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?

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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 Faced with an outdated process requiring paper forms, a staff member explored how Microsoft Office 365 applications could help.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!*

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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.

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