

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP ABSTRACTS

Published by the National Council of Instructional
Administrators (NCIA)

It's Everyone's Job to #EndCCStigma



Eric Heiser
NCIA, Vice President

Eric Heiser is currently the Dean of the School of Applied Technology & Technical Specialties at Salt Lake Community College. Beginning January 2, 2020, Eric will become the Inaugural Provost at Central Ohio Technical College in Newark, OH.

The following is an Op Ed offering written by Eric Heiser.

I have watched with great enthusiasm the past few months as I've seen more and more movement behind the #EndCCStigma movement, both on Twitter and in real-life form. Frankly, this has been many years in the making and is long overdue. The fact is, we have allowed society to perpetuate this stigma and it is high time we stop allowing them to do so. Community colleges touch the lives

of so many individuals. Even those who never become our students are often touched by their local community college. Whether a parent, brother, sister, cousin, or even friend attended, the touch of a community college runs deep and wide. Community colleges change the lives of those who attend and their families for generations to come. In many cases, community colleges are largely responsible for moving families out of intergenerational poverty. That, in and of itself, shows the worthiness of community colleges.

Hiding in Plain Sight

I've often heard the phrase "best kept secret" with regard to community colleges and as fitting as it is, it's always struck me as strange. What is it about community colleges that makes us such a secret? I've got a few thoughts, namely the fact that we tend to do our jobs without touting it. When there's an educational need in the communities we serve, we do it. If the accolades come, great. Often times they don't. It also makes me wonder why we don't do more self-promotion. This is doubly important as more and more community colleges get into the fundraising game. For far too long, we've simply just done what was asked, often at a fraction of what it would cost in the private sector, without telling

folks what we've done and how it's impacted the communities we serve. This isn't to say that all community colleges face this problem, but as a sector, I think we can do better. Showing our legislators, both state and federal, the bang for the buck at a community college is vitally important to our continued success, especially with regard to continued or enhanced funding.



The Last Resort

Here's one that gets me going each time I see it. Community colleges are often viewed as a last resort. It's a narrative only made stronger by

#EndCCStigma



both society and the media. In just the past few weeks, I've seen and read numerous examples of this type of thinking. For instance, a board member of a large university system, while not realizing that he was implying that community college was a back-up choice, came to exactly that conclusion by saying that if a student "wasn't prepared" for the university system, his/her best bet was to start at a community college. Community colleges are a great place for everyone! The fact that community colleges continue to get billed as a back-up or last-resort option desperately needs to stop. Many of the jobs today don't require four-year degrees. In fact, in our current economic reality, many employers simply want well-trained employees, regardless of the degree they may or may not have. This is not to say that students should not be striving for degree completion. Quite the contrary, in fact. However, the idea that in order for someone to be successful, they must achieve a four-year degree is both outdated and shallow thinking. It's not a one-size-fits-all equation. Changing this mindset starts at home and as early as elementary school. We must do

a better job of partnering with our local school districts and getting in front of students earlier than high school. All students are college material. Period.

So How Do We Do This?

Community Colleges need to stop being afraid to tell folks how good we are. We've been content to let others have the accolades for the things we've accomplished. We need to be ok with telling our legislators, community members, and all who will listen, how good we are and how well we do with so little. Part of the reason we get so little is that our constituencies don't hear from us often enough. Again, I know I'm painting with broad strokes here. There are some phenomenal examples of community colleges touting how well they do their jobs. But, by and large, we need to get comfortable with letting folks know how well we do our jobs. As I've told my faculty and staff on countless occasions, not many people get to say that they change peoples' lives for the better on a daily basis. The economic impacts to the communities we serve are measurable, the data just need to be mined and shared. It's time to stop letting the story be told for us and start telling the (real) story ourselves. Get out in front of whoever will listen and show them your student success stories. Few stories can pull at the heartstrings of community members and policy makers than those about a family whose whole generational trajectory has changed by someone attending a community college. These stories are incredibly powerful, but they won't be told unless we are the ones telling them. It's

time to do just that.

Are you Ready?

For those ready to join in, I've included a few resources in this article.

First and foremost, my thanks to President Steve Robinson (Owens Community College, Toledo, Ohio) for starting this movement. Dr. Robinson and his staff came up with the #EndCCStigma campaign and are due many thanks for moving this conversation into the public sphere. To that end, I highly recommend adding their podcast to your list. They feature student and staff stories that will leave you with a smile and an occasional tear (of joy).

Second, and specific to your current institution, talk with your marketing or PR staff and see what your college can do to join the movement. It doesn't have to be a huge national campaign. Something as simple as media advisories or stories to highlight the benefits of your community college. Though it may seem small, it can make all the difference in the world. By each of us taking this endeavor seriously, we can all do our part to #EndCCStigma. With your help, we can move the needle and give community colleges the respect they rightly deserve.

Continued on next page.

#EndCCStigma

**Resources:**

<https://www.insidehighered.com/admissions/article/2019/02/18/community-college-presidents-campaign-against-stigma-about-two-year>

<https://twitter.com/occpresident?lang=en>

<http://www.ccdaily.com/2019/08/breaking-the-stigma/>

Katherine Wesley, Editor (ISSN 1551-7756) November 2019, Volume 11, Issue 4
E-mail: kwesley4@unl.edu



NCIA
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF
INSTRUCTIONAL ADMINISTRATORS

Further duplication is permitted by NCIA member institutions for their own personal use.

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP ABSTRACTS is published by the National Council of Instructional Administrators (NCIA), 141 Teachers College Hall, P.O. Box 880360, University of Nebraska—Lincoln, Lincoln, NE 68588-0360. The opinions and commentary offered in this and all issues of Instructional Leadership Abstracts do not necessarily represent the opinions of NCIA and its Board of Directors.

NCIA is committed to the free exchange of best practices and research-based findings that may enhance the instructional mission of its member institutions.

The NCIA website is www.nciaonline.org