQUIREMENTS** – American Community Colleges offering degrees must meet the same accreditation requirements as the state universities, and demonstrate that they can meet the same educational standards.
- **SCHOLARSHIP & RESEARCH** – American Community Colleges are not research institutions, and this remains the role of US public and private universities. However, various scholarship criteria were noted by the Mission, and this detail will be incorporated into the proposed TDA/LH Martin Institute Occasional Paper, to be published as a result of the US Mission.
- **FUNDING FORMULAE, PRICING DIFFERENTIAL TO UNIVERSITY DEGREES, AND STUDENT SUPPORT** – Although state government funding for degrees overall has declined during the current US Budget crisis, states nonetheless funded community colleges to offer degrees to support workforce development. This state funding was essential to support greater educational attainment at a more affordable price than universities. Community college degrees are funded at approximately 85 percent of the corresponding state university degrees offered in the local county or state, with students often paying far less in fees than they would at a state university. Funding for student support was also a highlight of the visit, with evidence of significant extracurricular activities and extensive remedial support for students to support educational progression.

The Australian Tertiary Mission was led by TDA and the LH Martin Institute, and included the National Centre for Vocational Education and Research (NCVER), TDC, which is the Melbourne-based professional development agency for TAFE Institutes and VET providers, along with representatives from TAFE Institutes in Queensland, NSW, Victoria and Western Australia, and MEGT which is one of Australia's largest Group Training companies and private registered training organisations.

According to Associate Professor Leesa Wheelahan from the LH Martin Institute, the Tertiary Education Mission to review baccalaureate degrees in American Community Colleges will assist in the development of public policy in Australia to support the expansion of higher education in TAFEs and non-university educational providers in Australia.

“In particular, we saw how governments can support these degrees to improve access to higher education and achieve equity objectives. Many US states have much stronger relationships between their community colleges and universities than we do in Australia, and this is because governments insist on it.”

Martin Riordan, Chief Executive Officer of TDA, said the US Tertiary Mission was timely, in light of the upcoming Federal Budget 2011 and review of extending Commonwealth Supported Places (CSPs) for TAFE and non-university HE providers.

“The Tertiary Mission highlighted that Community College degrees were being government-funded on a wide scale throughout the United States, and tied to tackling skill shortages and workforce development needs” he said.

The Australian Tertiary Mission wishes to acknowledge the support of the US Community College Baccalaureate Association for facilitating access to networks throughout the eight-day official visit, as well as the support of the American Association of Community Colleges, the League for Innovation in the Community College, the State of Florida Department of Education, and the Florida Colleges that hosted visits: Edison State College, Miami Dade College and Broward College.

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Detailed information on the Tertiary Education Mission can be found here:

<http://www.lhmartininstitute.edu.au/conferences-and-events/44-international-delegation-to-usa-community-colleges-reviewing-four-year-degrees-and-the-tertiary-agenda>