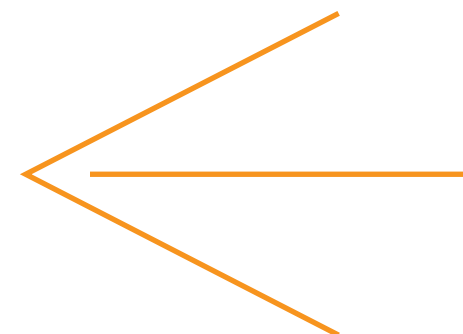




By Ellen Ullman

HOW TO IDENTIFY, DEVELOP, AND EMPOWER FUTURE LEADERS WITHIN YOUR RANKS



As pressure mounts to increase completion rates at the nation's community colleges, presidents and CEOs know the myriad reforms required to create substantive change won't happen overnight.

In most cases, it will take months, even years, for these efforts to have their desired impact.

That's why it's important for community colleges to train future leaders who can take up the completion mantle, especially if the college president and other executives retire or move on to new opportunities before that work is completed.

But finding leaders isn't easy. Assuming you can identify faculty and staff who are up to the challenge, the college has to have a system in place to cultivate the necessary skills sets.

"To get to an executive-level position, you must have the ability to look at what's going on in your environment, think strategically, and implement your thoughts on a day-by-day basis with input from others," says Rose Bellanca, president of Washtenaw Community College (WCC) in Michigan.

Committed to helping her staff grow into leadership opportunities at the college, Bellanca reached out to administrators at nearby Ferris State University to develop The Leadership Edge Leadership Academy.

As part of the program, 50 WCC executives were invited to learn about college leadership and organizational development. A total of seven sessions, taught at WCC by Ferris State graduate faculty, covered topics from actualizing the community college mission to enhancing leadership through staff innovation.

Aspiring WCC leaders who completed the course received a certificate of completion and credit toward applying for doctoral studies at Ferris State.

Two of four deans recently hired by the college graduated from the program. "People are now referring to it as 'dean school,'" Bellanca says. Five WCC employees who graduated from the academy are pursuing their doctorates in administrative leadership.

WCC will host another Leadership Edge program this year, with plans to launch an advanced seminar program. "Eventually, this will become an academy for anyone who wants to pursue a leadership role at a college," Bellanca says. "My staff is my priority. They are what builds the future of the college."

Need to Lead

Like many community colleges, WCC has made training and preparing future leaders a priority.

It hasn't been easy. In "Crisis and Opportunity: Aligning the Community College Presidency with Student Success," a joint report from the Achieving the Dream and the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program, researchers suggest that most continuing education programs for aspiring college leaders underemphasize critical skills, fail to help leaders take their skills to the next level, and do not always teach the skills necessary for success.

Given that some 50 percent of community college presidents are expected to retire or leave their posts in the next five years, it's critical for institutions to have capable leaders upon which they can rely. Colleges must empower leaders from within the institution to step into gradually more responsible positions and to ensure the leadership structure and vision of the college does not collapse



Kathleen Hetherington, president of Howard Community College (far right), stands with faculty and staff.

“When presidents, vice presidents, and senior administrators retire, there will be an enormous gap in leadership, so we need to try to provide opportunities for people while they’re here.”

Kathleen Hetherington, president, Howard Community College

if and when the president leaves.

Narcisa Polonio, executive vice president of research, education and board leadership services for the Association of Community College Trustees, cites American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) President and CEO Walter Bumphus when she says, “In the last three years, 600 community college presidents have retired, been pushed out, or moved onto another presidency. With this amount of turnover, [community colleges] need multiple strategies on all levels.”

50% Percentage of community college presidents who will retire in the next five years.

Source: American Association of Community Colleges

Three Levels of Training

That work is already underway at Maryland’s Howard Community College (HCC), where President Kathleen Hetherington promotes three different staff leadership programs.

“When presidents, vice presidents, and senior administrators retire, there will be an enormous gap in leadership, so we need to try to provide opportunities for people while they’re here,” she says.

Among the programs is EXCEL Forum, a four-month engagement that focuses on helping employees develop self-awareness, communication skills, and professional effectiveness.

Participants range from engineers in plant operations at the college to the director of finance.

“We try to encourage people who go through the program to think of themselves as a leader institutionally, whether that means giving a presentation, serving on a team, or moving up the ladder,” Hetherington explains. “When staff interact with employees at various levels and within different departments, it helps them develop their skills and provides a new perspective on their capabilities.”

Approximately 30 employees sign up for EXCEL Forum each semester. The group meets weekly to perform leadership assessments, listen to guest speakers, and complete group work. “Any college can set up a program like this with their own talented faculty and staff,” says Hetherington. “Even if someone doesn’t want to lead the college, they can be a leader in their own unit.”

The college also offers a program called Leading Edge, seven full-day training sessions that teach managers strategies to empower their staff, and the Advanced Leadership Experience, a semester-long professional development program that includes reading and group discussions about dealing with change, establishing a community atmosphere, and improving customers

service, among other topics. Program participants also take field trips and hear from guest speakers.

To date, 385 of 653 HCC employees have participated in at least one of these three programs. Graduates have earned promotions and signed up for committees and team assignments. In April, AACC recognized the college with the national Award of Excellence for Emerging Leadership.

Put What You Learn Into Practice

The Leadership Academy (LA) at Austin Community College (ACC) in Texas is a 10-month program during which attendees learn about public speaking, data and technology, servant leadership, budgets, ethics, and the role of the Texas legislature. In addition, each attendee completes a group project that aligns with one of the college's student success initiatives, such as increasing student persistence term to term. Teams work with administrative and peer mentors to create an implementation plan and develop a 10-minute presentation that they deliver to the college president and his leadership team at the LA graduation in June. The president then decides whether to implement the initiative. In the last two years, he has chosen to implement every project presented through the academy.

"The process results in lots of positive change," says Christina Michura, a faculty development manager who runs LA. "One group created a process for tracking the academic progress of vet-

erans across our 11 campuses. Another group designed a center to help students with jobs and career development." That latter program is now part of ACC's master plan.

LA and programs like it help participants with self-development. "We engage [participants] in understanding more about their communication style, personality, and leadership style," says Michura. "At one point, they do an art project to tap into their creative side."

Since it launched in 2008, the academy has graduated 109 future community college leaders. One-third of those employees have changed jobs at the institution, and several now serve in a leadership capacity.

"The Leadership Academy is one of the best ways to invest in the future of our employees and the college," says ACC President Richard Rhodes. "The skills, knowledge, and relationships developed during the year create a pathway to success for participants. The team projects developed have been thoughtful, innovative, and implementation ready. They have greatly enhanced our student success efforts."

Formal + Informal Development Is Key

Regardless of employee level, leadership education is key.

"I fundamentally believe that leadership is a behavior, not a position," says Jim Murdaugh, president of Tallahassee Community College (TCC) in Florida.

"Everything we do is related to that idea. Whether you're a groundskeeper, a tenured professor, or a custodian, you have responsibilities that contribute to the quality of what we do and the outcomes we want. That's the premise we start from."

That philosophy is emphasized in the college's leadership development programs—Leadership TCC and Advanced Leadership TCC.

Austin Community College President Richard Rhodes (right) speaks with staff and faculty.



Train Up

Need a leadership-training program? The American Association of Community Colleges offers these two.

The AACC Presidents Academy Summer Institute (PASI).

This three-day institute for presidents of member colleges occurs annually at a resort or city location. (The July 2014 PASI was in Napa Valley, Calif.) Attendees discuss challenges and issues of critical importance to college presidents in a safe environment while their spouses or partners can choose to learn how to better support them. PASI costs \$1,000, plus travel and lodging. A committee of presidents sets the agenda, based on hot-button topics. Find out more: <http://bit.ly/ZBcbYt>.

The AACC John E. Roueche Future Leaders Institute (Roueche-FLI).

Aimed at mid-level community college administrators (vice presidents, deans, and directors) who are ready for advancement, this five-day seminar focuses on improving community college leadership skills. Sessions on change management, using data to ensure student success, legal issues, communications, finance, and other topics are led by current or former college presidents and include hands-on activities. AACC offers a "Bring a Buddy" reduced-tuition program for attendees who attend with a colleague or friend. Tuition, which does not include travel or housing, is \$1,800 for AACC members; \$2,100 for nonmembers. More details: <http://bit.ly/1nTrXsz>.



Jim Murdaugh, president of Tallahassee Community College (front), meets with faculty.

In the advanced program, students research and make suggestions for a project that benefits the college. Participants develop self-awareness and other leadership skills by building on strengths rather than identifying areas of improvement. “We focus on what you have to offer, and every class is made up of both faculty and staff from all areas of the college,” explains Murdaugh. Students in the advanced class visit each of TCC’s campuses to gain perspective on the entire college. “Everything we do in every location matters,” he says.

The college also sends faculty and staff to other leadership training programs around the state, including Leadership Tallahassee and Leadership Florida.

Although Murdaugh encourages employees to attend formal, structured training and professional development programs, he never loses sight of the fact that the most important leadership development occurs at the college through the work they do each day. “If someone says they want to be a president, I try to include him or her in the things I do that he or she might not do as a vice president or dean,” he says. “In our everyday work, we learn how to collaborate, resolve conflicts, and improve our communication skills. That informal development is as important as the classes.”

Murdaugh works with individuals to refine the specific skills they need to advance their careers. If a dean says

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Jim Murdaugh, president, Tallahassee Community College

he wants to become a vice president, he analyzes the decisions the dean makes and the meetings he attends. Then he works with the leader to develop a short- and long-term strategy for advancement, including new responsibilities to gradually take on.

“When we did our strategic planning, I saw that we’d have significant turn-

over in the next few years,” Murdaugh says. “It would pain me if I didn’t do all I can do to help people become competitive. I don’t want to look back when I retire and know I didn’t give people opportunities to grow,” he says.

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Rose Bellanca, president of Washtenaw Community College, meets with nursing students.