

**Continuing Education and the Campus:
Partnering for the Sake of Learners**

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In these times, partnerships formed by community colleges are considered wise and imperative business. Yet, one of the most results-effective partnerships that could be forged, right under the institutional nose, is largely overlooked. Where conditions are right, continuing education (CE) staff working in true collaboration with campus based credit staff will better meet the learning needs of the community, improve instructional quality, and do so with greater resource efficiency. At many colleges, presidents could take the measure of institutional health, in large part, by examining if staff engaged in the delivery of these learning processes are organized for partnership.

The needs and practices in today's workplace evidence that the preparation of systems learners should be a fundamental charge of learning institutions. Colleges that do not perform as systems themselves, by connecting community with college instruction priorities, will not do well at preparing system thinkers. Colleges will not form the system for wholistic learning or achieve other mission necessities, without the interaction of applied training and general education, credit and noncredit, outreach and campus, and other related functions. Few initiatives of any import can occur effectively at a community college if turf mentalities and superficial administrative boundaries are allowed to stand.

The shared vision described by Peter Senge in his (1990) book about learning organizations, *The Fifth Discipline*, starts with recognition by the external and internal agents of instruction that they have to think and act together to foster learning systems. Their colleges in turn, must give them the security to share turf to place the needs of the learner above their historically divided interests. Presidents must understand the ecology of this, just as CEOs have understood the survival necessity of coordinating sales and manufacturing processes.

Legislation, out of the human investment strategy in Oregon, will soon be on the national agenda to obligate education, social service agencies, and business to perform as a seamless service system. The colleges that will be ready for seamless service must begin to remove the stitches between their campus and marketplace staff.

The force for change that can be exhibited by CE and business industry services (BIS) is dramatically represented in Lee Teitel's (1991) *Community College Review* article, "The Transformation of a Community College." The results described in that case study occurred under conditions of institutional decline and upheaval and were not organized as an overall institutional process. Most presidents would not want to face those conditions before trying to replicate the experiment. Rather, the revitalization of their college may rest with recognition that external and internal staff must team up. It is the job of management to organize the incentives, structure, and the staff learning climate to support that.

College presidents who confine their identification of continuing education to those offices or staff labeled "continuing education or community services" may have reason to be skeptical about the force for change that represents. It is the accumulative strength of all the functions of the college that are CE characteristic or external in emphasis that represents that potential. The market responsive, access or outreach, community problem solving, customer preference, entrepreneurial orientation to services as found in noncredit programming, business industry services, credit outreach, community literacy, distance learning, women's entry, and many other college functions is that force for collegial action and change.

The degree to which these characteristic CE functions are centralized or coordinated among themselves will have bearing on how much team influence can be exerted with the rest of the college. Theoretically, the CE office that administers credit outreach, business industry services, distance learning, or some like service combination has more status and connection to influence general institutional change. A strong business industry operation of itself may have good capacity to effect occupational programs, but little linkage with transfer studies. The CE office that has a conflict or lack of interest in fully representing credit as well as noncredit options to the

client is neither customer responsive or acting for the college as a whole.

Collectively considered, the information, ideas, and connections that result from the experience of the field oriented staff are the powerhouse needed "to have community educational needs and problems flow back and impact the college curriculum"-- "to link our faculty and the college with the real world" as advanced by Dale Parnell in a 1982 speech to the National Council on Community Services and Continuing Education. Lest there be any gloating by CE people over that statement, Dr. Parnell also emphasized this as a "two-way street." "The existing college credit curriculum can provide the basis for the continuing education program, in many instances."

The value of CE personnel on this "two-way street" is in their capacity for environmental scanning, resource development, market research, and community contacting that they perform in the natural course of their jobs. Presidents who do not look past the cash cow value of these staff may be sacrificing the more valuable long-term service results that can be achieved by harnessing their collaborative potential. This is not to suggest that we start up offices of institutional transformation or tell the CE staff they are now performing as environmental scanners. Assuredly, the way to kill off some ideas is to name them, staff them, or assign them. Another caution is against making any moves that inhibit the entrepreneurial thrust of CE staff by over-internalizing them. We can pull them in from the cold, periodically, to serve larger interests of the college, but not let them get too cozy.

The sniping that often occurs between CE and campus based personnel regarding mission, quality, budget, enrollment competition, and other issues is usually baseless. These staff do not examine each other's activities closely enough to figure out where healthy or unhealthy competition, necessary or unnecessary duplication is occurring, if it were. While campus staff are muttering suspicions over CE instructional free-lancing, mainly because they do not control it, the CE people think that by guarding trade secrets they are fending off decentralization threats. What is lost in the standoff are the possibilities for quality improvement of their own products to say nothing of the possibilities for institutional improvement. The following are some actual

and conceptual examples of what can happen if CE and campus staff think together.

Noncredit Programming

The department chair of the business management studies articulates with the noncredit CE professional development program to award credit toward a business degree to CE students completing those courses. The articulation is also extended to business-industry in-service activities in supervision in management. The CE program has new incentives to attract customers and work with industry. The campus credit program has a new student feeder market.

General Public Credit Outreach

Because of the increasing disproportion of part-time to full-time instructors, academic coordination between outreach centers, business, and industry credit classes sites with the campus is eroded. Partnership agreements are drawn between CE outreach staff and campus department chairs to clarify who is responsible for the hiring, orientation, staff development, mentoring, and evaluation of adjunct faculty. Faculty to faculty meetings are held in each discipline to establish where there is to be consistency of teaching practices to achieve similar student outcomes in the same classes. Similarly, it is agreed where autonomy of instruction is supported.

Community Services

Presidents reading the demographic handwriting on the wall, as it relates to future enrollments and mission, may wish to reconsider the community service function. The revival of nonprofit learning and attendant services extended to the under-represented in the community will become a fundamental support for diversity success. Although this movement has implications for colleges to become more things to more people again, there may be a way to do it and still make strategic planners happy. The Oregon human investment strategy referenced previously also has tremendous implications for the renewal of the community service function.

Occupational Learning Systems

At many colleges, occupational faculty are not

utilized as a primary source in industry-site, contract services. The reasons vary from the practical to the attitudinal. Without steady exposure in the business-industry setting, the institutional program can corrode. CE/BIS staff who distrust the currency of the campus program or for other reasons do not draw from faculty for outreach work, will eventually limit their own delivery resources. When they do not assist in building the home program, they risk losing market share in that occupational field.

Occupational clusters that adapt to today's demand will offer a continuum of learning services across the tech prep, job entry, and retraining markets. To do so, they will have to have strong customized training, outreach, continuing education, and distance learning capacity. Revenue gained from these enterprises can be applied to upgrading the occupational area. Instructors will work interchangeably on campus and in industry. They will be trained in the customization process and in how to perform instruction in the industrial setting. There will be systematic applications of the Dacum or like processes, to maintain currency. Business-industry representatives will serve in advisory roles as active monitors of the relevance of instruction offered. Faculty externships in industry will be a common practice.

CE staff will be a major source for reporting workforce trends, for new program development, and to facilitate change in the institution to accommodate change in industrial standards. CE staff will market and manage off-campus projects and share in the proceeds from them. In doing so, they will build capacity for those occupational areas to perform CE functions. They will monitor effectiveness of workforce learning services, advise on staff development needs, and assure industrial leadership is involved in curriculum direction. When CE staff can confidently market occupational learning in any form desired by the client, for initial on-site retraining, the likelihood increases that those employee-students will cycle to the campus to take advantage of equipment, self-paced learning, and other resources that may be difficult to extend off campus. The workforce student who may initially receive noncredit customized training may subsequently become a credit student. Thus, we have a dynamic wholistic system of administrators, instructors,

and students alike cross-learning in credit and noncredit programs.

CE administrators, no less than academic administrators, will have to become learning leaders and institutional partnership leaders. In a time when we need to produce educated technicians and trained professionals, the debate over the importance of training or education has become academic. To serve the learner first, along with the college and client organizations, there must be understanding of the mix and match of assessment, general education, skill building, and differing delivery processes that build individual learning capacity and fit organizational needs. The basic workplace skills defined by business leaders, the Association for Staff Training and Development, and the Department of Labor cut extensively across the curriculum lines of what we have regarded as transfer studies. Retraining, often thought to be the sole province of CE and BIS staff, cannot remain so without wasteful market overlap and the sacrifice of currency in campus occupational programs.

The college will always have new and distinct learning consumers to be reached inventively by staff who think and do in CE fashion. Institutional staff will have the benefit of working in a more stabilized laboratory to validate learning principles. The learner will be served when CE and institutional staff learn to share their vision of learning. The vision will hit the road when the colleges, of all places, learn how to enable staff to think together.

References

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