

College leaders face huge challenges By Ellie Ashford, Published April 26, 2013; Community College Times

SAN FRANCISCO—If the nation's community colleges are to reach the goal of **doubling the number of students who earn a credential or transfer by 2020**, it will require campus leaders who can rally faculty, staff and other stakeholders to focus and work together.

“We made that commitment. We can’t take it back now,” said Terry O’Banion, president emeritus at the League for Innovation in the Community College and senior adviser for higher education programs at Walden University. He spoke at a session on leadership during the annual American Association of Community Colleges conference.

He outlined five indicators that are likely to be used in 2020 to determine how community colleges measured up.

•**Leadership.** Whether the completion agenda succeeds will depend on whether colleges have visionary, substantive, committed and sustainable leadership. Not just in administrative positions, but throughout the college....especially at the faculty/divisional level, where each faculty is directly responsible for training the future leaders of our community (*with 50-250 students each semester!...yes, we do have a faculty member teaching 250+ students a term in 3-hr courses*). Mirroring those leadership behaviors to students is crucial to fulfilling the requirement to ‘lead by example’.

•**Faculty buy-in.** According to O’Banion, the lack of success at some colleges to reform campuses is because presidents “failed to engage a critical mass of faculty.” The purpose of CC mission this century is so clear and so profoundly logical and obvious, that a lack of buy-in from individual faculty members says as much about the faculty member as it does about the ‘leadership’. WCC is fortunate to have a ‘critical mass’ that is not only pushing forward with innovation and change, but doing so with a contagious positive, can-do attitude that is crucial for true cultural institutional change.

•**Transforming vision.** Campus leaders must see the effort as truly changing the campus and sharing that vision. Once again, these ‘leaders’ are throughout the institution and not just admin or senior faculty (*by years*). Senior faculty members have an obligation to provide the positive leadership mentoring for our junior faculty members, while the junior faculty members have an obligation to further inspire the senior members with their contagious enthusiasm for positive change!

•**A culture of evidence.** That will require bringing the faculty together to consider how to use the evidence to foster student success. The learning curve on this part has been shortened considerably due to the amount of divisional leadership and professional development training in the area of pedagogy and instructional strategies. However, the real key has been the setting of standards for those instructional strategies that are proven to increase student learning, as opposed to the archaic method of assuming **all** faculty will embrace these strategies proven to be successful for **all** students and put them into **action** in the learning environment.

•**Scale.** Campus efforts cannot focus on one or two areas, such as creating learning communities or providing support for veterans. “It has to reach **everyone** (100% of folks doing 100% of work),” O’Banion said. Hence, the reason for first addressing the paradigm shift from *accountability for teaching* to *accountability for learning*. Following this paradigm shift, an explosion of innovation, creativity, and leadership development is fostered by the decrease in stress as we adapt to the mentality that our efforts and improvements must be based on objective data and not our feelings or beliefs about the learning environment. Changes are then accepted as positive steps toward constant and never-ending improvement, as not as a torturous and meaningless process. People are always the problem...and **people are always the solution**. This philosophy, combined with *100% of the folks do 100% of the work*, will virtually guarantee this institution’s success in the 21st century.

Preparing future leaders

For John Roueche, president of the Roueche Graduate Center at the National American University in Texas, the spark lies with college leaders. He or she could have a strong vision, but “if you don’t have followers, you are not a leader,” Roueche said.

That means leaders need the ability to get the community, faculty and staff on board, and these constituents must have confidence in the leader.

“Can you motivate the faculty? If not, whatever you’re trying to accomplish can’t be done,” Roueche said. “Leadership is about motivation and inspiration.” It’s also about “tenacity and not giving up,” he added. Wonderful and true statement which is also the key for successful **teaching** in the 21st century. The degree of learning will be directly tied to the degree of motivation, inspiration, and persistence that faculty member can convey to the student. The more effective one is at motivating, the more effective they will be with their teaching. Everywhere you see the word ‘leader’, think of the one and only leadership position on this campus that is **directly** responsible for 50-250 folks (students) each and every term...the faculty member.

For Jerry Sue Thornton, president of Cuyahoga Community College in Ohio, the critical piece is getting faculty leaders on board to encourage their colleagues to participate.

“We have to empower the faculty leadership to move forward,” she said.

That means administrators **must provide professional development to cultivate effective faculty leaders**. She noted that Achieving the Dream program has been successful at colleges where individual faculty leaders embraced the initiative. **Most effective when 100% of folks do 100% of the work.**

The move from a focus on student success to the completion agenda happened so quickly that in many cases the faculty hasn’t been brought into the conversations, according to Gerardo de los Santos, president and CEO of the League for Innovation.

“We still have a long way to go to ensure that faculty members have a voice in the work on completion in our institutions,” he said.

It’s not so much that it’s a new initiative thrust upon faculty; it’s more about the need to have an “organic dialogue” with them about their challenges and concerns, de los Santos added.

Guilford Technical Community College in North Carolina pulled in faculty for a frank discussion with administrators, according to Don Cameron, the college's former president.

"We collected data, developed a dashboard for each department, held a convocation, broke the faculty into groups and asked them: ‘Are you satisfied with your department’s results?’ That started a discussion about completion and retention,” he said.

O’Banion also stressed the **need to gather essential data on student success**, such as the number of students who quit after one term and how many failed a particular class. Then discuss the results with faculty to develop improvements. This has been the essence of your individual action plans formulated after each semester in response to course eval results and course success/completion rates. Words like ‘excellence’ and ‘effective’ are no longer defined by a bias and objective individual approach based on feelings and emotions, but by the data as it relates to WCC standards and divisional/college averages. This prevents folks from applying a definition that meets their current data (regardless of how low their success rates are), thereby alleviating them of the responsibility to improve or change (our ‘old system’).

Thornton agreed with that strategy, noting that many institutions already call for faculty to “dig into the data and look for solutions.”

Input from students is also important to the process.

“We need to hear the voices of our students. They can tell us a lot,” Thornton said. This is obtained from both the course evaluations and the writing assignments in our courses.

Big changes coming

Preparing new faculty is another key concern—especially with a looming wave of retirements. Roueche said that when he started his career, there were more than 250 graduate institutions that offered master’s degrees in teaching at the higher education level. Now, only a handful are left.

Faculty may be well trained in their discipline, but **community college teachers must also know how to motivate students who don’t want to be there or are having academic issues**, Roueche said. They need to collaborate with groups of students who have historically performed poorly in school. Gotta reach ‘em, to teach ‘em!

“We’re **not** just teaching math or English; **we’re working with students**,” Roueche said.

De los Santos warned that the growing popularity of massive, open online courses (MOOCs) will also have a huge impact on community college leadership, as presidents will have to address such critical issues as credentials, student support and faculty roles.

“These are questions that are still unfolding at this point,” he said.

A key part of this is how college leaders will ensure that the prevalence of MOOCs **doesn’t leave behind underserved, first-generation students. Those students have lower success, completion and persistence rates when they take online courses**, he said.

“If we don’t take special care to provide technology literacy, we will be setting them up for failure,” de los Santos said.