

LCC leaders should reconsider program cuts

The recent decision to cut programs at Lane Community College has the support of the administration and the LCC Board of Education, even in the face of vehement opposition by faculty. Communications between faculty and administrative camps have become heated, with unresolved conflicts and old resentments coming to the surface.

The college's most pressing problem now is distrust and fear of the administration. Well-founded or not, these perceptions are widespread and are driving people's actions. I've been hearing versions of this same story for months about a number of different matters. It doesn't matter how much money is saved in this current budget cycle if this problem isn't addressed.

The hidden costs of serious cultural dysfunction far outweigh the financial costs of the three programs in question. People at LCC have been afraid: of speaking up, of losing their jobs or of retaliation. But some are speaking up now.

Others tell me off the record that they fear saying anything against the administration. Even faculty with job security through seniority, who have nothing to lose, say they've learned that it doesn't pay to speak up at Lane.

It saddens me that fear informs the decisions of so many people in LCC's culture. Every experience I've had with college administrators, without exception, has been cooperative, friendly and pleasant. The information they've shared with me about the college has either been positive, or administrators have indicated dedication to open communication and fixing what needs to be fixed.

In contrast, many others say that the administration presents a public image that purports to be inclusive in its governance, but isn't.

What accounts for this disparity between what administrators and other stakeholders are saying?

I'm reminded of a TED Talk titled "The danger of a single story." The speaker, Chimamanda Adichie, warns that when we hear only a single story about a person or a country, we risk a critical misunderstanding. This is true, I think, of all things.

The administration stands by the single story that it is accountable, transparent and inclusive. From the outside, the single story many are telling about the administration is that it's duplicitous, political and agenda-driven.

It's apparent that these two stories can yield only winners and losers, rather than a collaborative new way forward.

Whatever the causes that contributed to so much upset and position-holding, one thing's for sure: Something at Lane needs to change. To begin, stakeholders need actual power, not just an invitation to give input.



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The Electronic Technology, Medical Office Assisting and Auto Repair and Refinishing programs hold center stage right now. The situation is critical, and there's a lot at stake. I propose that they be used to effect the beginning of an equitable governance system at Lane.

The leader sets the example. The leader must win back the trust of the community, even if it means reversing a decision.

I don't believe for one second that Lane will go under simply for maintaining these two programs for one more year.

As a sign of good faith, I recommend that the Board of Education and LCC President Mary Spilde table the vote, as suggested by LCC Education Association President Jim Salt. This is not about one side winning and the other losing. Rather, it's about a reset — allowing a new way forward to be found.

I suggest the formation of a task force composed of administrators, faculty and students to investigate all three programs currently on the chopping block, along with others. The task force can then present its findings to the entire college, along with concrete options for alleviating the college's financial strain.

This is about having a college where people no longer feel defeated, but arrive on campus invigorated by knowing they can make a difference. There's just no valid argument for pushing through this unpopular decision, especially given that the potential financial savings involve guesswork regarding what choices potential future students might make. Given the college's \$4.6 million deficit, it just doesn't make sense that the cost of maintaining these programs for one more year would be a crucial factor. Further examination is absolutely warranted.

Lane Community College is a public institution. It is owned by us all. Its future is at stake, as are the careers and futures of its faculty, staff, students and residents in the broader community. People speaking up, in sufficient enough numbers, can and will benefit LCC.

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