

## **BIO**

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Bonnie Nygard is the Assistant Provost for Workforce Development and Career Pathway Planning at the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA). She served as Interim Dean of the UAA Community and Technical College during the 2005-2006 academic year, leading the College through a new planning process. The process, referred to as *Career Cluster Planning*, included an extensive demand analysis and ongoing input from industry partners. The College was the recipient of the 2006 Exemplary Leadership Award from the Alaska Association for Career and Technical Education for this planning model. Prior to this, Bonnie served as the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs for the UAA Community and Technical College. She was also faculty and coordinator of Physical Education and Recreation at UAA for more than ten years.

### **Realizing your Vision through Partnerships: A Success Story about Fast Track Planning**

#### **Prepared by:**

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Would you like industry partners to support your vision and faculty excited to make it happen? If the answer is yes, prepare yourself for one of the most challenging and rewarding leadership experiences of your career.

Where is your institution now, and what would you like it to become? What are the differences between the current environment and your vision of the future? These are questions the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA), Community and Technical College answered before engaging in collaborative planning; a process that ultimately transformed internal paradigms and external perceptions. Throw 'fast-track planning' into the mix, and get ready for a wild ride!

**THE RIGHT CONDITIONS** - *Requires leadership that is willing to assess strengths and weaknesses and systemically delegate what needs to be done to individuals who can do the job.*

As one of six schools and colleges at UAA, the Community and Technical College annually enrolls approximately 26,000 students in its courses and delivers 42 degree programs, ranging from certificates to baccalaureate degrees.

To establish the right conditions for collaborative planning, the college devoted considerable resources toward aligning curriculum with national standards, upgrading equipment, and improving quality in fledging programs. During this time the internal paradigm supported a narrow focus, concentrating on the health and future needs of individual academic programs. The college reinforced this paradigm through a short-term annual planning process. Without relatively healthy individual programs within each unit, faculty will be far less likely to collaborate and accept the holistic approach required in collaborative planning. In other words, *there was a solid base, with well established operational processes, to support and sustain quality within existing initiatives.*

Does your institution have the following conditions in place?

- Healthy individual programs, i.e. curriculum, facilities, equipment, etc.
- Widely communicated and accepted mission and values
- A basic understanding of the role individual programs play in meeting community/industry needs

*PLANNING FRAMEWORK - Requires leadership with strong communication skills and the ability to create a vision.*

The organizational structure of the UAA Community and Technical College corresponds with a number of the States' Career Clusters (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, 1999). *This framework provides a way for schools to organize instruction and student experiences around sixteen broad categories that encompass virtually all occupations from entry through professional levels.* Information related to the States' Career Clusters framework was distributed and discussed prior to establishing this framework as the foundation for planning.

Referring to this planning process as 'career cluster' planning should not imply an endorsement or formal process supported by the nationally recognized States' Career Clusters framework. The use of this terminology is only intended to support the national framework, align planning efforts with a comprehensive view of career preparation, and structure academic program planning in a way that makes sense to industry partners. For example, career cluster planning allowed us to establish a plan for our architecture and construction career cluster, aligning the needs of a variety of individual programs, such as construction management, architectural engineering and technology, and welding technology, in a single plan. These programs range from occupational endorsements to a baccalaureate degree.

*A SHARED VISION - Requires leadership that is able to generate enthusiasm and is prepared to accept input from both internal and external stakeholders.*

As a leader, you must know who your primary stakeholders are and be prepared to involve them in the planning process in meaningful ways. One key component of this success story involved a paradigm shift within the institution. The internal stakeholders, including faculty, staff, and administrators transitioned from a somewhat isolated program-level view of how they serve students to a broader perspective of how they serve industries. Using a broad-based lens versus an individual program focus allowed the college to initiate discussions surrounding how it serves each industry as a whole.

Another significant shift occurred in the external stakeholders' perception of their value to higher education. Inviting community and industry partners, with global views of workforce trends, to participate in establishing the vision was an important first step toward shifting their perceptions. They began to understand how true collaboration with higher education can address mutual needs.

Genuinely collaborative planning can result in a bold plan for the future. Make no mistake about it, this involves risk. *As the leader, you must be prepared to establish your vision, identify guiding principles, and then be willing to accept direction.*

**PLANT THE SEED** - *Requires leadership that is a catalyst for positive change by being highly driven and persuasive.*

Establishing a vision for collaborative planning, like planting a seed, is the first step. *Moving the college away from annual program-level planning required a clearly articulated justification, along with well defined planning outcomes.* The rationale must be attached to a better future, improved work environment, and tangible benefits for students and employers. As the leader, be prepared to share your vision for the planning process, solicit input, and then listen to feedback. Soliciting input allows you to identify potential challenges and saboteurs in advance. A solid vision, with justification and meaningful outcomes, can withstand initial pessimism. The vision for this planning process represented significant change for our college, requiring steadfast leadership and ongoing communication.

Involve your leadership team in brainstorming reasons why a broad-view planning process is important and identify who it will serve. For example, we viewed the career cluster planning process as a way to improve collaboration between programs and help manage growth. Examples of who we felt it would serve were industry partners, faculty, students, and fiscal decision-makers.

**IDENTIFY PLANNING LEADS** - *Requires leadership that can influence, mentor, and move an incongruent team in one direction with mutual respect and trust.*

Before you begin, review your organizational structure and determine whether it supports a career cluster planning approach. Most universities and community colleges are structured into schools and colleges that are further broken down into departments and/or divisions. The departments and divisions generally align academic programs in similar disciplines. For example, allied health programs can usually be found in a department or division of related programs - those that prepare students for a career in an allied health field.

If your current structure aligns programs in this way, you are likely ready to begin this type of planning without restructuring. The department/division chairs or directors can serve as career cluster planning leads. Involve the planning leads at the earliest stage of planning. *They will ultimately be responsible for cultivating the seed that will result in a new vision.*

**ESTABLISH PLANNING CRITERIA** - *Requires leadership that has a bold vision for the future and understands the importance of actions matching words.*

“If we build it, they will come” is not necessarily true in higher education. *Establish criteria that will guide your decisions for the future based on true demand.* Delivering programs in high demand job areas is an important part of our mission, so we organized the initial set of planning criteria around determining true internal and external demand. A consistent review of what our students want (internal scan) along with the states’ occupational forecast (external scan) was an

important part of this phase of planning. Our internal planning leads agreed on the initial planning criteria, which included the following six parts.

1. Identify career clusters included in the college and the educational pathways (programs included in area).
2. Identify specific industries currently served by the programs within each cluster.
3. Identify current status (snapshot of what our programs currently do to serve the industries - number of majors and graduates by program, number of total students enrolled in program courses, and student demographics).
4. Identify projected trends and demand through 2012 (Department of Labor and Workforce Development data).
5. Identify collaboration opportunities – within the university, program-to-program, community campuses, distance education, industry partners, and others.
6. Identify future needs to meet the demands (facilities, faculty, staff, equipment, distance delivery technology, what needs to be done to improve collaborations, etc.).

**BE PREPARED TO GET THINGS DONE** -*Requires leadership that is passionate and able to get individuals committed to making the vision a reality.*

The most important aspect of this step is to *establish a realistic timeline for completing a quality planning process*. Be willing to make planning a priority by assessing and reassigning, when necessary, other workload priorities. This step also involves determining what data will be needed in order to make informed decisions, keeping in mind 'over analysis can lead to paralysis'. What information do you need versus what information would be nice to know? Understand upfront how long it will realistically take to collect the needed data and then assign staff to assist with this process.

Remember, industry partners will want to see action, so don't bring them to the table unless you're committed to delivering a solid strategic plan in a timely manner. Our college successfully completed this planning process in a six month timeframe.

**INVOLVE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS AT THE FRONT END** -*Requires leadership that understands the dynamics of change and can clearly communicate the benefits of change with confidence.*

As mentioned earlier, the national States' Career Clusters materials were distributed in advance and used to organize the structure of this planning process. Planning leads and criteria were also identified. It was time to further cultivate the seed that was planted in our initial step of planning. *A college-wide meeting, including all faculty, staff, and administrators was scheduled.* Key industry partners were invited in order to introduce them to the planning model and solicit their input. The dean provided an overview of the national States' Career Clusters framework, how this framework complimented the college organizational structure, justification and benefits of a new planning approach, an introduction of planning leads, and the initial six parts and planning timeline (see above).

In addition, Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development data was presented, highlighting an overview of the State's occupational forecast. The meeting concluded with an industry forum, providing our industry partners with an opportunity to comment on the planning model and share perceptions regarding workforce trends. *More than 55 industry representatives attended this event and provided planning leads with recommendations that were extremely helpful in setting the stage.*

*WALK THE TALK - Requires leadership that is flexible, approachable, and detail-oriented, while maintaining forward momentum.*

*Now is the time to plan, plan, plan!* The dean's office collected and distributed the data used for the internal and external scan, thus, streamlining the process and ensuring consistency. This also allowed the planning leads to focus on regular communications with faculty, staff, students and external stakeholders. Keep in mind, our faculty were accustomed to planning solely around individual program needs. The career cluster planning model required multiple programs to sit at the same table and discuss community/industry needs related to a career area versus a single discipline.

Planning leads met monthly to discuss the process and share common challenges. It was no surprise that one of the biggest challenges was related to the internal paradigm shift. After years of planning around individual programs, faculty and staff struggled with this shared, collaborative approach. There was a degree of fear associated with losing the single program focus of the past. However, as faculty began noting common interests and strategies to leverage resources through this process, the shift became less painful.

At the end of three months, the planning leads completed the six initial steps of planning, concluding with a list of initiatives needed in order to meet the demands in their career cluster.

*DEFINE PRIORITIZATION CRITERIA - Requires leadership that is unafraid to establish guiding principles that truly represent the college mission and expectations of the primary constituents.*

*Prioritization criteria should be connected with your mission, values, and overarching performance metrics.* As noted above, each career cluster planning lead reviewed internal and external data, met with faculty and staff, and solicited input from external stakeholders in order to establish a preliminary list of needed initiatives. It was now time to bring in an external planning consultant (Professional Growth Systems) to assist in identifying criteria for prioritizing these initiatives. By doing this, we eliminated the risk of slanting the criteria based on internal perceptions or preferences. Since priorities would drive future decisions, an external entity was critical toward maintaining objectivity.

As a result, each initiative was rated using the following subjective criteria:

1. Why is this initiative important to meeting industry needs?
2. What does this initiative include? (Brief overview of the scope of work needed)

3. Knowing the College's current human resources, financial resources, knowledge base, materials/supplies, etc., what additional resources do we need to undertake this initiative?
4. What is the potential loss of not undertaking this initiative?

The following objective criteria were then applied to each initiative in order to generate a specific list of priorities in numeric order. Each of the five criteria was weighted and accompanied by a specific rating scale from 1 to 5.

1. *Available Job Openings – 2002-2012:* A blending of the number of new job openings predicted to be created 2002-2012 according to State DOL report, and the extent to which accessible competitors are available that are sufficient to meet demand.
2. *Facilitates Student Success:* Contributes to preparation, retention, completion rate, and employability.
3. *Additional University Resources Required/Sustainability:* Funding and other resources from the general fund are required annually now or after external funding expires.
4. *Outside Resources/Collaboration Committed:* Potential for pledge of resources from within university or industry resulting in savings/cost reduction to the college.
5. *Contributes to Distinction:* Innovative program design and quality of program leading to setting a standard in the field.

**REALITY CHECK - *Requires leadership that actively listens.***

Each career cluster planning lead then presented their list of priorities, with initial rating scores that were determined using the prioritization criteria (see above), to industry representatives during a two-hour career cluster planning forum. *Industry/community representatives were provided with an excel spreadsheet of the prioritized initiatives based on the preliminary internal scores.* Each initiative was described on a separate form, which included a clear reference and explanation of rating for each initiative. The representatives who attended these forums were engaged in this process and appreciated having detailed information to respond to. They freely shared their recommendations regarding specific ratings, which resulted in revisions to priorities presented in the twelve forums hosted by the College. This phase of the process was a huge success, resulting in a higher level of mutual trust with industry partners.

**ROLL PRIORITIES UP - *Requires leadership that sets high standards for the team and methodically employs effective strategies for pushing them to their full potential.***

This was the most difficult step in the planning process. We now had twelve career cluster plans, ranging from aviation technology to culinary arts and hospitality. Although this provided the college with specific priorities aligned with each career cluster, it did not specify college-wide priorities. Another paradigm shift was in order. *The planning leads had to collaborate in good faith to identify which of their individual career cluster planning priorities should be at the top of the list for the college.* The dean reviewed the final plans and extracted the top two to

three priorities from each plan. The planning consultant who assisted in developing the guiding principles was retained to facilitate a day-long session with the planning leads. During this session, all numeric scoring for the top priorities from each plan were scrutinized by the group, discussed, adjusted, and placed into one of the following two categories:

1. Priority initiatives that will be managed and tracked by the dean's office. Overarching priorities, such as establishing a career pathway focus on all college marketing materials, were included on this list.
2. Priority initiatives that will be managed and tracked at the department/division level and supported by the dean's office. An example of an item on this list is to inventory and align statewide secondary and postsecondary automotive and diesel technology programs.

Please note that this process did not change the individual career cluster priorities that were finalized during the industry forums. Each individual career cluster plan remained intact. The above process was used to assist the college in identifying overarching college-wide priorities. All college-wide priorities were extracted from the list of top priorities within each individual career cluster plan.

*DEVELOP TOOLS TO ACHIEVE GOALS - Requires leadership that is accountable and recognizes the importance of maintaining credibility over time.*

Again, with the help of a planning consultant, the college was now ready to create tools necessary to accomplish their goals. *The top priorities from the two lists noted above are currently being tracked in the following areas:*

- *Multi-year goals*
- *One-year targets*
- *Metrics for measuring success*
- *Challenges*
- *Outcomes*
- *Ongoing evaluation*

Follow-up industry forums will be conducted twice a year throughout the life of the plans. With a clear direction and plan of action, the college is enjoying a reinvigorated relationship with its community and industry partners. Most importantly, our students are reaping the benefits.

The emphasis on including external partners in the planning process should not diminish the importance of bringing internal stakeholders to the planning table early and often. College faculty, staff, and students were kept informed and encouraged to participate throughout this process. Their contributions were essential to the success of this process, and their continued support is necessary for the future success in realizing and sustaining our goals.

The internal paradigm of annual program-level planning has now shifted to a strategic shared vision of how we can best serve our community and industry partners; demonstrating through this process that we are ready to listen to external stakeholders and respond with action. Our college completed this planning journey in six months; however, the resulting shared vision will lead us well into the future.