

The Senior Team: Common Purpose & Collaboration

Josh Wyner, Founder and Executive Director
Aspen Institute College Excellence Program



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What levers for change exist at the cabinet level?

Composition



Common Purpose



Collaboration + Implementation



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Methodology for curriculum development:

- Aspen identified 19 four-year and two-year institutions for research, based on strength of student success and equity outcomes and reputation for strong executive leadership
- Conducted in-depth interviews with presidents and chancellors
- Conducted follow-up research with college/university leaders on attributes of specific cabinet roles

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What attributes are most important within high-performing senior teams?

- **Mission-aligned:** Committed to student success, outcomes-oriented
- **Good communicators/collaborators:** Emotionally intelligent, good listeners, collaborative in process and action
- **Trustworthy:** Ethical, reliable with follow-through
- **Bold:** Energetic, ambitious, willing to push back, courageous, willing to take risks
- **Strategic and innovative:** Analytical, strategic thinking, resourceful and curious about innovations around the country and in other sectors

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How can the cabinet develop and foster a common understanding of purpose?

Use consistent, compelling language

- Develop talking points/ideas on reform.
- List the big goals for the year.
- Hold regular meetings to address strategy.

Emphasize common data

- Define a limited set of aligned goals.
- Keep goals in front of everyone.
- Include data review as a standing agenda item.
- Dedicate time for the cabinet to discuss progress to metrics.

How can the cabinet develop and foster a common understanding of purpose?

Replicate communications, data, and resource processes in divisions

- Ensure that each cabinet member has a plan in place aligned to the institutional plan:
 - Communications plan to increase understanding of the importance of the student success agenda
 - Data plan to use common data sets aligned to student success goals and strategy
 - Resource allocation plan to reinforce the importance of reform and de-emphasize traditional measures (for example, enrollment growth)
- Share a set of common talking points to tailor for individual divisions
- Create a set of clear, compelling data slides to use in each division
- Create and implement a plan to communicate to the entire institution the link between resource allocation and student success, including through budget and other resource acquisition and allocation processes
- Discuss scale and sustainability for each new initiative

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How can leaders create the conditions for collaboration across units?

Create the conditions for honest and open feedback

- Make it clear that candid discussion and transparency are valued, and that feedback is welcome.
- Set a policy for the cabinet to disagree openly behind closed doors but present a unified front outside.
- Reauthorize cabinet “rules of engagement” when a new member joins.

Ensure appropriate leadership of the initiative

- At cabinet meetings, set aside time to discuss whether collaboration between and within units is adequate for implementation.
- Ask about specific opportunities to deepen understanding and collaboration between units.
- Consider whether the project leads within the units have the appropriate level of positional authority to collaborate effectively.

How can leaders create the conditions for collaboration across units?

Signal the importance of collaboration through performance review and improvement processes

- In cabinet members' annual evaluations and goal-setting, include some common goals for all cabinet members.
- Reserve time in one-on-one meetings to discuss institution-wide goals.
- Consider having each cabinet member's review depend substantially on evaluations from other cabinet members.

What systems can support strong implementation?

Ensure divisions have accountability systems in place for follow-through

- At the cabinet level, discuss the importance of planning for scale and sustainability, as well as accountability for results.
- Consider training mid-level managers on implementation.
- As a team, normalize and encourage admitting challenges.
- At the cabinet level, expect to set SMART goals for each major initiative
 - Continue/modify/stop decisions will be made at set milestones.

What systems can support strong implementation?

Typical goal:

Create course maps for 10 programs of study.

SMART goal:

By August 2026, ensure that faculty and advisors have worked together to create full-time and part-time program maps that set forth course sequences, learning goals, and applied learning requirements for 10 programs of study in a format that is readily available and easily understood by students.

Prioritize plans for programs of study that (1) are among those most frequently pursued by students, and (2) have significant gaps in success for Black, Hispanic, Indigenous, and/or Pell-eligible students.

College Team Activity: Reflections on the Senior Team Assessment Tool



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Assessment Tool: Independent Reflection



Spend the next 10 minutes independently exploring your senior team assessment results. Consider:

- Where is your team the strongest? Where is institutional reform aligned with key actions from senior leadership?
- Where are there misalignments and/or opportunities for improvement?
- As you consider your guided pathways work, does the team have a sense of common purpose? To what extent is the team collaborating effectively to advance guided pathways reform?

Assessment Tool: Group Discussion



As a team, discuss the results of the assessment tool.

- What areas of alignment and misalignment does the assessment tool reveal? What surprised you and why?
- Given your assessment results, what barriers might your senior team face in enacting guided pathways and moving toward community college 3.0?
- What accountability models and systems can you create as a senior team to support implementing your guided pathways?

Assessment Tool: Keep, Stop, Start



Consider the Keep, Stop, Start framework to determine the steps your team will take to maintain and improve strategies of transformational senior teams.

- **Keep:** What policies, routines, communications efforts/patterns, or other practices do you have in place that support common purpose & collaboration?
- **Stop:** What are you currently doing that does not support common purpose & collaboration? What might you stop or significantly change?
- **Start:** What ideas from the presentation might you try with your team?

Whole Group Debrief



What reflections do you have from team time?

CEO Role-Alike Roundtable: Leading the Senior Team

Pascale Charlot, Managing Director

Josh Wyner, Founder and Executive Director

The Aspen Institute College Excellence Program



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Introductions



Briefly introduce yourself by sharing your name, institution, and tenure.

Senior Teams—Composition



Does the college have:

- *the right team...*
- *with the right skills and attributes...*
- *organized in the right way...*

...to advance the institutional reform agenda?

What makes up a strong team capable of creating transformational change at the college?

- What attributes are required for **all cabinet** members and collectively across the cabinet?
- What attributes are uniquely required for **key cabinet positions** (vice president of academic affairs, chief financial officer, vice president of student services, etc.)?
- What kinds of **diversity** are needed among the group (thought, lived and professional experience, race, ethnicity, gender, attitude, etc.)?
- How do the skills and attributes of the existing cabinet **align with the goals and needs of the institution's reform agenda?**
- **What changes might be needed** in the composition of the cabinet or in roles and responsibilities?

Do you have the right team with the right attributes in the right roles to advance reform?

- **Mission-aligned:** Are they committed to student access, success, and equity? Are they outcomes-oriented?
- **Good communicators/collaborators:** Are they emotionally intelligent and good listeners? Are they collaborative in process and action? Can they deliver the message to advance the goals of reform?
- **Trustworthy:** Are they ethical? Do they follow through on what they say?
- **Bold:** Are they energetic/ambitious? Are they willing to push back? Are they courageous/willing to take risks?
- **Strategic and innovative:** Are they analytical, strategic thinkers? Are they resourceful and curious about innovations around the country and in other sectors?

Transformational qualities of three, key leadership roles:



Why focus on these three roles?

Chief Financial Officer

Traditional to Transformational

From...

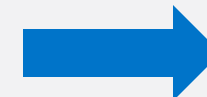
Believes the CFO “owns” the budget, withholding information from others to ensure the fiscal strength of the institution in good and in difficult times.



To...

Aims to build widespread fiscal knowledge and budget transparency, believing they are essential to ensuring that unit leaders can align spending to mission; builds trust that resources are aligned to mission and connects their efforts to those of others within the institution.

Believes student success goals, such as improving retention and completion, are the responsibility of other cabinet members.



Shares responsibility for student success by collaborating with academic and student services to ensure that fiscal resources and processes are fully aligned with student success goals and activities.

Treats the budget as a fixed amount of resources to be parsed out among units within the college.



Partners with the president and other cabinet members to creatively generate resources, including by building and leveraging external partnerships, creating operational efficiencies, and activating resources often regarded as unavailable, such as savings from hiring delays

Provost/Vice President of Academic Affairs

Traditional to Transformational

From...

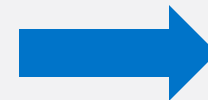
Believes it is solely the responsibility of disciplines and departments to determine the content of and requirements for faculty professional development.



To...

Takes responsibility for advancing excellent teaching practices through professional development by devising college-wide goals for professional development, allocating resources accordingly, and visibly recognizing teaching excellence.

Believes student success goals, such as improving retention and completion, are the responsibility of divisions that provide student services and the senior team members who oversee them.



Shares responsibility for student success by ensuring that faculty are fully engaged and by collaborating with student services to ensure that academic enterprises (including faculty advising practices) are fully aligned with student success goals and activities.

Leads academic units based on tradition and history, seeing the scope and pace of change as constrained by expectations rooted in the past—regardless of the trajectory of student success or evidence about the student experience.



Regularly analyzes and uses data, predictive analytics, and qualitative evidence of the student experience to make decisions about programs, evaluate their effectiveness, celebrate successes, and communicate priorities.

Vice President for Student Services

Traditional to Transformational

From...

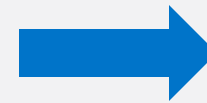
Believes it is up to individual student service units to decide the content and process of professional development, and that professional development goals and resources should be decided solely by directors and division heads.



To...

Takes responsibility for advancing excellent practices through professional development that is significantly integrated across student service units and is supported through adequate resource allocation and visible recognition.

Believes it is up to student service units to decide the criteria and process for hiring staff, and that the vice president for student services is not responsible for ensuring alignment of such criteria and processes with college-wide priorities.



Takes responsibility for aligning staff hiring with institutional priorities for student services delivery; ensures that the college has adopted prioritized attributes for hiring diverse staff with the technical expertise needed in each unit and that college-wide priorities are utilized in hiring systems (for example, interview questions, assessment rubrics, and committee deliberations).

Believes improving student retention and completion is not a significant faculty responsibility, but rather the responsibility of student services units that oversee student advising, student life, and provide out-of-classroom academic and nonacademic supports.



Shares responsibility for advancing student retention and completion by collaborating with the provost/VPAA and academic units to ensure that faculty are fully engaged in the classroom, in their advising practices, and in collaboration with advisors and other staff.

Lessons from Unlocking Opportunity



Questions & Reflections



What questions/reflections do you have about composing a senior team to lead guided pathways work?

Senior Team Attributes Matrix



You will spend the next 10 minutes independently completing the Senior Team Attributes Matrix. Consider the traditional-transformational from-to chart for the three key senior team roles as you work. Reflect on the following:

- As a whole, what are the strengths of the senior team? What are the gaps?
- What are some attributes you need more of to enact your reform agenda?
- To what extent is there alignment between (1) how you filled out the matrix and (2) the strengths and weaknesses suggested in the completed senior team assessment tool? If/where there is misalignment, why might that be?

Group Discussion



- Where do you see particular strengths or gaps in your cabinet's composition?
- Where do your three key leadership roles (VPSS, VPAA, and CFO) fall on the traditional-to-transformational spectrum? How might these three positions be better leveraged to contribute to your guided pathways work?
- What do your matrix and senior team assessment results imply about how you evaluate and provide feedback to individuals and teams? Are you considering making any changes as a result?
- As the president, what next steps might you take regarding senior team composition? Consider potential turnover, role reassignment, and professional development opportunities.