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AUTHOR Boone, Edgar J.; Vaughan, George B.
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ABSTRACT

The Academy for Community College Leadership Advancement, Innovation, and Modeling (ACCLAIM) at North Carolina State University is working with state community college systems in Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia to develop and implement a process that positions the community college to play a major role in resolving community issues. In the ACCLAIM model, community colleges are seen as a moving force in promoting greater collaboration among community-based organizations, formal and informal leaders, and citizens in seeking resolution to major and complex issues. The model consists of a series of tasks: (1) the community college critically examines its mission, philosophy, goals, and structure to assess its readiness to assume the role of a community-based institution; (2) the college increases its knowledge of the social, cultural, economic, and political environments of its service area; (3) the college then establishes a mechanism for scanning its external environment; (4) issues identified by environmental scanning are ranked and confirmed by community leaders; (5) the college analyzes, identifies, and maps the publics within its service region directly affected by each issue; (6) the college initiates dialogue and forms a coalition among community leaders and other stakeholders in a given issue; (7) the college leads the coalition in developing, coordinating, carrying out, and evaluating a plan for addressing the community problem; (8) coalition leaders report to their respective constituencies on progress and results; and (9) the plan elements to which the college has committed resources must be incorporated into the college's planning and budgeting processes. If a new issue emerges, the process begins anew. (ECC)

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POSITIONING THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE FOR COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

Edgar J. Boone and George B. Vaughan

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Community college leaders face challenges today that extend well beyond the boundaries of traditional degree programs and on-campus instruction. While venturing beyond these boundaries is nothing new to them, the challenges they face are different in degree, if not always in kind, from past challenges.

In the past two decades, community colleges have reached out to their communities and assisted with economic development activities, worked to improve secondary schools, and provided industry-specific job training for local employers. However, the pressing needs of the communities in which they are located mean that community colleges can no longer afford to wait for constituents to request assistance. Instead of simply reacting to expressed needs, community colleges must work with community organizations and leaders at all levels to identify and address critical community concerns. They must become community-based colleges, and college leaders must work to ensure that their institutions play appropriate roles in helping to solve community problems—sometimes as catalyst, sometimes as leader, convener, or participant. To be effective, in today's environment, college leaders must collaborate with other leaders in the community in applying a rational, orderly process to help resolve community issues.

Repositioning the Community College

Community college leaders that seek to assist the resolution of community issues must be prepared to reposition their institutions to serve as catalysts, leaders, or in other roles as needed. How to effect such repositioning is an important question currently being worked on by the Academy for Community College Leadership Advancement, Innovation, and Modeling (ACCLAIM) at North Carolina State University. Funded by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, the ACCLAIM project is currently working with the state systems of community colleges in Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia to develop and implement a process that positions the community college to play a major role in resolving community issues and revitalizing the lives of individuals and the communities in which they live.

The process is community-based programming, an approach to planning that provides the model for much of the work of ACCLAIM. The importance of the model is that it provides a philosophical base, a framework, and

a process by which community college leaders can reposition their colleges to work with community leaders, organizations, and agencies to solve problems that threaten the health and welfare of their communities, and ultimately the nation.

The ACCLAIM Model

The ACCLAIM model is based upon the assumption that community colleges are community-based institutions devoted to improving the quality of life of the citizens and communities they serve. Further, the model assumes that there now exists a critical need for community colleges to become the moving force in promoting greater collaboration among community-based organizations, formal and informal leaders, and citizens in seeking resolution to major and complex issues.

The model, which can be adapted successfully by most community colleges, consists of a series of processual tasks. While the tasks follow a logical order, the model is flexible enough to allow an institution that has already worked through some of the steps to adapt the model to meet its needs. A key feature of the model, other than its adaptability and flexibility, is that it assumes that community colleges never work alone in resolving community issues, thus avoiding a mistake too many colleges have made in the past. The model, then, defines a process by which a community college can work effectively in collaboration with other agencies, organizations, institutions, and individuals to carry out its mission as a community-based institution.

The Processual Tasks

The ACCLAIM model requires the commitment of institutional leaders to community-based programming and acceptance of the role of the college in addressing problems outside its walls. The following tasks outline a process for its effective involvement in the community.

1. The community college must critically examine its mission, philosophy, goals, and organizational structure to determine if it is prepared, both philosophically and practically, to assume the role of a community-based institution. The goal of the examination is to position—or reposition, if need be—the institution so that a major emphasis is placed on community-based programming as the process through which the community-based

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mission is fulfilled. One objective of the examination is to develop a definition of community-based programming that is in concert with the institutional mission and philosophy.

2. The community college must increase its knowledge of the social, cultural, economic, and political environments of its service area. An understanding of the dynamics of the community and its linkages to the larger environment is key to successful community-based programming.

3. The community college must establish a mechanism for scanning its external environment. In most cases, the logical way of doing this is to establish an environmental scanning committee made up of representatives of the community and the college. Scanning the environment will aid institutional leaders in identifying and ranking emerging issues that are of critical concern to the community and its citizens. The college president should incorporate the environmental scanning process into the college's permanent administrative and governance structures, and the environmental scanning committee should report to the president and assist in the planning process as needed.

4. The issues identified by the environmental scanning process should be ranked and confirmed as important by both formal and informal community leaders who are not members of the scanning committee but who have a vested interest in seeing issues resolved. These leaders who assist in reviewing issues are one of several constituent groups and participants in the process that should be regularly kept apprised of the progress being made in resolving identified issues.

5. The community college should analyze, identify, and map the publics within its service region who are directly affected by each issue identified by the environmental scan. The goal is to identify those groups and individual leaders who will play key roles in resolving an issue, as well as those who have any vested interests in their resolution. Another goal is to identify those leaders who reflect the beliefs and values of the target public and who wield influence with those publics.

6. The community college, in its role as catalyst, can initiate dialogue among community leaders and others involved in a given issue. The objective is to create understanding of the issue among the members of the target public and its leaders and to interest them in seeking a resolution to the issue. Once an understanding of the issue is achieved, a coalition is formed consisting of representatives from the college, the target public, and other stakeholders affected by the issue. The community college can provide the setting for the coalition to discuss the issue and to develop a plan for its resolution. The purpose of the coalition is to reach a consensus on a plan for resolving the issue. However, once an issue is resolved, the coalition is dissolved.

7. The community college provides leadership for the coalition in developing, coordinating, carrying out, and evaluating the plan for addressing the community problem. At this stage, members of the coalition must commit resources to resolving the issue. In addition to

determining how resources will be obtained and utilized, the plan provides a mechanism for coalition leaders and others to report on the progress being made in carrying out the plan and for modifying it as needed. In evaluating the plan, care must be given to establishing goals, reviewing them regularly, determining if they have been met, and revising them as required.

8. The plan requires that the coalition leaders report to their respective constituencies on the progress of the plan and the result achieved to date. It is especially important to keep members of the target public, its leaders, other stakeholders, members of the college community, and all those who have been involved in the process of the progress being made in resolving the issue of concern.

9. Those elements of the plan to which the college has committed resources must be incorporated into its institutional planning and budgeting processes. The college board and president must continue to prioritize the college's involvement in plans to resolve various community issues. They must anticipate their involvement in other emerging issues and balance the college's continued commitment of resources to the current issue with its other and future commitments.

College leaders then evaluate what they have learned from working to resolve the current issue and apply it to any emerging issues. If a new issue emerges, the process begins anew, utilizing those aspects of the community-based programming model that are required.

The ACCLAIM model for community-based programming provides community college leaders with both the philosophical base and a rational process for positioning their institutions for leadership in their communities—a role which effective community colleges must occupy if they are to fulfill their missions as community-based institutions. The model also provides practical advice on how community colleges can assist in identifying and resolving important community problems. While a community focus is not new to community colleges, they have never been more relevant to helping the nation and its communities address the major challenges facing them. Community college leaders must step up to the task to lead both their colleges and their communities.

Edgar J. Boone is professor and director of the ACCLAIM project at North Carolina State University. George B. Vaughan is professor and associate director of the ACCLAIM project. Much of the foregoing discussion was abstracted from Community-Based Programming: An Opportunity and Imperative for the Community College, by Edgar J. Boone, published by North Carolina State University in December, 1992.

The authors and other ACCLAIM staff will conduct a preconference workshop on community-based programming at "Leadership 2000," July 18-21, 1993, in Washington, D. C. Contact the League office, (714) 367-2884, for registration information.

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