

Leading Forward: Twenty-Four Women Advancing Community College Leadership Through UCLA's WCCLA

During Women's History Month, 24 women leaders completed the second cohort of the **UCLA Women's Community College Leadership Academy (WCCLA)** a national leadership program designed to strengthen mid-level leadership capacity within community colleges across the United States. While WCCLA draws participants from across the country, this year's cohort was uniquely composed entirely of leaders from California's community college system, reflecting the strength, diversity, and depth of leadership across the state.

The Academy was created in response to the evolving and complex realities facing community colleges today, including financial pressures, enrollment challenges, equity commitments, and increasingly dynamic campus environments. Through expert-led workshops, mentorship circles, collaborative problem-solving, and focused professional development, participants expanded their leadership skills and deepened their ability to navigate institutional change with clarity, confidence, and purpose.

A Shared Commitment to System-Level Leadership

Beyond the curriculum, what defined Cohort 2 was a shared sense of responsibility for the future of the community college system. Participants consistently spoke to the value of learning in community and engaging with peers who are leading meaningful efforts across campuses and regions. Many described the experience as both affirming and catalytic, sharpening their leadership vision while reinforcing a collective commitment to improving outcomes for students.

The Academy fostered intentional space for reflection, dialogue, and authentic engagement, reinforcing the idea that sustainable institutional change is driven by leaders who learn from one another and work in collaboration rather than in isolation.

Leadership from Across the Institution

A defining strength of the cohort was the range of roles represented. Participants included faculty members, directors, deans, associate vice presidents, and administrators working across both academic affairs and student services. This diversity created rich conversations about how leadership decisions affect students, programs, and institutional culture from multiple vantage points.

Through these cross-functional exchanges, participants developed a deeper understanding of how priorities, resources, and decision-making intersect across an institution. Many reflected on gaining valuable perspectives beyond their current roles, strengthening the systems-level thinking necessary for broader executive leadership.

Leadership Rooted in Experience and Readiness

For many participants, the Academy was both validating and forward-looking. Leaders shared that the experience strengthened practical skills such as budgeting, strategic planning, and navigating competing institutional priorities, while also affirming their readiness for increased responsibility.

Participants described leaving the program with a clearer understanding of how to align daily decisions with long-term vision, maintain a student-centered focus, and lead collaboratively through complexity and change. The Academy emphasized not simply advancement, but purposeful leadership grounded in service to campuses and communities.

A Vision Shaped by Community College Leadership

The UCLA Women's Community College Leadership Academy was founded by Dr. Linda Rose, a distinguished educational leader whose career spans faculty service, academic administration, and community college presidencies. Her vision for WCCLA was shaped by decades of experience and a deep commitment to preparing women leaders to meet the challenges facing today's institutions.

Central to the Academy is the belief that women often underestimate their readiness for leadership and that mentorship, peer learning, and intentional development are critical to unlocking that potential. Under Dr. Rose's guidance, the program emphasizes confidence-building, collaboration, and real-world leadership practices that extend well beyond the Academy experience.

National in Scope, Lasting in Impact

Although this cohort reflects California's community college landscape, WCCLA remains a national program open to faculty and administrators across the country. Its growing network of alumnae continues to influence leadership pathways, campus practices, and institutional culture within community colleges nationwide.

As Cohort 2 participants return to their campuses, they do so with expanded perspective, strengthened professional networks, and a renewed sense of responsibility to lead thoughtfully, inclusively, and strategically shaping policies and practices that support student success and institutional stability.

Looking Ahead

The completion of the second cohort marks an important milestone not only for the 24 leaders who participated, but for the institutions and communities they serve. Their collective growth reflects the enduring power of community colleges and the women who lead within them.

As the UCLA Women's Community College Leadership Academy continues to welcome future cohorts, it stands as a powerful example of how intentional leadership development can strengthen institutions designed to serve as gateways to opportunity locally, statewide, and nationally.

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