

# **Ladders to Success: How to Build Your Own Faculty and Staff Leadership Academy**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In preparing to meet the need for educational leaders, community colleges must formulate institution specific strategies that will address both the qualitative and quantitative challenges they face. There are a number of community college leadership development initiatives throughout the country. Most are in the form of fixed-site, short-duration type programs. Such professional development programs are typically scheduled in accessible locations and bring together speakers of national stature to address participants individually, as a panel or both. Because of travel budget restriction, many of these programs are available in the form of interactive and non-interactive web broadcasts. These training efforts are usually very well-designed, but often fail to provoke substantive change when participants return to their organizations. The short-term exposure to information in such sessions limits participants to only the most superficial understanding of any topic. After attending numerous conferences, web-casts, and institutes with a focus on leadership, why don't we see a substantive increase in both the numbers of individuals prepared to step into senior community college leadership positions and the quality of the leadership skill-set of current and aspiring leaders?

## **EPCC OVERVIEW**

To illustrate how community colleges might address the qualitative and quantitative leadership challenges, we want to focus on efforts that have taken place over the last four years at El Paso Community College. El Paso is a community of approximately 800,000 people and is situated in far West Texas where New Mexico, Mexico, and Texas intersect. Not surprising is that one encounters many of the challenges common to so many borders communities – high unemployment, low educational attainment, and low per capita income. Because of its strategic location on the U.S.-Mexico border, El Paso has evolved into a major gateway for goods flowing both north into the United States and South into Mexico, Central America and South America. Additionally, El Paso is home to a substantial number of active duty and retired military families because of the presence of Fort Bliss. Recent recommendations from the BRAC suggest significant increases in that military population over the next ten years.

El Paso Community College District was established June, 1969 and began enrolling students in September, 1971. The first class offerings took place in buildings leased from the U.S. Army at Fort Bliss. From this rather humble beginning, EPCC has evolved into a district operating five campuses and an administrative service center serving the post-secondary educational needs of 25,000 credit students and 9,000 continuing education students. With a workforce of 3,000 staff and faculty and an annual operating budget in excess of \$100 million, EPCC is one of the area's major economic drivers.

Approximately five years ago, as a new president assumed leadership at El Paso Community College, vigorous discussions took place regarding both qualitative and quantitative leadership challenges we faced. What emerged from these discussions were concerns about the process by which most individuals find their way into leadership positions. Many community college leaders began their post-secondary careers as faculty members hired to teach accounting, biology, history, or whatever else is consistent with their subject expertise. As they mature in their profession, they might be asked to serve on various institutional committees, to represent their institutions at regional, state, or national conferences, and to chair teams charged with specific tasks (i.e., accreditation self-study teams, performance appraisal teams,

professional development planning teams). When individuals enjoy high-profile success, their stature within the college grows and they are frequently invited to assume more responsible leadership positions. Why then do so many leaders disappoint when they assume the full responsibilities of their positions? Is this another example of people being promoted to their respective level of incompetence, at which point, they become a danger to those around them? Are we generally poor judges of leadership potential?

We submit for your consideration that the reason many community college leaders fall short of expectations is most often an artifact of the promotion process in higher education. We assume that because an individual is a skillful classroom leader and an effective member of the tenure review committee, that they will be equally skillful as a discipline coordinator, dean, or director. All of us have been cautioned about the risks inherent in assumption.

## **PLANNING**

Once colleges commit to putting in place a leadership academy, they must understand that it is a planning intensive endeavor. What is the purpose of a leadership academy? What will be the duration of the academy? How will academy participants be selected? Should there be multiple tracks to the academy which address the unique needs of participants? What should be the elements of the academy curriculum and how will these elements be presented? How does the college intend to monitor the effectiveness of the academy? There are numerous other issues which must be addressed during the planning stage, which is why this stage may be so protracted and provoke such vigorous discussion.

In an effort to assist other colleges which see value to a leadership academy, we wish to share our institutional journey that took us from planning to implementation. To preface this discussion, it must be emphasized that the success of any leadership initiative is contingent upon unwavering support from the highest level of the organization. A leadership academy requires a commitment of institutional resources to include people, time, facilities, and money. As such, support from the president/chancellor and his/her cabinet is critical.

To assist in our planning effort, El Paso Community College approached the Institute for Community College Development (ICCD) at Cornell University to help formulate a leadership development plan. The plan presented by ICCD was the result of a three day visit by two ICCD staff members to each of the five campuses of EPCC and the results from two surveys, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Enterprise Questionnaire and the 15 Leadership Competencies Survey, which were completed by all district administrators.

The purpose of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Enterprise Questionnaire was to:

1. Identify which of 12 organizational competencies were most important at EPCC;
2. Assess current levels of performance on each of these 12 competencies; and,
3. Determine which competencies most needed to be addressed by the College's leadership program.

The top five competencies which were identified as critical by EPCC administrators were:

1. Vision directed;
2. Flexible and continuously learning;
3. Customer driven and marketing focused;
4. Creative use of technology; and,
5. Innovative.

These areas needed to be given specific attention as the curriculum for the academy at EPCC was developed.

A second instrument called the 15 Leadership Competencies Survey was also responded to by many administrators and yielded data intended to:

1. Determine which of 15 leadership competencies were regarded as most important;
2. Assess current levels of performance on each of the 15 competencies; and,
3. Determine which of the leadership competencies most needed to be addressed by the academy curriculum.

The six competencies which were regarded as most important by the administrators who responded to this survey were:

1. Knowledge of job;
2. Taking action and making decisions;
3. Energy, drive, and ambition;
4. Time management;
5. Communicating information and ideas; and,
6. Coping with pressure and adversity.

Results from the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Enterprise Questionnaire and the 15 Leadership Competencies Survey were combined with information gathered by the Cornell team during their interviews with over fifty EPCC faculty and staff. The recommendations resulting from their in-depth analysis of the College's leadership milieu served as a blueprint for the development of the EPCC Leadership Academy. It must be emphasized that not all recommendations from the Cornell report were adopted, however most were. Though time-consuming, the diagnostic work performed by ICCD was certainly worth the institutional investment of time and money.

## **IMPLEMENTATION**

The goal of the EPCC Leadership Academy is to establish a program to “facilitate the development of leadership qualities, characteristics, and skills in participants, and to increase knowledge about El Paso Community College.” To be viable, it was important that all constituencies within the College, administrators, faculty and staff be afforded the chance to participate in the Academy. With such a broad target audience for the Academy, participants present with a wide-ranging repertoire of leadership skills. Some will be mid- or senior-level administrators with years of experience, while others may be novices with little or no leadership experience. To address the initial disparity of leadership skills of participants, it was recommended to have two tracks available, one for individuals with little formal leadership experience and one for individuals with extensive leadership experience.

Another key recommendation to emerge from the Cornell Report was the need to establish a broadly representative leadership development committee charged with the overall development and implementation of the College's Leadership Academy. Several of the more critical responsibilities thought to be appropriate for this committee include:

- Review of the leadership development needs of the various employee constituencies;
- Coordination of pragmatic modules and activities;
- Review program applicants and recommend participants to the President;
- Identify ways for the College to integrate leadership development into daily operations;
- Formulate a budget and recommend funding for the academy; and,
- Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the academy in order to improve the quality of the programs.

The first step in the implementation of the Leadership Academy was to convene the Academy Steering Committee. The committee selected was comprised of 15 members and included a broad representation of both faculty and staff. The committee met on a regular basis to evaluate and act on the numerous recommendations contained in the Cornell Report. Following a protracted and vigorous discussion by the steering committee and with the full support of the President and his cabinet, the EPCC Leadership Academy was ready to accept the first class of participants which began the program in January, 2005. Interest in this initiative was strong throughout the District with all 30 seats in the fundamentals track filling and all 30 seats in the advanced track filling.

Any full-time faculty or staff member was eligible to apply for the Leadership Academy. To be considered, each individual was required to complete an application detailing significant components of their professional career and indicating why they wished to participate in the Leadership Academy. Along with this application, individuals were required to submit a supervisory statement of support. The purpose of this supervisory statement was to obtain an evaluation of a candidate's strengths and weaknesses and to insure that their supervisor was fully supportive of their participation. The time commitment is significant and involves participation in a series of twelve four-hour sessions (one each month) focusing on a variety of leadership issues. It was then the responsibility of the Academy Steering Committee to review all applications and to recommend to the President participants in both tracks. These individuals were formally notified by the President of their selection and began the program in January.

Completion of the Fundamentals Leadership Program requires completion of the following leadership training modules:

- Personal Responsibility
- Interpersonal Communication
- Leadership Styles
- Equal Opportunity, Equal Success
- Elements of Successful Change
- Ethical Challenges in the Workplace
- Creativity in the Workplace
- Effective Communication
- Dynamic Team Building
- Conflict Resolution
- Mentoring and Coaching
- Recognizing and Appreciating Others.

To obtain the Leadership Academy certification, participants needed to complete all pre and post-workshop assignments, complete all twelve training modules, participate in all prescribed outside activities, work with a mentor from a different College department, and complete a team project that benefits the College.

The Advanced Leadership Development track is similar in design to the Fundamentals track, being comprised of twelve four-hour modules, each presented once a month for a calendar year. The following are the training modules that constitute the Advanced Leadership Program:

- Personal Responsibility
- Interpersonal Communication
- Strategic Budgeting
- Leading by Example
- Developing Others Through Coaching
- Communicating for Results

- Creativity in the Workplace
- Effective Communication
- Improving Results by Managing Time
- Engaging with the Community
- Motivating People to Achieve Results
- Recognizing and Appreciating Others.

Advanced Academy participants are expected to develop and implement Individual Learning Action Plans (ILAPs). These action plans are intended to encourage participants to reflect upon information presented during the training modules and the results of individual assessments.

The final certification requirement for these participants is to work with others in the class to plan and execute a team project. The project must be able to be completed during their Leadership Academy year and should yield a product that can be integrated into the College structure or process.

### **THE FUTURE**

Even as members of the third class begin their year of study, the Academy Steering Committee works to review participant evaluations from prior years to identify ways to strengthen the program. This commitment to continuously strive to improve the program means that our institution is not married to any component of the Academy. If we identify an aspect of the Leadership Academy which can be improved upon, we are ready to modify what is currently being done. This degree of programmatic flexibility is deemed critical if the Academy is to continue as a vital professional development tool affecting the organizational landscape.

Though it may be a bit premature to confer tenure upon the College's Leadership Academy, it does seem that the Academy is having a positive organizational impact. Participant reviews for both the fundamentals and advanced tracks have been favorable.