

From the President's Desk: The View at Nine Months

By David Roland Finley, Ph.D., North Central Michigan College

The vernal equinox has passed, and Commencement will be upon us in six short weeks! It's been an exciting nine months since I've begun my duties as president, and I've been learning a lot. As North Central's new leader, I have been in a persistent, appreciative inquiry mode, which culminated in the 'Brainstorming our Future' workshop on Friday, March 15th. While I will continue to listen, experience and network over the next several months (and actually during my entire tenure as president), I am quite certain that I may never again garner the input of more than 100 individuals with the best interests of the College in mind in a single day! The feedback and ideas shared were truly inspiring. (For those who could not attend, please know that I have an open door.)

Since my arrival, I have learned that the College is comprised of an amazing team! We're not here simply for a paycheck, but because we have the opportunity to improve lives and make a difference in our host communities (and ultimately our world). It is our vocation! It is what *matters*! I extend my sincere thanks to each and every member of the North Central community for your efforts.

Having said this, I believe there are three opportunities (low-hanging fruit) before us that can move the College forward immediately. As such, I recommend that we pursue these initiatives even prior to the finalization of the Strategic Plan, as I am certain that they will be incorporated into this document.

- #1) We must pursue **mutually beneficial partnerships** with corporate and educational entities throughout our community. Whether this is a partnership in health care, hospitality, or Career & Technical Education (CTE), North Central must not limit itself to being "that place on the hill," but rather a distributed campus with multiple classrooms throughout the communities we serve.
- #2) We must adapt the **mode(s) in which we deliver learning opportunities**. Is this via online courses (now an expected mode of delivery) or in an 8-week accelerated format on the 'shoulders of the tourist/resorter season'? Is this via paid apprenticeship programs? Additionally, we must lead in the development of a model of Corporate & Community Education with accelerated coursework that leads to a credential for the nontraditional learner! Given fewer high school seniors in Michigan through 2030, this is where the greatest opportunity for growth exists.
- #3) **Conference and Events Services** must grow significantly in scale and scope, driven by strong curricular alignment. It is no longer possible to exist by the growth of tuition revenue alone. As such, it is important that we become a year-round, cost-effective venue to host conferences/weddings/workshops of over 175 people without shutting down space routinely used for other purposes on campus.

What's more, it is incumbent upon the College to become the convener for important conversations regarding the future of our host communities. We cannot solve every problem. Our forte is to provide higher education to solve some of the problems that we face. Nonetheless, we can expand our role as the 'community's College' for our region and serve as the venue where shared issues are discussed, such as affordable housing, childcare, transportation, and the lack of available tradespeople.

As we move forward, I remind you of the ten points of focus from my remarks at the August 27, 2018 Welcome Back Breakfast.

- 1) Strategic Planning/Vision
- 2) Branding/Marketing
- 3) Fundraising
- 4) Enrollment Management
- 5) Summer Programs/Activities
- 6) Academic Program Development/Innovation
- 7) Upgrade Physical Plant/Address Deferred Maintenance
- 8) Expand Facilities, Services, and Activities for Students
- 9) Seek Further Opportunities to Enhance Faculty/Staff Development and Continuing Education
- 10) Strengthen and Improve our Partnerships with Entities in Petoskey, Emmet County, the Tip of the Mitt, and throughout the State

The good news is that we're making progress on each of the fronts. I'll speak briefly to each.

Strategic Planning/Visioning

The Strategic Planning/Visioning process began last fall, and a draft mission statement was developed with input from many. This statement reads, 'North Central Michigan College provides exceptional, accessible, and relevant higher education of and for the community.' It is brief enough that it can be remembered by all, and the acronym (EAR) denotes that we are truly listening to the constituencies we serve to provide the very best educational opportunities to our students.

Strategic Planning/Visioning will continue through the summer and fall, culminating in a new Vision Statement for the institution. Once the institutional framework is in place, departments will be asked to identify how they contribute to the overall plan, with this work to be completed by Spring 2020.

Branding/Marketing

An external consultant has reviewed Branding/Marketing of the College, and she has found our efforts in this regard to be exemplary and well-coordinated. Nonetheless, we seek opportunities to broaden our social media outreach to include channels to garner activity-based, student-level participation, as well as evaluating the ROI on the various events hosted by the College. Which of these events should we continue, bolster, or discontinue to best utilize limited resources?

Fundraising

We've had tremendous fundraising success at the College in the past nine months, with nearly \$3.5M in current and deferred gifts secured since July 2018. Please understand the cash in hand today is significantly less, with much of this money restricted to scholarships, equipment, the capital campaign, or bequests. Nonetheless, it all makes for a stronger North Central Michigan College. What's more, we've found a new Executive Director in Chelsea (Townsend) Platte. Chelsea, a Petoskey native, currently serves as Lead Gifts Officer at Munson Charlevoix Hospital, and on April 8th we will be welcoming her to the North Central family.

Enrollment Management

We experienced a decrease of ~10% in both students and credit hours in Fall 2018, however given the demographics in northern Michigan (fewer high school seniors through the year 2030), I was not surprised. We are going to have to work harder in the next decade simply to hold our own. The answer

is not dual credit or Early College. (More on this later.) The good news is that we held our own with a decrease of ~9.5% for Winter 2019. I'm optimistic that we've turned the corner. However, much stronger recruiting and retention will be required in years to come.

Summer Programs/Activities

Summer Programs/Activities are where I believe that we have a tremendous opportunity. When our community is most vibrant, North Central is the quietest. We have the chance to invite more than 35,000 summer residents, not to mention passing tourists, to campus to show them the amazing environment and educational opportunities that the College provides. Again, it is imperative that we reach a broader audience (with fewer high school seniors through 2030). As a first step, North Central will offer a Breakfast Lecture Series on the third Wednesday of June, July, and August at 8:30 a.m. to step up its game in the summer and showcase campus to many folks who have not had reason to visit the College. I'm confident that many more summer activities will build upon this outreach effort.

Academic Program Development/Innovation

With regard to Academic Program Development/Innovation, I am aware of several initiatives. The first is a new CNC machinist certificate, which will give students NIMS certification upon completion. This, along with a revamped CAD certificate of development, and a proposed Mechatronics certificate will ultimately roll into an Associate of Applied Science (A.A.S.) degree. North Central is collaborating with the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians to bring these new programmatic opportunities to fruition. The grant under development also includes the first steps toward establishing a Career Center at North Central. The Nursing curriculum is also undergoing significant revision to enable graduates to 'hit the ground running' in clinical settings. Application for approval of the curricular changes has been made to the State of Michigan. Acquisition of the Anatomage Table last fall proved to be a noteworthy step forward for our Nursing, Allied Health, and Public Safety offerings, with more curricular developments likely to come of this. Finally, the new SludgeHammer wastewater treatment tank demonstrates a sustainability innovation in action, and it ought also generate curricular development.

Upgrade Physical Plant/Address Deferred Maintenance

While the delay in the AD/CL Building Renovation Project has been a disappointment, this turn of events has allowed us to 'sharpen our pencils' and be certain that the renovations designed are precisely what we seek. (What can we build for the \$7.4M price tag approved by the Legislature?) The delay provides the opportunity to secure optimal bids for a 2020 build and to reach out to more friends of the College to garner their support for this renovation. Sometimes, patience truly is a virtue. Even with the renovation project setback, we have made good strides to upgrade our physical plant and address deferred maintenance. Improvements were made to our main campus entrance, new visitor parking established, and energy-saving LED lighting and divider curtains have enhanced our SCRC. What's more, a solar panel demonstration project, electric car charging station, and a new green roof are queued up for the summer months.

Expand Facilities, Services, and Activities for Students; Seek Further Opportunities to Enhance Faculty/Staff Development and Continuing Education; Strengthen and Improve our Partnerships with Entities in Petoskey, Emmet County, the Tip of the Mitt, and throughout the State

In the interest of keeping these thoughts reasonably brief, let me acknowledge that the three remaining points of focus clearly relate to the success of the capital campaign, as well as the path of the College moving forward. At the 'Brainstorming our Future' activity last month, several themes came to the surface. These include sustainability, childcare, career services, education in the trades, and virtual reality. Let us now consider together how we might use these themes to create an even more impactful North Central in years to come.

In sum, three opportunities exist that can move the College forward immediately, and it is incumbent upon us to pursue these endeavors with vigor.

- We must pursue **mutually beneficial partnerships** with corporate and educational entities throughout our community.
- We must adapt the **mode(s) in which we deliver learning opportunities**.
- **Conference and Events Services** must grow significantly in scale and scope.

Further, we must take the lead in convening important conversations regarding the future of our host communities. We are the community's College.

Working together with purpose, I am confident that we can achieve our draft mission of "providing exceptional, accessible, and relevant higher education of and for the community" in even more impactful ways in the decade to come.