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# Assessing the Power of College Culture in Educational Transformation

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**Assessing the Power of College Culture in Educational Transformation**

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Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Master of Education in Higher Education Degree,

Merrimack College

May 2016

### **Abstract**

The fundamental purpose for the existence of every educational institution is to provide knowledge and value through the teaching and learning exercise. Positive culture is an invisible yet significant element of success that inspires excellence in colleges and universities that enjoy good reputation. This qualitative study investigated the power of college culture in improving the quality and performance of a low performing college to become a high performing college through the college's day to day operations and services. Six faculty and senior administrators were interviewed to determine how positive culture delivery is perceived to function, impacts students' academic success, students' retention, faculty and staff satisfaction/retention and the distinctive image that a positive culture can make for the college in the internal and external forum. The findings include a set of factors that are evident in a toxic culture and how to facilitate a transition to a positive college culture with examples that have played out at college levels. Important steps to consider in this is by choosing good leaders equipped with the cultural competence, drafting a new mission statement or reviewing it periodically, hiring and training faculty and staff to understand and support the college's mission, organizing programs that will pull the entire college community together in one place and doing something together. Further recommendations include giving a clear-cut definition of tasks and functions to reduce work stress and enhance good results through commitment and dedication to tasks and responsibilities in order to sustain the positive culture.

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## **Introduction**

The shaping of the destiny of a nation and that of an individual is to a great extent carried out within the four walls of the school environment. Through the teaching and learning exercise in schools and colleges knowledge is transmitted, adequate and relevant skills are transferred, values are cultivated and characters are built. This describes in simple terms what student personal and academic success as well as school success is all about.

The above ingredients tend to give us a reasonable idea of what a sound and high performing college is all about. In modern times schools/colleges with such characteristics tend to be the apple of the eye of every student, parent and guardian as they go in search of the good and quality places of learning to enroll themselves or their wards at the beginning of each academic year. The uneven spread and distribution of schools/colleges with such qualities has forced parents, guardians and even the students themselves who desire good education to travel thousands of miles in search for quality education.

With the exception of some few elite schools and colleges, Ogunyemi (2005) opined that most schools and colleges operate under difficult environments thereby going a long way to stall the creative ability and development of the young people. The result of this is a declining standard of education evident in the dwindling academic performance of students in both internal and external examinations (Olaniyan & Israel, 2013), loss of trust and confidence in the system leading to high attrition rates among students, faculty and staff and the decline in the number of competent and balanced personalities who are equipped with both skills and character that are presented to work in different offices and capacities of the labor force.

This research therefore suggests that building and sustaining a positive culture through a strategic, active and intentional process is the requisite basic factor to transform low

performing colleges to high performing colleges. Peterson (2002) defined college culture as the underground stream of norms, values and beliefs, rituals and ceremonies, symbols and stories that make up the persona of the educational institution. It is cultivated to shape how people think and operate within the colleges. College culture is about what you see being done, what you hear being said and how it is being directed. This leads to a fruitful creation of an institutional identity and implementation of College's programs.

It is important to note that college culture can be positive or negative and both of them are socially constructed. Haberman (2013) opined that college culture is intangible, but it is essential: "you can walk into a school and know immediately whether you want to be there or not" (p. 1). This indicates that whereas positive college culture enhances success and builds the image of the college, the negative one is toxic and unproductive. Therefore positive culture is the cornerstone of all the "choice/quality/successful and high performing" colleges.

In this project, I set out to understand how college culture is developed, fostered and maintained by studying the culture of Moonshine College, a religiously affiliated small liberal arts college in the Northeastern United States. Moonshine College has a special strategy in growing and sustaining college culture that is poised from within to engender job satisfaction among staff and faculty and enhance students' personal and academic success and retention as well as institutional success.

In this study I adopted the qualitative method of research that is constructivist in nature. I conducted six interviews with Administrators, faculty and staff of Moonshine College in order to better understand the nature of positive college culture, its value and relevance to the success of college operations and students success in higher education and how best to develop and sustain a positive college culture in modern day business of higher education.

At the end of this study I have been able to describe clearly why positive college culture influences active participation, job satisfaction, student retention and success as well as staff and faculty retention; and how **positive** college culture can be the underlying reason why high performing colleges are flourishing and the foundation for the transformation of the higher educational enterprise.

Positive culture will be an important factor in the strategic formulation of our educational policies. It will also enhance professionalism among college administrators, faculty and staff, students and their parents, boards and other practitioners in higher education in general, in their daily efforts towards ensuring that they provide a quality learning environment and in assuring students' academic enhancement, character formation and personal growth/human development.

## **Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

The positive culture of a college remains a vibrant tool that can engender a healthy climate for the teaching and learning enterprise when it is designed deliberately and actively executed. In fact it has remained a *conditio sine qua non* for a successful breakthrough towards an excellent image making venture for every school that deliberately and consciously seeks it. It is on this note that Kent and Deal (1998) argued that institutional culture is extremely powerful. They noted that it is one of the most significant features of any educational enterprise, because it influences everything that goes on in within the college.

### **Components of Positive and Toxic College Culture**

College culture is the sum of the shared values, norms, orientation, practices and beliefs that holds a college together and guides the modes of operation within the institution and gives it

a distinctive identity. Unlike other kinds of organizations, college is a people oriented organization with a complex structure and unique set of organizational culture called college culture. The college rises and falls on its institutional/college culture. This culture can be either positive or toxic; it can pay good or bad dividends in the internal affairs and external relations of the college depending on how the operational quality is applied.

While probing into what a college culture can be, Gun & Caglayan (2013) observed that the success and failure of a college is connected to whether the culture of the college is positive or toxic. Through a mixed method descriptive study carried out with 127 faculty members as participants in a private English medium university in Turkey, they collected data by conducting surveys using purposeful sampling method of interviews. The reason behind this was to identify the faculty's perceptions of the current culture of the college while examining the relationship between administration and faculty. In this study they found that college culture is positive when leadership establishes and maintains collaborative relationships with faculty and staff, when all individuals are committed to a common purpose and working towards a common mission; and when faculty and staff engage themselves in a constructive dialogue that adds value to the efficacy of the college. The concomitant effect of these tangible symbols and practices is that, among other elements, it largely expresses the key to what makes the college distinctive and effective in the internal and external operations. That is why it is a positive culture.

Any other element or quality that is short of the ability to set the institution apart in being productive, successful and to influence performance on campus by attracting everyone into wholeheartedly supporting the institutional goals is considered a toxic culture. Sporn (1996) opines that a positive university culture has to be a performance enhancing culture that can



facilitate and anticipate the identity, motivation, communication, coordination and development of the college.

With a mixed method study design, Sporn (1996) sets out to understand college/university culture by assessing and measuring its strength and orientation. The research concentrated on the formal flow of internal information through the analysis of communication and internal contacts, e.g. emails between academic and administrative units of the university. The data for this study were collected through interviews and surveys within the university conducted among the departmental faculty and staff of the university.

The result of this study revealed that a toxic culture is not a performance enhancing culture. Hence it is a weak culture. This is characterized by the heavy presence of divergent values, beliefs, and purposes due to the factions and silos that exist on campus; the desire to concentrate on their own work and not to identify with the university as a community and the inability to base their work on a common standard that aligns with the university vision and mission. This culture is not healthy and cannot keep a college on a harmonious and successful path. The implication therefore is that with a toxic culture, the vitality of the college is threatened.

It goes to show that the role and power of the college culture cannot be taken for granted. Obviously, the positive college culture is the most desirable because it is the nucleus of the process of educational innovation and transformation. Gumuseli & Eryilmaz (2011) asserted that a positive culture affects the quality of the teaching and learning exercise, stimulates enthusiasm among faculty, contributes to employee's retention and improves productivity.

Through a quantitative research methodology conducted with 756 educational administrators of different sizes of institutional types across different levels of education as

participants, data were collected through surveys and analyzed to identify the major factors of a positive college culture based on the perceptions of the participating administrators. The findings indicated that ‘collaborative school factors’ (p. 22) are the major components of a positive college culture. These include: unity of purpose, collaborative leadership, professional development, faculty collaboration, collegial support and learning partnership. These factors play a prominent role in stimulating administration, faculty, staff and students to create a culture that will improve the quality of the institution.

### **The Process of building a College Culture**

College culture does not just appear; neither does it emerge unintentionally. It is built, created or cultivated as the case may be. In essence, it cannot exist if we do not choose to bring it into existence. Some may call it a social construction. This entails that people often bring forth conscious and deliberate ideas and make efforts with the aim of creating new images for schools and colleges.

To demonstrate how a college culture is built, Gun & Caglayan (2013) argued that it is important to reexamine the current culture and restructure it by taking into consideration what is known about a given culture. Through a mixed method research design, they explored instructors’ perspectives and perceptions of the existing culture in a Turkish private university. They conducted surveys and interviews with 116 professional and institutional tenured faculties in the college whose level of education stands between graduate and post graduate levels. The findings revealed that trust, fairness and transparency, shared decision making and valuing the opinions of the instructors were identified as elements of the current culture that needs to be reexamined and restructured in order to improve performance in the college. This is simply a

‘self-critique’ that is very necessary to understand and redefine the college operations by building a strong and healthy culture that will set the college on the path of success.

At the heart of this newly born successful college operation is the beliefs, values, attitudes and practices common to all who have a stake in the college. Collins (2015) noted that building a college culture is also dependent on how the beliefs, values and attitudes of the administration, faculty and staff can be changed. In a mixed method research, Collins (2015) created a questionnaire which was completed by 51 faculty members and conducted interviews with 13 participants comprising of some administrators, faculty and staff of a university in Turkey that was going through accreditation by a foreign institution. The findings revealed that doing one’s jobs to the very best level and separating one’s professional life from personal life are all values that should be considered among administrators, staff and faculty as virtuous and not as duties requisite for change of beliefs that will usher in a new college culture. Building college culture by changing beliefs, values and attitudes is a complex business that has a direct bearing on all the various actors in the college. Even though it cannot be achieved easily in a standardized way, it has a great potency of influencing meaningful practices between and among college administrators, faculty, staff and students.

The value that is contained and needed to make college culture positive will only add meaning to the college and appreciated when it is transmitted in the teaching and learning exercise. Ginsberg and Bernstein (2011) strongly asserted that to maximize its potential, the teaching and learning exercise has to operate within a culture that has to be built and sustained. Through this work, the college culture is able to build upon itself through sustained inquiry and an evidence-based culture. However, for the quality of teaching and learning to take place on a campus, a culture shift often needs to occur. When this happens, the actions by campus leaders,

change agents and facilitators will become the groundwork laid to effect the institutional change. Ginsberg et al (2011) did not carry out any study but offered their personal opinion, which went on to suggest an organizational theory approach to sketch out a model by which this culture change can occur.

With all hands being on deck, building positive college culture to transform the identity of a college will not be farfetched. Audrone & Areta (2006) postulated that involving the university community in the quality management activity of the institution is a veritable way of building college culture. Through a quantitative descriptive research, they studied and assessed the perceptions of academic and management staff of colleges from four Lithuanian regions; Kaunas, Vilnius, Klaipeda and Siauliai. ‘the sample was formed to represent equal ratio of colleges and universities, all staff groups in all the regions’ (p.53). In the study, the researchers discovered that quality culture is more developed in colleges because different employee groups agree more on sharing responsibility, quality assessment, evaluation, control, monitoring, improvement, assurance and development that is observed by all at the institutional and individual levels.

Building a college culture is an active process of nurturing and shaping a set of beliefs, values and attitudes that will guide the operations of a particular higher education institution. It is a complex process that runs gradually over a period of time and requires a high level of intentionality in order to make it achievable both in principle and practice. To build a college culture therefore, individual actors and groups within the higher education institution have a responsibility to collaborate in respecting and observing the set beliefs, values and attitudes in their daily operations for the smooth running of the institution.

### **The Role of Administrators in building College Culture**

As a significant feature of the educational enterprise, college culture influences everything that goes on campus. The responsibility to build and shape it, in order to define the thoughts, feelings and actions of all and for a safe and harmonious operation of the system rests on the college administrator. Tsai (2011) opined that institutional administrators play the role of building a college culture that aligns with the institutional mission and vision. Therefore, leaders adjust their leadership behaviors in order to deliver on the institutional mission and vision and foster job satisfaction among employees. In a cross-sectional study design conducted to understand the relationship between organizational culture and leadership styles in two medical organizations, questionnaires were distributed among 300 employees and 200 valid questionnaires were returned. The result indicated that the leaders who act accordingly with a certain institutional vision and mission, use positive rewards and reinforcement on followers, and get those who disagree with their vision to agree with it impact greatly in building or sustaining the organizational culture and defines a better future for it. This study thus explains that leadership and administrative styles play important roles in designing, shaping and maintaining a positive and healthy culture in all organizations.

The subject of leadership influence on organizational culture has remained a recurrent decimal in the field of higher education as well, clearly demonstrating the impact of leadership style on the institutional performance and job satisfaction in higher educational institutions. To this end, Alonderiene & Majauskaite (2016) noted that leadership plays a key and significant role in building college culture and affects significant areas of the institution's operations and successes. In order to investigate the various leadership styles and how they impact the culture of higher education institutions in a positive manner, a quantitative study was conducted on 72

faculty and 10 supervisors (Deans) in 23 universities and 24 colleges, both public and private in Lithuania. The findings revealed that the leadership in general plays a significant role in building college culture because it affects job satisfaction and institutional performance. The findings noted that adopting the servant leadership model will be very helpful because the servant leadership style is the most impactful model that builds positive college culture among the various leadership styles and theories that are known to them.

The servant leadership style creates a strong and positive culture when it is aligned with shared goals and values. According to Sporn (1996), a strong culture should ordinarily manifest a high degree of congruence between the values and goals of the administration, faculty and staff. In essence a strong university culture should create an atmosphere where the leadership, faculty and staff share a relatively consistent values and methods of doing business. College leaders/administrators succeed in their roles of building and sustaining a strong and positive culture through their efforts to adjust and adopt significant leadership styles that should focus on common goals and learning objectives; celebrate and reward achievements and success of faculty and staff at meetings and ceremonies, look for opportunities to tell stories about success and cooperation and use a shared language to strengthen the commitment of faculty staff and students. Although the college culture guides and regulates leadership operations and practices too, successful leaders build the college culture through values, ideals, principles and beliefs.

### **The Effects of College Culture on College Success**

The value of a culture is perceived and received from the impact it is able to make in the society and in the lives of those who inhabit it. If this does not happen, it is considered a wild goose chase, or what is called in Hebrew 'havel' which means a mirage. College culture

therefore ought to bear fruit and be relevant to the system that cultivates and sustains it in a positive dimension.

The possible fruits of college culture therefore, should be in the areas of enhanced institutional performance and college success, student success and job satisfaction for faculty and staff of the institution. It is good to note also that, for a culture to be worth its salt, it must generate some psychological motivations that will enable active involvement and inspire the development of intrinsic skill development. In Sadeghi, Amani & Mahmudi's (2013) study, it is emphasized that organizational culture should bring about job satisfaction for the faculty and staff of the institution/organization. Because job satisfaction is a basic component of the psychological health of the staff and their well-being, it improves their attitude towards their work. In a correlational research method conducted to measure the basic psychological needs of male and female faculties, the researchers asserted that job satisfaction is one of the main reasons for creating a positive and healthy organizational culture. Therefore, the effect of college culture on the staff includes the following: it prevents the staff from being disappointed; it affects their organizational performance; it engenders civil behavior among them. This is also translated in their individual lives in the sense that it enables them to enjoy a higher level of mental well-being, a high level of self-esteem, less anxiety, more job motivation with a higher efficacy, positive behaviors towards themselves and a positive feeling about their jobs.

In their study, Gun & Caglayan (2013) affirmed that positive college culture should ultimately create 'more effective schools' (p.48). In their mixed method study of a private English-medium university in turkey to determine the instructors perception of college culture, they suggested that a more effective college should bring about faculty development and innovation, academic effort and excellence and a safe and orderly learning environment.

These components of a more effective college goes a long way to affect the perception of the college on the part of the faculty, staff (the internal forum) and on the part of the parents, media and donors (the external forum). Zhu & Engels (2013) noted that positive college culture will enable the internal drivers- leadership, faculty, staff and students to detect what is perceived as vital for the college's continues transformation and growth. In a quantitative survey, they sampled faculty and students of six different universities to investigate their perceived needs and views, responsiveness and implementation of innovations. The result revealed that the internal drivers of colleges with a more positive culture tend to better perceive what is vital for the college and eventually leads to job satisfaction, high participation, shared vision and an enhanced orientation innovation. With this internal effect of positive culture on the educational transformation of higher education institutions, the task of attracting the external drivers on board to participate in different ways in the transformation agenda is made simple and easy.

From the external perspective, positive culture affects the choices made by parents on where they should enroll their wards, by students on where they will like to go to college and how they will succeed in college. According to Saggio & Dempsey (2003), college culture is a significant element that can influence students and parents college choices and how they persist and succeed in college. Using a qualitative research approach, 81 students of an American Indian college participated in four different focus groups that generated data for the research. The result indicated that operative systems of the recruitment and support services programs were instrumental to students' choice to enroll in a particular college. The students were particularly impressed with the efforts to recruit them as students and the culture that built the support service programs on campus was also a positive one which has helped them to persevere and succeed.



College culture therefore is a vital element of educational transformation for higher education institutions. It can be either toxic or positive and it is clearly not a product of chance. Rather it is an intentional, conscious and active process that requires leaders/administrators, faculty, staff and all stakeholders to play significant roles at their various levels of operation to make it a positive culture or a toxic one. The positive college culture should be the heart desire of every college and university because cultivating such culture will enhance and transform the basic operations of the college such as teaching and learning exercise, recruitment, enrollment and retention and also engender job satisfaction among faculty and staff.

### **Methods**

In order to understand the power of college culture in educational transformation as well as the best practices employed by Moonshine College to cultivate a positive college culture, I visited members of Administration, faculty and staff of Moonshine College within the month of March, 2016 for an interview that lasted between 30 to 45 minute with each of the six participants in the school.

In this study, I adopted a qualitative research approach. With this approach, my primary activity was to listen and observe during interview sessions in order to capture the different experiences and perceptions of the administration, faculty and staff of Moonshine College about a reality that is cultivated as college culture. It is therefore a qualitative research that is phenomenological in nature with the interview method as the primary activity. These interviews were conducted with selected members of the college administration, faculty and staff and it lasted for 30-45 minutes for each person.

This research was carried out using the constructivist paradigm. It is a single method approach, because it attempted to answer specific questions such as: what is the significance of college culture in educational transformation? What are the basic factors/elements needed to cultivate a positive college culture? What best practices are we to implement in order to cultivate and sustain a positive college culture? Mertens (2015) defined the constructivist researcher as one who attempts to understand the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it. The effort here, according to Mertens (2015) is made to obtain multiple perspectives that yield better interpretations of meaning. This is important to me because through personal inquiry I was able to know about participants' perceptions, beliefs and values and captured, through an insider's perspective, the necessary steps of cultivating a positive college culture and what it takes to sustain it. I have been able to gather information about the basic key players in this all important project and why it is not just fundamental but also significant in the success and transformation of a college.

I conducted interviews with different members of the administration, faculty and staff in a location chosen by them. The sampling method I adopted is the purposeful/purposive sampling. Through this the participants were purposefully and intentionally selected out of the members of the faculty, staff and administration of Moonshine College based on their long years of practice, wealth of experience in the educational enterprise and the office they occupy which are very relevant in the construction and maintenance of college culture. Meanwhile, in order to win the participation of this demographic in the interviews, I distributed the participant consent form to each selected participant, to educate the participant about the nature of the study and why I am seeking his/her willful participation.

Each participant answered questions regarding their understanding of college culture and, drawing from their long years of service and experience, what it takes to build a positive college culture in a college or university. Similarly, each participant discussed their perceptions and the roles they played, given the different positions they occupy and the experiences they have gathered, in the cultivation and sustenance of the existing culture in the college. They also discussed the impact it has made in the life of the college and what other colleges with a toxic culture or new colleges need to do to create a positive college culture.

The data collection procedure in this project did not intend to cause any harm to any of the participants, as the questions were not sensitive ones, rather they ignited discussions on their various experiences and perceptions about the college culture. No physical risks were intended or even envisaged in this procedure other than the minimal risks that are encountered ordinarily in daily life. However, participants were reminded about their liberty to discontinue or call off their participation at any time they deem fit, with due respect to their physical comfort and their individual emotional/psychological dispositions. More so, the consent form they received, explained the level of confidentiality this study was set to practice by protecting their identities. It will keep their identities out of the public domain whenever and wherever this study may be exposed or published, while the information gathered from the interviews will be used only for the purpose of the research.

Through the interviews with the participants, this study established the fact that cultivating college culture is a conscious and deliberate effort carried out by a set of people with the sole intention to *turn around* or *transform* the atmosphere of teaching and learning in a positive dimension to further lead to educational transformation. It will thus be a tool in the hands of all educational actors to transform the image of their schools/colleges to raise it to the

ranks of ‘*choice*’, ‘*high performing*’ or ‘*high profile*’ schools, improve on their annual admission/enrollment, bring quality education closer to the people where they find themselves, bring about job satisfaction that is not focused on what one should receive but what one will do to guarantee a bright future for the next generation and ultimately to increase students’ retention and success.

To analyze my data, I used standard method of coding qualitative data (Saldana, 2015). I transcribed each interview, then conducted line by line coding to identify themes and patterns, from which my findings and subsequent recommendations are generated

### **Findings**

In order to deeply understand the dynamics and power of college culture I interviewed six faculty, staff and administrators of Moonshine College. The interview was designed to understand the toxic and positive culture and how positive college culture can be created and sustained to help other institutions of higher education that may be in need of relevant information on college culture to facilitate the educational transformation of their campus/environment. The six persons shared their honest experiences and opinions as they discussed their roles and contributions to the creation and sustenance of the culture in Moonshine College from their various levels and positions of operation.

After analysis of the interview data, the findings revealed the following themes: College culture can be positive or toxic; it is intentionally built or cultivated through focused and purpose driven *leadership* that practices the model of *shared vision* and objectives and supported by the *commitment* to personal roles and contributions from all stakeholders in the college.

It can be a challenging venture to create and sustain a sound and positive culture, but its vitality is very helpful to the image, content and operations of the institution. In this study,

participants also discussed the benefits of creating and sustaining a sound college culture in the institution based on how it can impact the image of the institution. As a result of these, they went further to outline strategies adopted to encourage others or co-opt others into this onerous task of creating and sustaining a sound culture for a college community.

At the beginning of the interview the participants described themselves and their professional path to their various positions. They are all full time employees of Moonshine College and have worked in the college for a reasonable length of time. Central to the entire submissions rests on the principle of good practice exemplified by the administration, faculty and staff.

### **The importance of College Culture**

Culture can be toxic or positive. When it is toxic the institution fails even in doing the ordinary things it is supposed to do. It does not affirm people or encourage them to boost their morale at work. Participants observed that it causes great harm to the morale and the psychology of the people within the institution. Pablo affirmed this in these words:

Previously the most powerful feeling was a sense of inferiority... we are not just good enough. They will evoke that in weird ways; the ways they will scream and yell but it was all we are not just good enough. They blame a lot; we are not just good enough.

Other participants confirmed that it is the most challenging thing that can ever happen to an institution because it leads to conditions of hostility and fighting. To express that toxic culture does not provide a worthwhile experience, as McGuire noted when describing a faculty meeting during a toxic period of the campus culture:

It was the nastiest meeting I have ever been to. It was an ugly meeting and I decided that I wasn't really sure I wanted to be here. But then I didn't go back there for a while because I didn't like that body.

Participants confirmed that when the culture is not a sound one progress is replaced with setbacks and retrogressions while the entire campus community splits into silos and factions, each running a negative agenda that is not healthy for the success of the institution. To describe this Mary Jo said:

There was a group of faculty that resisted everything and this held us back for a long time. They resisted graduate programs when all our other competitors and schools our sizes were opening graduate programs. It took faculty 15 years to approve the program. There is this group of faculty that did not want anything to change, they wanted to run the college and they fought the administration and that was a problem and a lot of people saw that problem.

This is a clear testimony of how a toxic culture truncates educational transformation. The drive therefore is to cultivate a positive culture which engenders an enabling environment that will catalyze the educational transformation agenda to avail everyone on campus with a pleasant experience either as faculty, staff, student or administrator.

### **Positive culture**

Whereas a toxic culture promotes a lot of setbacks, splintering, factions and plenty of unhealthy competition that only tears and destroys, and accommodates resentments and misunderstanding, positive culture has a different characteristic. Participants noted that with a positive culture in place people are valued and respected as observed by Dr Castello: “

Now we have been brought up to the next level; you now have an administration that I feel that much more values the contributions that we have on a day to day basis.

Some participants further noted that with a positive culture, a fresh air of liberation is the dominant feeling. To describe the feeling Castello stated again: “in some ways it liberates us and it allows us to really focus on the students much more”.

As regards the primary purpose of the existence of an educational institution, i.e. the teaching and learning exercise, participants observed that the teaching and learning business

thrives better in a college that operates with a positive culture. While affirming this point

Professor Gretsinger stated that:

Because we have this new dean, I have the ability to do these things other things that I couldn't do before. So I am able to teach in different ways, have new equipment that i can work with, students get that sort of benefit.

It was also noted by participants that a positive culture transforms the college into a choice school, leading to a significant desire by parents to enroll their children into that institution, and the children themselves desiring to be in that kind of environment. To explain how it is now a new dawn for Moonshine College, Mary Jo asserted:

I know parents send their children here first of all because we teach the course of study they want, their majors, but they will tell you they like the environment on campus, the faculty and administration is there to help their children- so they want that.

Positive culture therefore carries along an aura of success; students' academic success and personal success, work satisfaction for faculty and staff, sound external relations leading to increase in patronage and enrollment, increased rate of retention and many other benefits.

### **What it takes to create a Positive culture**

To answer the question about what it takes to create a positive and sound culture, participants observed that nothing good comes easy. Therefore, it requires a lot of work and, with all hands being on deck, something new, something different and something pleasant and positive happens. Pablo captured beautifully what the reaction to a positive culture could look like in these few words: "it was the moment when Moonshine culture made its turn from 'we are not good enough, we are awful and we are terrible, nobody wants to be here' to *we love this place*".

As noted above, since a positive culture does not just emerge from nowhere rather it is consciously and deliberately cultivated, participants observed that it is the product of the

responsibilities that are carried out and fulfilled by the leadership of the institution, through a shared vision coupled with the commitment of all and sundry that are connected to the successful operation of the institution.

### **The Role of Campus Leadership**

For an institution to succeed in building and sustaining a positive culture, the power of leadership cannot be underestimated. Most participants observed that the quality of leadership makes or mars the culture of the college. In essence, focused and competent leadership begets positive culture, bad leadership begets toxic culture. Pablo captures the impact of bad leadership in these few words: “it was 16 years of bad leadership- lots of hostility, lots of fighting and the school shrinking every year instead of growing”. However, with the turnaround of events, Dr. Gretsinger explained:

That is not true *anymore*, we have been growing, there are new opportunities and we are getting people from other countries like you and I think it’s helping the college grow. So I think people feel good and confident.

Speaking with the same sentiments of the impact of good leadership transformation, Professor Martinez confirmed:

In many ways *now*, it is a very positive culture...*Now* we think of ourselves differently as an institution, we think bigger but before everything we did was small. Like we didn’t have the ability, flexibility, the authority to think big... so it is a really positive atmosphere in terms of how everything goes.

From this empirical point of view therefore, the indispensable power of leadership in building and sustaining a sound culture is revealed and participants suggested that it will facilitate and enhance educational transformation.

The pertinent question at this point is what roles does the leadership play to produce the needed positive result? Most participants from among the staff, faculty and administration were united in upholding that leadership has some key roles to play. This ranges from stating and



clearly defining the institutional mission and vision, defining the identity of the institution, being experts and competent in the job they are doing and being able to dish out control without losing control.

Dwelling on the importance of the institutional mission to drive the institution into a positive and sound culture, Pablo stated: “my first task at the college was to facilitate a process to rewrite the college’s mission statement” It is important to note here that for the mission to be functional and relevant to the space, it has to align with the identity of the college. Other participants therefore observed that it is always difficult to create a sound culture when there is a crisis of identity. With regards to that Pablo further stated:

Basically the problem was we weren’t anything. We are trying to be everything. So not only do we want to be Catholic, we want to be protestant, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist...we want to be everything but we would not want to be anything. We didn’t want to be liberal arts or professional college we want to be all and consequently we were nothing because we were not making any choices about this is what we are or who we are.

However, when the identity is defined, most participants opined that the result is evident in the experiences that took place on campus which are the indicators of a positive culture.

Professor Gretsinger affirmed this point when he said:

I think this goes back to the Augustinian Fathers who were here, the college has always has a good sense of community and of dedication to students and to their intellectual and moral and spiritual growth. People who come here from other places would always remark on that, how there is a sense of community and care for the students.

Another key factor that applies to leadership success in building and sustaining a positive culture is about being good in what one is doing. Some participants noted that when the leadership unleashed its dexterity and expertise, things began to turn around for the good of the institution. According to Mary Jo this was truly what happened:

And then the President comes, he knows the business of higher education inside out and upside down... he is also the greatest salesman in the world. He brought

those two qualities; a real sense of what a college has to do to succeed, started implementing them and people started to experience success and then selling his vision.

This may sound like the power of knowledge as a leadership quality which entails that when leadership is knowledgeable and competent it makes it easy to get everyone on board. Those who are lukewarm are meant to see things from a different perspective and that drives them into the moving train in order not to be left behind or even left out.

To further sustain the positive culture that is created, leadership must get everyone on board not to keep them idle rather to get everyone engaged. Some participants asserted that this usually impacts positively in the modus operandi of the institution. Interestingly they noted that it empowers subsidiaries to function without leadership losing the ultimate control, as Dr. Richie Castello asserted:

The president is still the ultimate authority and will assert that authority when he believes it is necessary. But he believes that every department chair and dean should have a certain level of authority... that is one that empowers a lot of lower level folks.

According to participants, the power of leadership that is needed to enable a positive culture is meant to flow from above in order to energize the remaining members of the community to drive further the beautiful venture to its logical conclusion. To make it work, participants feel that leaders should find the shared vision model of leadership as an important springboard.

### **Shared Vision**

Steve Jobs once opined that if you are working on something exciting that you really care about, you don't have to be pushed, the vision pulls you. This explains the power of vision in the life of an institution or organization. When vision is shared the community is pulled together to one direction.

In this study, participants felt that Vision is made concrete and perceptible in the institutional mission. Through this mission the entire community is connected to one course, thus giving rise to and sustaining a positive culture. Most participants held that the institutional vision and mission are very essential because they are the channels of healing, capable of transforming a toxic culture to a positive one. With respect to the process of defining Moonshine College's mission, Mr. Pablo asserted:

Actually, the mission statement process, people told me it was one of the most healing processes they have ever been through. The end product wasn't stale... the process of creating it was the first step of energizing the culture.

As noted above, through the power of vision, the entire college is intended to pulled together to gather in one place. Few participants opined that pulling people together in one place to do something together is an experience that has the capability of creating a positive culture and sustaining it. To this end Pablo further observed that:

it is difficult to pull the college together. But I believe that if you are going to build the culture or sustain it you have to share experiences, you have to share rituals. The Mass of the Holy Spirit and the Mack Gives back day for example pulls the community together and we have an experience of doing something together which matters a lot.

The participants observed further that the experience of coming together can only build and sustain a positive culture if it provides the opportunity for the people to come to help, encourage and affirm each other. While affirming this opinion, Patricia explained:

Now students gather much more than they used to. They will come together to support each other. We have the LEADS award where we recognize students' excellence in everything- academics, leadership opportunities, athletics and stuff like that. And we've worked on that and we've made that into a real celebration.

To further emphasize the importance of gathering together in one place as a community and do things together as well as move in one direction, some participants explained that when

such gatherings take place periodically it can cause a pleasant explosion that will change the psychological temperature of the institution. In his reaction, Pablo described this experience:

It was move-in day 2011. First year students are arriving, we got people helping them move in and on that experience we had a flash mob. That was the moment in which our students got Yes we can. We can do it, we are not second to anybody, we can do stuff and we can do really cool stuff. And that is something that clicked in that moment and kind of changed the way this campus feels.

Other participants noted the importance of information dissemination in this process.

When people seem not to know what is going on it is a toxic culture because it can be disturbing. But when people know what is going on around them, a sound and positive culture can be created and sustained. This is because it keeps everyone abreast with what is happening around the college and gives everyone a sense of belonging in driving the mission of the institution.

Mary Jo affirmed this notion thus:

I try to make sure that faculty knows what the student life is doing and student life knows what the faculty is doing. So if the boss says; do this, we would do it and we would explain to the students and make the students understand that and all the people that work with me that this is why we are doing this.

Patricia shared the same sentiment when she said:

I have made it a point of duty to really reach across and make sure that the faculties are well aware of what we are doing and also to the administration that they have knowledge of what we do and how we can be of assistance to the students.

When the vision is shared through effective communication, e.g. through well-constructed emails, letters, personal address etc. to make it more appealing to the targeted audience, few participants opined that positive culture can be created and sustained. Affirming this, Dr Richie Castello noted: “I like to think that I can sometimes help them formulate a message that can be better received by faculty and students. Ideally, I should just be a clean pipe that passes the message through”.

The result of this is that it makes the people feel valued. Katie Basil observed that a toxic culture can be transformed into positive culture if people are carried along in the institutional mission and respected for the contributions and sacrifices they make to keep the system running.

About the current culture she said:

There is an improvement now. People are happier. I think they feel more respected, I think they get paid better which I think goes along sometimes with the respect. Even something such as whether we have school on a snow day, you feel like your life is valued that you don't have to drive in the snow. So I think that's really the positive part of it.

### **Sustaining a Positive Campus Culture**

Having said all that, it is important to know how a positive culture which has been created can be sustained. While responding to that question, participants noted that besides the efforts to maintain effective information dissemination, affirming people and valuing people, positive culture can be sustained when there is a strategic plan to protect and sustain the mission of the school. McGuire affirmed that to sustain the positive culture you have to co-opt people who believe in what you believe and share the same vision with you. He captures it thus:

You have to hire people who support the mission and understand the mission of the institution. In my own opinion they don't all have to be Catholics. It's just that it is good to have a different point of view because it keeps you sharp and you can say; well, here is why we believe what we believe, here is why we practice what we practice.

Some participants opined that for the mission to be well supported for the sustenance of a sound and positive culture, it is the responsibility of the college to educate employees to understand the institutional mission. Damaris added:

Most of the time it is because they don't understand it, so it's the college's responsibility to help them understand it. And that's what I used to do; to spend a lot of time with faculty especially and once they understand that they are ok.

Other participants added that it is the duty and responsibility of the college employees to support and advance the college's mission in order to sustain the positive culture that the school has created. This was asserted by Patricia in these few words:

Most of the faculties we hired had no idea what it was because they haven't gone to Catholic colleges. So it's important to provide opportunities to learn. I think they can disagree but if you are working here you have to support the mission. That is a delicate balance but I think it's important to have people who understand the distinctive mission of the college.

Having come this far, it is now time for all who are on board to walk the talk and put the words into action. Participants expressed that It is a passionate commitment to the course of change that the institution believes in and the change that works to move the image, operations and content of the institution from grass to grace.

### **The role of commitment in college culture**

Participants were asked to describe the roles they have played and the contributions they have made to create and sustain the culture in Merrimack College. Most of them testified that commitment is the vital role they have played and the valuable contribution they have made. Dr. McGuire observed that commitment is one factor that gives them joy no matter how degrading it may be. For her, one has to be as humble as that to turn the table around when she stated:

I am not afraid to get down into the Nitty gritty of any job. I am happy to be the voice of the students at the senior leadership level... I am also ready to move the table when it needs to be moved, to clean up trash if I need to clean up trash. I have a strong work ethic... and I have to do something that is a positive contribution every single day.

This is important to make one feel good and fulfilled even if no one acknowledges it. Just like a lizard that falls from a tall tree to the ground and nods its head to praise itself if no one is ready to praise it, so also does commitment make us to work harder to produce results irrespective of what we hear and see around us. To affirm this point, McGuire added: "If I don't,

I will feel like that day was a waste. That is how I look at my position. I want to see how I can make a difference on each and every day”.

The significant impact of commitment on college culture is revealed in the ability of individuals to carry out their duties effectively either as administrators, faculty or staff. Most participants upheld the fact that it is not about the individual but about the institution and when duties are carried out well, it makes it less stressful and reduces the concentration of the weight on one side. To affirm this Damaris said: “My job is to make sure that the President’s message and priorities are effectively communicated... I am just an effective messenger”. This therefore is carried out by means of creating an enabling environment for one and others to function and succeed. For your commitment to bear fruit as a faculty, Patricia noted:

My role is primarily in training and educating our students. Hence it is about providing an environment where my students have the ability to succeed... that I take advantages and opportunities that are provided to us as by the administration to provide new opportunities to my students whether that be through internships, trying to get them access to new equipment or new opportunities that we’ve never had before.

To elucidate this point and hit the nail on the head from a faculty point of view, Professor Gretsinger asserted:

You need to be a good teacher, you need to be a researcher... looking for new methods of pedagogy so that we can continue to improve our teaching. It means expanding programs and it’s important for faculty to do that.

The need therefore to be committed does not entail that one is expected to do everything rather every individual who is employed and owes some commitment to the institution is expected to be focused on one’s primary roles. Most participants agreed that the ability to manage your space and allow others to have their space as well is very crucial to creating harmony within the workspace that will further metamorphose into a sound and positive culture.

To affirm this Dr. Castello noted:

Our thinking in the central administration is to stay out of the faculty's way generally. Their job is to teach our job is to manage the institution. So I think we get along very well because each group knows its limits.

When this necessary distance is missing, the atmosphere becomes a foul one that cultivates and nurtures a very toxic culture. Some participants noted with dismay the fact that the result is always played out in chains of complains, unhealthy competition and rivalry. Pablo captures it briefly in these words:

So when you taught in one department and you got something that meant I didn't get something and so it was a very difficult time because you had departments that competed against each other in terms of getting resources ... that is a very stressful environment.

But that existed in the past. This is not a sweet experience that anyone will like to even romanticize about, talk more of going back to that same situation.

The ability the focus on your primary responsibility was observed and applauded by most of the participants citing it as a necessary ingredient that can create and sustain a sound college culture. Damaris confirmed this:

The current push has been to free faculty up to fulfill our primary roles of teaching and research. It stands really wonderful because and administration that much values the contributions that we make on a day to day basis. And so in some ways it liberates us and it allows us to really focus on the students much more.

Other participants also noted that the push to focus on the primary roles is very beneficial to the students as it enables faculty and staff to strive to know their students very well. Mary Jo indicated that:

The faculty has a close contact with their students that we get to know our students pretty well. I think some, we know them too well... so our students don't get lost in the cracks; we make sure that we keep them moving towards graduation. When they are struggling we try to do our best to take them off and give them chances...

This is a quality that can impact the institution and make it stand out amidst other institutions perhaps because it will be remarkable for one thing. Some participants held that



when there is a positive culture the institution may not be highly selective with regards to the kind of students they admit but can take even the difficult ones and improve them to be good students. While yielding to this idea Pablo affirmed that:

We don't go after the top 5% of students like Harvard or the top 3% or 2%. But we can go after the top 25% of students in the high school... some are better and some are not. But we are very good at taking them and helping them to grow to be better students and in many case even great students.

One important part of the commitment which is very instrumental in building and sustaining a positive and sound college culture is service. Most participants raised the concern on the fact that service is very important in creating and supporting the college culture and should be one of the criteria that should be used to consider faculty and staff for promotion and tenure. Dr. Castello noted with an unpleasant tone the fact that "some faculties, for example, apart from teaching you never see them". Many participants do not consider performing the roles for which one is employed alone to be enough. Besides commitment requires that one should go an extra mile if the need arises. Hence it is about serving in committees and attending meetings with faculty staff and students and other relevant events on campus that will create a sound culture that is deeply rooted to support and sustain the college in all ramifications. KateBasil further affirmed this position by saying:

I think it is important to be part of the community and support the community by your presence in different ways. People will do that in many different ways; some will go to sporting events, some will go to theatres, and some will go to student organizations...that is supportive.

Patricia also indicated that service is another way of participating actively in the operations of the college and being active in the governance of the college:

What I have tried to do is to be active in governance, whether that be through faculty senate, whether that be through serving on committees to hire people who are in the administration. I was on the search committees for a provost, a number of years ago I have been on dean search committees to help us put administrators in place who will buy into our overall culture. That shows to the administration

that we are serious, that we believe in what they say we should be doing and we are putting someone forward who we think can help us effectively implement what that vision is.

With this level of commitment, innovative strategies should be employed to nurture and sustain them. One factor of commitment that some participants observed should be fanned into flame is to constantly return to the mission of the college. Faculty, staff and administration need to constantly support the mission of the college because it will make the mission real and concrete. Professor Gretsinger asserted briefly: they have the responsibility to understand and support the mission of the institution. This responsibility is fulfilled in their responsiveness and focus on how the various individual, departmental and faculty operations will further advance the achievement and success of the college's strategic goals and mission.

### **The Significance of College Culture in Educational Transformation**

With a sound and positive culture a new, vibrant and reputable institution is born. And if the positive culture is guarded and sustained, the institution is set to remain on the continuous path of progress. Positive school culture therefore signifies a delicate achievement that unleashes a positive impact on the educational enterprise.

Since a golden fish has no hiding place and a house built on a hill top cannot be hidden, some participants noted that a positive culture it is easily perceived because of the harmony and beauty it carries along with. As McGuire commented:

I think that is one of the most important things. People feel it the moment they arrive on campus. So if they don't feel a warm or an accepting culture then the student, faculty or staff is never going to come here. So I think that we want to highlight that as possible as we can.

As noted above, Sadeghi, Amani & Mahmudi's (2013) observed that a positive culture reduces or eliminates disappointments among faculty and staff; enhances the organizational performance and it engenders civil behavior all staff, faculty and administration. Participants

affirmed that this is perceptible through the fact that people eloquently enjoy pleasant experiences while on campus, especially if they had once been in a miserable experience either in the same institution previously, or coming from a different institution. As Pablo affirmed:

People enjoy coming to work every day. I think if they are concerned about the toxic level, they are going to be concerned about what they are saying and who they are saying to. I just think that the happier people are, the more they feel respected by the culture, and they will give more back to it.

Speaking further on the pleasant experiences and the level of comfort among all on campus, Professor Gretsinger explained:

First of all, myself as a faculty member and a number of my colleagues are much happier being here. We feel like our contributions are valued, we feel that we are appreciated and those are very big items to think about

While Zhu & Engels (2013) observed in the literature above that faculty, staff and administration of colleges with a more positive culture tend to better perceive what is vital for the college and leads to high and active participation, shared vision and an enhanced orientation innovation, participants affirmed that with cooperation and common purpose, their achievements experienced an added push forward as Castello commented: “it gets people cooperating with each other and working together more. And when you work together you accomplish more than if you are working in isolation”.

It is important to note here that some participants felt that the significance of a positive culture will reach the crescendo when it impacts positively on the teaching and learning exercise, which is the central factor that brings colleges into existence. As Pablo commented:

It also makes it an enjoyable experience for teaching and learning, instead of mourning and groaning. You get to actually enjoy the process of teaching students and watching them grow and develop and the joy of the place rather than the anger, shame, sadness, fear etc.

More so, speaking on teaching and learning, Patricia commented briefly: “the ultimate benefit one hopes is that it creates a better institution for us to educate our students. Positive culture means we attract faculty who are interested in teaching in a positive way”.

The next factor is that it creates an outstanding reputation for the school thereby making it very attractive. Other participants observed that having a positive culture signifies increase and progress in the different departments and wings of the college. As Castello commented:

Positive culture means we attract staffs who are motivated and you keep faculty and staff who stay motivated. You attract students who see it as an exciting place and an interesting place... you start to attract donors who start to say that’s a place I should invest in, you start to attract the media who say there is something interesting going on here. And all that fits into itself; more media and donors means more students, more students means more media and donors.

The high point therefore is that a positive culture is the lifeblood of any institution that cares. Most participants noted that it is difficult to comprehend if an institution can survive without it. Affirming this point, Pablo asserted:

Without a positive college culture we die. The market place is so competitive today that the students will go to some place where they are going to be happy and if they sense that nobody is happy here, they are not coming.

Dr Castello also echoed Pablo’s opinion in these words:

So, positive culture is a means of survival and growth of an institution. The negative one means that your enrollment is dropping, your donations are dropping and the media is beaming on you with every opportunity. A positive culture means you stay alive. I mean I don’t know how a college could not create a positive culture.

Generally, this research finding revealed that when college culture toxic, bitterness, setbacks and low self-esteem becomes a norm for that college. But when it is positive the entire community is immersed into a fresh experience of value and respect for one another irrespective of position, department or race; focus and commitment on a common goal which subsequently enhances the standard and quality of the college’s practices and delivery. Though all participants seem to

agree that the role of campus leadership in building and sustaining positive college culture cannot be taken for granted, they recognized the need for all –faculty, staff and stakeholders- to be committed to a shared vision and be consistent in living out the institutions mission in their day to day operations of the college. Clearly, when all the above efforts and practices are put in place there will be a tremendous turn-around of the college standard and activities, leading to enhanced academic and character formation of students, students’ enrolment and retention and college success.

### **Recommendations**

***Recommendation 1: In order to cultivate sound college culture, colleges should choose good, strong and competent leaders***

In order to create, cultivate and sustain a positive culture, educational institutions such as colleges and universities that are experiencing a toxic culture or a new institution seeking to begin on a good foundation should choose good and strong leaders. This should be considered a top priority since leadership is very essential in the business of cultivating a positive culture. The literature opined that leadership in general play important roles in designing, shaping and maintaining a positive and healthy culture in all organizations (Tsai, 2011) because its actions and decisions greatly affects institutional performance and job satisfaction (Alonderiene & Majauskaite, 2016). Sharing the same sentiment, faculty and staff in this study also reported that hiring/choosing good leaders is very important for any college that wants to cultivate a sound/positive culture. Significant cases were reported in this study which revealed also that unlike other colleges, Moonshine Deans face an uphill battle in leading effectively. The Deans here may be equipped with the needed power but without the authority to do their jobs well. Due to this factor, some in this study suggested that faculty Deans suffered the opposition of faculty

that kept the school behind from a lot of innovative and contemporary practices such as the approval to operate graduate programs.

To ensure a meaningful positive culture, colleges and institutions of higher education need leaders who will avail themselves and engage others on campus in their capacities as the chief morale builder properly and effectively. The leaders should adopt the collaborative model of leadership or a decentralized form of leadership that encourages and enhances relationship building in order to be successful. This style of leadership will cultivate and foster responsibility, common chain of authority and accountability (Komives & Wagner, 2009). It also entails that leaders should be flexible and open to relationship building, use open communication, take advantage of team building and teamwork and always be ready to negotiate but not compromise. (Eddy, 2010). This will bring everyone closer on board to the mission of the administration and to recognize the need to influence, motivate, inspire and enable the faculty and staff to direct the efforts to a common goal and contribute to the success and effectiveness of the institution.

Also, for a sound and positive culture to be realistic, the institution should choose leaders who are competent, passionate and dedicated. The findings in this study revealed that when the new leadership which understands broadly the governance of higher education came on board and began operations with dexterity and expertise, the college atmosphere began to take a different shape. Thus choosing competent persons as leaders means that the institution should choose leaders who are experienced and are very much at home with the business of college operations; leaders who are equipped with the skills to understand the values and strategies and how they influence operations of higher education institutions. This is because building a positive culture rests also on the skills and knowledge one has with regards to the right mode of operation for institutions of higher education. So it is about choosing leaders who have the

cultural competency and the foresight to always scan the setting to comprehend what is valued and operate in a way to respects those values (Eddy, 2010).

One area of competency that leadership in higher education should consider is on how to value the staff and faculty, and avoid every tendency to micro manage them. This is a strong indication that there is trust and confidence in the air. And the eloquent statement here is: It is about you, not about me. This does not make the leadership to lose control over the institution; rather it displays their ability to dish out authority without losing authority. It also displays the gift of creating leaders for the future by making faculty and staff sharers in the visions, goals and solutions of the institution in a collaborative process (Komives & Wagner, 2009). Some elements of a positive culture as highlighted in the literature above includes the fact that faculty's enthusiasm is stimulated and employee's retention improves. The result of this study also shows that a positive culture keeps faculty and staff who stay motivated. Therefore, in the bid to build and sustain a positive college culture, leaders should value and respect people to encourage them to stay and remain wholeheartedly dedicated to the shared goals of the institution's mission and vision.

***Recommendation 2: Colleges should cultivate good leadership through listening, communication, faculty/staff support and teamwork***

Significantly, the ability of the leadership to develop good listening habits is very important. For a positive college culture to be born and sustained the leadership should be open to listening to the people; dedicate a relevant amount of time to listen to their ideas, needs, wishes, concerns and aspirations. This will help the leaders to recognize and understand the strengths and weaknesses of the workforce in order to support their individual and professional development. This study revealed that it is about listening to the students, the facilities workers,

the police officers, the faculty and even the parents. It will lead to a good and positive culture when people feel heard or listened to because it makes them feel respected and valued. This could be carried out through regular meetings with faculty, staff and students' bodies or having a series one on one moment with groups and individuals on campus to be able to access firsthand relevant information about the campus operations and climate.

Having listened to the people, good leaders should be willing to engage faculty and staff in a teamwork that will lead to the implementation and observation of the concerns raised and thus bring into existence the desired positive college culture. Related literature above, observed that when leaders make intentional efforts to get those who do not agree with their vision to agree with it, it will greatly help to build a positive culture and define a better future for the institution (Tsai, 2011). To achieve this, leaders may wish to establish a structure that will ensure and enhance teamwork and collaboration and to make it a part of everyone's job description to ensure that no one is left out in the implementation process and possible decision making (Bailey, Jaggars & Jenkins, 2015).

The leadership should communicate their goals and aspirations in concrete terms thereby engaging the staff, students and faculty with clear information on their goals and strategies. The president as a good leader should be open and willing to telling people 'these are my goals and here is why it is in your best interest'. Making your goals and ideas apparent as a leader has a strong potency to build confidence and trust in the faculty and staff and students as well as attract their commitments to the mission of the college. Through this collaborative/shared leadership style, leaders ought to delegate authority to the various roles assigned to different people in order to enable them function well. This indicates that it can be counterproductive when people are given responsibilities without authority.



Giving out the needed authority will be a smart strategy that will enable them to become more effective and productive in their job descriptions. The reason is that it will enable them to remove the structure and obstacles that may get on their way towards making the positive culture a reality in the college. In addition it will encourage risk taking to the reasonable extent that it can guarantee the emergence of the required positive culture (Komives & Wagner, 2009).

The authority therefore, is the element that drives the change and can help to change a toxic culture to a positive culture and further sustain it as long as the institution exists. In order to make everyone effective in the college, power and authority need to spread across from the president to the deans and further downwards causing everyone on board to be creative and innovative, each trying to figure out how best to do their best or give their best since it can minimize the amount of papers pushed and the tables one has to visit before implementation. Related literature above noted that when there a collaborative relationship is established and sustained by the leadership with the faculty and staff, a positive culture is always the result (Gun & Caglayan, 2013). This can be achieved by power distribution carried out through team work or shared governance. In this case, leaders should expand leadership to include other stakeholders such as faculty through the faculty senate, staff and even people in informal positions and people outside the positions of authority like the facility workers and students. This helps everyone to see leadership as a collective process that will initiate creativity, innovation, problem solving etc, carries everyone along in the effort to create the positive culture for the college.

Furthermore, it will be tremendously great for the leadership to operate based on values and promote values in order to guarantee a lasting effect of the positive culture on the students to promote and practice them in the college especially and even after they have graduated from the college.

***Recommendation 3: Colleges should periodically review or develop a new mission statement for the institution in order to build and sustain a positive culture.***

In the bid to create and sustain a positive culture, the college needs to construct her mission statement in a way that it creates a sense of pride and honor to boost the morale of the entire college community. This study revealed that rewriting the mission statement was a right step in the right direction that improved the image of the college and made the college a place of pride for the students, faculty and staff. This study also reported that the description of the college as ‘a small’ in the previous mission statement was an unnoticed element that heavily demoralized the entire campus.

To draft the college mission statement, relevant authorities/personalities such as founders/proprietors of the college and experts in the educational practice should come together as a committee to draft an effective and meaningful mission statement. They should place emphasis on the identity of the college, why it was established, what it is set to accomplish and how it is going to accomplish it. An effective mission statement should also capture the target population, the values it is out to uphold and promote; the policies for employees’ recruitment and practice, the strategic position of the school and the public image they want to project. Note also that the committee should be very intentional while selecting the words that will form the mission statement because if it is formulated correctly, it will play a great role in directing the focus of everyone to work towards a common goal with a clear strategy to promote quality and pleasant experience both as a student, staff or faculty. It will also inspire and challenge the college community out of any complacency and consequently build and sustain a positive culture.

Potential faculty and staff should be appropriately educated on the letters and spirit of the college mission and be adequately nourished with it in order to ensure that it is not just observed but appreciated and respected by all who work for the college. This institutional mission advancement/orientation program should be conducted by the office of the Vice President for Mission for all potential employees to ensure that it will be respected before their appointments will be confirmed. This should be an event that should last for a few hours during which all the potential employees are gathered in one room for a presentation on the college's mission to explain and ignite their passion and interest towards the mission.

After this they should be made to split into small groups with each holding a copy of the complete mission statement of the college in order to analyze the strength and weakness of the college, analyze the college's mission statement and come up with suggestions of strategies to implement the mission in a fruitful manner. This moment should also be used to come up with the roles and practices every employee should perform to meaningfully live out the mission of the college and identify practices that will violate the tenets of the college's mission. This will be a way of getting all to understand how the college's mission is valued and how everyone is expected to cooperate to make it a reality.

In order to accomplish this, adequate funding should be made available for the purchase and production of materials for the staff and faculty mission orientation program, production of flyers and posters that will be displayed with relevant information about the mission statement around strategic areas of the college campus. Periodic research should be carried out by the office of Mission and possibly by the graduate students in the Mission office to determine the impact of the awareness about the institutional mission on the faculty, staff, students and administrators and to detect or create new methods of carrying out the enlightenment program.

This session could be a focus group with selected members of different departments, faculties and offices or general departmental meetings where faculty and staff of every department and faculty and the administration could come together to further explore how the mission of the college can better serve as a framework for making decisions and guiding the general operations of the college. To achieve this faculty, staff and administration should be united in offering suggestions that are relevant to bringing solutions to critical areas in the college. From here also, questions should be formulated for use during interviews to measure and hire candidates who are good fits for the mission of the college.

***Recommendation 4: Hire faculty and staff who understand and support the mission of the institution.***

In a college that is nursing the idea of creating or sustaining a positive college culture, I wish to recommend it should endeavor to hire people who understand and support the mission of the institution. This study revealed that when people do not understand or support the institutional mission, the tendency to operate on a toxic culture will not be farfetched. So the institution should hire the best it can, and make sure they understand the mission of the institution.

To achieve this, the ideas of questions proposed by the different departments and faculties as stated above should be utilized based on the kind of jobs being offered and offices or departments that those persons are being hired for. This is an assessment strategy that should be both written and oral. The oral one should create a space where every individual comes to face a selected panel of interviewers or possibly the entire members of the faculty or department and defend his/her ability to give the best in connection with the college mission. At the end of this, opportunities should be provided to the panelists and the entire community that was present to give feedback on each candidate to before the candidate can be confirmed.

It is always important for people to know what an institution stands for. For example, a Catholic college has and operates with the Catholic educational policies and values. So it is the responsibility of the Catholic college for example to ensure that the staff and faculty understand and support the institutional mission which is also reflected in the policies and values she represents. However, it does not strictly entail that it must hire only Catholics, rather it should be ready to communicate why the institution believes what she believes and why it practices what it practices. Hence, it is good to respect the conscience and religious inclination of everyone but at the same time everyone has the responsibility to understand and support the institutional mission because therein lies what the college seeks to achieve and accomplish.

Having acquired the basic knowledge of the institutional mission, it will be a good step for the institution and her leadership to support the staff in the work they do. In this case the faculty and staff should be encouraged by affirming them and appreciating their contributions and sacrifices, as well as being honest to them and challenging them not by being harsh to them but telling them the truth.

Initial and regular training for staff of the office of Mission should be conducted by college's department of Human Resource or relevant committees comprising of staff and faculty of the college selected to educate on the need to appreciate the identity of the institution in order to appreciate and support the institutional mission. This should be in form of workshops, seminars or lectures which should also generate some feedback from the participants at the end of the workshop or lecture, for future reference and development (Bailey, Jaggars & Jenkins, 2015). The staff should also be well equipped with the professional competencies of certain conferences of Higher education professionals such as NASPA/ACPA, NACADA etc. Sufficient funding should be provided, perhaps through budgeting for this office to enable her to meet up

with the basic operational needs of the office and to also facilitate events, functions, research etc. that are connected to the assessment process. I also recommend that an adequate number of staff for the office of Mission should be employed on a full time basis and should be placed on an annual salary that resonates with the value of the job and the financial strength of the institution.

***Recommendation 5: Initiate and sustain programs that will pull the college community together in one place doing something together.***

The need for all members of the college, ranging from the administrators, faculty, staff and students to come together and do something together in one place at certain moments within the college's operational schedule should not be taken for granted because you cannot imagine how pleasant and wonderful it is when brethren dwell together in unity (Psalm 133:1).

A man, who calls his kinsmen to a feast, does not do so to save them from starving. They all have food in their homes. When we gather together in a moonlit village ground it is not because of the moon. Everyone can see it in his own compound. We come together because it is good for kinsmen to do so (Achebe, 1962. Pg. 118)

It is therefore simply good to come together as a community. The reports of this study indicated that with the opportunity to bring everyone together in one place people tend to express that they are part of the college community and that is very supportive. This goes further to the exchange of ideas and sharing of experiences and rituals as the case may be. Through this sharing people get to know what others are doing and how each one is contributing to the success of the institution. This study also revealed that through this gathering, people tend to help, encourage, support and affirm each other. At gatherings such as sporting events, theatre or drama/movie shows, student organizations, Mack Gives back day, Mass of the Holy Spirit, commencement, committee/departmental meetings or celebrations etc. words of encouragement and appreciation are shared awards are bestowed on outstanding and excellent performances and

contributions to encourage those who have done well and challenge those who are working hard to work harder.

This type of atmosphere should be created, unfailingly observed and adequately utilized by the leadership and entire college community for the creation and sustenance of a positive culture by way of gathering their troops together to affirm them, keep telling them how much their duties, tasks, and efforts are respected and appreciated, how much their lives are valued and keep asking them for more efforts and commitment to move the institution to the highest level. This is a beautiful way of motivating people to step up in their duties but it is not an atmosphere to make empty promises by saying things one could imagine that people want to hear. Creating a positive culture and sustaining it is not about pleasing the people, or playing to the gallery but it is about being honest, affirming the good, telling the truth and challenging the bad. As observed in the literature above, positive culture is achievable if administrators are conscious of the toxic culture with its negative qualities and correct them (Peterson & Deal, 1998). As such, challenging the bad may be viewed as confrontational but that is only a way of sustaining the positive culture in order to control certain negative influence that may dampen the established and hard earned positive culture.

The idea of gathering together in one place could also be carried out in a miniature level through committees and departmental get together or meetings occasionally. This could be seen as the grassroots system of creating and sustaining a positive culture that will eventually blossom like a beautiful flower and spread out to add to the beauty of the entire college community. These gathering together for committees, departments and student bodies are also avenues to assess the success they have recorded and how relevant is the recorded success to the institutional mission and values. At this grassroots level, they tend to contribute tremendously to a sound and positive

culture because they get to see very closely how much they are doing and recognizing the errors made. Learning from experience they can easily correct the errors and develop more powerful strategies that will pave the way for them to clearly record a higher achievement as their contribution to the development of the college and the sustenance of the positive college culture.

Additionally, the institution can build bridges across departments and disciplines by bringing people from different offices or departments into one committee in order to create a positive culture and sustain it. The finding in this study revealed that this opportunity should bring many people as possible into the committees so that through that avenue they can share and understand each other's roles in their various departments or disciplines. This will promote respect and will keep building the culture in that manner. Having people from the school of liberal arts, business school, athletic department, and student life together for example, they get to know themselves as members of the community and get to know what each one is doing. Their inability to this initially is not because they hated each other but it was because they were all doing their jobs in their various offices without the opportunity to cross over to the other side and see what the other side is doing. With these committees, they should be made to work together for a good duration of time and that makes the result fabulous because those sorts of relationships build trust, and brings people of like minds and common ideologies together and consequently enhances the positive culture or even create it as the case may be.

For this to have a positive impact, these committees should be empowered to make decisions that will be accepted and supported by the administration and when they create a best case solution, the senior leadership and administration should support the implementation (Bailey, Jaggars & Jenkins, 2015). In addition, the college administration should ensure that they organize periodic occasion to visit the various committee members and show appreciation for the



work they do. Appreciation could also be expressed through material gifts and cash if possible to sustain the committees tempo and efficacy in their job descriptions.

It is also worthy of note that coming together makes an impact and it is called community impact. This is noticeable in the way it enhances retention, student success and staff/faculty satisfaction. It may look less significant when measured with financial success but it is very important because it is about relationship success, social success and occupational fulfillment. In essence, it holds a pride of place as far as self-satisfaction and feeling among all is concerned.

***Recommendation 6: Define limits and boundaries for everyone's roles in order to ensure optimal output***

Any institution that wants to create a sound and positive culture ought to define and give everyone the space to fulfill his/her primary responsibility. Faculty for instance has the task to educate the students through the teaching and learning exercise and research as their primary role. Every other thing is considered an addendum; hence they should be less involved in admission and other administrative activities. This platform gives each one the needed time and space to focus on his/her primary responsibility in order to produce the optimum for the growth and success of the college. If on the other hand, many are busy doing other things that are not connected to their primary responsibilities, their roles are made to suffer and that keeps the institution crawling behind and also creating and sustaining a toxic culture instead.

This study revealed that with the advent of the positive culture in the college, people have gained more time because their roles are been refocused. The result of this is that faculty for example will do more to educate their students better through working out a new pedagogical method or to develop new programs such as additional graduate programs in other discipline/areas or even new majors. To create a positive culture therefore, institutions must

acknowledge that it is the job of the faculty to educate the students and conduct research and it is the job of administration to manage the school and provide what is necessary. Any attempt to confuse this will lead to a toxic culture instead. This delineation of task empowers people to do more and do better in their areas of expertise.

It is the job of leadership to ensure that everyone's duty is clearly defined and held responsible for any breakdown in that area. Leadership should identify that when each group know their limits, all groups in the college will be able to get along very well thereby building and sustaining a positive culture. While people are being employed, instructions should be clearly given about who each person reports to in the different departments to avoid conflict of interest and to detoxify the atmosphere from promoting the pursuit of personal aggrandizement and unhealthy competition which will be detrimental to the sustenance of a positive culture.

Through the departmental or faculty meetings, each office should endeavor to assess their roles to determine how effective each one has been to the sustenance of the positive culture through their commitment to the task bestowed on them. This can be also a platform on which employees can be retained, awarded or promoted for the building and sustenance of the positive culture. While emphasizing that each person's boundaries should be clearly defined, efforts should be made by the chief executives of the different offices to bestow trust and confidence on themselves to avoid the situation that will lead one to micro-manage others. When this factor is evident, people will be less stressed and spurred to give back even when it is not demanded from them.

***Recommendation 7: Leaders must communicate effectively to all in the campus community, setting an example for all.***

In order to build and sustain a positive culture, colleges must learn to communicate effectively as often as possible. When there is effective communication there will be understanding and when there is understanding there will be peace. These ingredients are very necessary for cultivating and sustaining a positive culture because a positive culture cannot thrive in a chaotic atmosphere. Through communication everyone is carried along in the program of events across campus and within departments and offices. This makes every member of the community to be aware of the type of decision taken and how it affects them, what happens on campus, why and where it is billed to happen.

From the internal perspective, information dissemination strategy should be dispensed through emails, personal address at college or departmental gatherings, meetings, college magazines and other print media. This should be prompt, constant and consistent to ensure that the right meanings and right interpretations are related to scare away small talks that may be peddled to the detriment of the college's precious positive culture. To achieve these feat colleges should establish an office of communication staffed by trained communication practitioners. They in turn should focus on how to distill every information of any toxic contents to ensure they are related using the right choice of words and in a manner that will edify everyone on campus. For communication to be complete, people ought to be open to listen and correctly utilize the correct information they have been given. People should also not be afraid to argue or air their views provided that they have vital points to communicate. This should be done at committee meetings, departmental meetings; small group interaction, one on one session and other appropriate meetings even if it may sound like an opposition. What is important is that they should be practiced in a respectful manner without insulting the dignity of others. It is important

to note again that one has the freedom of expression when one has something important to say and not the desire to talk because others are talking.

The external dimension of communication that is required to build and enhance the positive culture of the college is that people have to spread the good news of the college if they are enjoying a positive experience within the college. This in another way of giving back; every individual- faculty, staff, students and administrators ought to share the good news to promote the image of the school. This is a free service that can impact on the culture positively and sustain it. When people are at home, at parties, among friends, in the church etc, they should make it an act of charity to be harbingers of the good news of the college by promoting the positive image of the college with all relish and wholeheartedly. This is a strategic way of building a positive culture through what we may refer to as branding or rebranding of the college as the case may be. It is essentially a matter of shaping a distinctive identity and projecting a coherent and consistent set of images to the public (Toma et al, 2005) To create a positive college culture, colleges should make efforts to improve the institution's reputation and esteem to consequently add value to the institution's external relations. Since people want to associate with places that are perceived as distinctive, excellent and productive, and where they will also be perceived the same way, they will be pulled to that direction. The result will be increase in enrollment and a high level of persistence.

### **Conclusion**

The choices we make are very crucial and related to the achievements we make as well. The popular African wise saying captures it thus: you cannot plant yam and expect to harvest cocoyam during the harvest time.

This study was conducted in order to understand how positive college culture can enhance the effectiveness of a college as well as to identify and locate the key players and the roles they need to play towards cultivating and sustaining a positive college culture. By reviewing literatures and conducting personal interviews, I was able to uncover the views and needs of faculty and staff for a sound college environment with a positive culture. The faculty and staff identified the incumbent roles on the part of leadership/administration to successfully cultivate a positive college culture. By listening to the viewpoints and perspectives of the leadership/administration, this study was able to unravel the important elements, practices and values that faculty and staff are required to carry along and observe in the business of higher education in order to cultivate and sustain positive college culture.

As a result, this study recognized and recommended certain practices and values that are important in the process of building a positive college culture. It recognized the value of choosing good and competent leaders; cultivating good leadership practices through listening, communication and teamwork; developing or reviewing the college mission statement in a periodic manner to address the continuous changes and evolution of the societal trends and to hire staff and faculty who understand and support the mission of the college. The research further emphasized the importance of initiating and sustaining programs within the college that will pull the college community together in one place to do things together; the need to define job descriptions and their boundaries for the sake of efficacy and responsibility among college faculty, administration and student affairs practitioners and the need for leaders and all actors to communicate effectively and promptly in their daily affairs in the college.

These are all important steps because they all constitute a call to action that will create an active college community that is committed to a common goal of enhancing the college practices

for individual colleges and higher education in general. It will further enhance the institutional mission and identity that supports students' civic, intellectual and moral/character development and the critical mindedness that will raise a balanced personality and ensure a better society. For any country to thrive and sustain its progress in the global economy, proper education that is intentionally driven to impact the intellect and characters of the students should never be underrated. These steps of building a positive college culture will provide colleges and higher education institutions with the right climate and programs to equip and develop students' intellectual prowess and character formation while on campus.

Recognizing and sustaining positive college culture will see the colleges to the end of every academic year, presenting to the society and the world a set of graduates and potential employees that are armed with both skillfulness and thoughtfulness ready to drive the economy and labor market with good conscience and transform the world economically, politically, socially, and morally by doing good works.

While acknowledging the diverse growth and change in today's students, faculty and staff demographic, this process of building a positive college culture will help to stimulate desire and openness for honest and respectful conversations that will ensure and foster an atmosphere of understanding, trust, safety, civility, mutual respect and mutual recognition for everyone within the campus. This will ensure and enhance positive outcomes of cultural competence and professional development among all kinds and levels of higher education practitioners through active participation in running the affairs of higher education in general.

Generally this study has further enriched the knowledge base of readers and educators, administrators and policy makers, students and educational admirers in any part of the world. I have equipped them with new information to help develop new strategies that will guide

more colleges with toxic culture into building a positive culture; while the newly established colleges need to apply the principles therein in order to lay a good and positive foundation for their colleges and institutions. When that happens, it will enhance the efficacy and productivity of the less qualitative colleges and post-secondary institutions; it will increase the number of high performing colleges and universities, Improve access and availability for students to quality, high performing and high profile colleges and degree awarding institutions; it will motivate more students to desire and seek college education; increase enrollment and enhance retention among students and among staff and faculty because of the healthy and encouraging environment; it will motivate parents and guardians to intensify their desire to enroll their wards in those institutions around them instead of travelling too far and it will bring world class education closer to everyone's doorsteps and make it affordable.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Protocol

1. How has your day been?
2. How is your work going? Do you like it? Why do you like it?
3. Describe your professional path to this position.
4. Describe the culture at Moonshine college
5. Can you tell me more about your experience with culture in other colleges (if possible) schools before you came to Moonshine college?
6. As an administrator or faculty member, what is and what has been your role in creating and sustaining the college's culture?
7. Has the reaction of other staff and faculty (Parents/staff and students) been supportive or challenging to you when this was going on?
8. Do you think these other stakeholders favor the current school culture? Why do you think so?
9. What then will you recommend that others colleges should do to create a positive school culture?
10. Do you encourage other folks in the college to be part of creating and sustaining the culture?  
How so?
11. From your perspective what is the benefit of cultivating a particular kind of college culture?  
How does it help students, others in the school?
12. What are the challenges of creating a meaningful college culture, if any
13. Is there anything else you will like to share that I have not asked you?