

This updated article by Terry O'Banion first appeared in Vision for Opportunity: John Roueche and the Community College Movement edited by Martha M. Ellis and published in 2020 by AACC and Rowman & Littlefield.

John E. Roueche—A Leader Who Disturbs the Universe

Two community college leaders walk into a bar.... True story: It is March 2018 at the annual convention of the League for Innovation held at the Gaylord National Resort in National Harbor, Maryland. I am sitting in the resort's Belvedere Bar nursing an over-priced and poorly-made Negroni when I hear "Dr. O'Banion." A tall young man, Keith McLaughlin, introduces himself and says, "I was in Block 58 in Dr. Roueche's program at UT." I ask Keith to join me, and we are soon joined by his friend, Ted Lewis, who had planned to meet Keith in the bar. Ted introduces himself by noting that he was in Block 64 at UT.

Keith said, "I'm buying." I switch to a martini, Ted orders a martini, and Keith orders a glass of Chardonnay. We begin sharing our John Roueche stories, and we are soon deeply connected through a number of networks, overlapping experiences, shared values, and a revered history in which our mutual friend, John Roueche, is the nexus.

When John was a graduate student in the Higher Education program at Florida State University in Tallahassee, one of his professors asked if John would be willing to drive a visiting speaker to nearby Wakulla Springs where a special conference was being held. The visiting speaker was B. Lamar Johnson who directed the Community College Leadership Program at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and who founded the League for Innovation in the Community College in 1968. During the drive over and back, Professor Johnson and John became good friends and remained so for the rest of Professor Johnson's life. John even joined Professor Johnson at UCLA from 1967–69 as associate director, Educational Resource Information Center Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges, and associate research educator.

In 2001, John Roueche came to Corning Community College (NY) as a keynote speaker, and the president asked a young staff member in Enrollment Services if he could pick up John at the Syracuse Airport. Keith McLaughlin agreed, and he and John engaged in a rich conversation during the four-hour round trip. When Keith dropped off John for his return flight home, Keith reports that when John was getting out of the car, he suddenly asked John if there would be any chance that he might be admitted to the CCLP at UT directed by John. Keith reports as follows:

- *Dr. Roueche responded to my question with much less surprise than I did, and he matter of factly said he thought there would be a very good chance I could be admitted to the program. I honestly believed he was just being polite and would forget who I was as soon as he stepped out of my car and headed into the airport. But, not Dr. Roueche!*

A few days later I received a large envelope in the mail with the CCLP application and program materials, along with one of those hallmark gracious notes from Dr. Roueche thanking me for picking him up at the airport and encouraging me to apply to the CCLP program. That trip to the airport almost 20 years ago was a turning point for me both personally and professionally. An entirely new world of opportunity the size of Texas opened up to me, and my “territory” has been enlarged and enriched because of Dr. Roueche’s influence and impact on my life. I cannot thank him enough.

Everywhere I go and the people I serve along the way—from my ongoing work in leadership roles in the community college to volunteer mission work in Haiti—are a direct result of the chain of events that started with meeting Dr. Roueche and the gift of a lifetime he gave me to be part of the CCLP legacy (Mc Laughlin, personal communication, 2018).

Today Keith is the provost of Morton College in Illinois.

As a visiting professor for over a decade in the Texas CCLP, I was almost always picked up at and returned to the Austin airport by a doctoral student in the CCLP. In this process I had many rich conversations. I was able to expand my own network of significant friends, a number of whom I hired at the League for Innovation. John knew what he was doing in this strategy to connect aspiring leaders with established leaders—a lesson he learned well as a graduate student at Florida State University when he chauffeured B. Lamar Johnson to Wakulla Springs.

Ted Lewis did not pick up John at an airport, but his experience with John proved life-changing as it has for hundreds of other aspiring leaders. For fifteen years Ted had been an instructor at Collin County Community College in Texas. His first move into administration was as the founding dean of Cy-Fair College in Texas. Ted reports that

- *Shortly after Cy-Fair College opened, our college president and two other administrators, who had been students of Dr. Roueche's in the CCLP, encouraged me to apply to enter the program. One went so far as to contact Dr. Roueche's assistant and set up an appointment for me to meet with him. When I travelled to UT and entered the Sanchez building, I was both inspired and intimidated by a banner stating, "Welcome to CCLP, the #1 Community College Leadership Program in the Nation." However, when I walked down the hall to Dr. Roueche's office, the intimidation diminished as I was warmly welcomed by him as if we had already known each other.*

Over the years, I have learned a great many lessons from Dr. Roueche: to practice patience and humility, to at all times strive for greatness and not worry about who gets credit for accomplishments, to expect excellence and constantly inspect what you expect, that leadership is to always do the right thing, and that your character is

defined by how you act when no one else is watching (Lewis, personal communication, 2018).

Today Ted Lewis is the Provost of Bluefield State College in West Virginia.

These chance meetings and engaged conversations with John Roueche are not unusual; it has been happening for decades in convention hotels all across the U. S. These meetings and conversations in which John Roueche is the main character are but one indicator of the admiration and adulation his students and colleagues hold for John. Hundreds of his students and colleagues could tell similar stories. It is not hyperbolic to say that John Roueche has had more impact on aspiring community college leaders than any person in the history of the community college.

The Child Prodigy and the Prodigious Adult

There was standing room only in the Western Avenue Baptist Church that Sunday morning in Statesville, North Carolina. Pastor Davis was thrilled at the steady increase in attendance over the past few weeks; everyone wanted to see the miracle. Pastor Davis gave a moving introduction punctuated with a goodly number of amens from the congregation. Then, dressed in a starched white shirt and blue short pants, Little Johnny Roueche, age five, came to center stage and began reciting Bible verses by heart. Sometime later, Pastor Davis stopped him and brought the miracle to an end with a triumphant prayer; he knew Johnny Roueche could have gone on for hours. John Roueche was a child prodigy, and he has lived up to his early promise to become a prodigious adult.

John Roueche is the most productive and the most recognized community college leader in the history of the community college movement. There are numerous listings of his

accomplishments in the literature on the community college. In a nutshell here is that list followed by an analysis of each category in terms of impact:

- Publications: Author of 39 books and over 175 articles and chapters
- Speeches: Keynote speaker at more than 1,300 colleges and universities and hundreds of state, regional, and national conferences
- Grants: Recipient of more than \$40 million for research and projects
- Graduates: Over 600 doctorates—one-third women, one-third minorities, more than 200 presidents
- Awards: Recipient of 40 national awards for distinguished service and leadership

Publications

No other community college leader has written so much and so well about the community college than John Roueche. He is also one of the most collaborative authors in the community college world. Of his 39 books, Suanne Roueche has been a co-author on 12 books, and George Baker has been a co-author on nine.

A cursory examination of his bibliography reveals that *Teaching and Learning* has been his highest priority. All these books have had impact on teaching and learning, but two stand out: *Teaching as Leading* (1990) and *A Modest Proposal: Students Can Learn* (1972). In *Teaching as Leading*, he proposed that teachers are not just there to provide instruction but to also have an important role as leaders in creating a college culture and managing many of the key functions of the college. In *A Modest Proposal: Students Can Learn*, one of his earliest books, John challenged the common wisdom of the day and created a mantra for the community college that became a core value of the contemporary community college: given the right environment, support, and instruction all students can learn.

John has written 12 books on developmental education and at-risk students and has become a national spokesperson on this issue. *Salvage, Redirection or Custody? Remedial Education in the Junior College*, John's second book written in 1968, was a blunt analysis of the failures of remedial education and a call heard throughout the community college world for reform. John wrote the book at the request of the American Association of Junior Colleges (AAJC). The report documented that remedial courses (reading, writing, and math) were the most offered courses in the nation's community colleges. His findings indicated that no more than 10% of the students placed into remedial English, math, or writing courses ever completed the course or progressed into college level freshman courses.

Edmund Gleazer Jr, CEO of the AAJC and his board were alarmed at these findings and worried about publishing the book as an association; up to this point it was common practice to present only the positive side of the community college movement. It was a critical moment for AAJC, but Gleazer and the board met the challenge and published it. The book became a major catalyst for community colleges to make good on the promise of the open door.

In 1984, John's study, *College Responses to Low-Achieving Students: A National Study*, made a major contribution to developmental educators by documenting practices that work. In *Between a Rock and a Hard Place: The At-Risk Student in the Open-Door College* (1993), he showcases 12 community college programs recognized as successful in serving the needs of at-risk students, reviews the impact of limited resources and a growing high-risk student population on community colleges, examines successful programs and strategies, discusses faculty selection, and reviews program evaluation criteria and methods. His most recent book on developmental education, *High Stakes, High Performance: Making Remedial Education Work*

(1999), continued his decades-long commitment as an advocate for improving programs for underprepared students.

Today John is known primarily for his work in developing leaders for the community colleges, not only through his professorships at the University of California at Los Angeles, Duke University, The University of Texas at Austin, National American University, and Kansas State University, but also his writings on the topic. He has written three books and numerous articles and chapters on leadership. His opus on leadership, *Shared Vision: Transformational Leadership in the American Community College* (1989) is a seminal work that has influenced generations of leaders and reflects the core values he has taught in his courses on leadership.

As a Renaissance scholar, John cannot be contained by these categories of his books. He has written three special books regarding studies he made of the Community College of Denver (CO), Guilford Technical and Community College (NC), and Miami-Dade College (FL). In addition, he has written seminal works on adjunct faculty, the entrepreneurial college, the private junior college, diversity, institutional research, and accountability.

His 1971 book, *Accountability and the Community College*, created quite a stir among national community college leaders who resisted facing up to the challenge of accountability; but the book triggered a major reform effort and recognition that community colleges needed evidence to back up the promises they had made to the nation. Forty-nine years later community colleges are still struggling to live up to the challenges John set forth in this book.

Through his leadership programs, his research, his speeches, his articles, and especially through his powerful books, John Roueche has been a leader whose response to poet T. S. Eliot's question "Do I dare disturb the universe?" (Eliot, June 1915, line 45-46) was a resounding

affirmative. Many of his books have been controversial, challenging the common wisdom and status quo in community colleges. Armed with evidence from his research on leaders, programs, and practices, he has shed light on our failures, giving the community college world a wakeup call. He has always included in his books prescriptions, examples, and recommendations on how our colleges and our students can be successful. By disturbing our universe, John has had more of an impact on positive change than any other leader in the community college world.

Speeches

It would take a dissertation to analyze John's speeches and determine their impact on the thousands and thousands of people who have made up his audiences. He has been the keynote speaker at over 1,300 colleges and universities and hundreds of state, regional, and national conferences; it is not hyperbole to claim that he has been the most popular speaker in community college history.

John's range of topics is enormous extending way beyond the numerous articles and books he has written. He can speak spontaneously with great knowledge about any issue in the community college world. His greatest gift as a speaker, however, is not so much about the topics as it is about his style of speaking.

John has a great sense of humor that naturally punctuates his message to the delight of audiences. In his early years he told a great story about his experience as a student addressing a question on the final exam. It became a classic and was the best story I have ever heard a speaker share. Several friends asked to use the story in their speeches, but it did not work for them because John told the story with such panache that no one else could come close to his delivery.

In addition to his special style, John never uses a note or a PowerPoint, which to this day astounds me. I learned early never to follow him at the podium. He uses many brief stories and

experiences to make his point, and he has a way of engaging the audience with such questions as “Are you with me?” He is a natural born speaker and a natural born teacher.

Grants

John has been one of the most successful recipients of foundation and federal grants in the community college world. He has received grants from:

- the Lumina Foundation;
- the Ford Foundation;
- the Houston Endowment;
- the MetLife Foundation;
- the Pew Charitable Trusts;
- the W. K. Kellogg Foundation;
- the Sid W. Richardson Foundation;
- the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE); and
- the U. S. Office of Education.

With these funding sources, as well as others, John has expanded and enhanced the CCLPs he has directed. He has received \$23,651, 953 just for research and development grants alone.

John has received millions more in fellowships and scholarships to support the tuition and fees of his graduate students. No other CCLP in the nation has had its students supported with so many resources. And a major source of support for his students comes from the various scholarship funds he has set up with his own personal contributions. His generosity is legend.

Graduates from John’s CCLP at UT include:

- the current and former CEO of the American Association of Community Colleges;

- the Director and two former directors of the Center for Community College Student Engagement;
- the Director and two former directors of NISOD;
- two former directors of the League for Innovation; and
- the current CEO of the Commission on Colleges/Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

Graduates of John's programs have served as presidents of some of the leading community colleges in the nation including:

- Cuyahoga Community College (OH);
- Austin Community College (TX);
- Sinclair Community College (OH);
- Tarrant County College District (TX);
- Grossmont-Cuyamaca Community College District (CA);
- Johnson County Community College, (KS);
- Alamo College (TX);
- Western Governor's University (TX); and
- countless others.

In addition, hundreds of vice presidents and deans have been graduates of the program, and more than 30 graduates have been professors of community college leadership programs in universities.

Awards

Just a listing of some of his national awards provides a stunning record of how John has been honored by his colleagues. Some of his awards and honors include:

- the 2016 Harry S. Truman Award from the AACC, the highest award given by the Association;
- the 2012 Lifetime Leadership Achievement Award, the first such award ever given by AACC;
- the first-ever 2012 “Diverse Champion Award” from the publishers and editors of *Diverse Issues in Higher Education* for his lifetime support and contributions to increased diversity in American community colleges;
- being honored in 2012 by the AACC Board of Directors, who named their national leadership initiative after him: the John E. Roueche Future Leaders Institute;
- having the Community College Association of Texas Trustees name their trustee training initiative in his honor;
- having National American University name its graduate center in Austin after him: the Roueche Graduate Center;
- having the League for Innovation in the Community College name its excellence award after him: the John and Suanne Roueche Excellence Awards;
- the 2011 O’Banion Prize for Leadership in Teaching and Learning from the Educational Testing Service (he shared this award with his wife Suanne);
- the National Distinguished Leadership Award from the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges; and
- the 1988 B. Lamar Johnson Leadership Award from the League for Innovation in the Community College.

John has also been recognized by The University of Texas with:

- the University of Texas Distinguished Faculty Award;

- the University of Texas Teaching Excellence Award; and
- the University of Texas Career Research Excellence Award, the University’s top research prize.

While John has never considered himself a researcher in the traditional sense, the Career Research Excellence Award was the first such award ever received by a faculty member in the College of Education at The University of Texas—and that from a committee of University faculty representing the hard sciences, engineering, law, and medicine. John and his co-authors received more national research awards than any of his colleagues in the College of Education. More evidence of his ability to “disturb the universe.”

A Lifetime Partnership Begins

I said earlier that John Roueche has had more impact on aspiring community college leaders than any person in community college history. As my best friend and great colleague, he has had enormous impact on me.

I first met John at Florida State University when we were both Kellogg Fellows in the Higher Education Program; we both had also been awarded a Florida State Fellowship—the only ones in our program to receive both awards. I think we both must have showed promise! We had early professional experiences that were quite similar:

- John received his Ph. D. from Florida State in 1964, and I received mine in 1966;
- John’s first job in higher education was as a dean of students at Gaston Community College in North Carolina, mine was as a dean of students at Central Florida Junior College; and
- we both started as assistant professors of higher education in 1967—John at the University of California at Los Angeles and I at the University of Illinois.

We have enjoyed a professional partnership and a close friendship for 56 years.

The first time I ever saw John he was entertaining a group of students in our program at Florida State with a story, and he had a parrot sitting on his shoulder. I don't remember the story, but I remember the parrot and wondered who John Roueche was. I thought at the time he was just a kooky iconoclast. Little did I know he would become one of the most significant leaders in the history of the community college—a leader who would disturb the universe of our world.

Our early friendship deepened when we both agreed to join Nova University's pioneering program to bring the doctorate to various regions around the U. S. Along with a band of other professors who free-lanced for Nova as professors, John and I served as provocateurs to challenge university policy and practice to improve services to students. We each served as dissertation chairs for some of the leading community college presidents of the day. John also adapted Nova's practice of taking the program to the students which is a key feature of the Kansas State University program he directs today.

Partnering with John was never all work and no play. With his delightful sense of humor and his spirit of adventure we greatly enjoyed our time together as friends. John is a great story teller and loves to tell the story of the time we were participating in a Nova conference for doctoral students in Hawaii. He and I had apparently been out one evening walking the beaches and talking when we walked into the lobby of the hotel where a student greeted us with "Dr. O'Banion, I am looking forward to your speech." I responded that I looked forward to seeing him at the speech tomorrow morning. He replied that the speech was scheduled in 30 minutes, at which point John and I realized we had been out all night long. I made it to the appointed hour, and John ends the story by noting that the person who was to introduce me failed to show up. Neither of us remember what the speech was about.

John capitalized on a grant from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation in 1977 to expand scholarships for his doctoral students, establish the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD), and create *Innovation Abstracts* as a benefit of membership in NISOD. It was a brilliant use of foundation funds in that John created through NISOD a means of collaboration between academe and practical needs in the field.

NISOD became a laboratory through which his doctoral students could interact with leaders in the field, network with those leaders through internships, and enrich the connections at a national conference that became one of the most important and substantive conferences in all of education. With over 700 community college members, NISOD also became a network through which thousands of community college faculty and administrators benefited from publications, conferences, and services.

John has a very special quality of dreaming big and implementing big. As T. E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia) noted “All people dream, but not equally. Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds wake in the day to find it was vanity. But the dreamers of the day are dangerous people, for they may act their dream with open eyes and make it possible” (T. E. Lawrence, n.d.). John is a daytime dreamer with his eyes wide open who knows how to implement his dreams.

With this major Kellogg grant he not only dreamed big about what he wanted to accomplish; he also created a practical strategy to ensure his dream would continue far into the future. Grant funds were used to entice community college presidents to become paying members of NISOD by offering reduced payments for the first three years of membership. For example, annual dues were \$200 the first year, \$300 the second year, and \$400 the third year; from year four forward dues were \$500 a year. By the fourth year colleges had experienced the

benefits of being members of NISOD and were happy to begin paying \$500 for their annual membership.

Innovation Abstracts, a weekly report on innovations written by community college practitioners, was also created as part of this Kellogg grant. At its peak, NISOD published and mailed 85,000 copies of *Innovation Abstracts* each week, and 150,000 copies were mailed electronically on a weekly basis. Suanne Roueche played a major role as the longest-serving director of NISOD and first editor of *Innovation Abstracts*.

Our first major partnership was a W. K. Kellogg grant between the League for Innovation and John's program at UT to further enhance our leadership programs. Our mutual friend, Nancy Armes LeCroy, played a major role in drafting the proposal. With its part of the funds, the League created the Executive Leadership Institute (ELI), an annual institute of 30 to 35 aspiring leaders who had already earned the doctorate and who wanted to determine if they were ready for the presidency.

John and I designed the ELI and facilitated the first four institutes before hiring Brenda Beckman as director. Through 2015, 865 aspiring presidents had participated in the Executive Leadership Institute. Forty-seven percent were women, and twenty-four percent were minorities. Forty-two percent became presidents of community colleges. The League continues to sponsor the ELI today which is in its 30th year.

In addition to ELI the League also began publishing *Leadership Abstracts* in 1988 with the UT program as a twice monthly report distributed free to all community college CEOs in the U. S. John and I co-authored the very first *Leadership Abstracts* in January of 1988, and with some sense of what loomed ahead for community colleges, said:

Our colleges require leaders who care equally about quality and access. Such leaders must be able to instill and inspire this concern in all faculty and staff members, if community colleges are to see dramatic improvement in student persistence and graduation rates in the years ahead. Such presidents will seek to identify, recruit, and select faculty and staff who truly believe in the mission of the community college- individuals who want to make a difference in the lives of the students they teach. These presidents will lead their institutions in adopting sound educational policies and practices to end the unacceptable attrition rates so common in today's community colleges. They will hasten an end to irresponsible "right to fail" policies in favor of policies that promote and provide students with the right to succeed. These leaders will collaborate with faculty and staff to create campus cultures that value learners and the teaching-learning process. They will care about the numbers of entering freshmen who persist to graduation, and they will be able to answer the basic questions concerning educational quality in their colleges (O'Banion and Roueche, para 11).

With funds from this grant John and I also began to co-sponsor a national conference we dubbed "Leadership 2000" that became the national conference for community college leaders for almost a decade. Attended by thousands, we were able to recognize national leaders identified by John in a national study of leaders, honor women and minority leaders, and honor the W. K. Kellogg Foundation for its contributions to the development of community college leaders.

One of the most important projects for the League in this grant was the creation of the League Alliance, an organization of over 600 community colleges around the world dedicated to innovation. John, with his usual generosity, suggested we use his creation of NISOD as a model for creating the Alliance, and he helped convince the W. K. Kellogg foundation of the value of

this idea. The Alliance became, as NISOD did, the self-supporting foundation for our leadership programs, and they continue to function in that capacity today. NISOD and the Alliance may be two of the best examples still in existence after 30 years of how grant recipients have used grant funds to leverage and support the continuity of their programs.

Our next major project together focused on Expanding Leadership Diversity (ELD). Building on the success of the ELI, John and I worked with the W. K. Kellogg Foundation to create a new program to increase the number of minority leaders. This year-long program was initiated in the 1989-90 academic year for approximately 20 faculty members and mid-managers who aspired to senior-level leadership positions. The program included two intensive week-long seminars held on community college campuses; a third seminar was held in conjunction with the Leadership 2000 conference. In addition to the seminars, participants worked with a mentor, prepared a long-range professional development plan, held an internship at a community college, conducted research on a community college issue, and expanded their professional networks.

The program was funded by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation for 9 years. By 1999, of the 202 participants in ELD, 29 became presidents; the rest became vice presidents, deans, or program officers. ELD was a resource-intensive program that could not be continued without foundation funding, but it did create a model of how more minorities could join the ranks of leadership. Following ELD, both the League and the UT program continued to expand leadership opportunities for minorities by enrolling them in the UT doctoral program, the ELI, and the National Institute for Leadership Development—a program that has prepared over 6,000 women for leadership positions. (O'Banion, 2016)

Our friendship and partnership continued through the Community College Leadership Program (CCLP) at National American University where John served as director of the CCLP

and president of the Roueche Graduate Center. John asked me to join this effort as chair of the graduate faculty and chair of the National Community College Advisory Board. At the first formal graduation ceremony for the CCLP on June 8, 2018, 34 graduates received their Ed. Ds.; 26 were minorities and 29 were women.

As of 2018, John has been working as an advocate of community colleges for 58 years, and I have been working alongside him for 57 years; together we have contributed 115 years of our lives to the community college movement. We plan to continue our work as long as our health permits.

John's Greatest Achievement and Partnership

John's achievements are universally recognized in the field of higher education, but John would be the first to say that his greatest achievement occurred when he convinced Suanne Davis—an instructor of developmental education at El Centro College (TX)—to become Suanne Roueche. There have been a number of collaborative couples in the community college world—Christine and Irving McPhail, Kay and Byron McClenney, and Arthur Cohen and Florence Brawer—but there has never been such a productive and collaborative partnership as John and Suanne Roueche. Some have suggested that Suanne was the power behind the throne (and in some situations this author is sure she was), but on the whole she was a full and equal partner with John in creating a legacy that will never be equaled.

Suanne powered the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD) into one of the most effective networks in community college history. She keynoted at hundreds of colleges and conferences. She received 18 national awards for service and leadership. She helped anchor the Community College Leadership Program at The University of Texas at Austin as a lecturer and dissertation mentor for hundreds of doctoral students.

She was co-author with John on 12 books and many articles, and she was always the sharp-eyed editor who tidied up. On walks in the hills around their dream home in Northwest Austin, they invented some of the most creative titles in higher education—“Between a Rock and a Hard Place,” “Embracing the Tiger,” “Strangers in Their Own Land,” “Practical Magic,” “The Company We Keep”—each with an explanatory subtitle.

But Suanne was much more than a full partner with John in creating community college history. Movie-star gorgeous (she could have been the stand-in for Tippi Hedren or Dina Merrill), her delicate beauty belied her steeled strength and her enormous compassion. As President of the Assistance League of Austin, board member of the National Assistance League, and board chair of the Center of the Survival of Torture, Suanne was a model for servant leadership.

Her compassion for animals made her a poster girl for People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. In Austin, she earned the name “The Possum Lady” for rescuing and releasing hundreds of possums into the wild. She had a similar track record for dogs and cats—many of whom took up permanent residence in the Roueche household. This author was deeply honored to have a favorite named TJ (for Terry John), to whom Christmas presents were sent for years. More recently, Suanne became the champion of pot-bellied pigs and donkeys and supported their survival in shelters across the country. John and close friends always teased her about, upon their death, coming back as one of her dogs; such resurrection would be a life of great luxury and love.

After battling cancer for years, Suanne passed away on Christmas Eve 2017. Even in the last years, months, and days of declining health, she never flinched, never gave up, never lowered her standards, and never suffered fools. She was always there for John; and with

Suanne, there was a lot of there there. Suanne was a force of nature with a complex character. She was at the same time delicate and tough, tender and resilient, witty and profound—but more than anything she was lovely and delightful. It was one of the great privileges of this author’s personal and professional life to be an adopted brother of John and Suanne.

Summing Up a Renaissance Man

The title of a featured article in the May 22, 2012 volume of *Diverse: Issues In Higher Education* was entitled “John Roueche - Community College Renaissance Man.” It is an apt appellation for John who is definitely a “man for all seasons” in the community college world. And it is a real challenge to sum up this dynamo of a leader who is constantly “disturbing our universe.”

In the 119-year history of the community college movement John stands out as the most prolific, creative, gifted leader and educator in the community college world. No former or current leader comes close to matching his record, and we are not likely to see his kind ever again.

The personal and professional traits admired in John Roueche become for us a basic leadership template that may prove useful to leaders and leadership programs—and certainly to the thousands of educators who admire John’s work. In the simplest terms these elements include the following:

1. Practice honesty and consistency with colleagues and constituencies.
2. Faithfully keep the promises you make to students, networks, foundations, leaders, and donors.
3. Embody the core values of the community college movement in your day-to-day work demonstrating openness, service, fairness, and respect.

4. Cultivate and enjoy humor as a bridge to relationship-building.
5. Give generously of your own talents and resources to further the work.
6. Develop stamina and career productivity through healthy life choices.
7. Intentionally build relationships across traditional boundaries that tend to isolate groups and perpetuate prejudice.
8. Cultivate ties with similarly strong peer organizations, emphasizing collaboration rather than competition.
9. Emphasize the core truths you espouse through speaking, writing, teaching, and mentoring.
10. Be field-based to the core, connecting continually to the groups you serve.

How very fortunate for the community college movement and for all of us who have worked in the community college vineyards that John Roueche decided to cast his lot with the down-trodden segment of higher education—the People’s College, Democracy’s College. With his extraordinary talent John:

- could have been president of a flagship university or flagship community college;
- could have been CEO of a Fortune 500 company;
- could have been a popular televangelist;
- could have been head of a major foundation; or
- could have been governor of North Carolina.

But the community college was clearly John Roueche’s calling; and our students, our colleges, our communities, and our nation are all the beneficiaries of his career choice.

Those who know John Roueche relish and celebrate his delightful sense of humor, his keen ability to create networks of inclusiveness, his uncanny gift for grafting vision to action, his

awesome intelligence, his genuine compassion and love for humanity, and his courage “to disturb the universe.” I hope the readers of this article will come to know him at least in part as I do. John Roueche is absolutely unique and absolutely wonderful.

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