8 - Sustainability: Leadership, Institutional Commitment and Shared Vision

The student success movement at BC over the last two years has been built on the following strengths and assets: (1) developing an adaptive and agile mindset among employees; (2) strengthening interwoven networks of connectivity across the institution and community at large; and (3) repurposing existing resources to sharply focus on student success priorities. These three cornerstones naturally result in long-term sustainability.

Bakersfield College’s distributed leadership style operating alongside traditional leadership and a system of increasing college constituents’ knowledge base encourage a culture of innovation and adaptability. BC embraces leadership at every level by using distributed leadership in tandem with traditional leadership structures. Distributed leadership emphasizes praxis rather than traditional roles or functions. In distributed leadership, individuals at varying institutional levels demonstrate the agility and knowledge-in-place to engage important issues, taking responsibility for goal achievement and task completion.

An example of distributed leadership is the Bakersfield College Administrative Transition Team (BCATT) that provides short-term leadership opportunities to employees interested in stretching their learning and abilities in new employment roles. By cultivating new leadership, Bakersfield College maintains the flexibility to generate a renewed intensity of output toward student success and equity goals. BCATT positions recently filled to support BC’s student success innovations include Dean of Student Success and Pre-Collegiate, Director of Equity and Inclusion, and Student Success Program Manager. Nearly 60 employees applied for BCATT leadership positions, and 16 BCATT positions have been filled since the innovation’s inception. In addition, champions have been identified and empowered to make things happen on various initiatives while residing in their traditional assignments. These leaders actively participate in student success initiatives and together generate a leadership knowledge base. The BCATT process has further developed among these employees the three cornerstones resulting in long-term sustainability: adaptive and agile mindset, connectivity, and a shift to sharply focus on student success priorities (Appendix F, p. 67-68).

BC’s strong traditional leadership base is highly visible and accessible through systematic information-sharing. Since 2013, BC has continued to promote and prioritize the value of information sharing via learning opportunities. Through campus-wide collaborative efforts, a spirit and culture of innovative learning, thinking and practicing has emerged. The college employs campus-wide conferences, forums and community meetings, in addition to electronic communication that spreads intellectual capital throughout the institution and service community. These strategies represent a bold shift in culture at Bakersfield College. Where segmented workshops once provided information for a few select employees working in specific programs, today’s full-blown campus conference provides national speakers, local experts, and engaged campus personal to share their experiences and engage others in the dialog of student success strategies. Attendance at campus events is actively encouraged for all employees, irrespective of position. This represents a direct culture shift in building a vast knowledge base and engaging all in the work of the institution. Additionally, leaders readily share knowledge and information orally, in writing, and through social media. The knowledge culture grows steadily among employees and community partners, empowering them toward strategic action and investment in student success. The amalgamation of these steps results in long-term sustainability.

Professional learning as information-sharing emanates from the college’s Professional Development

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Committee, organizing workshops to share student success strategies and build support for innovation. Workshops include integrating basic skills strategies into the classroom, introduction to the Early Alert System, and strengthening use of technology as a teaching tool. During the week preceding the opening of school 2014, workshops garnered 700 enrollments by over 350 employees, including faculty, classified, and administrative staff (Appendix F, p. 69).

The growth of BC’s leadership and knowledge base is an asset in engaging community partners in the college’s work of student success. The college has partnered with 40 leaders in the African American, Latino, and Veterans communities who took on mentorship roles with students. Mentors are matched with current and potential students who are engaged and inspired to access higher education. Students hear from, visit, and tweet a question to a leader within their community. The leader is a role model who overcame personal and societal obstacles to earn a college degree. In addition to mentors, local organizations within the target communities partner with the college. For example, in the African American community local fraternities like Alpha Phi Alpha and sororities such as Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. and Delta Sigma Theta, and community organizations such as the LINKS, Inc. support students and provide civic engagement (Appendix F, p. 69).

One strategy to maintain this engagement is EquityTV, as referenced earlier in this document. EquityTV covers issues on higher education attainment among the African Americans, Latinos, Foster Youth, and other disproportionately impacted populations. The sessions feature key individuals from the community interviewed on varying topics related to equity. For example, through EquityTV, a local business owner who is a member of the Kern County Black Chamber of Commerce can share his or her perspective and advice to students on succeeding in college.

BC’s pre-law program and rural initiatives demonstrate innovation and increased community partnerships (Appendix F, p. 69). The program is supported through administrative and faculty leadership, as well as commitments by local professionals and critical stakeholders. A cadre of 23 other community colleges, six participating universities, and the State Bar of California are committed to mutual collaboration, support, leadership and sustainability of this program. Likewise, BC’s rural initiatives enhance work and existing relationships with application participants and expand relationships with the six rural cities that surround BC (Appendix F, p. 72). With Building Healthy Communities, for example, BC is generating a college-going culture with parent college nights (fall 2013, spring 2014) and an educational summit (fall 2014).

As stated in BC’s most recent Achieving the Dream report, engagement efforts including campus focus groups, student success and equity conferences, and faculty mentoring are assets integrating BC’s student success vision campus wide. Community engagement such as the pre-law program, rural initiatives, and outreach to our service area’s underrepresented populations combine with campus engagement to sustain the college’s culture of innovation and adaptability (Appendix F, p. 75).