

Former Finance Executive Encourages Others to Lead Community Colleges

Two years ago, Dr. Stewart Sutin became the seventh president of the Community College of Allegheny County. Like most presidents, he brings to this position extensive leadership experience, a commitment to economic development, teaching, and community service. What sets him apart is that he acquired these credentials in the private sector. Prior to his presidency, Sutin was Senior Vice President and International Department Head for Mellon Financial Corporation. He was responsible for the organization's global strategy, identifying strategic partners, negotiating joint ventures, and marketing products and services to financial institutions around the world. Previously, he was president of Bank of Boston International and Assistant Manager for the Latin American division of J.P. Morgan Chase.

According to Sutin, "I made this transition because I wanted to make a direct contribution to the economic vitality of my community. There have been many challenges in leading a large, public institution of higher education, but they are far outweighed by the rewards. Community colleges are the most vital segment of higher education. The opportunities to make a difference in the lives of individuals and their families are immediate and profound."


Sutin's transition is fairly unusual in the world of community colleges, but may become more common in response to an impending leadership crisis. Close to 50% of the current community college presidents are expected to retire by 2007. The senior administrators who had previously filled these vacancies are leaving from their current positions at similar rates. Community college scholar George Vaughan recommends that governing boards recruit presidents

from the ranks of business and political leaders, career-changing military personnel, and other people with high level leadership experience. Nat Sutton,

Managing Partner of Education and Not-for-Profit Management at Heidrich and Struggles, adds that in a competitive environment community colleges must find the best talent available. "The critical ability to articulate a vision and translate the big picture into doable actions may come from outside the academy."

Sutin, in collaboration with the Institute for Community College Development at Cornell (ICCD), is eager

to encourage individuals from the private sector to explore a transition like his own. In October 2005, ICCD will offer a program at Cornell to help corporate leaders appreciate the rewards and challenges of community college leadership. Sutin and others who have successfully adapted to the academic culture will share their experiences with potential career changers.

The program is intended for potential CEOs, CFOs, and senior managers in HR and IT. It will emphasize the transferable skills private sector leaders already possess, and identify the skills they need to be effective in the public arena. Case studies will address the challenges of private fundraising, building board, community and legislative relationships, conducting business in open meetings, and collective bargaining. Search firms will assist participants in understanding the process community colleges use, and will provide advice on building a competitive resume. 

For information about the program contact Barbara Viniar, Executive Director, ICCD, 607-255-9259 or visit www.iccd.cornell.edu.



Stewart Sutin