Aligning Systems and Power Structures and Bridging Distances

Block 4 Report (1/7/23)

Megan Nicklaus (co-chair)
Jacob Sanchez (co-chair)
Participants: Matt Bonser, Re Evitt, Ersaleen Hope, Chad Schonewill, Katherine Menendez, and Christine Siddoway

This working group was tasked with evaluating the ideas generated through the listening and idea generation sessions facilitated in the first year of Project 2024 and to provide options for how Colorado College (CC) could move forward in aligning power structures to bridge distances within the CC community. The working group also referenced CC’s Modern Think Campus Climate survey results and responses and used these data points to enrich the conversation.

The working group grounded the conversation and recommendations generated around the concepts of **equity, information and money as power, and collaborative leadership**. President Richardson has put forward in her pillars for the college aspiring to be a “best place” to work, healthy communities, and ADEI. The working group believes the following options will support these pillars. Furthermore, **working towards a campus ethos of trust, generosity, and collaboration rather than distrust, suspicion, and territorialism** would contribute to bridging distances in relationships, information, and resources allocation.

Encouraging Cross Office and Divisional Collaboration

The college signals where we place value when it comes to the work of the college by what information is communicated, through the awards given, and the opportunities created. In an effort to foster cross campus collaboration the working group presents the following options:

- **Reimagine college awards**, transition from individual contributions to highlight/feature/celebrate/reward collaborative work.
- **Broaden the landscape of learning** by increasing opportunities for staff and faculty collaborations, for example, incentivize faculty/staff fall conference presentations, lunch and learns, staff member support for faculty field trips or faculty and staff block break trips, joint Excel@CC and Crown Center offerings.
- Investigate creation of ‘mixed office spaces’ and ‘nomad outposts.’ Conduct an internal **audit of workspace use** (for example, hybrid employees who are on campus once or twice a week.) and look at ways to create vibrant, energized workspaces. Additionally, space is a college resource, and it is important that it be used effectively to meet the needs of the college as a whole. Community space should not be “owned” by a department, but rather there should be the ability to reserve space that is under-utilized.
Mixed office spaces, could host employees from different departments/divisions at the same time either by similar functions or facing similar challenges. (Could be a similar concept to the OneStop shop proposed in 2020 as a part of faculty, staff, student design thinking project.) Having mixed office space could foster information sharing, collaboration, and connection. Additionally, ‘nomad space’ could provide opportunities for hybrid employees to work in a common space and free up office space for on-campus employees, while providing a space to connect with others. It would also provide a space for those who are transitioning between activities.

**Systems and Power Dynamics**

The working group discussed how **information, money, and resource allocation influences power dynamics on campus.** Those who have institutional information and know how to navigate the college structures have considerable power within the college. The Colorado College community frequently speaks about what a “relational” campus we are. Relationships as a means of navigating the college and “getting things done” is problematic as it can and has led to feelings of covert or subtle discrimination and powerlessness.

In order to create equitable opportunity for all employees and the larger CC community, the working group puts forward the following options:

- **Create dynamic organizational charts.** Within Outlook currently you are able to see a hierarchical organization chart. The working group proposes providing a more detailed organizational chart. This chart would include a brief description of what each position supports and how the work impacts/supports/adds value to the college. It would also be searchable by using key words, in this way, the CC community could identify the right person for what they were seeking. Additionally, the CC community could see the logic behind the organization of the college and how to get things done by established channels rather than “who you know.”

- **Create a database of expertise for staff and faculty.** Everyone at the college has expertise, however, it is often difficult to penetrate the sense of hierarchy to get things done. If the college values collaboration, then people need to be able to identify expertise of individuals across the college. Additionally, making time for and incentivizing departments to allow the lending of expertise across the college is important.

- **Conduct an internal review of bureaucratic/approval processes.** A reoccurring theme from both the Project 2024 data and the Modern Think data is that staff do not feel empowered to do their jobs. While they were hired for their expertise, the approval process is so often so lengthy they are unable to do their jobs effectively.
• **Create leadership development opportunities that focus on succession** and building the knowledge, skills and abilities of future leaders. Included in these development opportunities would be mentorship by senior leadership.

The college could benefit from defining accountability across the institution, codifying policies and procedures, and reviewing & reimagining the shared governance model.

• **Create structures and processes in place of uncodified and ambiguous norms**, review vague policies and procedures, and develop and support accountability structures.

• **Transparency and accountability from leadership is needed**. This was an additional theme that emerged from both the Project 2024 and Modern think data.

Currently senior leader “reports” are unidirectional and often vague. **Townhalls feel like a “data dump” and cabinet meeting notes are vague.** There is a strong desire for true conversation. The community does not know what the leadership is accountable for nor the progress towards those goals.

One option for moving accountability forward across the institution is to **create dashboards that show institutional goals and to update the progress towards goal attainment**. Additionally, these institutional goals should be developed via data collection by the CC community and a mandate that requires goal development that includes diverse perspectives of stakeholders impacted at all levels of a division/department.

• **Create structures and processes in place of uncodified and ambiguous norms**, review vague policies and procedures, and develop and support accountability structures.

• **Examine, restructure or create, and adopt a new model of shared governance or shared leadership** that incorporates provisions that balance the powers of all continuant groups in a formal and visible way. The shared governance concept has not been fully adopted at Colorado College with the Faculty Executive Committee and the Staff Council having very different structures and levels of influence. This continues to perpetuate a divide between staff and faculty. This new/restructured governance model would include bylaws that transparently hold members of committees accountable to actions that represent the values and mission of the college to mitigate dominance of members with more social and/or tenure power. One option would be an All College Senate, where faculty, staff, and administrators all have representation.

Another area for further investigation is **resource allocation**. How and why resources are allocated across campus is unclear. One example shared in the working group centered around
unspent funds. One department consistently has significant financial resources left at the end of each year in their student employee line that totals more than the entire operating budget of a single department on campus. This can create a culture of the “haves” and “have nots” across departments and divisions. While the working group’s primary focus was on operating budget allocation, positions, space, and other resources were discussed. The working group puts forward the following options for investigating and starting the process of creating clarity and systems around resource allocation.

- **Identify the questions that need to be addressed around resource allocation so that structures can be created to collect the data through a standardized system/process.** For example, “What does equity and fairness look like in the division, department, area?”, “Where are unused resources going?”, “Are the resources continuously going unused? If so, why?” By creating a standardized process/system the data can be effectively used to make strategic decisions. Additionally, analyses of the current structures and approach to resource allocation especially through an anti-racist lens. **Record and analyze where exceptions are being made, how often, and for what purpose.**

- **Create new mechanisms/formulas for allocation and move away from across-the-board increases or decreases.** Across the board increases and decreases impact departments in very different and significant ways.

- Audit annually the allocation process and ask questions that lead to process improvement for the following year.