

Perspectives

Community College
Leadership for the
21st Century

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The Future of the Community College Presidency

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We as community college presidents often reflect on the many contributions our colleges make to the educational, economic, and cultural life our regions, cities, counties, and states served. We have current and past faculty, staff, and administrators – and might I add students – who have contributed to the success and well-being of the college. Who are our students? Community colleges meet the needs of students in many stages of life: single parents, dislocated workers, veterans, the under employed, recent high school graduates, career and technical students, transferring students, honor students, senior citizens, and many others. Community colleges are finally coming into their own nationally as people are realizing that graduates and completers of community colleges are making significant impacts in their communities and earning more money than graduates of four-year universities. What is the future of the community college presidency? What are the challenges and opportunities encountered by community college presidents? How do presidents face the problems and continue to advance the missions of these very unique American institutions?

The community college president is faced with many challenges and opportunities. These include leading teams, managing boards, fundraising and advocacy, working collaboratively with K-12 schools, communicating effectively while managing a message, advancing and supporting issues of diversity and equity, improving teaching and learning, reporting and showcasing value and economic impact, balancing the needs and priorities of the numerous constituencies, sustaining academic and technical programs, meeting the needs of communities, and supporting student success. Most recent emerging challenges and opportunities for the community college president include updating the technology infrastructure on campus, managing the wellness (physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, occupational, social) impact of the college, leading multiple and very different generations (World War II, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y, Millennial Generation) of employees, handling the mortality of personnel, navigating social media, and seeking out and partnering with mutually beneficial enterprises among others. The impact by varying degree of these challenges and opportunities pull the attention, time, and effort of the community college president. The often unspoken or hidden toll on the president includes family, personal health, and well-being.

Students and their success and completion of our programs should be the community college president's primary concern. We no longer can be satisfied with just

enrolling students. We are all responsible for ensuring that students have the additional support needed to complete courses and move to the next level. The next level may be a co-requisite course, an advanced course, a selective admission program, transfer to a four-year institution, a promotion on their current job, or a new job. Learning and student development can only effectively move forward when all of the components focus on individual students and their learning process. Community college presidents must commit resources so students are presented with opportunities for learning and development by relating their own experiences to the college environment. Teams of higher education professionals led by the community college president should assess the needs of students, develop informational responses and strategic plans related to identified needs, conceptualize services and programs, and provide resources and avenues for students' exploration and maturation. It is important that the community college environment provides opportunities for students to form connections with other students and campus personnel early in their college experience.

It is important that great community college presidents acknowledge and learn from failures.

Solutions to the vast challenges and opportunities are numerous. As we continue to look for factors for future community college presidents to consider, we must not look at just what has worked in the past but also test and evaluate other solutions. No one solution will fit all. Consider the ideas, evaluate the effectiveness, reflect on the impact of the end result, and store the idea for future use.

Community college presidents must understand that the institution is a living system. As a living system, the organization is interconnected and relies on the network of relationships. To be sustainable organizations, systems operate and function exclusively by relying on each other. Community college presidents need to research and understand state and institutional policies and procedures impacting the institution. As leaders, we need to encourage appropriate employees to develop and use desk procedures and checklists that reflect those state and institutional policies and procedures. We must establish within our systems that the organization routinely review and update policies and procedures to reflect our mission, vision and values.

The community college president can develop a culture of mutual respect and care for others. The mutual respect extends and resonates through interactions

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While the stressors on community college education will persist into the foreseeable future, having an accurate starting point for identifying the key characteristics of an effective and successful community college president will be an aid in any high level job search.

- Cizek Associates, Inc. and HR Group, LLC

Many of the leadership characteristics that have made college and university presidents successful for the past 50 years may not be those that enable the institutions to thrive in the future.

- The Aspen Institute

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EMERGING LEADERS' PERSPECTIVES

Recently, community college presidents have been leaving their positions in shorter periods of time than before. This high turnover may be reflective of the complexity of the role, combined with the evolving skill sets needed to perform it well. In a recent national survey, many presidents expressed concerns about the future of their profession and uncertainty regarding the quality of the talent pool available to fill future community college presidencies. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders. Their answers appear below.

Saundra Kay King, MS

Assistant Vice President of Remediation and Innovation
Ivy Tech Community College
Indianapolis, Indiana

As a professional who aspires to become a community college president, this is an intriguing question. I have had the good fortune to work at community colleges of all sizes, small to large, in three states with differing state governance and funding structures, and with presidents who reflected the needed leadership skills and experience for each.

What are the broad skill sets needed by today's community college presidents? In reviewing recent college president position profiles, desired characteristics included experience in either the classroom or workforce development, in some cases both; demonstrating leadership and innovation, as well as successful student success initiative implementation; being a visionary, while still meeting goals and metrics; and managing, projecting, and increasing college resources.

In its 2013, *Competencies for Community College Leaders* publication, The American Association for Community Colleges (AACC) provides a list of needed skills critical to community college leaders. In addition, the report also stated that approximately 146 current first-time presidents reported that they had no professional development in budgeting, academic management, and fundraising.

So, how does one go about acquiring these needed skills and experience? As most of us can attest, positions tend to be very limited in scope. Faculty teach, and are given the opportunity to serve on committees and progress to department chair, and then dean; professional administrative staff are afforded similar opportunities and often supervise staff and manage their departmental budgets. But few, if any, are included in higher level budget management decisions and/or significant fund raising efforts.

Mentoring and professional development programs at community colleges can provide an opportunity to identify leadership traits, advance skills, and provide experience in areas not related to their immediate positions, such as fund raising and grant writing. Doctoral programs geared toward community college leadership, such as the Ferris State University Doctorate in Community College Leadership program, also provide the opportunity to advance in areas not otherwise offered.

Finally, in speaking with my current president about this question, Dr. Sue Ellspermann commented that no one single person will have had experience in every area, but one of the most critical aspects of the job is to be aware that, "80% of your time will be spent in outward facing responsibilities." Considering this, how often will we, as college presidents, be required to interact with a state or federal-level government official? Providing rising community college leaders with the chance to interact with these leaders, whether it be local boards, state boards, or state legislators and legislatures would also seem to be advisable.

QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

How can community colleges ensure that a new generation of leaders has the deep and broad skillsets needed to meet the demands of an increasingly complex college presidency?

Janice Kinsinger, MA

Associate Dean, Organizational Learning, Retired
Illinois Central College
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Community college professionals should realize that leadership is not a position, but a way of thinking. Developing employees and growing future leaders is not only the job of senior leaders, but all managers. Managers should be developing their employees' knowledge and skills, while enhancing their own. However, proactively developing employees may not be part of the culture at all colleges.

Understand College Culture. Community college leaders should make time to build employee relations for mutual trust, listen to needs, and hold "courageous conversations" to tackle challenges, while modeling follow-through and accountability (Shugart, 2013). The more leaders understand college culture, rely on strengths, and recognize areas to change, the more successful the college transformation. Community college presidents' concern for their employees should accompany their deep commitment to student success. Developing future leaders is tantamount to increasing student success.

Create Opportunities. Employees thrive in a culture where they are needed and valued. As community colleges work to sharpen their focus on student learning, leaders must create opportunities to mold employees' leadership skills, while accomplishing the work of increasing student success. The AACC *Competencies for Community College Leaders* (AACC, 2013) stress five competencies: Organizational Strategy; Institutional Finance, Research, Fundraising, and Resource Management; Communication; Collaboration; and Community College Advocacy. Achieving the Dream's *Leadership Imperative* (2014) highlights the need to create a sense of urgency and a willingness to take risks. Develop a community-based strategic plan, collaborate in designing a first-year experience, and build community partnerships can provide employees with opportunities to develop leadership competencies.

Invest in Employees. Community colleges must invest time and funding to build leaders. Valuing employees, encouragement, and recognition must be accompanied by actions of:

- ▲ Offering mentoring programs for new employees and new managers;
- ▲ Modeling an inclusive community college environment and offering educational programming for administrators, faculty, and staff;
- ▲ Rotating membership on teams and search committees to provide new experiences for emerging leaders and fresh perspectives for teams;
- ▲ Funding employee conference attendance aligned with strategic goals; rotating participation to mentor newer managers;
- ▲ Fostering participation in professional organizations and community service boards;
- ▲ Offering support towards advanced degrees and doctoral education programs.

Developing employees helps build leaders who can weather the complexities of transformative work to persist in moving colleges forward in student success. Developing leaders matters!

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Janice Kinsinger retired from Illinois Central College after 38 years of teaching and directing the Medical Laboratory Technician (MLT) Program, later serving as Associate Dean of Organizational Learning. During her tenure, she supervised the Library, Learning Labs, Teaching and Learning Center, Instructional Technology, and Curriculum and Scheduling Services. She enjoys presenting at state/national conferences. She earned her MA at Bradley University in Peoria, Illinois, and is enrolled in the DCCL program at FSU.



NATIONAL LEADER PERSPECTIVE

Recently, community college presidents have been leaving their positions in shorter periods of time than before. This high turnover may be reflective of the complexity of the role, combined with the evolving skill sets needed to perform it well. In a recent national survey, many presidents expressed concerns about the future of their profession and uncertainty regarding the quality of the talent pool available to fill future community college presidencies. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders. Their answers appear below.

Community Colleges and a New Generation of Leaders

Rayane Alamuddin, PhD

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Community colleges are an immensely powerful tool for improving the opportunities of a very large and diverse group of Americans. To meet their potential, present-day community college leaders face the challenge of drastically improving the success of their students in a rapidly changing environment that requires a deeper and broader skillset than ever before, while maintaining commitment to open access and low cost. Many existing community college presidents have been reaching retirement age at a time when the traditional presidential pipeline and rigorous leadership training programs have narrowed, and presidential resignations and terminations are more common, leading to warranted concerns about a shortage of qualified candidates who can tackle the role.

Actively searching for and training nontraditional candidates is especially important given that the number of traditional candidates...is decreasing.

So what can community colleges do to ensure that a new generation of leaders has the skill set needed to meet the demands of this increasingly important and complex job? I love this question because it puts community colleges at the center of the solution, assuming they play an essential role in shaping the future of their leadership at large. Community colleges are presently in a unique position in this regard – they are not the main institutions that train potential candidates, and yet they have much at stake and much to contribute. They can gain more control over this process by formalizing systems for identifying, training, and mentoring their own diverse pool of traditional and nontraditional candidates, contributing more vocally to the public conversation regarding leadership needs and training, and demystifying the presidential search and hiring process.

The “grow-your-own” approach to leadership development is valuable as colleges can identify potential candidates based on observed talent and fit for a particular position, and prioritize college- or district-specific issues and needs in the training. While the approach has typically focused on traditional candidates, generally existing mid-level faculty and administrators who aspire to senior leadership positions, and on curriculum-based training, such as leadership academies and seminars (AACC, 2017), it is broadening to include nontraditional candidates and more experiential training opportunities. Actively searching for and training nontraditional candidates is especially important given that the number of traditional candidates who aspire to the role is decreasing. Additionally, nontraditional candidates might already possess a unique set of skills that may be especially well-aligned with the demands of modern and future presidencies, such as creative entrepreneurial thinking, data and technology savviness, calculated risk-taking, and change management experience. Nontraditional candidates not only diversify the skillset of the candidate pool, but also add much needed demographic diversity to senior leadership across the sector (Aspen Institute, 2017). Such diversity contributes positively to community college leadership on the whole by bringing invaluable perspectives and experiences to presidencies, and by continuing to attract a broader pool of

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talented candidates in the longer-term.

In addition to providing potential candidates with formal training opportunities, direct mentorship of candidates by sitting presidents is a very powerful and fruitful strategy for community colleges. The Aspen Institute Task Force on the Future of the College Presidency rightfully recommends that all presidents identify and mentor a number of exceptional individuals, and that such mentorship be fully integrated into the president role. Even traditional

candidates with experience in higher education institutions often need extensive professional development to understand and prepare for a presidency, and this is especially true for nontraditional candidates. Mentorship experiences help them gain an intimate and clear sense of the demands on the position, but also of its selling points and appeal. Potential candidates can assess their fit for the role and identify areas for development before assuming a position. Ideally, mentees would also include individuals external to an institution, such as doctoral students, interns, and participants from community college leadership programs that are valued.

Lastly, community colleges can contribute to the development of future leaders in the longer-term by engaging more actively and vocally in the public conversation on the topic, and providing more information about their presidential search and hiring processes. The two go hand-in-hand – and are especially important for attracting and growing a pool of qualified nontraditional candidates, though they are also relevant for traditional candidates who may not always be privy to new developments within their institutions, let alone other institutions. There is a need for more publicly-available information on the presidency that is generated directly by community colleges, including what the role entails, the rewards and challenges of the position, the skillset needed and sought by committees and trustees, the external forces that influence it, lessons learned from taking risks, and the realistic timelines and processes for measuring success. This would complement second-hand accounts that tend to focus on challenges and failures, and rarely include the necessary nuance, context, or constructive analyses that the complex position deserves.

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By identifying and developing a broad pool of candidates, and playing a more central role in the public conversation on the topic and dissemination of relevant information, community colleges would also be signaling the types of training programs, skills, and candidates they value and seek. This will in turn help shape programs, and attract and prepare a broader group of candidates in ways that are better aligned to community colleges’ needs and visions for their own future.

Rayane Alamuddin, PhD, is a senior researcher at Ithaca S+R, an education non-profit based in New York. Her current focus is on evaluating new programs and identifying institutional best practices for supporting less advantaged college students. Earlier in her career, she taught and advised undergraduate students and studied the postsecondary trajectories of low-income mothers with young children. Rayane is fluent in four languages and previously worked in post-conflict educational programming in her native Lebanon. She has a PhD from Northwestern University, and a MA from the American University of Beirut.



QUICK TAKES Highlights from the Field

Pathways to the University Presidency: The Future of Higher Education Leadership

by Jeffrey J. Selingo,
Sonny Chheng, and
Cole Clark

Focusing on the college and university presidency, the authors examine what is needed to perform effectively and excel in the role today, given that the dynamics of higher education in America are driving a new set of skills and capabilities for tomorrow's leaders. This document is designed as a primer to help leaders recognize the challenges they may face and how to potentially rethink leadership for higher education in the 21st century.

Access this work here:
<http://bit.ly/2Ez7LWV>

Renewal and Progress: Strengthening Higher Education Leadership in a Time of Rapid Change

by The Aspen Institute
and The Arthur Vining
Davis Foundation

Given the changing public perception of higher education, today's college presidents are charged with the responsibility of ensuring access and opportunity, balancing commitment to affordable quality learning, and effectively communicating the value of higher education. To do so, the next generation of presidents will need broader skillsets than ever before.

This report examines what will be needed to strengthen the presidency in the coming decades and identifies concrete areas of focus.

Access this work here:
<http://bit.ly/1zdFyib>

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The Future of the Community College Presidency *(continued from page 1)*

with others, spoken and written communications, and actions and inaction taken. The leader must investigate and listen before acting. This thoughtfulness may take time; however, the community college president should communicate appropriately. Take the time to reflect and, if needed, apologize and move forward. It is important that great community college presidents acknowledge and learn from failures.

The efforts of the community college president must squarely rest on providing a student-centered focus, while managing multiple challenges and opportunities.

The community college president needs ongoing professional development. Effective professional development could include participation in webinars, Ted Talks, regional and national conferences, focused mentoring or coaching, and/or leadership academies. Work life balance must also be a factor community college presidents should consider to function well. The prioritization of one's own well-being in the context of serving and leading others will, in the long-term, contribute positively to the impact of the institution.

The community college president must effectively tap into the local community with active participation and contributions to various organizations and businesses. This will require a leader's focus on understanding the strategic needs of the college and how the resources of the organization or business can contribute to the college's need in a meaningful way, thus creating a budding mutually beneficial partnership. Board members and important community thought leaders can provide valuable insight and information to the leader regarding the local community and region. Seek out those who want to contribute to the success of the institution by providing relevant and reliable information and contacts to assist in traversing and positively engaging in the local community.

Community colleges effectively using human resources practices and policies based on best practices and research can handle personnel matters in a systematic structure. This system usually includes processes for recruitment, selection, salary and benefit management, orientation, corrective action, and professional development. The current functions of human resources are not routine and generally contribute to the organization's bottom line by keeping it out of litigation and focused on improving the working environment for employees. The community college president must understand and rely heavily on human resources to manage the greatest resource of the organization that ultimately impacts students. The community college president needs to have a keen appreciation and positive working relationship with human resources to fully engage the necessary components of human resource functions. The leader can offer employees dignity and respect even during difficult crucial conversations. Lastly, the community college president needs to be committed to genuinely connecting with others. The connection could be a result of sharing a relatable story, taking the time to listen during a difficult challenge, and appropriately celebrating professional and personal accomplishments.

Encouragement, communication, and coaching are key elements for today's leaders in managing institutions. These are elements that provide the fortitude for living systems to operate and flourish. Successful organizations generate energy internally to grow and transform. A leader may not always visualize the order of the organizational change, but by communicating and providing resources, transformation is encouraged. Encouragement and coaching are essential techniques that the community college president should use with staff members to provide motivation and generate positive interactions for professional development. Verbal and written encouragement are the major pieces we can utilize to appropriately coach others. It is a balancing act to consider the effects of decisions on the various team members we lead when appropriate team decision making can be used. We must take into account individuals' backgrounds and experiences, allowing for our decisions to coach them to meet their own professional development needs.

It is essential that community college presidents send communications that are timely, using preferred and appropriate communication channels. We should support and encourage the expertise of the various teams to contribute to the direction of programs and services for the institution. This encouragement will hopefully contribute to the inspiration the leader provides to all to move the institution forward. The decisions that are communicated should focus on student success and completion. The efforts of the community college president must squarely rest on providing a student-centered focus, while managing multiple challenges and opportunities.

Finally, the best way we can embrace the future is for community college presidents to reaffirm our commitment to the mission of the community college. As community college presidents, there are many factors that may contribute to our journey of success. It is essential to take into account the solutions presented to navigate the complex environment and meet each challenge and opportunity. The future of the community college presidency hinges on the individual and the collective environment of community college champions to consider, test, and contribute to these solutions. Students and their families expect that their future success resides at the very core of the community college presidency. We have to prepare for the future now.



L. Marshall Washington, PhD, is a passionate advocate for maintaining the community college open door access mission, improving student learning and success outcomes, and creating opportunities for learning. In 2013, he began his tenure as the third president of New River Community and Technical College, where presides over a public institution with four campuses, an advanced technology center, and multiple locations serving nine counties in southeastern West Virginia. He attributes his love of learning and education to the people who believed and invested in him as he made the journey from first generation college graduate to president of a multi-campus institution. In addition, Washington is an adjunct instructor and enjoys teaching and mentoring secondary and postsecondary students, while also teaching graduate students at Ferris State University. Washington received his PhD from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and a master's degree in education from Winona State University, Minnesota.