

# Perspectives

Community College  
Leadership for the  
21st Century

FEBRUARY 2015

[www.ferris.edu/alliance](http://www.ferris.edu/alliance)

We need ... a concerted and sophisticated strategy for "moving the needle" on what counts as evidence of high quality learning... We are in a sea change moment.

- Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U)

Community college transformation... requires all parties to imagine their way out of the boxes in which we work. It demands unprecedented leadership at all levels, as well as collaboration.

- Kay McClenney

Doctorate in Community College Leadership

Empowering graduates to advance community colleges towards excellence and community responsiveness through exemplary leadership.



ENROLLING NOW FOR THE NEXT COHORT

## The Community College Academic Sea Change: Sink or Swim

**Lori Sundberg, DBA**

President, Carl Sandburg College  
Galesburg, Illinois

Higher education is experiencing more change than ever before. For those in higher education, change is coming at lightening speed and from multiple directions. On a macro level, we're experiencing change in terms of greater accountability and regulation from our individual states, the federal government, and our accrediting bodies. At the same time, at the micro level, we are experiencing demographic shifts and changing workforce needs in our local communities and districts. The term "sea change" is used frequently to describe the events shaping higher education, particularly community colleges, today. In so many ways, this is an apt description of the swiftly changing landscape we face.

One dramatically changing dynamic which is simultaneously exciting and daunting is the type of student coming to our colleges and the ways those students want to learn. This is exciting because in many ways as educators, we are still looking to science to determine how actual learning takes place. It's daunting because the variables that used to define learning are shifting. Today's students are not the same as many of us were when we were students. For those in my generation, there was nothing better than the traditional lecture. All of us can remember those profoundly inspiring professors who made such an impact on us. However, we have to remind ourselves that as much as we appreciated the lecture format, this is not how today's college student wants to learn.

***[W]hile we are fielding and responding to the other changes coming at us, we are encountering an academic sea change that is occurring right before our eyes.***

Today's learners bear little resemblance to the students of previous generations. Given the dramatic changes in society and technology, it's reasonable to see why. Today's students have been raised with technology, realizing the answer to a factual question is simply a Google-click away. There is no need to memorize facts or dates because that information is readily available on any smart phone. However, this is not the largest change we see. The bigger and more significant change is that learning no longer seems to be an individual endeavor. Rather, it has morphed into a group endeavor.

Social media, texting, and gaming have changed independent learners to collaborative learners. Fixed time periods for learning, traditional classrooms, and the lecture format simply don't resonate with these learners. They prefer to share and discuss among themselves at their own rate of learning and to find and create solutions collaboratively.

***We have to be courageous and supportive enough of our faculty to try ideas that might be a bit risky, knowing some will fail, but others very well might become best practices with time.***

The problem for those of us in higher education is while we are fielding and responding to the other changes coming at us, we are encountering an academic sea change that is occurring right before our eyes. How can or will higher education and community colleges in particular respond to the influx of learners who simply cannot flourish in the way in which higher education has approached teaching and credentialing up till now? And how can we help our faculty respond to a generation of learners far different from those we have seen in the past? These are the questions community college administrators and faculty have to find answers for today.

The first time I questioned the fixed time for learning question was after seeing a presentation by Sal Kahn from the Kahn Academy. He described two very different types of students attempting to learn the same math problem, but who clearly had different learning styles. He described one student who was older and had been out of school for several years and needed to watch the video over and over again in order to get it. The other student was younger and seemed not to need to watch the lesson as many times; rather he was more interested in why it was important and how it was used in everyday life. So two students with different abilities, learning styles, and reasons for learning, and yet those two students would likely end up in the same class on any of our campuses. One student provided with a context for the math problem was able to master the material in a short time, while the other student was

*(continued on page 4)*

## EMERGING LEADERS' PERSPECTIVES

The challenges of the past decade have brought about a sea change in community college academics, impacting every facet of the organization and generating a more vibrant academic vision. To increase dramatically college completion rates for a widely diverse student population, college leaders, faculty, and staff must work together in the redesign and reinvention of their institutions to ensure that those credentials represent high-quality undergraduate learning. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders; their answers appear below:

### QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

**What changes in the academic division do you see on the horizon to meet the needs of 21st century learners?**

#### **Nancy Sutton, M.S.**

Department Chair, Parkland College  
Champaign, Illinois

The days of the content expert are fading. Faculty and student services staff in our academic institutions need to work closely to assist students with educational needs that may go beyond the content in the classroom. While faculty consider the potential of the flipped classroom, the integrity of online learning, and the increasing need to address multiple learning styles and levels of preparedness in one classroom, the front lines of student services are struggling to assist students with growing financial, social, and personal commitments. One side of the ship needs to understand and support what the other side is doing. It is no longer enough for faculty to plan a thorough and challenging curriculum while counselors and advisors try to identify a student's interests and available timeframes, only to find that despite solid content and a convenient schedule, the student is unable to follow through to completion.

***The crew of today's academic vessel must work in tandem to help students navigate successfully.***

The crew of today's academic vessel must work in tandem to help students navigate successfully. Faculty must understand the attitudes, expectations, and strengths of today's learners in order to design curriculum that will draw on those strengths, while refocusing attitudes and expectations to encourage success. All faculty need to understand assessment policies and be part of discussions concerning the foundational tools needed for a student to enter the classroom with a chance for success. Advisors and faculty need to work together, developing information to help students understand what courses require in time, cost, attendance, and effort, as well as faculty expectations and teaching style. Student services personnel need to help faculty understand the life issues that are holding students back and to offer suggestions for class scheduling and faculty involvement that might mitigate those issues. Information must flow freely between the fabled silos of the institution as all hands on deck must understand that the success of the students who have stepped aboard the ship is the responsibility of all crew members. While those students have a personal responsibility to remain upright while onboard, they may not have the sea legs to walk the ship without assistance from all hands on deck.

Nancy Sutton is the Department Chair for Fine and Applied Arts at Parkland College in Champaign, Illinois. In that position for nearly seven years, she previously served as full-time faculty in communication at Parkland and has also worked in corporate communication in the non-profit sector. She earned her M.S. in Organizational Communication from Southern Illinois University in Carbondale (IL) and is currently enrolled in the Ferris State University DCCL program.



#### **Jen Sieszputowski, M.A.**

Faculty, Central Michigan University  
Mount Pleasant, Michigan

In order to prepare students to be successful in the global, technology-infused 21st century workplace, colleges need to focus more on student-centered methods of learning that develop cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal competencies. Students need to engage

in problem-based and project-based learning mirroring real-world situations that require them to apply content knowledge while developing important skills, such as analysis, critical and creative thinking, and problem-solving. Passive learning and assessments that emphasize fact and procedure recall are not sufficient. Students need to be able to apply knowledge and skills within and across disciplines and have the ability to reflect on their learning and improve metacognition. Significant effort should be spent on teaching learners how to learn.

More emphasis needs to be placed on creating learning communities within classes and throughout the college. Learning communities provide opportunities for students to collaborate with one another and build relationships, while developing important interpersonal skills. Colleges would do well to provide opportunities to increase cultural awareness and assist students in developing intercultural skills they will need in a globally competitive workplace

Student success in this information age not only calls for traditional literacy skills, such as reading, writing, and researching, but the ability to communicate effectively in many forms of media and in the use of technology. Students need more than the ability to remember, understand, and apply information. They need ample opportunities to learn how to navigate and evaluate the excessive amount of information available, while also being successful producers of information using a variety of media. These are especially important skills as technology and media are rapidly changing.

Colleges need to increase partnerships with organizations that allow students opportunities to gain work-based skills and experience. These partnerships should also encourage company employees to receive further education and training through the college. Reports are showing a growing demand in jobs that require science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) literacy. Institutions must stay up to date with the latest technology and have curriculums that adapt to these changes. Assessment processes must be in place to evaluate learning and assure relevant, effective curriculums that develop highly skilled graduates.

Jen Sieszputowski is a Physical Education and Sport faculty member at Central Michigan University, Mount Pleasant, Michigan, teaching Sport Management courses. She previously taught Science for 12 years at Kirtland Community College, Roscommon, Michigan, where she developed fully online science courses with hands-on labs. She earned her M.A. in Sport Administration at Central Michigan University and currently is working toward her doctorate in the Ferris State University DCCL program.



## NATIONAL LEADER PERSPECTIVE

The challenges of the past decade have brought about a sea change in community college academics, impacting every facet of the organization and generating a more vibrant academic vision. To increase dramatically college completion rates for a widely diverse student population, college leaders, faculty, and staff must work together in the redesign and reinvention of their institutions to ensure that those credentials represent high-quality undergraduate learning. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders; their answers appear below:

### QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

**What changes in the academic division do you see on the horizon to meet the needs of 21st century learners?**

#### **Mark J. Felsheim, Ph.D.**

Vice President, Milwaukee Area Technical College,  
Oak Creek Campus  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

When considering what sea changes in the academic division I see on the horizon to meet the needs of the 21st century learner, my first thought was that we need to look at the student holistically, which brought me back to my dissertation work. When I completed my dissertation on student success, I tried to weave several theories into a coherent whole to see if there was one truth behind the various theories. Using existing models and even creating some of my own, I diagramed circles of relationships (Tinto), squares of involvement (Astin), and lines of engagement (Conrad). What slowly emerged for me was a visual of the Vitruvian Man, Leonardo da Vinci's famous drawing of man in two superimposed images framed in a circle and square.

***Moving forward, I believe the most successful colleges and universities will be those that have truly broken down the barriers...***

The point for me – then and now – is that student success depends upon educators looking at the student as a “whole person.” The old idea of specialization and division within academia created a kind of assembly line approach to education in my view. With the pressures of limited resources and a renewed focus on student success, this old siloed approach appears to be breaking down. Moving forward, I believe the most successful colleges and universities will be those that have truly broken down the barriers between student support, student services, academic instruction, academic curriculum, and even student finance to create an environment focused on the whole student where all college staff members feel empowered to support and mentor students.

This vision will take the current practices of the first-year experience, service learning, apprenticeship, engaged learning, active learning, student activities, student clubs, mentoring, peer support, and tutoring and will integrate them into a seamless system that enables students to make a connection with their college/university and find the support needed to be successful. What might this look like? At one urban college, I freed up my student affairs staff and the faculty to develop their own strategies for helping students along with a strong referral and support network that increased overall retention by 6% and completely eliminated the retention gap for students of color. In this model, teams of individuals, including counselors, advisors, recruiters, and faculty worked together to help students succeed.

The goal, never quite achieved, was to help all students to identify

at least one staff member whom they could approach when needed as an advocate or mentor, whether a faculty member, counselor, advisor, dean, clerical person, or even someone in maintenance. This advocate or mentor could offer support when circumstances were challenging and would follow up to make sure students were on track. We started with students who were on probation and suspension, requiring them to develop a plan for success and to identify a staff member who was going to assist them. That staff person would also have to sign off on the plan and agree to meet with the student.

***The new academic environment will also include more information, instruction, and support on the skills needed to be successful.***

The new academic environment will also include more information, instruction, and support on the skills needed to be successful. This includes the need to have a plan, understanding that there will be challenges and that failure (or struggle) is an option that can provide a powerful learning experience. We will also teach students how to work with their faculty member, advisor, and the entire college to be successful. One of the most popular workshops and training I offer, for example, is how to teach students how to handle a complaint or disagreement with their faculty member.

In conclusion, the most significant change I see on the horizon will be the need to treat students as whole persons and to leverage all of institution's resources and staff to help students succeed. The most successful colleges and universities in the future will be the ones that have broken down the barriers and divisions and truly empowered faculty and staff to help students succeed.

***[T]he most significant change I see on the horizon will be the need to treat students as whole persons and to leverage all of an institution's resources and staff to help students succeed.***



Dr. Mark J. Felsheim is the Vice President for the Oak Creek Campus of Milwaukee Area Technical College, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He holds a Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin – Madison and has worked in higher education for over 30 years as a teacher, curriculum-writer, director of continuing education, academic dean, chief academic officer, and chief student affairs officer. As a first-generation college graduate who attended a community college, he has focused his career on student success through student engagement.



**QUICK TAKES**  
**Highlights**  
**from the Field**

**Replenishing Opportunity in America,**  
**by The Education Trust**

*Our nation must improve postsecondary educational attainment to preserve our democratic ideals of opportunity and advancement and to maintain the global competitiveness of our workforce. Access to Success (A2S) systems have worked to build capacity to lead change and engage, mobilize, and support campuses around the critical issues that drive improvements in access and success. The authors report on the recent efforts of A2S to boost academic attainment and success of all students. Read the complete study at: <http://bit.ly/1E2dHRB>*

**Community Colleges: Choosing Change,**  
**by Kay McClenny**

*The author notes that community colleges today are facing a long list of daunting challenges. The pressing academic sea change is driving colleges to ponder who they are serving, what outcomes they are seeking, and how to approach the difficult prioritization of programs and services. While colleges are generally familiar with the process of instituting a change here and there, they are now pressured to dramatically redesign themselves, their missions, and their students' educational experiences. Read the complete article at: <http://bit.ly/1vidbcU>*

To receive a copy of this publication, please send your email address to: [thoman13@ferris.edu](mailto:thoman13@ferris.edu)



Published by the Alliance for Community College Excellence in Practice, Ferris State University, Doctorate in Community College Leadership Big Rapids, Michigan

**The Community College Academic Sea Change: Sink or Swim**

*(continued from page 1)*

less concerned with context but very much concerned with deep understanding. Yet, both expected to learn in the same amount of time and in the same way.

For most, that timeframe would be 16 weeks or perhaps 8 weeks. We've all experienced something similar to this in our own teaching where some students clearly could master the material very quickly, yet for others, 16 weeks was still not enough. We found ourselves teaching to the middle, leaving some students behind and reassuring ourselves that the others who could have completed sooner were still getting additional benefits from being in class. As I consider this today, it seems peculiar to me we thought everyone should learn at the same pace or during the same timeframe and yet that is how higher education has been delivered for decades. Personalized and contextualized learning, I believe, will revolutionize our industry.

The traditional classroom format of neat rows of desks seem routine for those of us from another generation. However, today's learners think this is archaic and, in fact, this configuration really doesn't lend itself to collaborative learning unless desks and chairs can be easily reconfigured. An alternative approach my college piloted this past semester is a new collaborative learning classroom which has no desks and chairs. Instead it is filled with pods of couches and low tables with attached computers, as well as ipads for the students to use during class. Three of the four walls of the classroom are brainstorming walls and can be written upon. This classroom encourages collaborative learning at its best, utilizing what students like. Students work in small groups with technology and are able to capture their ideas on a surface right in front of them.

The outcome of our pilot saw overwhelming approval from the students and the faculty. Initial data from the first course offered in this environment shows an improved retention rate from the same course taught earlier in the traditional environment. While this is one answer, it is only one of the innovative ways to engage today's students. We have to be courageous and supportive enough of our faculty to try ideas that might be a bit risky, knowing some will fail, but others very well might become best practices with time.

The last piece is instruction itself. Today's learners are simply not enchanted with the lecture format. They see it as a waste of their time. In their minds, just record it and they can listen to it some other time. They feel coming to class needs to be for something deemed worthwhile and important. The question is how to make that time meaningful to today's student and how can we help our faculty transform their teaching across disciplines?

Many faculty are having great success flipping their classrooms, whereby students read the material at home and come to class to complete what would have been the homework assignment collaboratively as a class or in small groups during class time. This flipped approach seems to work better for those disciplines where learning needs to be sequential such as accounting, math, or chemistry. The collaborative learning

*We are learning more and finding better ways of reaching all students; in a time of diminishing resources, this is a good thing.*

environment classroom seems to work well for those kinds of classes requiring creativity or problem-solving, such as courses from the humanities or social sciences.

What is most important is providing opportunities for professional development for faculty to help them determine what works for their style of teaching, and for their discipline. In a time of ever tightening resources, it can be a challenge to find the funds for professional development and travel, but I see this as a fundamental investment. Giving faculty the opportunity to learn, to brainstorm with colleagues, and to share best practices is simply invaluable. Sharing research on techniques or strategies that have demonstrated effectiveness can help faculty spend the very limited time they have much more efficiently. One way to encourage time away is to urge faculty to submit presentations to national conferences.

It is without question we are experiencing unprecedented times for community colleges and for all of higher education. With change being foisted upon us at every turn, responding to the challenges requires much from all of us - administrators and faculty alike. On top of all of these changes, we need to be responsive to a population of learner very different from those of previous decades. However, we are also living in extremely exciting times because higher education is making changes that are well deserved, make perfect sense, and will move us toward better forms of instruction and delivery of education. We have a chance to make changes academically that will not only meet the demands of today's learner, but all learners. We are learning more and finding better ways of reaching all students; in a time of diminishing resources, this is a good thing. We are experiencing an academic sea change, but if we remain optimistic and our strategies remain firmly grounded in data, higher education will emerge on the other side of this sea change stronger and more relevant than ever before.

*Dr. Lori Sundberg serves as president of Carl Sandburg College in Galesburg, Illinois. She is the 6th president of the college and the first female to serve as president. Dr. Sundberg is a graduate of Carl Sandburg College, where she has spent her entire professional career. She earned her bachelors from Knox College, her MBA from Western Illinois University, and graduated from St. Ambrose University in Iowa with a Doctor of Business Administration. She started her career in Institutional Research and remains very data-driven in her leadership today. She serves on the AACC Board of Directors, as part of the Executive Committee, and serves on the Executive Committee for the Illinois Council of Community College Presidents. She is also an adjunct instructor for the Ferris State University DCCL Program.*

