

# Perspectives

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Community College Leadership for the 21st Century

As state funding towards higher education continues to decline, community and technical colleges must become more entrepreneurial in their approaches toward institutional sustainability, which requires increased efficiencies.

- Mordecai I. Brownlee

For community colleges to be truly entrepreneurial, they must be willing to embark on a transformative journey grounded in responsible risk-taking, problem-solving and creative thinking.

- Madeline Pumariega and Carrie Henderson

## College Entrepreneurship in the Post-Pandemic Future

**Sean L. Huddleston, EdD**

President  
Martin University  
Indianapolis, Indiana

By now, most colleges and universities have faced the sobering reality that higher education institutions have been impacted, and in many ways, fundamentally changed by the COVID-19 health pandemic. Schools across our nation are faced with declining enrollments, shuttered buildings, and other challenges that have substantially limited the probability of achieving revenue projections for this fiscal year. In most cases, annual operating budgets for our institutions were established and approved at a time when little was known about the health pandemic. Adding to these woes for some institutions has been the need to shoulder unanticipated expenses for upgrading technology infrastructures to successfully transition to virtual teaching, learning, and student support models.

While these items certainly address the concerns of getting the college or university's enterprise and operations through the pandemic, the greatest critical collateral damage for any institution has been the students. Incoming freshman classes have been diminished by the disappointment of students not being able to partake in the early college experiences they were promised during their campus visits. Many of these students have wondered if it might be better to simply wait until their schools of choice can deliver on those promises.

*As colleges and universities grapple with simply finding ways to make it through the year, looming questions stand in the shadows awaiting answers. What will our institutions look like after COVID-19?*

Students and faculty are being introduced to each other virtually, and ironically, attempting to build social bridges and connections through social distancing. And, as we deal with one public health pandemic, another pandemic emerged that many would argue has always been there. Structural and systemic racial inequality and injustice issues have plagued our nation since the first slave ship arrived in Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619, and were brought to another crescendo in 2020. For higher education, this focused an even brighter light on the persistent inequities that can negatively impact the campus climate and, ultimately, the bottom line for institutions.

As colleges and universities grapple with simply finding ways to make it through the year, looming questions stand

in the shadows awaiting answers. What will our institutions look like after COVID-19? How have health and social issues changed how we teach and engage students, and what will be their lasting effects on higher education? What do we need to start doing, stop doing, and keep doing to be more proactive and limit the instability caused by the things we cannot control? There are no simple answers. Even the best predictive analytics models cannot foresee what the future may hold for higher education in a post-pandemic world. While we do not know much, I believe that we can no longer avoid the imperative of re-imagining, re-defining, and re-calculating the higher education enterprise. More importantly, we can no longer maintain a strong reliance on tuition, fees, state appropriations, and donations as primary revenue drivers for sustainability and growth.

*As it relates to revenue diversification, this means that we must become more entrepreneurial in our ideas, offerings, and approaches.*

To address these challenges, higher education institutions must think and act differently. As it relates to revenue diversification, this means that we must become more entrepreneurial in our ideas, offerings, and approaches. Colleges and universities lead the way in educating future leaders, generating and publishing critical research, and serving as centers for thought leadership and innovation. These alone or combined demonstrate the diversity of our strengths and contributions. Thus, it would seem that our approaches to revenue generation should also be equally as diverse. However, the idea of embracing entrepreneurship in higher education may be challenging for some.

Several colleges and universities have resisted business and operating models that appear to be aligned with what they might deem as commercializing the institution and potentially threatening the academy's freedom and integrity. They may construe the idea of entrepreneurship as an effort to detract from higher education's true mission and purpose. This thinking would suggest that entrepreneurship and the role of higher education institutions conflict with each other. I submit that the two are actually quite complementary.

I began my higher education career eleven years ago, after several years in corporate America. My prior career experiences included positions in which I was

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## EMERGING LEADER PERSPECTIVES

As the coronavirus pandemic continues relatively unabated in the United States, it has become increasingly apparent that colleges and universities are suffering from its negative impacts. As a result, community college leaders are far more open than ever before to making transformative changes and are becoming increasingly more entrepreneurial in their approaches toward institutional sustainability. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders. Their answers appear below.

### QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

**In what ways can a culture of entrepreneurship benefit community colleges post-pandemic?**

#### **Pete Lacey, MSA**

Vice President of Student Services  
St. Clair County Community College  
Port Huron, Michigan

The once-popular song, *Don't Stop Believing*, by Journey is a favorite of mine. As the pandemic has tasked campuses with many new challenges, I am reminded of a line from the song which goes, "Some will win, some will lose. Some were born to sing the blues. Oh, the movie never ends. It goes on and on, and on, and on." If you know the song, you may be singing now but pause for a moment to think about those words. What can we do to "win" during these uncertain times? How can we avoid "singing the blues" while facing seemingly endless challenges? As the pandemic rages "on and on," community college leaders must create a campus culture of entrepreneurship to thrive in the future.

Since March, campuses nationwide have launched many creative new solutions. For example, when our campus buildings closed in March making placement testing unavailable, faculty collaborated by launching a guided self-assessment process to support fall enrollment. A short video explaining entry level English courses and a brief online Math test provided students direction on where to begin their college journey.

To address the shock students felt from moving to an online schedule, our team launched a Student Navigator program by adjusting duties of existing tutors and staff. Navigators were trained to maneuver the online world and assigned to each online class. Both faculty and students welcomed the extra support. The creative program provides on-demand help for students now in an online learning environment many did not choose.

Reflecting upon the past several months, it is clear our campus has prospered thanks to the entrepreneurship of employees. Faced with an outdated process requiring paper forms, a staff member explored how Microsoft Office 365 applications could help. She later told me that her "critical thinking skills were in high gear" as she spent hours testing an automated process. Ultimately, several new electronic processes were implemented, allowing faculty easily and securely to submit grade changes, program substitutions, and more remotely.

The pandemic serves as a critical reminder that we cannot be satisfied with the status quo. A quote by actor Ryan Reynolds recently caught my eye: "Any kind of crisis can be good. It wakes you up." I pondered how our campus had the talent and tools to improve long before the pandemic, yet it forced us to wake up. The lesson for all leaders is to remain wide awake and rely upon the skills of the entire team to tackle challenges. Collectively, community colleges must evolve and have the courage to act during a time of crisis to best meet the present and future needs of our students. While it can be exhausting and difficult work, *Don't Stop Believing!*



*Pete Lacey is Vice President of Student Services at St. Clair County Community College in Port Huron, Michigan. In this role, Pete is responsible for Admissions, Advising, Athletics, Enrollment Services, Financial Aid, Housing, Institutional Research, Marketing and Communications, Records, Student Clubs and Activities, Student Behavior and Support, Testing, TRIO, and Tutoring. He earned his MSA from Central Michigan University and is currently pursuing his doctorate in the FSU DCCL program.*

#### **Patrick R. Turner, SMME**

Former Vice President and Chief Information Officer  
Schoolcraft College  
Livonia, Michigan

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced community college leaders to rethink everything about how they do business, while desperately attempting to hang onto their core mission, vision, and values. Such rethinking has required nearly a complete tear-up and restart of pedagogy and course delivery. Challenges include a nearly 100% pivot to online learning, while adapting to new concepts of social distancing, an at-home workforce, synchronous teaching, hosting meetings via enterprise teleconferencing, and an increasing cyber security focus. All further stretch an already strained environment of massive unemployment, changing student demographics, declining enrollments and state funding, and worsening national perceived value of higher education. Community colleges need to embrace needed levels of entrepreneurship, given that they are in a fight for their very existence and require competitive differentiation to win an increasing percentage of a shrinking pool of potential students.

Academic freedom and faculty contracts have led to faculty who have never used an online LMS and now must learn the subtle difference between pointing to an in-class PowerPoint and making sure to look into the webcam so students feel engaged, all without normal cues indicating which students are paying attention and which are on their phones. Pedagogical paradigms are going through a tectonic shift, while declining enrollments are forcing colleges to investigate alternative sources of revenue to keep the lights on.

Colleges must reduce brick and mortar costs and increase competitive differentiation. Innovation in accessibility and engagement through novel access to resources enables a growing work-from-home staff and clientele, while reducing cost. Some colleges are attempting to lease building space left vacant by pandemic changes in a glut of available commercial real estate. Others are turning to private/public partnerships such as an externally funded on-campus soccer dome paired with a long-term lease with a private soccer club, an elite sports training center partnership with public sports medicine and physical therapy providers, and land leases for office complexes, while providing leaseholders with security and IT services, none of which happen overnight.

Embracing entrepreneurship means mitigating the need for on-premise labs via advanced methods like VR (virtual reality) and AR (augmented reality), replacing physical lab sensory experiences with the likes of pendants and sensory gloves. Large investments in capital and training are needed to help faculty and instructional designers build pedagogically effective courses in these new modalities. Likewise, pandemic-driven entrepreneurship is epitomized by technology changes in course delivery for higher education. For more information, see the author's *League for Innovation article* and this *interview*, discussing enhanced remote accessibility, mobility, affordability, and equity for all.



*Patrick R. Turner, SMME, most recently served as Vice President and Chief Information Officer for Schoolcraft College in Livonia, Michigan. He has spent over half of his 40-year career as a CTO/CIO in the software, scientific computing, data center, and higher education industries. He earned his master's degree from MIT, holds a US Patent, and is published internationally. Currently, he is enrolled in the DCCL program at Ferris State University.*

## NATIONAL LEADER PERSPECTIVE

*As the coronavirus pandemic continues relatively unabated in the United States, it has become increasingly apparent that colleges and universities are suffering from its negative impacts. As a result, community college leaders are far more open than ever before to making transformative changes and are becoming increasingly more entrepreneurial in their approaches toward institutional sustainability. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders. Their answers appear below.*

### QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

***In what ways can a culture of entrepreneurship benefit community colleges post-pandemic?***

## Crisis, Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Opportunity in the Post-COVID Community College

**Alicia L. Booker, MSA**

*Vice President, Workforce, Community & Economic Development  
Cuyahoga Community College  
Cleveland, Ohio*

Community college sustainability during the COVID-era reminds me of a quote often attributed to Darwin, "It's not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change." But change takes time, and as we have learned in this COVID environment, time is something we have precious little of. Today, things are moving at a blindingly fast pace and delay can be costly. What is required now are leaders and educators who can move, adapt, innovate, and who are not afraid to take risks. What community colleges need are entrepreneurs, leaders who have an entrepreneurial mindset – a mindset that looks beyond where we are now, to where we need to be, and that can turn the institutional rudder toward the future.

History has shown us that there is not just one force that will have the greatest impact on our survival, rather it is a multitude of things, taken together, that will ensure our future. Community colleges faced this situation, maybe more so than any other time in history, during the winter months when COVID-19 hit. It was the beginning of a crisis of global proportions. It also marked the start of a national effort to transform education as we know it. These changes were not about the next great idea, or some prize to be won. They were about survival. They were about the students. They represented a new way of thinking and doing. Amid the chaos grew entrepreneurial activities clothed in innovative thinking.

**Collaboration is Key to Innovation.** The good news: Most community college administrators, faculty, and staff have embraced the innovations that were born of COVID-19. Many have moved past the point of initial resistance and accepted the changes. Some even like them better. The bad news: These pilots that were so hastily melded together must now be brought to scale and launched as version 2.0. More good news: We are seeing the beginnings of a cultural shift in community colleges toward innovation, and that starts with collaboration.

Community colleges are engaging their neighboring colleges to discuss processes and sharing best practices. Although this was being done before, it is now being done with a renewed understanding that a rising tide lifts all boats. There are instances where one college president is designated to represent all the college voices on certain issues. Marketing campaigns, which are so critical to the growth of these institutions and which are normally done individually, are being done jointly, with one message supporting the services of all the colleges.

The embracing of virtual resources also is taking place, from virtual tours to accommodate students, to the use of virtual job fairs to support employers. The "because we've always done it that way" policies are being replaced with flexible, real-time options, often based on suggestions from faculty. Colleges have also borrowed some business concepts, like the loss leader, even offering full-tuition assistance to ensure

more student enrollments and support student completion.

**Business Continuity vs. 'Crisis-tunity.'** Most community college leaders are agonizing over the decision to cut costs amidst declining revenues

and increased costs related to new safety standards. Community colleges have utilized this pandemic time to focus their attention on business continuity, understandably so. Although this is important, perhaps even more important is the need to think in terms of "crisis-tunity" – the opportunity to support crisis-related innovation and plan for growth. For higher education institutions, it is a time for strategic re-thinking – and for re-examining the strategic plan and organizational priorities with a different entrepreneurial lens – and doing it with the understanding that things will not return to the way they were before.

***While they certainly should be commended for their effort, the real work must now begin. That is, the long-term transformational work of shifting the culture from process-centric to entrepreneurial-minded.***

**The New Entrepreneurial Norm.** The "new normal," as it has been coined, will be the normal for the foreseeable future, so shifts in operation are necessary. What was done a few short months ago out of necessity, must now be woven into the fabric of the institution, adopted, accepted, and approved as the new way of doing things. For most of our institutions, this is not news. Community colleges transitioned months ago, at the drop of a dime, and did it well. While they certainly should be commended for their effort, the real work must now begin. That is, the long-term transformational work of shifting the culture from process-centric to entrepreneurial-minded. If this is done, community colleges should be able to survive this current age of uncertainty. If done well, the college will not only survive during the pandemic, but thrive in the post-COVID future with a leaner structure, more collaborative practices, enhanced technology-driven classes, and the ability to meet the needs of its growing customer base.

*Alicia Booker serves as the Vice President for the Workforce, Community & Economic Development division for Cuyahoga Community College. She joined the college in 2014 as a seasoned professional with more than 28 years of workforce development experience. Her background includes extensive work in developing career pathways models, implementing sector-based workforce strategies, and developing in-demand training programs.*

*Her previous higher education experience includes work with the State of North Carolina Community College System where she provided policy and programmatic guidance to 15 community colleges. She also served as the Assistant Vice President of Workforce Development, administering open enrollment and non-credit programs as a part of a two-college workforce alliance in Richmond, Virginia. Prior to joining Tri-C, Alicia served as the Vice President for Workforce Development for the Community College of Allegheny County in Pittsburgh, PA. She received her MSA from Central Michigan University and is currently completing her doctorate in the Ferris State University DCCL program.*



**QUICK TAKES  
Highlights  
from the Field**

**It's Time to Digitally Transform Community College**

by Sean Gallagher

The author notes that more than ever before, community colleges must position themselves for the digital future since they will face intense competition in an effort to meet the demand for digital pathways to four-year degrees, non-degree offerings, and work-related learning. The evolution in strategy and resourcing that this will require provides exciting opportunities for entrepreneurs and policy leaders interested in this crucial sector of higher education. Access this work here: <https://bit.ly/36v1fQ2>

**The Indispensable Institution: Reimagining Community College**

by Opportunity America Working Group on Community College Workforce Education

As a foundation for this report, the Opportunity America working group on community college workforce education considered innovative practices being implemented by community colleges and state education authorities across the US, concluding that as the nation rebuilds after the pandemic, what's needed is a new vision. Recommendations are offered for community colleges, along with suggestions for three critical changes to federal workforce policy and student financial aid. Access this work here: <https://bit.ly/32HvJ0f>

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**College Entrepreneurship in the Post-Pandemic Future** (continued from page 1)

responsible for leading diversity and inclusion, supply chain management, and business development for my employers. When I joined higher education, one of my early roles as a department leader provided a budget that was less than what I felt was needed to achieve all of the goals I had established for myself and the department. I'm sure most administrators reading this can relate. Knowing that a re-allocation of funds from other areas in our division to increase my budget was not possible or practicable, I needed alternatives. My colleagues in the division had similar concerns, so whatever I came up with needed to help all of us.

My job at the time was to lead diversity, equity, and inclusion training and development for the institution, helping to increase the knowledge, skills, and efficacy of our faculty, staff, and students in these areas. I had held a similar role for corporations in the past, and at one point, started and successfully grew my own consulting firm and provided these services to clients. I knew that a market demand still existed and could generate revenue for the university if we offered the work I was already doing internally to businesses and organizations outside of the institution for a fee. Leaning on my previous experience as an entrepreneur, I created a business plan to develop a diversity and inclusion consulting practice within our department. I proposed the idea and was allowed to run with it. In its first year, the new consulting practice generated enough revenue to supplement our division's budget. It also established corporate partnerships that could be expanded upon in other areas of the institution.

Like many institutions, Martin University, where I currently serve as president, has been negatively impacted by COVID-19. We are a small private institution that predominantly serves African American, low-income, and non-traditional students. As such, approximately eighty percent of our revenue is generated from tuition and fees. If the declines in enrollment and gift revenue we are experiencing this year were to continue at the same rate without the addition of other sources of revenue, our institution would face an uncertain future and ultimately be looking at the possibility of closure. For us and many others, thinking and acting entrepreneurially represent not just our new reality. They are our imperatives.

*For us and many others, thinking and acting entrepreneurially represent not just our new reality. They are our imperatives.*

For Martin, my previous institutional entrepreneurship experience has guided us to a strategy that we believe will provide revenue innovation and diversification. Martin University will launch our National Center for Racial Equity and Inclusion in 2021. The center will offer fee-based diversity, equity, and inclusion education, training, and support services to individuals, businesses, organizations, industries. Our faculty will help develop and deliver educational content and materials for the center to maximize and effectively utilize the talent and resources already present. Courses on these subjects typically taught in our degree programs will be offered as stand-alone learning modules both virtually and in a hybrid format. Our Marketing department and Admissions office will help

recruit clients for the center as they simultaneously deploy strategies to attract students. Additionally, the Office of Institutional Advancement has added the National Center for Racial Equity and Inclusion to our university's case for support to help generate philanthropic funding. This comprehensive approach allows the university to generate revenue from other sources, while utilizing existing resources and maintaining our mission and purpose.

These personal examples join other entrepreneurial approaches that successfully have been implemented at colleges and universities throughout the country. Some have developed strategies to provide external client services for research and evaluation, conference space and event planning, marketing, public relations, catering and dining, and many others. It is important to note that when adopting such an approach, the institution should focus on areas in which they possess marketable expertise. The goal should be to develop new streams of revenue that can be sustained. Concentrating on areas where your institution may already have some experience will help manage and control any investments needed to operationalize the approach. This focus will also help achieve buy-in from the Board of Trustees, faculty, staff, students, and external stakeholders.

*Ideas and approaches that are entrepreneurial in nature will likely challenge higher education traditions but will help ensure its future.*

Thinking and acting entrepreneurially is not new to colleges and universities but considering approaches for when we become a post-pandemic society is an urgent call to action that must be top-of-mind of college and university leaders now. Ideas and approaches that are entrepreneurial in nature will likely challenge higher education traditions but will help ensure its future. I believe our sector's existence, stability, and growth depend on how innovative and bold we are willing to be.

*Dr. Sean L. Huddleston began his presidency as Martin University's 5th president in 2019. Dr. Huddleston's entire career in higher education has been focused on leading institutional efforts that create conditions of success for nontraditional students and those who have been historically underrepresented and underserved. Prior to joining Martin University, Dr. Huddleston served as the inaugural Vice President and Chief Equity & Inclusion Officer for the University of Indianapolis. In this role, he led system-wide efforts that enhanced institutional excellence through the design, implementation, and assessment of institutional diversity, inclusion, and equity initiatives. He held similar roles at Framingham State University and Grand Valley State University and has taught various courses at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.*



*Dr. Huddleston's educational experiences have focused on non-traditional, adult learners in higher education. He earned his MEd degree in Adult and Higher Education and an EdS in Leadership degree from Grand Valley University. Dr. Huddleston completed his doctorate in Community College Leadership at Ferris State University and has also received professional certifications from Cornell University and Dartmouth College.*