When the University of Pittsburgh decided to introduce a specialization in community college administration to its 50-year-old higher education management program in 2008, the School of Education formed an advisory board that spent close to a year assessing the demand for graduates of community college specializations, analyzing data on requisite skills, and developing a model curriculum.

"We learned that community college leaders require solid business skills, thanks to increasing budgetary problems and government appropriations becoming less predictable," says Stewart Sutin, clinical professor of administrative and policy studies and associate director of Pitt's Institute for Higher Education Management.

From the advisory board's work sprang four new community college courses, including one that asks students to examine contemporary challenges and apply cultures of evidence and inquiry to decisionmaking. Says Sutin, "Our curriculum is a valid snapshot at a certain point in time, and we'll work to continually improve on it."

Since most of Pitt's students are mid-career professionals, the team decided to deliver lessons in nontraditional formats. Rather than listening to lectures, students participate in debates, simulations, and hands-on activities. Sutin says the goal is to teach students to mobilize internal and external constituents to support systemic change.

Pitt is not the only institution that has realized a need to change the philosophies and programs that underpin the training of community college leaders. Other schools of education are adapting to give college leaders the necessary tools to thrive in today's changing climate. New and evolving skill sets include the ability to digest and understand data, global awareness, technology prowess, emotional intelligence, financial acumen, and fundraising ability.

Culture of Accountability

Today's environment requires community college leaders to put student success and equity at the top of their leadership agendas. "A community college president must create a culture wherein it is both safe and necessary for the campus community to engage in 'courageous conversations,' prompted by data, depicting the attainment gap that separates students based on race, ethnicity, and family income. That is the starting place,"

THE CHANGING STATE OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRAINING PROGRAMS

LEARNING for Today's Leader

BY ELLEN ULLMAN

COLIN ANDERSON/GETTY IMAGES

says Kay McClenney, program director of the Center for Community College Student Engagement at The University of Texas at Austin.

McClenney's doctoral students study effective practice by determining what institutions need to do to ensure that more students succeed. An important first step is learning how to collect and interpret data, which the college teaches through a unique combination of student-engagement research and real-life examples from the national Achieving the Dream program.

At the annual Executive Leadership Institute (ELI) held by the League for Innovation in the Community College, student success is a key focus. "We talk about accountability in our sessions," says Gerardo E. de los Santos, president and CEO of the League. "We try to instill the critical need for leaders to build a culture at a college that can produce the data to demonstrate that students are learning what we say they're learning."

Global Awareness

The Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Iowa State University requires its students to do campus visits. "We expose our students to what is happening across our state and country because it is problematic if you look only within," says University Professor Larry Ebbers. Each year, Ebbers, who teaches higher education administration, invites leaders such as American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) President and CEO George R. Boggs to visit his campus and discuss national and global issues. The goal: to help students develop new ways to improve themselves and their schools.

At the annual Future Leaders Institute (FLI), an AACC program, aspiring leaders learn about national issues while developing a network of peers with whom they collaborate, research jobs and colleges, and share experiences. "This is a network that will last them a very long time," says Margaret Rivera, director of member services for AACC.

"WE EXPOSE OUR STUDENTS TO WHAT IS HAPPENING ACROSS OUR STATE AND COUNTRY..."
—Larry Ebbers, Iowa State

Technology's Value

"I have Twitter and Facebook accounts to see what's happening and how people communicate," says Antonio Perez, president of the Borough of Manhattan Community College. "We haven't begun to use the latest technology in leadership training programs, but it would be great if these programs could be interconnected so that the individuals in them could talk with people outside their systems to glean ideas from each other."

Social networking—like it or not—has become a critical topic for presidents. That's why AACC made it a part of its FLI/Advanced curriculum. "We talk about how to make it work for your

Leadership Training Gets A Makeover in California

Contra Costa Community College District (CCCD) Chancellor Helen Benjamin had one goal for her district's first-ever Leadership Institute: "I didn't want it to be talking heads. It had to have components that speak to today," she says.

The 4CD Leadership Institute, held at CCCD during the first half of this year, emphasized the American Association of Community College's Future Leaders Institute core competencies and took hands-on learning in a new direction, aiming to upgrade the skill sets and attitudes of career professionals for success in modern leadership roles.

Beginning with the opening session, during which attendees identified a campus or districtwide problem and worked in small groups to come up with solutions, the entire institute focused on individuals making changes. After each group determined potential solutions, students presented their findings to the chancellor's cabinet. "Leadership programs need to do this kind of stuff," says Benjamin. "We have to talk about real things and have real-world experiences."

Attendees were asked in advance to determine the next position in their career and write a cover letter and resume for that job. "We sent the 27 resumes to Thelma Scott-Skillman, president of Folsom Lake College, and she critiqued them all," says Benjamin. After her presentation on cover letters and resumes, she gave them their edited submissions.

Next, Benjamin set up job interviews for all the participants for the job they identified. Three-person teams across the district made up questions, and the interviews were videotaped for further review. Candidates completed a critique of their interview, and the interview committee critiqued them as well. Scott-Skillman led a follow-up session on the interview process.

Session topics included out-of-the-box thinking, collective bargaining, shared governance, and appreciative-inquiry leadership; a former priest even led a session on ethical dimensions of leadership.

As a final component, Benjamin asked attendees to fill out forms to complete semester-long job shadowing for the position they identified as the next step in their career.

"We tried to create what was missing at other leadership programs," she says. "To be meaningful, these programs must have a piece that's personal for each participant."

Important Skill Sets

Writing
Today's college leaders must be strong writers. "Most traditional programs don't help students with writing, but we have a huge writing center and a series of courses designed to help students improve writing and grammar," says Terry O'Banion, director of Walden University's Community College Leadership Program. "You can't assume that doctoral students can write, so we face that up front with free writing classes." In addition, Walden's virtual school offers a writing service to which students can send drafts for feedback.

Business Ethics
Because community colleges conduct business differently today than in the past and presidents are required to do more fundraising and more corporate work, the notion of ethical leadership has taken on new importance. "Presidents are finding themselves pressured to fund structures; we must make sure that ethical behavior is part of our training," says Rufus Glasper, chancellor of Maricopa Community College District in Arizona. "Everything you do will be in the public eye, so don't cut corners."

Mentoring
Antonio Perez, president of the Borough of Manhattan Community College, is a big advocate of mentorship programs for new college presidents. "Too often, people look at textbooks and theories when developing their leadership styles. You can't do that. It has to be consistent with you as an individual," says Perez. He has mentored a number of current college presidents, and says it's imperative for the mentor and student to be at separate colleges. "It has to be objective. I get weekly calls from the people I mentor, asking for help. If they can't share their thoughts openly, the relationship won't work," he says.

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institution," says Desna Wallin Jarrett, associate professor at the University of Georgia and a FLI facilitator. "We discuss the positives, including ways to communicate with students and develop a user-friendly Web site, and the possible pitfalls, such as how one deals with negative and inaccurate information appearing on blogs."

New forms of online learning have also proved beneficial to leadership students.

At the online Walden University, for example, future leaders are not simply acquainted with today's technology—they are immersed in it. When a Walden participant interviewed for a community college presidency earlier this year, his colleagues reviewed and critiqued his resume in an online chat room. They also helped him come up with key questions to ask during his interview. "Going through a program like Walden gives you corollary learning and technological astuteness, which gives you that experience you need," says Terry O'Banion, director of Walden University's Community College Leadership Program.

Emotional Intelligence

A leader can be extremely competent at balancing a budget or writing a memo but still not know how to work with people, and it's the relationships that get people through the rough times, says Pam Fisher, a leadership consultant and chancellor emeritus of the Yosemite Community College District. Fisher works with leaders on emotional intelligence, which is the ability to identify and manage our emotions. "I focus on this because it is what gets people in trouble or leads to success," she says. "Presidents need to develop relationships with every board member and be sensitive to their values and priorities. They must be in contact with people throughout the campus and get continual feedback from people they trust. It is all about building relationships."

In her sessions at FLI, Fisher helps students assess their strengths and vulnerabilities and come up with strategies for improvement. "I go through inventories with people that are quite revealing. They learn how to rein themselves in and to go from the theoretical to the practical." Fisher also helps students develop collaboration and participatory decisionmaking skills. "I don't think any president will succeed without being good at doing these things," she says. "The days of isolation are over."

John Roueche, director of UT Austin's Community College Leadership Program, agrees that much of leadership is about working well with people. "It's about getting people excited," he says. "The president needs to know how to read a balance sheet but can't be an expert on everything. The key qualities are respecting others, listening, and patience. The human skills are most important."

Finance and Fundraising

In an era of tight budgets, the ability to raise money is paramount. Today's community college presidents may spend 35 percent to 50 percent of their time doing fundraising, says Rufus Glasper, chancellor of the Maricopa Community College District in Arizona. He says presidents are being asked to turn a traditionally government-funded capital program into a mixed private/public enterprise. "We need to create new organizations to manage these connected revenue sources, so leaders have to learn a new language and new tax structures." Glasper says presidents must also spend more time reaching out to alumni. "Students are living longer and finding connections to community colleges," he adds.

Angela D. Provart, who handles academic searches for community colleges, says she has seen an increase in schools requiring their leaders to be savvy about finances and fundraising. "Unless you're a president, you haven't really done any fundraising. You may have shadowed a foundation but you probably haven't gone out and asked for $2 million," she says.

The League for Innovation's de los Santos agrees that today's college presidents have more fiscal responsibility. "As state budgets are slashed and federal dollars dwindle, more community college leaders are spending a higher percentage of their time on fundraising and working with foundations," he says. Consequently, he invites experienced leaders to bring real-life examples to the table at ELI. "They discuss mistakes as well as successes," he says.

New Pathways to Leadership

The consensus among experts is that colleges must begin to train leaders at all levels, not just for presidencies. Leadership programs must place a greater focus on developing junior and support staff to become the next generation of presidents. "There is a lot of talent on the nonacademic side that needs to be identified," says FLI's Fisher. Some of this is already happening, with people from the economic and workforce development and financial sectors being groomed. "I see more people from these sides of the house in the programs I run," says Fisher.

Still, she is concerned that the top community college jobs are so demanding, and so diverse in nature, that they have lost their appeal, at least to some. It's up to the college, she says, to make the positions more attractive. "It's a major challenge. We see people crashing and burning at the very top. At the same time, it's a wonderful role, and you can make a difference in the world."

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