

Perspectives

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Community College Leadership for the 21st Century

With a jolt of this magnitude, with this rapid of an onset, at this pace, and with this level of uncertainty, we must lead and make decisions without precedent—a massive challenge.

– Philomena V. Mantella

Leading an academic institution in a crisis is stressful, given that the role and the influence of the leader are magnified in times of change.

– Ruchika Tulshyan

Leading Higher Education’s Emergence Post COVID-19: A Call to Action

Alicia B. Harvey-Smith, PhD

President/CEO
Pittsburgh Technical College
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Novel coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) has caused the United States to push the ‘pause’ button on life as we knew it. While corporations and small businesses were forced to cut production, hours, or close entirely, there were those in education who transitioned quickly and emerged more versatile and nimble than anticipated, and were able to adapt to one of the most challenging periods in our nation’s history.

Although the country may have paused, many post-secondary education providers never did. While some have contended that higher education is ‘a change-resistant enterprise,’ Pittsburgh Technical College (PTC) proved that we can – and did—move at the speed of thought. Our higher standard was evidenced through PTC’s planning and upholding the mission of empowering students to succeed, no matter the obstacles.

While some have contended that higher education is ‘a change-resistant enterprise,’ Pittsburgh Technical College (PTC) proved that we can-and did—move at the speed of thought.

Pittsburgh Technical College is a regionally accredited leader in private non-profit higher-education and is committed to student-centered learning. PTC consists of nine academic schools and more than 30 career-focused programs awarding certificates and associate and bachelor’s degrees in competitive fields.

All across America, COVID-19 forced colleges and universities to quickly transition all of our brick-and-mortar education to virtual classroom learning. We needed to anticipate every possible scenario and then envision new possibilities.

As COVID-19 continues to spread its effects throughout our country and our lives, campus administrators everywhere are unsure what lies ahead – and when traditional on-the-ground learning will return. Once it resumes, what will be required? What does this mean for fundraising and endowments? How do we build our pipeline of students without our traditional approaches to contact? How will enrollment be impacted?

These are great questions, and the answers will require a re-imagining and an ability to seek out the opportunities hidden within the chaos. It will be our task to decipher the chaos. As Jose’ Saramago wrote, “chaos is order yet undeciphered”.

COVID-19 has created the opportunity for us to think differently about college education. Questions regarding value and cost have persisted for years and COVID-19 has, in many ways, forced a reckoning. Our traditional approaches to strategic planning, enrollment management, financial models, instructional modalities, and student services must now be reconsidered through a new lens.

How will higher education respond and lead through this period, keeping our organizations focused and moving forward together? How will we reckon with this demand for immediate change, fewer resources, and an even higher level of scrutiny and accountability? How will our structures and missions evolve to better align with the needs of those we serve and gain increased relevance with business and industry as new jobs emerge?

During this period, visionary and entrepreneurial leadership will make the difference.

Leadership Matters.

In short, it will require bold and competent leadership, comprehensive and integrated communication strategies, increased collaboration, and compassion. During this period, visionary and entrepreneurial leadership will make the difference. As colleges work through this time of uncertainty, there is an opportunity to reimagine and create innovative partnerships, expand research, development and training for jobs of the future, professional development of faculty and college teams, redistribute the higher education infrastructure, and launch innovative curriculum post COVID-19.

What has become abundantly clear is that there is an opportunity through leadership to define our future by design and redefine our role in the new normal. As a provider of rigorous education and training for the middle-skilled workforce, colleges like PTC have the unique opportunity – in fact, the responsibility – to own a leadership role in rebuilding our communities, states, and nation, as we emerge from this global pandemic. I contend that through effective leadership and planning, Technical and Applied Educational Institutions will find a welcome home in the new normal as the preferred curriculum, due to its alignment with business and industry and employment expediency.

We don’t know what long-term effects COVID-19 will have on workforce issues of supply and demand. What we do know is that the needs of employers will be different. We can anticipate that unemployment rates will remain high for some time; different ways of working will emerge, and a differently trained workforce will be required.

To lead, we must move quickly; there is no time for ‘pause’
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EMERGING LEADER PERSPECTIVES

As our nation struggles with the unprecedented havoc created by the COVID-19 pandemic, community colleges are facing enormous challenges as college leaders attempt to navigate through these previously uncharted waters and begin to reimagine our colleges. Pressures are building daily, and it has become abundantly clear that colleges cannot keep on doing their work in the same ways as before. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders. Their answers appear below.

QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

How can community college leaders best direct the community college's emergence post-COVID-19?

Michele Albright, MS-CTE

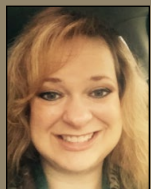
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Life as we knew it will not return to how it was. However, as Benjamin Franklin stated, "Out of adversity comes opportunity." The coronavirus has taught us the value of flexible and adaptive leadership and allowed experimentation with emerging ideas and technology. Long discussed changes have quickly become practice. Amid a pandemic, colleges have flipped theories, introduced an alternative, and used its human capital to support stronger communities. After many aspects of college life returns to normal, I hope several new developments will remain the same.

Colleges leaders have "leaned in" hard, listening to their communities, students, and employees. For this, we are grateful. We know that "normal" situations are gone. With that, our professionals, students, and relationships all mourn losses in one capacity or another. While suffering individually, generous faculty and staff provided countless hours emailing, calling, and video chatting with displaced students. Leadership teams have created fundraising campaigns and advocated for CARES funding. Faculty have transformed lab space to produce PPE and conduct research to combat the pandemic. College support services have shipped supplies and food and offered campus space to assist healthcare. The pride that comes from working in a college environment that aligns its expertise with the needs of its community is, to me, the most important lesson we can provide students.

Historically, regional recovery has been impacted by intellectual and product developments made within community colleges. Partnerships between local employers and community colleges lead to innovative programs and employment opportunities. From a national unemployment rate of 3.5% in February 2020 to 11.1% in June 2020 (BLS), it is necessary to get skilled people back to work. What this means is, colleges need relevant programs. Community colleges are uniquely situated to meet these challenges, however not without collaborative partnerships with local industries. Leadership that prioritizes community engagement will expand experiential learning and hands-on practicum while aligning with the local workforce and economy. Consequently, this will also enrich the college experience and increase ROI for both students and stakeholders.

Incredible plans have evolved in record time: emergency response, educational continuity, virtual learning, and re-opening to name a few. Experts from all areas of colleges have assembled to brainstorm, share resources, and support the continuation of academic programming and operations. Committees have spent their summers together making decisions and creating fluid guidelines based on the varied phases of state mandates. So now, let us further these plans to launch long-term institutional improvement. By evaluating the college mission, listening to students, focusing on strengthening community, and creating an enriched educational experience, we now have the opportunity to continue the momentum toward growth and excellence for students and colleges.



Michele Albright, MS-CTE, returned to Ferris State University in 2011 as an employee and full time student after 20 years in the business sector. She earned her MS-CTE degree while advancing into a role as a leader in both career services and volunteer engagement. She has taught numerous courses and facilitated hundreds of career development workshops. Currently, she is pursuing her doctorate degree in the Ferris State University DCCL program.

Keambra Pierson, MA

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It has been just shy of half a year since higher education institutions scrambled to cope with a highly indeterminate and rapidly evolving landscape of COVID-19. As the pandemic continues to shape and change lives, community college leaders must develop an adaptable plan that sustains community college education. The world has been thrust into a new way of living, which brings community college leaders an opportunity to reimagine their visions, values, and goals.

Change is inevitable and offers an immense opportunity to stretch leadership skills. According to Kouzes & Posner (2017), personal best leadership involves a shift from the status quo, and no one achieves a personal best by keeping things the same. Leading a college through a pandemic is certainly a change from the status quo. A crisis makes one want to cling to the comfort of established mindsets and behaviors, but an old mindset may not be useful in a situation that has not been faced before.

COVID-19 will continue to bring challenges for community colleges. Low-enrollment, layoffs, and an increased online learning environment are a few common issues that each bring a level of institutional anxiety and stress. Each college will have its own unique challenges. Effectively addressing these issues will be a testament to the leadership on campus. Although the trials will be abundant, this is a prime opportunity for growth. Bold leaders must take a second look at their vision and create a plan to empower and engage their most significant asset; their people.

Envision the future by establishing direction and goals for the current state of the college. The isolation of a pandemic brings forth personal and professional reflection, which lends an opportunity to evaluate existing leadership styles while considering strategies appropriate for the dire situation. It's imperative to be mindful of one's assets, weaknesses, and drive. Self-aware leaders will be more honest, competent, inspiring, and forward-thinking as they navigate these unprecedented times.

Now is the time to eradicate complacency and institute a future driven culture. Moving the college forward will require buy-in from team members and students, all of whom may have a vision of their own. Work to align vision and values while enlisting feedback to gain perspective on concerns and opportunities. Coordinate people to manage the fluidity of the day-to-day operations, as leaders look ahead to the future, post-crisis.

Confidence and motivation will dwindle, but leaders must promote resilience and optimism for the future. Followers will look to leadership for guidance, and leaders must be willing and able to engage, motivate, and pull on the strengths of their people. Create an engaging environment where trust and working relationships flourish. Empower others by strengthening their beliefs in their individual effectiveness and influence.



Keambra Pierson, MA, serves as the Associate Dean of Business, Entrepreneurship, and Professional Development at Henry Ford College in Dearborn, Michigan. She is a Henry Ford College alumna. She earned her MA in counseling from Spring Arbor University and has a diverse background which includes, health, counseling, and academia. Keambra is currently seeking her doctorate as a member of Cohort 10 of the DCCL program at Ferris State University.

NATIONAL LEADER PERSPECTIVE

As our nation struggles with the unprecedented havoc created by the COVID-19 pandemic, community colleges are facing enormous challenges as college leaders attempt to navigate through these previously uncharted waters and begin to reimagine our colleges. Pressures are building daily, and it has become abundantly clear that colleges cannot keep on doing their work in the same ways as before. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders. Their answers appear below.

QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

How can community college leaders best direct the community college's emergence post-COVID-19?

Putting Community Back in the Community College in a COVID-19 World

James R. McCoy, MA

Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Success
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We might be feeling tired, uncertain, and perhaps losing hope as our sense of optimism about the immediate future is waning. We all are navigating this uncharted COVID-19 world. Our collective thoughts are overrun by health and safety concerns. The people we are entrusted to lead are perhaps caring for kids and other loved ones. They are working through strategies for how best to engage their children in remote learning, while at the same time, working through their employment circumstances. Our physical and mental health is under attack and somehow, we need to rise as leaders and lead the people of our colleges to prepare for the role that community colleges must play during this COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

The last several months certainly have been trying times. Setting aside the personal challenges we all have undoubtedly faced, we have been thrust into what seems like a million different directions as we prepare to welcome back our students and employees to a new academic year. We have had to pivot each day in our strategic planning as the pandemic has gained traction. Early in our planning, we may have planned for a return to our physical campuses for the upcoming year. The next minute, we were forced to change course by thinking about what instructional delivery might need to look like if we could not open our physical campuses. Through all of the uncertainty, our students, faculty, and staff have looked to us for clear direction, empathetic support, and ultimately a clear plan for what the immediate future of our colleges would look like.

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Serving as higher education leaders during this time has certainly been a challenging road for all of us. At times, it has probably felt overwhelming with the weight of our colleges resting on our shoulders. However, we must remember that we are not alone during these uncertain times. We must purposefully collaborate with our internal and external communities to work together to move our colleges forward. We must keep community at the center of our community colleges.

To advance our colleges, we must connect with members of our internal community. We must support our faculty and staff in significant and meaningful ways. We need to (re)build a sense of community on campus—particularly since the pandemic has prompted an environment of virtual learning, virtual teaching, virtual working, and thus virtual collaboration. We need to implement strategies that keep everyone connected to ensure the mission of the college can move forward in meaningful and realistic ways. We must provide our team of faculty and staff with the tools and resources

they need to be successful so they, in turn, can help to ensure our students are successful.

Now more than ever, our students are faced with challenges in meeting their most basic survival needs. We must know their stories and their current circumstances so we can meet them where they are and provide them with additional support

and encouragement. We must encourage our internal communities to talk with one another, share their stories of struggle and triumph, and to help one another. Then, and only then, will students truly feel connected to the college community, to their learning, to their instructors, and to their ultimate success.

We must also focus on our external communities. After all, community colleges are the community's college. We serve and employ a population of people that live in our community, we educate the students in our community, and we send our graduates into the workforce within our communities. As such, it is important to collaborate with other leaders in our external community as we chart the course for our college in both the near future and the post-pandemic world.

For example, we must re-engage with our local community safety net organizations as a means of triaging our students who have basic survival needs like food, shelter, and childcare. We must implement strategies where we can make these connections between our students and the external community within the virtual environments that we are currently operating. After all, we know that if students do not have their basic survival needs met, their success in college will certainly be compromised.

Additionally, we must amplify our communication and collaboration with our local workforce development leaders and employers. We must double down in our offerings of workforce aligned credentials of value. With unprecedented unemployment rates in our communities, it is incredibly important for us to stay connected with our workforce leaders and to ensure faculty are trained and ready to go to provide more capacity in programs that are aligned to today's workforce needs. This is particularly important for displaced workers in our community.

We often find ourselves saying to the members of our communities that these are unprecedented times. Armed with this truth, we need to acknowledge that there is no roadmap in the leadership 101 handbook for how best to move forward. However, we do know that together, as a community, we can – and will – build a better tomorrow.

James R. McCoy currently serves as the Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Success at the Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE) and is the Co-Creator and Executive Producer of the Emmy nominated documentary No Greater Odds. Prior to his work at NSHE, James served for nearly two decades in a variety of roles at the College of Southern Nevada, including Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, Associate Vice President for Academic Success, as Chair and Lead Faculty for the Department of Communication, and is a tenured Communication Professor. James also serves as a Fellow and a national Content Expert for Complete College America (CCA). As the CCA state lead in Nevada, his latest work involves the development and implementation of the Momentum Year. A highly sought-after national keynote speaker and presenter, James often talks about the important work that community colleges do in the United States. James had the opportunity to speak during the 2016 Democratic National Convention, where he focused his remarks on the mission of community colleges and student success. He earned his MA from California State University, Fresno, and is currently completing his Doctorate in Community College Leadership at Ferris State University.



QUICK TAKES
Highlights
from the Field

6 Factors Community Colleges Should Consider in Their COVID-19 Response

by Gordon Freedman

In the lingering aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the author posits that community colleges will largely be flying blind. Leaders must attempt to gauge employer demand; yet tooling up to train and educate people to meet that demand will be difficult. What is still unknown is what behavioral changes will be permanent. Six vectors of change that could make a significant difference going forward are presented.

Access this work here: <https://bit.ly/2PE3hFu>

A Post-Pandemic Strategy for U.S. Higher Ed

by Vijay Govindarajan and Anup Srivastava

This Harvard Business Review article focuses on three external forces which have come together to create a perfect storm for American colleges and universities, post-pandemic. These include the public outcry over the skyrocketing cost of higher education and its impact on student debt; new generations of digital technologies that allow cost-effective personalized online education; and the widespread lowered psychological barriers to change.

Access this work here: <https://bit.ly/3ku7nOG>

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Leading Higher Education’s Emergence Post COVID-19: A Call to Action (continued from page 1)

buttons. Colleges with a focus on technical and applied careers must understand the emerging needs of employers. We cannot prepare students for today’s jobs; we must prepare them for tomorrow’s job opportunities. To do so requires understanding how workforce needs are changing, and gaining that understanding requires listening to employers. It requires elevating public and private discourse and partnerships.

The convergence of academic and applied careers has created hybrid career paths designed to build a modern workforce prepared to fill a growing need for knowledge-based, technology-driven job creation. At PTC, over 300 prominent employers comprise 17 advisory boards that help to shape curricula that reflect industry demand and ensure that we are preparing our students to be sought-after, contributing members of the workforce.

Working with these employers helps to ensure the academic programs are driven by project-based, hands-on experiential learning with state-of-the-industry technology that mirror workplace scenarios. It is through the input of our advisory boards that we have introduced programs of study, such as Network Security and Forensics, Smart Building Technology, and our curriculum for Licensed Practical Nurses to earn an Associate of Science in Nursing degree.

Our national initiative and the guidance of our advisory boards, combined with PTC’s culture of excellence and accountability, makes us an educator of choice and contributes, in large part, to 96% of our 2019 available graduates working in-field, either full time, part time, or on a freelance basis.

What has become abundantly clear is that there is an opportunity through leadership to define our future by design and redefine our role in the new normal.

By continuing our rich history of experiential learning and by building upon the quality and alignment of our academic and workforce programs, we are serving the needs of the workplace that will fuel the economic redevelopment of our region, while concurrently positioning our students to succeed, no matter the obstacles.

When the current crisis abates, our region, our nation, and our world are going to need to rebuild. New technologies and associated jobs will be emerging, and employers will want the credibility and proven skill set that comes with having the appropriate certification and degree.

Pittsburgh Technical College is ready to educate students with the knowledge and skills to succeed in their careers from day one. If day one is in two years or in 20, schools like ours can – and do – adapt quickly to changing circumstances.

Forging a New Future.

So where do we go from here? Today’s colleges must collaborate with workforce leaders to understand what they anticipate lies ahead. Armed with this knowledge, we can gain from employers, and we can create programs and training that will equip our graduates with the skills for the workforce demands of the future.

When we step out onto the other side of COVID-19, we likely will find that what we once regarded as ‘normal’ is gone. It is up to us – academic administrators – to assume the leadership roles in guiding our communities, our states, and our nation in the emergence from a global pandemic. It will be challenging, but we will anticipate. We will adapt. And we

will advance the training and experience needed in the next workforce.

I encourage you, my colleagues and friends, to carry beyond the classroom the message of the importance of training for middle-skills careers in defining the new normal. Carry the message to congressmen and corporations, to mayors and media, and to elected officials and opinion shapers.


When we step out onto the other side of COVID-19, we likely will find that what we once regarded as ‘normal’ is gone.

To advance our cause, I have initiated a number of actions to include:

- ▲ Meeting with local, state, and national elected officials to discuss Higher Education’s role in retraining the workforce and supporting economic development post-COVID-19.
- ▲ Serving as a champion for equitable access to effective workforce training and career pathways on the Career Ready Pennsylvania Coalition.
- ▲ Initiating a Virtual Think Tank for College and University leaders to share creative ideas and strategies as we reimagine Higher Education Post COVID-19.
- ▲ Introducing a National Engagement Initiative to build a pipeline to attract, educate, and retrain job-ready graduates.

I urge you to heed this Call to Action and consider comparable measures, as appropriate for your mission and community. Join me in ensuring our message of how colleges and universities can lead Higher Education’s Emergence Post COVID-19. As our world emerges from this pandemic, colleges and universities must also be ready to reimagine, rebuild, and support the economic development of our future redefined.

Alicia B. Harvey-Smith, PhD, is the President/CEO of Pittsburgh Technical College, Oakdale, Pennsylvania, her second college presidency. A learning-centered educator with twenty-five years of experience in leadership, instruction, training, development, and consulting. Dr. Harvey-Smith has served in a variety of senior level positions in higher education, including Executive Vice Chancellor, Vice-President, Dean, and Executive Director. She earned her PhD from the University of Maryland, College Park, and her MS from The Johns Hopkins University. She also holds a certificate of completion from the Harvard University School of Education Competitive Presidents Institutes. Believing in the transformational power of education, systems thinking, and the importance of intentionality, this thought-leader in the learning college and student success movements strives to connect educational systems in this pursuit.



Dr. Harvey-Smith originated The Seventh Learning College Principle, a model of transformational change, which directs attention to the creation and nurturance of cultures that are open and responsive to change and learning. Her research is cited in Redesigning America’s Community Colleges and her publications include: Partnering for Success: How to Build Strong Internal Collaborations in Higher Education, The Seventh Learning College Principle: A Framework for Transformational Change, and Eclectic Insights Part 1. She received the 2019 Women Who Mean Business Higher Education Leadership Award from the Houston Business Journal, and 2020 Awards for Woman of Excellence from the New Pittsburgh Courier, Women of Influence from The Pittsburgh Business Times, and Women of Achievement from Pittsburgh’s Cribs for Kids.