

# **Yes, You Can! Grow Your Own College Leader Development Program**

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*“BCLDI has given me the opportunity to look at my strengths with regard to leadership and how I might best incorporate those strengths into what I do.”*

– Faculty participant (Department Chair, currently Interim Assistant Dean)

## ***The Leadership Gap***

Researchers and community college leaders across the country foresee a looming leadership gap in higher education – not only at the uppermost administrative levels, but in entry- and mid-level leadership positions as well. Over the next several years seasoned administrators and faculty leaders will retire. In the absence of programs designed to bridge the resulting leadership gap, colleges could find themselves in a dangerously vulnerable situations. By 2007, the United States will need 700 new community college presidents and campus heads, 1,800 new leaders in upper administrative positions, and 30,000 new faculty (AACC, 2004).

Butte College President Diana Van Der Ploeg, aware of the national need for leaders and concerned about the potential impact of the leadership gap on the college, outlined a vision for a leadership program that would help the nearly 40-year-old college meet its upcoming needs. Butte College, a mid-sized semi-rural community college located in the rolling foothills north of Sacramento, faces the retirement of academic, student services, and business leaders who have served the college nearly since its inception.

Late in the spring 2004 semester, President Van Der Ploeg charged staff development coordinator Teresa Ward with the creation of a leadership program that would help college employees reach the “next step” in professional growth. The program should be designed to serve not only deans and fulltime faculty, but adjunct faculty and classified staff as well. The underlying philosophy was that the college would be wise to take an inclusive approach to preparing leaders for service across campus. Employees in all campus departments and areas should be encouraged to develop leadership potential.

Early in fall 2004, Ward began interviewing deans and other college leaders for suggestions regarding how best to approach the creation of the new program. Volunteers were recruited from existing staff development committees and other leadership programs on campus. Design team participants were neither assigned nor individually selected. It took one full semester to gather the seven-member team, which included

Human Resources Director Doug Houston, three fulltime faculty members, two student services faculty, and one classified manager.

### ***Creating the Program***

A day-long off-campus retreat for design team members and the president took place in early spring 2005. The retreat, facilitated by the staff development coordinator, focused on defining leadership in the context of the community college and determining the overarching philosophy of the new program. Design team members worked in small groups and collectively to brainstorm and discuss leadership qualities and ideals, which were listed and categorized.

Having established a solid foundation at the retreat, the team began to meet regularly to design the program curriculum, create marketing and application materials, and compile a list of human and fiscal support requirements. To develop an understanding of current best practices, team members researched existing local and national leadership programs, as well as books and journal articles on community college leadership. These resources were distributed, evaluated, and discussed in depth. A list of curricular themes and topics emerged. The team, wanting to emphasize the interconnected nature of personal and professional leadership development (Palmer, 1998) bestowed the name Butte College Leader Development Institute upon the new program (McCauley, 2003). The BCLDI would be a two-year program, the first focusing on academic work and the second focusing on collaboration with a professional mentor to pursue individual goals.

### ***Marketing & Application Process***

Two members of the design team, one with experience in marketing and one with graphic arts talent, volunteered to work together to create marketing materials. An inviting and informative tri-fold brochure that outlined program philosophy and curricula was mailed to all Butte College employees. Interested faculty, staff, and administrators were encouraged to contact design team members for more information.

The first step in the BCLDI application process was to meet with the staff development coordinator to gain a greater understanding of the program and the commitment required. This step turned out to be critical because approximately half of potential applicants decided that the required two-year commitment to the program was not realistic given existing professional or personal obligations.

Applicants completed a written application packet: resume, letter of supervisor endorsement, and responses to the three following questions.

- What are your current job responsibilities? (1/2 page)
- What are two of the most important challenges you face in your job? (1 page)
- In what ways do you expect your particular skills, experience and perspective contribute to small group discussions and activities? (1 page)

Application packets were thoughtfully reviewed by design team members, presidents of the Academic and Classified Senates, and the college president. Fifteen participants, including five fulltime faculty, four adjunct faculty, four classified staff, and two management staff, comprised the first class. One participant, a fulltime faculty member serving as a department chair, opted not to join the program due to an especially heavy workload. The remaining 14 participants have persisted.

### ***First Year: Growing Together***

BCLDI participants met for the first time at an on-campus luncheon in August 2005. The gathering included introductory activities designed to support participants' getting to know one another as quickly as possible. Having decided during the curriculum design process to focus on strengths rather than leadership deficits, facilitator/participants (formerly the design team) distributed the StrengthsQuest inventory and text (Clifton & Anderson, 2002) to BCLDI members. The StrengthsQuest inventory identifies 34 potential strengths that leaders might possess, for example, communication, positivity, responsibility, and connectedness.

Participants and facilitators completed the inventory and reported their results to the program coordinator (a design team member). Facilitators divided participants and themselves into four small advisory groups based both on diverse strengths and diverse employee classifications. A typical group would include at least one fulltime faculty member, one classified staff member, one manager, and one adjunct faculty member who represented a balance of strengths as defined by the inventory. These small groups were to serve as discussion/support groups throughout the first year of the program.

Advisory groups were announced at a three-day retreat held in September 2005 at the Feather River Inn, a beautiful mountain retreat facility approximately two hours from the college. The retreat was designed and facilitated by facilitator/participants with experience coordinating such events. Although the team had decided to make the BCLDI a "class act," and although the college funded the program generously, it was critical to expend funds wisely; therefore, outside speakers and facilitators were hired only when necessary. The retreat included small and large group activities, as well as time for individual journaling and reflection. Participants were encouraged to record leadership experiences, challenges, and successes in journals.

Monthly five-hour meetings were scheduled on Friday afternoons throughout the 2005-2006 academic year. At each meeting, participants gathered over lunch, often with their advisory groups, to discuss assigned questions. During fall 2005, presentations by BCLDI facilitators or outside speakers on topics such as leadership styles, emotional

intelligence (Goleman, 1995), and communication were scheduled at every meeting. Individual and group exercises and activities followed each presentation. At the conclusion of each session, participants were assigned reading, writing, or other “homework” to be prepared for the next session. In addition to hard copy handouts, assignments and meeting dates were posted on a college WebCT site. A formal paper based on the first semester’s experience was assigned for the January meeting.

In January 2006, participants self-selected into presentation groups on a variety of leadership topics, including courage and perseverance, diversity and community, and balance and renewal. Members of each of the small groups collaborated to create presentations for the larger BCLDI group. Facilitators worked with and advised the presentation groups, but members of each group were encouraged to research their topics and come up with original ideas for assignments and activities. The diversity group, for example, distributed articles and journal assignments to be completed prior to their presentation. Among the suggested topics for journaling were the following questions: “Explain what diversity meant to you when you were growing up (within your family, your school your neighborhood). What role did diversity play? How aware of diversity were you? How did you become aware of diversity?” Group presentations were well received by BCLDI participants. The first year ended with a presentation on balance and renewal and a mid-program celebration.

### ***Second Year: Individual Development Plan & Mentorship***

In preparation for the second year of the program, BCLDI participants were asked to work over the summer of 2006 on a detailed Individual Development Plan (IDP) to define a minimum of two professional goals and one (optional) personal goal. Participants brought copies of IDPs and personal and professional goal statements to a 1½-day retreat in late August 2006. At the retreat, participants were divided into small groups yet again – this time “job alike” advisory groups based for the most part on current employment categories: faculty, classified staff, or administration. One participant asked to move from the faculty group to the administration group, and the request was granted. Facilitators assigned themselves to an advisory group. (At the beginning of the program’s second year, four of the original seven facilitators remained. After the first year, two facilitators moved on to other projects, and one became a program participant.)

The first task of each advisory group was to support individual members as they identified and approached potential mentors. By the end of the retreat, each participant had selected mentor candidates and felt ready to approach them. Advisory groups provided encouragement, and the BCLDI program provided leatherette portfolio packets containing letters and information for participants to share with mentors. Participants were encouraged to find mentors other than direct supervisors and/or BCLDI facilitators. In every case, participants were successful in establishing relationships with mentors, many of whom were also Butte College employees. Below is a list of participants and mentor pairings.

## **Participants**

- Assistant Dean
- Classified Staff
- Management
- Classified Staff
- Full-time Faculty
- Management
- Part-time Faculty
- Part-time Faculty
- Faculty / Department Chair
- Part-time Faculty
- Faculty / AS Advisor
- Part-time Faculty
- Classified Staff
- Faculty / CAS Coordinator
- Classified Staff (Management)

## **Mentors**

- Butte College Dean
- University Program Coordinator
- Butte College Assistant Dean
- Vice-Chancellor – Technology
- Community College Program Director
- Director – Human Resources
- Butte College Full-time Faculty
- Butte College Full-time Faculty
- Butte College Dean
- Butte College Full-time Faculty
- Former Vice-President -- Administration
- High School Principal
- Butte College Full-time Faculty
- Former Butte College President
- Interim Vice-President – Administration

## ***Lessons Learned***

After much discussion and evaluation of participants' professional growth due to their involvement in the BCLDI, the president approved the continuation of the program, and remaining design team members enthusiastically embraced the opportunity to revise the program and deliver it again. This decision represents a significant commitment on the part of the president and the college because, although the program is relatively cost effective, it is not inexpensive.

Direct BCLDI program costs from 2005-2007 are outlined below.

- Development – approximately \$15,000  
(stipends / release time materials / food)
- Program Year 1 – approximately \$15,000  
(retreat / monthly meetings / food / guest speakers / books & materials)
- Program Year 2 – approximately \$10,000  
(short retreat / meetings / materials / food)

## ***Looking Ahead: Planning for BCLDI II***

The second iteration of the Butte College Leader Development Institute is currently in the planning stages and will begin in fall 2007. The planning team is smaller this time around and includes four original members plus one from the current class. The program coordinator has agreed to serve a second time. Planning for the next BCLDI

retreat and meeting schedule has begun, brochures and applications are being designed and printed, and college employees are being encouraged to consider the program.

The second BCLDI class will be slightly larger – possibly 18 participants, again drawn from all employee classifications. Facilitators and current program participants agree that the curriculum should be revised to be more closely aligned with the leadership competencies outlined by the American Association of Community Colleges (2006); therefore, slight modifications to current program topics are being discussed. College administrators and program facilitators agree that participation in the Butte College Leader Development Institute merits official recognition, and efforts are underway to establish the program’s value for movement on the salary schedule. Additionally, two facilitators are working to take the BCLDI curriculum through the process that would make it credit bearing and FTE generating.

Three years ago, the idea of creating a new leadership program to help bridge the predicted leadership gap seemed exciting but daunting. Butte College administrators, faculty, and staff came together around President Van Der Ploeg’s vision and developed the BCLDI from the ground up (Wheatley, 2005; Quinn, 2004). When colleagues from other colleges ask whether they, too, can grow their own leader development programs, the response from Butte College is an enthusiastic, “Yes, you can!”

## References

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