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Creating a Culture of Leadership

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For many decades, community colleges have been creating and advocating different emphases in organizational culture that reflect their evolving nature and values. Historically, the most visible effort has been the creation of a Culture of Teaching, to the point that the community college has been known until recently as the Teaching College.

A Culture of Teaching

In 1988, the Commission on the Future of Community Colleges, established by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), issued the landmark report, *Building Communities: A Vision for a New Century*. The report emphasized teaching as the heart of the community college.

- "At the center of building communities there is teaching. Teaching is the heartbeat of the educational enterprise..." (pp. 7-8).
- "Building communities through dedicated teaching is the vision and inspiration of this report" (p. 8).
- "The community college should be the nation's premier teaching institution. Quality instruction should be the hallmark of the movement" (p. 25).

This report helped confirm, more than any document in community college history, the Culture of Teaching as the central value and commitment of these institutions.

A Culture of Learning

A decade later, the culture of the community college began to shift toward teaching *and* learning, and then segued quickly into an emphasis on learning. Robert Barr, John Tagg, and George Boggs from Palomar College in California ushered in a new era that suggested the purpose of education was learning, not teaching. In 1995, Barr and Tagg's seminal article, "From Teaching to Learning: A New Paradigm for Undergraduate Education," became the most widely read article in the history of *Change* magazine. In the article, Barr and Tagg said, "In the Learning Paradigm, the mission of the college is to produce learning" (p. 1).

This early work promoted an emerging learning revolution in higher education that would find its most ardent champions in the community college. In 1996, the first national conference on the Learning Paradigm was held in San Diego, California, and the Association of Community College Trustees released a special issue of *Trustee Quarterly* devoted entirely to the Learning Revolution (O'Banion, 1996). The next year, the American Council on Education and AACC jointly published *A Learning College for the 21st Century* (O'Banion, 1997), which provided a framework for creating learning-centered institutions. In 1997 and 1998, the League for Innovation in the Community College (League) and PBS held three

national teleconferences on the Learning College. The League launched *Learning Abstracts* in 1998 and also sponsored a major national initiative, the Learning College Project, beginning in the year 2000. The League continues to sponsor an annual Learning Summit as a working retreat for college teams to focus on improving and expanding learning at their institutions.

A Culture of Evidence

In the last two decades, the culture of the community college has shifted once more to an emphasis on student success and completion grounded in evidence. Teaching and learning are still deeply important to community colleges, but today the overall mission of the community college is focused on student success supported by a Culture of Evidence.

In 2007, Allen and Kazis observed:

Historically, colleges have generated data primarily for compliance purposes—to meet state or federal reporting requirements. This has begun to change. Some dynamic, entrepreneurial community colleges are taking a hard look at how they can create and sustain an internal culture of evidence-based practice, and they are engaging staff throughout the institution in looking at data to identify areas of weakness, progress, and potential improvement. (p. 1)

In 2020, there are more national initiatives on student success in the community college funded by more foundations and involving more organizations and community colleges than any time in the history of the community college. Achieving the Dream, Community College Research Center, Center for Community College Student Engagement, Complete College America, Completion by Design, Guided Pathways Project, Aspen's College Excellence Program, and the Committee on Measures of Student Success are just a handful of these initiatives. All these and dozens more are undergirded by a strong commitment to a Culture of Evidence.

Now We Need a Culture of Leadership

Community colleges cannot create substantive and sustainable cultures of teaching, learning, evidence—or any kind of positive cultures—without the vision and support of highly competent leaders at all levels of the institution. Identifying and preparing leaders for the community college has been a priority since the community college first sprouted from the rich soil of Illinois at Joliet Junior College in 1901, but the work never evolved into anything like a Culture of Leadership. The closest community colleges came to such a culture happened when the W. K. Kellogg Foundation established graduate programs for community college leaders in eleven major universities in the early 1960s. Those graduates led the way in the rapid development of community colleges throughout the 1960s, when community colleges were being established almost weekly.

Since the 1960s, the preparation of community college leaders has been a hit and miss situation. None of the original eleven university programs produce anywhere near the graduates they did in the 1960s; most are not even in operation today. Currently, there are few programs that prepare doctoral students with applied degrees for practical leadership; most such programs have been absorbed into departments that emphasize policy or research issues or prepare secondary school principals and superintendents. A number of programs operate with a single faculty member with experience in the community college or offer only a smattering of courses dedicated to community college specifics. None of these

operations can be remotely identified as players in creating a Culture of Leadership for the community college.

Because they were abandoned, for the most part, by university doctoral programs does not mean that community college stakeholders gave up on preparing leaders for the challenges of leading these institutions. Instead, individual colleges, state associations, and international organizations such as the League and AACC created short-term institutes, workshops, and mentorships to prepare aspiring leaders including faculty, administrators, trustees, counselors, and classified staff.

The League, in cooperation with the Community College Leadership Program (CCLP) at The University of Texas at Austin, created in 1988 one of the oldest and longest-running leadership institutes in the nation. The Executive Leadership Institute (ELI) is still in operation after 32 years and has graduated over 1,000 senior leaders for the community college. The League also established the National Institute for Leadership Development (NILD) in 1981 as a series of workshops to prepare women for leadership positions in community colleges. No longer in operation, NILD prepared over 6,000 aspiring women leaders during its tenure.

Today there are a number of such national institutes, including AACC's Future Presidents Institute and John E. Roueche Future Leaders Institute, the Aspen Institute and Fellowship Programs, and the Harvard Institutes for Higher Education. A number of states offer special institutes for aspiring leaders, as do many individual community colleges. Professional organizations also offer special institutes for their members. These institutes are helpful in preparing aspiring and experienced leaders, but all lack two major components: None of these short-term experiences in leadership offer the doctoral degree or a comprehensive continuing educational experience longer than a week or intermittently longer than a year.

If community colleges are to embrace and establish a substantive and sustainable Culture of Leadership, a new kind of program must be created. Such a program is currently in progress at the College of the Desert (COD) in the Coachella Valley of Southern California. The program is contributing to an expanding Culture of Leadership at COD and other community colleges, and serves as the foundation for creating a national Culture of Leadership for the nation's community colleges.

Kansas State University Community College Leadership Program

In 2019, Kansas State University (KSU)—the first land-grant institution created under the Morrill Act—established an innovative center and doctoral program to prepare community college leaders for an evolving institution committed to student success. The program reflects the goals of the *AACC Competencies for Community College Leaders—Third Edition* (2018); specifically that “the goal is to prepare leaders capable of spearheading change at all levels within the institution” and “Everyone in the community college can lead from their respective positions” (p. 4). In other words, leadership is a basic skill and responsibility of every person in the community college whether one is a faculty member, administrator, counselor, librarian, classified staff member, or president. Substantive leadership occurs when it is a collaborative process among all stakeholders committed to a Culture of Leadership.

The focus of this doctoral program is on leadership, not management. The authors believe that management is being effective at keeping things as they are; leadership is taking risks to create that which should be. As Don Berz, consultant to the President of COD, says more bluntly, “Management all too often works to maintain the status quo and prevent change,

while leadership works to challenge the status quo and foster change” (Don Berz, personal communication, September 11, 2020).

The [Community College Leadership Program](#) (CCLP) at KSU is an ideal venue for community colleges that wish to create their own Culture of Leadership. It is based on the pioneering work of John E. Roueche, who created and managed the most substantive and most successful community college leadership program in the history of higher education at The University of Texas at Austin, which graduated over 600 leaders—one-third women, one-third minorities—and more than 200 presidents. A well-known scholar of community college leadership, Roueche explains that,

No quality is more vital to the success of today’s community college than leadership....No president, dean, or department chair conducts the work of all or a part of the college alone. It is, rather, the shared work together toward institutional goals that signals successful leadership and makes the achievement of institutional excellence possible. Much has been written about vision, but it is “shared vision” that leads to successful attainment of the college’s vision for itself (Roueche, 2014, p.1).

At COD, 23 members of the faculty and staff who call themselves the Roadrunner Cohort have been working in the program for two years, and the outcomes are beginning to impact the individual members and institution. Early signs of that impact are reported here based on internships, team projects in a capstone course, and dissertation topics.

Impact of Internships

All students in KSU’s Community College Leadership Program are required to design and participate in a supervised internship. The internship is an opportunity for the student to:

1. apply much of the learning from previous courses to real life challenges in a real college or agency;
2. expand on the student’s past experience as a community college educator to enhance skills and knowledge in preparation for future challenges;
3. begin to identify and focus on specific goals that will fulfill the student’s professional and personal aspirations; and
4. develop a practical applied research initiative. (John E. Roueche Center for Community College Leadership, n.d., p. 1)

The following briefs are examples of the internship experiences from the perspective of students in the COD cohort—applied, personal experiences that are beneficial to the student and to the college.

- **Global Perspectives in Early Childhood Education.** The purpose of this internship proposal is to help leaders in early education acquire a global perspective of early learning facilities and teaching practices abroad. In addition, this project will enhance capacity within the Child Development and Education (CDE) Program at the College by creating an international educational exchange program for students and teachers at the College and with their counterparts in Costa Rica (Ciudad Colon, San Jose).
- **Leadership Styles.** As membership chair of the faculty union executive board, I was able to create pertinent objectives, track my progress—including any setbacks, etc.—and explore best practices in providing effective leadership by union leaders. In

addition to discussing my experiences, I explored what I learned about my specific leadership style and skills as aligned with AACC's leadership competencies.

- **Many Roads: All Roadrunners Project.** The student's voice is a powerful tool for student engagement, empowerment, and motivation. The Many Roads: All Roadrunners Project will tap into the rich voices of our student body to showcase the diversity and strength of the campus community through student storytelling. The project begins with a collection of student narratives, initially curated from the submission of English 1A students. These narratives will be published as framed posters with photographs of the student writers and placed throughout the School of Communication and Humanities. Further development will include placement in common areas, administration buildings, schools, and campuses.
- **Dreamers' Student Club.** The focus of the supervised internship is to develop a student club for undocumented students, also known as Dreamers, at one of the campuses of the College. This includes serving as faculty advisor for the student club as well as planning and coordinating outreach events and meetings that lead to the growth and progress of the student club. Part of the supervised internship is to study how a student club influences student retention and creates a sense of belonging for underrepresented students.
- **Black Student Success Center.** The purpose of this project is to increase the enrollment, academic success, and transfer rate of African American students by creating a safe space on campus that offers quality academic support services. While all components of the center have not yet been determined, it is anticipated that the center will offer (in collaboration with the overall College) the following services in some format: peer mentoring, tutoring, summer bridge, workshops, early alert checks, study hall, and social activities.
- **Professional Development for Classified Staff.** This project will establish a Professional Development Committee for Classified Staff which I will chair. The goal is to create a professional development plan for classified staff that will include learning opportunities in leading a committee, creating agendas, reviewing minutes, assigning tasks; working with a variety of constituency groups throughout the campus community; understanding the processes involved in creating an institutional committee; working with executive leadership; researching and developing a committee purpose and structure that aligns with the College's mission and values; researching and developing an institutional plan; and assisting with accreditation standards.
- **Technology Master Plan.** As co-chair of the five-year Technology Master Plan and chair of the Educational Technology and Distance Education Committee at the College, I am in a good position to sharpen my skills as a leader in this arena to ensure that we will create a master plan that focuses on student success as one of the priorities of the plan. The internship provides a framework for me to be more thoughtful about how I will improve and expand my skills in leading the taskforce meetings, researching other technology master plans and technology best practices, guiding development of the plan, creating a mission for the plan, and steering approval of the plan through the College Planning Council and All Faculty Senate.

These seven brief descriptions of internship experiences are illustrative of the impact the Community College Leadership Program is having on COD and on the staff and faculty in the graduate program. Initiated by the students as practical challenges they often face, the

internships provide a supervised opportunity to study an issue and create thoughtful solutions their regular schedules seldom allow. When these 23 internships are completed and evaluated, there is likely to be a significant return on investment for College of the Desert.

Impact of Team Projects

The capstone course is designed around developing real-time team initiatives that will improve COD and encourage institutional collaboration to bring these transformational change projects to life. Students begin examining a list of key issues created by COD's leadership team that need examination, but they are not limited to the issues on this list. Since they are all full-time faculty and staff at the college, they have their own ideas about what needs attention. In the early stages of this course, the students identify issues, gather data, conduct environmental scans and needs assessments, and work as a team to create a report on the issue, including how to address it. For the capstone course in summer of 2020, five teams worked on the following topics:

- Increasing Student Retention in Online Programs
- Establishing Success Milestones for Student Retention
- Engaging Employees in Transforming the College
- Creating an Early College High School
- Designing Agile and Innovative Workforce/Economic Development Programs

These initiatives are not just academic exercises to meet course requirements. The students became so involved in the projects that most of the teams began meeting and working on creating solutions before the end of the course. And they continued to work as teams after the courses ended, not only creating useful solutions for the college but expanding and improving their skills in collaboration and teamwork as a collateral value to the students and COD.

Impact of Dissertations

The Community College Leadership Program is designed to ensure that students begin to think about dissertation topics beginning in their very first course to avoid the "all but dissertation" trap common to most university doctoral programs, in which half their students leave graduate school without completing the dissertation. There are built-in opportunities for students in many of the courses to explore ideas for dissertations, to prepare papers on topics of interest, and to learn through special sessions and forums the requirements of completing a dissertation. By the beginning of year three, most students have identified a topic and have begun to explore appropriate methodologies and draft literature reviews. The value of the completed dissertation accrues to the student's personal goals but is of enormous value to COD and to other community colleges. Here is a sample of COD students' dissertation topics:

- Administrator and Faculty Perceptions of Dual Enrollment Programs
- A Case Study of College of the Desert's Dreamers Resource Center
- Correlation Between Faculty at College of the Desert and Their Racial Identification Versus Those of Their Students and Impact on Final Grades Based on Same Race Identification.
- Gen Z Students: Programs and Processes that Lead to Their Success
- Creating a Culture of Leadership: The Impact of the Graduate Leadership Program on College of the Desert

- Creating a Successful Workforce Development Program to Drive Economic Development in the Coachella Valley
- Diversity in CEO and Senior Administrator Positions in Community Colleges
- Employee Onboarding Programs: Impact on Student Success
- Increasing Institutional Awareness and Promoting Policy Changes for Homeless Students and Housing Insecure Students at College of the Desert

The positive, collective impact of CCLP on the culture and viability of COD is increasingly evident beyond these samples of internships, cohort projects, and dissertation studies. A body of shared knowledge about proven practices, individual and institutional pitfalls, and experimental inquiry is mounting from the hundreds of papers, surveys, and reports the cohort is generating and sharing. In turn, this communal knowledge is percolating into classroom improvements and institutional planning practices. But it is the harder-to-measure cultural effects of the CCLP experience that offer the greatest promise for COD. Cohort members and institutional leaders describe new-forged relationships, interdisciplinary alliances, and deepened understanding between constituent groups as the “magic sauce” in this unique, work-based model of organizational learning and change. COD’s diverse cohort includes 14 faculty members (11 instructors, 3 counselors), 4 classified administrators (directors, vice president), and 5 academic administrators (deans, directors)—all deeply engaged in advancing their vital, but typically segregated part of the college. These scholar-practitioners are actively applying their jointly forged knowledge, values, experimental approaches, and new institutional networks to improve collegial relations and departmental and student success. Most importantly, perhaps, is the emergence of a Culture of Leadership in which the first cohort of 23 students is becoming a continuing force for positive change and transformation at the college.

Expanding the Culture of Leadership

The KSU Community College Leadership Program is helping to develop a Culture of Leadership in a number of community colleges across the nation. There have been programs in Kansas, California, Texas, Ohio, Michigan, and New Jersey. The return on investment has been so valuable to the colleges that follow-up cohorts have been established in some of the states. Cuyahoga Community College in Ohio is launching its third cohort; Wayne County Community College District in Michigan will soon be creating its second cohort; both Central Texas College and Northeast Texas Community College are in the process of establishing their second cohorts.

The return on investment in the first cohort at COD has already been so valuable, the president and the board of trustees have committed to creating a second cohort. From the experience of the first cohort, the president and board are creating an emerging vision for the second cohort that will aim to transform the college into a model of how COD can become more engaged with its community as a partner in creating a more dynamic and equitable community.

COD is becoming a catalyst for Coachella Valley to work in partnership with community leaders and agencies to address key social and economic development issues facing the various cities in the area. COD can provide educational opportunities for students as its core value, but it can also provide community leadership in linking its resources and its leadership capability to the needs of the local community, which has long been the vision and values of the nation’s comprehensive community colleges.

A sample of key community issues in which COD can take a leadership role include:

Social Issues

- Creating opportunities for equity in Coachella Valley
- Providing for basic needs such as food, housing, childcare, transportation, etc.
- Making social justice work
- Addressing systemic, intergenerational poverty
- Redesigning programs, policies, and practices that support structural racism

Economic Issues

- Diversifying the tax base in the Coachella Valley to reduce disproportionate reliance on seasonal work
- Creating an agile educational and training system to attract national and international investments, partnerships, and educational opportunities
- Providing start-up businesses with an incubator resource
- Aligning programs and training with the economic development initiatives outlined in the Coachella Valley Economic Partnership
- Revising and creating special training programs for students to prepare workers for jobs in:
 - Digital arts and media
 - Web development
 - Coding
 - Gaming
 - Architectural design
 - Broadcasting, audio, and film production
 - Artificial intelligence
 - Cybersecurity
 - Application of digital arts to industry sectors: health and wellness, hospitality, real estate, education, science, and technology
 - Alternative energy
 - Cannabis production, distribution, and research
 - Casino management
- Retraining underemployed workers for high-demand jobs

Staff from COD and CCLP have begun exploring a framework for a second cohort and have agreed to tailor the program to focus on the theme “college and community” by tying in more program activities for students in the CCLP to understanding and addressing community issues important to the college.

Students will, of course, benefit personally and professionally by securing a doctoral degree in this program, but, more importantly, they will participate in an innovative and creative three-year applied learning experience as the vanguard of a new approach to preparing community college leaders for the future. This second cohort will work as a collaborative team to help COD realize the dream of creating a community college that fully engages with its community in identifying and solving the social and economic challenges all communities face. In Coachella Valley, there is an experiment underway to create a Culture of Leadership at COD that has potential for transforming the college, the communities it serves, and even the programs that prepare community college leaders.

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