

Perspectives

Community College Leadership for the 21st Century

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Community College Leadership During Challenging Times: Lessons From Hurricane Harvey

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Understanding and Preparing for Leadership Complexity.

Community college leaders operating within the vastly changing and differentiated landscape of higher education are more likely to find satisfaction and long-term success if they understand and are prepared for the enormous complexity of challenges that they will inevitably face. The American Association of Community College's 21st Century Commission Report projects significant shifts in higher education senior leadership. Many individuals entering executive leadership roles often lack the depth of experience needed, or have minimal practice in addressing the array of issues likely to emerge. This places them under tremendous pressure to lead effectively during challenging times.

Leaders must think strategically and implement tactically in response to internal and external challenges. One of the most important lessons gleaned from my experience in senior level administration as Dean, Vice-President, President, and Executive Vice Chancellor, is to make critical investments in preparing the institution to respond to challenges, change, and disasters before they happen. These pre-disaster strategies will pay major dividends during the difficult times, which will surely come. The most important of these investments are people. Building strong and trusting relationships with faculty, staff, administrators, and students will prove invaluable in a crisis and trust is required.

During difficult times, it is important to maintain a powerful institutional vision centered on student success, while also sustaining an environment that is open and responsive to surmounting challenges. Regular, clear, and honest communication is essential at times of uncertainty to enable the institution to recalibrate after significant disruption. Using effective and transparent communication strategies before, during, and after a major crisis or disaster is a wise investment in the future of the institution.

The Need for Leadership Inclusion. It is never wise to isolate yourself during challenging periods. I would recommend being visible and actively engaging others in constructive problem solving. Silo cocooning is a mistake and will always disadvantage strategy development. Most importantly, such behavior often results in rumors that are mistaken as facts. Leaders who "barricade themselves in their offices" operate from a limited vantage point. More communication, not less, is needed during a crisis. When people do not have access to clear and accurate information, they may default to fears which are often far worse than reality.

During challenging times, it is important to recognize individuals who continue to move the college forward. Shine the spotlight on those who go beyond the call of duty through specific, authentic, and sincere recognition.

A Leader's Response to Challenge and Change. The type and number of challenges faced by community college leaders are numerous. No two days are exactly alike and new challenges lurk at every turn. Whether positive or negative, these challenges bring rich opportunities to exercise decisive and compassionate leadership.

Challenges can arrive as a crisis or disaster and will test a leader's ability to control or respond effectively. It is important to be proactive. Identify the problem and determine what action is needed. Regardless of the situation, take action. Knowing that considerate and thoughtful action is occurring will relieve stress and provide confidence to the college community. When waiting is the right strategy, exercise control and communicate accordingly.

Leading during a crisis or disaster will challenge any administrator. Preparation should occur before the incident. Advance planning must support instructional and operational continuity during and after the crisis or disaster recovery. Moving beyond the examination of the technology infrastructure, planning should also include an exploration of the implications for scheduling, instruction, adjusting semester start and end dates, implications for payroll, and the continued enrollment of special student populations to assure such things as students' ability to adjust payments, continuation of veteran benefits, and international visa allowances.

A clearly developed contingency plan for online instruction when face-to-face classes are unavailable, guidance for working with accreditors and coordinating boards for compliance, approvals for alternative sites, and the validation of student learning outcomes are all highly suggested. When developing an emergency response plan, special attention should be given to assuring that the college community is aided in returning to normalcy as quickly as possible. During a crisis or disaster, no aspect of the institution goes untouched and therefore, each aspect of the institution should be a component of any pre-disaster strategy.

Hurricane Harvey – The Perfect Storm: A Leader's Test. In August 2017, Hurricane Harvey, considered by many to be the costliest hurricane on record and the second-costliest natural disaster worldwide, inflicted nearly \$200 billion in damage, primarily from widespread flooding in the Houston metropolitan area. Framed by a powerful institutional vision focused on student success, Lone Star College's emergency response galvanized the college community in support of

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The 21st century leader sees adversity through the lens of opportunity. Rather than panic, a leader with composure takes a step back and begins to connect the dots of opportunity with adverse circumstances.

- Glenn Llopis

Crises can make or break a leader. . . Good leaders help their [organizations] emerge from a crisis stronger, whether they turn the culture upside down or take it back to its roots.

- Jose Costa

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EMERGING LEADER PERSPECTIVE: A FIRST-PERSON ACCOUNT

Community college leaders must face myriad challenges ranging from accountability, autonomy, and governance, through dwindling resources, capacity, and purpose; however none of these presents such potential for catastrophe as natural disasters, both weather-related and man-made. Such crises can make or break a leader – and potentially, the college itself. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders. Their answers appear below.

The Aftermath of that Hellacious Fire: A Survivor’s Tale

Meredith Blau

Vineyard Owner and Wildfire Survivor
Knights Valley, California

QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

How can college leaders effectively and creatively plan for and deal with such unforeseen crises?

Editor’s Preface. During these past few months, our country has endured a vast number of natural and man-made disasters, including hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, wildfires, and mass shootings. These events touch all of us, including community colleges and their leaders. As college leaders in affected areas work to restore full-function to their colleges, we must not lose our focus on the survivors of these disasters, many of whom are our students, family members, and neighbors. It is impossible to truly comprehend the horrific experiences of those who lost their homes, relatives, pets, livelihoods, and in some cases, hope. We trust that the following first person account of one night of terror due to wildfires in the Napa Valley region will provide a window into the lives of those who experienced such a natural disaster.

It has been over a month since my husband and I, along with our neighbors, scrambled to safety, but the drama of that night goes on. While we have been assembling in small groups to tell our stories, some tales were so horrific, they have left many with signs of PTSD.

Most people were alerted to the danger just before midnight. In our case a friend from St. Helena heard that the fire was heading to Knights Valley and called us. You can’t imagine how my legs turned to jelly trying to dress in the dark and get out of the house with the wind tossing branches everywhere and trees in our path. I was in a state of panic seeing large trees down on our vineyard as we were trying to flee by weaving through the vines. Getting out of the car, the wind was so fierce it blew me up against the door.

Some didn’t get calls, but saw the flames advancing towards them. One friend had guests staying with her and looked out to see the flames coming across her grass. They dashed to their cars and then learned the electric gate would not open since the electricity was down. Forgetting to use her cell phone for the code, she impulsively dialed 911. In the interim before the firemen arrived to ram her gate, there was panic. When she tells the story she cries.

We were heading to San Francisco and saw Santa Rosa on fire, with the flames leaping across Highway 101. Cars were turning around on the highway to find the exit and I, with night blindness anyhow, could not figure why cars were coming at me.

Another friend on the road that circles behind us to Santa Rosa saw the flames coming up her road and also on the hill behind her. They grabbed a chainsaw because of the downed trees and took the same route we did on 128 towards Healdsburg. They were the ones who made surgical cuts to the trees across the road so we could maneuver around the dozens of downed trees. Like us, once in Healdsburg they learned there were no hotel rooms left and called a hotel in Santa Rosa. She was told to come down, that there

were rooms left. When she arrived, that hotel was on fire too.

We were heading to San Francisco and saw Santa Rosa on fire, with the flames leaping across Highway 101. Cars were turning around on the highway to find the exit and I, with night blindness anyhow, could not figure why cars were coming at me. At 2:30 in the morning it was like rush hour traffic, but clogged.

The friend facing the burning hotel went on to the next small city to stay overnight, then back up valley

to friends, finding they were evacuated there also. She spent the next six nights being evacuated from every place she went, including Calistoga. Now she has trouble sleeping, fearing she will have to be on the run again.

The days after the fire passed us by left no electricity and the roads closed. We had no access to food, electricity, or even cell service as the tower was down. One neighbor came to our property to move gas cans and vehicles into the vineyard so they would not explode. And then there was the woman who told me, “I am wearing one of two pairs of shoes left to my name.”

There were many angels working to help each other. My Knights Valley Ladies group meets monthly and has for over 100 years. These are mainly the older women whose families were deeply rooted here. I always admired their comfort with themselves and the land. Several of them had their homes totally destroyed. One woman I so admired for her spunk at age 85 has a license plate reading Vixen. However, she isn’t adjusting well at all to her flat-tened home. She first fled to her son’s house near Berkeley and the daughter-in-law took her to resale shops to replace her clothes. She was incensed, wanting her own nightgowns and clothing. So she left and went off her own. Wandering into a shop in her small town of Calistoga, she mentioned she had an appointment with an oncologist, but could not remember his name or the appointment date. After checking online, the shop owner made sure she had a ride there. Another neighbor took her to the insurance adjuster, but she kept saying, “I can’t remember what I had.” Apparently in shock, she has lost her signature spunk.

The days after the fire passed us by left no electricity and the roads closed. We had no access to food, electricity, or even cell service.

I have been inviting those still out of their homes for dinner, as they so appreciate a home cooked meal. My immediate neighbors come to Sunday brunch and to share stories of melted piping to their water tanks, destroyed property, and animals rescued. That is the most important part, sharing stories. We all have them and the tears seem to disappear as we talk.

The scene of devastation is hard to look at. It is like a war zone in places, with all the leveled homes, standing chimneys, and burnt cars scattered like toys. It brings tears just to see it, but we were lucky. Bill and I were in survival mode from the minute of that call in the night. People in parked cars on the road to Healdsburg were telling us it was blocked with downed trees, but we kept weaving through them toward safety. No one will ever forget that night. We all have our stories and now we are sharing them. That is a good thing – for all of us.

Meredith Blau, owner and operator of a vineyard in Knights Valley in the heart of the Tubbs fire in Northern California, grows Bordeaux varietals for premium vintners in the Napa Valley. Meredith observed first-hand the trauma the fires caused in her valley.



NATIONAL LEADER PERSPECTIVE

Community college leaders must face myriad challenges ranging from accountability, autonomy, and governance, through dwindling resources, capacity, and purpose; however none of these presents such potential for catastrophe as natural disasters, both weather-related and man-made. Such crises can make or break a leader – and potentially, the college itself. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders. Their answers appear below.

Leading in Times of Crisis: A Perspective on Abraham Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

Katie Fleener, PhD

University Registrar
Fresno Pacific University
Fresno, California

As of late, our communities seem to be wrought with challenges of a catastrophic nature. With crises ranging from raging fires, to hurricanes and flooding, to shooters on our campuses, our educational leaders have been challenged in a myriad of ways. Leading through a crisis goes well beyond disaster preparedness training and business continuity planning to the actions we take in the aftermath of a crisis.

Pulling from Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, as educators, many of us tend to think of ourselves as helping students transcend, changing their lives for something better, even self-actualizing. But in times of crisis, our students, our faculty, our colleagues, and our community may be faced with the real struggle of meeting basic physiological and safety needs. How do we as community leaders, typically focused on education, help our communities meet their basic needs? It is our duty as educators to teach our students to be productive, active members of their communities. This work begins on our campuses and can be taught through leading by example, a necessary part of the educational journey.

During times of crisis, it is likely we will be challenged as academicians to think ... from a more basic perspective of meeting physiological and safety needs first.

College leaders should ask themselves what they can do to support their college communities and their communities at large from their unique perspectives of their educational institutions. During times of crisis, it is likely we will be challenged as academicians to think more basically beyond extending homework deadlines, adjusting final exam schedules, and ensuring adherence to Carnegie Units, as during these times we need to think from a more basic perspective of meeting physiological and safety needs first. If our campuses remain intact, we are in a unique position to provide aid in our communities. Pulling from the idea that our campus communities remain intact, I am presenting a list of ideas that college leaders can pull from and build upon while considering how best to serve their own communities in the aftermath of a crisis. Some thought should be given to the type of support that can be provided and how that may vary depending upon the specific situation.

Examining physiological needs, we can challenge ourselves to consider how to meet such basic needs as food, water, and shelter. Since many of our campuses have dining halls, is there an opportunity to open our doors and feed the community? With that in mind, is there a possibility of offering shelter in unused dormitories or alternative campus housing options? Perhaps consider

QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

How can college leaders effectively and creatively plan for and deal with such unforeseen crises?

providing shelter to displaced community residents in our gyms or multipurpose centers that may help meet not only physiological needs, but additionally some aspects of the need for safety.

Through our health and counseling centers, is there an opportunity to provide medical care or psychological services? While this type of short-term service would certainly not take the place of traditional and

continuous treatment, there may be some opportunities to operate under an emergency response framework. For those of us that educate in the veterinary fields, is there an opportunity for us to provide veterinary care or shelter to displaced pets? As our emergency shelters become overcrowded in response to tragedy, it may be increasingly difficult to find safe shelter and even more difficult for families to find care and shelter for their beloved pets.

...I challenge you as educational leaders to work beyond the budgetary and time constraints to a place of realization that we have a duty to serve our communities in more ways than just the educational marketplace.

All of these efforts will likely require many volunteer hours. This provides us, as educators, the opportunity to teach our students the importance of being involved and giving back to our communities, especially during times of crisis. Encouraging our students to become involved in these types of efforts may spark a lifelong dedication to service and a better appreciation of the communities in which we live, something that is desperately needed in many communities these days. There are countless ways to pull together as volunteers, both in the short and long term; helping our students identify those opportunities can go a long way. In so doing, we can help foster their growth of such psychological needs as the belongingness and esteem needs.

Of course, whatever we do needs to be balanced against our already tight budgets. But I challenge you as educational leaders to work beyond the budgetary and time constraints to a place of realization that we have a duty to serve our communities in more ways than just the educational marketplace. We have a duty to educate students on the needs of our communities and the need to be productive citizens working toward a better, stronger community. These needs are highlighted during times of crisis, but they exist day in and day out. Taking some time with our leadership teams to brainstorm how we might further open our doors and serve our communities can prove to be a worthwhile effort. While it is my sincere hope that none of us are challenged to lead through a natural or man-made disaster, taking the time now to think through our unique opportunities to serve will help make us stronger leaders when faced with them.

Dr. Katie Fleener, PhD, has held various leadership roles in education focused on both academics and operations. Her roles have included Associate Provost, Quality & Accreditation at Carrington College in Sacramento, CA; and Campus Dean, and Associate Dean, Academic Affairs at DeVry University’s Fresno, CA location. She currently serves the Central Valley of California and the student population at Fresno Pacific University. Dr. Fleener holds a PhD in Psychology from Capella University, an MA in Counseling Psychology from National University, a BA in Psychology from CA State University, Fresno, and an Associate of General Studies from Mesa Community College.



QUICK TAKES
Highlights
from the Field

Community College Re-enrollment After Hurricane Katrina

by Sarah R. Lowe and Jean E. Rhodes

Many community college students must balance school with holding jobs, caring for children, and other personal responsibilities. Research reveals that such potential stressors on persistence might be exacerbated if students face a traumatic event. Given the tragic consequences of this year's various natural and man-made disasters, leaders might learn much from this study's exploration of community college persistence in the aftermath of a major natural disaster, using outcomes associated with Hurricane Katrina. Access this work here: <http://bit.ly/2hAZBU3>

Leading in Tough Times: When You're Going Through Hell... Keep On Going

by Martin Haygood and Hodge Golson

Many believe that we don't learn much about ourselves or our character in good times, only fully discovering our strengths and shortcomings when tested by adversity. In bad times, all eyes are on the leader. The authors suggest how we deal with adversity is central to who we are – and how credible we'll be in leadership roles. This article addresses leadership success and poses what it takes to lead effectively in tough times. Access this work here: <http://bit.ly/2B26YMQ>



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effective planning and execution of strategies aiding its internal and external communities.

Leadership Compassion. The Lone Star College campuses opened their doors as shelters in response to the needs of the community and worked hand-in-hand to support recovery. Through internal and external donations, the college foundation provided Hurricane Relief Assistance to 2,061 students totaling \$954,250 and to 275 faculty and staff totaling \$122,250.

Leadership Communication. Lone Star College is intentional about sound and consistent communication practices. During Hurricane Harvey, Lone Star College administrators maintained regular communication with faculty, staff, and students to keep them apprised of recovery efforts.

The Chancellor, his cabinet, System Office, and campus administrators modeled the expected leadership behavior by taking action to reassure the college and its community through regular updates on recovery efforts and resources. The Chancellor engaged his leadership team and maintained ongoing communications through continuous email updates to all faculty, staff, and students.

Faculty across the system reached out to students enrolled in their classes to encourage and aid their continued enrollment. Students were regularly updated on class changes. College advisors were available to modify schedules as soon as students were ready to do so. The overarching leadership message was to help students remain on path and connect to Lone Star College.

Maintaining a focus on the needs of all of our students was of central importance and included direct focus on special populations such as Veteran, International, and Dual Credit students, who received specialized case management to support the full maintenance of their benefits and to reduce any negative impact from schedule changes.

Leadership Partnerships. Focusing on the people within our organizations and building quality relationships should be the real bottom line. Left unattended, the result is often frequent turnover of the institution's most talented members and diminished effectiveness.

Challenges can arrive as a crisis or disaster and will test a leader's ability to control or respond effectively. It is important to be proactive.

During our response to Hurricane Harvey, these positive relationships surfaced in a variety of ways, including the care with which sister campuses supported the instruction of another campus, closed indefinitely due to the disaster. These campuses housed campus programs, welcomed students into later-start classes, and supported instructional recovery. This was a demonstration of strong internal collaboration and a major strategy to help students displaced from their home campus to remain enrolled.

Through the support of System Office staff, 1,061 sections were converted from traditional face-to-face classes to fully online and hybrid classes, allowing students to attend class from anywhere. Students were also supported with books and technology lost during the disaster. Local businesses opened their doors to support our continued instruction by relocating specialized programs displaced by storm damage to prevent course cancellation. Special accommodations were also made for dual credit and early college students in collaboration with the Independent School Districts to assist

these students to remain in classes and on path.

Leadership Execution. The impact of Hurricane Harvey was extensive, yet the majority of the instructional schedule at the Kingwood campus was rebuilt in 2 weeks. This required a complete redesign of the schedule, reassigning locations, building new course sections, and rolling students into their new sections. Faculty were trained and certified quickly to teach online courses through LSC-Online and campus-based professional development. In addition, current online faculty offered their courses to face-to-face faculty needing to rapidly convert to online instruction.

Leadership Rewards. Of the rewards resulting from Lone Star College's Hurricane Harvey response efforts, the demolition of traditional silos that typically exist between academics and student services – and frequently between system offices and campuses – ranked high. Throughout this period of crisis management, everyone worked together to serve students and to serve each other.

During a crisis or disaster, no aspect of the institution goes untouched and therefore, each aspect of the institution should be a component of any pre-disaster strategy.

System Office support to the campuses was "on demand" to ensure that systemized processes could support students getting classes and schedules finalized. This required bringing together a complex web of teams from Finance, Financial Aid, Marketing, Academic Affairs, Student Services, Office of Completion, Office of Technology Services, and campus personnel in complete partnership to form powerful connections and solve problems. Unanticipated gains included a 4% increase in student headcount and a 3% increase in course enrollment over fall 2016.

Margaret J. Wheatley illustrates the importance and benefit of connected systems in her book, *Finding Our Way*. She writes, "Life needs to link with other life to form systems of relationships where all individuals are better supported by the system they have created." This was the case at Lone Star College and the lessons learned from Hurricane Harvey will continue to connect and inform our work for many years to come.



Alicia B. Harvey-Smith, PhD, is the Executive Vice Chancellor at Lone Star College in The Woodlands, Texas. A learning-centered educator with twenty-five years of experience in leadership, instruction, training, development, and consulting, Dr. Harvey-Smith has served in a variety of senior level administrative positions in higher education, including dean, vice-president, and president. She earned her PhD from the University of Maryland, College Park and her MS from Johns Hopkins University. She also holds a certificate from the Harvard University School of Education Competitively-Selected Presidents Institute.

Dr. Harvey-Smith serves on a number of national and local boards, including the Executive Board for the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), and is a noted speaker and author. She originated the Seventh Learning College Principle, encouraging institutions to create and nurture organizational cultures that are open and responsive to change and learning. An active mentor, Dr. Harvey-Smith loves to inspire people to reach beyond what they imagine is possible and to make excellence a habit.