

Perspectives

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Leadership for the
21st Century

Leadership for the next century could be the most critical challenge for community colleges.

- J. Noah Brown

Leaders are key to how organizations function; leaders needed to guide colleges in tomorrow's complex environments have to think about their work differently than did their predecessors.

- M. J. Amey

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Who Will Lead Our Nation's Community Colleges?

Jeanne Bonner, Ph.D.

Leadership consists not in degrees of technique but in traits of character; it requires moral rather than athletic or intellectual effort, and it imposes on both leader and follower alike the burdens of self-restraint.

- Lewis H. Lapham

Throughout this past decade, scholars and higher education practitioners have asked: Who will lead the nation's community colleges in the future? This question is especially critical today since at no previous time in the nation's history have community colleges confronted such an array of monumental challenges. Presidents and key leaders are departing in droves; in a recent survey by the AACC (2012), as many as 40% of presidents plan to retire within the next five years. This phenomenon occurs at a time when our colleges are faced with a variety of previously unimagined threats, many resulting from the impact of conflicting socio-economic changes. Further, colleges must address the American education and skills gap in an effort to meet the emerging needs of the new knowledge economy, while simultaneously struggling with the task of educating those students with the greatest needs during a time of dwindling funds.

Also posing potential concerns are the competing demands of various college constituents, vacillating enrollment trends, demands for student outcomes and accountability, faculty shortages, and budget cuts, resulting in the growing complexity of the leadership role of our presidents and key leaders. Given that effective leaders are key to an organization's success, leadership of the nation's community colleges has never been more challenging, nor more critical.

During times of dramatic change such as currently impacting community colleges, talented leaders become essential to organizational success. Effective leaders can improve strategically the quality of the institution, protect the long-term health of the organization, promote the success of its students, and sustain the community college mission. As a result, it is clear the ultimate success of community colleges depends upon the skill of the institution's leadership.

The type of leadership required within the new context of globalization, demographic changes, technological advancement, and the questioning of social authority may call for new or different skills than those acceptable in the past, requiring re-education among campus stakeholders if they seek to be successful leaders in the future.

The quality of leadership, more than any other single factor, determines the success or failure of an organization.

- Fred Fiedler & Martin Chemers

In a study undertaken by the author in the spring of 2013, a sample of community college presidents from one Midwestern state at various stages of tenure in office were interviewed. The purpose of this study was to learn their perceptions of the most important leadership characteristics necessary to guide community colleges during these turbulent times. The study disclosed those leadership characteristics likely to sustain community colleges through periods of organizational change and educational reform and guide and advance institutions further than thought possible.

The findings of the study clearly reveal that those who aspire to the community college presidency or to the executive leadership ranks must prepare well in advance for the challenges that college leaders will face. Clearly, academic preparation in the form of advanced degrees is mandatory. Yet, professional and personal preparation ranks equally important in the perceptions of sitting presidents. In short, college leaders for the 21st century must possess the requisite academic credentials, competencies, professional expertise, and personal traits and abilities if they are to succeed.

Leadership that is not only effective but reflective of the world around it will be key to managing the challenges of today and the unrevealed challenges of tomorrow.

- Jeffery S. Boyd

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EMERGING LEADERS' PERSPECTIVES

Looking at the near future of community colleges, there are a number of leadership issues that must be faced. The massive departures of current presidents and executive leaders, combined with the often competing demands of today's higher education environment, have resulted in massive challenges for those who will lead our colleges. Our effort in this inaugural issue was to pose the question below to emerging and national leaders. Their answers appear below.

Jon Mandrell, M.A.

Dean, Sauk Valley Community College
Dixon, Illinois

It is an exciting time to be in higher education, yet many challenges lie ahead. New technologies, innovative course delivery methods, and global access are a just a few ways that the landscape is changing. While surrounded by all of this excitement and transition into a new era, the mission of community colleges has remained the same by serving their citizens with an affordable and quality education. It will be expected that our institutions remain committed to this, but the outreach and engagement from our institutions must be emphasized and expanded more than ever.

Community college leaders must continue to increase their visibility within the community, foster relationships, and develop partnerships that benefit the student, the workforce, and its citizens.

~ Jon Mandrell

With education being accessible from virtually anywhere, leaders should have great rapport with their community, yet have a global perspective. Community college leaders must continue to increase their visibility within the community, foster relationships, and develop partnerships that benefit the student, the workforce, and its citizens. It is also expected that such leaders will be visionary and innovative, proving again why community colleges should be the first choice for its citizens.

Future leaders should focus on more exposure with stakeholders at the local, state, and national level, yet hear the voice of the student in all of their efforts. Establishing mentoring relationships with current leaders can open the door to new contacts and opportunities to foster such partnerships. Serving on community boards, working closely with K-12 districts, and getting involved in workforce initiatives are just a few examples to increase such collaboration. Identifying these many stakeholders of a community college and pursuing partnerships with such individuals will greatly enhance the skillset of tomorrow's leaders.

Jon Mandrell is Dean of Instructional Services at Sauk Valley Community College, Dixon, Illinois, where he oversees adjunct faculty. Currently a doctoral student in the DCCL program Ferris State University, he holds an M.A. in Law Enforcement and Justice Administration from Western Illinois University and previously served as Criminal Justice Faculty and as a local police officer before joining the college administration.



QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

What strengths must emerging community college leaders demonstrate to address the challenges facing our colleges?

Kris Walz, M.S.

Project Manager-Nursing,
Cuyahoga Community College, Cleveland, Ohio

There are numerous strengths that an emerging leader must utilize in order to be effective, especially with the challenges facing us today. Here are the top six strengths that I think would benefit the up-and-coming leader:

▲ **Be Responsible through Transparency.** Regardless of the situation, transparency needs to be present and practiced. Transparency equates into building trust and respect.

▲ **Be Inventive and Deliver.** Gone are the days of cycling through routine. We need to dig deep and bring out our entrepreneurial selves. Leaders today need to be creative problem

solvers, innovative thinkers and deliver results.

▲ **Be Value Driven.** Demonstrate who you are by living the values that you want to reflect and represent.

▲ **Be Connected.** Build relationships and rapport. Make connections with all people in the institution and community.

▲ **Be a Dedicated Learner.** There is always an opportunity to learn. Push yourself to learn from a variety of resources.

▲ **Embrace Challenge, Crisis and Mistakes.** Sidestep fear, rely on what you know and admit when you are wrong.

The dynamics and initiatives we face may change, but they will always be present. New leaders would benefit from practicing different methods and styles of leadership. Being able to identify what method would be most successful in a situation is the key. Future leaders need to be prepared to lead through constant and evolving change. Change occurs so rapidly; it has been long understood that even the best leader can't do it alone.

Leaders should remember the important commodity of people and recognize the value of each role and member of the team. Utilizing that role and developing the person will be critical for the personal success of that person and the outcome of the initiative. The essential element is having leaders understand they are not only the leader of the team, but a member as well.

Earn your leadership every day.

~ Michael Jordan

Kris Walz is Project Manager in the Division of Nursing at Cuyahoga Community College, Cleveland, Ohio. She is currently enrolled in the DCCL program at Ferris State University.



NATIONAL LEADERS' PERSPECTIVES

Looking at the near future of community colleges, there are a number of leadership issues that must be faced. The massive departures of current presidents and executive leaders, combined with the often competing demands of today's higher education environment, have resulted in massive challenges for those who will lead our colleges. Our effort in this inaugural issue was to pose the question below to emerging and national leaders. Their answers appear below.

Conway A. Jeffress, Ph.D.

President, Schoolcraft College
Livonia, Michigan

The most recent book I have been reading is called *Leadership isn't for Cowards*. It was written by Mike Staver. At the outset he asks and answers a very straight forward question. "Do you know what you're doing?" The question is addressed to people who are in charge; from CEOs to people who are first level managers or department heads. The question is designed not so much to get at your technical skills but at your business skills. His rather blunt answer to the question he poses is not as simple as it seems. When you are in charge you are ". . . Messing with people's lives."

It's time to adjust your perspective on your job as a leader. You do not lead an organization, department, or group. And your people do not follow strategic plans, fancy goals, or year-end reports. They follow a person. If you are their leader, that person needs to be you.

- Conway A. Jeffress

When choosing a leader there must be some indication that this person is capable of empathy with the people he or she supervises. Empathy is important and appropriate even within the most results-oriented context.

The more obvious strengths needed are a cluster of technical skills germane to the duties assigned. Respect, cooperation and productivity more easily follow the person who understands the nuances of the business.

The leader of any group is expected to know the probable consequences of the decisions made. Regardless of how democratic the process of decision making, in the end, one person will be held accountable. While sharing the blame is an amusing concept, sharing the rewards of a good decision made by one or a few is the kind of event that bonds a group, and ultimately increases the effect you seek.

QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

What strengths must emerging community college leaders demonstrate to address the challenges facing our colleges?

Brent D. Cejda, Ph.D.

Professor, Chair, Department of
Educational Administration
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

The recently revised AACC Competencies for Community College Leaders describes organizational strategy as a competency that "promotes the success of all students, strategically improves the quality of the institution, and sustains the community college mission based on knowledge of the organization, its environment, and future trends" (p. 6). In my opinion, it will be essential that emerging community college leaders develop the skills to demonstrate this competency.

The community college mission is unique in providing open access to all individuals who can benefit from continued education. With increased accountability demands, it will become more and more important that leaders continue to promote the success of students enrolled in the breadth of programs that have come to represent the comprehensive community college. Facilitating success will require the strategic investment of both human and fiscal resources and will be essential to maintain if community colleges maintain open access and their comprehensive mission.

Exposure to trends, issues and solutions from across the country...will prove essential in developing the next generation of leaders.

- Brent D. Cejda

It is imperative that senior community college leaders encourage and foster community college faculty as well as entry- and mid-level administrators to consider assuming positions of greater administrative responsibility. I believe that broad collaborations between AACC, its affiliated councils, grow-your-own programs and university programs will be necessary in order to address the leadership gap. I agree with the introduction to the revised AACC competency statement, calling for all preparation efforts to take an outward-looking approach. Exposure to trends, issues and solutions from across the country, not just within the institution, will prove essential in developing the next generation of leaders.

Dr. Conway A. Jeffress, President of Schoolcraft College in Livonia, Michigan, is an officer within the Michigan Community College Association, a Commissioner of the Midwestern Higher Education Compact, and serves as a member of its policy board; he also serves on the Board of Directors of Garden City Hospital and is a member of a number of other state and national organizations.



Dr. Brent Cejda is Professor and Chair of the department of Educational Administration at the University of Nebraska—Lincoln. He developed UNL's Community College Leadership program and served as Executive Director of the National Council of Instructional Administrators, an affiliate council of AACC. His AACC work includes serving on the steering committee for the Teaching by Choice Initiative, and the planning and evaluation task force for the Leading Forward project.





QUICK TAKES Highlights from the Field

Leadership, Change and the Future of Community Colleges by Jim Riggs:

The author examined the community college leadership challenge during these times of change and asserted the current way community colleges function simply will not work for institutions that are charged with serving as major democratizing forces and economic engines for a changing population, a changing world and a rapidly evolving future. Change must be purposeful, well planned, and strongly executed by capable leaders and will require a new way of thinking about how best to lead our colleges into the future.

Read the complete article at: <http://bit.ly/19fILms>

A Different Set of Advice for Community College Presidents by George Boggs:

As president emeritus of the AACC, Boggs offers valuable insights on key leadership characteristics for community college presidents, which also has import for other key leaders. He notes the presidency is a demanding, sometimes all-consuming, job and often insecure. By creating a safe climate for criticism and possibly unwelcome information, presidents can encourage the college team to help improve the organization.

Read the complete article at: <http://bit.ly/19fJ3tt>

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Who Will Lead Our Nation's Community Colleges?

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Respondents of this study – whether early, mid-career, or senior presidents – expressed remarkably similar perceptions regarding the important leadership strengths required for current and future leaders. Findings revealed leadership often is influenced by prevailing societal forces impacting higher education. As a result, presidents indicated their fundamental leadership characteristics had shifted or changed somewhat in response to the requirements and demands of the presidency. Participants spoke of the complexity of today's presidencies and indicated they relied heavily upon their "tools" – the varied leadership skills and experiences developed from past professional positions – to support them in their current leadership roles.

In addition the prevailing competencies of the AACC, the following list of personal leadership characteristics were perceived as important to leaders today. Included are

- ▲ Approachability and adaptability
- ▲ Aggressiveness and competitiveness
- ▲ Communication and listening skills
- ▲ Humility, humbleness, ability to admit mistakes and learn from others
- ▲ Passion and commitment to the role
- ▲ Professional preparation and a tool-kit full of wide-ranging experience and skills
- ▲ Stamina, strength, persistence, perseverance, healthy living, and "Grit"

Of this list, all of the presidents in the study strongly endorsed three of these leadership characteristics as critical for the success of future community college leaders. These are (1) approachability and adaptability; (2) the necessity to present a full tool-kit – a wide and diverse set of skills, honed through a broad array of previous professional experiences; and (3) perseverance, stamina, persistence, healthy living, and Grit.

Approachability and adaptability. The subjects in all three subgroups identified adaptability and the capability of shifting one's personal leadership style or approach in response to the requirements of the specific institution as essential leadership skills for presidents and key college leaders. Despite original expectations, the subjects discovered their preconceived beliefs did not match the various leadership requirements of the position once they assumed the office. College leaders able to adapt their leadership to the demands of the individual college culture and environment realized positive outcomes. Those who did so while still remaining approachable met with the highest degree of success.

Full Tool-kit. Respondents indicated that the complexities of today's college environment demand that leaders function as "men and women for all seasons." The skills and competencies learned throughout a

leader's professional career may be called upon at any given time. As a result, a varied professional background, combined with the ability to learn on the job, will serve future leaders well as they ascend to executive leadership roles. In fact, a majority of the presidents in the study indicated they believed their full tool-kit of professional experience played a major role in their original selection for the presidency.

Stamina, Persistence, and GRIT. The heavy demands of the college leadership role require leaders to maintain a healthy lifestyle to meet those stresses and mitigate associated pressures. A consensus revealed that the personal characteristics—or strengths—of persistence and perseverance constituted invaluable tools for today's leaders. The majority agreed that "Grit," or the ability to work strenuously toward challenges despite adversity, was key to their leadership. The research of Duckworth (2007) suggests that grit may be at least as essential as talent to individual high accomplishment. Community college leaders who demonstrate and practice grit likely will meet and exceed expected outcomes.

We need a special sort of leader and a distinctive kind of leadership to steer a course through currents that will tug and pull in many directions. We can begin by being clearer about what qualities those leaders and that leadership need to have.

– Richard A. Skinner

Lessons learned for future leaders as discovered from the perceptions of sitting presidents indicate leadership of today's community college is dynamic, volatile, and challenging. Yet the returns and rewards for those willing to accept the leadership challenge are immense. Prior earned academic credentials and professional preparation, combined with adaptability and grit, constitute vital keys to future success.

Dr. Jeanne Bonner earned her Ph.D. in Higher Education Leadership at the University of Nebraska. She is a former dean at Schoolcraft College and at DeVry University and currently serves as president of BJB Higher Education Consultants, Inc.

