Rallying Faculty and Securing Resources for Completion

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Editor's note: This issue of Leadership Abstracts *is drawn from O'Banion's monograph* Access, Success, and Completion: A Primer for Community College Faculty, Administrators, Staff, and Trustees, *to be published by the League for Innovation this fall.*

If community colleges are to meet the goals of the Completion Agenda, they will need strong leadership from college presidents, other key leaders, and trustees. The 21st Century Commission on the Future of the Community College concluded, "Change cannot be achieved without committed and courageous leaders…Community colleges have been developing leaders to maintain the inherited design. They need now to develop leaders to transform the design" (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012, p. 17). In order to transform the design of the community college to pave the way for the Completion Agenda, two very important tasks for leaders to address in the early stages of planning include the need to (1) rally faculty and staff, and (2) secure resources to support this agenda, which has become the overarching mission of the contemporary community college.

A leader or core of key leaders must champion the Completion Agenda and be able to rally a critical mass of faculty and staff to commit to the effort. From trustees to the college president and top administrators to senate and union leaders to chief influencers among faculty, staff, and students, it will take a sustained, collaborative effort to achieve success. Five years is a starting point; the institutional change called for in achieving the goals of the Completion Agenda willrequire intentional, continuous improvement for 10 to 15 years.

How to get the leading stakeholders to agree on this agenda, and collaborate to make it successful, is the major challenge. The historical architecture of education that many community colleges adopted from their four-year counterparts encourages silos, not collaboration. Faculty members divide into departments around disciplines; staff in student affairs and academic affairs hardly communicate on some campuses; and the curriculum is bifurcated into career/technical education and liberal arts/transfer education.

Though every member of the college community has a stake in the Completion Agenda, faculty—full- and part-time—must be strongly committed and deeply involved. In the first major evaluation of Achieving the Dream, researchers at MDRC and the CCRC recommend in *Turning the Tide* (Rutschow, 2011)that colleges do more to involve adjunct and full-time faculty in reform efforts and concentrate on teaching and learning in the classroom. Mark Milliron, formerly of the Gates Foundation, and Vincent Tinto, a well known educational researcher from Syracuse University, recently drew attention to the importance of faculty involvement during their "Taking Student Success Seriously: Focusing on the College

Classroom" series of presentations at national conferences, where they pointed out what most faculty already know: teaching matters most.

The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) weighed in on this issue in March with its *Student Success in Higher Education* report (2011). "Student success is what AFT Higher Education members are all about," (p. 1) the union said. "The AFT believes that academic unions, working with other stakeholders, can play a central role in promoting student success. Making lasting progress, however, will have to begin at tables where faculty and staff members hold a position of respect and leadership" (p. 5). The report is an important statement about the critical role of faculty in the Completion Agenda.

Byron and Kay McClenney, in *Reflections on Leadership for Student Success* (2010), in the context of their experience with Achieving the Dream and the Community College Survey of Student Engagement, note, "There are many important aspects of the Student Success Agenda….But significant change will not occur—and stick—without visible, persistent leadership from the college president or chancellor" (p. 3).

Ed Hughes, president of Gateway Community and Technical College in Kentucky, is one such leader. In the spring of 2011, Hughes held a series of sessions designed to help college employees to better embrace an institutional shift from access to success. "We need 100 percent participation in this critical dialogue because what we decide to do will impact our lives and our students for a long time," wrote Hughes. "Each of us must embrace this unique opportunity to transform student learning and success through a collective effort of the college community" (Hughes 2011). The president and other core leaders must be clear about what the goals are, involve faculty and staff in substantive ways to make major institutional changes, and identify and make available the resources to do the job.

Colleges will realign current resources and identify potential new resources— funding, personnel, facilities, and community support—to support the goals of the Completion Agenda. It is ironic that community colleges have been called on at this time by the nation's leaders to play a key role in reviving the economy. Never in its 100-year-plus history has the community college experienced such a dramatic decline in resources coupled with such a dramatic increase in enrollments. This is not the best of times for community colleges to take on a mandate to double the number of completers in the next decade and a half.

Hilary Pennington (2011), who headed up the postsecondary agenda at the Gates Foundation, says, "Dramatically improving the nation's completion rate can seem daunting and impossible. It's understandably hard to consider retrofitting the airplane you are flying when two of its engines are aflame" (p. 2). To make the best use of the resources we do have, we are going to have to stop and do some restructuring. "Higher education systems and campuses are going to have to be smarter with the resources they have," says Pennington.

No more nibbling at the edges in an attempt to wring efficiencies out of a higher education model built in a different era. We are nearing a watershed moment in American higher education. We can either keep doing things the way we've always done them, with less money and diminishing success, or we can make the biggerstructural reforms we need—strategically and smartly. Realistically, this is our best option for long-term success. (Pennington, 2011, p.1)

Pennington (2011) cites Valencia College (VC) in Florida, which, with the same resources as other Florida community colleges, posts graduation rates that are 15 percentage points higher than its peers. President Sandy Shugart explains VC's success: "We stopped spending so much money and energy trying to get butts in the seats and instead began seeing the college through the eyes of the student" (p. 1).

Other leaders also recognize the reality of working within the confines of current resources.

As the focus on student success and completion intensifies on campus, community college leaders know the only way to stay viable is to change the culture of their institutions. With state and federal coffers in perpetual free fall, that means leveraging existing resources to spur reforms. (Violino, June/July, 2012, p. 1)

In an analysis of the major reform efforts at Chaffey College in California focused on increasing student success, researchers pointed out that, "...services seem to be funded by using existing resources more intelligently and less wastefully" (Gabriner & Grubb, 2012, p. 27).

In addition to using current resources more wisely, community colleges must exercise entrepreneurial skills to create more resources to support student success and completion. There are a number of promising practices for better realigning or garnering more resources:

- Establish income-producing programs and services for the community: catering, rental facilities, weekend flea markets, athletic facilities, consulting services, assessment programs, specialized training, and more.
- Expand partnerships with business and industry to include customized training programs beyond the current slate of programs (Humber College in Toronto offers customized training in more than 35 countries.) and engage business and industry in directly supporting high-demand job programs with funds for program development, staff training, equipment, internships, and scholarships.
- Earmark portions of current state and federal funds for the Completion Agenda.
- Explore the Economics of Innovation model (Boroch, 2010, p. 175) created in California that demonstrates a good return on investment through increasing the number of fulltime enrollments by improving support services and other elements of the student success pathway in developmental education programs.
- Since education is a labor-intensive enterprise, audit the numbers of potential volunteers in the local community and consider how to use them to supplement current personnel. Many adjunct faculty, classified staff, students, and citizens will volunteer if called on to help with tutoring, advising, coaching, and teaching. At Alverno College in Wisconsin, hundreds of local citizens are trained as external assessors to give students feedback about their progress. An audit at Tidewater Community College in Virginia revealed 1,956 college employees, 32,808 students, 45,117 associate degree graduates, and a population in the college's service area of 1,090,400. The tally did not include the number of service clubs, churches, nonprofit agencies, and business and industry which are all sources of volunteers. The United States has a strong culture of volunteerism that colleges have not yet fully tapped into.

There are many important roles for leaders in launching and implementing the Completion Agenda, but on the front end, leaders must make sure they rally a critical mass of faculty and staff to champion the goals and identify and secure resources to support the initiative. Without these two key actions to provide a foundation, the Completion Agenda will begin to

unravel and will soon become an incomplete initiative alongside other disappointing attempts to transform the institution.

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