Greetings Everyone, and Welcome Back to the Fall Semester!

In keeping with our efforts towards greater communication I will periodically send out correspondence to keep you apprised of items of interest to you and our students. This is the first in a series of articles and this one focuses on a vision for College of Alameda, who we are, what we do, and what we promise.

I first vetted these ideas this summer at a retreat of the newly created Institutional Effectiveness Committee, which is chaired by Economics instructor, Diana Bajrami. Haven’t heard of the IEC? There is an excellent overview of the committee and its charge on our webpage. The committee has already started posting items of interest, with a link on the college’s main webpage menu bar under College Governance, then look for the Institutional Effectiveness Committee. This committee plays a pivotal role in our college governance structure and is integral to our efforts towards continual improvement.

LEARNING RECONSIDERED:
A VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF COLLEGE OF ALAMEDA

Learning Reconsidered is an argument for the integrated use of all of higher education’s resources in the education and preparation of the whole student. It is also an introduction to new ways of understanding and supporting learning and development as intertwined, inseparable elements of the student experience. It advocates for transformative education – a holistic process of learning that places the student at the center of the learning experience.


I recently received an article from a colleague which began with the excerpt above. It was quite fortuitous as I was looking for a great introductory quote that would frame my argument for moving the college towards a vision that includes the tenets of what it means to be a learning college, and how that vision encapsulates the modeling of processes, policies and behavior. A quote that would capture the essence of what I feel, at a pivotal moment in our history as an institution.

The purpose of the Learning Reconsidered document was to re-examine some widely accepted ideas about conventional teaching and learning and to question whether current organizational patterns in higher education support student learning and development in today’s environment. As stated in the article, the need to do so is clear: “few of the social, economic, cultural, political, and pedagogical conditions and assumptions that framed the structures and methods of our modern educational system remain unchanged.” And, College of Alameda is a microcosm of this system, and we too have changed since 1970, when the college was first dedicated. So beginning with this premise:
The challenge of creating change in higher education is daunting, but there is intrinsic value in fighting for what is right—and a practice that does not support student success is indefensible;

Change for the sake of change is fraught with peril and should not be undertaken; but change grounded in a belief system that is shared amongst the stakeholders makes the journey easier and the success that much better—because it is shared; and, finally,

The current economic, social and political climate mandates that if institutions are to survive they must be flexible, innovative, and have the ability to seize opportunities and respond to the winds of change. And research in this area substantiates that organizations that are more open to- and involved in- adjusting to change are more likely to be successful.

In line with this, I propose a vision for COA that centers on the mission, vision and values that have been adopted by the college’s shared governance committees and focuses on three themes: academic excellence, budgetary competence and community engagement. These are not revolutionary concepts, but they frame the discussion as we look to reduced budgets—doing more with less; maintaining services which may result in reorganization—as was necessary with combining the divisional offices; and, survival and sustained growth—not mutually exclusive concepts, as we look to external revenue streams to survive, and at the same time seek grants that jumpstart new programs which position us for future growth.

What follows is an examination of these three principles:

**Academic Excellence**
- Assessment
  - Operationalizing a clear definition of what student success looks like for COA, and
  - The need to have valid and reliable measures.
- Innovative Curriculum
  - Integrated Curriculum that is built on collaborative partnerships(Student Services & Instruction, Applied Learning: Service Learning, Civic Engagement and Cross-Discipline Learning Communities), and
  - Creating a safe environment that encourages risk-taking, looking outside the box.

**Budgetary Competence**
- All our services need to be offered creatively within the real-world constraints of our budget
  - We are all a part of this process,
  - We can’t take ideas to the table without first asking how this fits within our budgetary limits,
  - We need to find creative ways to supplement our budget, and
We all need to find creative ways to do what we want to do within the context of our vision of success – not merely a shrunken vision of what we have always done.

Creative Block Scheduling
- Plan offerings over a period of 2-3 years. This will allow us to offer courses that are productive, creative & experimental, and
- Look at holistic offerings that complement our existing programs, our sister colleges, and play to our strengths.

Community Engagement/Collaborative Partnerships

Creative Partnerships
- Invest in the Metacampus Concept, where our surrounding community is (by proximity) part of our greater learning community,
- Adopt the “Town & Gown” approach, i.e., partnerships with local businesses and community–based organizations, for example, the West Alameda Business Association (WABA), Boys & Girls Club, Alameda Point, etc., and
- Develop pathways with 4-Year & Private Institutions (Pathways to Jobs, Degree & Certificate Completion and Internships).

Embody a renewed Spirit of Collegiality
- Work actively to short-circuit obstacles to collegiality rooted in dysfunctional patterns of interaction and attributional errors,
- Hold one another accountable to clear standards of success/excellence, in our evaluations, programs & services,
- Use tried and tested models that work: COA’s Learning Communities (Adelante, APASS, AMANLA and Community Development & Leadership-CDL) programs can serve as examples,
- Expand our internal collaborations to include Classified Professional staff; recognizing that they are the face of the college for first time students and we should value their contributions to our organization, and
- Strengthen our Associated Student organization (ASCOA) by facilitating the move towards a student-driven organization that serves as the focal point of student life.

The article on Learning Revisited ends with the following quote: “Regardless of our past accomplishments or disappointments, we are all, as colleagues and educators, now accountable to students and society for identifying and achieving essential student learning outcomes and for making transformative education possible and accessible for all students.”

I believe this, and hope that you do too.

As we move forward with our integrated planning and budgeting process, we need grounding in a commonly accepted vision when making difficult decisions on the future of our college. Academic excellence, budgetary competence and community engagement provide not only a vision, but a framework for decision-making consistent with our values and mission.