

Perspectives

Community College
Leadership for the
21st Century

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Celebrating Diversity: The Lee College Story

Dennis Brown, PhD

President
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Baytown, Texas

Let us first begin by stating how honored we are to have been asked to contribute an article about creating equity and achievement, a priority at Lee College in Baytown, Texas. Lee College is proud to have been recognized by the American Association of Community College Excellence Award in Diversity and the Association of Community College Trustees Western Regional Equity Award, both in 2018. With over 83 years of service, Lee College continues to celebrate diversity and has been intentional with supporting underserved populations and providing opportunities for all students.

Lee College has taken a strategic and proactive approach to addressing inequities hindering the persistence barriers students face, especially in our growing Latino population. As a recipient of two recent Department of Education Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) grants, Lee College leveraged funding to establish a campus-wide sustainable HSI Initiatives Department to ensure that support systems would have the best outcomes for decades to come. Through this bold endeavor, we were able to offer students a centralized hub of support and a wide variety of diversity programs to celebrate cultures, provide mentorships, host cultural pedagogy professional development for faculty, and involve families and community groups as part of the college support system. We have targeted communities with the lowest college-going rates by taking our mobile resource go center directly to families. We have launched GRADcafe, a Café College with ProjectGRAD Houston, targeting opportunity youth. We proudly offer our students the nationally recognized Puente Program from California, among other programs.

When we look at "diversity," it is important to realize we are not just talking about an ethnic group, but a variety of types of groups within our community and institution.

As a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), planning for the future needs of our students, as well as increasing our stance on diversity, is at the core of our mission. For example, last year we created a department to house all initiatives previously created under our 2011 HSI STEM Grant and current grants from the Department of Education HSI Division. These funding sources specifically ask us to address the inequities in enrollment, persistence, completion, and transfer of many of our marginalized student groups. Two of the five overarching goals of our Title V Grant is to increase the persistence of male students and first-time in college students. Through strategic leveraging and cross collaboration, the grant teams have been able to assist and build partnerships

across the institution. Many of these efforts were led with data-driven decision-making, in an effort to support underserved students. We have addressed persistence barriers of underserved students through practices such as mentoring, intrusive advising, and STEM pathways with 4-year partners.

When we look at "diversity," it is important to realize we are not just talking about an ethnic group, but a variety of types of groups within our community and institution. For example, first-generation students tend to hold underrepresented identities that often intersect across race and social class. Since race and ethnicity are related to socioeconomic status and parental education, these disparities could in part influence educational attainment outcomes by race and ethnicity. The cultural experiences encountered by first-generation student populations impact their access, success, and completion in post-secondary educational settings. We are eliminating barriers, improving processes, and offering a supportive family environment to help all students thrive.

The faculty and staff have worked tirelessly to design programs to help students be successful in and out of the classroom. Below are a few highlighted programs that have created equitable outcomes for students.

Project Leeway, funded by the Carl D. Perkins grant, is designed to promote and facilitate access to technical education through student-centered services which promote equity, foster success, and contribute to the economic independence of special population students. Students receiving services are enrolled in non-traditional programs, students with disabilities, displaced homemakers, and limited English Proficiency students. Leeway services include childcare assistance, textbook lending, transportation assistance, and a food bank.

Puente Mentoring Program provides a three-prong approach to addressing persistence and completion of Hispanic and other low-socioeconomic first-generation students: 1) English from developmental into college-level English courses linked to freshman orientation courses; 2) Intensive Advising with a College Completion and Transfer Coach, and 3) Mentoring from professionals in careers desired by the students. Over the last five years, Puente students have persistence rates on average 25% higher than other first-generation students, and on average earn at least 11 credit hours their first year solely through the Puente Program. Many of us know the impact mentoring has on students, especially those of low-socioeconomic, first-generation sub-populations. Due to the great team at Lee College, we have just welcomed our 7th cohort of Puente students. The implementation of Puente has shown effectiveness in many areas from linked courses, intrusive advising, university awareness, and culturally relevant teaching practices. The Puente Mentoring Program boasts participants with a persistence rate in excess of over 20% in comparison to other like students.

STEM Outreach provides strategic leveraging and cross collaboration. The grant teams were able to assist, construct, and build partnerships across the institution and community (continued on page 4)

The need to educate students in an environment that reflects the diversity of the country and the global society in which tomorrow's college graduates will be living and working is paramount.

- Angela Chen

Working to change a [college's] diversity culture is not something that is achieved by a single individual or... mission statement; it is a collective, moral responsibility for which we are all, ultimately, accountable.

- Christine A. Stanley

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EMERGING LEADERS' PERSPECTIVES

Diversity is increasing across all facets of American society, creating both opportunities and challenges for community college leaders. Clearly, it is important to educate students in an environment reflective of the diversity of the world in which tomorrow's college graduates will be living and working. However, true diversity is about more than just the student population; it involves an institution-wide focus that considers students, faculty, and staff. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders. Their answers appear below.

Al Grippe, MSM

Director of Grant Strategy and Development
Oakton Community College
Des Plaines, Illinois

Community colleges provide historical access to postsecondary education. Open access and affordability have made it possible for a larger and more diverse cross-section of the population to earn a postsecondary degree. While achieving these boundary-breaking accomplishments, community colleges must be responsive to the changing needs of students, employees, and communities, especially pertaining to diversity, inclusion, and equity.

Increasingly, community colleges are investing in this work through the hiring of a Chief Diversity Officer. The position can play many roles within the institution including outreach and engagement, compliance, employee officer, and/or change agent (Pickett, Smith & Felton, 2017). Responsibilities may include carrying out programs, policy, and procedure reviews, trainings and hiring, and retention practices at the institution.

Seeking increased diverse representation at your institution is a good place to start, but is not enough. Accounting for all students pursuing a postsecondary education, a higher proportion of students of color attend community college (Ma & Baum, 2016). But while providing open access for students, employee hiring has not diversified at the same rate as student enrollment.

Institutions that develop and integrate "organizational strategies and practices that promote meaningful social and academic interactions among persons and groups who differ in their experiences," will be more successful (Tienda, 2013, p. 467). Most institutions are cognizant of addressing overt racism and discriminatory practices, but this is less true for microaggressions. Offering training on racial bias, microaggressions, intergroup dialogue, and cultural competency may begin to shift the campus culture toward one of valuing diverse experiences.

The greatest benefits will occur when an institution is able to look critically at the ways in which current practices and policies are contributing to oppression of historically marginalized groups. This is a comprehensive examination, leaving no area of the institution untouched. Through this process, an institution may review forms and procedures to ensure they are protecting undocumented, transgender, and nonbinary students and employees from unnecessary risk and harm. Marketing and communication may be evaluated to ensure it is language accessible. Institutions may evaluate their use of standardized test scores to determine if it is disproportionately impacting student remediation placement, and may review the role bias in faculty evaluation plays on tenure selection. Once barriers are identified, institutions should be prepared to address them.

Diversity, inclusion, and equity are everyone's responsibility. Everyone has a role to play in identifying areas of improvement, calling out microaggressions, and creating space for diverse voices. It is important to recognize this is an ongoing effort that should be intentional and comprehensive in order to have the greatest impact at our institutions.

Al Grippe, MSM, serves as the Director of Grant Strategy and Development at Oakton Community College in Des Plaines, Illinois. Al earned a Masters degree in Management using Technology (MSM) from Marlboro College in Vermont, and is involved with community organizing, anti-racism, and social justice work in Chicago. Currently enrolled in the final semester of the DCCL program at Ferris State University, Al anticipates graduating with an EDD in December 2018.



QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

How can community college leaders best cultivate a campus culture that advances diversity, equity, and inclusion?

Kenneth Hawkins, MA

Professor of English
Hillsborough Community College
Tampa, Florida

The simple answer to cultivating a campus culture that promotes inclusion and equality begins with hiring more people of color. Continue with "qualifiers" and what I call the, "If only ..." statements, then the modus operandi of employing

the "best" candidates who usually are white will persist. In a report on college faculty diversity, the National Center for Education Statistics points out the staggering underrepresentation of instructors of color. "In fall 2015, of all full-time faculty at degree-granting postsecondary institutions, 42 percent were White males, 35 percent were White female ... 3 percent each were Black females and Black male, and 2 percent each were Hispanic males and Hispanic females."

Diversity and inclusion will never fully happen if we operate on the few who make a difference. An argument cannot be used on whether a college or university is trying to be inclusive when the averages of minority hires are disproportionately low. Another quagmire exist in the hire itself. The institution's goals to have black and Hispanic instructors teach and play a role in students' lives are not being fully realized because the instructor's need to survive and make it to tenure supersedes an interest to mentor. Therefore, they become like any other teacher and thus, the students continue to feel alone, even when having an instructor of color.

Whether hiring blacks and Hispanics is intentional, or as a result of being the best candidate, we need to support these instructors far after they've been contracted. Because these professors face the burden of racism or discrimination, having a job is not the same for them as it is for others. We need to encourage them, and encourage their mentorship of students. If our students see these teachers, they begin to view the world and people differently.

What I have seen is that faculty and administrators alike agree on diversity. They believe in its grand idea. The concern is there tends to be a hitch when considering African American or Hispanic applicants as a final hire: they didn't go to the right college, their grades aren't as high as we want, or they don't have the level of experience we'd like to see. While these ideas and requirements are noble, they are also subjective and weigh on the side of white instructors. In a recent article in the Tampa Bay Times, African American students at the University of Florida, who make up 6 percent of the population, complain that part of the reason they struggle is because they are outnumbered, and therefore possess very little voice with regard to their rights and treatment. In turn, they have created a coalition in an effort to respond to the lack of diversity and care of present black students.

This phenomenon is happening all over the country and is an apparent call for action. Clearly, the approach to inclusion should be one in consideration of other qualities a professor possesses that might, too, help to make the institution great.

Kenneth Hawkins, MA, is a professor of English at Hillsborough Community College in Tampa. He earned his master's degree from National University in La Jolla, California, and worked as a high school teacher for fourteen years before becoming a full-time college instructor. Hawkins' English thesis and other published articles rest on the relationship between race, politics, and opportunity. He currently is enrolled in the DCCL program at Ferris State University.



NATIONAL LEADER PERSPECTIVE

Diversity is increasing across all facets of American society, creating both opportunities and challenges for community college leaders. Clearly, it is important to educate students in an environment reflective of the diversity of the world in which tomorrow's college graduates will be living and working. However, true diversity is about more than just the student population; it involves an institution-wide focus that considers students, faculty, and staff. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders. Their answers appear below.

Community College Leadership and DEI: Advancing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Throughout the College

Kim Baker-Flowers, JD

University Diversity Officer
California State University, East Bay
Hayward, California

"Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced."

~ James Baldwin

Community college leaders today must model diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) throughout the institution, and lead in these efforts. There are constant new learnings, language, and best practices to model; the field of diversity is ever-changing. Community college leaders need to be well-versed in leading across lines of difference in more than just a superficial manner. Most college leaders know what buzzwords are used when speaking about diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). However, true leadership goes beyond that.

The last few years in a community college context have felt uniquely different from any other time in higher education. In 2018, a college leader must possess and demonstrate a well-informed understanding of DEI. Changing demographics and societal normative behaviors demand college leaders to engage successfully across all levels of the college hierarchy with self-awareness and a willingness to enter conversations on uncomfortable topics, and then help navigate their college community through them. Accountability for thoughtful and engaging learning activities that promote DEI is key at all levels of the institution. If it is only present and happening in a few pockets, it will not be sustainable. The only way DEI will work effectively is if there is leadership from the top down, along with a strong faculty partnership that commits to leading DEI in the college classroom.

Community college leaders need to be well-versed in leading across lines of difference in more than just a superficial manner.

An intentional and strategic approach to DEI by community college leadership is integral to cultivating a college environment of inclusion. The best practice model in this regard is a college leadership team that has studied, listened, and then models the action of inclusivity, in conjunction with as foundational college-specific knowledge regarding diversity. A shared understanding of how DEI is defined and outlined by the college community is essential. The college leadership must do more than just use the words; they also must lead the college community into action. This also requires engagement, and accessibility to all members of the community on the leader's

QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

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part, a recognition of their personal biases, and the ability to move beyond them. This leadership requires the ability to hear difficult and challenging pushback and criticisms, with a willingness to think in creative ways. Dialogue, restorative practices, and transparent problem-solving are all tools that can be used to aid in creative thinking amongst the college leadership. The aspirational outcome is to create an institutionalized way of operating through diversity,

and equitable and inclusive practices.

Members of the college community are normally open to participating in strategic initiatives as long as the framing/context is understood and the outcome is clear. At Portland Community College, critical race theory is used as a lens for analysis and a tool to aid with framing in order to ensure that bias, intersectionality, and the valuing of experiential knowledge of faculty, staff and students are considered. DEI efforts are interpersonal endeavors. Recognition, valuing, and celebrating those who participate and collaborate in these initiatives are integral to the success of institutionalizing the communities' behaviors.

The testament to the college's commitment to pursue an inclusive campus lies in its willingness to continue to try.

Community college leaders must appreciate that there is no end, no simple "checking off of a box." DEI fundamentally demands continuous learning. In the current socio-economic times, college communities recognize that DEI is a priority. An orientation towards transparency, of "seeking to understand," of open honest dialogue, humility, and accountability are the foundational values that work to engage a college community. Members of the community are savvy enough to observe when words are being used and no action or change follows. Doing this can do irreparable harm to the community as a whole. If you are going to participate in these endeavors, do so with complete dedication; mistakes and missteps are simply part of the journey. The testament to the college's commitment to pursue an inclusive campus lies in its willingness to continue to try.

Kim Baker-Flowers, JD, serves in higher education and non-profits as a diversity professional at the administrative level, where her approach to diversity work is framed through a social justice approach, informed by critical race theory. She holds a Juris Doctorate from Creighton University School of Law. She is currently the University Diversity Officer at California State University, East Bay, in Hayward, California. Until recently, she served as the Chief Diversity Officer at Portland Community College, the largest post-secondary institution in the state of Oregon.

Her previous positions include Director of Diversity Initiatives for the State of Oklahoma for Teach For America, Chief Diversity Officer at East Carolina University, and Director of Multicultural Student Success in Academic Affairs at the University of Missouri, Kansas City. Kim strives to create inclusive climates and diversity/equity/inclusion professional development for faculty, staff, and students. Her working philosophy stems from Maya Angelou's "when you know better you do better" and believes it is her job to help facilitate with the "knowing."



QUICK TAKES
Highlights
from the Field

Addressing Diversity on College Campuses: Changing Expectations and Practices in Instructional Leadership

by Angela Chen

Given the increasing diversity evident across all facets of American society, this study synthesizes the issues of racial and ethnic diversity in higher education institutions and ethnically diverse college environments, and reviews the associated opportunities and challenges. The author analyzes effective leadership practices in the creation of opportunities to ensure that underrepresented minorities reach their greatest potential and develop the social, intellectual, cultural, and emotional capabilities required today.

<https://bit.ly/2NzFV4I>

The Critical First Year: What New Chief Diversity Officers Need to Succeed

by Witt/Kieffer

The position of chief diversity officer (CDO) has become increasingly prominent in higher education institutions and is critical to their success. Colleges are faced with increasing expectations from constituents around diversity and inclusion that are pushing the need for strong leadership and a strategic approach. This report highlights responses by diversity leaders who reveal that effective D&I leadership calls for a genuinely supportive culture and total buy-in at the top.

<https://bit.ly/2wVWTzd>



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Celebrating Diversity: The Lee College Story (continued from page 1)

to build bridges for all students. Many of these efforts were led with the overarching goal of supporting underserved students by addressing campus-wide improvements and technology upgrades, professional development opportunities, and STEM Outreach activities across the region. These efforts have served over 50,000 students and community members annually. STEM Outreach events have gone to churches, and community events, and celebrated across two counties serving over 200,000 residents. Many of these outreach events involve hands-on learning, bringing children and their families together to learn about all the opportunities not only in STEM, but in education.

First in the World best practices learned from the HSI Initiatives Department steered Lee College to become the sole Texas community college to be a recipient of the First in the World (FITW) Grant. The FITW Grant took the needs of many of our part-time students into consideration as we developed our first Weekend College Program through high-impact practices such as learning communities, hybrid-block scheduling course offerings, and true advising relationship-building support with a College Completion Coach. The Weekend College Program now boasts a three-year graduation rate of 70% in comparison to the state average of 20%.

I believe in empowering our staff in their visions and believe together we will make a much larger impact on closing the societal gap and inequities our students face.

The following student-led organizations, focused on diversity and inclusion, have collaborated on many events to draw attention to social justice issues across campus, the community, and nation.

Reaching Excellence Against Limitations R.E.A.L.'s mission is to "help manufacture an environment where the black voice is heard and put into action." Members have provided mentoring to a group of young men at a local college-bound elementary school, assisting them in building upon their four pillars: Educate, Empower, Enhance, and Create Change.

OHANA aims to use education, support, and advocacy to create a safer and accepting environment for all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. As part of their work, the organization hosts events and activities that bring awareness of LGBTQ+ issues.

MAS Raza Collective, a student organization with ties to the Mexican American Studies Program and Puente Mentoring Project, aims to educate and improve the community through the power of activism and the empowerment of marginalized groups.

Women in Manufacturing is helping diversify the petrochemical industry by promoting high wage, high-demand careers that are often filled by men and preparing woman for those roles.

As an HSI Achieving the Dream Leader College, planning for the future needs of our students, as well as increasing our stance on diversity, is at the core of our mission. Lee College serves the community by providing innovative and quality education to our diverse students along guided pathways to gainful employment, personal enrichment, and life-long learning.

A newly developed Equity Council comprised of faculty, staff, administration, and a community member has begun reviewing data, both qualitatively and quantitatively, in order to address equity barriers for students. As a result of many

of these endeavors, the HSI Department has implemented supplemental instruction in various gateway courses, as well as peer mentoring. Grant-funded Advisors will utilize these resources to provide deeper interventions to assist students with graduation, employment, and/or transfer.

We have leadership representation from all ethnicities and a good balance of females and males.

Lee College's administration is diverse. We have leadership representation from all ethnicities and a good balance of females and males. We work hard to attract strong talent and have faculty and staff who serve as leadership role models for our students. Our team has been successful in raising millions of dollars in scholarships and grants, and are always finding new ways to make college accessible and affordable for all students.

We have made it a priority to increase capacity of our services and facilities for students, faculty, and staff. Newly created endeavors include supplemental instruction, peer mentoring, and an equity council, all of which operate under an equity lens, with disaggregated data at the forefront of implementation and evaluation. Additional student support services have been classroom technology upgrades, various professional development opportunities, STEM Outreach activities that have served over 50,000 students and community members, and enhanced counseling and advising case management strategies.

Together we have now been able to take on a more collaborative non-territorial approach to serving our Hispanic and other underserved populations. This in turn has shown great benefits and strides in serving all of our students and surrounding communities.

I believe in empowering our staff in their visions and believe together we will make a much larger impact on closing the societal gap and inequities our students face. What makes Lee College so amazing is that many of our employees are from this area and carry the true definition of community when they walk on our campus daily. It is an incredible honor to work alongside this dynamic team day in and day out.

Contributors to the Article: Dr. Dennis Brown, President; Dr. Christy Ponce, Executive Vice President; and Victoria Marron, Executive Director of HSI Initiatives.

Dr. Dennis Brown serves as the President of Lee College, a comprehensive public community college of over 8,000 unduplicated credit students in Baytown, Texas, located twenty-five miles East of Houston. Dr. Brown has over 40 years of administrative and teaching experience in community colleges. He earned his PhD from New Mexico State University and Master's degree from Arizona State University. Lee College serves a population of over 220,000 in Baytown and its surrounding communities and seventeen school districts. The College is designated as a Hispanic Serving Institution and as a Military Friendly Institution. Located in the center of the Texas petrochemical industry, the College prepares workers for the ever increasing technologically-based industry. Lee College is an Achieving the Dream Leader College and has been named among the top 10% of community colleges in the nation by the Aspen Institute. Lee College was honored by the American Association of Community Colleges as the national Student Success Excellence Award winner in 2015, and the national Advancing Diversity Award winner in 2018. Also in 2018, Lee College received the Association of Community College Trustees Western Region Equity Award.

