Quality & Accountability: Driving Community College Success Today

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It is a given in higher education that we are preparing students for the world of work and for life. It is also a given in today's world that higher education's product must be of quality and that higher education must be held accountable for student learning. Finally, it is a given, as well, that the expectation is to do more with less, to find efficiencies.

These principles, along with rising tuition costs, have placed higher education under the microscopes of both the legislators and the public. To emerge from this examination, college leaders must monitor student outcomes regularly to determine roadblocks to student success and to determine revisions, improvements, and optimal resource use.

Eastern Gateway Community College is at the forefront of using data to guide decisions on academic programming and policies. The college's work is centered on improving developmental education outcomes and gateway course pass rates, while increasing retention rates. Other keys to the college's overall success are clear goals and defined paths to reach these goals through enhanced teaching experiences, refined and updated programs, and expanded student support initiatives. The profile of degree-seeking students at Eastern Gateway includes 64 percent federal aid recipients and 23 percent minority, with an average student age of 28.

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As colleges shift from a primary focus on driving enrollment to an emphasis on maximizing student success, they must work diligently on improving policies and practices and the refinement of developmental education with an emphasis on retention by course, term, and graduation or transfer. In Ohio, community colleges now are funded 100 percent based on student learning and student retention outcomes.

Colleges must deliver its product – teaching to learn – with more engaging student experiences. Classroom instruction must be presented in a wider array of methods, such as computer-based instruction, math emporiums, competency-based curriculum, Accelerated Learning

Program Model (developed by the Community College of Baltimore County), cooperative learning, online, hybrid, and clicker-feedback. Intensive and continuing professional development must be a priority. Classroom-delivery enhancements can be augmented by work from faculty inquiry groups.

Competency-based curriculum and emporium-style of delivery for developmental math courses at Eastern Gateway allow faculty to target problem areas for students. Under this structure, faculty have found that they can react more quickly to offer interventions for problem areas. The Accelerated Learning Program Model is helping students who score just below the cutoff mark to enter college-level English immediately and complete the course in one semester, rather than two semesters, if a developmental English course was taken also. To help these students succeed, they also receive one hour of weekly supplemental instruction.

Academic advising and student coaching should be enhanced to help students stay on track and move as quickly as possible through their requirements to reach their personal goals of training for a desired job, retraining for advancement in the workplace, or transferring to a four-year college or university. Such advising/coaching can come on multiple fronts. Perhaps it begins with professional academic advisors/coaches who aid students in making decisions on a college major and a career path. This work will enhance advising from the student's faculty advisor, who teaches in the student's chosen field. If this dual advising system is used, initial and ongoing training is required so students receive advising experience that is as seamless as possible. To accomplish this objective, providing professional development for full-time and adjunct faculty is imperative. New and refreshed delivery methods of instruction are important to keep today's student engaged and progressing academically.

To track the progress achieved by these interventions, as well as policy changes and other improvements, colleges must track retention records by course and term. Completion reports are imperative, as well as results from student surveys focused on student satisfaction and student engagement. Data should be used by employees to help to determine what enhancements and changes should be made to policies and procedures, as well as services and programs. This data should be disaggregated to include age, race, gender, income level, and residency so trends in one or more areas may be recognized

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"Accountability" refers to how and the extent to which higher education and accreditation accept responsibility for the quality and results of their work and are openly responsive to constituents and the public.

– Judith Eaton

As community college leaders attempt to foster a new accountability culture within their institutions..., questions regarding how to go about creating effective systems for continuous quality improvement emerge.

– Teresa Renee McKinney

EMERGING LEADERS' PERSPECTIVES

One of the most significant policy shifts over the last several decades has been the movement toward quality, standards, and accountability. Community colleges today are being held accountable for institutional cost, value, and quality. As a result, colleges are challenged to provide high-quality instruction while improving their efficiency in order to be more affordable to the students, taxpayers, and donors. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders; their answers appear below:

Kimberly Klein, Ed.D.
Associate Professor, Delta College
University Center, Michigan

"If you can't measure it, you can't manage it."
– Peter Drucker

The lack of a pathway connecting what is occurring at the grassroots access point – the level of the student – with demands from policy makers, taxpayers, and donors results in the inability to improve on the overall current student success rates. Sound judgment occurs when achieving standards that produce quality results are duplicated across the continuum and lead to greater student success.

For the most part, quality in education is determined through the practice of measuring, which allows for the standards, or learning outcomes, to be held accountable. These learning outcomes at the course level are part of the institutional outcome continuum. In community colleges, quality control can certainly be met by individual faculty members who are responsible for the rigor and the streamlining of learning outcomes, or standards. There, in each classroom setting, the faculty member is accountable for supporting the learning outcomes by using a rigorous standard of quality content delivery. In order to remain consistent, these standards must be assessed to ensure continued relevance. Ultimately, this suggests that standards must be measured against the backdrop of student completion. Ideally, there should be alignment across the college assuring that standards are being "enforced."

Certainly, the issue of accountability is embedded in this quality model. As a college, we profess the value of a quality education, yet our ability to do just that is in question due to our inability to adjust to the stark reality of inefficient student success. The end result (graduation rates) needs to be attacked at the point of student access – individual classes. The lack of measurable data at this point impacts evidence-based strategies and continues to be a vulnerable point at the community college level. There are gaps, such as tracking overall student progress, that are not being managed; therefore, the results are not changing. This is compounded by the limited vision that faculty members have outside of their classroom setting.

Classroom silos are disconnected from the system. Subsequently, this leads to a lack of shared information, which would support the managing of the system as a whole. It is as though we are traveling in two different universes. The challenge then becomes how we retain the standards but increase the student productivity across the college, not just in individual classrooms, as evidenced by higher passing rates and increased retention rates.

QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

How can community college leaders develop rigorous standards for quality, but also assure that the standards are judiciously enforced?

Bruce Moses, M.A.
Assistant Vice Chancellor for Accreditation,
Pima Community College
Tucson, Arizona

An institution thrives when its leadership actively creates and supports a Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) -driven culture, modeling values and behavior. An expectation of quality, accountability, and evidence of performance measures is prominent in the public sector, business, and industry globally. However, this phenomenon is not systemic amongst our community colleges. Leaders in community colleges can develop and enforce rigorous standards of quality through the use of continuous quality improvement principles that inform strategic planning and budgetary allocations.

Leadership must ensure that the institution's systems and processes align with its mission and vision, making certain that the necessary resources are allocated and used in support of the overall mission and vision. The implementation of CQI principals and processes requires leaders to identify purposeful goals, plan activities, implement planning, assess results of implementation with measurable outcomes, and incorporate and integrate indicated modifications where appropriate throughout the institution.

The optimal goal for leaders is to integrate a model of CQI into the way the college does business on a day-to-day basis. The use of quality tools will improve the planning and budgeting process and increase the use of data, rather than anecdotal information, in decision-making. Collecting, analyzing, and using data to determine budget allocations ensures accountability and strengthens a culture and commitment to continuous quality improvement. Promoting the use of continuous improvement in all aspects of systems, processes, and activities allows the institution to maintain accreditation, realize improvements in service to students and stakeholders, improve processes that help employees do their jobs better, and improve institutional outcomes.

Improvement always results in change, but change does not always result in improvement. Accepting new paradigms is difficult when the suggested change is radically different from the status quo. Change comes slowly, and community college leaders should realize that their current efforts may not be implemented for many years, or may never be accepted by employees of the institution. But through the implementation of continuous improvement, the benefits will continuously emerge. As community colleges develop increased expertise in the use of quality tools and implement changes pursuant to the outcomes, the college community will see a cultural shift that enforces standards in institutional performance.

Dr. Kimberly Klein is an Associate Professor of Political Science at Delta College and serves as co-chair of Delta's involvement in The Democracy Commitment initiative. This program hosts numerous local events, resulting in students becoming active creators of their environment. She received the Michigan Campus Compact biennial award honoring faculty contributions in service learning and community service. Klein earned her doctorate degree from the FSU DCCL program in 2013.

Bruce Moses is the Assistant Vice Chancellor for Accreditation at Pima Community College. With over 20 years' higher education administrative experience, he previously served as Associate Vice President of Planning and Institutional Effectiveness at Central Arizona College. Bruce has been a Higher Learning Commission Peer Reviewer since 2007. He earned his M.A. in Educational Leadership from Eastern Michigan University and is currently a doctoral candidate in the Ferris State University DCCL program.

NATIONAL LEADER PERSPECTIVE

One of the most significant policy shifts over the last several decades has been the movement toward quality, standards, and accountability. Community colleges today are being held accountable for institutional cost, value, and quality. As a result, colleges are challenged to provide high-quality instruction while improving their efficiency in order to be more affordable to the students, taxpayers, and donors. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders; their answers appear below:

It Takes a Village... or a New Take on Five Cs

Roberta C. Teahen, Ph.D.

Associate Provost, Director of the DCCL Program, Ferris State University
Big Rapids, Michigan

Heightened accountability has captured the attention of most college leaders, and few expect that this scrutiny will disappear soon. Leaders are challenged to "provide high-quality instruction while improving their efficiency," but a review of the past may suggest that this current level of interest is a direct result of the historic lack of attention paid to quality and efficiency. Questions about quality and costs are not new. As early as 1985, colleges within the 19-state Higher Learning Commission (formerly NCA) region have been required to implement assessment plans, yet the response of most institutions has been minimal. Few colleges have documentation that "proves" the learning that has been achieved by students at all levels; fewer yet have robust assessment systems that inform institutional improvements, including planning and budget allocation processes. Many have failed to modify their traditional educational models that may be poorly suited to today's diverse student populations in order to achieve better results.

First we must be convinced that this is vital work, and when we are convinced, it should drive our agenda – including our time and our budget.

However, we are where we are, and an entire essay could focus on where we should have been. Yet this question asks: "How can community college leaders develop rigorous standards for quality, but also assure that the standards are judiciously enforced?" There is no easy answer to this, or we would have done so by now. But what will it take? It will take Conviction, Collaboration, Commitment, Courage, and Creativity. As preface to commenting on these five Cs of assuring standards, it is essential to communicate that the task must be a shared responsibility. Thus, we need to define "leaders" very broadly, including faculty and students. This work belongs to all of us – and its potential – and our obligation - will never be realized until we move forward collectively.

Conviction for me is fundamentally a statement about one's values. Too few leaders (whether administrators, boards, or faculty) are focused primarily on this question of assuring high standards, despite the frequent rhetoric. First we must be convinced that this is vital work, and when we are convinced, it should drive our agenda – including our time and our budget.

Collaboration is a term that is understood, but not as frequently observed in our colleges. Assuring quality requires that college staff, boards, and students work together toward achieving a commonly

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agreed-upon vision for quality in our institutions. There are lots of models to build from, like the Degree Qualifications Profile; the LEAP Initiative; vibrant assessment systems, such as Alverno's; and others. The fact that we have not yet defined what quality learning looks like in most of our institutions is puzzling at best. After all, what is the college's mission?

Commitment differs from conviction in that it suggests engagement, persistence, and follow-through. Just valuing the importance of setting high standards and saying we are committed is not enough. Commitment exists when the emphasis continues during a "leadership" turnover; when each year's annual plan includes specific objectives with appropriate resource allocations; when job descriptions include references to the vital work of assuring quality within the college; when meeting agendas incorporate these conversations; and when performance evaluations review efforts and achievements directed toward maintaining, advancing, and assuring high standards.

Courage is the natural follow-on, because this is not easy work. All leaders (faculty, boards, students, administrators) will need to be unafraid to take stands, to initiate actions, and to assure the college is focused on holding everyone accountable for the highest professional standards. Professionalism always embraces striving for excellence in the profession, regardless of one's role. Hard decisions will need to be made, because not everyone is well suited to this new work – of assuring student success and doing so efficiently. For students, graduation may need to be defined as more than accumulations of credits.

Finally, it will take **creativity**. With student populations as diverse as those we serve today, the traditional delivery model may no longer serve us or them well. There are numerous alternative options. Some may not be as efficient, which is likely to argue for different scheduling and staffing models. Yet efficiency can result when focus is maintained on delivering quality--creatively and collaboratively. Creativity may be the mechanism to enable renewed collaboration and shared commitments (including conviction concerning the value of high standards). And when these Cs are not achievable, leaders must display courage in making the right decisions – despite how tough this may be.

Roberta Teahen, Ph.D., serves as Associate Provost and Director of the Doctorate in Community College Leadership at Ferris State University. She joined Ferris in 2002 as the Dean of Extended Learning, overseeing Ferris' multiple sites statewide. She spent 30 years at Northwestern Michigan College in a variety of roles from adjunct faculty member to Dean of Workforce Development. She earned a doctorate in Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education from Michigan State University.

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and evaluated, enabling interventions to be adjusted or developed. Routine reviews of disaggregated data will help college leaders to determine areas where barriers to student success may exist.

Other areas where data may be collected and used in determining enhancements and changes come from national sources such as Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory, Survey of Entering Student Engagement, and Community College Survey of Student Engagement. Student focus groups, program advisory committee feedback, and public forums should also be used.

Eastern Gateway joined Achieving the Dream, the national comprehensive non-governmental reform movement for student success, more than a decade ago. Due to the student success agenda established by the trustees and administration through Achieving the Dream and other initiatives, the college is well positioned to implement the new completion plan required by the University System of Ohio for all community colleges. This plan is tied directly to the 100 percent student performance-based funding formula. The designed plan drew upon the decade of extensive experience and knowledge the college gained in areas of developmental education redesign, intrusive academic advising implementation, academic program refinement, and course completion support. Through this exploration of what works and what needs improvement for student success, student learning became the most important outcome characteristic of our college. Today, this characteristic is used to describe our college.

After four years as an Achieving the Dream college, Eastern Gateway gained the distinction of being selected as a Leader College in this national network. College officials share their experiences with our student success work and serve as advisers on the implementation of successful strategies. This Achieving the Dream work was enhanced by participating in the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Developmental Education Initiative, which further expanded the college's work on developmental education courses. The curriculum was entirely revamped eight years ago and continues to be refined as the college adapts to student needs and embraces emerging and successful instruction methods.

As a college centers its focus on student success, then that must become the core of the institution's strategic planning goals and objectives, under the direction of the Board of Trustees. With data to guide decisions, the college can easily set reachable goals and objectives; then take the next step and evaluate how well they have met these goals and objectives.

Further, student learning must be emphasized in the college's mission. After all, that is why institutions of higher learning exist.

The President must be a believer of a student learning focus since the President's role is to develop a culture of belief. The President keeps his/her eyes on learning through many avenues, including:

▲ Reinforce to the college community the external pressures placed on the importance of our work.

> *By emphasizing the student success agenda and the resulting outcomes, colleges will be on the right path to guarantee that more students graduate or transfer...*

▲ Make data available and interesting to show where we want to be and how we are doing.
▲ Make sure we know our students through internal data of class, program, and outcomes; external data on national student surveys; and rankings compared to national trends.

To gauge student success progress, colleges and presidents may develop and employ a scorecard to mark progress. Eastern Gateway has two scorecards – institutional and Board of Trustees. Each card shows a major focus on objectives supporting student success. The President's evaluation is tied directly to the institutional scorecard. Updated scorecards are presented at each trustees' meeting along with student success data.

An essential concept to remember is, "if at first you don't succeed, try, try again." And it is important not to shoot the messenger during reports and reviews of student outcomes and program/practices results. Since student success work often is challenged on most college campuses because of budget challenges and restraints, one method to aid a budget is to outsource services where possible. Examples include on-campus security services, day-care for students with children, bookstore services, and career guidance and job placement. Many colleges are exploring the pooling of services where feasible.

Finally, it is a given that a college must evaluate targeted data, devise plans, review outcomes of student success, and refine initiatives to build upon success while carrying more productive practices forward. By emphasizing the student success agenda and the resulting outcomes, colleges will be on the right path to guarantee that more students graduate or transfer so they become productive citizens in society and champions for themselves and their families. We must keep in mind that the final goal is to celebrate those successes with our students.

Dr. Laura Meeks is the president of Eastern Gateway Community College, serving four counties in Eastern Ohio. During her 14-year tenure, enrollment has grown more than 50 percent and the college has gained national recognition, including being named an initial Leader College in the Achieving the Dream national student success movement and receiving more than $31 million in federal and private grants. Previously, she served as president of Fort Scott Community College in Fort Scott, Kansas. Dr. Meeks earned an M.A. and an education specialist degree from Pittsburg State University, and a Ph.D. in curriculum and instruction from Kansas State University. She also served on the Board of Directors and the Executive Committee of the American Association of Community Colleges and on the AACC national working group for the Voluntary Framework of Accountability. Most recently, Dr. Meeks received the 2013 Athena Award, presented by the Youngstown/Warren Regional Chamber.