

# Two Views Toward Learning

BY WALTER G. BUMPHUS

## An Interview with Terry O'Banion and George Boggs

Community colleges are not quite as old as the Canterbury Tales, but in their 90 years of existence, they have been adhering to the scholar's statement that he would "gladly teach and gladly learn."

What we are seeing today is a subtle shift in emphasis, perhaps, from being the teaching institution to an even greater focus on student learning as both a product of instruction and as an outcome produced by students actively engaged in the learning process. Terry O'Banion, executive director of the League for Innovation in the Community College, refers to this change as the "learning revolution." David Pierce, president of the American Association of Community Colleges, characterizes the movement as a new paradigm of "strategic teaching." Pierce suggests that this phrase is a more accurate description of the shift in emphasis to teaching and learning excellence, which has been our hallmark as colleges for more than nine decades.

Robert Barr, director of research and planning at Palomar College in California, talks about what happens when paradigms are changing in these terms: "Difficulties and anomalies begin to appear in the functioning of the existing paradigm which cannot be handled adequately." He also states that a new paradigm must exist to embrace the change and provide hope for solving the dilemmas.

Our colleges are currently in a paradigm shift between being organizations that provide instruction and organizations that exist to produce learning. The change is from laying out what we want to teach to providing what our customers, the students, our business partners, and our communities, want and need. The change for the traditional role of faculty from the purveyors of information to the facilitators of learning is spread across a continuum of non-acceptance to acceptance.

Margaret Wheatley, author of *Leadership and the New Science*, noted recently that resistance to change that often accompanies a paradigm shift is really a process of reforming an identity, of being able to see oneself



and one's place in the world differently.

The impetus for change from a resource model to an outcomes model, to the value-added that we bring to our communities is coming from all directions: accountability standards, business and industry expectations, taxpayers, and students. Some colleges are responding by creating "shadow" colleges, institutions that operate tangentially to the core college of transfer and tech-occ courses. Others are struggling to develop a new partnership between the faculty and the college administration to bring about systemic changes in the way a college addresses the future.

Within this context, I posed several questions to two national leaders on this topic: George Boggs, president of Palomar College, and Terry O'Banion.

**What steps would you take as a college leader to help your faculty and administrative colleagues form a new vision of the role of the community's college and to adopt the new paradigm of a learning institution?**

**O'Banion:** Develop a vision by addressing the following question: Knowing what we know about our students today, knowing what we know about learning today, knowing what we know about technology today—what kind of community college can we create for the 21st century?

To initiate action, capitalize on a trigger event such as reaccreditation, a new technology plan, a dramatic drop in resources or students, or the retirement of a core group of faculty, etc.

**Boggs:** At Palomar College, we started by working with campus innovators and leaders to develop a vision statement for our college. As college president, I chaired the task force and it was exciting for us to learn together about planning, to engage in environmental scanning, and to discuss what we wanted our college to be like in the future. The task force produced new vision and mission statements that clearly defined our college's purpose as promoting and supporting student learning. From the date of formal adoption of the vision statement in 1991, we shifted our institution from an identification with *process* to an identification with *results*. We stated our intent to set learning outcome measures and to evaluate the success of our institution based upon improvements in those measures.

I would recommend changing the language used by the college. Catalogs, publications, and job descriptions should be changed to reflect the institution's commitment to student learning. Recruitment brochures and procedures should be changed to attract a faculty and staff committed to promoting and supporting student learning. New employees, and even new board members, should be oriented to the new paradigm.

A leader can do a lot by making faculty and staff aware of the outside forces which will influence our future (such as increased calls for accountability, competition for public funds, possible competition caused by distance learning). The leader can also make use of institutional pride in motivating the college's people to be on the leading edge of a significant development. Of

course, you can't motivate everybody, but what a leader should do is support the innovators and try to get the institution focused on outcomes.

**What do you see as the most common challenges to these changes and how would you suggest addressing them? What effect will government and accreditation agencies have?**

**O'Banion:** The most difficult challenge is fear of faculty regarding job security. The solution is to guarantee job security (which tenure already does), but indicate all future resources will be used to support needed change in creating a more learner-centered institution.

Government and accreditation agencies provide leverage for these changes, especially accreditation. But limiting state and local education policies will have to change.

**Boggs:** Change is always difficult. I think we will see barriers to change in several areas:

- Enrollment-driven state funding formulas will be a barrier. It is interesting that states pay us for having students sitting in traditional classes, then criti-

cize colleges based upon outcomes or perhaps lack of data on outcomes. College personnel need to get involved in developing funding incentives for outcomes before legislators develop measures that do not make sense for our colleges or our students.

- Students who may have spent 12 years in an educational environment which is individualistic and competitive rather than cooperative and collaborative may resist more active learning environments.
- Faculty, staff, and administrators may have difficulty adjusting to new roles.

Accreditation agencies are having a significant influence in focusing our colleges on outcomes-based measures of institutional effectiveness. I think these bodies will continue to have a positive impact on our colleges.

**Suppose it is the year 2006 and you've come to visit a "learning-centered" college. What would you expect to see and how would it be organized? Who will be the students? Will it even be a place? What role will distance education play?**

**O'Banion:** As I've said in the past, learning is clearly the central focus with no barriers


of time, place, efficiency, or role standing in the way of the learner. The learning college provides educational experiences for learners anyway, anyplace, anytime. Distance education is just one more delivery mechanism in the learning college of the future.

**Boggs:** The true learning college of the year 2006 or beyond will be one that takes risks and is not bound by the traditional instruction paradigm. Learning will not be place-bound or time-bound. Students will enroll in courses of study at their convenience and in a variety of ways, perhaps using technology in new and exciting ways. Degrees and certificates will be granted upon demonstration of the required learning rather than by accumulating units.

What we will not see is all students sitting in a class with one instructor per classroom. Instructors will work with colleagues on the faculty and staff to design learning environments. Classes will not all start at the same time and end at the same time as most do now.

Innovative faculty are already experimenting with the Internet to communicate with students. I think we will see more of this type of distance interaction in the future.

Students (customers) will be anyone who wants to use our services to help them to



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learn and to provide them with documentation of their learning.

**What role would technology play in this college of the next century? What relationship will exist between the faculty and the technology?**

**O'Banion:** Technology creates connections and community, provides access to expertise and knowledge, allows for management of much of the everyday processes and procedures, frees faculty from repetitive activities, and empowers faculty to place learning first.

**Boggs:** So far, most technology has not been used to its best advantage because we have tried to use it to extend the current instruction paradigm. An example is television courses which, for the most part, just extend the traditional classroom lecture to a wider audience. In the future, I think we will see technology more clearly focused on improving learning. Innovative faculty and staff who break free of the binds of the instruction paradigm will use technology in creative ways.

**If you were preparing to teach in such an institution, what kind of background and skills would you want to bring with you?**

**O'Banion:** Staff for the learning college must be flexible, creative, collaborative, and entrepreneurial. They must have knowledge about how to access resources, and how to use information technology, and they must be able to serve as an expert in some key area needed by the learners.

**Boggs:** Most of us teach the way we have been taught. In the future, we will have to find ways to encourage our faculty to take risks and try new ways to promote learning. The most important characteristics of the teacher of the future will be to be clearly committed to student learning and to understand that the job is to design environments for that to occur. That means we will need teachers who are not afraid to break away from traditional methods of doing things.

Future faculty should be skilled in coaching students and in encouraging them to collaborate with other students. Evaluation of student learning will remain an important responsibility for faculty.

The Department of Education predicts that we will need 6,000 new schools and more than 190,000 teachers to address the needs of the baby boom generation's chil-

dren. A large percent of these students will come from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, as well as multi-ethnic groups. What challenges does this pose for two-year colleges, which expect nearly 45 percent of current faculty to retire in the next decade?

**O'Banion:** Community colleges already staff on an ad hoc basis (part-time and contract faculty). In the learning college the focus will be on a "community of learners" instead of "a community of scholars." We will staff on the basis of what students need and a core group will create the vision and manage the operation — hopefully without all the partitions (faculty, administrators, support staff, etc.) that currently divide the educational community.

**Boggs:** The challenge of accommodating the increasing number of students headed toward higher education may be one of the factors that influences us to change. We cannot jam all of these new students into our lecture halls and laboratories. Moreover, there will probably not be enough public money to build new facilities for colleges or to hire enough full-time faculty to accommodate the students. Yet, there will be the pressure from the students and from parents to get that college degree. We will simply have to figure out new ways to deliver learning opportunities.

We are beginning to understand that learning styles are culturally linked and that we may be doing our underrepresented students a tremendous disservice because their learning styles may not match our teaching styles. With the learning paradigm we will accommodate individual learning styles.

Bob McCabe, senior fellow with the League for Innovation, has been writing about his concerns with the increased use of part-time faculty. However, all of the research I have seen indicates that students learn as well with part-timers as they do with full-timers. The challenge for the colleges will be to make sure that the part-timers, as well as the full-timers, are oriented and supported. Our colleges are only as good as their people.

**If I gave you a time capsule to fill with five characteristics from today's colleges that would still be valuable a decade from now, what would they be and why?**

**Boggs:** My five items would be:

- 1) I would want to maintain our community responsiveness.

- 2) I would want to maintain the entrepreneurial spirit of our community colleges.
- 3) The sense of community as a climate to be created (from the AACJC Future's Commission) should be maintained.
- 4) The capability of forming partnerships with businesses in industries in the communities.
- 5) The sense of commitment of our faculty and staff should be preserved.

**If you could grant one wish for the teaching and learning in community colleges of the next century, what would it be?**

**O'Banion:** That we embed in our community college culture one question to guide our work: Does this action improve and expand student learning?

**Boggs:** My wish is that community colleges will take the lead in this paradigm shift from inputs and processes to outcomes and results. Community colleges need to lay claim to the mission of student learning. If we do, not even the most prestigious university can compete with us.

There are many voices in the community college movement—thoughtful people questioning and probing our role for the new century. A common thread runs through the discourse: We must be centered on students and their learning. The questions raised here are ones that each community college in this country needs to consider. I genuinely appreciate the clarity, directness, and vision expressed in these answers. I hope the questions and answers will provide a starting point for discussions on your campus. I suspect that everyone's time capsule must include our continued commitment to learning.

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