

## **Developing bold strategies for the 21st century** - Commentary By Corey Murray, Published May 8, 2013

*The following is an excerpt from the April/May issue of the Community College Journal, the bimonthly magazine of the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC).*

When AACC President and CEO Walter Bumphus announced the release of AACC's "Reclaiming the American Dream: Community Colleges and the Nation's Future" report last spring, he **made a promise to community college leaders: This report would not sit idle on the shelf.**

Bumphus and the 38 other community college presidents and leaders who comprise AACC's 21st-Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges are making good on that pledge. The association has appointed nine implementation teams tasked with bridging the bold ideas and recommendations in the report with the practical understanding necessary to implement lasting reform.

**"The report that we wrote set lofty goals," Bumphus says. Any time you ask a 100-year-old institution to redesign, reinvent, and reset itself, it's going to take a bit of work. Each of these words relate to dramatic transformations.**

### **Keeping momentum on the 21st-Century Initiative**

Fortunately, community college leaders have never been the type to shy away from a challenge. Since the commission's recommendations debuted last year in Orlando, Fla., Bumphus says more than 150 colleges are **already using the document for strategic planning purposes, consulting its recommendations while making changes to professional development and other core administrative and instructional functions.** Fourteen university professors now use the report as a **planning guide for graduate education courses.** And more than 112 community college presidents, faculty members, board members, and others have volunteered to help fulfill the commission's goal of revamping community colleges for 21st-century success.

"We have received a lot of great feedback," Bumphus says. **"But the true test of how we move our institutions forward is going to be in how our 1,132 community and technical colleges start to implement change—start to look at how they can dramatically transform their institutions to have higher completion rates, serve students, and deliver such things as developmental education in a more accelerated fashion."**

Pressure from Washington, funding constraints, and a nationwide push to prepare the next generation of American workers for success in the global economy have fueled the urgency for change.

### **From recommendations to reform**

Enter the commission's nine implementation teams—each of which will tackle a specific area of reform:

- **completion**
- reimagining student pathways
- community college and K–12 collaboration for college readiness
- **developmental education**
- **closing the skills gap**
- setting a new policy and advocacy agenda for reclaiming the American Dream
- **redefining** institutional roles and functions

- accountability
- faculty engagement and leadership development

Kay McClenney is the director of the Center for Community College Student Engagement at the University of Texas at Austin and co-chair of AACC's 21st-Century Commission, the group of community college leaders tapped to oversee the reform process. She says the purpose of the implementation teams is not to rehash work that's already been done—the report did not mince words in making clear the challenges faced by community colleges—but to **identify concrete ideas and examples to steer the conversation on campus from theory to practice.**

“If we say that we need to reduce the number of students who need remediation, for example, by half, what is the best of what is known about how to do that? We're pulling together the tools for colleges—the examples and the evidence—that would help them know what to do in order to succeed,” McClenney explains.

The teams met virtually and in-person over the last few months and used the AACC Convention in San Francisco to share and vet ideas for reform, with the goal of submitting their findings to the implementation steering committee early in 2014. The steering committee will face the task of synthesizing a formidable amount of information into an actionable framework and workable strategies for community colleges.

### **Ready for a sea change**

Dan Phelan, president of Jackson Community College in Michigan, co-chairs implementation team seven, which is committed to helping colleges redefine their role and function to better adapt the commission's recommendations.

“In large measure I think my community college colleagues across the country recognize that there is a sea change happening,” Phelan says.

That change comes in many forms—new policies; education technology, such as massive open online courses; and societal needs, to name just a few. The challenge is that “we don't always have the time to sit down and stitch all of these experiences together,” he says.

Phelan's team, which he co-chairs alongside Northern Virginia Community College President Robert Templin, will accomplish its goal two ways: introspectively, by evaluating the present role and function of community colleges, and prospectively, by anticipating community college needs. “Given the global environment that we are in, what kind of forms and structures are necessary as we think about the future? What does that look like?” Phelan asks.

If done right, he says, the work of the implementation teams will yield a “vast utility” that community colleges across the country can use, regardless of size or location, to pursue the goals outlined by the commission.

**“I think you are going to see something that is frame breaking, that is challenging, and that prompts a lot of provocative ideas and notions that perhaps we haven't yet considered,”** Phelan says.

### **Already rolling ahead**

Charlene Dukes, president of Prince George's Community College (PGCC) in Maryland, agrees. As a member of implementation team three, Dukes and her fellow team members will explore the issue of college readiness and the importance of K–12 and community college partnerships, an area of need that President Obama and other national and local leaders have highlighted as critical to the nation's economic success.

Together with the Prince George's County Public Schools—one of the nation's 20 largest public school districts— PGCC in 2011 launched the first middle college high school in Maryland, which features a mix of high school, college and dual-enrollment credits.

The collaboration will enable as many as 100 participating ninth-grade students, at least 60 percent of whom hail from low-income households or are among the first in their families to pursue college, to graduate in the class of 2015 with an associate degree

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