



Local Community College Case Study



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Voices on Campus Divided About LCC's STEM Initiative

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Ever since President Nolan and Academic Vice President Jeffrey Pollen announced plans for pursuing a large National Science Foundation (NSF) grant to bolster LCC's programs in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (also known as STEM fields), the buzz about it on campus has been growing.

Some faculty, staff, and students are thrilled about it; but others aren't sure how to feel about it just yet.

For example, the business faculty are concerned the increasing focus on STEM programs will mean their department will ultimately get the short shrift.

"We've been focused on developing and delivering the best and most affordable business education programs in the region for years now. And go ahead, ask anyone—LCC's known best for our programs," Stanley Winters, the business dean stated. "Will this new initiative funnel all available resources to STEM departments only? What does that mean for us?"

The faculty who run the law enforcement program share this skepticism. "Frankly, I don't get it," stated Lynne Drummen. "The college is likely going to get a bunch of money to put this together, but it seems like so much work that it probably isn't going to be worth the extra funds. LCC should focus on what it does well. The law enforcement certificate we offer is top notch and in high demand. Let's invest in what we already do well."

What do LCC students think about the STEM initiative?

"It sounds great to me. Maybe we can finally upgrade the equipment in the physics lab."

– Rob Jenkins, 24, physics

"I want to major in English, so I don't think it affects me at all. I hate math!"

– Haley Sims, 19, liberal arts

"I don't really care."

– John Christian, 31, history

"I don't know much about it, but from what I heard, it might really help students in STEM fields."

– Juliana Holmes, 22, nursing



Juliana Holmes examining micro-organisms in Ms. Lee's biology lab.

"I understand that mentality, I do," President Nolan said in response. "But the reality is that the world is changing and the needs of our community are changing."

She continued, "As a community college, we have to be constantly evolving. We can never be satisfied with doing things the way we always have been doing them. That's not good for our students, and that's not good for our community at large. Investing in STEM is an investment in our future."

Other faculty question the appropriateness of initiating advanced programs when more basic educational needs exist at LCC. "I like and respect the President, but that's a bunch of hogwash," English faculty

member, Jane Golden remarked. "We have more and more students coming here who read at an eighth-grade level or worse. How is this STEM initiative going to help them?"

Golden's remark reflects LCC's reality: over 60 percent of entering students must take remedial writing.

Other departments are optimistic about the initiative.

"This is just what our college needs to prepare our students for the growing job opportunities in the STEM fields, including health services," remarked nursing faculty, Jane Smiley. "And the prestige of the grant will ultimately benefit all students and faculty."

BACKGROUND & MISSION



Local Community College, located in a midwestern metropolitan area, has a rich tradition as a technical college focused on vocational education and as an open-enrollment community college focused on offering general studies for transfer students and the local workforce.

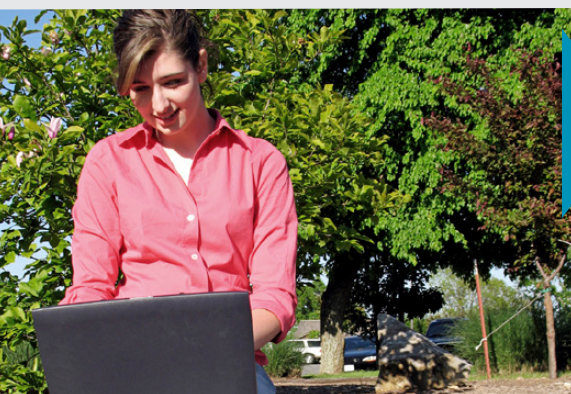
LCC was established in the early 1980s by the merger of Public Technical College (established in the 1920s) and City Community College (established in the 1960s).

The college’s mission is “to help individuals achieve their dreams by providing quality learning experiences that prepare citizens to live and work in a democratic society and a global community.” To achieve this mission, LCC finds itself delivering a diverse—and occasionally competing—set of educational initiatives: general education, liberal education, technical education, baccalaureate transfer education, dual-enrollment education, developmental (or remedial) education, English language education, continuing education, and workforce training. Over the past decade, there have been rumors that some administrators and trustees want to develop a limited number of four-year baccalaureate programs in the health sciences.

LCC finds itself increasingly expected to help the region transition into a more knowledge-based workforce. In addition to its longstanding tradition of workforce training, LCC’s new STEM initiative reflects a concerted strategy to assist in the region’s economic development. Under the direction of President

Elizabeth Nolan, who was hired a year and a half ago, LCC’s academic vice president, Jeffrey Pollen, recently created a working group to develop a proposal for a National Science Foundation (NSF) grant focused on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). The specific NSF grant seeks to increase the number of students receiving associate (or baccalaureate degrees) in STEM fields. At the same time, the state legislature has launched a new economic development initiative connecting economic growth to science and technology innovation; state leaders envision an active role for the region’s higher education institutions in these efforts.

Although the STEM working group has yet to finalize its recommendations, potential ideas include opportunities to collaborate with other colleges and universities in the region: funding scholarships to LCC graduates, especially underrepresented students, who transfer to neighboring All-State University (A-SU) to study STEM disciplines; providing support services such as tutoring and career development for LCC students hoping to transfer into A-SU’s engineering programs; and co-sponsoring after-school and summer workshops about STEM career and academic opportunities for area high school students. The recommendations of the STEM working group are likely to affect LCC’s relationships with external stakeholders such as other higher education institutions, regional businesses, and local and state government. The STEM proposal, which represents the centerpiece of President Nolan’s strategic agenda, will also affect numerous relationships within the college, especially among academic units.



LCC finds itself increasingly expected to help the region transition into a more knowledge-based workforce.

EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT



Local Community College is one of four higher education institutions in its community.

The most prominent institution is All-State University (A-SU), a large land-grant university that is part of the state's higher education system. In addition to its College of Arts & Letters and College of Natural Science, A-SU has colleges of agriculture, business, education, engineering, medicine, nursing, and social science. A-SU offers more than 100 doctoral and masters programs and enrolls more than 47,000 students.

In recent years, A-SU has received state funding for new state-of-the-art classroom buildings and initiatives to improve undergraduate and graduate programs targeting high-growth professions in the health sciences. The state, however, is experiencing a prolonged recession, and A-SU's total appropriations have been cut by more than 10 percent over a three-year period. A-SU's general fund budget has suffered from these cuts, despite the targeted investments in academic programs and classroom technologies.

In addition to A-SU, Walnut College is an urban private, four-year residential liberal arts college. Walnut has been a fixture in the city for more than a century: it was founded in 1872 by a religious order as a boarding college and became a four-year accredited college in 1923; in 1943, it became a private, independent institution after merging with a junior college nursing program. The institution was reorganized in 1955 into a college with one division (Arts and Sciences) and three schools (Business and Public Affairs, Education, and Allied Health Professions).

The third higher education institution in the region is a for-profit trade school, Top Notch Tech (TNT). The school originally trained secretaries and bookkeepers for local businesses. In the 1950's it introduced programs for skilled trades to serve the community's expanding manufacturing base. Through an agreement with regional school districts, TNT provides vocational education to high school students and graduates. Despite its long-standing presence, it enrolls a modest number of students: TNT graduates about 200 clerical workers and 25 skilled trades-people each year.

Two issues characterize a tenuous environment for LCC and its regional counterparts: declining state support for higher education and a slumping regional economy. After adjusting for inflation (using the Consumer Price Index), state appropriations for higher education have declined every year since 2003; and on average, inflation-adjusted appropriations have only increased 1.1 percent from 1970 to 2012. In response to declining levels of state support, state institutions such as All-State University have steadily increased tuition and fees to generate additional revenues. LCC had enjoyed continual increases to operating revenues because it receives most of its funding from the city and county rather than the state—and the county had mostly avoided the recession affecting the rest of the state—until two years ago, when the recession hammered the area. Yet by increasing tuition rates, LCC has mitigated the effect of decreased revenues due to plummeting property values.

Second, this urban region, like many in the Midwest, continues its transition from an industrial economy to a knowledge-based economy. The largest employers in the region are a computer parts manufacturer, an automobile assembly plant, A-SU, a hospital, and the headquarters of a national department store chain. Over the past decade, the state's economic development agency has increasingly recruited new knowledge-based businesses, including biotechnology research firms and financial services companies. The biotechnology companies, including several start-up ventures commercializing AS-U-sponsored research, have begun sponsoring endowed chairs in the sciences and are seeking similar opportunities to sponsor an entrepreneurship cognate in AS-U's business school.

To address concerns over the state's economic competitiveness, the state's legislature recently established a comprehensive economic development initiative, the Science and Technology Economic Plan (STEP). With an initial appropriation of \$1,000,000 and promises of future appropriations, STEP represents the state's plan to stimulating investments in science and technology companies in order to create new cutting-edge jobs. The public-private partnership will create new opportunities for the region's higher education institutions, whether it is A-SU identifying faculty research projects ripe for commercialization or LCC retraining industrial workers for new high-tech jobs. LCC's president, Elizabeth Nolan, while attending the press conference announcing STEP, commented, "The region's higher education institutions can offer unique contributions to helping lead the region into the 21st century. Our collective efforts can help reenergize our languid economy and stimulate a new era of regional prosperity."

In addition to the state's new economic development initiative, LCC's STEM initiative offers new opportunities to develop relationships with external partners. LCC, for example, is exploring how to strengthen existing dual credit programs in STEM courses with local K-12 school systems. In addition, President Nolan wants to develop stronger relationships with regional business executives and richer partnerships with local businesses; one anonymous member of the STEM working group mentioned businesses sponsoring STEM faculty and hosting faculty "field sabbaticals" to provide applied experiences as a potential partnership, as well as hosting student internships and career development seminars for students in STEM fields. The college's STEM initiative also offers new opportunities to collaborate with A-SU. In addition to recruiting A-SU graduates to LCC's faculty, LCC and A-SU could collaborate on curriculum development for STEM disciplines, on promoting transfer opportunities for LCC graduates, and on grant proposals supporting faculty development, applied research, curriculum development/alignment, advisement, and student services.



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—LCC President Elizabeth Nolan

ACADEMIC PROGRAMS



LCC organizes its academic programs into three main units: Arts and Sciences led by Dean Lesley Field; Business, Advanced Technologies, and Careers led by Dean David Johnson; and Health and Human Services led by Dean Janet McCleary.

In 2010–2012, LCC’s Arts and Sciences departments enrolled 5,087.0 full-time equivalent students (FTES)¹ and employed 176.9 full-time equivalent (FTE) faculty. Business, Advanced Technologies, and Careers enrolled 1,869.2 FTES students and employed 80.7 FTE faculty, while Health and Human Services enrolled 656.7 FTES students and employed 49.5 FTE faculty.

In 2010–2011, 987 associate degrees, 752 certificates, and 234 diplomas were awarded. LCC awards five different types of associate degrees: Associate in Arts (A.A.), Associate in Applied Arts (A.A.A.), Associate in Science (A.S.), Associate in Applied Science (A.A.S.), and Associate in Fine Arts (A.F.A.).

The top five most awarded credentials by LCC in 2010–2011 were the liberal arts A.A. degree (303 graduates), the nursing A.A.S. degree (202 graduates), the nursing assistant certificate (165 awardees), the business management certificate (132 awardees), and the law enforcement certificate (112 awardees). These credentials comprised almost 50 percent (46.3%) of all credentials awarded by the college.

LCC’s new STEM initiative has caused some tension among departments and faculty. A recent article in LCC’s student newspaper, *The Local Herald*, featured some of the mixed feelings about it. (See page 2 for full article.) The business management program at LCC has a strong reputation in the community (including business leaders who employ LCC graduates) and their student success rates have been some of the highest in the college. But according to the business faculty, the writers of the STEM grant disregarded their

perspectives. Stanley Winters, the Associate Dean of the Business division, was particularly perturbed. In a recent division meeting he stated, “It’s unbelievable to me that the STEM working group hasn’t involved us much at all in the design of this initiative. The business perspective is key to its success.”

Yet those coordinating the STEM initiative offer a different perspective. In response to Stanley’s remarks, Dean of the Business, Advanced Technology, and Careers unit, David Johnson, explained, “The STEM initiative committee working group has considered the business programs and of course they are important to the success of the initiative. Our committee was already getting unwieldy with ten members. Although Stanley wasn’t named to be on the working group, his input and his departments’ perspectives have been considered and will continue to be important.”

The Dean of Health and Human Services, Dr. Janet McCleary (also one of President Nolans’s first hires) serves on the STEM initiative working group. She is very excited about the potential of the initiative to put LCC “on the map” as the best, most affordable option in the state to pursue a nursing degree or certificate. At a board meeting, she cited the national and state-wide job reports that suggest the health industry will be the source of good paying and stable jobs for years to come.

“This STEM initiative will help LCC serve its community and its students in ways it hasn’t been able to before on its own,” McCleary explained to the Board. “Our nursing programs are already strong and are improving. If enrollment trends showcase where the college should invest, then the growing demand for our nursing programs affirms the decision to expand and develop the programs in our Health and Human Services academic unit.”

¹ FTES is calculated by dividing the total student credit hours for the fiscal year by 30, the number of credit hours constituting a full load.

Yet many faculty have argued that LCC should focus on and invest in what it already does well. In addition to its business programs, LCC has developed reputable law enforcement programs. Before the economy declined in 2009, 87 percent of graduates found a job within six months of graduating. (Now that figure is closer to 55 percent.) The digital arts department has also seen an increase in enrollment and student success. Like the business faculty, the law enforcement faculty also wonder why LCC doesn't focus on and invest in its existing strengths.

Other faculty question the appropriateness of initiating advanced programs when more basic educational needs exist at LCC. Over 60 percent of entering students take remedial writing and even more alarmingly, 75 percent of entering LCC students take remedial math. Zane Swibbel, one of the younger math faculty, commented on the STEM initiative in a recent department meeting. "I get the sense this STEM initiative is going to focus mainly on the advanced Health Services students, areas like nursing or the advanced technology programs. But I really, really hope this initiative doesn't neglect our lower-level math classes." While the remediation success rates in English are roughly 70 percent, only 40 percent of students have successfully passed the math remediation sequence. "If [the initiative] is really supposed to support the full STEM spectrum—science, technology, engineering, and *math*," continued Swibbel, "I hope our department is able to benefit from the effort the college is putting towards all this. Basic math skills form the foundation of the S, T, E fields that make up STEM. Without improving our math remediation rates, the initiative is doomed, I'm afraid, and so are our students."

Figure 1: Academic Units and Divisions

Arts & Sciences [5,171.1 FTES]

- Languages and the Arts
- English
- Math
- Science
- Social Science and Humanities
- Academic Development

Business, Adv. Tech. & Careers [1,869.2 FTES]

- Business
- Applied Manufacturing
- Computer Information Technologies
- Design and Construction Technologies
- Public Service Careers
- Utility and Energy Systems

Health and Human Services [656.7 FTES]

- Allied Health and Human Services
- Nursing
- Physical Fitness and Wellness

Figure 2: Top Five Credentials Awarded 2010–2011
(See Appendix E for full data chart.)

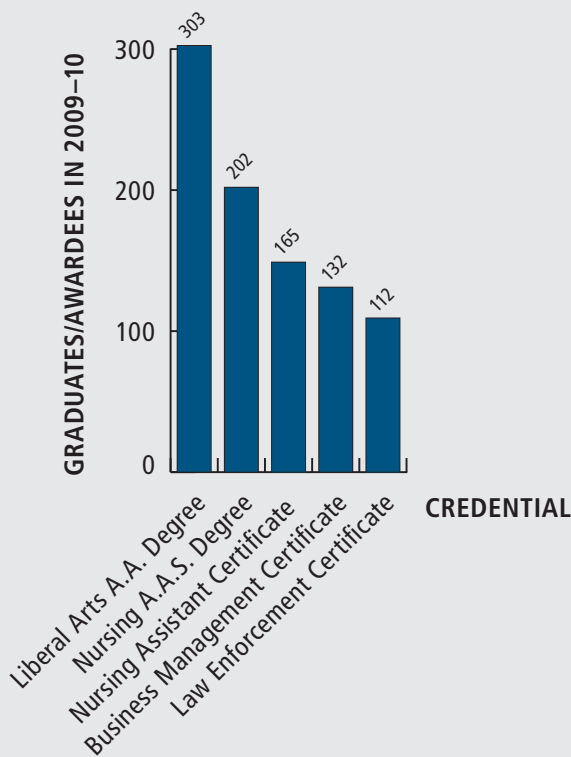
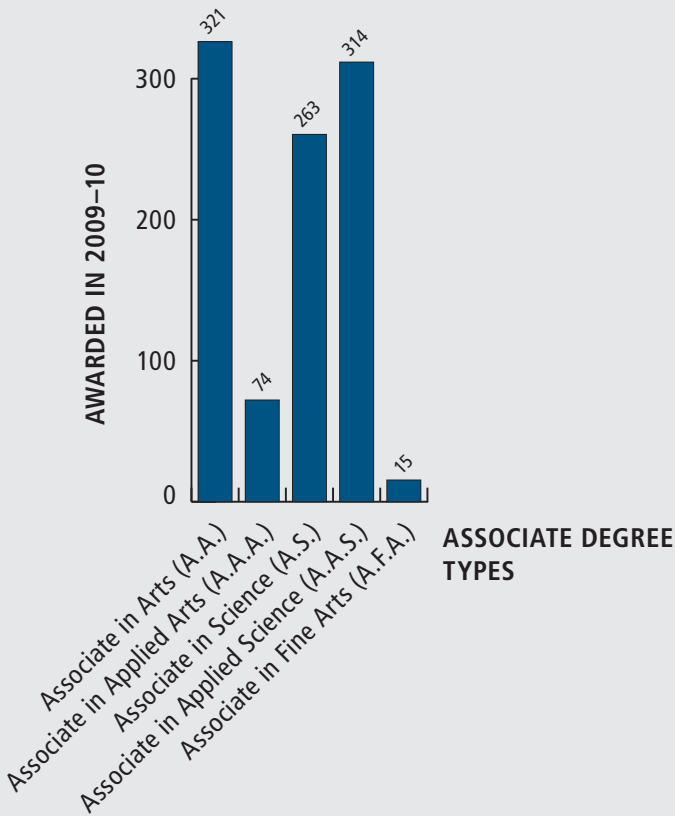


Figure 3: Top Five Associate Degree Types 2010–2011
(See Appendix E for full data chart.)



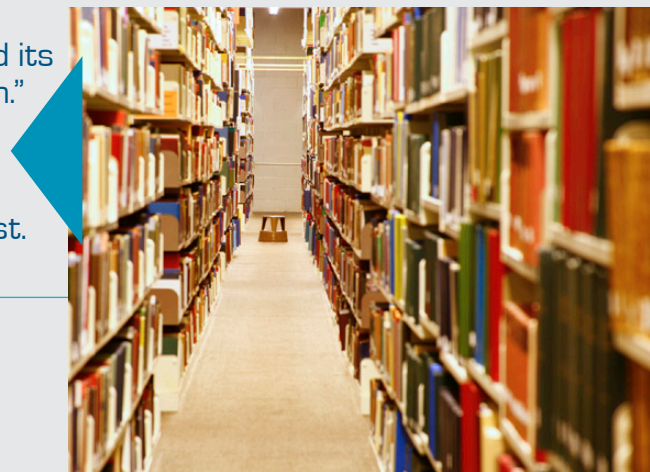
Other departments remain split about the STEM initiative. In general, the arts and humanities faculty are wary about the STEM initiative and its impact on their departments. The music department has especially argued that the college should not lose sight of the importance of the arts. Music Chair Lynn Langlass was overheard stating, “Secondary schools in Florida, New York, and Ohio are already recognizing the importance of including the arts as part of all STEM efforts. It’s time LCC moved from STEM to STEAM to include the arts as well.”

In contrast, other faculty are excited about the opportunities to offer a richer portfolio of online courses. eLearning Director Sam Gonzalez believes his department can play an important role in the initiative’s development and success. The number of online and hybrid courses have doubled over the last five years, from 31 in 2005 to 64 in 2010. Additional online degrees have also been added since 2005, including the interdisciplinary humanities and the business office systems programs. Online degree programs with growing enrollment include business management, computer networking, business office systems, and interdisciplinary humanities. The online certificate programs, including business management, computer system security, computer networking, and business office systems, have become even more popular.

“This STEM initiative will help LCC serve its community and its students in ways it hasn’t been able to before on its own.”

— Dr. Janet McCleary, STEM initiative working group

Other faculty question the appropriateness of initiating advanced programs when more basic educational needs exist.



Student evaluations of these courses, however, have generally been much lower than the traditional in-class options at LCC. Some have said that the online programs expanded too quickly without the proper people in place to make it work. Still, the demand for online offerings is growing and student evaluations have begun to improve over the last three years. Many faculty, administrators, and students view LCC’s online course offerings as a real strength of the college. “Online learning is no longer the wave of the future; it has already arrived!” Gonzalez remarked. “Not only is it worth investing in, it is important to invest in it because it helps LCC live up to its mission as being the most affordable and accessible higher education institution in the area.” Indeed, LCC’s online course offerings are predicted to grow.

The faculty, therefore, remain split on their impressions of the STEM’s potential positive impact on LCC. In response, President Nolan was recently quoted in the school paper as stating, “The reality is that the world is changing and the needs of our community are changing. As a community college, we *have* to be constantly evolving; we can never be satisfied with doing things the way we always have been doing them. That’s not good for our students, and that’s not good for our community at large. Investing in STEM is an investment in our future.”

Figure 4: Popular Online Degree Programs 2010–2011
(See Appendix E for full data chart.)

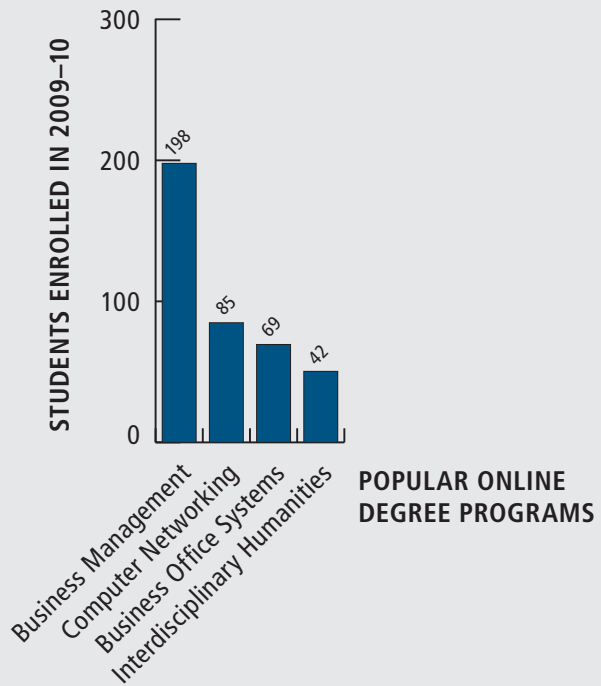
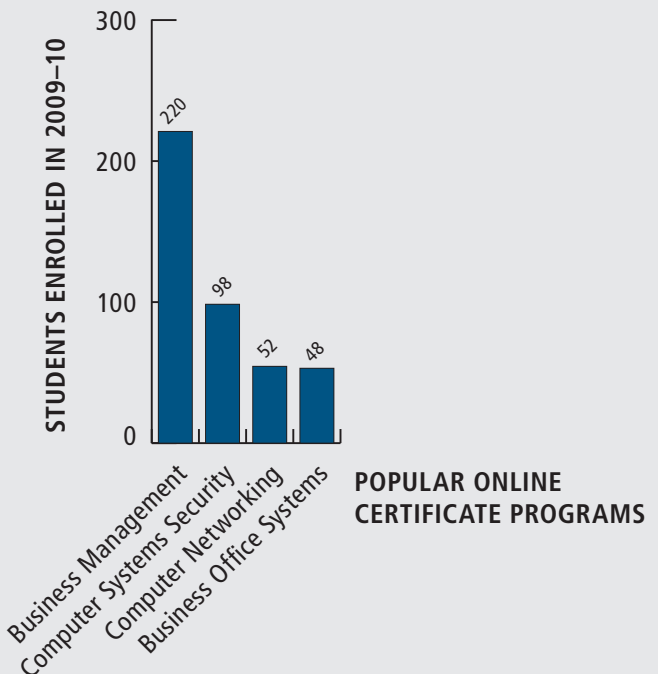


Figure 5: Popular Online Certificate Programs 2010–2011
(See Appendix E for full data chart.)



CAMPUS & FACILITIES



Local Community College occupies a prominent place in the region's downtown area.

The campus is quite visible, buttressing a popular downtown park, Goddard Park, and within walking distance to cultural landmarks and institutions. LCC's campus features buildings with modern architectural appeal. It is also conveniently accessible by gateway freeways, public transportation such as light rail and bus, and the city's popular bike path. The campus is impossible to miss while driving or walking by LCC's location.

Yet its prominent downtown location also causes challenges for LCC. Most notably, the college cannot easily—or affordably—expand its operations. A former facilities administrator jokes that the college will dominate the city's skyline if LCC expands over time because the primary opportunity for physical expansion is to build “up.” Students, faculty, and staff also grumble about limited (and expensive) parking options. The campus has fewer than 1,400 parking spots and there are inadequate “drop-off” locations for commuter students.

Its urban character also frustrates attempts to create a campus “feel.” There are few natural demarcations to separate the “campus” from the city. There is also a recurrent proposal to explore the creation of a residence hall near campus, whether by building a new structure or buying an existing hotel or apartment building. Although most administrators and some faculty like the idea of offering affordable and convenient residential housing, the likely cost of the project always undermines any serious evaluation of the idea. The Student Center was scheduled for renovations in FY2010, but was delayed until FY2013 after voters decide on a bond proposal to fund part of LCC's deferred maintenance needs.

The urban character of LCC's campus means that it is smaller than many community colleges. The campus includes 17 acres and 10 buildings with a total of 1,100,000 net assignable square feet; its buildings are valued at \$380 million. In FY2010, deferred maintenance totaled \$31.3 million. The oldest building, Jefferson Hall, dates back to 1931 while the newest building, the Williams Community Recreational Center, was built in 2009. In addition to its downtown facilities, LCC operates a workforce training center by leasing a 46,000 square-foot building in the industrial section of the city. LCC implemented wireless technologies in all of its buildings in 2008.

The campus' space constraints pose serious challenges for LCC's expansion, as illustrated by a recent attempt to renovate LCC's gymnasium. In 2002, then-President Thomas Fitzhugh established a committee to discuss renovating Johnson Gymnasium into a state-of-the-art athletic facility for students, staff, faculty, and the community. In a LCC newsletter, Fitzhugh described the project as “another way of engaging the community. It complements our missions of educating students and the community about healthy lifestyles. By building a community-focused recreational facility, LCC can further establish itself as a ‘hub’ for the city and promoting healthy citizens.”

The president's proposal offered clear benefits. The recreational sports facility would have upgraded facilities for students, helping to attract new students and establish a greater campus feel. The proposal called for new cardiovascular equipment such as treadmills and elliptical machines, new weightlifting equipment, and a new pool. The upgraded facilities also promised to generate new attention for LCC's popular men's and women's basketball teams. The college's marketing director proposed hosting preconference basketball games for local colleges, as well as rock concerts at the new center. President

Fitzhugh had courted the support of city council members for the project, negotiating modest opportunities for the city to help finance the project.

Although the project offered clear benefits to LCC and the city, it soon encountered serious difficulties. First, the project coincided with a steady rise in commercial real estate prices. Although LCC was prepared to spend top-dollar for the right property, it lost a bidding war with one of the city's top real estate developers to purchase a building across from Goddard Park. Moreover, in addition to a city-funded subsidy, LCC's initial projections for generating new revenues from membership fees overstated consumer demand; although some city residents were willing to consider spending less money at LCC's facility than for a private health club, a second market research study found that the actual demand was 61 percent less than original forecasts by LCC's financial analysts. The facilities team encountered significant cost overruns when it projected costs for renovating Johnson Gymnasium into the proposed facility.

Despite numerous frustrations, LCC opened the Williams Community Recreational Facility to much media fanfare in May 2010. The project, with the help of a state-sponsored brownfield redevelopment grant, just exceeded original cost projections, though the project took almost three years longer to complete. In a fortuitous sense, the project strengthened relationships with city and state redevelopment officials; these relationships will prove helpful as LCC pursues its next construction project: the proposed Schechter Science Center. In fall 2010, Fitzhugh announced a proposal to build a new science center to enhance classroom and laboratory technologies for the college's science classes. As President Nolan contemplates how best to implement the proposed STEM initiative, the facilities staff will face new challenges designing the academic and administrative space of the Schechter Science Center.



TOP PHOTO: RICHARD DOBER



When President Nolan visited LCC for her on-campus interviews, she was immediately struck by the strong commitment of its faculty and staff.

“It was clear that the people who work and teach at LCC just *love* this place. They are strongly committed to the students here. That was definitely a determining factor in why I ultimately took the job. I’m glad I did, and that commitment and loyalty that I felt from the faculty and staff then, I feel even more strongly today.” LCC was recently named a “Great Place to Work” in its metropolitan area.

That is not to say, however, that it does not have its fair share of tensions and challenges. One of the major issues facing the college today is its increasing numbers of part-time faculty. As Ms. Golden from the English department explained, “Our department hasn’t had the funds to hire any additional full-time faculty for three years in a row. Meanwhile, the number of students seeking writing remediation has been growing. We rely on part-timers to teach *70 percent* of our classes, and most of those classes are our remedial courses, which have got to be the most difficult courses to teach. This STEM initiative is supposed to be the best thing since sliced bread, but where’s the funding to help us support the students who come here who need us the most?”

LCC’s part-time faculty rates have been constantly creeping upwards, especially in the remedial education classes. By 2011, LCC had a total of 172 full-time instructors and 425 part-time instructors, a 71.2 percent part-time faculty rate. In 2000, adjuncts represented 65 percent of all faculty and in 2005, 68 percent. This year marks the college’s highest adjunct rate ever. It also marks the highest rate of courses taught by adjuncts at 53.2 percent.

LCC’s adjunct faculty are not represented by a union, but discussions among longtime adjuncts have been brewing over whether now is the time to start seriously talking about organizing. LCC’s administration has been closely monitoring these discussions and is expected to strongly resist any movement towards the formation of an adjunct union. The Board recently approved a 1.5 percent raise for part-time faculty; some faculty believe the measure was an attempt to appease and temper momentum for adjuncts unionizing.

The difficulty of organizing the part-time faculty is their busy and irregular schedules. “We come and go. We’re in and out,” explained an adjunct that teaches sociology. “I teach three other classes at two other institutions in the region. I wake up some days and have trouble remembering which college I’m supposed to be driving to; it gets that bad. Do I feel connected to LCC? Ah, no. But I’m happy for the job. I like teaching and I like my students. I hope to get a full-time job somewhere eventually. Not sure how a part-time union might effect the full-time faculty, is the only thing. If I support the union as an adjunct, will it hurt my chances of getting a full-time job, or will it come back to haunt me if I become a full-timer? Adjuncts are facing a lot of questions like that right now.”

Another group feeling overworked is the student support staff. “I can tell you, not only are we seeing more students coming into our department seeking help, but they’re coming in with more complicated and serious issues,” remarked Sherry Jones, a counselor in the Student Services division. “My student appointments have been booked solid since the beginning of the semester. Whether they are right out of high school or have just come back from Iraq or have their own kids to support and look after, a lot of our students face a great number of challenges at home and at school. They need a lot of support figuring out how to navigate this place and their future options. It seems more of them are working full-time or multiple

part-time jobs, too. They are better described as workers who study, not students who work. I love my job, but I think I speak for everyone in our office: we are burnt out.”

The new president recognizes the need to focus on developing faculty leaders at the college, but it’s not on her (or the Board’s) “top-priority” list. With a strong background in the sciences both academically (in addition to her Ed.D. in higher education administration, she received her Ph.D. in Biological Sciences from A-SU) and professionally (she worked in research development at a pharmaceutical company headquartered in the region), President Nolan has the Board’s support to make the STEM initiative her most important project for 2012–2013.

President Nolan explains: “For the past twenty years, LCC has served its community well, but it has generally always been five to eight years behind where it needs to be when it comes to preparing its students to enter the science, health, and high technology industries. This STEM initiative will finally put LCC on the map and equip us with the resources to provide the best, most affordable education for our students.”

“But this STEM initiative won’t only benefit our students. Our faculty will benefit as well,” she continued. “We have begun discussions with A-SU and are planning to offer professional development opportunities taught by some of A-SU’s top STEM faculty for our own STEM faculty.”

Not all faculty are thrilled with the opportunities for professional development, however. “I heard about the professional development opportunities,” remarked a longtime faculty member in the physics department. “Someone should tell Nolan that LCC has much better

teachers than A-SU! It’s like she doesn’t get community colleges or something. We value teaching here. They [A-SU] don’t. *We* should be teaching *them* how to teach; not the other way around.”

The STEM working group has also discussed plans to offer teaching internships to A-SU master’s students in mathematics and the sciences at LCC and develop a one-year STEM teaching academy that will serve as a recruiting pipeline for talented, mid-career professionals interested in exploring teaching careers. This, too, has sparked concern among LCC’s current faculty. As one biology instructor quipped, “I thought this STEM initiative was going to benefit us, but it sounds like she [the president] is looking to replace us.”

Although some of LCC’s faculty are worried and skeptical about President Nolan’s leadership abilities, the Board of Trustees is not. “President Nolan is just what we need,” remarked Daniel Portman, the longest serving LCC board member. “The time is now to put the college on this kind of strategic path towards the STEM disciplines and industries.” The board sees the predicted growth in STEM field jobs as a real opportunity for the college to serve the region well. Portman continued, “If we are going to really serve our community right, we *have* to make this sort of change. With the new president’s background and connections across the region, she’s the perfect leader for us right now. We’re lucky we got her when we did.”

LCC’s board is elected and the board members serve six-year terms. “My term date ends in 2013, so this STEM initiative will likely either make or break me,” remarked Amy Noler, one of the youngest members of the board. “But I have faith in President Nolan and the college as a whole. This is what’s right for our students and our community.”



“We value teaching here. They [A-SU] don’t. *We* should be teaching *them* how to teach; not the other way around.”
—Longtime faculty member

Local Community College has established a reputation for prudent financial management.

In recent years, LCC's commitment to planning has only underscored this reputation with the college developing a series of five-year plans to better coordinate academic, facilities, and financial planning. Although meeting the accountability requirements of the state's coordinating body was the genesis behind early planning efforts, LCC soon realized the value of modifying this process for its own purposes. Former President Fitzhugh explained to President Nolan during the interview process that "we were all sitting in the board room, and realized that if the state was going to ask for this data, we should do something with it for ourselves. Their mandate actually pushed us in a better direction."

A differentiating feature of LCC's financial planning is its coordination with academic and facilities planning. The financial master plan provides data, such as five year forecasts for enrollment, capital needs for strategic projects, increases in compensation and benefits expenses, continued debt service, and revenues from external sources. Between January and June every year, LCC's financial analysts formulate forecasts and more importantly, discuss these emerging plans with academic, administrative, facilities, and student services staff.

Although financial staff kick-start the process, academic and facilities staff really shape the contours of planning by submitting annual work plans that articulate and prioritize unit-level goals in February and March of every year. After reviewing the plans of academic and administrative units, the financial staff and senior academic leaders transform the unit-level reports into an integrated institutional work plan. This institutional budgeting process ultimately provides many of the requested resources to the units, but also

identifies some projects and units to prioritize while lowering investment in other units and projects.

The state's coordinating body believes that other state colleges and universities should emulate LCC's budgeting process. Despite this fanfare, some administrators admit (although quietly) that the budget process typically "rubber stamps" previous budgets and reinforces the status quo. "The truth is folks get what they request each year. Sure, on the margins some departments get more and some get less, but most of my fellow department heads can guess what we'll get each year," explained one anonymous department chair. "We're all a tad anxious to see what happens when we really start trimming our budget. How will 'winners' and 'losers' be determined?"

These refined budgetary practices will be tested as LCC confronts potential financial challenges. LCC's financial growth remained strong in FY2010: total revenues increased by 7.9 percent to \$63.9 million; and assets totaled \$133.0 million while liabilities totaled \$38.9 million, equaling net assets of \$94.1 million. In FY2010, total operating revenues increased by \$2.8 million. Importantly, \$500,000 in federal stimulus funding that helped the college with operating expenses over the past two years will no longer be provided, ending June 30 of the current year. The college's external grant revenues have remained at around \$2 million annually for the past decade, with the bulk of grant funds coming from Carl Perkins Act federal flow-through dollars and two federal TRIO grants.

Like many colleges, LCC has increased its tuition in recent years to generate more revenues. LCC has increased tuition rates from \$79 per credit hour to \$96 per credit hour over the past three years; the college charges higher rates for certain programs such as nursing (\$141 per credit hour) and digital arts (\$163

per credit hour). Tuition accounts for 41 percent of revenues.

Yet just like many institutions, LCC has also observed a steady increase in total operating expenses in recent years. In FY2009, total operating expenses increased by \$3.3 million and by \$4.9 million in FY2010; total operating expenses totaled \$69.5 million in FY2010. The higher expenses stem from continued growth in enrollment and hiring more faculty to expand course offerings to meet unprecedented demand. Although these increasing expenses alarm some business administrators, they acknowledge that the college hired higher percentages of part-time faculty to mitigate expenses. Despite the increasing costs, the use of part-time faculty might be LCC's most efficient alternative for expanding its programs.

The proposed STEM initiative presents potential revenues and likely expenses. The initiative offers new revenue streams. The STEM working group is currently preparing a NSF grant totaling \$1.1 million, and partnerships with regional businesses and the state economic development agency offer opportunities for future revenues. The college's initiative, however, will create expenses. Academic programs in STEM fields such as health services and engineering services, for example, are more expensive than most programs due to their labor-intensive nature and accompanying specialized technologies; and new staff will need to be hired to coordinate the work of new partnerships with regional businesses and the state's economic development agency.

One potential source for future revenues is expanding LCC's modest endowment. LCC benefits from a small group of committed donors, who fund several endowed scholarships, but most private donors gravitate toward supporting the popular men's and women's basketball teams. The LCC Foundation, which manages a modest endowment of \$5 million, is exploring how best to leverage interest in the Williams Community Recreation Center as it prepares to launch a capital campaign in 2013.



BOTTOM PHOTO: RICHARD DOBER

STUDENT PROFILE



For the 2011–2012 academic year, 15,135² students enrolled in at least one credit-bearing class, the highest credit headcount in the college's history.

This figure jumped nearly 1,000 students from the previous year (a 6 percent increase), but projections for 2012–2013 anticipate credit headcount will likely start to flatten for the first time in five years (since 2006) when enrollments increased by at least one percent each year. Students enrolled in credit courses comprised 84 percent of the enrollments at LCC, and 40 percent of credit students were enrolled full-time.

Over the last academic year, the number of credit enrollments (i.e., the number of registrations in courses) increased 13.6 percent, while enrollments in non-credit continuing education courses decreased 3.8 percent. The president recently remarked, “I’m not so worried about the declining enrollment in the continuing ed classes. We essentially break even in those classes anyway. Meanwhile, the incredible growth in enrollment in our credit programs is almost more than we can handle.” Over the last five years, enrollments in credit courses have increased 35 percent, while non-credit enrollments have only increased by 10 percent.

The demographic composition of the student population has not changed much over the past five years. In the current year (2011–2012), 54 percent of credit students are female and 45 percent are students of color. Almost half (49 percent) of students are eligible for the Pell Grant and, therefore, considered low-income students. One in four students is a first-generation college student. The college is eligible for funding under Title III of the Higher Education Act as a developing institution given the percentage of its students receiving need-based aid and its low average Educational and General expenditures per FTE. However, the college’s grant writer is unsure as to the

focus a Title III grant of close to \$2 million should take, so no clear plans are in place to apply in the year ahead. The college also receives two TRIO grants from the U. S. Department of Education aimed at assisting disadvantaged students, including a Student Support Services grant and a Talent Search grant.

LCC has historically enrolled a greater percentage of minority students and lower income students than represented in the county’s general population. However, some faculty and community members are beginning to question the low course success rates³ of LCC’s African American and Hispanic students compared to its White and Asian-American students. These critics want LCC to address its achievement gap. In college-level courses, White students’ success rates have been around 80 percent over the last five years, but for African American students, the success rates have been 12 to 14 percent lower (between 66 and 68 percent).

The comments of one vocal faculty member at LCC best capture this sentiment: “It’s disappointing, unfair, and frankly immoral of LCC’s leadership to ignore our achievement gap—to know it exists but to do nothing about it. We are moving in the direction of getting a grant for STEM education to support our STEM efforts. That’s great. But what’s the leadership going to do to support the minority students in our community who have been trying to get an education for themselves, trying to improve their lives, but face obstacles and low achievement expectations time and time again and haven’t been getting adequate support from the college? Where’s the grant to address *that* problem? What’s the college’s commitment to equity for all students? I don’t see it.”

² This represents college-wide unduplicated enrollment; students enrolled in credit classes over the span of the 2011–2012 academic year are counted only once.

³ Successfully completing a course is defined by achieving an A, B, C, Pass, or Satisfactory grade.

The Associate Vice President of the Arts and Sciences division acknowledges the achievement gap and explains that LCC is trying to address it. “The comparatively low achievement of our minority students, especially our African American males, is something we are quite concerned about and committed to improving. Thanks to Avery Dunbar [an African American faculty member in the psychology department], we started a pilot mentorship program that pairs African American students with faculty of color. We are optimistic this program will initiate the start of closing the college’s achievement gap.”

The mentoring program, however, has had difficulty attracting students. After a weeklong marketing blitz, only eight students showed up for its introductory meeting. “But really, let’s be honest. What’s a single program going to do anyway?” asked one of the faculty in the history department. “In my opinion, LCC needs a campus wide *culture* change in order to really get at the root of the achievement gap problems. A mentoring program might help a few students. But what about the other nearly 3,500 Black students who are students here?”

Like most community colleges, LCC attracts a student body encompassing a wide range of ages. The average age of credit students at LCC is 28 years old; the youngest student is 15 and the oldest is 68. The median age of credit students is 24 years old. Thirty-seven percent of students are recent high school graduates under the age of 20. The number of students dually enrolled in high school and the college has increased one percent over the last five years, representing three percent of all credit students.

LCC has seen a growing number of students (known as “swirlers”) who enroll at LCC and at least one other postsecondary institution, but the exact number of swirlers is difficult to determine exactly because students do not always disclose their multiple enrollments. Current figures suggest 17 percent of students fall into this category and that their enrollments peak during the summers.

Figure 6: Student Metrics 2009–2011
(See Appendices A–D for full data charts.)

Metric	2009–10	2010–11	% Change
Unduplicated Credit Headcount	14,226	15,135	+ 6.4%
Credit Enrollments	40,634	46,175	+ 13.6%
Noncredit Enrollments	12,486	12,006	- 3.8%

Figure 7: Student Demographics 2011–2012
(See Appendices A–D for full data charts.)

Demographic	% of Students
Race	
White	56%
African-American	23%
Hispanic	14%
Asian-American/ Pacific Islander	4%
American Indian	1%
Unknown	2%
Schooling Level	
High School Graduates	37%
Dually Enrolled High School Students	3%
“Swirlers” (estimate)	17%

Demographic	Years
Average Age	28
Median Age	24

Figure 8: 3-year Success Rates of Full-time Students as of 2012
(See Appendices A–D for full data charts.)

Action After 3 Years	% of Full-Time Students
Receive Associates Degree, Diploma, or Certificate	15%
Transfer to 4-year Institution	22%
Retained	14%

Two other student groups that have been enrolling in greater numbers over the last few years are displaced workers and returning veterans. These students are generally either seeking new skills or opportunities to retool their current skills in order to be more competitive in the job market. The displaced worker population tends to be older (in their 30s and 40s), male, and has had limited experience with postsecondary education; most have just a high school diploma. The returning veteran population is difficult to categorize because they represent all races, all ages, and enroll in a variety of programs.

LCC has a small but enthusiastic student activities office led by two full-time staff members and assisted by six part-time employees and coaches. They coordinate all of LCC's student activities and clubs, including two club sports teams (coed cross country and women's volleyball) and two varsity sports teams, men's and women's basketball, which are often called "the pride and joy" of LCC sports.

In fact, LCC's popular (and competitive) basketball teams are the only athletic programs that receive consistent funding. Most students are asked to pay full price to participate in sports activities and clubs, but low-income students can seek financial support through LCC's Foundation. The Foundation itself, though, is on somewhat shaky ground; it has not received the same level of donations since the recession. LCC's sports programs remain limited because A-SU's sports teams have long dominated the athletic booster scene in the region; moreover, past presidents simply did not prioritize athletics. Before President Fitzhugh, President Oakes was known to say that LCC should be more focused on serving the students who are in school to support their families rather than the students who are here to play sports.

The three-year full-time student success rate at LCC is pretty strong: 15 percent of students earn an associate's degree, diploma, or a certificate; 22 percent transfer to a four-year institution; and 14 percent continue taking classes.

With the construction of the new recreation building, however, both student activities staff and students are excited about new opportunities to expand LCC's programming. For some students, sports activities and clubs are an essential part of their education. "Man, I think I would have dropped out the first week of classes if it wasn't for basketball," stated T.J. Davis, the starting point guard on the men's team and a psychology student who receives a scholarship from the Foundation. "It keeps me focused, you know?" The number of students participating in activities is only between 450 and 500 students each semester, but Debby Gross, director of the student activities office, highlights that their students' grades and academic indicators are generally much better than the average LCC student.

The three-year full-time student success rate at LCC is pretty strong: 15 percent of students earn an associate's degree, diploma, or a certificate; 22 percent transfer to a four-year institution; and 14 percent continue taking classes. "Our three-year success rate is something to be really proud of," remarked President Nolan. "It's emblematic of the dedication of all our faculty and staff. The success of our students is our number one priority."



STRATEGIC PLANNING



How should Local Community College define its future and how will the college know if it's achieving this vision?

In 2012, LCC is better equipped than in previous years to explore and answer this question.

Over the past decade, the importance of strategic planning has increased at LCC. When then-President Fitzhugh arrived in 2002, he led the creation of an Office of Accountability and Strategy (OAS), moving the institutional research staff and a special assistant for strategic initiatives under the new OAS umbrella, while also recruiting a vice president for accountability and strategy. Although LCC had developed numerous strategic plans over the years, the planning process had always been managed through the President's office with budgetary and financial support from the Administration and Finance office.

With the new structure in place, Fitzhugh embarked on formalizing LCC's performance management practices. LCC began measuring a broader set of indicators; the college had long measured and tracked indicators relating to enrollment and finances, but began investigating important student segments such as students of color and those studying science and mathematics. With the support of many deans and directors, and external consultants, LCC launched a "performance dashboard" on its website that showcased metrics such as the college's enrollment trends, its revenues per full-time student equivalent, and the retention rates of students of color, among other metrics. The dashboard, for example, has helped increase awareness of the college's achievement gap problem.

Fitzhugh and other faculty and administrative leaders, however, soon realized that creating the dashboard merely represented an initial step in refining strategic

planning at LCC. President Nolan recalls Fitzhugh saying "we knew changing people's behaviors would be difficult, but in retrospect, we hadn't a clue of how easily we could create and tweak the dashboard without anyone noticing—and this proved both good and bad." During the interview process, President Nolan learned of some frustrations over ideas for improving performance on key metrics. A discussion of LCC's passage rate for remedial and introductory math and writing classes, for example, apparently frustrated faculty who perceived Fitzhugh and OAS' vice president as critiquing teaching practices. In a Faculty Senate meeting coinciding with the annual budgeting and planning cycle, the mathematics chairperson argued "if the president wants to launch a curriculum review, or contend that we could teach these students better, then do so or say so. Don't disguise critiques as a project supporting a fancy website for the board of trustees."

So when President Nolan assumed office 18 months ago, she knew that the college still confronted daunting strategic planning challenges, especially as LCC now considers how to develop and implement the proposed STEM initiative. The Board of Trustees has also begun applying pressure on President Nolan to establish and track targets for performance indicators such as graduation and retention rates. Administrative and faculty leaders may agree that strategic planning has benefits—and may understand the relationship between budgetary and academic affairs—but the LCC's strategic planning process has yet to be tested during tough economic circumstances or periods of retrenchment and reprioritization. One anonymous administrator hinted at skepticism while saying "Yeah, in the shadows, you'll hear people question whether we're going to pull-off this STEM plan. I mean, what does it really mean for our college? How can we both 'succeed' at STEM and meet our many other goals? I don't hear much discussion along these lines."



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