

Perspectives

Community College
Leadership for the
21st Century

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Adapting to Change: Creating a Pathway to the American Dream

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In life, change is inevitable. Likewise, in higher education, change has become a constant. As leaders in the community college sector, surviving change is predicated on our ability to understand what is driving the change and to leverage the market trends to expand opportunity and meet the needs of our various constituents. Clearly, the business of higher education has changed dramatically in the last decade. The important point for new leaders to understand is that the business of higher education is not the point. Instead, the business of higher education is still a means to an end. Delivering on the mission of our colleges in this new and volatile environment is the focus.

I have spent much of my career in leadership roles in the Louisiana Community and Technical College System (LCTCS), the last five as System President. The LCTCS is a mission-driven organization and the primary contributor to the state's workforce and overall educational attainment. We are a system of twelve open admissions, two-year colleges, touching every corner of the state. Our colleges are governed by a single Board of Supervisors, function under one set of policies, have the same admissions application, and a single student information system. This degree of coordination provides the LCTCS with an ability to scale on a state-wide level, affording a unique opportunity to address workforce issues and ameliorate socioeconomic, gender, and racial disparities through access to transformative postsecondary education and workforce development.

Since the great recession of 2008, funding volatility and shifting demographics became permanent features of the community college business landscape in many states. These two factors have put the community college mission and its once reliable business model in the crosshairs across many communities. If by chance you are thinking your state or locality is insulated from such financial challenges, think again. The spiraling costs of health care and retirement liability is suffocating many local and state governments in a way that will have long-term implications. Louisiana, as one example, experienced the nation's largest disinvestment of public funds while raising tuition and fees at a rate greater than any other state in the union. Our colleges collectively went from \$194 million in state funding in FY2008 to \$114 million in FY2016. In that same period, annual tuition doubled for our students. Fundamentally, the funding model of our colleges changed. By 2012, the full effects were upon us. By 2016, our colleges had closed hundreds of programs, eliminated a significant number of positions, and even merged colleges. While the changes were very difficult to navigate, we realized over time that the financial disruption occurring in our state presented a tremendous opportunity to transform our colleges and by doing so, helped to drive

the success of our people and our business partners.

Interestingly during this same timeframe, Louisiana's economy was experiencing significant workforce demand for talent. In particular, the industrial expansion across southern Louisiana brought nearly \$100 billion in capital investments, leveraging the newfound natural gas sources that are transforming the manufacturing sector, reducing costs of production, and infusing new technology into sectors that needed these investments. Southwest Louisiana was booming with economic activity, and was named one of the nation's hottest job markets. In addition, the state has grown a vibrant and diverse information technology sector that includes the headquarters of CenturyLink in northeast Louisiana, a growing cybersecurity industry featuring General Dynamics in the northwest part of the state, CGI in Lafayette, IBM in Baton Rouge, and most recently, the nation's second largest economic development win this past year in the location of the DXC Digital Transformation Center and over 2,000 direct jobs in downtown New Orleans. In each of these sectors, there is opportunity for the students we serve. Our challenge was to ensure there was a pathway into those companies and careers.

While the American Dream can be defined in many ways, financial opportunity and social mobility are both core aspects of what we know our work to be.

The mission of community colleges has always been to provide access not just to higher education, but to the American Dream. While the American Dream can be defined in many ways, financial opportunity and social mobility are both core aspects of what we know our work to be. When the leadership team of Louisiana's community and technical colleges realized both the challenge and the opportunity ahead, we developed a strategy that focused on three simple, yet critically important components. First, we had to look beyond the college to consider the demographics of our communities and fundamentally reconsider the target market of our colleges. Second, we needed desperately to align our program offerings to the needs of our business partners to improve the value of our offerings to students. And finally, we had to rethink how we delivered education and training to students.

As we reviewed the demographics of our state, we quickly realized that focusing our recruitment efforts on the 40,000 annual high school graduates was not the answer. Although this population is important to the future, our state has 1.1 million working-age adults (25-64 years) with a high school diploma or less. Continuing to recruit local high school students simply would not effectively deliver our mission to the masses, nor allow our colleges a large enough pool of

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Students, their needs, the labor market, and learning technologies are always changing, and so must institutions. The outcomes of any single reform process may be less important than creating an institutional culture that values ongoing improvement.

- J.B. Grossman

Today's community college landscape is evolving, and change seems to be a constant—particularly at institutions embracing innovation as part of their culture.

- Randy Weber

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EMERGING LEADER PERSPECTIVES

Numerous forces—including societal, political, and economic trends and pressures—are driving change in the higher education sector. The challenges facing community college leaders are immense, and are unlikely to abate any time soon. As a result, we are taking a look at the “big picture” of educational change this month, and will assess more specific components of this change dynamic in subsequent issues later this year. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders. Their answers appear below.

Kara Jackson, MSN

Associate Professor
Clark State Community College
Springfield, Ohio

Community colleges evolved from a need for higher education institutions to better serve their communities and local workforces. They were unconventional institutions known for propelling innovative ideas. Those unprecedented philosophies, however, are now of the past. Many new, innovative ideas are now being offered by organizations outside academe. Community colleges are no longer the innovators in education. The higher education landscape is rapidly evolving, and community colleges need to catch up, which involves taking risks. It’s time for community colleges to make changes, take leaps, and be willing to take the bigger risks that are needed to thrive in this changing cultural and political climate. No longer can community colleges do what they have always done. Instead, they need to think outside the box and rethink how education can be delivered.

Although keeping a pulse on current trends is important, it’s not enough either. Instead, possible future trends need to be identified even before they become trends. We need to continue to involve our stakeholders and communities, but we must now look at the workforce innovators, new best practices in growing fields, and current research. Perhaps by partnering with pioneering organizations, community colleges can work to remarket themselves and their role in workplace development. Possibly then community colleges can return to their original roots and become the leaders of innovation in higher education that they once were. Reactivity is no longer an option; community colleges must become more proactive in their approach to education.

It is important to keep in mind one key concept: the difference between hard work and innovation. Community colleges everywhere are made up of caring, determined individuals who continuously strive for growth in student success. They collect and assess data, brainstorm, and implement new ideas. They join forces with nationalized incentives and programs. They act upon ideas that may be ground-breaking but are not enough for the current diverse student population or workforce. It is a step in the right direction, but community colleges need to start taking leaps to reach the level of success that they are capable of reaching. Community colleges must think even bigger and lead change not as individuals within institutions, but as strong, unified institutions.

Change is inevitable. We are at a time when change needs to happen at a faster pace and with greater urgency. This is challenging for a culture that is accustomed to moving through change at a slower pace. Perhaps the best way to prepare for the changes needed is to look within the organization and start preparing for the transformations that are desperately needed for the success of community colleges, their students, and their communities.

QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

How would you describe the ongoing evolution of the community college in this era of uncertainty?

Brenda Sipe, EdD

Director of Continuing Studies
Kendall College of Art and Design
of Ferris State University
Grand Rapids, Michigan

As they were at their inception, community colleges are leading change in higher education. In just one century community colleges have reshaped our educational system by significantly expanding access to higher education and blurring the lines between secondary and career education. Balancing open access with program excellence, while supporting students with diverse goals and abilities, has required creative solutions. Today’s challenges are even more compelling, but their extended experience leaves community colleges well-equipped in this era of uncertainty.

Numerous sources maintain that organizations that do not innovate will not long survive. With current competition from non-traditional educational providers, this surely applies to community colleges. The “knowledge economy” has changed the way education is delivered and perceived. Public perception of higher education has declined along with traditional funding sources, while expectations have increased. Community colleges can survive by doing what they have been doing all along, innovating.

Historically higher education is not agile, and decisions laden with bureaucracy slow down innovation. Barriers at community colleges may include limited discretionary funds, lean staffs, and funders and regulatory bodies that must be satisfied. Community colleges, however, have some characteristics that may support innovation, such as a relatively short organizational history. Some community colleges with transformational leaders have organizational structures that allow them to make decisions more quickly, or that allow for trial and error in the development of innovative solutions. These colleges can respond to change more effectively.

Student success should be the driving force behind institutional change, not just competing with new markets or providers. Students are increasingly non-traditional, engaging with education in non-traditional ways. The notion of one career for life is obsolete, and education now occurs over a lifetime. Many students need developmental courses, and most need financial assistance. Clearly there is no more one-size-fits all for today’s students. While four-year institutions may worry about diluting advanced degrees by offering non-credit and short-term learning, or assigning credit to prior learning and life experiences, community colleges are listening to their students and considering the full range of student needs. Community colleges are better positioned to meet the flexibility needs of today’s students. Bundled courses, certifications, badges, stackable credentials, and career pathways are all serving students, while keeping the college competitive in the education market.

Community colleges are at the forefront of innovating to meet student needs: designing courses that reach diverse learning styles, making data-centric decisions, and ensuring learning outcomes are met. As they continue to innovate, focusing on their mission of serving students, community colleges will add value to the education they provide.

Reactivity is no longer an option; community colleges must become more proactive in their approach to education.

Kara Jackson is an Associate Professor at Clark State Community College in Springfield, Ohio. She is involved with a number of college initiatives, including the faculty development committee and new faculty mentoring program. Kara earned her BSN from Urbana University, and MS in Nursing and Masters in Healthcare Administration from the University of Phoenix. Currently Kara is pursuing her doctorate degree at Ferris State University in the DCCL program.



Brenda Sipe, EdD, is Director of Continuing Studies at Kendall College of Art and Design of Ferris State University, Grand Rapids, Michigan. She currently serves on Ferris State University’s Steering Committee for HLC Reaccreditation, and is a member of KCAD’s President’s Council and Dean’s Council. She holds a BFA from Grand Valley State University, an MFA from Michigan State University, and an earned doctorate from the Ferris State University DCCL program.



NATIONAL LEADER PERSPECTIVE

Numerous forces—including societal, political, and economic trends and pressures—are driving change in the higher education sector. The challenges facing community college leaders are immense, and are unlikely to abate any time soon. As a result, we are taking a look at the “big picture” of educational change this month, and will assess more specific components of this change dynamic in subsequent issues later this year. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders. Their answers appear below.

The Ongoing Evolution of Community College Reform: Internal Structural Redesign as the First Steps in a Longer Journey

Shanna Smith Jaggars, PhD

Assistant Vice-Provost of Research and Program Assessment
The Ohio State University’s Office of Student Academic Success
Columbus, Ohio

Over the past two decades, policymakers have increasingly called upon community colleges to improve their rates of student retention, graduation, and transfer to four-year destinations. Across the 2000s, leading community colleges enthusiastically responded to this call by designing and implementing a wide variety of reform-oriented interventions. Most colleges focused their efforts on specific student support interventions, such as advising, student success courses, early alert programs, tutoring, or summer bridge programs. Few involved changes in classroom instruction or reforms of college-level curricula – and those which did tended to focus on developmental education. As a result, faculty teaching in college-level programs were largely uninvolved in, and unaffected by, reform efforts. Moreover, colleges’ innovative practices were often directed at only one segment of the student experience, usually at the beginning; and each practice typically reached a relatively small number of students. Overall, the reform movement across the 2000s did not shift colleges’ outcomes in a substantial way.

In our 2015 book *Redesigning America’s Community Colleges*, my colleagues and I synthesized evidence across the previous fifteen years of reform, and argued that to improve outcomes on a substantial scale, colleges must fundamentally rethink their organization and culture. In particular, community colleges were created in order to expand college enrollments, particularly among underrepresented students, and to do this at a low cost. However, the emphasis on low-cost enrollment encourages colleges to offer an array of often-disconnected courses, programs, and support services that students are expected to navigate mostly on their own. To improve outcomes, colleges need to engage faculty and student services professionals in creating more clearly structured, educationally coherent program pathways that lead to students’ end goals, and in rethinking instruction and student support services in ways that facilitate students’ learning and success as they progress along these paths. In our book, we refer to the resulting strategy as the guided pathways model.

The guided pathways model has now become a national movement, with more than 300 community colleges undertaking large-scale guided pathways reforms. Most of these colleges have focused on internal structural redesign: mapping program pathways; clustering programs into meta-majors; redesigning intake, advising, and academic planning; and integrating academic support into critical introductory college-level courses. These structural changes do seem to improve student progression and completion in and of themselves; but they are also important as a foundation for colleges to extend their work into two important additional pieces of guided pathways: redesigning instructional approaches within every classroom, and creating inter-institutional pathways with local partners.

First, rather than conceptualizing each individual course as a stand-alone

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experience, the guided pathways approach conceptualizes each course as a step along a coherent path to program completion. Instruction should therefore focus on building the skills, concepts, and habits of mind that are necessary for success in subsequent courses, as well as on sparking and supporting students’ interest in learning. This framework for instruction, known as

learning facilitation, typically requires the sacrifice of some existing content within each course. Accordingly, during the early step of mapping program pathways, it is vital that faculty define course learning outcomes in ways that are consistent with guided pathways and learning facilitation. In subsequent steps, colleges also must redesign their hiring, promotion, and professional development structures to support ongoing improvement in terms of students’ achievement of these learning outcomes.

Second, in order to improve pipelines into and out of a given community college, program mapping is indeed a critical early step. As next steps, however, institutions also need to redesign their external relationships with feeder high schools, destination four-year colleges, and area employers. For example, some colleges are now leveraging dual-enrollment programs to reach into local high schools, guide students through an exploration of college and career options, and enroll students in dual-enrollment courses in their prospective area of interest. Similarly, colleges should work with

their highest-volume four-year destinations to design joint advising approaches, transition programs, and perhaps even dual-admission systems, in order to create a clear, well-trodden, and well-supported pathway between earning an

associate degree at the community college and becoming a thriving junior at the four-year destination.

Guided pathways reform is neither quick nor easy. Most colleges require two or three years to lay the cultural and political groundwork for reform, three more years to create and implement internal structural redesigns, and additional years to implement instructional and partnership improvements. However, if colleges demonstrate that they are working step-by-step through a clear strategy toward substantially improving student outcomes, they will put themselves in a better political position when arguing for increased public funding or working to shape other state policies in ways that support student access and success.

[T]o improve outcomes on a substantial scale, colleges must fundamentally rethink their organization and culture.



Shanna Smith Jaggars is Assistant Vice-Provost of Research and Program Assessment for The Ohio State University’s Office of Student Academic Success, where her research focuses on university programs, services, and policies which aim to improve student success. Previously, Dr. Jaggars was Assistant Director of the Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University. She earned her PhD at the University of Texas at Austin, and has published extensively on student success topics in journals such as *The Journal of Higher Education*,

Economics of Education Review, *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, *Community College Review*, *Computers & Education*, and *American Journal of Distance Education*. She has contributed chapters to *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research* and the *Handbook of Distance Education*, and also serves as an Associate Editor for the journal *Online Learning*. Her 2015 book, *Redesigning America’s Community Colleges: A Clearer Path to Student Success* (co-authored with Thomas Bailey and Davis Jenkins), distills a wealth of research evidence into a playbook for college redesign.

QUICK TAKES

Highlights from the Field

Changing Community Colleges: Early Lessons from Completion by Design

by Jean Baldwin Grossman and others

This brief reviews the CBD process and aims to provide college and higher education system leaders, as well as concerned funders and policymakers, with a framework for thinking about systemic change. The brief explains how systemic change is different from other, more incremental changes that colleges often implement and why systemic change is difficult, but necessary. It also provides insights from the CBD experience that can help others considering similar initiatives.

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

The Continuing Evolution of the American Community College

by Terry U. O'Banion

One of the key chapters of 13 Ideas That Are Transforming the Community College World, this article notes that the community college is a dynamic institution that has been changing for decades, and often is not clearly understood today. O'Banion reviews and summarizes the thirteen key ideas identified as the most significant concepts impacting the contemporary community college by a group of national leaders, and provides his perspectives on each one.

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



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students to meet the burgeoning demand of our industry partners. As such, we began a deliberate effort to target the adult student market. Our colleges have flipped their entire focus to one that seeks to attract the working adult to attend college to gain the skills and education needed to improve their lives.

We learned quickly that students without a high school diploma can do college level work. These students are highly motivated and bring life experience to the classroom. In a bold step, our Board of Supervisors reinforced their commitment to open admissions and eliminated the high school diploma as a requirement for admission to our colleges. They went on to adopt a wide range of financial aid strategies that remove barriers for the most vulnerable adult populations. Most notably, the Board adopted the 5 for 6 Scholarship Program by allocating \$600,000 to assist students with no high school diploma and enrolled in adult education programs to cover the cost of six credit hours. Successful completion of the six credits allows students to qualify for federal financial aid. This effort represents an opportunity to obtain a postsecondary credential that leads to a high-wage, high-demand career. Further, the Board, in conjunction with the Louisiana Board of Regents, has positioned Louisiana as one of the first states to begin using state need-based-aid to fund workforce non-credit training like what is being proposed at the federal level today. While many colleges today rely upon the mythical excuse of an improving economy to explain enrollment declines, our colleges are reversing that trend and seeing adults returning to our colleges, pursuing the skills and education that allow them to fully participate in the economy.

Given the experience of the last decade, we have become more purposeful in how we manage the changes within our sector. We are far more sensitive to and more keenly aware of the landscape around us.

Aligning program offerings with the economy is easier said than done. Because Louisiana was faced with budget cuts, we were forced to make difficult cuts. We eliminated programs that were not in demand in the economy, bolstered existing in-demand programs, and in some cases developed new in-demand programs. Our colleges went from over 1,000 programs in 2008 to about 450 today. Ultimately, we were forced to face the reality that our tuition increases required that the value we deliver to our students improve. No longer could we charge students over \$4,000 annually in tuition for a program that led to a job earning \$20,000 per year. The proposition to the student simply was not a good one. Instead, we began focusing our limited state funds on programs that resulted in good jobs, careers, and a strong paycheck in return for the tuition and hard work our students were investing. Since 2008, the number of graduates from our colleges has more than doubled with graduates now earning over \$45,000 per year, on average, in their first year after completion. The alignment our colleges have created is now changing how we describe our offerings. While we are—and always will be—teaching institutions with extraordinary faculty and cutting-edge programs, we now see that our immediate value to the student lies in our ability to leverage relationships with some of the largest employers to serve as the front door into careers with those employers.

And finally, our colleges are seeking to improve how we meet students where they are and help them accomplish

their goals. Our colleges are shifting course offerings to fit the schedule of our students. Some colleges are embracing shorter terms rather than the outdated, traditional 16-week semester. The student success movement of the last two decades has taught us a great deal: stackable credentials, co-requisite models, and much more. I believe the most important result has been the realization that the greatest enemy to completion in college is not the comma or quadratic equation—it is time. Our students can do the work, they simply need to do it in time increments that allow for life's realities. They also need to enter programs and quickly gain the skills that allow them to earn while they learn. Faculty are beginning to see the value in delivering technical skills on the front end of programs to allow students to go to work while continuing to pursue the next level certification or degree. When and how we deliver instruction must focus more on the life needs of our students.

As leaders in the community college sector, I challenge each of you to think about the who, what, and how of your colleges. The mission of our colleges is far too important to the people of this nation to continue to do the same things we have done for years simply because we have always done it that way. We must embrace the role of innovators. More and more our university partners are turning to our colleges to understand how they too can become more nimble and agile as the world around us requires. We are the example because we are closer to the market than the rest of higher education. We are not better than, nor less than, but different. We have often built our colleges in the image of universities. It is time we recognize that our colleges must be reflective of our mission and the students we serve.

Given the experience of the last decade, we have become more purposeful in how we manage the changes within our sector. We are far more sensitive to and more keenly aware of the landscape around us. Change represents opportunity for our leaders to forge a better, stronger college and improve our ability to deliver on the mission. This work, and all the change that comes with it, makes our roles as leaders more important today than ever. While we are making progress in Louisiana and around this nation, there is much work to be done. Today, there are 64 million working-age adults who need the skills and education required in this economy. What are we doing to create a path to the American Dream?

Monty Sullivan has served as the fourth President of the Louisiana Community and Technical College System since 2014. Since his appointment, he has led Louisiana's twelve community and technical colleges to several significant accomplishments, most notably, the development of Our Louisiana 2020: Building the Workforce of Tomorrow public agenda. Prior to being selected as president, he served as Chancellor of Delgado Community College in New Orleans for nearly two years. Under his leadership, Delgado experienced a systemic and cultural resurgence with nearly \$200 million in facility developments, significant gains in foundation giving, substantial increases in student success rates, record numbers of graduates, and a reconnection with the business community of the region. Dr. Sullivan earned his doctorate at Louisiana Tech University and has served in six different colleges and in two state community and technical college systems over the last two decades, providing a broad background understanding of the importance of higher education in solving the most pressing needs of communities, industry, and people. He also has worked successfully in both state and federal advocacy efforts to improve the policy environment.

