

Perspectives

Community College
Leadership for the
21st Century

FEBRUARY 2019

www.ferris.edu/alliance

The challenges facing college presidents today are immense, and few candidates come prepared in all of the key areas of presidential responsibility.

- Susan Resneck
Pierce

Greater attention to intentional onboarding and increased continuing professional development opportunities can equip college presidents with the knowledge and skills they need to navigate and adapt to the diverse and evolving needs of their institutions.

- Aspen Institute

**Doctorate in
Community College
Leadership**

Empowering graduates to advance community colleges towards excellence and community responsiveness through exemplary leadership.


**FERRIS STATE
UNIVERSITY**

**ENROLLING NOW FOR
THE NEXT COHORT**

Survival Skills for First-Time Presidents: A Practical Guide From the Frontlines

Jon D. Mandrell, EdD

President

*Tennessee College of Applied Technology
(TCAT) – Murfreesboro
Murfreesboro, Tennessee*

Having come from a law enforcement background prior to academe, I am accustomed to the term, "There's a new sheriff in town," which I am sure you are as well. Oftentimes, this can imply change, a new day, or a new image. While that can be true and inevitable, I learned in my time at DCCL, and also in my higher education experience, that individuals should be both deliberate and delicate in how they manage that change and its pace. As communities and technology transform, we are always changing and evolving as institutions. This is built on the premise that colleges are responding to community needs daily and building our curricula and services around those demands. It is both an exciting and challenging intersection to be addressing during an equally challenging time in the nation. As servants of our community, our work here may never be done, and deservedly so.

I was once given the advice to focus first on people, processes, and then programs as a starting point for leading a college.

When you make your way to campus as a new president, there are a variety of survival skills you will want to employ. First and foremost, reflect back on what brought you there. Perhaps more importantly, remember what you stated during the search process, particularly in the various forums and while responding to questions about what you could bring to the college and community. People will remember your words, your interests, and opinions. If you made any promises, be ready to deliver and to expand upon those remarks. Many will be asking about those statements, and you most certainly should recall them if you made such commitments. Also, no more campaigning for the job is necessary. You have arrived!

In all your efforts, it should be well known that your first priority is student success. Regardless of what issues you encounter or how complex they are, student success fits into any conversation. After all, your mission is to be student-driven and to lead the community in its success. This involves a well-oiled machine that includes K-12, industry, universities, foundations, chambers of commerce, and many more service organizations. Not

only do these partners want to hear about your vision and commitment to continuous improvement, but they also want to learn of your plans to enhance their communities by educating their students. Never forget whom you serve, and recognize that no group is greater than the student.

I was once given the advice to focus first on people, processes, and then programs as a starting point for leading a college. That seems to have rung true as people are what puts the chain of events in motion that therein direct your processes and programs. We are in the people business and our human capital is invaluable in our efforts to serve and advance an institution. As a first-time president in my initial days, it has become inescapable that many people on and off campus have a lot to say and are seeking an opportunity to be heard as part of an inclusive environment. As a result, active listening is a survival skill that is key when assuming the office. Not just listening, but actively hearing what is stated and having a thought or inquiry about such. Don't be so quick to state your response though, as there may be several moving parts to the situation. Let the other party be heard and understood. This not only provides an opportunity to learn more about others and the institution, but also supports the nurturing of relationships and helps in establishing rapport.

As you continue nurturing these relationships, forming partnerships, and facilitating change, remember that you are starting anew. What you did at your last college or experience may not be of value like it once was.

As you continue nurturing these relationships, forming partnerships, and facilitating change, remember that you are starting anew. What you did at your last college or experience may not be of value like it once was. In fact, it is highly unlikely. Make it a habit to refrain from starting a sentence with, "At my last college." While it can be instinctive to a response or may contribute to a discussion, it can be perceived as talking down to others, casting doubt on the college's previous hard work, or simply boastful. Most of your work may have come from a previous college, but each institution has its own identity. Help this college and its community work within its own identity.

Focus on the growth of others. In my time at Ferris State University and within higher education, I often debated
(continued on page 4)

EMERGING LEADER PERSPECTIVES

Today's community college presidencies have become more complex, high-profile, and stressful than ever before. Yet, it has been claimed that within the field of higher education, not enough is being done to prepare first-time presidential hopefuls to become CEOs, especially at a time when such training is more important than ever. Most incoming presidents will bring a wealth of experience to the position, but few will present a full complement of skills required. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders. Their answers appear below.

QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

What should first-time presidents know about the types of survival skills they will need when assuming the office?

Aura J. Cazares, MLA

Student Conduct and Compliance Officer
and Title IX Coordinator
Henry Ford College
Dearborn, Michigan

Psychologist Guy Winch proposes the concept of mental hygiene in his 2015 TED talk, *How to practice emotional first aid*, and explains the benefits of equating one's mental care to our physical well-being (TED, 2015). First-time presidents typically have only a short time to demonstrate their ability to secure strategic plans, increase enrollment and retention, solicit endowments, and understand the corporate culture of their colleges. These tasks can easily overshadow scheduling self-care, such as time to ensure their physical, mental, and emotional health. Scheduling time for themselves, friends, meditation, reading, or other forms of disconnecting from college is a vital survival skill for a first-time president.

The Aspen Institute's Task Force on the Future of the College Presidency (2017) also recommended the importance of mental, emotional, and physical health as part of the report, *Renewal and progress: Strengthening higher education leadership in a time of rapid change*. The report also reinforced the importance of developing a relationship with the faculty, making connections with students and donors, and learning local and regional political landscapes within the first year. In addition to these practices, the task force recommends "crafting a plan for the president's emotional and physical well-being as part of the first-year plan" (2017, p. 31). The individual manner in which presidents can employ such practices will be dependent on their particular circumstances. Nonetheless, the starting point may be a different survival skill – cultural humility.

Cultural humility is a method used to train medical professionals which focuses on challenging biases and norms as they relate to how they care for patients with different backgrounds (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). A first-time president also should employ cultural humility as a cultural survival skill. The application of this principle can lead to a better understanding of the constituents served and lessen cultural landmines. Examples include engaging with faculty on current initiatives and their role in governance; displaying institutional courage to refrain from embarking in educational trends that may not be apt for their institution; and providing a voice and institutional support to the people impacted by the disparities of lack of diversity, inclusion, and equity. Cultural humility empowers the college community, while providing the space for executive self-care.

Institutional strategies presented in the Aspen Institute's report provide a clear and practical blueprint for a successful first year; however, such strategic survival skills will falter if college presidents do not exercise self-care and cultural humility. As is colloquially stated, "It's lonely at the top," and it is probably worse in cases where physical, emotional, and mental burnout occur. Like any survival kit, these recommendations can be considered and put into practice by all new leaders, including those embarking on a first-year presidency.

Aura Cazares serves at Henry Ford College as Student Conduct and Compliance Officer and Title IX Coordinator, where she develops policies, procedures, and investigation trainings which focus on balancing the neurobiology of trauma and due process rights. She earned her MLA from the University of Detroit Mercy, is enrolled in the DCCL program, and has been accepted in the New Leadership Academy (NLA) Fellowship Program at The University of Michigan.



Shani Newton, MEd

Success Coach
Clark State Community College-Greene Center
Beavercreek, Ohio

It is no secret regarding the future deficit of community college presidents across the nation. As a response, there have been many doctoral degree programs created to prepare future leaders for the task of becoming a community college president.

Coupled with this surge of new leadership, there will be a shift in leadership styles and new ideologies. Establishing new methods are imperative for the campus culture, faculty and staff retention, and relationship-building with the community and industry partners. There may also be a demand for the first-time president to create a campus environment that will contribute to overall student success, including retention, graduation, and successful transfer rates. These types of efforts build morale from within the organization to motivate, change, and produce positive outcomes. A first-time president will already possess many of the tools he/she will need for a successful tenure in the presidency; however, it is also important for the first-time president to recognize and create a plan for the demographic diversity of the institution's student body, faculty, staff, and the surrounding communities.

There has been a significant shift in today's community colleges. Community colleges have been challenged to prepare students – many of whom are often academically unprepared – to continue an academic career, finish a two-year degree or training certificate, or transfer to complete a baccalaureate degree. Community college presidents and key leaders must continue to dedicate themselves to meeting the needs of their changing student population – a population that is becoming more and more ethnically diverse with under-represented students.

The challenge of ensuring equitable student success outcomes, given the increasing demographic diversity of the community college student population, requires leadership that can respond effectively. Regardless of the leadership style, the first-time president must possess characteristics that encourage minority student populations to work toward and achieve academic success. This person can work within the system while also advocating for change, providing support, and striving to affect the educational environment for the benefit of minority student success.

Whatever the leadership style, the first-time president should be well suited to advocate for student success amongst under-represented students. Each leadership style can provide a significant impact for those efforts as well. In many cases, the predecessor will have begun the footwork toward allocating resources and providing support for minority student success. Initiatives and support services may have been established to increase the academic success of under-represented students. It is imperative that America's community college leaders use motivation, self-determination, and stimulation to compel key stakeholders such as board members, faculty, staff, parents, and students to recognize the value of investing in such resources and support.

Shani Newton is a Success Coach at Clark State Community College-Greene Center in Beavercreek, Ohio, and also serves on the diversity committee and assists with the administration of the Men of Clark State, a group focused on the academic progress, retention, and success of the college's African American male population. Shani received her MEd from the University of Arkansas, and is currently enrolled in the Ferris State University DCCL program.



NATIONAL LEADER PERSPECTIVE

Today's community college presidencies have become more complex, high-profile, and stressful than ever before. Yet, it has been claimed that within the field of higher education, not enough is being done to prepare first-time presidential hopefuls to become CEOs, especially at a time when such training is more important than ever. Most incoming presidents will bring a wealth of experience to the position, but few will present a full complement of skills required. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders. Their answers appear below.

Survival Skills for First-time Community College Presidents

Angel M. Royal, PhD

Chief of Staff
American Association of Community Colleges
Washington, D.C.

Rather than focusing on survival skills for a first-time presidency, which indicates that the individual in his/her first presidency or just embarking upon it is starting at a deficit, first-time community college presidents should focus on developing a leadership strategy which allows them to thrive in this new role. Some new presidents miss this critical step in planning and often don't realize its importance until they find themselves facing criticism from trustees, college staff, or the community, which is often too late to make a difference. Having worked with community college presidents over the last seven years and having been privy to hosted conversations of new presidents sharing what they wish they had known before assuming the presidency, my best advice for success can be summed up by the old adage, "Prior planning prevents poor performance."

[F]irst-time community college presidents should focus on developing a leadership strategy which allows them to thrive in this new role.

In April 2018, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) and the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) released a monograph focused on presidential onboarding and transitions. This document, coupled with the third edition of the AACC Competencies for Community College Leaders, provide advice and resources for first-time community college presidents that can greatly extend their tenure in this exciting and challenging role. The advice that I would offer to new leaders is that they avail themselves of the resources available to them for ongoing professional growth and development.

First and foremost, the first-time president must conduct an honest assessment of his/her competence to lead a student success agenda. This includes being familiar with accreditation, resource allocation, utilization of data for decision-making across the institution, and other competencies. A student success agenda also requires a leader to possess the skills necessary to mobilize the college community to advance the institution's goals. Through use of the AACC Competencies, the first-time president can determine where gaps exist in his/her skillset and develop a plan for closing those gaps. That plan could include ongoing professional development designed for CEOs, networking with seasoned leaders, and executive coaching.

In the new president's onboarding process, communication with the district CEO or board chair, for leaders reporting to a board of trustees, is critical. It is important to be transparent about the priorities for the institution and what actions or steps will be required to accomplish them. Sometimes, a district CEO or board of trustees might have high aspirational goals for the new president, which require that new leader to make radical changes and decisions that turn the culture of the institution on its head. If the supervisor does not have a clear sense of what is required to advance the agenda and cannot provide unequivocal support to the new president despite the resistance that he/she might face, then the new president must not move

QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

What should first-time presidents know about the types of survival skills they will need when assuming the office?

forward on this agenda. The first-time president should not allow himself/herself to be placed in a position where he/she is standing alone in advancing the agenda.

It also is important to advocate for district CEO or trustee support for the first-time president's professional growth, which could include coaching resources or other supports which allow the new president to seek advice and counsel from a trusted resource. Both the supervisor and president must

mutually agree to the plan, and in cases where the new CEO reports to a board, the board chair must be a champion for why the CEO's ongoing development is critical to the institution's long-term success. No one begins his/her tenure in the presidency having experience in every single area of the institution that impacts student success. Wise supervisors understand this and express a willingness to position the leader to be successful in advancing the institution's goals.

Another important tool for first-time presidents that cannot be emphasized enough is networking with other first-time and seasoned presidents. These opportunities provide the first-time president with the opportunity to share his/her experiences and learn from the experiences of others. AACC provides a New CEO Academy for new presidents, and a Presidents Academy Summer Institute (PASI) for new and seasoned presidents. The agenda for PASI is developed by presidents for presidents, and the event provides a safe space for leaders to be vulnerable about their challenges and to receive support and advice from others on how to move past those challenges. Both the New CEO Academy and PASI provide presidents with the opportunity to learn about the latest trends and issues impacting the sector.

Another important tool for first-time presidents that cannot be emphasized enough is networking with other first-time and seasoned presidents.

AACC CEO Dr. Walter G. Bumphus often says that the community college presidency is one of the most rewarding and challenging 1,103 jobs in the country. For first-time presidents, the stakes are extremely high, so it is of the utmost importance to put in the required work to ensure long-term success.

Dr. Angel M. Royal is chief of staff for the American Association of Community Colleges. Royal serves as Secretary to the AACC Board of Directors and has oversight of the nine standing commissions. She also oversees and coordinates the association's annual convention, is responsible for the AACC Competencies, and manages the association's corporate program. Prior to joining AACC, Royal served as executive director of university outreach for The University of Texas at Austin. Before returning to the field of education, she worked for a year in private industry as the director of special programs and initiatives with Best Associates in Dallas, Texas. From 2002 to 2007, she served as executive assistant to the president and vice president of external affairs with the Louisiana Community and Technical College System. In addition to her administrative work, Royal has been an adjunct faculty at Baton Rouge Community College and at the University of Texas at Austin. Royal holds a master's degree, EdS, and PhD in curriculum and instruction from Louisiana State University.



QUICK TAKES Highlights from the Field

Renewal and Progress: Strengthening Higher Education Leadership in a Time of Rapid Change by The Aspen Institute Task Force on the Future of the College Presidency

Given today's fast-changing socio-economic dynamic and the revolving door of the college presidency, the Task Force found that to succeed in the future, presidents will need a skillset "that is both deeper and broader than ever before." This report presents the findings of the Task Force as they investigated what will be needed to strengthen the college presidency, along with concrete recommendations for the profession. Access this work here: <https://bit.ly/2I95qrl>

Executive Leadership Transitioning at Community Colleges by AACC and ACCT

Presidential departures may have become fairly commonplace at community colleges today, but often such leadership transitions can be fraught with risks. This paper reviews the critical factors connected with presidential transitions, helps to inform boards of trustees and clarify their roles as they plan and develop detailed strategies for successful presidential transitions, and highlights the critical importance of the selection and onboarding processes. Access this work here: <https://bit.ly/2UTMj6C>



**FERRIS STATE
UNIVERSITY**
Alliance for Community College
Excellence in Practice

Published by the Alliance for
Community College Excellence
in Practice,
Ferris State University,
Doctorate in Community
College Leadership
Big Rapids, Michigan

EDITORIAL STAFF

Jeanne Bonner, PhD, Editor
Mara Jevera Fulmer, EdD, MFA,
Design & Production Editor

To send comments or receive a
copy of this publication, please
contact us at: ccallian@fsu.edu

Survival Skills for First-Time Presidents: A Practical Guide From the Frontlines (continued from page 1)

with others the meaning of leadership. The discussion can go for days regarding characteristics of a leader and what it truly means to be in a position of influence. What has become increasingly apparent to me is that team chemistry and trust is key. To establish that, it is imperative that others grow and maximize their strengths. This means pushing others outside of their comfort zones and helping to find avenues to grow personally and professionally.

As mentioned earlier, be the last to speak at times. Many of us enjoy participating in conversations and being a contributor. Until I became a president, I often contributed to discussions like anyone else at the table. When in the presidential role, I began to notice the beauty in watching conflict become constructive. I found that if I contributed to the conversation too early, the opinion could sway my direction, which may not have always been the consensus or best decision. Allow people to disagree. Allow them to discuss and work through problems. In certain moments, give them permission to fail. This enables them to innovate, experiment, and think differently. Critical thinking and honesty are key to a team's growth. Being the last to contribute to the conversation is not always a negative. It provides an opportunity to see all sides, watch the team dispute the issues, and then land on a decision. It empowers and facilitates discussion. Let them have the last word; you still get the last decision.

Have a shared vision. As you venture into new territories and relationships, aside from student success being your primary focus, be guided by a collaborative approach that is built upon a shared vision. Not your vision, not their vision, but a shared vision. Not only does this demonstrate your commitment to an open and inclusive environment, but also your dedication to move as one vehicle. Will there be disagreements and differences? Of course. Your goal is to be a consensus builder who makes decisions for the greater good. There will be times when you fall on the sword for a decision you made, but owning that decision and demonstrating accountability will represent your willingness to admit fault and learn from a mistake.

If you take a glance at your mission, it is likely to include your engagement in the community and partnerships. Engaging the community can happen on many levels and you will be hard-pressed to find a conversation in which you cannot be involved. After all, community colleges are "the community's college," so being a contributor to the community and collaborating is part of institution's foundation and mission.

You will inevitably come across severed past relationships or partnerships that went awry. Take note of those relationships and study them closely without having an opinion, at least publicly. There is a very good chance that your presence alone as a new president can change the dynamic of the relationship and help in moving forward. Seek first to understand the situation. Any situation that took years to deteriorate will require some tact and thoughtfulness before it can be restored. Consider all sides and look for an opportunity to mend a fence, where possible.

Know the media. Do not hesitate in setting up a time to get to know the local media. After an introductory

meeting, establish a time to have standing meetings with them. This is a great opportunity to inform them of college happenings, where you are headed, and also what controversial topics may be on the table. This allows you to get in front of the topic and inform the community about why you made a particular decision and how you came about making that determination. Within these conversations, it is also a great time to invite the community to contribute to your college. This could possibly be in the form of asking their input on strategic directions, new program ideas, or perhaps even teaching opportunities. Recruiting great talent to your college oftentimes comes from telling others directly in your community about your needs.

Being a new president requires being an agile thinker, an active listener, and providing continuous communication to stakeholders.

Above all, live your mission. This includes your vision and values. A college mission is its guiding light and many of your toughest decisions can be answered by reading it. Have a budget decision to make? Maybe a programmatic one or even a partnership? Look to your mission and be able to recite it. Not only is it guiding your strategic plan, but also your leadership decisions and service to the community, with none being more important than the student.

Being a new president requires being an agile thinker, an active listener, and providing continuous communication to stakeholders. Along this journey, presidents should remain true to who they said they were in the search process, while remaining genuine. Visibly demonstrate your passion to serve – and focusing on student success can serve as a guiding light in that endeavor. Likely the road ahead will be full of challenges and surprises, with the community's support and relationships invaluable during this time of transition. Embrace the challenges and opportunities with a students-first approach each and every single day.

Dr. Jon Mandrell serves as the President of Tennessee College of Applied Technology (TCAT) in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, which also includes the Smyrna Campus. Prior to this position, he served as the Vice President of Academics and Student Services at Sauk Valley Community College in Dixon, Illinois, where he was the Chief Academic Officer (CAO) and Chief Student Services Officer (CSSO). He holds an EdD in Community College Leadership from Ferris State University and an MA in Law Enforcement and Justice Administration from Western Illinois University in Macomb, Illinois.



Dr. Mandrell has worked closely with several workforce initiatives within higher education, school districts, and industry. In addition, he has worked extensively in the formation of industry partnerships, as well as with the alignment of curriculum to meet today's workforce demands and bridge the skills gap. Additional initiatives have included forming workforce advisory councils, expanding dual enrollment to high school students, and increasing the focus on college credit for prior learning experience.