

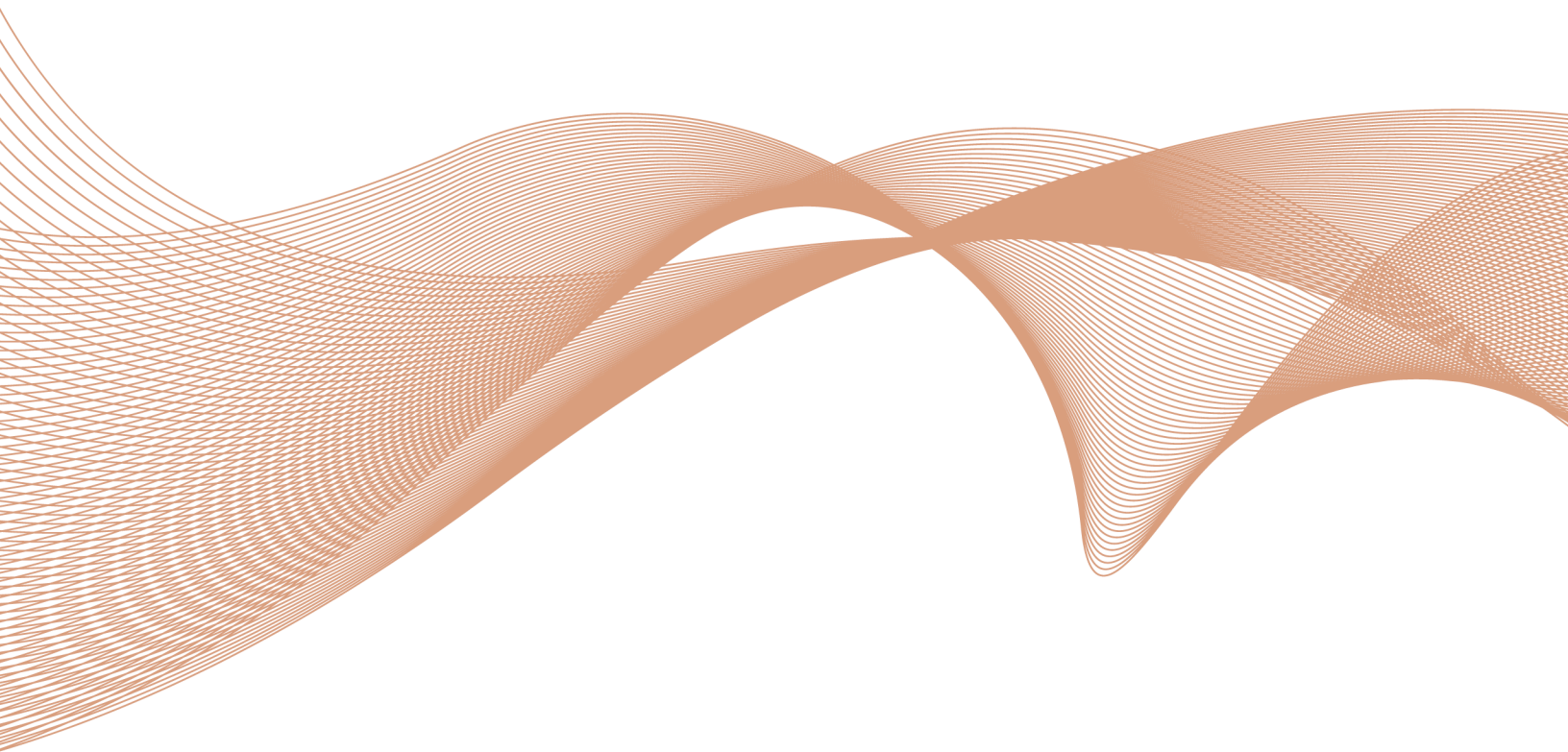


THE NATURE OF INNOVATION IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

LEAGUE FOR INNOVATION
IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

WITH SUPPORT FROM
METLIFE FOUNDATION

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The League for Innovation in the Community College is an international organization dedicated to catalyzing the community college movement. The League hosts conferences and institutes, develops web resources, conducts research, produces publications, provides services, and leads projects and initiatives with more than 750 member colleges, 160 corporate partners, and a host of other government and nonprofit agencies in a continuing effort to make a positive difference for students and communities. Information about the League and its activities is available at www.league.org.

MetLife Foundation supports education, health, civic and cultural programs. In education, it places emphasis on strengthening teaching and learning in public schools and on preparation for, access to and success in college, including a long commitment to community colleges as a dynamic and innovative sector of higher education. In addition to the League for Innovation in the Community College, it supports the MetLife Foundation Community College Excellence Award administered by Jobs for the Future, and the MetLife Foundation Initiative for Student Success with the Community College Leadership Program, University of Texas at Austin. The Foundation's grantmaking is informed by findings from the annual MetLife Survey of the American Teacher. For more information visit www.metlife.org.

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But innovation is still highly prized as a way of creating new applications of practice to improve and expand student learning and to deal with some of the gnarly and prickly issues that elude educators in achieving that goal...

In the current economic crisis facing the United States, there are calls from politicians and policymakers, from former CEOs of Fortune 500 companies, and from union leaders for more innovation. Some of these heralds believe we can actually innovate our way out of one of the worst crises since the Great Depression. Such optimism is, in part, a reflection of the value placed on and belief placed in innovation as an end and a means for solving problems. There are congressional leaders who refuse to address the issues of global warming, declining food resources, and dependency on fossil fuels because they have come to accept that innovative solutions will be found in time to avoid disaster. And the truth is: We have been saved time and time again by innovations in American society. Whether that will happen this time is still up for debate.

In the world of education, innovation also has its champions. The expectations for success may not be as dramatic; there is not much in the educational arena that compares with solving world hunger or creating new organs through stem cell research. But innovation is still highly prized as a way of creating new applications of practice to improve and expand student learning and to deal with some of the gnarly and prickly issues that elude educators in achieving that goal—as long as it is not innovation for innovation's sake, as the cynics are eager to remind us.

In any case, innovations and innovative faculty, staff, and administrators have always been part of the educational enterprise. At one time, having students recite what they had read and solve problems on a blackboard were innovative breakthroughs. The imprints of those innovations can still be observed in some school systems. But the innovations today are much more creative, more appealing, and more effectively orchestrated, especially when supported by technology. As we approach the second decade of the new millennium, there is a renaissance of innovation in education, a resurgence of interest and experimentation that begs for analysis and review. With support from MetLife Foundation, the League for Innovation in the Community College commissioned researchers Terry O'Banion and Laura Weidner to conduct this analysis and review and to share through this report their findings about the nature of innovation in the community college.

The community college as an institution is one of the most important innovations in the history of higher education. A distinctly American social invention, the public, comprehensive community college is unique in purpose, scope, and design. At no other time and in no other place has such a cultural experiment been attempted. The driving premise of the community college—the opportunity for higher education for everyone—is a pivotal educational innovation not just for the United States, but for the world (O'Banion, 1989).

Even the founding fathers of the world's greatest democracy could not imagine "democracy's college" in their time. Harvard, established as the first institution of higher education on American soil in 1636, was a transplanted form of the English college with all of the accompanying restrictions related to class, gender, and race; only white males representing the clerical and business classes were granted admission. Although the land-grant college was touted as the "people's college" when the concept became law in 1862, the original land-grant colleges did not admit minorities, offered few programs for women, and were inaccessible to many students because of their location. When the German university model, emphasizing research and selective admissions, began to influence the shape of the land-grant college, the idea of the people's college passed to the community college.

Not until 1902 was the ancestor of the modern, comprehensive community college established, and that ancestor was very unlike the offspring that began to achieve maturity in the latter half of the 1900s. Joliet Junior College opened in 1902 in Joliet, Illinois, as an institution designed to prepare students for the university (Henderson, 1960, 13). William Rainey Harper, then president of the University of Chicago, encouraged the superintendent of schools in Joliet to extend Joliet High School by several grades to establish the "junior college." Harper's faculty at the University of Chicago felt that high school graduates were not prepared for senior college and should continue their preparation by attending the junior college for two additional years. Thus the original two-year college became the handmaiden of the university, sorting out students who were not qualified to attend the more rigorous programs of the university (Brubacher and Rudy, 1958, 247).

In fewer than 50 years, this Joliet experiment had changed completely. Responding to the economic needs of a rapidly expanding industrial nation and the social demands of a maturing democracy, the community college began to take form. By the end of the 1960s, the open-door, comprehensive, community-based community college had become a major force in American higher education. Throughout the last half of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century, the community college has become even more embedded in the culture of American society as one of the most effective social innovations ever created.

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Forged from elements of the university and the high school, the community college has become one of the most successful institutional innovations of all time. As it has evolved over the past 100 plus years, the community college has become a crucible of innovation, an innovation spawning innovations.

Designed originally as a single-purpose institution to provide the first two years of a collegiate education—a junior college to Harper’s senior college—the community college responded to social and economic needs and became a multipurpose institution. By the 1960s, it had become a comprehensive community college with programs in transfer education, vocational and technical education, developmental education, general education, and community services—five different purposes and five different colleges cobbled together under one roof, or at least under one system of management and governance. This was a rich mix of programs, purposes, and personnel, a creative and fermenting dough from which a great many innovations would rise—prompted by competition among the programs and the opportunity to create constructive alliances across programs. The critics who charged that “the community college is trying to be too many things for too many people” were silenced by the sheer number of innovations.

Comprehensive programs were necessary if this new institution was to serve the new students who came to community colleges in droves during the 1960s and who still come today at 10 million and counting. These were not the traditional students admitted to Harvard or the University of Nebraska or California State University at Riverside; they were new, nontraditional students. They were the first of their generation to attend college. They were returning homemakers, dislocated workers, older Americans. There were large numbers of minority students and large numbers of immigrants. There were more women enrolled than men. The majority attended part time, and the majority worked part time or full time. These nontraditional students required for their success nontraditional programs, nontraditional student services, nontraditional faculty, and nontraditional approaches to teaching and learning. The community college responded and became a crucible of innovation.

The majority of these nontraditional students had one thing in common: Most were unprepared for success at the collegiate level. They also represented high-need populations. Four-year colleges and universities had closed their doors to these students; the open-door philosophy at the community college offered a second chance. As Frank Newman, former president of the Education Commission of the States, said decades ago, “The community colleges have been assigned the toughest tasks of higher education.” Undaunted by this assignment, community college leaders have for the most part embraced the task and made a priority of creating successful opportunities for students not well acquainted with success in school. Current experiments such as “Bridging the Gap” and “Achieving the Dream,” funded by foundations, are flagship programs that reflect this priority. These two programs, in addition to hundreds of others established by individual community colleges and organizations across the country to ensure student success, have made the community college an institution committed to innovation.

As the community college prospered and matured—no president since Nixon has failed to praise the community college for its contributions to American society—there was a new confidence among its leaders. A vision began to emerge that portrayed the community college as a key player in keeping the country competitive, as the first and last chance for millions of Americans to achieve success in college, as a gateway for the acculturation of immigrants, and as an American social innovation that could be exported to other countries. In an article in *The Washington Post* on July 12, 2009, President Barack Obama announced a major new initiative to create free online courses through the nation’s community colleges, declaring that, “Our community colleges can serve as 21st century job training centers.” In the first decade of the 21st century, there is a robust community college at the table of higher education, a strong, accessible college that is welcomed in statehouses and the White House. The can-do American spirit animates the entrepreneurial community college as a force to make a difference. This spirit thrives in the crucible of innovation that is the hallmark of the contemporary community college.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Throughout 2008, the League for Innovation in the Community College celebrated its 40th anniversary as one of the oldest and most significant organizations in the community college world. Created in 1968 when community colleges were being established at the rate of one per week, the League became a beacon for forward-looking ideas that would influence the community college movement over the next four decades. Through its projects, programs, and practices, the League continues to reflect the major issues faced by community colleges while having considerable influence on those issues.

The League's success stems in part from its role as champion and advocate of a concept—innovation—rather than of a specific discipline, educational program, or political purpose. Along with the latitude to explore many opportunities across community college education, the League also has a broad, inclusive goal to serve the entire community and technical college field. The League's commitment to innovation and service to the field position it to focus on new ideas, programs, and practices; its more than 750 member colleges provide a formal structure for sharing ideas, experiences, programs, and practices.

As an organization committed to the process of innovation, organized for the continuity of leadership and priorities, and committed to serving all community colleges, the League has had considerable impact on the community college movement. The League has sponsored over 200 conferences and other gatherings, produced more than 170 publications, and addressed major issues facing community colleges through 130 national projects funded for some \$50 million. These projects have focused on instructional design, leadership, workforce development, information technology, the learning college, and diversity and inclusion. Transcending all these projects is the League's continuing commitment as the leading community college organization in the nation to champion innovation as its core business.

The Innovation of the Year Award is the League's most visible showcase of its commitment to innovation.* Created in 1982, the annual award is presented at participating colleges in recognition of the most outstanding innovation of the year. Winners can be individuals or teams; all college employees, including classified staff and part-time faculty, are eligible. Criteria for selecting the winner(s) are provided by the League, and colleges are urged to add any criteria they think appropriate. In addition to the award, winners are recognized with a photo and brief description of the winning innovation on the League's website. Since the beginning of this award, more than 500 innovations have been recognized.

* Information about the League's Innovation of the Year Award, including descriptions of award-winning innovations, is available at <http://www.league.org/ioy.cfm>.

Capitalizing on this rich repository of innovations, the League submitted a proposal to MetLife Foundation to examine these innovations and to explore the perspectives of the winners of these awards. The study included winners at the 19 League board member colleges from 1999 through 2008. This decade was selected because winners from earlier years would be difficult to locate. Throughout 2009 the League has been engaged in a study on "The Nature of Innovation in the Community College." Details on the methodology used in the study are provided on the project website at www.league.org/natureofinnovation. A brief summary of those details follows.

Categories of innovation. Researchers organized the 173 winning innovations by year and college and, using the descriptions featured in League publications, categorized each innovation in terms of its content and substance. These data provided insights into the kinds of innovations colleges featured and into indications of trends in innovation.

Perspectives of award winners. Four hundred winners, including members of teams, were identified. A survey (see www.league.org/natureofinnovation) was created by the researchers, field-tested, and vetted by the project's advisory committee. The survey was distributed electronically in September 2009; 117 respondents returned surveys for a response rate of 29 percent.

A culture of innovation. In a special work session, League Representatives identified responses to the question: What are the characteristics of a community college culture that support and encourage innovation? League Representatives are the key liaisons to the League for Innovation from each of the 19 member colleges that comprise the board of the League, and are selected for their leadership positions as champions of innovation. The characteristics were included in the survey and rated by members of the League's Alliance and by the 117 winners of the Innovation of the Year Award.

Interviews with selected winners. Each participating college was asked to identify two winners who could respond to interview questions about the process and the nature of innovation. The colleges were asked to select one winner from earlier years and one to represent more recent years, and to select winners who could represent diversity in age, gender, ethnicity, and job function. A list of interview questions created by the researchers and vetted by the advisory committee, along with guidelines for making videos of the interviews, was provided to each college. As part of this report, the researchers created a video from the interviews (www.league.org/natureofinnovation).

DEFINITIONS OF INNOVATION

A single satisfactory definition for “innovation” is difficult to find. In fact, in trying to define innovation, the problem is not a lack of definitions; the problem is too many definitions. The research team conducted a review of the Internet on October 14, 2009, and discovered 5,020,000 links to “Definitions of Innovation.” The *Innovation Journal* even sponsors, “An Exchange on Definitions of Innovation” (<http://www.innovation.cc/discussion-papers/definition.htm>).

There is a robust literature regarding innovation and the innovative process, particularly in the business world. The education world has also embraced innovation with considerable enthusiasm; the research team conducted an Internet review of “Innovation in Education” on October 14, 2009, that resulted in 282,000,000 links.

All the definitions of innovation, whether in business or education, usually involve two components: *a creative process that results in an improved product*. The summary below of examples from Creative Advantage (2008) illustrates these two components beginning with its own definition: the creation of business value through the development and implementation of new ideas.

While many organizations acknowledge that innovation is important to their growth and success, the term “innovation” is still without a consistently agreed-upon definition in the business world. Therefore, in addition to our definition, we offer some others that may be useful:

- “Innovation is creativity with a job to do.” John Emmerling
- “Innovators can hold a situation in chaos for long periods of time without having to reach a resolution...won't give up...have a long term commitment to their dream...innovators introduce a maximum of tension into the thinking process, unifying concepts that often appear to be opposed, solving problems which appear impossible.” George Land and Beth Jarman, *Breakpoint and Beyond: Mastering the Future Today*, Harper/Collins Publishers (1992).
- Incremental innovation seeks to improve the systems that already exist, making them better, faster, cheaper. This is sometimes called “Market Pull” Innovation. Radical innovation is more focused on new technologies, new

business models, and breakthrough businesses. This is sometimes called “Technology Push” Innovation.

- Innovation is people creating value by implementing new ideas.
- The starting point for innovation is the generation of creative ideas. Innovation is the process of taking those ideas to market or to usefulness.
- Innovation is anything that provides a new perceived benefit to a customer or employee.
- Innovation concerns the search for and the discovery, experimentation, development, imitation, and adoption of new products, new processes, and new organizational set ups.
- Innovation is the conversion of knowledge and ideas into a benefit, which may be for commercial use or for the public good; the benefit may be new or improved products, processes, or services.
- Innovation is the process that transforms ideas into commercial value.
- The distinction between “invention” and “innovation” is that invention is the creation of a new idea or concept, and innovation is turning the new concept into commercial success or widespread use.
- Innovation = Invention + Exploitation

For this study, a number of steps were taken to determine the best definition for innovation. On March 16, 2009, a focus group of 20 leading innovators convened during the League for Innovation’s annual conference on innovation in Reno, Nevada, to address several issues related to this project. Focus group members brainstormed definitions of innovation appropriate for the community college environment. This list was refined by the researchers into a list of 10 definitions (see methodology, www.league.org/natureofinnovation) that was distributed to the 19 League Representatives in early June. They were asked to select the five definitions they thought best reflected the environment of the community college. Two definitions tied for fifth place, so six definitions were included as an item for the survey of the Innovation of the Year Award winners.

Table 1: Definitions of Innovation

| | Number of Respondents | Percent of Respondents |
|---|-----------------------|------------------------|
| The development or adoption of new or existing ideas for the purpose of improving policies, programs, practices, or personnel | 25 | 21.3% |
| The creation of new opportunities that are transformative | 25 | 21.3% |
| The placing of creative ideas into action | 21 | 17.9% |
| The application of ideas, with the goal of effecting positive change | 20 | 17.0% |
| The creation of new programs or practices, or the improvement of old ones | 12 | 10.2% |
| A creative approach to increasing effectiveness | 7 | 5.9% |
| Other | 5 | 4.2% |
| No Response | 2 | 1.7% |
| Total | 117 | 100% |

The award recipients were asked in the survey to respond to the following item: “The definitions listed here appear in the literature. Based on your own experience, please select the one statement you think best reflects a definition of innovation for the community college environment, or use the ‘Other’ response to add a definition you think best reflects the definition of innovation for the community college environment.” See Table 1 for the responses.

In reality, all of these definitions work quite well and are acceptable. Only 5.9 percent selected, “A creative approach to increasing effectiveness,” and only 10.2 percent selected, “The creation of new programs or practices or the improvement of old ones.” These definitions then are clearly less applicable or useful in the community college, at least as perceived by award-winning innovators in the community college.

Only five respondents (4.2 percent) offered their own definitions, which included, “Continually moving student success forward,” “Implementing creative ideas that impact outcomes,” “Making a difference that sticks,” and the colloquial, “Hitting ‘em where they ain’t.”

There is little difference in the value placed by these winners on the other four definitions (see Table 1). Two of the definitions were selected as the most appropriate by 17.9 percent and 17.0 percent of the respondents, respectively, and two were selected as most appropriate by 21.3 percent. The two highest rated definitions are, “The creation of new opportunities that are transformative” and, “The development or adoption of new or existing ideas for the purpose of improving policies, programs, practices, or personnel.” The former is briefer and a bit more transcendent; the latter is more inclusive and practical. Both definitions work for the community college environment and should prove to be useful by these institutions.

CATEGORIES OF INNOVATION

Between the years 1999 and 2008, the Innovation of the Year Award was presented to 173 individuals or teams. To gain an understanding of the kinds of innovations championed by community colleges, the researchers organized these innovations into 26 categories. The researchers created a working list of categories and together assigned the innovations from two years—1999 and 2008—to the categories on the working list, which resulted in a further refinement of the categories. Working independently, the researchers then assigned categories to the innovations in the remaining years; where differences occurred in the assignment, the researchers consulted with each other until agreement was reached. The categories of innovations are listed in priority order in Table 2 (page 7).

Not surprisingly, almost one-fourth (22.5 percent) of the innovations reflected experiments in Course/Program Development. Historically, colleges have almost always used the framework of courses and programs to organize and deliver student learning. It is an efficient way to organize, track, count, and be reimbursed by funding agencies. College leaders recognize that significant learning can occur in the extra-curriculum, but it is the curriculum—expressed in courses and programs—that is the molding that frames the core business of the educational enterprise. And these innovators have made valiant efforts to improve and expand this framework for their students.

Table 2: Categories of Innovation

| | Number of Innovations | Percent of Total |
|---|-----------------------|------------------|
| Course/Program Development | 39 | 22.5% |
| Faculty/Staff Development | 22 | 12.7% |
| Student Support Services | 17 | 9.8% |
| Instruction | 16 | 9.2% |
| Workforce Development | 12 | 6.9% |
| Community Services | 9 | 5.2% |
| Basic Skills/Developmental Education | 6 | 3.5% |
| Diversity | 6 | 3.5% |
| Student Services/Academic Services Collaboration | 5 | 2.9% |
| Global Awareness | 4 | 2.3% |
| Information Technology | 4 | 2.3% |
| Sustainability | 4 | 2.3% |
| Student Services/Academic Services Collaboration and Course/Program Development | 4 | 2.3% |
| English as a Second Language | 3 | 1.7% |
| Business/Finance | 3 | 1.7% |
| Marketing | 3 | 1.7% |
| Learning Outcomes | 3 | 1.7% |
| Distance Education | 3 | 1.7% |
| Miscellaneous | 2 | 1.2% |
| Workforce Development and Course/Program Development | 2 | 1.2% |
| Library | 1 | 0.6% |
| Facilities | 1 | 0.6% |
| Cross-sector Partnerships | 1 | 0.6% |
| Community Services/Workforce Development | 1 | 0.6% |
| Diversity/Community Services | 1 | 0.6% |
| Sustainability and Course/Program Development | 1 | 0.6% |
| Total | 173 | 100% |

In the category of Course/Program Development, there were no discernible trends by year. The category appeared in every year from 1999 through 2008, appearing 9 times in 2001, 7 times in 2003, and 7 times in 2005.

The researchers also applied the processes or delivery mechanisms of Distance Education, Information Technology, and Cross-Sector Partnerships to each of the

categories when these processes/mechanisms were evident. For example, of the 39 innovations in Course/Program Development, 7 were Cross-Sector Partnerships, 6 were in Distance Education, and 2 illustrated applications of Information Technology. These various approaches to creating and implementing innovations in courses and programs are an indication of the creativity exercised by faculty and staff as they experiment in this arena.

The second most honored category was Faculty and Staff Development, with 22 (12.7 percent) innovations. It is encouraging that Faculty and Staff Development innovations are so prevalent in community colleges. If community colleges are to meet the multiple goals to which they have ascribed and if they are to provide for the diversity of students they serve, they must continually provide opportunities for their faculty, administrators, and staff to stay on the cutting edge of experimentation and innovation. Through innovative staff development programs, community colleges are illustrating their commitment to innovation.

Examples of innovations in Faculty and Staff Development were fairly evenly distributed across the years included in the study. In one year, 2001, there were no innovations in this category; in two years there were four such innovations; in all the other years the number of innovations ranged from 1 to 3. Only 6 of the 22 innovations in Faculty and Staff Development were developed or delivered using Distance Education (3), Cross-Sector Partnerships (2), or Information Technology (1).

Student Support Services was the third most honored category of innovations with 17 (9.8 percent). Because of the complexity in designating these categories, two related categories were created that reflect the role of student services: Student Services/Academic Services Collaboration with 5 innovations, and Student Services/Academic Services Collaboration and Course and Program Development with 4 innovations. If all these categories had been organized around student services as the core element, then Student Support Services would have been the second most honored category with 26 innovations. Student services is clearly an important program area in the college that lends itself to innovation and recognition by college personnel. But historically, although student services is deemed an important function in the institution, it struggles with identity and role, especially in relationship to other functions in the

institution. Whether second or third in the number awarded the Innovation of the Year, either place is a good showing for Student Support Services and reflects its important role in supporting the agenda of student success.

There were no discernible patterns in Student Support Services by year. In 2008, there were four such innovations; in 1999, there were three. In the years between, the innovations ranged from none to two.

Eight process or delivery categories could be applied to Student Support Services. One was in Distance Education and one was in a category used only one time, Business/Finance. It is telling that 6 of the 8 categories were in Information Technology. This is not surprising since student services is responsible for admissions, registration, assessment, counseling, advising, placement, financial aid, and a host of services that require the sophisticated use of information technology for efficient functioning. By experimenting with the technological aspects of these services, community colleges reveal they are continuing to improve their services for their students.

The fourth most honored category in this study was Instruction. While Instruction was reflected in a number of these categories, such as Course/Program Development, Basic Skills, and Learning Outcomes, here it represented processes of instruction and teaching that could not easily be subsumed in one of the other existing categories. An innovation to incorporate a multi-tiered approach to learning strategies in a Spanish program at one of the colleges is an example. With 16 innovations (9.2 percent), Instruction was a close second to Student Support Services.

There were no discernible patterns in Instruction by year. Only one year failed to produce an innovation in instruction, three years had three such innovations, and the other years ranged between one or two innovations a year. There was an equal spread among the processes or delivery mechanisms used to create these innovations in Instruction, with three each in Distance Education, Cross-Sector Partnerships, and Information Technology.

During the last several decades, the role of the community college in job training and workforce development has expanded to the point that it has become in some ways the contemporary hallmark of the

community college. Colleges have responded by creating a large array of federally funded programs to train workers and have organized business and industry institutes to retrain and provide short-term, contracted training for almost any need. It is a bit surprising, then, to discover that Workforce Development was only the fifth most honored category for innovation, especially since this area lends itself to innovation and is so visible as a priority for community colleges and broader society. Only 12 (5.2 percent) of the 173 innovations in this study were categorized as Workforce Development programs.

There were no clear trend patterns by year for Workforce Development, but there were clear patterns of delivery mechanisms. Of the 9 delivery mechanisms identified, 8 illustrated Cross-Sector Partnerships. This finding is in keeping with the community college's commitment to working in partnership with local schools and universities and local business and industry to address the need for trained workers. Some of these partnerships are multimillion dollar agreements involving the creation of national training centers with buildings and sophisticated equipment provided by business and industry. Of the 8 Cross-Sector Partnerships, 6 involved partnerships with community groups such as social service agencies or business and industry. The two exceptions reflected partnerships with area high schools to create bridges and career pathways. With the national interest in and federal support of tech-prep and career pathways, the researchers expected more innovations in this arena.

The remaining 21 categories ranged from nine innovations in Community Service, six in Basic Skills, and six in Diversity, to only one each in Library and Facilities and a few combined categories that could not fit into any other category. The researchers examined the data for trends in such categories as Global Awareness, Sustainability, Diversity, and Learning Outcomes, but there were too few winners in these categories to discern trends.

In summary, Course and Program Development is the primary arena in which faculty and staff innovate in community colleges, followed by Faculty and Staff Development. Student Support Services, Instruction, and Workforce Development are almost equal in the number of innovations honored in this study and round out the top five as the areas of innovative activity. Of the 173 innovations representing 26 different categories, 106 (61 percent) placed in the top five categories.

WHAT INNOVATORS THINK ABOUT INNOVATION

WHO ARE THE INNOVATORS?

In this study, 117 Innovation of the Year Award recipients responded to a survey on the nature of innovation in the community college. These innovators are employees on the firing line of community colleges. They are practitioners of innovation who go beyond the requirements of their jobs in efforts to correct problems and explore new ways of doing the business of education. Their experiences and their perceptions of the nature of innovation provide insights into innovation and the innovative process that should be informative to all those interested in innovation.

Almost half of the innovators (43.5 percent) are full-time faculty, while only 2.5 percent are part-time faculty, recognition of the challenges community colleges face in their efforts to incorporate part-time faculty into the life of the institution. A little more than one-fourth (26.4 percent) of the innovators are administrators, recognition that administrators are fully engaged along with faculty in addressing the problems and opportunities they face through innovation. See Table 3.

Table 3: Innovator's Primary Role at the College

| | Number of Respondents | Percent of Respondents |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Full-time faculty | 51 | 43.5% |
| Administrator | 31 | 26.4% |
| Non-faculty professional staff | 21 | 17.9% |
| Support/classified staff | 6 | 5.1% |
| Other | 4 | 3.4% |
| Part-time/adjunct faculty | 3 | 2.5% |
| No Response | 1 | <1% |
| Total | 117 | 100% |

Because of the variety of ways colleges categorize employees, the researchers had a difficult time determining the appropriate categories for survey participants. The relatively general category of non-faculty staff includes a variety of technical and specialized staff, with and without degrees, and almost 18 percent of respondents identified themselves as non-faculty professional staff. These employees play an important role in the efficient functioning of the institution, and their importance is further underscored by their involvement as innovators and as members of teams of innovators.

Support and classified staff comprise only 5.1 percent of the innovators in this study. This low number may be an indication of how college leaders perceive the role of support and classified staff in academic affairs, student affairs, and college operations; it may also reflect written or unwritten policies that place limitations on or fail to encourage the involvement of this group of employees in creating and implementing innovations.

Innovators were asked to identify the areas of their primary responsibility within the college during the time of the award-winning innovation (Table 4). Instruction, with 37.6 percent, is the area where most of the innovators worked. Almost 19 percent of respondents indicated "Other." Ten different areas were provided for responses, but 22 respondents felt their work could not fit into any of the ten options. These respondents added numerous descriptions of their areas which, in the view of the researchers, could for the great majority easily be categorized into the existing options.

Table 4: Innovator's Area of Primary Responsibility at the College

| | Number of Respondents | Percent of Respondents |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Instruction | 44 | 37.6% |
| Other | 22 | 18.8% |
| Student Services | 21 | 17.9% |
| Faculty/Staff Development | 7 | 5.9% |
| Workforce Development | 5 | 4.2% |
| Library | 5 | 4.2% |
| Continuing Education | 5 | 4.2% |
| Information Technology | 4 | 3.4% |
| Distance Education | 4 | 3.4% |
| Business/Financial Services | 0 | 0.0% |
| Facilities | 0 | 0.0% |
| No Response | 0 | 0.0% |
| Total | 117 | 100% |

Student services was selected by 17.9 percent of respondents. Combining Instruction and Student Services, the majority of innovators (55.5 percent) worked in the area of Instruction or Student Services at the time they received the Innovation of the Year Award. Innovators were fairly equally distributed among the other categories

at 3 percent to 5 percent; however, no innovators were represented in Business/Financial Services and Facilities.

DO INNOVATORS WORK ALONE, OR DO THEY WORK IN TEAMS?

In this study, award winners most often worked as members of a team. Only 14.5 percent of the awards were given to individuals, with 85.5 percent going to teams. Teams ranged in size, as indicated in Table 5.

Table 5: Number on a Team

| | Number of Respondents | Percent of Respondents |
|------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Team of two or three | 38 | 32.4% |
| Team of four to six | 34 | 29.0% |
| One person | 17 | 14.5% |
| Team of seven to ten | 17 | 14.5% |
| Team of eleven or more | 11 | 9.4% |
| No Response | 0 | 0.0% |
| Total | 117 | 100% |

“Teams of two to three individuals” was the most prevalent response, with 32.4 percent; the least prevalent team number (9.4 percent) consisted of eleven or more. It is known that many of the colleges in the League for Innovation encourage collaboration among staff as an institutional value, which may be reflected in the primacy of teams over individuals among award winners.

Innovators were also asked about the importance of teamwork in creating innovations (see Table 6). Respondents were asked to rate the importance of four statements about teamwork on a five-point scale ranging from Highly Unimportant to Highly Important. Of the 102

respondents who identified themselves as a member of a team, regardless of size of the team, 44 percent rated “Team member contributions to creating and implementing were about equal” as Highly Important. Five percent of respondents indicated Highly Unimportant, and 11 percent indicated Somewhat Important. The researchers assumed this statement would be rated much more important since team members share equally in the award recognition, but apparently equal contribution is not as important to members of the team, or the rating is recognition of the reality of the unequal contribution.

The other three statements were rated fairly high: “The innovation was better for being a team—not individual—effort” was rated Highly Important by 78 percent of respondents; “Involvement of a team has improved the innovation’s chances to endure” was rated Highly Important by 74 percent of respondents; and “The collaborative process produced benefits beyond the innovation” was rated Highly Important by 70 percent of respondents. Combining the ratings of Somewhat Important and Highly Important, the three statements were rated, respectively, by 93 percent, 93 percent, and 94 percent of respondents. These high ratings indicate that innovators place high value on teamwork in creating and implementing innovations. They believe that innovations are better and have a better chance to survive when created by a team. Equally important, these innovators pointed out that working on a team produced benefits beyond the value of the innovation. Administrators would be wise to note these values and to create policies and practices to encourage more teamwork and collaboration around the innovative process. Considerable value may accrue to the institution in its innovative work and possibly in daily operations when such values are supported and encouraged.

Table 6: Importance of Teamwork

| | Not applicable | Highly Unimportant | Somewhat Unimportant | Neutral | Somewhat Important | Highly Important |
|--|----------------|--------------------|----------------------|---------|--------------------|------------------|
| The innovation was better for being a team—not individual—effort. | 2 – 2% | 0 – 0% | 0 – 0% | 5 – 5% | 15 – 15% | 80 – 78% |
| Involvement of a team has improved the innovation's chances to endure. | 4 – 4% | 0 – 0% | 0 – 0% | 4 – 4% | 19 – 19% | 75 – 74% |
| The collaborative process produced benefits beyond the innovation. | 5 – 5% | 0 – 0% | 0 – 0% | 4 – 4% | 22 – 21% | 72 – 70% |
| Team member contributions to creating and implementing were about equal. | 5 – 5% | 5 – 5% | 11 – 11% | 8 – 8% | 28 – 27% | 45 – 44% |

First number is the count of respondents selecting the option. Percent is percent of the total.

WHAT WAS THE GENESIS OF THE INNOVATIONS?

There is extensive literature on the nature of innovation in terms of originality and adaptation. There is some tendency to place more value on innovations that can claim originality, but innovators are cautious to claim originality because they are not always sure of the origins of their own ideas. In reality, few ideas spew forth from Zeus' head that do not reflect the contributions of other creative individuals. It is more likely that most innovations are, in at least some way, adaptations of other ideas or products already in existence.

In this study, the 117 innovators divided almost equally along the lines of originality and adaptation. In response to the item, "To the best of your knowledge, your award-winning innovation was an original idea," 50.4 percent claimed originality. Respondents were provided a second choice of, "...an adaptation of an existing idea, with or without original elements added," and 49.5 percent claimed this response. Even with the response on adaptation including a flexible tweak of "with or without original elements," the respondents still leaned in favor of originality. This issue needs further study to determine if this response is a reflection of the pride these innovators are expressing in their work, an indication that they are not familiar with the variety of educational innovations, or an indication that their innovations can be accurately labeled as original. The researchers believe that in some cases the response can be interpreted to mean that the innovation, while perhaps not original or new in general, is new for the college where it was implemented and honored with an award.

Responses to the question, "What prompted you to initiate the innovation?" provided insight into why faculty and staff go the extra mile to create and implement innovations, usually effort beyond required responsibility. Respondents were asked to select all that apply from a list of eight possible responses (see Table 7).

"Improve student learning" was selected by 58.9 percent of the respondents, followed closely by 54.7 percent who selected, "Improve an existing system, process, practice, procedure." These fall about equally between effectiveness and efficiency: making learning more effective and making the institution more efficient. Effectiveness and efficiency, of course, are symbiotic in the business of education. Just over 43 percent of

respondents selected "Improve student retention or attainment," another indicator of effectiveness related to student learning. All three of the top motivating factors began with the word "improve," which may be another clue about how innovators view the innovative process.

Table 7: What Prompted the Innovation?

| | Number of Respondents | Percent of Respondents |
|---|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Improve student learning. | 69 | 58.9% |
| Improve an existing system, process, practice, procedure. | 64 | 54.7% |
| Improve student retention or attainment. | 51 | 43.5% |
| Meet a community need. | 46 | 39.3% |
| Other | 19 | 16.2% |
| Respond to a suggestion or recommendation by college leaders. | 14 | 11.9% |
| Address an accountability issue. | 13 | 11.1% |
| I did not initiate the innovation but joined the team later. | 9 | 7.6% |
| Total | 117 | 100% |

"Meet a community need" was selected by 39.3 percent of the respondents, which may be an indication of how these innovators view the connections between their college and their community. It would be interesting to investigate whether or not innovators in universities would make this connection.

Nineteen respondents (16.2 percent) also selected "Other," indicating that the responses provided in the survey did not best reflect the factors that motivated them. About half of these responses could be subsumed under improving student learning or improving practices, but several were not in the list provided: "increase student affordability," "personal need to do something significant," "effectively serve at-risk youth," and "need for better data for decision making."

HOW DID THE COLLEGES SUPPORT THE INNOVATIONS?

Given the community college's propensity for innovation and the League for Innovation's strong commitment to innovation, the researchers assumed there would be strong support for innovation, including financial support. However, only one-fourth (24.7 percent) of the winners in

this study received any financial support from the college budget (see Table 8). Almost one-third (31.6 percent) reported they received no funding from the college for their innovations. It is not clear what these data mean. Some innovations do not require funding. Some innovators may have wanted funding but did not ask for support from the college. In colleges where innovation is not championed, the rate of funding may be lower than reported here. The role of funding innovations is an area that requires further study.

Almost one-fourth (22.2 percent) of the winners report that they received funding from a grant or contract outside the organization. External grants usually require the development of a new program or practice so it is not unusual that so many of the award winners were grant based. Altogether, 67.3 percent of the winners did receive financial support from some source, including 8 winners (6.8 percent) who were given reassigned time or a sabbatical. Of the 11.1 percent who listed “Other,” the sources included student activity fees or combinations of funds from a variety of sources.

Table 8: Primary Source of Financial Support

| | Number of Respondents | Percent of Respondents |
|---|-----------------------|------------------------|
| No funding or financial support was provided for this innovation. | 37 | 31.6% |
| The college budget | 29 | 24.7% |
| A grant/contract from an outside organization | 26 | 22.2% |
| Other | 13 | 11.1% |
| Reassigned/released time or sabbatical | 8 | 6.8% |
| The college foundation or development office | 3 | 2.5% |
| No Responses | 1 | <1% |
| Total | 117 | 100% |

When asked to identify the primary sources of support other than financial, approximately one-third (32.4 percent) selected their own department or division (see Table 9). This is a good sign that innovations reflect the needs and interests of students and colleagues in the places where they work and study. In other words, the innovations may reflect practical issues of teaching and learning that confront faculty and staff on a daily basis. This information may also be an indication that a great

deal of innovation occurs at the grassroots level and reflects a propensity of faculty to address their own challenges through innovation without support from the top leadership.

Table 9: Primary Source of Non-Financial Support

| | Number of Respondents | Percent of Respondents |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| My own department or division | 38 | 32.4% |
| Vice President's Office | 22 | 18.8% |
| President's Office | 15 | 12.8% |
| Other | 14 | 11.9% |
| Other faculty in the college | 9 | 7.6% |
| External groups or organizations | 7 | 5.9% |
| Staff Development Office | 5 | 4.2% |
| Students | 4 | 3.4% |
| Office of Institutional Research | 1 | <1% |
| Professional organization | 1 | <1% |
| No Responses | 1 | <1% |
| Family or friends | 0 | 0.0% |
| Total | 117 | 100% |

Almost one-third (31.6 percent) of respondents, however, did report that their primary support came from the president’s or vice president’s office. The vice president’s office was identified by 18.8 percent of the respondents, while the president’s office was identified by 12.8 percent. In another item, when respondents were asked to identify the three most significant barriers they encountered in implementing their innovation, only 7 respondents (5.9 percent) identified, “Lack of support from college leaders” as a barrier. This is a clear indication that top administrators in these colleges are supportive of innovation and are not viewed as barriers. Fourteen (11.9 percent) of the respondents identified other sources of support than those listed. Three of the sources were related to support from computing services and two from the district office.

When respondents were asked to identify the three factors that were most important in the success of their innovation, their overwhelming response (70.9 percent) centered on their or their team’s enthusiasm and

perseverance (see Table 10). They gave themselves the primary credit for the success of the innovation with an altruistic bent. The second most frequently selected factor (46.1 percent) was the need for the innovation, so it appears that these innovators, when they recognize the need for a new solution, approach the challenge with enthusiasm and perseverance. This altruistic perspective is further supported when respondents selected, “Opportunities for award or recognition” as the lowest rated factor related to success of their innovation; only two respondents (1.7 percent) selected this factor. When asked to select the three most significant barriers in implementing the innovation, no respondent identified, “Lack of award or recognition” as a factor. These award winners are apparently not motivated by the need for recognition for their efforts.

Table 10: Factors Leading to Success of Innovation

| | Number of Respondents | Percent of Respondents |
|--|-----------------------|------------------------|
| You and/or your team's enthusiasm and perseverance | 83 | 70.9% |
| The need for the innovation | 54 | 46.1% |
| An institutional culture that supports and encourages innovation | 51 | 43.5% |
| Support of college leaders | 45 | 38.4% |
| Support from colleagues | 32 | 27.3% |
| One or more champions within the college | 27 | 23.0% |
| Student interest | 21 | 17.9% |
| Financial support | 19 | 16.2% |
| Support from outside the college | 18 | 15.3% |
| Documented effectiveness of the innovation | 17 | 14.5% |
| Other | 4 | 3.4% |
| Opportunities for award or recognition | 2 | 1.7% |
| Total | 117 | 100% |

The third most frequently selected factor in the success of innovations is, “An institutional culture that supports and encourages innovation,” a factor deemed important by 43.5 percent of the respondents. “Support of college leaders” was selected by 38.4 percent of respondents, and, “Support from colleagues” was selected by 27.3 percent of respondents. These three factors combine to suggest that an institutional culture of support and

encouragement—which includes support from leaders and colleagues—plays a very important role in motivating faculty and staff to create and implement innovations. This point is further buttressed by the sixth most frequently selected factor, “One or more champions within the college”; 23 percent of respondents listed this item among their top three factors.

Respondents were also asked to select the three most significant barriers encountered in implementing the innovation (see Table 11). Half (51.2 percent) identified,

Table 11: Most Significant Barriers to Success

| | Number of Respondents | Percent of Respondents |
|---|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Lack of time | 60 | 51.2% |
| Logistical and/or technical issues | 35 | 29.9% |
| Unanticipated problems | 28 | 23.9% |
| Lack of financial resources or support | 25 | 21.3% |
| Magnitude of the project exceeded the anticipated effort and resources | 25 | 21.3% |
| Other | 23 | 19.6% |
| Difficulties in bringing the innovation to scale | 17 | 14.5% |
| Lack of support from others within the college | 12 | 10.2% |
| Lack of support from college leaders | 7 | 5.9% |
| Difficulties among the individuals working on the project | 6 | 5.1% |
| Lack of sufficient evidence of the effectiveness of the innovation | 5 | 4.2% |
| An institutional culture that does not support and encourage innovation | 4 | 3.4% |
| Withdrawal of support before the project was completed | 3 | 2.5% |
| Insufficient research and preparation | 1 | <1% |
| Lack of award or recognition | 0 | 0.0% |
| Total | 117 | 100% |

“Lack of time” as the primary barrier. “Logistical and/or technical issues” was identified by 29.9 percent as a significant barrier, with, “Unanticipated problems” identified by 23.9 percent as a significant barrier. In identifying these barriers, respondents have not blamed others as impediments; the identified barriers are generally nonthreatening aspects of the culture in which these innovators operate. Two factors tied for fourth place

as barriers, with 21.3 percent of respondents identifying, “Magnitude of the project exceeded the anticipated effort and resources”—a fairly benign aspect of the culture—and, “Lack of financial resources or support,” which could reflect the innovators’ perspectives on leaders as a barrier. However, only 7 respondents (5.9 percent) identified, “Lack of support from college leaders” as a barrier, so there seems no propensity to blame others as barriers.

Twenty-three (19.6 percent) respondents selected “Other.” Four of these responses indicated there were no barriers involved in implementing the innovation. Five of the responses addressed lack of preparation, interest, or time on the part of other faculty members as a barrier. There were no discernable patterns in the other responses.

WHAT WAS THE IMPACT/OUTCOME OF THE INNOVATIONS?

For a national organization to champion innovation as its core business for over forty years, and for hundreds of community college educators to embrace innovations and share their work—as well as take great pride in that work—there must be some significant value in innovation. In this study, the researchers attempted to dig deeper into that issue by asking award-winning innovators to share their perspectives regarding the impact and outcomes of the innovations they created. Respondents provided insights into the impact on the goals and the functions of the institution and indicated how they knew that impact had occurred. They also provided insights into how they were personally affected as the creators and implementers of award-winning innovations.

Institutional outcomes. Respondents were asked to rate the impact of the award-winning innovation on a list of outcomes that are generally considered priorities for all educational institutions (see Table 12). The researchers were somewhat surprised that respondents rated, “More creative use of resources” as the highest outcome, with 93 percent rating the impact as Somewhat Strong or Very Strong. While this is an institutional value to be encouraged, it does not equal the value institutions usually place on such outcomes as improved student learning and increased retention and graduation rates.

Eighty-six percent of respondents rated, “More effective educational practice” as Somewhat Strong or Very Strong, making it the second highest rated outcome. This outcome represents another important institutional value, but one not quite as important as the core business of the institution, which is improved and expanded student learning.

However, 78 percent of respondents rated, “Improved student learning” Somewhat Strong or Very Strong in terms of the impact of the innovation, which made it the third highest rated outcome. The lowest rated outcome for Somewhat Strong or Very Strong (52 percent) was, “Increased retention, GPA, and/or graduation rates.” This outcome is the bread-and-butter index for institutional effectiveness, and so it is somewhat disappointing that of all the outcomes listed, it received the lowest rating by the innovators. It will be interesting to ask the same question in 2020 to see if more innovations will have focused on this outcome in response to President Barack Obama’s challenge to double the numbers of community college degrees and certificates by that date. In general,

Table 12: Impact of the Innovation on Outcomes

| | Not applicable | Very weak impact | Somewhat weak impact | Somewhat strong impact | Very strong impact |
|---|----------------|------------------|----------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| More creative use of resources | 4 – 3% | 0 – 0% | 4 – 3% | 53 – 46% | 55 – 47% |
| More effective educational practice | 9 – 8% | 0 – 0% | 7 – 6% | 45 – 38% | 56 – 48% |
| Improved student learning | 12 – 10% | 1 – 1% | 12 – 10% | 40 – 34% | 52 – 44% |
| Increased engagement of students | 14 – 12% | 0 – 0% | 12 – 10% | 39 – 33% | 52 – 44% |
| More efficient educational practice | 18 – 15% | 0 – 0% | 13 – 11% | 34 – 29% | 52 – 44% |
| Increased engagement of faculty with students | 19 – 16% | 1 – 1% | 19 – 16% | 37 – 32% | 40 – 34% |
| Increased retention, GPA, and/or graduation rates | 27 – 24% | 4 – 4% | 23 – 20% | 41 – 36% | 18 – 16% |

First number is the count of respondents selecting the option. Percent is percent of the total.

these innovators felt that their innovations have more impact on creative use of resources and effective practices than they do on improving student learning and increasing retention, GPA, and graduation rates.

Table 13: How Do You Know the Innovation Had an Impact?

| | Number of Respondents | Percent of Respondents |
|---|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Faculty/staff testimonies or anecdotes | 69 | 58.9% |
| Student testimonies or anecdotes | 61 | 52.1% |
| Student surveys | 48 | 41.0% |
| Faculty surveys | 28 | 23.9% |
| Student interviews or focus groups | 28 | 23.9% |
| Institutional data (e.g., course completion rates, student retention rates) | 28 | 23.9% |
| Faculty interviews or focus groups | 27 | 23.0% |
| Other | 20 | 17.0% |
| Formal pre- and post-tests | 17 | 14.5% |
| Administrator and/or staff surveys | 16 | 13.6% |
| No formal or informal evaluations have been conducted. | 12 | 10.2% |
| Use of balanced scorecard or other management tools | 6 | 5.1% |
| Total | 117 | 100% |

In addition to rating the impact of the innovations on institutional outcomes, the researchers asked the respondents the key question: “How do you know?” The question was followed by ten items related to various methods of gathering data, and respondents were asked to select all that apply (see Table 13). The most frequently selected (58.9 percent) method was, “Faculty/staff testimonies or anecdotes,” followed closely by, “Student testimonies or anecdotes” (52.1 percent). This is a very disappointing finding because it reflects business as usual in the community college, where faculty and staff continue to rely on anecdotal data in spite of the strong national push to create a culture of evidence in institutions of education. The researchers had assumed that these innovators might be a bit more conscientious than other staff regarding the need to verify outcomes with more reliable data than anecdotes and testimonies.

Student surveys, at 41 percent, were the third most frequently selected method of answering the question, “How do you know?” with faculty surveys coming in fourth at 23.9 percent. Two additional methods were tied for fourth place at 23.9 percent: “Student interviews or focus groups” and “Institutional data.” “Faculty interviews or focus groups” came in fifth at 23 percent. The institutional data moves these innovators closer to a culture of evidence, but this is offset by the finding that 10.2 percent of the respondents reported that no formal or informal evaluations have been conducted.

Respondents were also asked to select the three most significant institutional outcomes for the award-winning innovation (see Table 14). By a wide margin, the most frequently selected outcome (70 percent) was, “Acknowledged by college leaders as a value to the college.” The second most frequently selected outcome (54.7 percent) was, “Embedded in the culture of the college and accepted as practice.” These innovators saw the impact of their innovations in terms of how college leaders viewed them and how they were accepted in the college as more important than their impact on students,

Table 14: Most Significant Institutional Impacts of the Innovation

| | Number of Respondents | Percent of Respondents |
|--|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Acknowledged by college leaders as a value to the college | 82 | 70.0% |
| Embedded in the culture of the college and accepted as practice | 64 | 54.7% |
| Changed behavior of individuals for whom the innovation was created | 60 | 51.2% |
| Adopted by others in the college beyond the individual or team that created it | 38 | 32.4% |
| Helped implement the college's strategic plan | 28 | 23.9% |
| Strengthened institutional focus on educational practice based on clearly articulated theory | 19 | 16.2% |
| Strengthened institutional efforts to base evaluation of programs, processes, and practices on documented evidence | 17 | 14.5% |
| Other | 10 | 8.5% |
| Total | 117 | 100% |

although, “Changed behavior of individuals for whom the innovation was created” was the third most frequently selected outcome (51.2 percent).

Almost one-third (32.4 percent) of the respondents selected, “Adopted by others in the college beyond the individual or team that created it.” This is significant, because for innovations to endure and to increase impact, they must migrate beyond the champions who created and implemented them in the first place. Such adoption by others in the college is also testimony to the value of the innovation.

The lowest rated item, except for “Other,” was, “Strengthened institutional efforts to base evaluation of programs, processes, and practices on documented evidence.” This response reflects earlier responses about the lack of evaluation and the use of anecdotes as primary measures. Apparently, award-winning innovators are not making a major contribution to institutional efforts to base their evaluations on documented evidence.

Personal outcomes. In addition to indicating institutional outcomes, respondents were asked to select the top three personal outcomes for their award-winning innovation (see Table 15). Personal satisfaction was the outcome selected most frequently by respondents; 63.2 percent selected, “Satisfaction with being recognized by a national organization such as the League for Innovation,” and 62.3 percent selected, “Satisfaction with being recognized by my colleagues in the college.” This is strong evidence that the League is playing an important role by awarding the Innovation of the Year Award, at least in terms of the personal satisfaction it brings to the winners. Faculty appreciate being recognized by the League and by the local visibility the award provides among their colleagues. Interestingly, the outcome selected by the fewest number of respondents (13.6 percent) was, “Satisfaction with being recognized by my students.” This low rating could be a recognition that the logistics of the awards do not include much opportunity for students to know their instructors and other staff have won these awards. The rating could also be an indication that not all the innovations related directly to students.

Table 15: Most Significant Personal Impacts of the Innovation

| | Number of Respondents | Percent of Respondents |
|---|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Satisfaction with being recognized by a national organization such as the League for Innovation | 74 | 63.2% |
| Satisfaction with being recognized by my colleagues in the college | 73 | 62.3% |
| Motivation to champion the innovation in my college | 55 | 47.0% |
| Motivation to create more innovations | 48 | 41.0% |
| Motivation to do my work better in the future | 30 | 25.6% |
| Motivation to champion the innovation in other colleges | 19 | 16.2% |
| Satisfaction with being recognized by my students | 16 | 13.6% |
| Other | 15 | 12.8% |
| Total | 117 | 100% |

In addition to satisfaction, the awards also serve to motivate the winners. The motivation is fairly high, “To champion the innovation in my college” (47 percent) and, “To create more innovations” (41 percent). About one-fourth (25.6 percent) of respondents were motivated to do their work better in the future as a result of their efforts in creating the innovation, while only 16.2 percent were motivated to champion the innovation in other colleges. In general, this survey confirms that the Innovation of the Year Award is a source of personal satisfaction and serves as a motivating force in the lives of those who champion innovations.

The following individual responses provide more flavor to the personal value these innovators ascribe to the award: “tremendous satisfaction in teaching,” “personal satisfaction that I am doing significant work,” “happy,” “motivation to continue to do great work in the future,” “satisfaction that my colleague was recognized,” “encouraged to persevere in spite of multiple challenges,” “satisfaction in meeting a community and national need,” “satisfaction knowing students were served better,” and “value to business community.”

Table 16: Impact of the Award on Various Populations

| | No impact not applicable | Very weak impact | Somewhat weak impact | Somewhat strong impact | Very strong impact |
|--|--------------------------|------------------|----------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| The winner/the team of winners | 4 – 3% | 4 – 3% | 12 – 10% | 56 – 49% | 39 – 34% |
| The department/division in which winner or team resides | 6 – 5% | 5 – 4% | 17 – 15% | 51 – 45% | 35 – 31% |
| The college as a whole | 5 – 4% | 9 – 8% | 18 – 16% | 53 – 46% | 31 – 27% |
| Students | 19 – 16% | 8 – 7% | 13 – 11% | 38 – 33% | 38 – 33% |
| Faculty and staff apart from the winner or team of winners | 9 – 8% | 14 – 12% | 29 – 25% | 44 – 38% | 20 – 17% |
| The local community | 29 – 25% | 19 – 17% | 27 – 24% | 24 – 21% | 15 – 13% |

First number is the count of respondents selecting the option. Percent is percent of the total.

WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE INNOVATION OF THE YEAR AWARD?

A special feature of this study was to determine the value and impact of the League award itself in addition to the impact of the innovations on institutional goals and functions and on personal dimensions. When asked to rate the impact of the award on various groups and individuals in the institution, respondents rated themselves (the winner/the team of winners) the highest with 83 percent indicating Very Strong Impact or Somewhat Strong Impact (see Table 16). The department or division of the winner or team of winners was rated second highest with 76 percent indicating Very Strong Impact or Somewhat Strong Impact. Apparently, the award functions to bring recognition to winners and the units where they work.

Seventy-three percent of respondents indicated Very Strong Impact or Somewhat Strong Impact for, “The college as a whole.” Students came in as the fourth group on which the award had impact at 66 percent for Very Strong or Somewhat Strong Impact. Students, however, were the second lowest group (16 percent) for which there was No Impact/Not Applicable, an indication that some of the innovations were not related to students or innovators could not make connections between the innovations and students.

The local community was the group least impacted by the award. Thirty-four percent of respondents rated the impact on the local community as Very Strong or Somewhat Strong. Twenty-five percent of respondents also rated No Impact/Not Applicable for the local community, an indication that the great majority of the innovations were more relevant to the internal functioning of the college.

Compared to other forms of recognition for their work in education, these innovators place high value on the League’s Innovation of the Year Award. Almost 40 percent rated the award, in comparison to other awards, as Highly Important. Another 29 percent rated the award Somewhat Important. Over two-thirds of the respondents rated the award either Highly Important or Somewhat Important. Interestingly, 17.9 percent rated the award as Highly Unimportant. See Table 17.

Table 17: Importance of League Award Compared to Others

| | Number of Respondents | Percent of Respondents |
|----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Highly important | 46 | 39.3% |
| Somewhat important | 34 | 29.0% |
| Highly unimportant | 21 | 17.9% |
| Somewhat unimportant | 6 | 5.1% |
| Neutral | 6 | 5.1% |
| No Responses | 4 | 3.4% |
| Total | 117 | 100% |

Some of the impact of the Innovation of the Year Award, and some of the satisfaction, may be related to the actions that occurred in the winner’s college following the award. Respondents were presented with a list of 15 possible actions that a college could take to recognize them for the award and were asked select all that apply (see Table 18). Over half (51.2 percent) selected, “articles in in-house publications or websites featured the winners.” An awards ceremony was selected by 47 percent of respondents. It is surprising that in a decade in which colleges have had to monitor budgets carefully,

36.7 percent of the respondents indicated their colleges provided travel funds to make presentations at state and national conferences. This fairly solid showing may be an indication of the strong relationship between the League colleges and the conferences sponsored by the League for Innovation. League colleges are encouraged to send the winners to the League’s annual Innovations conference.

Table 18: Actions Related to Receiving the Innovation of the Year Award

| | Number of Respondents | Percent of Respondents |
|--|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Articles in in-house publications or websites featured the winner(s). | 60 | 51.2% |
| An awards ceremony was held to honor the Innovation of the Year award recipient(s). | 55 | 47.0% |
| Travel funds were provided for the winner(s) to present at state or national conferences. | 43 | 36.7% |
| The college incorporated sessions on the innovation into its faculty and staff development programs. | 34 | 29.0% |
| Award recipient(s) received certificate(s) or plaque(s) other than those provided by the League. | 33 | 28.2% |
| Written reports on the innovation were distributed inside the college. | 31 | 26.4% |
| Visitors from other colleges came to the campus to review the innovation. | 31 | 26.4% |
| Stories in local media featured the winner(s). | 21 | 17.9% |
| Special funds were provided to support the new program. | 19 | 16.2% |
| Reassigned/released time was provided for those responsible for operating the program. | 18 | 15.3% |
| An article on the innovation was published in an educational journal. | 14 | 11.9% |
| No special actions or celebrations occurred. | 13 | 11.1% |
| A special program to implement the innovation was created in the college. | 11 | 9.4% |
| Other | 9 | 7.6% |
| New titles were assigned to those in charge of the new program. | 6 | 5.1% |
| The winner(s) were rewarded with promotion, bonus, and/or salary increase. | 4 | 3.4% |
| The award winner(s) received continuing education units (CEUs). | 0 | 0.0% |
| Total | 117 | 100% |

A little more than one-fourth of respondents selected, “The college incorporated sessions on the innovation into its faculty and staff development programs” (29 percent); “Award recipients received certificates or plaques other than those awarded by the League” (28.2 percent); and, “Written reports on the innovation were distributed inside the college” (26.4 percent). These are all indications of the college’s commitment to recognize the work of the innovators and to make that work available to faculty and staff in the institution. One other action was selected by over one-fourth of the respondents, “Visitors from other colleges came to the campus to review the innovation” (26.4 percent), which is an action that can create considerable satisfaction and motivation.

While special funds were provided to support the new program (16.2 percent) and reassigned/released time was provided for those responsible for operating the innovation (15.3 percent), only 4 winners (3.4 percent) were rewarded with promotion, bonus, and/or a salary increase. Colleges are apparently more willing or more able to provide travel and program-related funds for these innovators than they are to provide personal salary increases and promotion. Colleges should consider policies to implement these practices as a further indication of the value placed on innovation.

Thirteen of the respondents (11.1 percent) indicated that no special actions or celebrations took place at their college as a result of the award. This is not a particularly high number, but given the evidence that the great majority of the colleges did go beyond the League’s recognition of the winners to acknowledge these innovators, all colleges should be encouraged to follow suit.

HOW WERE THE INNOVATIONS EVALUATED AND SUSTAINED?

Historically, community colleges have not been champions of creating a culture of evidence. They lack systems in individual colleges and in state networks to gather and interpret evidence related to improving and expanding student learning. Where such systems do exist and data are available, college leaders still struggle with how to use the data for evidence-based decision making. Community colleges do not differ significantly from other sectors of higher education in this regard.

For decades community colleges have relied on anecdotal evidence as the basis for reports and decisions about policies, programs, and practices. The research team for

this study had assumed that these innovators might reflect a more encouraging direction toward more reliable evaluations of their innovations. The program criteria encourage evidence. There is considerable institutional and personal investment in the innovations. The innovations and the winners are quite visible in the institution and nationally. These conditions warrant more careful attention and increase the expectations that the innovations will be evaluated more carefully. Unfortunately, it is business as usual for these innovators when it comes to evaluation: As reported in Table 13, when respondents were asked “How do you know?” about the impact of the innovations, 58.9 percent relied on faculty/staff testimonies or anecdotes, followed closely by 52.1 percent who relied on student testimonies or anecdotes.

Table 19: Activities as Innovation Was Being Developed and Implemented

| | Number of Respondents | Percent of Respondents |
|--|-----------------------|------------------------|
| A review of literature related to the innovation | 54 | 46.1% |
| Pilot or field tests in our college related to this innovation | 54 | 46.1% |
| Presentation at conferences or other professional meetings | 45 | 38.4% |
| Survey of faculty and/or staff to determine need for/interest in the innovation | 41 | 35.0% |
| Interviews or conversations with colleagues in other colleges who had implemented this or a similar innovation | 33 | 28.2% |
| Survey of students to determine need for/interest in the innovation | 30 | 25.6% |
| Survey of community representatives to determine need for/interest in the innovation | 22 | 18.8% |
| Visits to other colleges that had implemented this or a similar innovation | 15 | 12.8% |
| Other | 14 | 11.9% |
| None of the listed activities occurred | 4 | 3.4% |
| Total | 117 | 100% |

The research team created several questions to probe this issue a bit deeper. One question asked about the various activities the innovators engaged in as they developed and implemented the innovation—activities

that generally reflect thoughtfulness and provide a framework for good evaluation (see Table 19). Two activities were selected by 46.1 percent of respondents: “A review of literature related to the innovation” and, “Pilot or field tests in our college related to this innovation.” These activities certainly reflect elements of a culture of evidence; it appeared that the innovators were going about their tasks methodically and critically.

These activities were buttressed by “Presentation at conferences or other professional meetings,” selected by 38.4 percent of respondents. Educators are expected to publically share their work for critical analysis by their colleagues, and while such presentations do not always invite critiques, presenters are usually careful when making claims of impact and describing their methodologies in a public forum.

Especially encouraging is that 35 percent of respondents selected, “Survey of faculty and/or staff to determine need for/interest in the innovation.” More than a third of the innovators completed a needs assessment as part of their creation of an innovation, and another 28.2 percent checked out their innovation with colleagues in other colleges who had interest in or who had developed similar innovations. And one-fourth (25.6 percent) surveyed students to determine need for or interest in the innovation. Only four respondents (3.4 percent) did not engage in any of these evaluative-setting activities. In summary, 97 percent of the respondents took some kind of action that reflected their commitment to a culture of evidence as they developed or implemented their innovations.

It was somewhat discouraging, then, to discover that when the winners were asked directly, “What methods of evaluation have been applied to your award-winning innovation?” the most frequently selected activities were, “Faculty and/or staff testimonies/anecdotes” (47.8 percent) and, “Student testimonies/anecdotes” (45.2 percent). Community colleges are still relying on anecdotal data as their primary source of information for making decisions about policies, programs, and practices in spite of a strong national conversation about the need for more reliable data and very strong recommendations from national leaders, major studies, foundations, and governmental and regulatory agencies regarding such data. See Table 20.

Table 20: Evaluation Methods

| | Number of Respondents | Percent of Respondents |
|---|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Faculty and/or staff testimonies/anecdotes | 56 | 47.8% |
| Student testimonies/anecdotes | 53 | 45.2% |
| Student surveys | 49 | 41.8% |
| Faculty surveys | 33 | 28.2% |
| Faculty interviews or focus groups | 28 | 23.9% |
| Student interviews or focus groups | 27 | 23.0% |
| Institutional data (e.g., course completion rates, student retention rates) | 22 | 18.8% |
| Formal pre- and post-tests | 16 | 13.6% |
| Other | 16 | 13.6% |
| No formal or informal evaluations have been conducted. | 14 | 11.9% |
| Administrator and/or staff surveys | 14 | 11.9% |
| Use of balanced scorecard or other management tools | 7 | 5.9% |
| Total | 117 | 100% |

There is a glimmer of encouragement in that 41.8 percent of the respondents indicated they used student surveys as evaluation and 28.2 percent indicated faculty surveys. Almost one-fourth of the respondents selected faculty interviews or focus groups (23.9 percent) and student interviews or focus groups (23 percent) as methods of evaluation. These encouraging indices are offset by the responses of 14 (11.9 percent) of the respondents who indicated that no formal or informal evaluations of the innovations have occurred.

Sustaining innovation. Efforts to sustain the innovations are generally sound (see Table 21). When asked to select all that apply from a list of efforts, the most frequently selected response (52.9 percent) was, “Staff have been assigned responsibility to ensure continuity.” When staff champions of the innovation are given formal responsibility for herding the innovation through institutional pastures, the innovation is likely to survive—at least as long as the champion is employed by the college. The second most frequently selected response (43.5 percent) was, “The innovation has expanded to

serve a larger number of students and/or faculty” beyond those for which the innovation was originally designed. When more students and faculty benefit beyond the original target group, the innovation is well on its way to becoming embedded in the culture of the college.

Significantly, 40.1 percent of respondents selected, “Support has been incorporated into the annual budget.” Almost 36 percent indicated that, “Organizational structures have been created that reflect ownership and support.” When support has been provided in the budget and organizational structures have been created for the innovation, the innovation is much more likely to endure.

More than one-fourth of the respondents rated two additional efforts as valuable in sustaining the innovations. “A critical mass of college stakeholders champions the innovation” was selected by 27.3 percent of the respondents. “The innovation is evaluated on a regular basis” was selected by 26.4 percent of the respondents. The innovators have made considerable effort to sustain their innovations and have done so in a variety of substantial ways. Thirteen (11.1 percent) respondents indicated there were no continuing efforts to sustain their innovations.

Table 21: Efforts to Sustain Innovation

| | Number of Respondents | Percent of Respondents |
|--|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Staff have been assigned responsibility to ensure continuity. | 62 | 52.9% |
| The innovation has expanded to serve a larger number of students and/or faculty. | 51 | 43.5% |
| Support has been incorporated into the annual budget. | 47 | 40.1% |
| Organizational structures have been created that reflect ownership and support. | 42 | 35.8% |
| A critical mass of college stakeholders champions the innovation. | 32 | 27.3% |
| The innovation is evaluated on a regular basis. | 31 | 26.4% |
| The innovation produces a revenue stream. | 17 | 14.5% |
| There is no continuing effort to support the innovation. | 13 | 11.1% |
| Other | 11 | 9.4% |
| Total | 117 | 100% |

Table 22: Criteria for Evaluating Innovations

| | Unimportant | Somewhat Unimportant | Neutral | Somewhat Important | Important |
|---|-------------|----------------------|----------|--------------------|-----------|
| Quality: Increases quality in course, program, office, or college | 0 – 0% | 2 – 2% | 0 – 0% | 13 – 11% | 102 – 87% |
| Impact: Has a significant, positive, impact on the target group | 1 – 1% | 0 – 0% | 2 – 2% | 16 – 14% | 97 – 84% |
| Creativity: Is original or a creative adaptation | 1 – 1% | 0 – 0% | 5 – 4% | 37 – 32% | 73 – 63% |
| Efficiency: Contributes to more efficient processes and practices | 0 – 0% | 2 – 2% | 14 – 12% | 46 – 39% | 55 – 47% |
| Replication: Can be replicated elsewhere with minimal difficulty | 1 – 1% | 0 – 0% | 15 – 13% | 47 – 40% | 54 – 46% |
| Cost Effectiveness: Adds value while containing or reducing costs | 1 – 1% | 3 – 3% | 26 – 22% | 44 – 38% | 43 – 37% |
| Scalability: Can be expanded to serve the entire target group | 1 – 1% | 2 – 2% | 18 – 16% | 54 – 47% | 41 – 35% |
| Timeliness: Not more than 5 years old in the college | 3 – 3% | 10 – 9% | 24 – 21% | 42 – 36% | 38 – 32% |

First number is the count of respondents selecting the option. Percent is percent of the total.

As an additional way of examining evaluation, the research team asked respondents to rate in importance criteria that “have been identified as useful in evaluating nominated innovations and selecting Innovation of the Year award-winning innovations” (see Table 22). All the criteria listed are relevant and useful in some contexts. Using a scale ranging from Unimportant to Important, 87 percent of respondents rated, “Quality: Increases quality in course, program, office, or college” as Important, and 84 percent rated, “Impact: Has a significant, positive impact on the target group” as Important. “Creativity: Is original or a creative adaptation” was rated Important by 63 percent of respondents. All other criteria were rated Important by less than 50 percent of the respondents, but none by less than 32 percent.

As this project evolved, the idea of examining the characteristics of a community college culture that support and encourage innovation emerged as a key aspect of the nature of innovation. The idea first emerged in a discussion with the 20 invited members of the focus group that met on March 16, 2009, in Reno, Nevada, during the League's annual Innovations conference. Focus group participants felt that while descriptions of the categories of innovation and perspectives of award winners on the nature of innovation would be important, a carefully constructed list of institutional characteristics that support and encourage innovation would be particularly helpful as the basis for guidelines that could be used by college leaders to assess their institution's commitment to innovation.

The timing to include a study of the characteristics of an innovative institutional culture was serendipitous inasmuch as the League Representatives would be together in Annapolis, Maryland, in April for their semiannual meeting. The chair of the League Representatives was contacted and agreed to schedule a two-hour session with the Representatives to address the key question: "What are the characteristics of a community college culture that encourage and support innovation?"

The researchers prepared a background brief on this dimension of the project for the meeting of the League Representatives that included the following assumptions about the key role these leaders play regarding the nature of innovation:

1. The 19 colleges that are members of the League for Innovation board of directors are, by definition, among the most innovative community colleges in the U. S. and Canada.
2. The 19 League board member colleges champion and recognize innovation as a hallmark of their culture.
3. League Representatives, as the institutional conduits to the League and as respected and seasoned leaders, are champions and supporters of innovation.
4. League Representatives are a rich resource of information and perspectives on innovations, on the innovative process, and on a college culture that encourages and supports innovation.

Held on April 23, 2009, in Annapolis, Maryland, the two-hour work session was facilitated by the researchers. From this session, the researchers compiled a list of 19 characteristics refined by staff into a list of 18 characteristics.

The final list was organized into a survey format, with respondents asked to rate each characteristic on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Highly Unimportant" to "Highly Important." Item 19 requested that respondents, "Please add any characteristics not listed here that you think are important in defining a community college as having a culture of innovation."

This survey was distributed to all 19 League Representatives on May 14, and 17 of the League Representatives responded for a response rate of 89 percent. On May 14, the survey was also sent to the 655 CEOs of member colleges. These are colleges that have considerable interest in innovation, that receive special publications from the League, and whose staff attend League conferences at special rates. The CEOs are surveyed four times a year on topics of special interest to CEOs. There were 88 responses to the survey for a return rate of 13 percent. The return rate for the preceding three surveys was 14 percent, 14 percent, and 15 percent, so the return rate for this survey was typical for these surveys.

Based on the responses from the League Representatives and member CEOs, the researchers culled out the ten top characteristics for inclusion in the survey of Innovation of the Year Award winners.

When the final draft was reviewed by the project's National Advisory Committee, one member suggested adding an additional characteristic: "The college routinely evaluates and discusses the impact of innovation." This item was clearly applicable and was added to the final survey of the importance of eleven characteristics of a community college culture that support and encourage innovation.

Not surprisingly, the award winners rated all of the characteristics as important in defining a community college culture that supports and encourages innovation (see Table 23). In fact, when the ratings for Somewhat Important and Highly Important are combined, between 93 percent and 99 percent of the respondents rated every characteristic as one or the other except for

“Faculty/staff routinely evaluate & discuss the impact of innovations.” This item was rated by 82 percent as Somewhat Important or Highly Important.

The top three characteristics reflect the important role, as perceived by award winners, that college leaders play in fostering innovation. Ninety percent rated, “College leaders visibly support and encourage innovation” as Highly Important. “Risk-taking is encouraged; faculty/staff do not fear failure” was rated Highly Important by 84 percent of the respondents, and, “Faculty and staff are encouraged to think creatively and unconventionally” was rated Highly Important by 83 percent of the respondents.

The three characteristics receiving the lowest rating include, “Faculty/Staff routinely evaluate and discuss the impact of innovations,” with 50 percent rating it Highly Important. “The college seeks and supports collaboration and partnerships” was rated Highly Important by 68 percent of respondents, and, “The importance and role of innovation are effectively communicated” was rated Highly Important by 69 percent of respondents.

It must be kept in mind that all the characteristics are important in defining a community college culture that supports and encourages innovation. The real value of this list is not in determining which characteristic is more important than another; rather, the real value is using this

The real value of this list is not in determining which characteristic is more important than another; rather, the real value is using this list to determine the extent to which a college reflects these characteristics.

list to determine the extent to which a college reflects these characteristics. The researchers encourage colleges interested in innovation to use these characteristics in surveys to assess perceptions of administrators, faculty, staff, and board members regarding the extent to which colleges champion and should champion these characteristics. Surveys of students and community leaders may also prove useful.

Table 23: Characteristics of a Community College Culture That Support and Encourage Innovation

| | Not Applicable | Highly Unimportant | Somewhat Unimportant | Neutral | Somewhat Important | Highly Important |
|---|----------------|--------------------|----------------------|----------|--------------------|------------------|
| College leaders visibly support and encourage innovation | 0 – 0% | 0 – 0% | 0 – 0% | 1 – 1% | 10 – 9% | 103 – 90% |
| Risk-taking is encouraged; faculty/staff do not fear failure | 0 – 0% | 0 – 0% | 1 – 1% | 2 – 2% | 15 – 13% | 96 – 84% |
| Faculty and staff are encouraged to think creatively and unconventionally | 0 – 0% | 1 – 1% | 0 – 0% | 3 – 3% | 15 – 13% | 95 – 83% |
| The college supports a variety of innovations | 0 – 0% | 0 – 0% | 0 – 0% | 1 – 1% | 21 – 18% | 92 – 81% |
| Innovation is recognized, celebrated, and rewarded | 0 – 0% | 0 – 0% | 1 – 1% | 4 – 4% | 20 – 18% | 89 – 78% |
| The college is committed to sustaining/expanding effective innovation | 0 – 0% | 1 – 1% | 0 – 0% | 5 – 4% | 21 – 18% | 88 – 77% |
| Faculty/staff show pride in the college as an innovative institution | 0 – 0% | 1 – 1% | 1 – 1% | 5 – 4% | 22 – 19% | 85 – 75% |
| Innovation focuses on strategies to improve student success | 1 – 1% | 0 – 0% | 1 – 1% | 5 – 4% | 23 – 20% | 83 – 73% |
| Importance and role of innovation are effectively communicated | 0 – 0% | 2 – 2% | 1 – 1% | 4 – 4% | 28 – 25% | 79 – 69% |
| The college seeks and supports collaborations and partnerships | 0 – 0% | 1 – 1% | 1 – 1% | 6 – 5% | 28 – 25% | 77 – 68% |
| Faculty/staff routinely evaluate and discuss the impact of innovations | 0 – 0% | 1 – 1% | 3 – 3% | 17 – 15% | 36 – 32% | 56 – 50% |

First number is the count of respondents selecting the option. Percent is percent of the total.

The Nature of Innovation in the Community College project sought to develop, through its research, a set of guidelines for community college educators who may see problems or challenges and have ideas for solutions, but are not certain how to go about turning those ideas into action. The guidelines below were developed from results of the project's survey of Innovation of the Year Award recipients and from interviews held for the project with more than 40 award winners. The list is in no particular order, nor is it intended to represent a linear progression. Interviews with award-winning innovators reveal that innovation can be a messy process of stops and starts, with ideas pieced together from various contexts. They can begin with a single focus and evolve into major transformations, or they can begin as major transformations and end with a single solution for a smaller but persistent problem. They are a blend of creativity and practicality, established processes and emergent design, thoughtful planning and immediate flexibility.

Demonstrate a need. Whether facilitating student success in a course or program, helping elementary students improve reading skills, or surveying local leaders to identify strategic directions for the community—all examples of award-winning innovations in this study—demonstrating a need is key to gaining support for an innovative idea. Asked to select “all that apply,” respondents to the survey of award recipients indicated that their motivation was to “improve student learning” (59 percent); “improve an existing system, process, practice, or procedure” (55 percent); “improve student retention or attainment” (44 percent); or “meet a community need” (39 percent). These most frequently selected responses relate to meeting a need of some sort. In interviews, award-winning innovators talked about identifying need by gathering information, reviewing research, and observing and listening to those they and their departments serve. A faculty member in graphic communications advised colleagues to “do the research first; do the legwork.” Survey respondents also indicated they conducted at least some research as they pursued the innovation. Asked to select all that applied from a list of activities that occurred as the innovation was being developed and/or implemented, 46 percent selected, “A review of literature related to the innovation”; 46 percent indicated, “Pilot or field tests in our college related to this innovation”; 28 percent selected, “Interviews or conversations with colleagues in other colleges who had implemented this or a similar innovation”; 25 percent selected, “Survey of students to determine need for or

interest in the innovation”; 35 percent indicated, “Survey of faculty and/or staff to determine need for/interest in the innovation”; 22 percent selected, “Survey of community representatives to determine need for/interest in the innovation”; and 13 percent selected, “Visits to other colleges that had implemented this or a similar innovation.”

A technology director said her team's award-winning innovation was designed “to meet a business need and to satisfy the phone calls, the walk-ins, the ‘we need something’” and other requests from colleagues. At another college, a natural and social sciences department chair described the impact of demonstrating need in terms of student success: “[Show] others how this can impact the students they work with, and once you've done that, then it's just a cascade and one success leads to another until the project is fully implemented.” A student development vice president also focused on students, starting with questions leading to innovative ways to improve student success: “How can we improve things? How can we be more innovative? And not just be innovative for the sake of innovation, or change for the sake of change, but to really think about what differences we can make that will really have an impact on student learning and on the behavior of the employees of the college, to really think about how to put students first.” When programs or processes are no longer effective, a college may need to dissolve rather than create. At one college, an advanced technology instructor noted, “Sometimes I think getting rid of things can be a tremendous innovation.”

Develop a vision and a plan. Some award recipients stressed the importance of identifying the vision and scope of an innovation early in the process so, as an information literacy librarian said, “you're not going off in 50 different directions” and “you can use your time and your energy and your resources efficiently.” A campus president cautioned, “When you think you're done planning, then you really need to plan some more.” Others, including a graphic communications faculty member, advised, “You have to be kind of flexible, too.” A program coordinator agreed that commitment is important, but also indicated that innovators should “be flexible and allow for change to happen.” Flexibility and tenacity were important for a web systems manager who explained that a “challenge” brought to his office by student services personnel seeking to improve student

retention turned out to be “the tip of the iceberg” he and his team “uncovered...as we went forward.”

Award winners also talked about what the researchers have termed “accidental” innovation, including innovations that are not initially perceived by their developers as innovative or that are unintended consequences of some other project or activity. A math professor explained, “What’s funny is that we in the math department didn’t think it was innovative. We thought it was logical.” An accounting faculty member said of his team’s project, “We started the project to benefit our students and didn’t even realize it was an innovative project until others outside of our college...started approaching us, asking us questions about our project, and some of the other colleges wanted to replicate our program. And that’s when we decided, OK, we’ve got something a little different here.” A student development executive described innovation as a process that “oftentimes leads you down a road you never expected,” and noted that at the start of her team’s award-winning project, they “never expected that it would be considered innovative.” A political science professor described one form of accidental, or serendipitous, innovation when she said, “I think most innovations probably have been percolating with people for some time and there’s just a point at which an idea that you have sort of meets some opportunity to bring it to fruition.”

Put the plan into action. Some award winners cautioned against too much planning. One program coordinator advised, “Just thinking about it or talking about it over coffee won’t get it done,” and a computer information systems professor noted, “Innovation is not only having the idea about doing something, but it’s also about doing something, about pulling it together and making it happen.” A web systems manager expressed concern that at times educators “spend too much time planning and not enough time implementing.” He further explained, “Sometimes you just need to go with the flow...so that we get some action. It may not be perfect, but we can adjust as we go.”

Talk with colleagues. Discussing thoughts and ideas with colleagues can be a way of garnering support and building a team around the concept for an innovation, and in some cases may be the germination of the innovation itself. An emeritus professor explained how his

involvement in several committees led to connecting similar conversations among various groups and ultimately gave rise to an award-winning innovation he described as “a clearinghouse for ideas relating to the promotion of teaching excellence.” A mathematics professor noted that her team’s innovation “was an idea that started inside a meeting one day in Ed. Affairs,” and a social sciences professor said his team’s award-winning curriculum revision project, which was driven by a state mandate, helped break down departmental silos when faculty “who had not talked to each other very much because they stayed in their isolated discipline” gathered in interdisciplinary sessions to “talk about things they had not talked about before.” Twenty-seven percent of interview respondents indicated that support from colleagues was among the three most important factors in the success of the award-winning innovation.

Build a team. Eighty-five percent of survey respondents indicated that their innovations were completed by teams, and an overwhelming majority of these survey respondents rated as Highly Important, “The innovation was better for being a team—not individual—effort” (78 percent); “Involvement of a team has improved the innovation’s chances to endure” (74 percent); and, “The collaborative process produced benefits beyond the innovation” (70 percent). Only 5 percent of respondents selected, “Difficulties among the individuals working on the project” among the three most significant barriers to implementation. In interviews, award winners described the value of diversity on a team. A business and public services dean was reminded of “the Lego analogy: you really have to put a lot of different colors, a lot of different shapes, many different perspectives together to build that critical coalition of people who can then innovate in a meaningful way.” She worked with people she described as “great thinkers...provocateurs...[who] would challenge the thinking [and] look beyond themselves,” while a web systems manager talked about putting together unconventional teams as a way of stimulating “fresh ideas or ways to question existing ideas that lead to...a breakthrough, or in a direction we might not have ever taken.” Other award winners mentioned the importance of partnerships, such as the marketing manager’s description of “people coming together, working together, trying new things.” A program director described trying “to find a partner in the community. We are community-based colleges...and we find partners in the most unlikely

places.” A graphic communications faculty member advised finding “people who are engaged almost to the point of being giddy about it, having fun with it, and realizing its importance,” while a program coordinator at another college advised would-be innovators to “find other creative people who are also doers and work with them, develop some sense of community with them.”

Secure administrative support. “The biggest thing is to have support from your boss,” according to an accounting professor, echoing 99 percent of respondents to the project’s survey of award-winning innovators who indicated, “College leaders visibly support and encourage innovation” as Somewhat Important or Highly Important. Award recipients also explained the reasons why this support is important, including a program director’s acknowledgement that “you have to have an advocate,” and a program coordinator’s straightforward claim that “a key to any sustained innovation is to have whoever is in charge of the money to support you and yet get out of the way.” A program director spoke of spoke of the value of encouragement and moral support, noting, “It’s the smiles when the administrators come out and actually see the program going that is most important....giving us a great pat on the back, giving us support, and cheering us on.” Almost 40 percent of survey respondents selected, “Support of college leaders” as one of three factors that were most important in the success of the innovation, and 44 percent selected the importance of, “An institutional culture that supports and encourages innovation.” Thirty-two percent indicated that the primary source of support other than financial support came from the president’s office or vice president’s office.

Dedicate the required time and effort. Innovators were not shy about discussing the amount of hard work involved in the process, nor were they slow to acknowledge that the required time and effort contributed to the success of their projects. At one college, a student services secretary noted, “The process of innovation is going to take a lot of work, a lot of time, a lot of effort, not just to bring your idea to fruition but to continue that idea to make sure it is ingrained in the college’s processes and culture.” An English professor explained, “When you talk about innovation in a college...what you’re really talking about are lots of people being willing to do hard work and being willing to continue it year after year after year.” An honors program director warned that innovation

is “hard work. I think if you’re coming in thinking this is going to be easy, it’s not,” and a web systems manager expressed similar sentiment when he said, “I think anybody who thinks that there won’t be hard work in innovation hasn’t been through the process very many times.” When asked to select the three factors that were most important in the success of the innovation, 71 percent of survey respondents selected, “You and/or your team’s enthusiasm and perseverance.”

Evaluate the innovation’s effectiveness. With increased attention to accountability and data-based decision making at community colleges, evaluation of the innovation’s effectiveness was on the mind of several interview participants. A campus president compared evaluation to a journey, noting that without it, “you know you’re kind of there and maybe you’re in that general direction, but you really don’t know whether you’ve arrived.” A department chair described the metrics used to determine the success of her innovation: “When I first came and I asked the president of the college what will be my measure of success, she said enrollment, and I said and what is that expectation? And she said, ‘If you have 100 students by the end of the first year, we will be happy.’ And we had 1,500, and it continues to grow.” And a web systems manager described the impact of his team’s innovation on counselors, advisors, and others, who “feel good when they know that what they’re doing has an impact that’s measurable, not just anecdotal but that they can see the hard numbers and facts, and research data supports that what they’re doing does increase student success...in grade point averages, retention, and graduation rates.” When survey respondents were asked how they know the impact their innovation had on the institution, student and faculty surveys were selected by 41 percent and 23.9 percent of respondents, respectively, with “Institutional data” at 23.9 percent and “Faculty interviews or focus groups” at 23 percent. Despite efforts for greater use of reliable data in evaluation during recent years, the most frequently selected responses were those related to anecdotal evidence: “Faculty/staff testimonies or anecdotes” (58.9 percent) and “Student testimonies and anecdotes” (52.1 percent).

Tie the innovation to the college mission, values, and goals. Innovators stressed the importance of ensuring the innovation supports the college mission, values, and

goals, with advice such as an honors college dean's recommendation to "make sure that you are consistent with the mission of the college" and a vice president's advice to "make sure it connects with the way the college is going." A continuing education and training executive described "the magic of innovation" as "being creative, having a great idea that's central to our vision, to our mission, to our core values, and then making sure that the innovation is sustainable," and an information literacy librarian explained that her team's innovation "fits within the college's strategic priorities." Asked to select the three most significant institutional outcomes of the award-winning innovation, 70 percent of respondents selected, "Acknowledged by college leaders as a value to the college," 54.7 percent selected, "Embedded in the culture of the college and accepted as practice," and 51.2 percent selected, "Changed behavior of individuals for whom the innovation was created." Almost one-fourth of respondents (23.9 percent) selected, "Helped implement the college's strategic plan."

Take risks. Innovators applauded community college cultures that not only allow but also encourage and reward taking risks. They spoke of cultures and mind-sets that do not fear failure, but instead choose to learn from unsuccessful attempts, make adjustments and improvements, and move forward with the idea of succeeding in future efforts. Survey respondents also indicated the importance of a culture that promotes innovation and risk-taking, with 43.5 percent selecting, "An institutional culture that supports and encourages innovation" as one of the three most important factors in the success of the innovation. Respondents rated as Highly Important or Somewhat Important several characteristics of a college culture of innovation, including, "College leaders visibly support and encourage innovation" (99 percent); "Risk-taking is encouraged; faculty/staff do not fear failure," (97 percent); and "Faculty/staff are encouraged to think creatively and unconventionally" (96 percent).

A teaching and learning center administrator said frankly, "This is about risk taking," and a marketing manager advised, "Don't be afraid of change." A workforce development dean described the culture of innovation at her college, a "culture that allows us to try new things," as "the best thing the college does." A political science professor noted, "Innovation requires a culture of

openness, a culture that allows people to try something and fail," and an associate professor of graphic communications advised, "You've just got to hang it out there and see if it will fly."

An educational programs and partnerships director spoke thoughtfully about her college: "One thing about an institution that really believes in innovation is that there's no penalty for failure.... Many times you learn more from something that doesn't work out as you anticipated than something that runs very smoothly. And I think that when you know there's no punitive outcome to something that may not work out as you anticipated, then people are very free to try something new. And I think the expectation that [the college] has, is you are expected to think out of the box and be innovative. And if you don't, then you don't really fit the [college] culture."

An academic advising interim director said, "Innovation also requires an acceptance to a degree of failure. Sometimes innovative ideas and plans don't pan out the way one would hope they'd do. But you learn from it, you study it, and perhaps the next innovation will build on that. But I think you have to have a certain level of experimentation and any kind of experimentation is going to allow for a certain degree of failure." An academic development dean spoke of creating "a culture of trust," since "for people to be innovative, they need to take risks.... If it doesn't work this time, it might work another way another time," and an education department chair explained that her college "provides us the emotional support to start with in terms of a belief system about innovation, a belief system that you can do lots of exciting things." A college web systems manager commented, "I think it's hard to have a big win if you don't gamble a little," and a college center coordinator at another college enthusiastically advised colleagues to "go for it!"

Plan for sustainability of the innovation. Survey respondents were asked to identify efforts that have been made to sustain the innovation, and 52.9 percent indicated, "Staff have been assigned responsibility to ensure continuity"; 43.5 percent selected, "The innovation has expanded to serve a larger number of students and/or faculty"; 40.1 percent selected, "Support has been incorporated into the annual budget"; and 35.8 percent indicated, "Organizational structures have been created that reflect ownership and support." In interviews,

innovators were asked specifically about the current status of their innovations, and responses indicated support for sustaining the projects and programs was either incorporated into the college budget or driven by external funds, or both. A program director praised a local organization for its support of the after-school reading program, noting, “We are supported by the college, though the majority of the support actually comes from the Rotary Foundation. I sort of pitched this idea to the Rotary Clubs here...and they jumped all over it. And they have been the real supporters. They’re helping pay for the bus, they’re helping pay for the snacks, they’re helping pay for the books the kids get.” At the same college, a college center coordinator noted, “If the innovation works and is thriving and continues to help the opportunities that are available to the student body..., I think the college will continue to support that innovation and in some cases the innovation will support itself.” At another college, a web systems manager said of his team’s innovation, “It’s become a mainstream activity at that college. It’s become the underpinning of our student services counseling model. I don’t foresee it going anywhere any time in the near future, and with it becoming a viable commercial entity, we hope to see it thrive and grow and spread across the country into a number of community colleges.”

“If the innovation works and is thriving..., I think the college will continue to support that innovation and in some cases the innovation will support itself.”

As indicated in the opening sections of this report, the community college has laid claim to innovation as a key characteristic of its core culture. Historically, the community college, in contrast to four-year colleges and universities, is an American social invention, a philosophical and structural innovation that is firmly embedded in American society. With its open-door philosophy and comprehensive programs, it has become an international innovation exported as a model to many countries around the world.

The open-door philosophy provides a second chance for those who have been cautious about the college experience or who are underprepared to succeed in a collegiate environment. And the range of programs sponsored by the community college provides a variety of opportunities for diverse students to find a successful pathway to the university, to a job, or to personal satisfaction. Orchestrating these various opportunities to ensure student success has made the community college a crucible of innovation. Creative and committed faculty and staff are not afraid to try new strategies for helping students succeed. Whether they intended to or not, they have become champions of innovation—innovators working inside a world-class innovation.

In 1968, visionary leaders created a national organization, the League for Innovation in the Community College, to provide a forum where these champions of innovation could convene and exchange ideas regarding innovative practices. Once established, they moved beyond just sharing innovations; they began to collaborate on creating and testing innovations on their campuses and in national projects involving corporate partners, other organizations, and other colleges not members of the League. There was so much interest in innovation and so much innovative activity that the League decided, in 1982, to establish an annual Innovation of the Year Award to identify and recognize the most outstanding innovations on each of the campuses of the League for Innovation. In the 27 years of the award, over 500 innovations involving several thousand innovators have been designated as an Innovation of the Year.

With a grant from MetLife Foundation, the League for Innovation has been studying throughout 2009 this rich database on innovation. For this project, it was decided that winners at 19 colleges from 1999 through 2008 would be included. Winners from earlier years would be difficult to locate, and the winners from this time frame

constituted a substantial number of participants—400—for the survey. During the selected decade, 173 innovations were recognized as Innovations of the Year. The researchers categorized and analyzed the 173 innovations and surveyed the 400 award winners. Data from these activities provide the base for the following summary statements about the nature of innovation in the community college:

1. Asked to rate a series of definitions of innovation most appropriate for the environment of the community college, “The creation of new opportunities that are transformative” and, “The development or adoption of new or existing ideas for the purpose of improving policies, programs, practices, or personnel” were each selected by 21 percent of the respondents.
2. Of the 173 innovations produced by the innovators, 23 percent were categorized as course and program development and 13 percent as faculty and staff development.
3. The majority of the innovators came from the faculty ranks, with 45 percent full-time faculty and 3 percent part-time faculty; 26 percent of the winners were administrators.
4. Thirty-eight percent of the winners listed instruction as their primary area of responsibility in the college, with 18 percent listing student services.
5. Only 15 percent of the awards were given to individuals, with 85 percent going to teams. The most prevalent grouping of teams included two to three individuals, noted by 32 percent of the respondents.
6. Asked to rate the value of team work, those who were members of a team rated, “The innovation was better for being a team—not individual—effort” (78 percent) as Highly Important. “Involvement of a team has improved the innovation’s chances to endure” was rated Highly Important by 74 percent of the respondents. “The collaborative process produced benefits beyond the innovation” was rated Highly Important by 70 percent of the respondents.
7. Fifty percent of the respondents indicated their innovation was an original idea, and 50 percent indicated their innovation was an adaptation of an existing idea, with or without original elements added.

8. Fifty-nine percent of the respondents selected “Improve student learning” as a motivating factor for creating the innovation, and 55 percent selected “Improve an existing system, process, practice, procedure.”
9. One fourth (25 percent) received funding from the college budget to support their innovation; 22 percent received funding from an external grant or contract. Almost one-third (32 percent) indicated they received no funding in support of their innovation.
10. In terms of non-financial support, 32 percent listed their own department or division, and 32 percent listed the office of the president or vice president.
11. Asked to identify the three factors most important in the success of their innovation, 71 percent of the respondents indicated their own and their team’s enthusiasm and perseverance. The need for the innovation was listed by 46 percent and an institutional culture that supports and encourages innovation by 44 percent.
12. Half (51 percent) identified lack of time as the primary barrier to success. Thirty percent identified logistical or technical issues, and 24 percent of respondents selected unanticipated problems as a primary barrier to success.
13. Asked to rate the impact of their innovation on institutional outcomes, 93 percent rated more creative use of resources as Somewhat Strong or Very Strong. Eighty-six percent rated more efficient educational practices, and 78 percent rated improving student learning as having a Somewhat Strong Impact or Very Strong Impact.
14. Asked the question, “How do you know the innovation had the impact?” 59 percent of the respondents identified faculty and staff testimonies and anecdotes as the source of information, and 52 percent identified student testimonies and anecdotes as the source.
15. Respondents were also asked to select the three most significant institutional outcomes for the award-winning innovation. The highest outcome by a wide margin (70 percent) was, “Acknowledged by college leaders as a value to the college.” The second highest (55 percent) was, “Embedded in the culture of the college and accepted as practice.” Fifty-one percent selected, “Changed behavior of individuals for whom the innovation was created.”
16. In addition to the institutional outcomes, respondents were asked to select the top three personal outcomes for their award-winning innovation. Personal satisfaction was the outcome most frequently selected by the respondents: 63 percent selected, “Satisfaction with being recognized by a national organization such as the League for Innovation,” and 62 percent selected, “Satisfaction with being recognized by my colleagues in the college.”
17. When asked to rate the impact of the award (rather than the impact of the innovation) on various groups and individuals in the institution, respondents rated themselves (the winner/the team of winners) the highest with 83 percent indicating Very Strong Impact or Somewhat Strong Impact. The department or division of the winner or team of winners was rated second highest with 76 percent indicating Very Strong Impact or Somewhat Strong Impact.
18. Compared to other forms of recognition for their work in education, these innovators place high value on the League’s Innovation of the Year Award. Almost 40 percent rated the award, in comparison to other awards, as Highly Important. Another 29 percent rated the award Somewhat Important. Over two-thirds of the respondents rated the award either Highly Important or Somewhat Important.
19. Asked about the actions that occurred in the college as a result of receiving the award, over half (51 percent) selected articles in in-house publications or websites featuring the winners. Forty-seven percent of respondents indicated an awards ceremony, and 37 percent of respondents indicated that their colleges provided travel funds to make presentations at state and national conferences.

20. Asked to indicate which activities occurred as the innovation was being developed or implemented, 46 percent of the respondents selected, “A review of literature related to the innovation” and 46 percent selected, “Pilot or field tests in our college related to this innovation.”
21. The answer to the question, “What methods of evaluation have been applied to your award-winning innovation?” reflects the same answer for a similar question (see item 14, above). The methods of evaluation most often used include “Faculty and/or staff testimonies/anecdotes” (48 percent) and “Student testimonies/anecdotes” (45 percent).
22. Asked to indicate the various steps taken to sustain the innovation, 53 percent noted that, “Staff have been assigned responsibility to ensure continuity.” Forty-four percent indicated, “The innovation has expanded to serve a larger number of students and/or faculty.” Forty percent noted that, “Support has been incorporated into the annual budget.”
23. As an additional way of examining evaluation, the research team asked respondents to rate in importance criteria that “have been identified as useful in evaluating nominated innovations and selecting Innovation of the Year award-winning innovations.” Using a scale ranging from Unimportant to Important, 87 percent of respondents rated, “Quality: Increases quality in course, program, office, or college” as Important. Eighty-four percent of respondents rated, “Impact: Has a significant, positive impact on the target group” as Important. “Creativity: Is original or a creative adaptation” was rated as Important by 63 percent of the respondents.
24. Respondents were asked to rate a list of characteristics that encourage and support an institutional culture of innovation in terms of importance. Ninety percent rated the characteristic, “College leaders visibly support and encourage innovation” as Highly Important. “Risk-taking is encouraged; faculty/staff do not fear failure” was rated Highly Important by 84 percent of the respondents.” Faculty and staff are encouraged to think creatively and unconventionally” was rated Highly Important by 83 percent of the respondents.

The nature of innovation in the community college depends, in part, on the resources available in the college. But in great part it depends on the culture and climate created by leaders to encourage, support, and celebrate the individuals and teams who design and implement the innovations. This study fills in some of the gaps in our knowledge about community college innovation, and it raises additional questions and issues for further study. What this study does best is to confirm that the community college is a crucible of innovation, perhaps illuminating the fact that the community college itself is one of the most inspiring innovations in American society.

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