Community College Leadership Program Review - 2012

Materials linked from the October 25, 2012 Graduate Council Agenda.

Review Committee
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1. Overall Recommendation

   Restructure

2. Summary of Findings and Recommendations

   A. Choose a degree focus for the program; either Ed.D applied scholarship or PhD research scholarship.
   B. Improve the design and practice of online instruction by development of guidelines and training for faculty.
   C. Revise the portfolio project to apply consistent expectations and approaches to be communicated early in the program.
   D. Locate and assess a venue for intensive course work sessions that provides strong connectivity for mobile devices and computers, as well as greater travel accessibility.
   E. Develop a program learning objective intended to achieve learner proficiency in managing technological change in the teaching and learning environment.

3. Detailed Findings

   Introduction
   The overall consensus of the reviewers is that the Community College Leadership Program (CCLP) is an excellent and needed program in which a great deal is going right. Students consistently attested to the value of the curriculum, the relationships formed, and the relevance of these experiences to practice in the world of work. Experts on the review panel confirmed to the need for this program in order to address the changing national and global higher education environment. This is a program to be sustained and strengthened. The recommendations made here are pursuant to that intent.
Community College Leadership Program Review - 2012

Over the past decade, the national dialogue about education has increasingly focused on student success and program, degree, or diploma completion. This is not a passing fad but instead reflects a growing body of evidence that the United States is rapidly losing and in fact has lost its leading role in educational attainment. Where the U.S. once boasted of having the most educated citizenry on the planet, no less than a dozen countries now have a greater percentage of their people obtaining post-secondary degrees and certificates than here in the U.S., and this fact alone greatly jeopardizes our future capacity to compete and succeed in the global marketplace. With the intent of turning around this troubling trend, President George W. Bush instituted “No Child Left Behind” a decade ago and, more recently, President Barack Obama turned his – and our nation’s – attention to our 1600 community colleges. Following suit, the State of Oregon instituted the educational attainment goal of “40-40-20” when it passed Senate Bill 253 in the 2011 Legislative Session, and it is no secret that the center “40” – the one that focuses on Associate’s Degrees and Career-Technical Certificates – is the goal the we are furthest from and therefore requires our greatest attention.

If our community colleges are to succeed in guiding and supporting 40% of Oregon’s people toward the completion of Associate’s Degrees or Career-Technical Certificates, and if our community colleges across the country are to achieve similar goals established by their respective states, then we are going to need to greatly expand the capacity and improve the performance of these critical institutions. And, to accomplish this, we are going to need a new generation of motivated, skilled, and visionary community college leaders.

OSU’s Community College Leadership Program (CCLP) has a long history of being a source for high quality community college leaders in our region. Oregon’s Commissioner for Community Colleges and Workforce Development, as well as numerous community college presidents, vice-presidents, and deans, are all CCLP graduates, and our students and our communities have been the beneficiaries. This role is to be commended and must be preserved – and perhaps even expanded – as the leaders of the CCLP look to the future. Doing so will require these leaders to combine their evident deep passion for the CCLP with a dispassionate objectivity that will allow them to continuously adapt the CCLP in a manner that not just corresponds to but helps guide the evolving role that our community colleges play in the lives of our students, our communities, our states, and our nation. It is with this need in mind that we have reviewed and now provide our commendations and recommendations regarding the Community College Leadership Program at Oregon State University.

Quality of students

It is difficult to assess quantitatively the quality of applicants and incoming students as a standardized test, such as the GRE, is not required, and the GPAs were not available. However, the CCLP web page states that “admission is limited and competitive.” Applicants must have “completed a master’s degree in education or a related field, or the equivalent in post baccalaureate graduate-level course work,“ and “need a minimum of three years of professional experience in technical or community colleges or a professional field related to teaching.
Community College Leadership Program Review - 2012

learning and/or leadership.”¹ No indication is given as to how the degrees and work experience are evaluated during the application process.

Admissions selectivity

A sense of admission selectivity can perhaps be made by considering the percentage of students that are accepted to the program. According to Table A in the Self-Study, over the past 10 years a total of 52 students were rejected and 137 were accepted. The number of students that were admitted each year over the past 10 years ranged from 11 to 16, with an average near 14. Clearly, not everyone is accepted, but it is difficult to gain much quantitative information from these numbers.

Related to admission selectivity is the issue of the strength of the applicant pool in both numbers and composition. A strength of the program “has been its ability to attract working professionals from across the country.” Over the past 10 years about half the students are Oregon residents; most non-residents are from Washington, Idaho and California. A few students have come from as far away as Florida, Hawaii and Alaska. Broadening the applicant pool is being attempted by publicizing the program through targeted efforts.²

Level of financial support of students

The program currently does not provide financial support as this is an e-Campus Program and all students are currently employed off-campus.³

Level and quality of student performance

A useful measure of student performance in this Ed.D. and Ph.D. program is the graduation rate. Based on cohorts 10 through 14 (entering 2001 through 2005), about 55% (40 of 72) have graduated (revised version of Table A). The average time to graduation is about 4.1 years. Of the 32 that have not graduated, 9 are still labeled as active. However, it is unlikely that very many of them will eventually graduate given that the longest time for a student to graduate so far has been 6.5 years. For cohorts 15 through 19 (entering 2006 through 2010), 11 have graduated taking an average time of 3.8 years. So, the overall average time to degree appears to be consistent over the past ten years.

A graduation rate of around 50% is probably a reasonable rate for this type of program. Students are usually employed in full-time jobs and receive little financial support. In addition


Community College Leadership Program Review - 2012

after their intensive course work experiences, students do not have the benefit of personal interaction with faculty and peers, as is the case for students in residence on campus. Another measure of student performance would be the advancement in their position subsequent to obtaining their degree. However, this information would require a detailed survey of graduates.

A. Degree Focus

We find that the Community College Leadership Program (CCLP) will benefit by choosing a single degree focus, conferring either a PhD. or Ed.D. Degree. The Ph.D. is a research degree and is most suitable for those wanting to continue to do research and those looking for employment in academia. The Ed.D is appropriate for those desiring to work in leadership positions in community college and similar institutions. Note that although more students in this program now choose the PhD, more students wind up in positions emphasizing leadership rather than research.

The program provided the option of choosing a PhD. degree option over an Ed.D. degree in 2004. That provision appears to also have made a subtle turn from the original purpose of the CCLP noted below. Page 8 of the program’s self-study document notes that the PhD. is to be a degree for “scholar researchers;” while the Ed.D. is the degree for “scholar practitioners”.

The first paragraph on page 6 of the self-study document expands on the description of the purpose of the program by noting the following:

The Community College Leadership Program (CCLP) was established 20 years ago to prepare teachers and administrators for leadership roles in technical and community colleges and similar organizations. The program was developed to serve a growing need in the Northwest Region for leadership preparation for the community college. A local advisory committee of community college leaders developed the components of the program. Over time, the program has managed to maintain its emphasis on serving the need for leadership preparation with an increased emphasis on the application of quality research to the problems and opportunities in community colleges.

This statement suggests that graduates of the CCLP program are prepared to assume leadership roles in their institutions and apply their skills and insights to the problems and opportunities that they will face there. However, it is not clear why the PhD. degree is necessary to do that. In fact, an EdD. degree would seem to better promote the connection between research and practice, theory and action, as discussed below.

In our interviews and meetings with faculty and students, that purpose and the important ways that an Ed.D. may promote leadership and leaders for today’s community colleges did not appear to be clear in the mind of the participants, faculty, or students. A few students indicated
that they chose the PhD. because it took less time to complete a thesis than it did to satisfy the Ed.D. internship requirement. The main reasons for the PhD. that we heard in our conversations suggested that students were choosing a PhD. over an Ed.D. because of the reputation that follows from having a PhD rather than an Ed.D. That is, in this view, the PhD. is recognized more widely and provides greater status and wider career choices to the holder of that degree.

As previously noted, during our meetings with faculty and students, the Harvard Graduate School only offers an Ed.D. Those graduates have career choices. In the experience of some of the review committee members, Colleges and Schools of Education do not value Ed.D. or PhD degrees differently. Nor are specific degrees offered as a reason to support a candidate for a position. Nonetheless, the status issue seems to be most dominant in students’ minds in CCLP as they make their decisions about which degree to pursue. And thus, most of the students are seeking the PhD., not the Ed.D., for these presumed status and career advantages.

Lee Shulman has nicely shown that the distinctions between these two degrees are not clear and the issues arising from this lack of clarity are pervasive, especially in Schools and Colleges of Education:

In reality, the distinctions between the programs are minimal, and the required experiences (curriculum) and performances (dissertation) strikingly similar (Anderson, 1983; Dill & Morrison, 1985; Murphy & Vriesenga, 2005). Instead of having two separate entities that effectively accomplish distinct functions, we have confounding and compromise, a blurring of boundaries, resulting in the danger that we achieve rigorous preparation neither for practice nor for research.¹

Shulman and colleagues further argue that scholars, whether practitioners or researchers, have to become stewards of the discipline:

We believe these people are scholars first, in the fullest sense of the word—future leaders who will creatively generate new knowledge, critically conserve valuable and useful ideas, and responsibly transform those understandings through writing, teaching, and application. We call such people “stewards of the discipline.”²

If all scholars are to reflect these qualities, what then might distinguish the students seeking an Ed. D. from those pursuing the PhD. in CCLP? The self-study document on page 8 suggests that such a distinction rests in students figuring out if they want to become a scholar researcher or a scholar practitioner. That is it.

² Shulman et al, 2006, P. 27.
The decision to promote scholar researchers seems then to change the purpose of the program from one of preparing “teachers and administrators for leadership roles in technical and community colleges and similar organizations” to one of preparing educational researchers for Tier One universities and other research organizations. As it now stands, a predominant number of students select the PhD. instead of the Ed.D., implicitly suggesting that the program prepares researchers more than it prepares students for leadership roles in community colleges.

To avoid the criticism that Shulman offered earlier—that is, not doing well in preparing researchers or leaders for community colleges—a focus is necessary. If the focus is on preparing researchers, then it is necessary to promote a hefty increase in the required experiences for students to fully realize the range of knowledge and skills required to become educational researchers.

For example, Shulman and his colleagues, who are involved in the Carnegie Initiative on the Doctorate (CID), call for PhD. programs to have a heavy emphasis on a quality research apprenticeship and have a strong intellectual community in which students in a PhD. program perform these apprenticeships. In other words, novice researchers—PhD. students—interact with many different practicing and other peer novices in a strong intellectual community where they learn, hone their skills, and attain knowledge of the stewardship of their discipline.

Without this kind of development, there is the risk that graduates will not be effective researchers. In Shulman’s eyes, this is one of the greatest challenges facing PhD program in Education. To address this challenge, Shulman suggests several features of a quality apprenticeship offered to a small number of doctoral students as they take courses during their first three years of their program:

… most students are also immersed in an apprenticeship to scholarly life: conducting research and teaching undergraduate classes. Students quickly transition from consuming to producing research, whether they are incorporated into a faculty member’s ongoing research program (typical in the labor field-based physical, biological, and social sciences) or are producing smaller pieces of scholarship under the tutelage of faculty in courses (usual in the humanities and other social sciences). Once they advance to candidacy, students spend most of their time on their own research and scholarship under the regular mentoring supervision of faculty.

An Ed.D program could go in another direction. In the process, students would gain expertise in what Boyer has called the Scholarship of Application. While not a perfect term, Boyer’s description of it fits well with the purpose earlier noted for the CCLP—preparing leaders for

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community colleges. For Boyer, this kind of scholarship, and the kind we imagine for a scholar practitioner who becomes a leader in today’s community colleges, involves the following activities:

… we speak of applying knowledge, we do not mean "doing good," although that's important. Academics have their civic functions, which should be honored, but by scholarship of application we mean having professors become what Donald Schon of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology has called "reflective practitioners," moving from theory to practice, practice back to theory, which in fact makes theory, then, more authentic-something we're learning in education and medicine, in law and architecture, and all the rest. ⁵

Some of this kind of scholarship is already part of the program, but it seems more in the background than in the foreground. In addition, all of the students spend most of their time in their work settings in their home communities, unlike students who spend full-time in the apprenticeship activities noted by Shulman at their respective university settings of their PhD program. The CCLP students are clearly immersed in their home educational setting, not the university setting, not the intellectual community of the university, but the intellectual community of their cohort and home educational setting.

There, and in their cohort, they can engage well in the scholarship of application. The activities of this kind of scholarship and the qualities of a reflective practitioner and the thought involved in problems of practice can include the following:

(a) recognizing the existence of a problem, (b) defining the nature of the problem, (c) representing information about the problem, (d) formulating a strategy for solving the problem, (e) allocating resources to the solution of a problem, (f) monitoring one's solution of the problem, and (g) evaluating feedback regarding that solution. ⁶

High standards of quality exist for evaluating this kind of scholarship. For example, questions like the following can be asked and answered: Is the identified problem being addressed and clearly stated about their work setting? Are the methods being used to understand the data about the problem appropriate and of the best kind? Are the generalizations on which a solution and its evaluation are based reliable and valid? Are the generalizations and solution-based in what is known in the literature? Are the manner and the product of communicating about the nature of the practical problem and its solution clearly and effectively conveyed? ⁷

⁷ Eugene D. Shapiro and David L. Coleman (September 2000). The Scholarship of Application, Academic Medicine, 75, 9, pp. 895-898.
The answers to these questions and the reflective thought required to answer them is clearly furthered among the cohort members if and when they come together at their monthly gatherings to share and evaluate these experiences, their problems, their solutions, and the evidence being used to provide warrants for these thoughts and actions. In that process, they would then be enacting the scholarship of application and using that scholarship in the leadership practices in their role of leading community colleges.

B. Online Design and Delivery

We find the need for the program to invest earnestly in increasing the quality and consistency of the online elements. Indeed, the program is offered as online learning via OSU Ecampus. We recommend that the program administrators engage professional online learning design expertise in order to structure resources, design, and practices that are appropriate to the online learning mode.

*Design for Blackboard usage:* Students reported that usage of Blackboard, OSU’s Learning Management System (LMS) was inconsistent and sometimes unorganized. Some instructors do not use Blackboard at all and many use it minimally. We are not urging the use of more technology. The recommendation is to use the online technologies effectively. Students should have a systematic design that reflects a program, provides consistent user-interfaces, and utilizes available tools for appropriate purposes. An online learning design expert will assist in attaining this level of overall and course-level quality.

*Instructor training for effective use of technologies:* In order to use online technologies effectively instructors must know what capabilities are available, what advantages and disadvantages they have, and how to manage them. This is a training task and such training is available at OSU. The outcome will be more confident and knowledgeable instructors with respect to the means of conducting online learning.

*Guidelines for online practice:* Students should know what they may expect from instructors in an online learning environment. Some of the expectations will be course and instructor specific. Other factors belong at the program level such as what elements make up a basic online course, interval within which student communications will be responded to, policies for technological issues, to indicate a few. The program will benefit by developing a set of guidelines for online learning that may be applied across the program.

*Assessments of technology effectiveness:* The program will benefit by conducting periodic assessments of the effectiveness of the technologies and designs. Technology and online learning practices constantly change. A cycle of feedback, reflection, and improvement will keep the online learning aspects of the program current and relevant.
C. Portfolio Project

We find a need to clarify the forms and expectations of the portfolio option.

Students may take a comprehensive oral or written exam to demonstrate proficiency in all eight learning outcomes or students may choose to submit a professional portfolio in lieu of written examination. To insure uniform quality and substance in all professional portfolios, the student must provide adequate evidence that each program outcome has been accomplished.\(^8\)

Specifications for the portfolios are clearly organized around the program learning outcomes. A significant proportion of students expressed lack of clarity over the design and format of the portfolio. It appears to them that individual instructors have distinct expectations for portfolios. Several students conveyed that they were well into the program before portfolio expectations were resolved.

This seems to review committee members to be a matter of coordination and communication. Faculty should clarify among themselves what forms portfolios may take and what expectations for each of the forms are. These forms and expectations should be provided to students early in the program so that students may build their portfolios with confidence from the onset.

D. Intensive Course Work Venue

We find cause to reconsider location(s) for the intensive course work sessions. Classes are held one weekend per month at Silver Falls. Students travel to this location each month to meet and study with their cohort.

Many learners and faculty value the natural setting and small-community environment of the Silver Falls facility. They experience a serene isolated venue that promotes collaboration and camaraderie. This can be a positive experiential component for learners and faculty in a primarily online program. Program alumni noted that these relationships continue into professional life.

The positives of the Silver Falls venue must be weighed against the deficits, which vary among students. Travel to the site is time consuming. Some students expressed concern that the journey is hazardous in Winter and Spring. Most expressed desire for reliable communication capabilities via cell coverage and wireless connectivity. Neither is reliable or robust at Silver

Falls. This leaves working professional learners out of touch with their families and work. Given that this is a distance degree program offered via OSU Ecampus we may suppose that students already have robust usage of internet and mobile devices in their personal and professional lives. If the program intends to limit access to outside communication during intensive course work sessions, it should be implemented by design and agreement, not as a side-effect of the location.

Our findings indicate the need to reassess the purposes and values of the Silver Falls location. There are many possible outcomes, such as varying locations especially during seasons of inclement weather.

E. Technologies Learning Objective

We find that the program will benefit by developing a learning objective and appropriate course elements that focus on proficiencies in managing technological change within an educational context. This will include capabilities to assess needs and outcomes, research options, and develop effective strategies for emerging technologies. Even a basic familiarity in these areas renders leaders more capable decision makers.

...the planning and management strategies necessary for the successful implementation of new technologies really require a change in the culture of many institutions. A laissez-faire approach to teaching and the use of technology becomes increasingly difficult or expensive as the application of technology to teaching spreads throughout an institution. The danger is that planning and rationalizing the use of scarce resources may lead to top-down management and unacceptable restrictions on academic freedom. One of the most difficult challenges will be to build a postindustrial form of organization, with teaching and administration devolved to small and flexible units in an overall planning and management framework.  

The successful use of technology for teaching and learning also demands major changes in teaching and organizational culture. Graduates from CCLP who go on to work as Community College administrators will encounter environments in which technologies are essential elements. No one in higher education is unaffected by technological change. Whether as budget managers or committee members, administrators need to make assessments and decisions about appropriate technologies. A learning objective directed to the technological side of institutions will bring important contemporary knowledge into the program. This development will be consistent with the program goal;

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Community College Leadership Program Review - 2012

Understand the role of leadership in instruction, student services, and community college finance.¹⁰

Each of those areas is integrally shaped by information technology. Understanding contemporary institutions for leadership requires awareness of key issues and dynamics of technological change.

4. Conclusion

We find that the Community College Leadership Program (CCLP) is effective and needed. The program succeeds at the mission to prepare community college professionals. Given the national growth of the US community college system this program has contemporary relevance and importance. CCLP stands on a twenty year history and undoubtedly look toward a vibrant future. This review is primarily a commendation of those successes.

Our critical finding concerns the mission of the program;

*The Doctor of Education (Ed.D) and Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) with an emphasis in Community College Leadership at Oregon State University, are designed to prepare professionals whose career path includes that of leadership roles and research in community college education.*⁴

The applied degree and the research degree in education are different paths and distinct professions. CCLP the committee finds that focusing the mission to one degree path will optimize the program resources and provide learners with clearer direction. Rather than choosing a Ph.D track based on intuitions about status, students will be dedicated to academic and career focus from the start with purpose.

How the program addresses this recommendation is a matter for the program and college. The committee members agree that the Ed.D. is the appropriate focus based on student outcomes and the direction of contemporary higher education.

The remaining recommendations concern details and logistics of the program. We believe that the students, faculty, and the program overall will benefit by addressing these findings. We encourage CCLP administration to seek expertise and resources available at Oregon State University in addressing the recommendations.

Community College Leadership Program Review - 2012

Principally we thank the CCLP and the College of Education for their sincerity and hospitality. We anticipate a bright future for this well conducted and highly needed program.