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Partnership, Preparation, and Progress in Training Community College Administrative Leaders

Ramon Dominguez

In Spring 2002, the Department of Educational Management and Development at New Mexico State University implemented the Community College Leadership Doctoral Program (CCLDP). This program was designed as a distance education doctoral program consistent with the mission of the university as a land grant institution “providing access as well as fundamental research; and serving the people of the state of New Mexico.”¹ Initiated as a cohort inclusive of a diverse group of graduate students from throughout the state of New Mexico, the program provided seasoned community college administrators in rural communities an opportunity to earn a doctorate in educational administration. Three years later, approximately 60% of the fifty-two student cohort will have earned their doctorate, and it is expected that by the end of the Fall 2006 semester a total of 75% of the cohort will have completed their degrees.

The success of the program as measured by a high retention and graduation rate has provided New Mexico’s community colleges with a significant number of trained and credentialed administrators at a time when it is estimated by the American Association for Community Colleges that 45% of community college presidents plan to retire by 2007.² Having a sufficient number of qualified individuals to fill vacant positions is essential for community colleges in both New Mexico and the nation. Qualified individuals must be well-prepared both academically and “practically” to take a leadership role in a major institution of higher education, the community college. The purpose of this study was to determine whether the CCLDP was achieving these goals. Specifically, the researcher sought answers to the following questions: (1) Were graduates prepared to take on the significant role and responsibility of enhancing the present-day mission and future challenges of the modern comprehensive community college as well as enhancing the success of the “whole” student? and (2) How did the CCLDP and community colleges work in partnership to prepare students with a comprehensive theoretical administrative base as well as a strong practical perspective?

Forming Partnerships

Initiating and implementing the Community College Leadership Doctoral Program depended on collaboration between the university and New Mexico’s community colleges. The collaborative efforts

were dependent on the support of New Mexico State University’s President, Provost, Dean of the College of Education, the Educational Management and Development Department Head, and the chief executive officers of the community colleges. The collaborative efforts between CCLDP and the community colleges took a variety of forms. First, in order for a student to be admitted into the program, the sponsoring chief executive officer was asked to write a letter of support. Second, the president or executive vice-president of the community college was approached by EMD faculty with a request to utilize their college’s physical facilities, telecommunications equipment, and interactive television studio. Third, the community college allowed EMD faculty to meet with prospective students to review the structure and requirements of the program. As Buettner, Morrison, and Wasicek have noted: “The strongest partnerships are those in which there is considerable perceived benefit by each of the partners. Each partner perceives the greatest value to the extent that its special needs and wants can be accommodated.”³

Program Structure

Based upon a statewide assessment of community college personnel and the university’s strategic plan to increase distance education initiatives, the CCLDP was designed as a three-year program. Students enrolled in six to nine credit hours during the fall, spring and summer for two years and met five weekends (Friday/Saturday) during each semester to complete their coursework. Since students represented rural communities across the state, the class sessions were conducted through a hybrid of distance media with interactive television as the primary medium connecting six sites simultaneously. These sites included Albuquerque, Clovis, Hobbs, Carlsbad, Farmington, and the originating site of Las Cruces. Secondary media of WebCT and limited face-to-face sessions supplemented the teleconferencing instruction.

Curriculum

The program structure was complemented by the curriculum which combined an academic research-based perspective with the practical aspects of community college administration. Peel, Wallace, Buckner, Wrenn, and Evans have noted: “Research suggests that the most successful educational leadership preparation programs are those that integrate theory and practice to provide students with a more realistic perception of the field.”⁴ In addition, according to Duvall: “Community college leadership programs recognize that learning is best done in a social community, not just solitary inquiry, and that new learning and being with other new learners lead to new information to making new meaning of existing information.”⁵

The practical component included courses relevant to the daily administration of the organization, which included community college administration, law, finance, politics, public relations, student services, leadership, and the internship. The instructional strategy focused on providing students “real life” approaches to situations, issues, and challenges faced in community college environments. For example, the law course presented students with issues involving faculty contracts, academic freedom, due process, and faculty/student relations. The leadership course encouraged students to compare their leadership style to research-based approaches and provided them the opportunity to interact with their staff or colleagues in “testing” their style. By identifying and comparing their leadership styles, students could conduct an introspective analysis of their

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“behavioral approaches” to situations. The challenge of understanding themselves in order to understand others and providing pro-active leadership rather than reactionary leadership were essential components of the leadership course. The “behavioral assessment” was accomplished through case study presentations, inventories, group discussions, individual reflection papers, and observations.

One of the most important practical initiatives in the program was the internship experience which involved a training partnership with the community college. According to Duvall, “Structured internships recognize the practitioner component of community college leadership training.”⁶ The majority of students were placed in an internship at their own community college to continue experiencing their own environment but in a different division or department. Aside from obtaining different perspectives and observations, students not only contributed to their assigned division/department but also assisted the institution by positively impacting students at the respective community college.

The internship experiences varied in scope and assignment and included the following: (1) observing and comparing leadership styles involving senior management, planning/evaluating instructional programs/courses; (2) developing/evaluating distance learning programs/projects; (3) conducting campus-wide assessment for regional accreditation; (4) developing leadership institutes for students; (5) creating multiethnic community partnerships; (6) monitoring enrollment trends; (7) assessing student services; (8) establishing partnerships; (9) analyzing financial reporting requirements; (10) conducting feasibility studies; and (11) investigating/researching funding sources.

A description of two internship experiences highlights the partnership between the CCLDP and community colleges to train administrative leaders in real world scenarios. For example, one internship involved a community college partnering with the community’s municipal court to provide avenues of alternative sentencing. The intern set forth to meet the following objectives: (a) establish a college/municipal court partnership to develop programs that would benefit offenders sentenced by the court; (b) design classes/workshops/short-term training that would serve as alternative options when sentencing offenders; and (c) explore grants or other funding sources to institute and maintain the program. Through observation in the courtroom and consultation with the municipal judge, an analysis of the courtroom procedure-sentencing format was established. Research into similar programs and factors contributing to the offenses provided a foundation for the development of action plans offenders could utilize to negotiate fulfilling of their sentence through workshops or classes at the community college. The internship provided for collaboration between a higher education entity and a government agency to address a dilemma by presenting a solution with societal and educational value.

A second example involved an internship examining a collaborative effort between a political organizing group and a community college in the development of a job training program. Through interviews, research, and consultations with the community college and political group, the intern pursued the following actions: (a) analyzed methods by which community training needs were identified; (b) examined the benefits gained through community and college job-training collaboratives; and (c) explored strategies for creating change and building social capital. This internship allowed the student to integrate the partnership concept with much needed job-training efforts

that will benefit the community. Russell and Flynn note that collaborations which include “outreach, service learning, interprofessional preparation, and strategic alliances... are of benefit to the college, school, or department’s students and constituents.”⁷

The practical components of the CCLDP were complemented by research-based courses including evaluation design, elements of research, Edumetrics,⁸ independent research, organization and planning, dissertation seminar, and dissertation. The instructional strategy focused on providing a strong research foundation supplemented by addressing daily administrative challenges. For example, the elements of research course presented students with an overview and applications of quantitative and qualitative methods. Utilizing these methods, students undertook research projects relevant to issues facing their local community colleges and applied their findings to state or national community college environments.

Through the independent research course, students explored a variety of issues impacting community colleges. Their exploratory review led them to consider a number of topics, such as: (1) common characteristics of leadership in multiethnic community partnerships; (2) use of distance education by faculty; (3) faculty and student retention; (4) relationships between cultural values and learning styles in post-secondary educational settings; (5) diversity in the classroom; (6) impact of Hispanic Serving Institutions; (7) functional partnerships between postsecondary institutions and high schools; (8) transformational leadership; (9) transfer within community college programs and from community colleges to universities; (10) economic impact of community colleges; (11) financial aid impact on non-traditional students; (12) communication behaviors of community college leaders; (13) academic dishonesty; (14) institutional image as perceived by stakeholders; (15) predictors of success in nursing programs; (16) external socioeconomic influences on student success; and (17) costs and benefits of program evaluation and assessment.

The dissertation seminar guided students through the complexity and dynamics of developing their dissertations. Emphasis was placed on format, mechanics, components, chapter contents, references, and literature reviews. The eventual goal of the course was the completion and defense of their dissertation proposal. The proposal encompassed the first three chapters of the dissertation and required the approval of a four-person doctoral committee. The completion of the final dissertation document was a major unification stage between research-based practices and reality-based scenarios. The CCLDP and the community colleges came together to assist students in successful completion of a comprehensive and relevant dissertation focusing on challenges confronting community colleges.

The development and defense of the dissertation were preceded by the oral comprehensive exams. In order to advance to candidacy, doctoral students were required to pass a three-day written examination followed by an oral defense. The oral comprehensive defense was conducted by a committee of four professors, with one of the committee members assigned by the graduate school dean to ensure fairness and adherence to university policies during the examination. This committee member was drawn from a department outside the Department of Educational Management and Development. Two committee members were required to be department professors. In keeping with the objective of working in partnership with the community colleges to train administrative leaders, the fourth committee member was selected from the ranks of senior level com-

munity college administrators. The chief executive officer of each community college affiliated with the university through its CCLDP students was sent a letter of invitation to serve on a doctoral committee. In addition, the chief executive officer was given the discretion to nominate senior managers for service on committees. The criteria for doctoral committee membership was an earned doctorate and appointment to a senior level administrative position at or above the position of director.

Once the chief executive officer had nominated potential committee members, each nominee was contacted by CCLDP staff and requested to submit a vita. The submission of the vita was also a requirement for chief executives willing to serve. The vita was forwarded to the graduate school for review by a graduate faculty committee and a final qualification assessment by the graduate school dean. With the approval of the graduate school, the nominee was accepted as the community college representative on a doctoral committee. The newly appointed committee member received an approval letter as well as instructions and materials for serving on doctoral committees.

The community college representative was the link between the university research-based perspective and the practical world of the community college administrator. As part of the four-member committee, the representative worked with the student through three major programmatic phases: (a) presenting an oral comprehensive examination; (b) developing the dissertation proposal; and (c) defending the final dissertation. The committee, through the leadership of the committee chair (advisor), guided the student throughout the critical phases of the CCLDP. This collaborative effort was evident in the CCLDP dissertations completed. The work reflected scholarly approaches to real community college issues.

The following two dissertations serve as examples of the utilization of scholarly approaches to addressing community college issues.⁹ In the first, "Community College Transfer Rates: A Comparison of Survey Responses by Administrators, Faculty, Students, and Constituents at New Mexico Junior College to a National Sample," Bensing gathered survey data from administrators, students, faculty, and constituents regarding the importance of the transfer function at a New Mexico junior college located in southeastern New Mexico.¹⁰ The survey responses from these groups were then compared to responses from comparable groups from a national study. The Chi-square and Fisher Exact Probability Test were utilized to compare responses of high transfer rate and low transfer rate students. The inferential statistical analysis indicated that the responses of the New Mexico participants were statistically different from responses of the high transfer and low transfer groups in the national study. Specifically, New Mexico participants from both groups strongly believed that the transfer function was a major responsibility of the junior college with approximately 60% of students participating in the survey listing preparation for transfer as their primary reason for enrollment. This dissertation provided valuable information to upper management regarding the programmatic direction of the college.

While the first dissertation generated information essential to a specific community college, the second emphasized research applicable to community colleges in general. The purpose of Garcia's study was to identify those factors influencing community college faculty to include service learning in their courses.¹¹ Through a survey of approximately 200 hundred faculty representing 40 community colleges affiliated with the American Association of Community

Colleges, the study sought answers to four questions: (1) Who motivates faculty to include service learning in their courses? (2) What institutional support factors motivate faculty to include service learning in their classes? (3) What student learning outcomes motivate faculty to include service learning in their courses? and (4) What rewards motivate faculty to include service learning in their courses?

The study concluded that an institution's service learning coordinator had a major impact on faculty members' decisions to include a service-learning component in their courses. Secondly, the benefits students gained from the service learning experience outweighed compensation, course release time, praise, or recognition as faculty motivators. Thirdly, faculty were motivated by the increase in students' civic responsibility. This dissertation provided practical insights, supported by research, for community college administrators who want to encourage service learning.

Implications

The Community College Leadership Doctoral Program attempts to bridge theory and practice in the preparation of higher education leaders. The task is complex, especially when a substantial portion of instruction is delivered through distance education media. However, instructional delivery was facilitated by the collaborative efforts of the community colleges and New Mexico State University. The success of this collaboration reinforced the findings of Williams and Pennington: "Community colleges and universities today are more likely to look into institutional cooperation to meet a variety of contemporary challenges and problems."¹² Further, Buettner et al. shrewdly observed that "when a partnership emanates from an overlapping but noncompetitive mission, its potential and potential durability are greatest."¹³ By working together, these institutions of higher education contributed to producing motivated and skilled administrators who not only earned doctorates but contributed to their community colleges by participating in research and internship activities that benefited students and positively impacted the community.

Endnotes

¹ New Mexico State University, *Strategic Directions, Benchmarks and Performance Indicators 2001-2002*, <http://www.NMSU.edu/Research/iresearch/ind306.pdf>, 3.

² Martha Romero, "Who Will Lead our Community Colleges?" *Change* 36 (November-December, 2004), <http://firstreach.oclc.org/images/WSPL/wspdf/HTML/03036/P4DER/G59.HTM>.

³ David L. Buettner, Michael C. Morrison, and Margery Wasicek, "Successful Experiences with Making Partnering an Operational Strategy," *New Directions for Community Colleges* 2002 (Fall 2002): 5-12.

⁴ Henry A. Peel, Corinna Wallace, Kermit G. Buckner, Steven L. Wrenn, and Ralph Evans, "Improving Leadership Preparation through a School, University, and Professional Organization Partnership," *NASSP Bulletin* 82 (December 1998): 26-34.

⁵ Betty Duvall, "Role of Universities in Leadership Development," *New Directions for Community Colleges* 2003 (Fall 2003): 63-71.

⁶ Duvall, "Role of Universities in Leadership Development."

⁷ Jill F. Russell and Richard B. Flynn, "Commonalities Across Effective Collaboratives," *Peabody Journal of Education* 75 (Spring 2000): 196-204.

⁸ Edumetrics Institute, <http://www.edumetrics.org>.

⁹ See the Appendix for a listing of dissertations completed through the Community College Leadership Doctoral Program, 2004-2005.

¹⁰ Robert M. Bensing, "Community College Transfer Rates: A Comparison of Survey Responses by Administrators, Faculty, Students, and Constituents at New Mexico Junior College to a National Sample" (Ed.D. diss., New Mexico State University, 2004).

¹¹ Rudy Garcia, "Factors that Motivate Faculty to Include Service Learning in Their Courses" (Ed.D. diss., New Mexico State University, 2004).

¹² Mitchell R. Williams and Kevin Pennington, "Collaboration in Professional Development," *Planning for Higher Education* 31 (September/November 2002): 39-45.

¹³ Buettner et al., "Successful Experiences with Making Partnering an Operational Strategy."

APPENDIX

Dissertations Completed by Students in the Community College Leadership Doctoral Program, 2004 and 2005

Abbott, Barbara Gayle. "The Impact of Community College Student Support Services: An Effective Parsimonious Model for Enhancing Student Persistence and Academic Achievement." Ed.D. diss. New Mexico State University, 2004.

Anderson, Deborah . "Vocational Advisory Committee Chair Leadership Practices: A Comparison of Chairs' and Members' Perception at Selected New Mexico Community Colleges." Ed.D. diss. New Mexico State University, 2004.

Bader, Jeff R. "Faculty Perceptions of Issues Affecting the Utilization of Distance Education Technology: The Case of New Mexico State University's College of Agriculture and Home Economics." Ed.D. diss. New Mexico State University, 2004.

Bensing, Robert M. "Community College Transfer Rates: A Comparison of Survey Responses by Administrators, Faculty, Students, and Constituents at New Mexico Junior College to a National Sample." Ed.D. diss. New Mexico State University, 2004.

Bircher, Wendy Diane. "The Effect Of Cultural Influences on American Indian Students' Matriculation Into a Southwestern Community College." Ed.D. diss. New Mexico State University, 2004.

Brandon, Judy Scott. "A Qualitative Study for the Identification of Wives of Enlisted Military Personnel as At-Risk Students for the Development of a Campus Wide Support Model for Those Students." Ed.D. diss. New Mexico State University, 2004.

Brito-Asenap, Teresa. "Project QUEST and the Alamo Community College District: A Community Partnership in Job Training." Ed.D. diss. New Mexico State, 2005.

Caton, Crit Dale. "Leadership Skills and Areas of Expertise as Components of the New Mexico State University Community College Leadership Doctoral Program: A Comparison with Those of a National Study." Ed. D. diss. New Mexico State University, 2004.

Dunlop, Michael. "Factors Involved in Hiring Teachers in New Mexico: An Analysis of Social and Structural Attributes." Ed.D. diss., New Mexico State University, 2004.

Garcia, Rudy M. "Factors that Motivate Faculty to Include Service Learning in Their Courses." Ed. D. diss. New Mexico State University, 2004.

Greer, Kristine. "Processes of Collaboration in an Early Care and Education Training System: A Qualitative Research Study." Ed.D.diss. New Mexico State University, 2004.

Isham, Eleonore Kate. "Faculty and Administrators' Beliefs About Experience with, and Willingness to Utilize, Distance Education Technology in Medium-Sized New Mexico Community Colleges." Ed.D. diss. New Mexico State University, 2004.

Jones, Robin. "Factors Contributing to Voluntary Inactive Licensure Status in New Mexico Nurses and the Potential for Change." Ed.D. diss. New Mexico State University, 2005.

Kaplan, Charles R. "The Use of Tutoring and Computer Based Instruction with Community College Developmental Education Students and Their Relationship to Student Success." Ed.D. diss. New Mexico State University, 2004.

Lloyd, Janice. "The Effects of Multimedia Presentations on Student Learning Outcomes: A Case Study." Ed.D. diss. New Mexico State University, 2005.

Lloyd, Richard Jon. "A Study of the Relationships Between Professional Development Characteristics and Effectiveness of Locally Elected Community College Governing Boards." Ed.D. diss. New Mexico State University, 2004.

Martinez, Vidal. "Hispanic GED Students and Their Barriers to Learning in English Language ABE Programs in Northern New Mexico Community Colleges." Ed.D. diss. New Mexico State University, 2005.

Megert, Diann Ackerman. "High School Advanced Mathematics Classes: A Better Predictor than High School Grade Point Average for Choosing Community College Honor Scholarship Candidates." Ed.D. diss. New Mexico State University, 2004.

Neel, Linda L. "Financial Aid Students at Risk: The Federal Financial Aid Appeal Process and Student Persistence." Ed.D. diss. New Mexico State University, 2004.

Organ, Regina Griffin. "A Study of Career Satisfaction Among Community College Chief Executive Officers." Ed.D. diss. New Mexico State University, 2004.

Schmidt, Michelle Melinda. "An Examination of Variables Associated with Student Completion at Clovis Community College." Ed.D. diss. New Mexico State University, 2004.

Schoonmaker, Stephen. "Faculty Leadership in the Classroom: Using the Transperceptional Leadership Model to Study the Impact of Student Perception of Faculty Leadership on Instructor Effectiveness." Ed.D. diss. New Mexico State University, 2004.

Taylor-Sawyer, Sandra. "Community College Chief Executive Officers and the Transformational Leadership Style." Ed.D. diss. New Mexico State University, 2004.

Toglia, Thomas Vincent. "An Analysis of the Instructor Competencies Perceived as Needed by Community and Technical College Automotive Technology Instructors Teaching in Manufacturer-Affiliated Training Programs and Manufacturer-Affiliated Technical Trainers." Ed.D. diss., New Mexico State University, 2004.

Wharton, Renee. "Tracking the Academic Performance of a Rural Southwestern Community College's Transfer Students." Ed.D. diss. New Mexico State University, 2004.

Whicker, Timothy R. "Critical Issues in Internet-Based Distance Learning in Community Colleges: Perceptions of Problems and Strategies for Solving Those Problems." Ed.D. diss. New Mexico State University, 2004.