THE NEW VISION COUNCIL:

A Report for the President and District Board of Trustees

Lake-Sumter Community College

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On June 24, 2010, the New Vision Council, by unanimous vote of the members present, adopted a resolution (see Attachment No. 1) to send to the District Board of Trustees concerning the future direction of Lake-Sumter Community College. The resolution contains three specific recommendations. First, as is timely and financially feasible, the college should implement four-year college degrees. Second, those degrees should be implemented as a part of the Partnership-Integrated Model (see Attachment No. 2) that expands upon the existing partnerships and relationships the college has with institutions and agencies in Lake and Sumter counties. The purpose is to create further educational opportunities for students and achieve cooperation among educational delivery systems to increase efficiency and effectiveness. Third, the New Vision Council recommended that it be allowed to continue its work to assist the college in bringing this vision to fruition.

SELECTION PROCESS FOR PARTICIPANTS

Appointment to the New Vision Council was by invitation from President Mojock. Members were selected for their experience, skills, and leadership in a cross-section of community work in both Lake and Sumter counties (see Attachment No. 3). The invited members were municipal officials, representatives of both school districts, from private industry committed to enhancing their community, area health and medical institutions, the hospitals, and law enforcement. Indeed, in my judgment, the Council was an effective and representative cross-section of the District constituencies and interests.

The addition of the President and his senior staff and Mr. Simpson, as Board liaison, added depth and knowledge to the Council’s study of the issues. Equally, the presence of several Trustees at the meetings also lent weight to the importance of their work. What might have become an overwhelming college presence, thereby limiting or dampening the community members’ participation, did not happen. In every instance, Dr. Mojock and his staff served as resources for the Council, answering questions and providing information. The staff and the Trustees were there to listen and learn, just as the Council. And, critically important, there was no effort made by the college staff to influence or sway the Council’s thinking or eventual recommendations. Dr. Mojock, his Cabinet, and the Trustees who attended are to be commended for that. In my past experience, such is not always or usually the case.
MY ROLE

As your consultant for this first phase, now concluded, my role was clearly defined. Upon my recommendation, the college agreed not to attempt a community-wide survey on the question of four-year degrees. Rather, I recommended, and the college agreed, that a series of focus groups --structured discussions on the subject -- would better serve the intended purpose. You, the Board of Trustees, experienced the first such focus discussion. Reports from those focus groups are available in the President’s Office.

In summary, however, I can say that in conducting and analyzing the focus groups, I was impressed by several things to which I call your attention as I did to the New Vision Council. First, is the overwhelming belief among Trustees, faculty, and students that the College should make the best decision for our community and our institution that it can, without concern for what LSCC’s sister institutions have done or are planning to do about four-year degrees. Second, there was universal expression of faith in the ability of Dr. Mojock and the college administration to reach that “best decision.” Third, I was deeply impressed with the quality of thought and serious reflection given to each question by all focus participants, especially by the students. They clearly appreciated the opportunity to have their say and, just as clearly, they appreciated the value in LSCC for place-bound Lake and Sumter students.

Also, I participated in lengthy planning meetings with Dr. Mojock, Dr. Howard and Mr. Scott in creating an agenda for each New Vision Council monthly meeting. Together, we deliberatively and deliberately planned the content with a single purpose in mind. As experienced educators, all of us know how complex this issue really is, especially here with such diverse demographics and community concerns. Our task in planning each meeting, was to try to develop in the New Vision Council that same understanding of the complex nature of the decision, one involving not just legislative mandates, but also complicated by budgeting, accreditation, instructional issues, additional faculty issues, the College’s relationship with UCF, the role of future economic development technologies and the like. What we wanted to do, as Dr. Mojock’s charging document (see Attachment No. 4) stated, was to make sure that LSCC, today an excellent community college, would not become a mediocre state college. I believe the members of the New Vision Council have come to understand the issue fully and that their recommendations are a reflection of same.
Further, I facilitated the meetings of the New Vision Council. As moderator, I had two main purposes: 1) to achieve a carefully considered recommendation on the subject, and 2) to insure that each Council member had the opportunity for full, free, and responsible input. I think we did that.

Finally in this part of my report, I want to add for your consideration my personal view of why this deliberative and thoughtful process, including the New Vision Council meetings and the focus groups, is so important and why Dr. Mojock is to be commended for undertaking it in this fashion. There is both a contemporary and historic perspective I wish to share.

Without speaking for the President or his Cabinet here, I have been intensely discouraged by the lack of planning and thought and the rush to offer degrees the Florida College System has produced. Overnight, for example, Okaloosa-Walton Community College became Northwest Florida State College and St. Petersburg College now offers seventeen different four-year degrees. These are illustrations only, meant to show how rapidly this new state college system has evolved, despite no significant financial boost, no required research on sustaining these degrees, and without measuring the true value and impact on their district communities constituencies. In many respects, it strikes me as the same “hell-bent for growth” mentality that has caused so many community colleges in the past to have severe budget crises, management crises, and continuing status as “second-class” institutions when viewed through the prism of the state universities.

What is happening here is far more thoughtful and carefully done. I did comment at the last NVC meeting that if my friend, Jim Wattenbargar, was alive and here, he would be very proud of LSCC and of the community. Dr. Wattenbargar was the original architect of the Florida Community College System, and as a Florida historian, I am well aware of the challenges and problems he and Governor Collins faced in creating it. Thoughtful and sustainable planning was his forte and that legacy, in my opinion, is being well served today by Dr. Mojock, by his Cabinet, by the New Vision Council, and by you, the District Board of Trustees.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

The third recommendation in the resolution requests a continuing presence for the New Vision Council. The college’s internal planning should remain apart from this group, except for communicating by Dr. Mojock and his Cabinet any information they see as necessary to share. The governance must remain solely the function of the college. Based on the first six months of the Council’s work, that requirement may be innocently challenged, but resisted nonetheless. One of the places I sense such
could occur is in the issue of new degrees and/or new programs. While it is appropriate for the New Vision Council to explore and study the feasibility of, and make recommendations to the college for new programs, any plan for implementation should be reserved to the Administration.

This becomes important in the issue of emerging new technologies as well as in more obvious traditional choices. One goal might be clustered under the idea of a Center for Emerging Technologies. Indian River State College has adopted that model and requested capital dollars for a building to house it. This could be a partnership goal here. It would have to be accompanied by private and grant fundraising, a goal expressed in the resolution. Fundraising also could - as an alternative or additional goal - begin the process of four-year scholarships as well.

The New Vision Council can help materially with the issue of community branding of the Partnership-Integrated Model. This branding begins with a projected name change for LSCC. The New Vision Council may uncover some creative choices involving, not just the name, but a new logo and a new tag line. Developing a new Vision Council Task Force for this branding can be an important use and of value to the college. Such a Task Force expands the creative opportunities for the college to consider.

Explaining the Partnership-Integrated Model to the community can easily become a function of the New Vision Council as well. That may be only a matter of inviting New Vision Council members to schedule the topic at their own civic activities or it can involve the creation of an entire public relations committee. As one New Vision Council member already has said, “We need to take this idea out of this meeting and share it with others.” “Others” could also include parents who need to understand how LSCC can fit into their child’s future educational plans.

I also believe that a statewide exposure of the model developed here would be both significant and important. In my view that includes, but is not limited to, an organized lobbying effort from the New Vision Council to support whatever efforts the college and its legislative representatives undertake. Because of the Council’s composition, it has political “clout,” and that political power should be used to further the process.

Finally, I believe the New Vision Council can serve to bridge any gaps in communication that have been or may arise between the college and other institutions and partners. That could involve inviting presentations on ways to streamline and make more effective all the educational processes in Lake and Sumter counties. Again it is not a matter of supplanting the college’s authority here, only to assist as is sensible or desired as the college sees fit.
Summarizing the previous discussion, here is what I recommend to the Board of Trustees, on where we go from here. The New Vision Council should assist the college in planning and implementing the following action steps:

1) Researching and reviewing potential new programs and degrees, especially those dealing with emerging technologies as potential economic development;

2) Working with the Foundation to conduct or support a fund-raising program for the P-I model and/or four-year scholarships;

3) Recommending name, logo, and tag line options to the board;

4) Communicating the vision and Partnership-Integrated Model via a public relations/speakers campaign for the community;

5) Organizing a New Vision lobby effort that supports the model development process.