

Lessons from Successful Innovations

New Report Offers Insights and Guidelines for Community Colleges

February 17, 2010, Phoenix, AZ. Innovation is in the American community college DNA, a significant part of its heritage, character, distinction, and leadership for change. A new report released today by the League for Innovation in the Community College adds new insights into why, how, and with what result colleges innovate successfully and lessons they can share. *The Nature of Innovation in the Community College* reports findings from a study conducted by Terry O'Banion, president emeritus of the League, and supported by MetLife Foundation. The study included 173 innovations at 19 colleges, involving more than 400 community college faculty, staff, and administrators and recognized with the prestigious Innovation of the Year Award during the decade 1999-2008. Methods included analysis of descriptions of all of the award winners, surveys, focus groups, and interviews.

Major findings include:

- Among thousands of potential definitions of innovation, two had the most resonance with the award winners represented in the study:
 - The development or adoption of new or existing ideas for the purpose of improving policies, programs, practices, or personnel
 - The creation of new opportunities that are transformative
- Those who sought to innovate and succeeded were motivated primarily to improve student learning; to improve an existing system, process, practice, or procedure; to improve student retention or attainment; and/or to meet a community need.
- The innovations were split evenly between original ideas and adaptations.
- For most innovators a lack of time was the most significant barrier to success (60%).
- Nearly a third (31%) of the innovators received no special funding or financial support.
- Collaboration was a major factor in success. Most of the innovations (85%) were developed by teams, and team enthusiasm was a top factor in success. Most innovators reported that involvement of a team improved chances their work would endure (74%), and that the collaborative process produced benefits beyond the innovation (70%).
- The institutional characteristics most frequently identified by innovators as highly important for supporting a culture of innovation all involved leadership: visible support of college leaders for innovation (90%), encouragement of risk taking without fear of failure (84%), and encouragement of faculty and staff to think creatively and unconventionally (83%).

Using survey results and analysis of interviews, researchers share a set of guidelines for aspiring innovators, such as aligning the innovation with the college mission, values, and goals; securing administrative support; talking with colleagues; developing a plan; and building a team.

The Nature of Innovation in the Community College report includes a video featuring Innovation of the Year Award winners discussing their ideas about innovation, based on their experiences. League President and CEO Gerardo E. de los Santos said, “The League encourages community college leaders to use this video to generate campuswide conversations about innovation and to encourage innovation at their colleges.” The full report, including the video, is available on the League’s website at www.league.org/natureofinnovation. Descriptions of the 173 award-winning innovations included in the study are available at www.league.org/ioy.cfm.

About the League for Innovation. The League for Innovation in the Community College is an international organization dedicated to catalyzing the community college movement. The League hosts conferences and institutes, develops web resources, conducts research, produces publications, provides services, and leads projects and initiatives with more than 800 member colleges, 160 corporate partners, and a host of other government and nonprofit agencies in a continuing effort to make a positive difference for students and communities. Information about the League and its activities is available at www.league.org.

About MetLife Foundation. MetLife Foundation supports education, health, civic and cultural programs. In education, it places emphasis on strengthening teaching and learning in public schools and on preparation for, access to and success in college, including a long commitment to community colleges as a dynamic and innovative sector of higher education. In addition to the League for Innovation in the Community College, it supports the MetLife Foundation Community College Excellence Award administered by Jobs for the Future, and the MetLife Foundation Initiative for Student Success with the Community College Leadership Program, University of Texas at Austin. The Foundation’s grantmaking is informed by findings from the annual *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher*. For more information visit www.metlife.org.

For more information, contact:
Terry O’Banion
obanion@league.org