

# Perspectives

OCTOBER 2014

[www.ferris.edu/alliance](http://www.ferris.edu/alliance)Community College  
Leadership for the  
21st Century

Cultural differences should not separate us from each other, but rather cultural diversity brings a collective strength that can benefit all of humanity.

- Robert Alan

The diversity we seek, and the future of the nation, do require that colleges and universities continue to... reach out and make a conscious effort to build healthy and diverse learning environments appropriate for their missions.

- Fairleigh Dickinson  
University

## Alliance Leadership Academy

To be held at  
Macomb Community College  
in Macomb, Michigan

November 3-6, 2014

Designed for new and  
emerging leaders!

## Leadership and its Intersection with Diversity

### Thomas R. Rios, Ph.D.

Vice Chancellor, University of Wisconsin – Whitewater  
Whitewater, Wisconsin

Leadership is an elusive concept. We each define it in our own terms and redefine it as we progress through life. But we are not at a loss for models and formulas of leadership. Our world provides us with many examples of leaders and prescribed routes to becoming leaders ourselves.

We applaud the political leader who, with single-minded pursuit, leads a bipartisan proposal to help the poor and elderly. We exalt the gifted athlete-leader who showcases her abilities in the arena or stadium. We embrace the servant-leader such as Mother Teresa who dedicated her life in helping the "least among us."

Examples and definitions of leadership abound. Yet in the final analysis, there is no universal definition of what constitutes leadership. Moreover, with today's ever-present emphasis on human diversity, we look to leaders who represent diverse identity groups, and who inspire us with their leadership and diverse "way of being."

### Identity and Authenticity

It's a vivid memory. I was on my first job interview after graduate school some 30 years ago, when the search committee chair turned to me and said:

"Boy, Tom, you're articulate, you have interesting ideas, and the search committee really likes you. I think you'll be a great addition to our university. Besides, you're Hispanic!"

"Excuse me?" I replied.

"You're Hispanic and we believe in diversity," she answered.

I often wondered about this and similar experiences. What is it about being Hispanic, African-American, Asian-American, LGBT, or affiliation with other identity groups that makes a difference in the workplace? What do people assume they are getting when someone with a "diverse" background is hired?

The diversity within identity groups makes this a hard question to answer.

There are many ways to be Hispanic, Asian-American, LGBT, or a member of any identity group. Please understand: there are important differences in identities that must not be minimized. However, the notion that our identity dictates how we exercise our leadership can handcuff us in superficial ways. Nonetheless,

facets of diversity and their intersections with leadership can manifest themselves uniquely.

In his 2008 opening convocation address at Brown University, Glenn Loury posed an interesting question: when does "identity" become the enemy of "authenticity?" In other words, when does one's affiliation with an identity group's "way of being" trump the individual's need to be authentic — to be oneself? How many times have we heard the within-community litmus test refrain that "Billy isn't Black enough" or that "Maria isn't Latina enough?"

Warren G. Bennis states: "Becoming a leader is synonymous with becoming yourself. It is precisely that simple, and it is also that difficult."

We are all shaped by family, culture, mentors, formal education, popular culture and other influences. It is important to understand our past and our roots. If leadership is a journey to oneself, it is critical to find the "uniqueness of you" and its influences in shaping your way of being.

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*Leadership involves our self-image and moral codes. We are profoundly shaped by what we learn from our family, race, ethnicity, and culture.*

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### Notions of Self as Leader

Now, let me ask you some questions:

When did you first see yourself as a leader?

What aspects of "who you are" connect with your self-image of leader?

For many individuals, leadership found them. They didn't seek it. They didn't aspire to it. Rather, circumstances required them to "step up" and assume leadership.

For other people, they first saw themselves as a leader through a progression of life experiences.

One young lady on our campus described how she first saw herself as a leader through her art — when she, as an artist, began "standing out" among other artists in high school and then in college.

She started viewing herself as having a unique talent that she could share with others in a "responsible"

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## EMERGING LEADERS' PERSPECTIVES

*In recent years, the enrollment number of minority college students has increased more rapidly than that of white students, yet their success rates still lag behind. If we are to close the gaps in opportunity and achievement that face many black, Latino, American Indian, or students from low-income families, community college leaders must direct the effort. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders; their answers appear below:*

### Wanda R. Hudson, M.S.

Faculty, Wayne County Community College  
Detroit, Michigan

Community colleges were founded upon the principle of an open-door policy. This policy has afforded ongoing opportunities to attend college for underserved and under-prepared students, many of whom are minorities. This does not mean these students are academically unskilled, but rather that their backgrounds may serve to put them at a disadvantage. Since the open-door policy continues to be engrained in the vast majority of our community colleges today, it is not surprising to witness an increase in the enrollment of minority college students as a result.

*As community college leaders, we need to find ways to be more creative and efficient in the pursuit of student completion*

Educational completion is perceived as a contributing factor for future income and socioeconomic status, making community colleges more appealing to prospective students. However, once students find themselves enrolled, they may require professional guidance to commit to their own completion. As community college leaders, we need to find ways to be more creative and efficient in the pursuit of student completion. Discipline and curriculum are the two most important elements in educational achievement; however, recent research indicates that despite the increase in minority college enrollment, minorities are under-represented among adults with college degrees. College leaders need to consider how to be more effective in helping minorities in completion trouble. Leaders would be wise to commit to multiple interventions such as educating students on their options and providing as much information on the college as possible, including expected costs, financial aid guidelines, and application fee waivers incentives. Once students matriculate, on-campus student supports should help promote completion.

*Aesop (c.620-560 BC) states – "Give assistance not advice in a crisis."*

Leaders must work strategically on additional diverse programs that collaborate with high schools and industry to determine what skills are needed to fill specific jobs in all regions of America. Promotion of jobs from the high school level and local industries should point those students directly to the community colleges with the main emphasis on completion. Not only leaders, but everyone in the institution can assist in this crisis. Looking to existing research and revisiting desired program outcomes are effective ways to ensure that all community college personnel are working smarter, rather than harder.

Wanda R. Hudson is a computer information instructor in Continuing Education & Workforce Development at Wayne County Community College in Detroit, Michigan. Earning her M.S. in Computer Information Systems at the University of Detroit-Mercy, she has 25 years in financial systems, including assisting in the development of the Westwood Cyber High School. She is currently pursuing her doctorate in the DCCL program at Ferris State University.



### QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

**What steps can college leaders take to promote learning and improve completion for all students?**

### Felipe Lopez Sustaita, Ed.D.

Coordinator, Lansing Community College  
Lansing, Michigan

In recent years the United States has undergone a significant demographic shift, particularly in the Latino/Hispanic population, which is growing at an unprecedented rate and now is the largest minority U. S. ethnic group. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that one in four children born in the US is of Latino/Hispanic descent. This trend, along with the current influx of underage immigrant children from South and Central America, will play a significant role in the future landscape of higher education enrollment, particularly at community colleges.

Today in certain areas of the country, minority students are becoming the majority. Black, Asian, Native American, and Latino students are enrolling at community colleges at higher rates than white students. Unfortunately, the data indicates that minority students tend to have lower completion rates. This is an issue well worth studying, especially since higher education institutions are evaluated and held accountable, based upon overall student performance.

One critical way in which college leaders can help improve minority student success is by enhancing the relationships between faculty, staff, and advisors with minority students. Learning opportunities such as personal tutoring, mentoring, cultural events, and university visits help to engage students. Holistic/strengths-based approaches, such as positive versus condescending language, can help to motivate students.

Research indicates Men of Color (Black and Latino males in particular) have the lowest completion rates than any group. Lansing Community College (MI), has closed the achievement gap through the Latinos Unidos Con Energia Respeto y Orgullo (LUCERO) Program. LUCERO offers a case management approach, one-on-one attention, personal tutoring, mentoring, cultural events, university visits, and most importantly, a center for student interaction and community engagement where students feel a sense of belonging. The program meets all students where they are regardless of socio-economic status, academic ability, language barrier, or other obstacles and maintains an open door policy, provides referrals, and gets students the services they need.

Finally, minority students can benefit from positive role models – other minorities who have excelled and could demonstrate career and personal success. More minorities are needed in higher-level college positions to allow minority students to connect with mentors that look like them. Students must be able to see themselves as future deans, vice presidents, and presidents of community colleges.

Dr. Felipe Lopez Sustaita is a first-generation college student, former immigrant from Mexico, and migrant farm worker. He earned his doctorate from the Ferris State University DCCL program in 2014, and also holds a Masters of Social Work from Michigan State University. For the past six years, he has served at Lansing Community College as the LUCERO Coordinator and Academic Advisor where he helped to generate a significant increase in the Latino Community graduation rate.



## NATIONAL LEADER PERSPECTIVE

*In recent years, the enrollment number of minority college students has increased more rapidly than that of white students, yet their success rates still lag behind. If we are to close the gaps in opportunity and achievement that face many black, Latino, American Indian, or students from low-income families, community college leaders must direct the effort. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders; their answers appear below:*

### What Can Community College Leaders do to Promote Learning and Improve Completion for All Students?

**Natalie Gibson, MPA**

*System Director, Kentucky Community and Technical College System  
Versailles, Kentucky*

American community colleges are at the center of the national conversation to enhance college completion. The foundation of the community college mission is to provide open doors to higher education. Community college enrollments include groups of students who are academically underprepared, historically disenfranchised, and financially under-resourced. Despite higher levels of access, these student groups persist and complete at lower rates than their respective comparison group. In response, colleges develop and execute a laundry list of targeted programs and services. Curiously, new data suggests the achievement gap continues to grow. These outcomes beg the question, "What steps can college leaders take to promote learning and improve completion for all students?"

*In this era of increasing accountability for student completion, institutional transformation is essential.*

In Strategic Diversity Leadership, Damon Williams posits the need for "a paradigm shift" if higher education is to meet the opportunities of a globally diverse world. Similarly, in 2012 the American Association of Community Colleges released a report titled Reclaiming the American Dream that challenges community colleges to redesign student educational experiences by reinventing institutional roles and resetting the system to meet the needs of the 21st century student. In this era of increasing accountability for student completion, institutional transformation is essential.

Created in 1997, the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS) is comprised of 16 colleges with over 70 campuses. Similar to the national data, KCTCS colleges enroll 47 percent of all undergraduates attending Kentucky's public postsecondary institutions. KCTCS is the largest provider of public postsecondary education in Kentucky. The KCTCS strategic plan guides system-wide action. All KCTCS colleges are accountable for system performance and success. Each college aligns its goals with the system goals.

Recognizing student diversity as a defining attribute of an open access mission, the first KCTCS Board of Regents committed to "embrace diversity in the broadest sense." KCTCS has reframed diversity as a strategic change initiative that utilizes an organizational "lens" to insure equitable student outcomes. Diversity work permeates all organizational functions. Organizational development tools accelerate diversity infusion.

#### QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

*What steps can college leaders take to promote learning and improve completion for all students?*

Through its values, goals and performance indicators, KCTCS articulates the importance of diversity, multiculturalism, and equity. In 2011 the KCTCS Board of Regents adopted Beyond the Numbers: KCTCS 2010-16 Diversity Action Plan for Inclusion, Engagement, and Equity as "the framework that guides system-wide action" to improve the success of diverse students. The plan defines diversity as an inclusive reality and focuses on student access and success, curricular transformation, campus climate, and leadership development. These priorities align with the KCTCS strategic plan.

Structurally, each KCTCS college and the KCTCS System Office have established an Office of Cultural Diversity. Led by administrators, these offices are foundational to institutional diversity capacity. These administrators report directly to the college president or to a member of the presidents' executive team. They also lead college efforts to develop, implement, and assess college diversity plans as well as facilitate inclusive campus-based engagement processes and programs.

*Through its values, goals and performance indicators, KCTCS articulates the importance of diversity, multiculturalism, and equity.*

To ensure the system diversity strategy, the college diversity administrators liaise between the system, colleges, and their respective communities as members of a functional peer team. While acting to address local needs, college diversity administrators also provide input on system-wide policies and procedures that affect the success and completion of all students. Under the executive leadership of the KCTCS Vice President, the KCTCS Director for Cultural Diversity provides leadership, support, and service to the diversity peer team as well as other functional peer teams. In this role, the KCTCS Director uses change and project management, professional development, cross-functionality and strategic communications to sustain the system diversity strategy.

KCTCS is building an infrastructure to elevate student success. As KCTCS establishes a plan to guide the development of the next strategic plan and related diversity action plans, the system will focus on addressing student achievement gaps through the lens of cultural competence. This schema will promote processes that deliver equitable access, success, and completion across the myriad of student identities.



*Natalie Gibson, MPA, is the System Director for Cultural Diversity with Kentucky Community and Technical College System where she successfully led the development of the system's first diversity action plan. She earned her MPA from the University of Kentucky and is currently a doctoral candidate at Morgan State University's Community College Leadership Development Program. KCTCS is a 2011 recipient of the Association of Community College Trustees Charles Kennedy Equity Award.*



**QUICK TAKES**  
**Highlights**  
**from the Field**

**Beyond the Diversity Crisis Model: Decentralized Diversity Planning and Implementation,**  
 by Damon A. Williams

Research reveals that often college diversity planning initiatives emerge in response to disruptive campus diversity crises. The author submits that a strong decentralized diversity planning model should replace the crisis model currently in place at some colleges. He offers a ten-phase model which advances the goal of infusing a college-wide appreciation of diversity challenges and achieve desired outcomes at all levels of the institution. A three-year decentralized model for ongoing college diversity planning is highlighted. Read the complete study at:

<http://bit.ly/1qabRpl>

**Minority Student Retention: Resources for Practitioners,**  
 by Alan Seidman

Student retention continues to pose a problem for all colleges despite the funds spent on creating programs and services to help students succeed. Graduation rates have not improved substantially over time, particularly for minority students, who have a greater attrition rate than majority students. It is imperative that colleges find ways to help improve retention rates for all students. The author provides an overview of research findings related to minority student retention.

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

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Alliance for Community College  
 Excellence in Practice

Published by the Alliance for  
 Community College Excellence  
 in Practice,  
 Ferris State University,  
 Doctorate in Community  
 College Leadership  
 Big Rapids, Michigan

**Leadership and its Intersection with Diversity**

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way... based on her sense of responsibility to serve people, her community, and her world!

For this young lady, leadership gradually became a responsibility that she embraced — rather than a role she suddenly assumed.

As I talked further with students about the first time they saw themselves as a leader, they told me about having a profound desire to touch the lives of others — the way they had been touched by people in their own lives.

These were people who believed in them, who viewed them with unlimited potential, and who shared excitement for their future.

*As leaders, our challenge is to understand how our lived experiences shape our personhood, our worldview, and our relationships with others.*

But regardless of when students first saw themselves as leaders, it's the second question that got them thinking deeply: What aspects of "who you are" connect with your self-image of leader?

Leadership involves our self-image and moral codes. We are profoundly shaped by what we learn from our family, race, ethnicity, and culture. The late U.S. Senator from Hawaii, Daniel Inouye, was the eldest of four children born into a Japanese American home. When speaking of his parents, he often stated, "They are my heroes." He attributed their quiet lives of hard work and integrity to "giving him the strength to pursue justice for all Americans, and the compassion to never forget that America's promise of equality is for all people — regardless of how humble their roots."

Back to the student who found her leadership voice through her art. As a Hmong American, she was like many other Asian Americans who often are less likely to self-identify as a leader compared to members of other ethnic/racial groups. Thus, to her, the question was "What does it really mean to be a Hmong American leader?"

As an adopted infant who grew up in a predominantly white area, her sense of leadership was inspired by individuals who embraced their cultural identities (e.g. MLK Jr., Cesar Chavez, An Wang, et. al.).

Her identity and purpose were shaped by these leaders' personhoods, their causes, and the intersections between the two. By eventually experiencing the Hmong community and the struggles they had economically and socially, she gained a direction for exercising her leadership.

**Leveraging Leadership Diversity**

As leaders, our challenge is to understand how our lived experiences shape our personhood, our worldview, and our relationships with others. Moreover, our challenge is to leverage the diversity in our organizations to make them powerful learning organizations

and solution providers. While there are important differences in race, ethnicity and gender that must not be minimized, cognitive diversity transcends these differences.

Leaders must think about how they think in order to really affect change and solve problems. Thinking changes lives; cultural or ethnic influences become less significant when one understands the importance and influence of an individual's problem solving (thinking) style. But here's where we go wrong. The pitfall is that . . . "If I'm successful, you should think like me."

We have a marked tendency to remove diversity or differences, and thus, pick one line of thinking or approach to problem solving and apply it to all problems.

Transformational change requires more than just doing things differently; it requires thinking differently — both individually and institutionally. Improving individuals' and groups' abilities to solve problems and make decisions is critical for organizations to prosper.

As a Latino leader on campus, I am keenly aware of how students (and underrepresented students in particular) view my leadership. All of us desire to see people in our environments who reflect ourselves. Indeed, after over 30 years in higher education, my leadership is characterized by nurturing the potential in others, by sensitivity to the fears people have in organizational life, and by an affinity to those who struggle to find meaning and purpose in their lives. Can a non-Latino exercise leadership in a similar way? Most certainly.

*Improving individuals' and groups' abilities to solve problems and make decisions is critical for organizations to prosper.*

Our cultural background can help ground our beliefs and ways of being. But group identity is ONE dimension of who we are and how we exercise leadership. Grab hold of the influences that allow you to honor people, your heritage, your legacy. The more authentic we become, the greater impact we have on others.

**Dr. Thomas Rios** serves as Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs at the University of Wisconsin - Whitewater. He earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Wisconsin - Eau Claire, his Masters degree from the University of Arizona, and his Ph.D. from Indiana State University. He has worked at Pima Community College (AZ), UW-Waukesha (WI), Dartmouth College (NH), Allegheny College (PA), Indiana State University (IN), Michigan State University (MI), and now back in his home state of Wisconsin. Tom has had the honor of being commencement speaker at UW-Whitewater in 2010, and in co-creating a higher education leadership program in UW-Whitewater's masters degree program. He is currently working with colleagues in Cuenca, Ecuador to shape a comparative higher education course that would include a visit to Ecuador.

