



## Community college leadership development

*Half of today's community college presidents are nearing retirement. What best practices will community college leader training programs employ to assure the success of their successors?*

Observing a shortage of community college administrators in the 1960s, the Kellogg Foundation granted considerable monies to start or bolster existing leadership programs at twelve U.S. universities. The community college leaders who were groomed during the ensuing 1970s and 80s are now retired or close to it, and a shortage of community college leadership is again a reality.

In addition to leadership instincts and skill, a community college president needs a working knowledge of school law, information systems, technology, communications, marketing and PR, community service and more. A successful leader will be a motivator, an energy source, and will often lead by being a team player, one that's at home in the community being served.

### Pedigrees and best practices

Leadership development is complex, multi-faceted and demanding—an not an easy subject to teach. How does one judge the success of something as

amorphous as leadership training? Of the many such programs, are some better than others? John Roueche, who occupies the Sid W. Richards Regents Chair in Community College Leadership at the University of Texas, Austin says clearly, "It's the career success of those who finished that matters."

Roueche heads the oldest such doctoral program for leaders. Since 1944, UT has graduated more presidents, chairmen and deans than any other campus in the country. Notable alums include Belle Wheelan, now SACS president; Bruce Leslie, chancellor of the Houston Community College System; and George Boggs, current president of the American Association of Community Colleges.

In the private sector of the U.S. economy, process improvements and best practices are competitive advantages. They are often closely guarded secrets that determine marketplace winners and losers. Community colleges do not play in that ballpark. Among them, the practices that are the best are also the most copied.

According to Bernard Luskin, executive vice president of Fielding Graduate University, community colleges adopt best practices rapidly. "Sharing, collaborative skills and group dynamics are more highly developed in education than in private enterprise," explains Luskin, who heads up the Community College Leadership program for Fielding in Santa Barbara, California. "Best practices are not isolated; they are widely adopted. Not to do so would be negligence or stupidity."

Drs. Luskin and Roueche share the view that the success of graduates is the ultimate measure of success for any leadership program. But each takes a unique approach to producing leaders.

Fielding Graduate University boasts some firsts: first TV course; first computer course; first Emeritus Institute; first dean of government relations. Luskin says he has a healthy respect for adapting quickly to change. He sees his curriculum as a 21st century variation with breakthroughs in technology and the way they blend.

### Distributive or face-to-face

Fielding embraces a distributive education model, employing 150 faculty and staff in Santa Barbara and another 150 throughout the U.S. teaching students in 20 nations. Many of the Fielding faculty are working deans themselves. Fielding students are often mid-career assistant deans, department chairs and an occasional instructor who is looking to shift to administration.

At University of Texas, it's face-to-face. Students move together in a cohort, establishing goals and objectives and working through issues collaboratively. Students benefit from interdisciplinary interaction on the Austin campus with people from the LBJ School of Public Affairs and the McCombs School of Business.

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Included is a series of workshops with noteworthy campus CEOs. There are also semester-long internships. Dr. Roueche emphasizes, "Each is at the elbow of a leading CEO mentor, with real life experience, cutting edge work. This is serious engagement."

### Applying best practices in the states

Freshly minted community college leaders are expected to transfer their knowledge to their associates. In Kentucky leadership training is open to all full-time employees. Faculty, staff and administrators attend the same classes together. "The dynamic is invaluable. It breaks down barriers," claims Michael McCoy, president

*continued on page 62*



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continued from page 60

**Community college leadership training***Best practices, before, during and after*

- Recruit those who want to lead
- Recognize leadership potential in faculty
- Build teams and use group dynamics
- Take an interdisciplinary approach
- Include exposure to non-academic environments
- Include exposure to other regions and situations
- Involve leading CEOs
- Include hands-on experience
- Share experiences and perspectives
- Reinforce learned material on the job
- Follow-up and track graduates on the job

of Kentucky's Community and Technical College System.

Presidents of the 28 Florida community colleges nominate candidates who attend an intense three-day leadership conference. Included are the requisite speakers from all over the nation. But a Harvard-style case history method is employed. To keep the energy alive, David Armstrong, Florida's chancellor of Community Colleges and Workforce Education, keeps track of the participants to see who is moving into roles of increasing leadership. He uses e-mail to keep them abreast of important issues, discuss strategic planning processes, and challenge them to share their experiences on their campuses.

The notion of "best practices" suggests there are others not so good. Community colleges did not prepare well for the exodus of high level administrators. Even many of the next-in-line replacements are nearing retirement age. The pipeline is not

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adequately filled.

Within higher education, community colleges have allowed themselves to be second class citizens. They do not get a reasonable share of the brightest and best teachers—and, hence, future leaders. Awareness is growing that universities who prepare teachers should include leadership training as part of the curriculum.

"Most graduate teacher education programs train a person to master a discipline, like biology," says Belle Wheelan. "We need to emphasize training that's not just about what you teach, but where." ■

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