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## ABSTRACT

Volume 4 of the League for Innovation in the Community College's Learning Abstracts include the following: (1) "Touching Students in the Digital Age: The Move Toward Learner Relationship Management (LRM)," by Mark David Milliron, which offers an overview of an organizing concept to help community colleges navigate the intersection between digital and learning revolutions; (2) "Learning from the Learning Colleges: Observations Along the Journey," by Kay McClenney, which offers observations on model programs and best-practices in learner-centered education; (3) "Evaluating Individual Student Learning: Implications from Four Models of Assessment," by Mary Hjelm and Ronald L. Baker, which presents an overview of the outcomes, grassroots, mandate, and institutional effectiveness models of evaluation; (4) "Advancing Learner-Centered Education at the State or Provincial Level," by Michael Skolnik and Roy Giroux, which argues that the advancement of learner-centered approaches is more likely when it percolates at the state or provincial level before going to a national level; and (5) "College Conversations on Learning," by Terry O'Banion and Mark David Milliron, which contends that extensive and intensive strategies for engaging conversations on learning can anchor an institutional effort to place learning as the first priority. (Author/NB)

# Learning Abstracts, 2001

Cynthia Wilson, Editor

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League for Innovation in the Community College  
Laguna Hills, California

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League for Innovation in the Community College  
Learning Abstracts

January 2001 Volume 4, Number 1

**TOUCHING STUDENTS IN THE DIGITAL AGE:  
THE MOVE TOWARD LEARNER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT (LRM)**

*Mark David Milliron*

Among surveys of incoming traditional-age freshman in higher education, more than 75 percent report significant experience with information technology. Don Tapscott calls this cohort the NetGeneration, the post-baby boom echo of young people who bring their expectations for digital access to work, play, and school. In addition, many older students are returning to college expressly to gain technology skills to improve their career options, gain access to information and services in the digital economy, and, sometimes, to keep up with their children. Adding to these trends are pressures from government, business and industry, and other sectors of education to equip our organizations and students for life in the Digital Age.

As we at the League have worked with colleges facing technology-in-education challenges, we often find responses accompanied by two regrettable corollary tendencies: (1) unfocused and sometimes haphazard technology adoption, and, more disconcerting, (2) a disconnect between technology planning and the fundamental educational purposes of the college. As the bits and bytes buzz by and the rapacious calls for workforce development continue, many faculty, staff, and administrators rightfully question whether, after three to five years of technology adoption, their technology infrastructures or their organizational strategies are heading in the right direction.

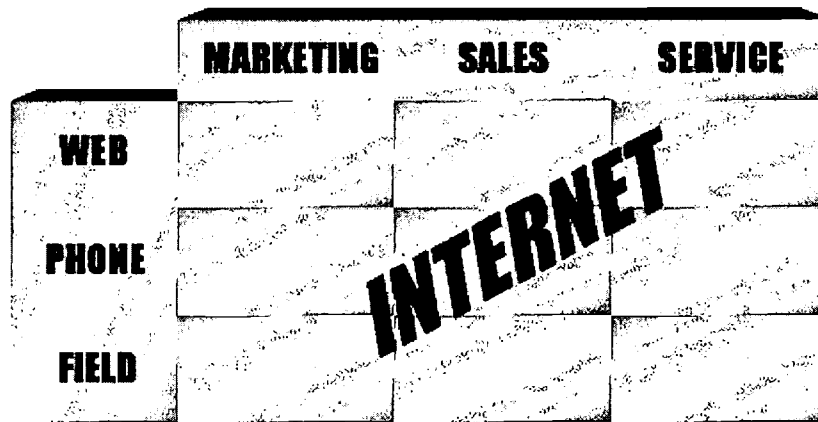
This abstract offers an overview of an organizing concept to help community colleges navigate the intersection between the digital and learning revolutions, a concept we call Learner Relationship Management (LRM). Many institutions are making good use of rudiments of LRM, and a few are using the comprehensive model for bringing technology, students, and strategy together to improve learning. For colleges struggling to meet the challenges of technology, workforce development, external competition, and increased student demands, the LRM concept offers a road map to help maintain a central focus on their core business--learning.

**From Lead to Loyalty**

We all know how it works in the business world. We belong to frequent flyer programs with airlines, frequent lodger programs with hotels, even frequent shopper programs at the local grocery store. All of these programs have at their heart the goal of creating longstanding relationships with customers, moving us from prospective leads to loyal patrons. And while some programs are annoying or complicated, others really work. Many of us will take an extra leg on a flight, turn down a lower rate at a competing hotel, or drive ten miles further to deal with our preferred business. People justify these actions with comments about the quality, service, and personal attention that make it worth the extra effort.

The current version of this relationship-centered business strategy is called Customer Relationship Management (CRM), one of the hottest economic concepts today, with sales of CRM tools reaching almost \$5 billion this year and expected to double by 2003. Although I'm not a fan of haphazard use of business metaphors in education or of tactics that reduce our students to drive-through consumers, CRM features some elements that are too powerful to ignore--elements that can help colleges ask hard questions and develop sound strategies for fulfilling their educational mission.

Foremost, CRM is focused on relationships. It asks an organization to look broadly at all its internal and external touch points and the purposes of the interactions in each touch point. The following chart illustrates a traditional company's matrix of touch points across functions (e.g., marketing, sales, and service) and infrastructures (e.g., Web, phone, and field).



### Customer Relationship Management (CRM) Model

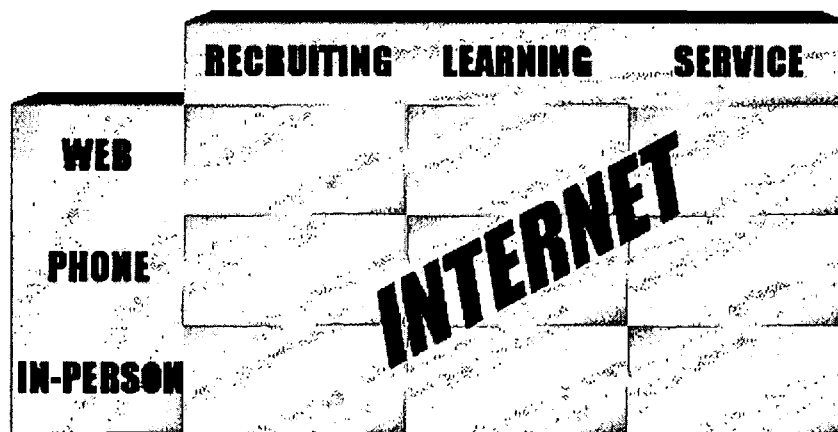
Proponents of CRM are quick to note that three years ago we had no expectations of tight integration across all these touch points, mainly because the Internet and its associated technologies had not matured enough. Today our expectations are different. Now when buying an airline ticket, we expect to be able to check fares and availability online, via a 1-800 number, or in person. Similarly, we expect to be able to purchase the ticket online, over the phone, or at the airport ticket counter. And we expect to get service (e.g., check our frequent flyer points or flight status) online, on the phone, or face-to-face. Further, we expect to proceed from one service representative to the next without having to reeducate each one and to get the *same* information from each source because our information is *in the system*.

Top CRM companies work to collect and use quality data about their customers to provide value that meets individual wants and needs. The goal is to let customers direct their interactions based on personal preference. For example, some people find buying a book on Amazon.com quick and easy. Others are drawn to their local Barnes & Noble to thumb through a book before buying. Still others integrate their experiences, browsing for cars online, calling to ask more questions, and buying in person at the local dealership.

The trick is to provide a seamless, multimodal, technology-enhanced infrastructure that customers find valuable enough to use again and again.

### **From CRM to LRM**

The logical extension of the CRM model to higher education leads to examination of traditional educational touch points with students. A college using the Learner Relationship Management model would ask key questions about how students are brought into the institution, how they learn, and how they receive services. Can students apply for admission online, ask questions about schedules over the phone, and apply for financial aid in person? Can they access an online syllabus, call for help from the tutoring center, and enjoy their in-class small group work all in the same semester? Can they check grades online, call a career counselor, or explore career options at the career center?



### **Learner Relationship Management (LRM) Model**

These questions are more revealing than they may appear at first glance. Most of us would readily extol personal interactions as the most influential and constructive modes of connecting with students. But even these human connections may be poorly mediated by phone or e-mail, or degraded by faulty student records. An LRM approach calls us to expand our humanist proclivities by critically evaluating all the ways we touch students, thereby determining whether we are building productive or obstructive relationships.

Many community colleges encounter major challenges with even basic LRM applications. The information provided on their websites doesn't match the information people receive over the phone or in person. Student services are limited to one modality. Instructional options exist in either/or formats, offering students purely online or traditional classroom options, when students might prefer a hybrid. And a call to the college as a new or continuing student remains a labyrinthine experience, with callers forced through a maze of transfers and delays and misinformation.

Nevertheless, some community colleges have succeeded in engaging students across an array of touch points. Several have opened call centers with single 1-800 numbers for the entire institution. Others are rolling out 24x7 online tutoring support and using 1-800

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"Beep a Tutor" programs for learners. Some are integrating phone and Internet technologies to enhance off-campus interaction for in-class courses, with language assignments submitted via voice mail and online threaded discussions held on key topics between classes. The measure of all of these good activities, however, is whether they serve as independent entrees or ingredients in a systemic recipe for student success.

### **Targeting the Outcomes**

If an integrated LRM strategy is to serve higher education, and if we are to avoid another business metaphor misapplied or technology budget misappropriated, then we must be clear about our desired outcomes. Fundamentally, LRM strategies must aim at developing better relationships with learners to best meet their wants and needs. In the case of student wants, for instance, some prefer to relate to us over the Web, others feel more secure if they at least connect with a voice over the phone, and others desperately desire face-to-face connections. Despite the boom in use of nontraditional touch points, it is interesting to note the College Board's recent study of adult learners, which reveals that if work, family, distance, or time barriers were removed, most adults would prefer to learn in person.

This finding also underscores the consideration that must be given to student needs. Clearly, many adult learners need alternate intake, learning, and service options because of their life situations. Other studies demonstrate that many community college students also may *need* a particular learning modality to succeed because of their lack of academic, technology, or social skills, despite *wants* to the contrary. For example, research suggests that if we enroll underprepared students in online classes without orientation or personal interaction, their likelihood of failure is high. But, if we start these students out with human-intensive in-person intake, learning experiences, and support services, and include the goal of helping them effectively utilize other touch points--to become more hardy learners--they can eventually develop the ability to learn well in multiple modalities. By focusing learning connections based on their needs, we enable these students to later engage other learning systems based on their wants. Put simply, through the effective use of LRM, we can foster the development of lifelong learners for the Digital Age.

The intersection of student wants, needs, and educational outcomes is the point where the *client* notion of education contrasts with the *customer* business model. If we develop our infrastructures thoughtfully in a client-based system, we can use our educational expertise to relate to our students better, help them balance learning wants and needs, and enable them to move toward becoming true lifelong learners. To work toward these ends, educators exploring LRM should ensure that as they strive to integrate touch points, develop hybrid models of intake, learning, and service, or create customized relationships, they target these strategies toward achieving at least four fundamental outcomes: (1) learners owning their responsibility for learning; (2) learners demonstrating content and competency mastery; (3) learners deepening their capacity to learn by using new modalities and strategies; and (4) learners forming a relationship with the institution so positive that the next time they have a learning need they immediately consider returning.

## **LRM Imperative**

Community college students must learn well to live well in the Digital Age. To meet this imperative community colleges must strategically equip and organize themselves to build powerful relationships with students that help those learners connect successfully to learning. Fortunately, today's workforce realities--those that make the Digital Age also the age of lifelong learning--give us more chances to touch students than we have ever had before. LRM can serve as a navigational guide for colleges striving to design all of their student touch points to best promote student engagement and learning. Ultimately, the thoughtful use of a strategy such as LRM can further the community college movement's longstanding commitment to be the catalyst of economic advancement, educational attainment, and empowering aspirations for all members of society.

*Mark David Milliron is President and CEO of the League for Innovation in the Community College. In this issue, he presents an abstract of a portion of Chapter 12 of the League publication, Access in the Information Age: Community Colleges Bridging the Digital Divide, edited by Gerardo de los Santos, Alfredo de los Santos Jr., and Mark David Milliron.*

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League for Innovation in the Community College  
Learning Abstracts

March 2001 Volume 4, Number 2

**LEARNING FROM THE LEARNING COLLEGES:  
OBSERVATIONS ALONG THE JOURNEY**

*Kay McClenney*

In January 2000, the League for Innovation launched The Learning College Project to assist community colleges around the world to become more learning-centered institutions. Twelve Vanguard Learning Colleges (VLCs) were selected by an international advisory committee to help develop model programs and best practices in learning-centered education with a specific focus on five key areas: organizational culture, staff recruitment and development, technology, learning outcomes, and underprepared students.

Between October 2000 and March 2001, three project staff members and the project's external evaluator got a glimpse of the work of these colleges in one-day site visits to the VLCs. These visits provide a basis for a preliminary set of observations regarding the challenges involved as colleges make the journey to become more learning centered. In making these observations, several caveats apply: (1) None of these observations apply to every college. (2) Most of the observations apply to many of the colleges. (3) Although a high degree of consensus exists, the observations may not reflect the views of every project staff member involved in the meetings.

The campus visits affirmed that the VLCs are leading community colleges where innovation is the norm and institutional pride is evident and justified; in these colleges innovation abounds. Led by committed and creative people and aimed almost exclusively at improving student service and student success, these innovations include outstanding programs in student advising, developmental education, faculty orientation and development, learning communities, project-based learning, applications of technology to improve teaching and learning, electronic portfolio development, Web-based registration and financial aid processes, call center customer service operations, Baldrige quality processes, and partnerships with businesses, community organizations, universities, and the public schools. At one college, a campus group identifies effective innovations and supports bringing them to scale within the college. This energy for innovation provided the backdrop for the campus visits, and from interactions during the visits emerged the significant crosscutting themes that follow.

**Key Observations: A Baker's Dozen**

*1. The journey is long, the tasks are multiple, the challenges are conceptually and politically complex....* The commitment to become a Learning College can be viewed as a long, arduous, and exciting journey to realign institutional priorities, policies, programs, practices, and personnel to focus on learning as the primary business of the college. This observation is not gratuitous information or rhetorical fluff; rather, it is an exclamation point. The visitors were



reminded that talking and writing about major institutional transformation is easy, but making it happen is quite difficult.

*2. The commitment to learning is not always a visible priority.* All of the VLCs have a long history of commitment to learning, but this commitment is not always explicit in policies, programs, practices, and participation of college personnel in the educational enterprise. The reasons vary from campus to campus: In some cases, the focus on learning may still be one of several competing priorities; in others, the formal language of the institution does not appear to have caught up with its intentions and daily practice; in still others, disparate projects have not yet been blessed with an explicit unifying vision.

*3. Innovations and projects abound, but they sometimes lack unifying goals or principles and frequently spawn reform fatigue.* All of the VLCs are heavily engaged in a variety of innovations and projects, sometimes numbering more than fifty on a single campus. In some cases, no unifying principles or goals exist for the vast array of institutional activities, a phenomenon that produces a culture some staff members identify as unfocused and frenetic. As one VLC team member said, “This college is pathologically committed to innovation.” Faculty and staff also identified a syndrome they call reform fatigue. Already dancing as fast as they can, they seek organizing principles and priorities as well as ways to reconfigure workloads and perhaps say no to some activities. Some of the VLCs are attempting to create a common set of principles, goals, and values focused on learning to help integrate and drive their work, and the Learning College concept is viewed by many leaders in the VLCs as an ideal umbrella under which to collect, unify, and focus college initiatives.

*4. Effective ways to scale up innovations that demonstrably support student learning are greatly needed.* Conversations about the plethora of projects under way in the colleges also yielded expressions of concern about the need to find effective ways to scale up successful innovations born through special projects. Too often, people at VLCs find that effective approaches remain marginal or even disappear from the institutional map once the inventor burns out or the grant runs out. By contrast, at least one VLC has established a process for bringing innovations to scale.

*5. The language of learning (a) is increasingly reflected in key institutional documents, (b) needs action to match walk with talk, (c) is not yet broadly and fully understood, and (d) produces resistance and resentment in some quarters.* As community colleges begin to use the language of learning in mission statements, program descriptions, policy statements, and titles of key staff, the Learning College concept is in danger of being gently co-opted by the appearance of interest and support without the necessary hard and long effort to make the concept come to full fruition. This observation comes also with a counterpoint. That is, on some campuses there is a notable resistance to the language of the Learning College among at least some faculty and staff. Explanations of this phenomenon vary from complaints about education jargon to objections that “we have always been about learning here!” and a sense that past performance is being unfairly criticized.

*6. There exists a continuing need for organizational teaching and learning—to gain common understanding and define common ground and then to develop new skill sets.* An insight related

to the language issue was articulated by one VLC faculty member in this way: There is still a significant need for internal teaching and learning, first to come to a collective and local understanding of the meaning of Learning College and then to develop new skill sets and attitudes. “Don’t assume too quickly,” he said, “that faculty actually know how to do things differently.” That honest reflection can clearly be applied to other campus groups as well.

*7. Learner-centered and learning-centered are still often used as though they were synonymous terms.* Some of the VLCs are still using learner and learning as if they were synonymous concepts. Community colleges have historically been learner or student centered, and many of them take great pride in this focus as one of their core values. The Learning College also includes a focus on the learner as a core value but places priority on learning as the desired outcome for learners. This modification of perspective is subtle but can also be transformative in key areas of institutional policy and practice.

*8. People foresee the need to consider significant changes in the roles of faculty and other professionals.* With some anticipation and also a measure of dread, some interviewees noted that a serious focus on learning will bring colleges to consider significant changes in the roles of faculty and other professionals. The shift from deliverer of knowledge to facilitator of learning may be only the tip of the proverbial iceberg, as people consider possibilities as diverse as case manager roles, distance learning specialists, and the potential unbundling of instruction and the assessment of learning. Such changes, they say, should be dictated by evidence of what works in facilitating student learning.

*9. The most challenging task is also the most essential task: defining, assessing, and documenting student learning outcomes.* Most community colleges have had experience in this process in selected occupational programs, but the VLCs are finding it quite difficult to apply the process to all college courses, programs, and degrees. A number of the VLCs have defined learning outcomes for many courses and have embedded these in the curriculum, though general education courses and critical across-the-curriculum skills remain a challenge. Few VLCs are satisfied with their processes to assess the acquisition of skills and knowledge identified in the outcome statements, and none of the colleges have created satisfactory models to document and transcript the learning outcomes. Clearly, substantial and important work needs to be done in this arena.

*10. Companion to the assessment challenge is the work of developing a culture of evidence.* Building a culture that addresses the demand for data about student learning, the capacity to produce and analyze that data, and the skills and commitment to use data for continuous improvement represents a significant departure from community college traditions of justification by anecdote. People in the VLCs are recognizing the value and the power of data-driven decision making.

*11. Project evaluation at the campus level needs further attention.* A significant amount of work still needs to be done within a number of the VLCs to establish clear and appropriate ways to evaluate outcomes of the project and achievement of project objectives. Community colleges have a fine tradition of becoming so involved in the work at hand that they overlook evaluation

of its impact. It will take active commitment and public accountability to avoid that phenomenon in this project.

*12. Project participation has reinforced college efforts to put learning first in related initiatives.* The VLCs recognize the value of participating in this project and have used their participation to reinforce their efforts to place learning first in related initiatives such as accreditation, total quality management, and measurements of institutional effectiveness.

*13. [reprise] The journey is long, the tasks are multiple, the challenges are conceptually and politically complex—and there is a significant distance yet to travel.* The VLCs are accustomed to being recognized in the U.S. and Canada as outstanding community colleges, and they have created a culture of pride and high expectations for their work. They like to succeed, and they like to perform at very high levels of competency. Compared to an ideal model of the Learning College, the VLCs are certainly best in class. At this point in the journey, however, the participant colleges, each on its own path, have a considerable distance to travel in order to achieve the five major project objectives. The early moral of this story can therefore be appropriately summarized: “A Learning College has a lot to learn!”

### **Observations of Fellow Travelers**

The project evaluator emerged from these campus visits enriched by her own learning—and with a notebook full of quotations from the Learning College pioneers. Asked to define the difference between a very good community college and a Learning College, one college staff member noted, “The difference is when you can provide credible and convincing evidence of learning.” Another commented, “An important goal for us is the *planned abandonment* of low-priority, off-target, or ineffective programs.” And, finally, one college staff member offered a fitting benediction when she revealed the extent to which the Learning College idea can be embedded in an institution: “Being learning-centered is like breathing for us.”

*Kay McClenney, a Senior Associate with The Pew Forum on Undergraduate Learning, is the external evaluator for the League for Innovation’s Learning College Project.*

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Cynthia Wilson, Editor in Chief

League for Innovation in the Community College  
Learning Abstracts

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**EVALUATING INDIVIDUAL STUDENT LEARNING:  
IMPLICATIONS FROM FOUR MODELS OF ASSESSMENT**

*Mary Hjelm and Ronald L. Baker*

Historically, judging the achievement of institutional and student learning outcomes for higher education was the province of colleges and universities. More recently, however, higher education's role as sole adjudicator of institutional effectiveness and student learning achievement is eroding, due in part to a decrease in public confidence regarding the ability of colleges and universities to authenticate the achievement of explicit outcomes. One indicator of that decline is public skepticism regarding the meaning, relevance, and significance of traditional grades and degrees as effective measures of achievement of intended learning outcomes. Community and technical colleges, noted for their effectiveness in fulfilling public expectations, have not escaped the fallout from this trend. Along with other sectors of higher education, they are under pressure to augment implicit measures of institutional and student learning outcomes with authentic assessment and meaningful documentation of explicit achievements.

**Graduated Scales**

Authentic assessment and meaningful documentation of student learning outcomes is beneficial at a variety of levels within the institution: (1) at the *institutional level*, explicit documentation of student achievement provides evidence to demonstrate accountability to the institution's publics; (2) at the program level, program effectiveness and continuous quality improvement are enhanced through the measurement and evaluation of student achievement of expected educational outcomes; and (3) at the classroom level, an evaluation of student learning provides valuable information to both faculty and students. Such assessment and documentation benefits faculty by providing data that can be analyzed to inform and improve instructional strategies that enhance teaching effectiveness. Explicit assessment of learning outcomes benefits students by providing evidence of achievement levels for expected learning outcomes. Regardless of the assessment rationale, assessments of achievement of explicitly defined educational outcomes complement more general assessments of student learning such as course grades, program certificates, and institutional degrees.

Unfortunately, two obstacles hinder ready implementation of effective assessment and documentation strategies. The first obstacle is cultural, since many educators are grounded in a culture of subjective assessment that uses historical criteria of achievement. Consequently, they have little understanding of and place even less value in explicit assessment and documentation of student achievements. The second obstacle is a perceived lack of assessment models to review and consider for implementation.

**Foundations of Assessment**

Evaluation of the achievement of intended learning outcomes is no longer the sole domain of faculty. An expanding number of constituencies, including students, faculty, administrators, and board members, expect institutions to provide primary evidence of achievement of explicit student outcomes. Frequently that evidence takes the form of data derived from an assessment of student learning outcomes. Assessment of student learning is most effectively conducted when based upon meaningful and relevant criteria that authentically evaluate the achievement of knowledge, skills, and abilities. Its conduct should be authentic, continuous, systematic, and substantive in nature; give students more control over their learning; provide a positive, risk-free structure for reflection and feedback; and support improvement in both student learning and instructor effectiveness. Furthermore, the results of assessments should contribute to the documentation of levels of achievement and effectiveness and suggest directions for improvement of student learning.

### **Taking Stock**

A consideration for the adoption of a model of assessment should begin with thoughtful deliberation of two key questions: (1) Why do we want to assess student learning? (2) What should be assessed? While appearing obvious and simplistic, these questions have profound implications because they require a clear understanding and articulation of the purpose and expected outcomes resulting from assessment. Given the spectrum of reasons for assessment, no single model can be applied universally to the broad range of intended higher education outcomes. Consequently, colleges have adopted a variety of assessment models based upon the perceived needs for assessment. Many of these models have characteristics that influence an evaluation of individual student learning. A discussion of the characteristics and implications of four models of assessment may be beneficial to an analysis of the resulting implications for the assessment and documentation of student learning.

### **Outcomes Model**

The Outcomes Model reflects a holistic approach to assessments of outcomes based upon the values and mission of the college. Planning begins with a broad consideration and subsequent refinement of the question: What are the explicit outcomes and levels of achievement that a student must attain to receive credentials from this college? Although the Outcomes Model respects external interests, it is not determined by them. It may be influenced by factors such as SCANS or SKILLS standards, grants, or state requirements, but it is driven by values identified by the college as primary to its mission and vision. The first step in implementing this model is the identification of overarching institutional learning outcomes that provide a framework for development of more program-specific learning outcomes. Collectively, the institutional and programmatic learning outcomes inform decisions on learning outcomes at the individual course level. Assessment methods and tools are subsequently designed to measure achievement of these intended institutional, program, and course learning outcomes. Consequently, an assessment of student learning is a central and critical component of an overall assessment of institutional effectiveness.

### **Grassroots Model**

The Grassroots Model emphasizes assessment of student achievement at the course and program levels. It is characterized by assessment efforts initiated and conducted by faculty, but assessment may be conducted and evaluated by anyone at the point of contact between the institution and its constituencies. This model is based upon a clear connection between the values held by faculty and the perceived benefit of measuring outcomes that reinforce faculty values and perceptions. Many faculty support the Grassroots Model because it enables them to integrate assessment with teaching and learning to improve the effectiveness of both. Faculty also support the Grassroots Model because it empowers them with the responsibility of defining the criteria and conditions by which learning is measured and evaluated rather than having those characteristics determined, imposed, and interpreted by others. Where the connection between values and perceived benefits to faculty is strong, faculty exhibit a high degree of buy-in and ownership of assessment, which in turn act as stimuli for inquiry and consideration by other faculty for implementation across the curriculum. An aggregation of class and program assessments of student achievement contribute to an overall assessment of learning outcomes at the institutional level that serves as an indicator of institutional effectiveness in one key area of the college's mission.

### **Mandate Model**

The Mandate Model is based on the principle of accountability for resources invested in the college as a whole. It may be the model most fraught with anxiety within the education community because its agenda is externally motivated, if not externally controlled. It is designed to determine a "return on investment" to the institution's publics. Assessment criteria for this model frequently define short-term priorities for the institution, since funding support is commonly tied to the results of institutional assessments that are then evaluated by stakeholders outside the college community. It measures institutional performance directly, and student learning indirectly, based upon performance indicators such as years to degree completion that may, in some cases, be in misalignment with the spirit and mission of institutional mission. Since the focus for the Mandate Model is the institution as a whole, assessment criteria frequently lack a substantial academic foundation. Furthermore, criteria typically used for this model are simplistic and economic in nature and are defined by entities external to the college. Since the rationale and criteria for assessments are determined externally, assessment strategies tend to be narrow and reactive rather than broad and proactive. Consequently, assessment of individual student learning is often anecdotal and indirect rather than meaningful and direct. The Mandate Model does, however, provide a clear indicator to the college of what is valued and expected by external stakeholders.

### **Institutional Effectiveness Model**

This model is designed primarily to evaluate the institution and its initiatives rather than to evaluate individual student learning achievement. Assessment criteria are drawn from the institution's mission statement - what it says it will do. The purpose of assessment in this context is to determine, on the whole, the institution's effectiveness in fulfilling its mission. In practice, this model assists in an evaluation of how well the institution is doing what it says it will do. Assessment results are returned to the college's stakeholders for an overarching evaluation of the institution rather than returned to individual students and faculty to inform and evaluate

individual student achievement. Consequently, assessment results from this model apply to the institution as an entity and students as a whole with only indirect inferences to achievements by individual students. Therefore, these assessment results are of limited value in improving and certifying individual student learning.

### **Considerations**

Each of the four models of assessment has strengths and weaknesses. Since some models concentrate on evaluating student learning directly while other models only imply student achievement, educators should carefully consider why assessment is conducted, what is to be measured, and why it should be measured. Furthermore, agreement should be reached regarding how, and in what context, assessments are to be conducted and how the resulting data are to be evaluated. Educators should avoid the common errors of assuming that all models of assessment produce the same results or reversing the sequence of considerations by first implementing assessment tools and techniques in hope they will somehow support an unspecified purpose for assessment. To be successful, strategies for an assessment of student learning should be based upon discussions and agreements within the college community and between the college community and the institution's publics concerning expectations, functions, and forms assessment will take in evaluating and documenting institutional and educational outcomes. In the end, however, what really matters to students directly, and to others more indirectly, is that the college conducts effective and meaningful evaluations of student learning that yield clear and compelling evidence of student achievement of explicitly stated knowledge, skills, and abilities.

*Mary Hjelm is General Education Division Manager at Eastern Idaho Technical College, and Ron Baker is Associate Executive Director for the Commission on Colleges and Universities of the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges and Universities. Mary and Ron are Project Facilitators for the League's 21st Century Learning Outcomes Project.*

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**ADVANCING LEARNING-CENTERED EDUCATION  
AT THE STATE OR PROVINCIAL LEVEL**

*Michael Skolnik and Roy Giroux*

In January 2000, the League for Innovation initiated the Learning College Project to assist community colleges around the world to become more learning centered. Thus far, efforts to advance learning-centered education in the community college have been conducted primarily at two levels: the institutional level and the national or international level. At the institutional level, the Vanguard Learning Colleges and many other community colleges in the United States and Canada have introduced numerous reforms intended to make them more learning centered. Many of these reforms have been described through League publications and conferences, reflecting the leadership role the League has played in the national and international movement for learning-centered education.

Another jurisdictional level—the state or province—lies between the institutional and national or international levels and is potentially fruitful for advancing the learning revolution in the community college. The state or provincial level initiative has several benefits: (1) closer geographic proximity of participating institutions to one another, compared to the national or international level, allows more frequent interaction among colleges for sharing information, resources, and expertise; (2) institutions working together have the potential to influence relevant state policies, e.g., those pertaining to finance, program approval, and assessment; and (3) every college exists within a broader educational and professional culture, and some aspects of that broader cultural environment need to change in order for reforms at the institutional level to take root and be most successful. Difficult as it is, for example, to imagine some changes in the architecture of learning occurring at any level (e.g., workload structures), change may be more likely if it is percolating at the state or provincial level as well as in some institutions. In this abstract, we describe our experience in launching a provincial organization to advance learning-centered education in Ontario, outline activities to date and some future plans, and indicate the lessons we have learned that may benefit educators in states which are considering similar initiatives.

**Building a Provincial Consortium**

To explore the possibility of pursuing some of the benefits of provincial level collaboration in Ontario, the University of Toronto's Community College Leadership Program and Humber College decided to test the waters last year. For the Community College Leadership Program, involvement in this provincial initiative would fit that part of our mission pertaining to dissemination of knowledge about state-of-the-art practice, it could be an important avenue for us to contribute to staff development in the colleges beyond what we achieve in our graduate degree programs, and it could help to foster a network that would be valuable for research. For



Humber College, a provincial initiative could be an important vehicle for the dissemination role to which it made a commitment as one of the twelve Vanguard Learning Colleges in the League's Learning College Project.

In this endeavor, the University of Toronto and Humber College had the advantage of a long history of working together in college-focused staff development, dissemination, and research activities. Still, we realized that unless other stakeholders in the system shared our interest in developing a provincial focus, we could expect little to happen. We started with informal networking to gauge the level of interest and were sufficiently encouraged to move the discussions to a more formal stage, that of contact with two systemwide organizations: the committee of Academic Officers of the colleges and the provincial organization of Staff Development Officers. Both groups were very supportive of the idea of a provincial-level initiative to advance learning-centered education and agreed to encourage their members to attend a planning meeting.

We have observed that frequently the launching of new forms of organizational activity is aided by a bit of serendipity. The serendipitous occurrence in this case was the doctoral dissertation research on learning-centered education being undertaken at the University of Toronto by Renate Krakauer, President of the Michener Institute for Applied Health Sciences (TMI), who had close connections with the Ontario community college system. A strong supporter of learning-centered education, Krakauer volunteered not only to become involved in a provincial initiative, but also to host a key planning meeting at TMI, a centrally located campus with excellent meeting facilities. With the benefit of advice from Terry O'Banion, participants in the planning meeting reached agreement on the terms of reference for the Ontario Learning College Consortium. In January 2001, we sought formal approval for the Consortium at a meeting of the Committee of Presidents of the Colleges. Formal approval from this body would give the project credibility, open some doors for us, and possibly help us to obtain necessary resources.

### **Guiding Principles**

Early on, five principles were adopted for the Consortium: (1) *Inclusiveness*. The initiative is intended to be as inclusive as possible. Our goal is to involve all 25 community colleges in Ontario, as well as other postsecondary institutions. We have already had inquiries from a few private professional and career colleges and hope to make some inroads in the university sector. (2) *Partnerships*. The agenda of the consortium is established by the participating institutions working collaboratively, and activities are undertaken by two or more institutions working in partnerships. (3) *Communication*. We aim to maintain active communication about learning-centered educational developments in participating institutions, and about the Learning College movement generally. A key element of this communication will be a website being developed for the Consortium by a Humber College professor. (4) *Programs and Services*. Among activities, we plan very concrete programs and services that emphasize information exchange and educational, professional development, and technical advisory activities. (5) *Research*. The Consortium, in concert with various partners, especially the University of Toronto, should be a catalyst for research, particularly on the impact of learning-centered education.

### **Activities and Projects**

The Consortium's first educational activity was an orientation session at the annual meeting of the Association of Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology of Ontario. This event brings together trustees, administrators, and faculty of the colleges, and the Learning College Consortium is now a regular agenda item at these annual meetings. Within its first six months, the Consortium sponsored workshops for faculty, administration, and staff development personnel at two colleges and for one large region of the province. In addition, the Consortium held a provincial workshop for Staff Development Officers, with George Boggs, President of the American Association of Community Colleges and a key leader in the learning-centered education movement, as the main presenter.

The Consortium's first research project is an inventory of best practices in learning-centered education in Ontario community colleges currently being conducted at Humber College. Our largest project to date is a Provincial Symposium on Generic Skills which will be hosted by George Brown College and Humber College in May 2002. The Symposium will be held at George Brown College and catered by the staff and students of the College's School of Hospitality. While the majority of participants will be from the Ontario colleges, we anticipate participation from colleges outside Ontario, including from some of the Vanguard Learning Colleges.

Thus far the Consortium has attained considerable momentum and visibility without any formal organization or resources assigned to it. We have been able to do this because participating institutions have allowed staff to spend time on Consortium activities, and they have contributed the use of facilities and supplies. We have also been fortunate that a staff development professional at Humber College has played an important role in coordination and guidance, and we have had great support from the Provincial Committee of Academic Officers. The lack of any formal infrastructure or budget may have been an advantage thus far, as it has forced us to rely on partnerships that have emerged spontaneously at the operational level to achieve specific goals. Time will tell whether we need to develop a more formal support structure.

### **Expanding the Movement**

Developing a framework for advancing learning-centered education at the provincial level has been an exciting journey. Beyond the upcoming projects already mentioned, we are keeping our agenda open for new initiatives to be suggested as more members of the college community in Ontario become familiar with the League's Learning College Project and learning-centered education. As our Consortium proceeds, we would be happy to share what we have learned about this process with colleagues who are interested in undertaking similar initiatives in other states or provinces.

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# League for Innovation in the Community College Learning Abstracts

September 2001 Volume 4, Number 5

## COLLEGE CONVERSATIONS ON LEARNING

*Terry O'Banion and Mark David Milliron*

Learning is the most popular word in education today. In less than five years, it has become the touchstone in book and article titles, project descriptions, speeches, conference themes, and national policy statements. The word learning has emerged to frame a whole new set of constructs: learning organizations, learning communities, learning audits, learning outcomes, learning-based funding, e-learning, and learning colleges. The League for Innovation formally launches a Learning Initiative. Palomar College sponsors an annual conference on the Learning Paradigm. Valencia Community College submits an alternative accreditation report to the Southern Association titled "Toward a Learning College." The Pew Charitable Trusts creates a Learning Forum to coordinate its 27 learning-centered projects, including the League for Innovation's Learning Outcomes project. The board of trustees at The Community College of Baltimore County approves a new strategic plan titled "Learning First." The American Council on Education and the American Association of Community Colleges jointly publish a book, now in its third printing, with the title *A Learning College for the 21st Century*. Chaffey College publishes a new catalog with the motto "Learning is Our Business" on its cover. Even the American Association of Community Colleges, for decades flying under the banner of workforce development, issues a new mission statement reflecting the emphasis on learners: "Building a nation of learners by advancing America's community colleges."

Learning is "where it's at" as the first decade of the 21st century gets under way. But will the emphasis and interest last until the second decade? Is learning just the latest in a long series of educational fads that crop up every ten years? Is it the flavor of the month soon to be replaced by a sexy new bromide for the ills of education?

Most of us have seen these sorts of movements come and go. And, plateau and decline are the likely outcomes for the current interest in learning-centered education unless we can figure out a way to substantively embed learning in all its variant themes into the common language and culture of education. Because of the innate commitment to learning and the ease with which educators connect with learning as the core goal of education, the learning-centered education movement may have more staying power and transformative impact than its predecessors. Our challenge, however, is to move deeper, to get beyond conference keynotes, popular publications, and strategic plans. A focus on learning must become an expected part of the day-to-day conversations on our campuses, the conversations that really shape what happens. In many ways, this talk about learning is essential if we want to walk the walk of learning. And, these conversations on learning can be stimulated both extensively and intensively.

### **Extensive Strategies**

Every college operates within an extensive framework of policies, programs, and practices designed to support the basic mission of the institution. At the beginning of the 21st century we are trying to operate within a framework that has been cobbled together over hundreds of years to meet the needs of various educational missions and changing socioeconomic forces. We have inherited an educational architecture that, ironically, often gets in the way of its reason for being—to improve and expand learning. Organizational theorists call this classic trait of bureaucracies goal displacement.

To overcome this learning goal displacement, a college community must commit itself to refocusing institutional policies, programs, and practices, and to providing more opportunities for faculty and staff to explore their deep commitments to and strong interests in learning as the core mission of the educational enterprise. Substantive conversations on learning are one way to begin this transformation of the extensive framework of education. The key question that can trigger these conversations asks: Does this policy, program, or practice improve and expand student learning?

For example, in the recruiting and hiring process, we should engage new faculty and staff members in conversations about the importance of learning and signal to them early on that our institutions take learners and learning outcomes seriously. Moreover, orientation programs should not only inform new employees about parking and paychecks, but further engage them to explore learning and challenge them to add their voices to the academic community. Evaluation programs should spend less time on perfunctory surveys and more time in real dialogue about how effective faculty and staff are in improving and expanding learning at the institution. Processes for creating curriculum, policies regarding grading, and practices in departmental and institutional governance should all be issues for conversations regarding the extent to which these institutional elements contribute to learning. Every aspect of the organizational culture should be examined in a continuing series of conversations on learning to help the college and its constituencies refocus the policies, programs, and practices to place learning first.

### **Intensive Strategies**

The more extensive strategies will be particularly effective if combined with a more intensive strategy directed by a learning centered staff development program. We strongly recommend that colleges tailor their staff development programs to make learning the priority for convocations, staff development days, workshops, visits to other colleges, in-house newsletters, readings, and committee meetings. College leaders who want to make their institutions more learning centered will design a staff development program as a curriculum—a curriculum for all staff members with clearly stated learning outcomes, many options to meet the diverse learning styles and needs of a diverse staff, an emphasis on core skills, entrance and exit competencies for selected key programs, assessment and documentation of learning achieved, and rewards and recognition for achievement.

A key feature of such a staff development curriculum will be a series of campus conversations on learning, an opportunity for faculty and staff to probe issues of learning seldom addressed in a substantive way through the usual one-shot workshops provided by

the typical staff development program. Faculty and staff hunger for rich and intellectual dialogue on a continuing basis on issues that are at the heart of their work, issues that reflect their core values and core concerns. The following questions suggest the richness of the topics that would deeply engage faculty and staff in a series of conversations on learning:

- What kinds of learning do we value most?
- What conditions do we need to create to best support the kinds of learning we value most?
- How do we measure the kinds of learning we agree to produce?
- What kind of learning do we value highly that we feel cannot be measured?
- Why can't this kind of learning be measured?
- What do we mean by deeper learning and broader learning?
- What are the primary learning styles of our students, and which of these can we best accommodate?
- How can we provide more learning experience options for our students to respond to their diverse learning styles?
- How do we distinguish between learner-centered education and learning-centered education?
- How can we use technology to better help our students extend and expand their learning?
- Is there a more useful way to document learning than grades and course credit?
- Is there a more effective way than workload formulas to utilize the skills and talents of faculty in facilitating the learning process?
- How do secretaries, custodians, technicians, and other nonfaculty staff contribute to learning?
- How do we really know that our students have really learned?

These are some of the basic questions to help planners begin, but more questions and issues can be identified from an institution's history, and many more will emerge when the serious conversations begin.

### **Organizing Conversations on Learning.**

A conversation on learning is a focused discussion, involving ten to twelve participants and led by an experienced facilitator, that has as its goal increased and expanded learning on the part of participants. The conversation is usually scheduled for two-hour periods weekly or every other week over a semester or a year. Participants are provided brief reading materials to stimulate discussion. They participate in structured exercises and often work toward specific goals. All topics relate to learning. While we know of no written guidelines for designing and conducting these conversations on learning, there are

highly competent instructional design specialists and staff development officers working in community colleges today who could create a framework for the staff development program to focus on learning. A good example of the power and impact of such conversations can be found in the work of Steve Gilbert and the Teaching, Learning, and Technology Roundtables. These structured and focused conversations deal with teaching and learning and “oh by the way, technology”—as they proudly note—and have had great impact on many community colleges.

Organized conversations on learning will create awareness, expand knowledge and understanding, and motivate action. Depending on the culture of the institution, conversations may work best when they are cross-functional, with representatives from a variety of areas within the college. In other cases conversations may be limited to representatives from specific disciplines or programs. Some conversations will thrive if students, trustees, secretaries, or community representatives are included. All conversations should be offered on a voluntary basis or as one of the options for scheduled activities in which faculty and staff are expected to participate. It is important to keep the conversations on a positive note as much as possible and to create a framework so that participants are working toward visible goals. The overall goal of college conversations on learning is to create as much interest as possible in issues related to improving and expanding learning for students and for the employees of the college.

## **Conclusion**

A series of extensive and intensive strategies to engage conversations on learning can anchor an institutional effort to place learning as the first priority. Over time, these conversations will help embed learning into the language and culture of education and can lead to an institutionwide initiative to examine every policy, program, and practice to determine the impact on learning. Given the opportunity, faculty, staff, and other institutional stakeholders will gladly add their voices to this conversation. And, as these conversations buzz across our campuses and throughout education, we again realize that the value of learning is not in its current popularity, but in its eternal ability to transform, inspire, and enlighten.

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