



May 4, 2018

Dr. James M. Limbaugh  
President  
West Los Angeles College  
9000 Overland Ave  
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Dear Dr. Limbaugh,

We would like to thank you and the ATD team members for the hospitality extended to us during our visit this week. Both of us feel that the visit was quite valuable. We also offer our thanks to the ATD team members, faculty leaders, and the college's leadership team for their time and participation in the various meetings with us.

During this visit, we met with a wide range of stakeholders. Through the various sessions, we heard about the comprehensiveness of student success initiatives taking place throughout the college. We learned that academic and student affairs leaders college-wide are partnering to expand efforts to address ongoing student success initiatives while exploring ways to identify launching platforms for new state mandates.

Your update on the college's accomplishments at the College Council meeting was inspiring and uplifting. It is clear that your leadership is providing direction for the institution. The College Council Open House provided an informative "snapshot" of the high impact work being done at WLAC and showed that Governance need not be adversarial. It can include all interested stakeholders working in collaboration to provide leadership for improved college outcomes. The remainder of this letter discusses some of our main observations during this visit.

***Data Summit.*** It was encouraging to learn that Linda Alexander and Agyeman Boateng conducted a college-wide Data Summit. Collecting and using data to examine what impedes and accelerates student progression at WLAC is critical to achieving the college's student success goals. We are hopeful that the data summit provided information to enable WLAC's college leaders, faculty, and staff to determine what works specifically for which kinds of students served by the college.

***Guided Pathways.*** As a Leader College, WLAC has focused on improving student success through using data to inform decision making, improving developmental education outcomes,

enhancing tutoring services, and professional development. We believe that WLAC is now uniquely positioned to launch *Guided Pathways* to strengthen WLAC's college-wide efforts to improve student outcomes. ATD has consistently encouraged colleges to take institution-wide approaches to student success by creating structured educational experiences that support each student from the point of entry to the attainment of postsecondary credentials and careers. We view Guided Pathways as the logical next step in the college's student success work. In the Guided Pathways, academic advisors are positioned to play a vital role in promoting student success. However, to be most effective, the "duties" of the advisors must be clarified at WLAC. All advising units must work in collaboration with each other and campus partners to provide a comprehensive set of programmatic activities to support Guided Pathways.

***The Culture of Student Success.*** Thanks to the passion and persistence of May Jo Apigo and Clare Norris, WLAC has made outstanding progress in integrating ATD student success principles into the culture of the institution. This change of perception reflects a dramatic improvement in the teaching and learning environment observed during the college's engagement with ATD. Several times during this visit, different employees mentioned that "Initiative Fatigue" is wearing them down. We encourage college leaders to be mindful of these concerns and exercise caution in launching new programs that are not intricately complementary to primary goals of the institution. We also encourage college leaders to align *Guided Pathways* and the *AB 705* work with ATD and other on-going student success work at the college rather than launching these programs as stand-alone initiatives.

### ***Leading Forward***

Our analysis of WLAC's top challenges and opportunities feed into one major point — the *focus of the college's teaching and learning environment has changed*. And, for the most part, it's still evolving, as new state mandates, enrollment and fiscal uncertainties, and other forms of disruptive initiatives impact the teaching and learning environment. The traditional organizational structures, where different units of the college operate autonomously will not work in today's environment. So, while it's useful for WLAC's administrators to stay on top of a list of local and state mandates, it's essential that college leaders recognize that the whole student experience is different from what it was — and that probably in California, it's likely to continue to change. Moving forward we offer the following suggestions:

- 1) We encourage WLAC to use your ICAT Assessment results to develop a Capacity Improvement Plan focused on the strategic plan, vision, mission and core values of the institution. We recognize that implementing the capacity framework requires a shift in mindset for the campus constituencies. However, we see the new ICAT model as a proactive way to help the college to rethink the ways you respond to the student experience and in delivering services that truly fit the needs of the students served. We also envision that a focused plan to build capacity in selected areas of the ICAT (Equity, data, and technology) will enable the College to attain and sustain an exemplary level of student success.

- 2) In your participatory governance environment, midlevel managers and faculty are highly engaged in the fast-moving legislative and other external changes underway at the college. The new state mandates such as guided pathways, AB 705, and changing funding mechanisms are forcing college leaders to rethink how they operate the institution. The focus of these changes has made faculty leaders and midlevel managers the driving forces behind many of these initiatives. We believe that faculty leaders and midlevel managers are instrumental players in driving change and the "link" that holds the efforts together. While many college leaders recognize the workplace is different than it was a few short years ago, many institutions fail to provide faculty and midlevel leaders with the professional development, tools and resources that they need to be successful when responding to change and launching new programs. In today's workplace, faculty and midlevel leaders are in positions where they are expected to exert influence and to manage complex internal and external networks. We encourage WLAC to design and implement a professional development series for these leaders which can be built into the college's ongoing strategic planning for the institution.
- 3) Since California's student success mandates and impending funding formula revisions primarily focus on performance outcomes, we encourage WLAC to consider the following sources for insights about how to propel the implementation of AB 705 and Guided Pathways.
- **The 4 Disciplines of Execution** by Chris McChesney, Sean Covey, and Jim Huling. The book is a guide for institutions to commit to the goals and plans they set. According to the authors, one reason commitments tend to be abandoned in business is that new projects and goals are less urgent than the day-to-day tasks of each employee, which the authors call the "whirlwind." The key to commitment fulfillment is for new tasks to take up only a small portion of each employee's time, but for that employee to be held accountable for completing them.
  - **Redesigning America's Community Colleges: A Clearer Path to Student Success** by Thomas Bailey, Shanna Smith Jaggars & Davis Jenkins. In this book, the authors argue that improving developmental education, instruction, student support, and the overall student experience is necessary but not sufficient; targeted reforms must be implemented as part of a broader institutional restructuring (<https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/redesigning-Americas-community-colleges.html>). They delineate a set of research-based design principles and strategies to help colleges achieve a challenging goal and lay out a path for community colleges working to produce more considerable success for their students, and for our nation as a whole.

These sources contain recommendations that provide insights to enhance the college's operations. We wish WLAC all the best in all your work. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Christine McPhail, Leadership Coach

Ted Wright, Data Coach