

point of view

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One Hundred New Community College Leaders a Year

NAU Pledges To Help Meet Need for New Generation of Leaders



The contemporary community college has been evolving for more than 100 years and has become one of the key institutions in the nation, supporting economic and social development with an emphasis on the underprepared, the underserved, and the disenfranchised. No current national leader can imagine an America without the 1,200-plus community colleges that serve hundreds and hundreds of communities and over 10 million students.

In the last several decades the community college has experienced more change than any time in its history, except for the 1960s, when a new community college was

established almost weekly. Our colleges today are the primary engines that prepare the American workforce, partnering with the federal government, foundations and business and industry. Community colleges are also leading forces in providing opportunity for students who never dreamed of going to college or becoming a member of the middle class. In addition, community colleges continue to expand programs such as the bachelor's degree, innovative models of developmental education and initiatives to improve retention and completion. And they struggle to deliver on these commitments with reduced budgets, part-time faculty and a receding tide of qualified leaders.

The contemporary community college cannot meet the expectations of the country or resolve its major challenges without highly-qualified, competent leaders. Quality leadership matters. Leadership matters in the political arena; it matters in business and industry; it matters in social and religious institutions; and it matters in the educational

world with all its vocal constituencies, complex traditions and bureaucratic barriers to change.

Unfortunately, current university programs that prepare community college leaders are inadequate to the challenge. In the first place, existing programs are not preparing nearly enough leaders to meet the need in the field. Secondly, current programs lack the support, faculty or curriculum to prepare the quality of leaders needed. Most of these programs are at the master's level or are add-ons to existing programs in higher education policy. Most are staffed by only one fulltime professor or an adjunct (often a retired president) with experience in the community college. The curriculum to prepare quality leaders for this complex institution is usually confined to one or two courses on the community college.

The American Association of Community Colleges has been aware of the need to prepare new leaders. It has concentrated its efforts on "Grow Your Own" programs, under which colleges sponsor their own in-house training institutes for aspiring leaders. While this is an important effort, there has been little emphasis in connecting these in-house programs with doctoral programs. Almost all community college presidents hold the doctorate, as do the great majority of vice presidents and deans; in some colleges, division chairs are required to hold the doctorate.

The challenge is particularly important in light of the number of leaders who are retiring or near retirement. Over the past 13 years, various studies have documented a growing trend in community college presidential

turnover. According to Martin and Samels (2004), college presidential turnover is more frequent than ever before, with one-fourth to one-third of the nation's community colleges preparing for or engaged in presidential searches. This is consistent with Trachtenberg, Kauvar, and Bogue (2013), who report the leadership turnover rate at the presidential level, in higher education, is 30 percent every two years. The Association of Community College Trustees (2013) reports 200 presidential vacancies in the 17-month period ending in September 2013.

The trend is accelerating. In 2001, 45 percent of community college presidents responding to an AACC survey indicated they planned to retire within six years. A 2012 survey of indicated 75 percent planned to retire within ten years.

No informed observer would disagree with the following statement: "Community colleges are in dire need of programs to prepare quality leaders for the community college including presidents, vice presidents, deans, and directors."

Because current university programs are not preparing nearly enough leaders, and because the programs that do exist do not provide comprehensive high-quality programs, it is time to for new programs to fill the void.

National American University (NAU), a 74-year-old proprietary university accredited by the Higher Learning Commission, has created a program that is committed to preparing, by 2020, 100 new community college leaders every year. The program can serve as a

model and catalyst to stimulate universities to improve and expand their own programs.

NAU's Community College Leadership Program is in the early stages of development and has been approved by the Higher Learning Commission. The core elements of the program are modeled on the former CCLP at the University of Texas at Austin. That program was created and nurtured by John E. Roueche, who also heads this new program. The UT program graduated more community college presidents and vice presidents than almost all other programs combined and was recognized for its commitment to women and minority leaders. Those values and program elements will provide the basis for this NAU program and include the following:

- The curriculum focuses exclusively on community college history, philosophy, issues, organization, programs, and policy.
- More than 60 faculty members with extensive experience in and knowledge of the community college serve as beginning faculty
- The program is offered in a cohort model of approximately 25 students to encourage collaborative learning and networking. In addition to professors who will meet on the local community college campus for the blended classes, a local cohort coordinator will provide assistance with doctoral studies, dissertations and logistical support.
- The professors will come to the students for much of the face-to-face learning, thus making this program highly accessible to working adults. In this blended format, the majority of courses will be taught face-to-face,

supplemented by synchronous and asynchronous online learning.

- The program will place high priority on recruiting women and minorities to ensure that future leaders reflect the demographics of community colleges.

National American University has provided significant support for this program. The NAU board and the top leadership at NAU have made it a priority to provide program support to make this the flagship CCLP in the nation.

NAU's goal is to produce 100 new leaders annually by 2020, and to accomplish that goal, we need scholarship support for students. We have designed a model of Partnership Scholarships, recognizing the high cost of graduate education today. The model is based on the idea that every stakeholder in a person's doctoral program should contribute an appropriate amount to help with tuition, books and fees.

The student, of course, is the key stakeholder and we are working toward a solution that will support students without them having to incur mountains of debt. Community colleges have a significant stake in providing support for student scholarships because they are major beneficiaries of the outcome. Already, NAU has engaged the local colleges in its first three cohorts to contribute scholarship support for the students from their colleges. We are currently working on agreements with several other institutions. In addition, NAU is also already providing scholarships for current students.

NAU is also planning to invite businesses and industries to join its Partnership Scholarships program. Business and industry have a stake in developing new community college leaders. Business and industry depend on community colleges to prepare their workforce. Community colleges have responded by creating innovative training programs in information technology, manufacturing, engineering, health sciences, teaching, human services and other fields at very low cost.

NAU's model also includes scholarships from foundations to help launch and sustain student support in the early years of the program. NAU is seeking out major foundations to work with the university in creating the Partnership Scholarships. We hope they will consider providing scholarships to students for a period of time until the program is firmly established.

Several foundations are providing major long-range support for reforming higher education, particularly in terms of reforming specific practices and programs to expand and increase student success. Without quality leaders — presidents, vice presidents, deans, directors, and faculty leaders — the goals of all these reforms will end not with a bang but a whimper.

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