

# Perspectives

Community College  
Leadership for the  
21st Century

**JUNE 2018**

[www.ferris.edu/alliance](http://www.ferris.edu/alliance)

Those of us in the business of community colleges clearly see that the amount of private support affects how effective a college can be with programs that focus students on career paths and educational preparedness.

- Neil Kreisel and  
Vanessa L. Patterson

Even under the most favorable circumstances, major-gift fundraising is a long-term enterprise that can take decades, and community colleges themselves are relatively young.

- Ginia Bellafante

Doctorate in  
Community College  
Leadership

Empowering graduates  
to advance  
community colleges  
towards excellence  
and community  
responsiveness through  
exemplary leadership.


**FERRIS STATE  
UNIVERSITY**

**ENROLLING NOW FOR  
THE NEXT COHORT**

## Closing the 'Difference Gap': Philanthropy at Community Colleges

**DeRionne Pollard, PhD**

President  
Montgomery College  
Rockville, Maryland

Much has been written about the philanthropic strategies of four-year colleges and some of those efforts can be successfully applied to community colleges as well. Some striking differences, however, call for distinct approaches. Many colleges, mine included, are figuring out as they go along: how to fund community engagement centers when most people don't know what they are; how to inspire giving for inmate-learners, who will upon release, enroll at the College; how to narrate the needs of low-income students so that donors identify with them and believe their support will be a worthwhile investment. These are just some of the challenges we face in driving philanthropy for community colleges.

The changing landscape of community colleges is shaping fundraising philanthropy strategies in several ways. As we all know, the racial and ethnic makeup of such colleges is increasingly diverse. At Montgomery College in Maryland where I am president, 72 percent of students are non-white. Of our 56,000 students, approximately 6,000 (more than 10 percent) were born outside the US. In Montgomery County where we are located, 15 percent of residents have limited English proficiency. These realities mean that we are often courting donors who belong to different ethnic groups, and even nationalities, than our students. In some cases, there is a bridge that we must construct for donors so that they feel comfortable supporting our programs.

*Community colleges need to be proud of the role they play educationally and in the community and stop thinking they can't get significant philanthropic investments like their four-year cousins.*

**Educating our donors about the economic and social factors** that create poverty, or the political circumstances that drive migration can help close the gaps opened by difference. Videos, letters from students, and campaigns with pictures of students and stories about their experiences can be valuable. A few years ago our Montgomery College Foundation funded a project by faculty, staff, and students called "Portraits of Life" through donations from the Webber Family Foundation and Freeman Foundation. The "Portraits of Life" were a collection of large posters that reflected the stories of students from different countries. The purpose of the project was to reflect the stories of hope, perseverance, and the value of education across a diverse cross-section of students

in multiple majors from countries across the globe. It was a teachable moment for the college and community around equity, inclusivity, humanitarianism, and the value of education.

Situating these efforts within a broader framework can create valuable context. I have **personally used the concept of "radical inclusion"** in my communications for several years now. Opening the doors of the College to people who may have been traditionally excluded from higher education—by poverty or discrimination, or even by their own perception that they don't belong in college—has been a powerful framing device. I have even given it some historical context in several speeches: Decades ago, it was "radical" to talk about inviting people of color or women to the College. Now MC talks openly about how to support its DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) students—those brought here as children by their parents, but are legally speaking, "undocumented." We also talk often about our "inmate-learners"—students who take college classes while still incarcerated in a local correctional facility. And since many of our students come from low-income families without a college graduate in the house, we often talk about "first generation" college students. Using all of these terms in speeches, articles, and editorials helps our donors to get a close-up on our students and their lives, in ways that shrink the difference gap. The effort personalizes our students' lives and experiences and helps open a window on their challenges. Developing a language that is inclusive and imaginative helps donors to view these students as just that—students, and not "offenders" or "illegal immigrants."

**Educating donors about social justice factors** that have created "outsiders" to higher ed is another tool that can help inspire philanthropy. As a president, I find myself doing this strategically. For example, in delivering a speech that mentions DACA students, I'll reference some of the factors that drive people to come to the U.S.—war, poverty, natural disasters—to counteract any biases against "undocumented" people. More often than not, such topics come up in private conversations, in which I find that a donor may be misinformed about a student group. DACA students, for example, do not include persons with serious criminal convictions—an occasional misperception that is fueled by media reports about widespread criminal activity by undocumented people. Whenever I can clarify some knowledge base for donors, I do so. This means staying alert to portrayals in the wider media, to which donors may be exposed.

**I also use my own story where appropriate.** As an African American woman, who was the first in her family to attend college and received food stamps while I did,

*(continued on page 4)*

## EMERGING LEADERS' PERSPECTIVES

Community colleges have served as the primary gateway to higher education for millions of students, yet they continue to struggle to capture even the smallest fraction of annual university alumni giving, despite the fact that any upward tick in alumni giving would expand the colleges' ability to better serve their student bodies. Clearly, strong fundraising can make a huge difference in how well community colleges perform financially, especially during times of budget cuts. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders. Their answers appear below.

### Sean Aikman, MSc

Non-profit Organization Consultant  
Greater New York Area

In 2015, Goldman Sachs awarded LaGuardia Community College an unrestricted two-million-dollar gift, a sum which nearly doubled the institution's endowment (Bellafante, 2015). Community colleges operate with incredibly limited financial resources and reserves, especially relative to many of the nation's more prominent higher education institutions. America's community college endowments collectively earn under \$30M a year (Marcus, 2013). To put these figures in context: Harvard raises one-and-a-half times LaGuardia Community College's major gift every day and it would take Harvard's endowment less than three days to exceed the country's 1000+ community college's aggregate endowment earnings (Marcus, 2013; Bellafante, 2015).

Community colleges, quite simply, do not benefit from the same levels, or types, of philanthropy as more "traditional" institutions. Despite accounting for roughly 40% of total undergraduate student enrollment, less than two cents of every dollar given to undergraduate institutions is contributed to the nation's community colleges (Kreisel & Patterson, 2013; Ma & Baum, 2016; Ginder, Kelly-Reid, & Mann, 2017).

This disparity likely stems, in part, from the very differences that make community colleges such special and distinctive institutions, starting with a profoundly different spectrum of student "pathways" and relationships to the concept of "alumni status". The high number of community college students enrolled in non-degree programs and issues surrounding "completion" are two of the principle matters that impact community college "alumni" numbers. The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center reports that, of first-time students (excluding dual enrollment figures), 38% complete a two or four-year degree within six years (Shapiro et al, 2017). Included in this low persistence/completion figure are students who transfer to, and graduate from, other institutions only to receive "alumni status" and fundraising solicitations from the latter institution.

Community colleges have work to do. The universal axiom in fundraising and development is that the principal reason that people don't give is because they weren't asked. For community colleges to "ask," they will need better former student (not just alumni) databases and tracking. They will also have to work on creating a different, more nuanced, sense of inclusion that encompasses all former students and not just program graduates. Community colleges play an instrumental and important role in the lives of the students they serve, allowing them to try new things, find new directions, retrain, earn credits "à la carte," and enroll in non-credit programs; they should celebrate this non-traditional role with a non-traditional sense of lifelong inclusion. Once students complete a class, they should be made to feel as though they are part of "an extended family" – and of course, go directly into the fundraising database.

### QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

**How can a robust philanthropy initiative help community colleges better cultivate donors and ultimately help themselves?**

### Khayree O. Williams, MEd

Assistant Dean of Multicultural Student Development  
Calvin College  
Grand Rapids, Michigan

According to Ginia Bellafante, a common claim exists in philanthropic circles that "the most effective way to raise money is to ask for it" (Bellafante, 2014). However, for community colleges, this is a

paradigm that is far more complex than just the simple task of asking. Community colleges, unlike many four-year colleges and universities, are younger institutions and often lack the long-standing history, legacy, pride, and droves of affluent alumni who are ready and willing to support the college's mission.

So, what is the solution? The fact remains that, "Alumni represent the largest untapped pool of prospective donors, and the success of alumni giving at 4-year institutions illustrates the potential that exists for community colleges" (Skari, 2014). Thus, common wisdom would dictate that community colleges should learn from four-year colleges and universities and begin to engage alumni more effectively.

Alumni give because they are asked, but the biggest problem is that community colleges are often in so much of a disarray as it relates to alumni databases and tracking that their alumni often just never get the ask. I myself began my higher education experience as a student in a Pre-College program at my hometown community college. I went on to get tutoring, pre-ACT support, and even college application support from this community college. I even eventually took my first college course there and returned home for two summers to take more classes at the institution. Even though my undergraduate credential came from a four-year college, I owe my community college a great deal for giving me the confidence to succeed at a university. Yet I have never ever received any type of ASK from the particular community college and I would gladly give!

The reason this matters is because numerous community colleges are finally figuring out that engaging alumni yields dividends that can shore up funding loss from traditional sources like state and local funding to support student success. LaGuardia Community College, dubbed as one of the most diverse community colleges in America boasting an enrollment of over 20,000, has learned this lesson in their fundraising endeavors. Robert Swartz, the Executive Director of the Los Angeles City College Foundation, stated that their alumni database boasts over 700,000 dating all the way back to 1940 (Suchecky, 2016). Harnessing this prospect properly has shown that often a small contribution today can blossom to a large donation later and in some circumstances, long-term expansive endowments from estates of deceased alumni, all beginning with making the connection via engaging in an ask.

Sean Aikman, MSc, is a non-profit organization consultant specializing in international non-governmental organization (NGO) training programs, service learning, and experiential education, including field studies. He earned a Master's Degree (MSc) from VUB (Vrije Universiteit Brussel), a PgDip from The Royal Military College of Science at The Defence Academy of the United Kingdom (Shirvenham), and is currently pursuing a Doctorate of Education in the DCCL program at Ferris State University.



Khayree O. Williams, MEd, is Assistant Dean of Multicultural Student Development at Calvin College, serving as an advocate for campus-wide cultural competency training initiatives and completion for historically underserved populations. Prior to Calvin College, he served at both medium and large public universities. Khayree began his higher education journey as a community college student, earned his MEd from Grand Valley State University, and is enrolled in the Ferris DCCL Program.



## NATIONAL LEADER PERSPECTIVE

Community colleges have served as the primary gateway to higher education for millions of students, yet they continue to struggle to capture even the smallest fraction of annual university alumni giving, despite the fact that any upward tick in alumni giving would expand the colleges' ability to better serve their student bodies. Clearly, strong fundraising can make a huge difference in how well community colleges perform financially, especially during times of budget cuts. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders. Their answers appear below.

### Community College Philanthropy: Cultivating Donors

**Dawn Dyer Magretta, CFRE**

Executive Director, Schoolcraft College Foundation  
Schoolcraft College  
Livonia, Michigan

As I sat down to write this article and share with the readers my perspective on community college philanthropy and cultivating donors, particularly alumni, my first thought was, "They don't know what they don't know."

Coming from a background of health care philanthropy to a role of chief fundraising officer in a Michigan community college, I quickly noticed that, at least in Michigan, the fundraising office was looked upon by faculty and staff as the place to send people interested in setting up a scholarship. This limited perspective of fundraising meant the Department was not recognized as the significant resource it could be.

Don't get me wrong, scholarships are important and will always be crucial in helping students achieve their educational dreams. But there is so much more need in a community college and it is vital to start telling that story AND focus on the successful outcomes made possible through philanthropy. Community colleges need to be proud of the role they play educationally and in the community and stop thinking they can't get significant philanthropic investments like their four-year cousins.

Many feel that graduates of four-year universities are compelled to give to their alma maters, but don't think about giving to their community college. Yes, that's true – but the main reason they are giving is simply because they have been cultivated and asked for a gift. For the most part, community colleges are late to this game and that needs to change!

Community colleges need to start reaching out to donors and alumni and talk about the impact that can be made for a relatively low investment, compared to four-year universities. Tell the story about how community colleges are affordable and serve a student population that is often socio-economically challenged. They should be inspiring alumni and other prospective donors to make an investment in their missions by encouraging them to become partners in the good work being accomplished. In doing so, they need to highlight unique and significant opportunities for support that allow donors to play an important role in the growth of the college. Opportunities exist such as establishing special funds to meet the needs of students – be it emergency needs support, introducing k-12 students to STEM programs and college, or helping provide workforce development for the local shortage of skilled trades workers. Or, let's talk about the affordability of community college. Community colleges are becoming more and more innovative in reducing or even eliminating student debt.

They don't know what they don't know!

#### QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

**How can a robust philanthropy initiative help community colleges better cultivate donors and ultimately help themselves?**

**Community colleges need to be proud of the role they play educationally and in the community and stop thinking they can't get significant philanthropic investments like their four-year cousins.**

In Michigan and throughout most of the country, community colleges became the backbone of economic recovery during the 2008 Great Recession. Community college leaders also quickly realized that local property taxes, along with state and federal dollars, were being reduced and a new form of revenue had to be found to keep tuition affordable. Philanthropy is, and continues to be, an important revenue source and a strong resource for operational and/or capital support.

I encourage all community colleges to participate in the Voluntary Survey for Education (VSE), which is the authoritative source of information on private giving to U. S. higher education and private pre-collegiate institutions. The survey is managed by the Council for Aid to Education (CAE). Trust me, it is easier than it appears at first glance and will provide a baseline for comparison year after year.

The VSE data shows how two-year public institution giving compares to other higher education sectors. For instance, in 2017, voluntary support by source at public two-year institutions' alumni giving is at 4.5% compared to 55.4% of alumni from Baccalaureate public institutions and 42.2% of alumni from Baccalaureate private institutions (Voluntary Support of Education, 2017). I'm

happy to say we are at 23% of alumni giving, so we are making strides. This is one example of how community colleges, as a sector, are behind four-year universities.

Ironically, as I was finishing this article, I received a phone call from Alan, an alum from the 1960's. Alan was a member of our first graduating class in 1966 and also our very first valedictorian. He doesn't live in Michigan anymore, but because we reached out and reconnected with our alumni around the college's 50th anniversary, Alan became engaged with the college. As a result, he started the First Valedictorian's STEM Scholarship and Achievement Award to provide financial support to students focused on STEM degrees. He has also endowed this scholarship with a planned gift. Alan now wants to increase his gift and the scholarship to include a transfer scholarship for two years at a four-year university as part of the scholarship award.

See what happens when you tell your story, communicate to your constituents, and inform alumni and donors of the compelling need that your community college faces? Now they will know what they didn't know!

**Dawn Magretta, CFRE**, is a Certified Fund Raising Executive (CFRE) and serves as the Executive Director of the Schoolcraft College Foundation at Schoolcraft College in Livonia, Michigan. With more than 30 years in professional fundraising and leadership development, Dawn has spent the last seven years in community college fundraising in Michigan. Her background includes advertising, public relations, fundraising, leadership development, and nonprofit management. She holds a bachelor's degree in Advertising and Public Relations from Grand Valley State University in Allendale, Michigan. She and her husband, Leon, live in White Lake, Michigan.



**QUICK TAKES**  
**Highlights**  
**from the Field**

**Community Colleges: Insights on Fundraising and Endowment Strategies by the Wilmington Trust**

This article examines today's community college fundraising and endowment management trends. Also discussed are the benefits of using separate foundations as part of a community college's development efforts. Finally, the authors share the results of their independent research study of 207 community colleges, located in the mid-Atlantic and Northeastern U. S., which looked at the use of separate foundations as both fundraising and long-term investment portfolio vehicles.  
<https://bit.ly/2LPDq9z>

**Revvng Economic Engines at Community Colleges**  
 by David Bass

This article posits that community colleges have a vast potential for philanthropy, presenting an overview of the state of community college philanthropy today. Nationally, individual donors and foundations are discovering that they can have a much stronger impact by partnering with their local community colleges, places where the regional economy is more likely to be directly fueled, and where working-class Americans often get their first lift toward the middle class.  
<https://bit.ly/2HQW8et>



Published by the Alliance for Community College Excellence in Practice, Ferris State University, Doctorate in Community College Leadership Big Rapids, Michigan

**EDITORIAL STAFF**  
 Jeanne Bonner, PhD, Editor  
 Mara Jevera Fulmer, EdD, MFA, Design & Production Editor

To send comments or receive a copy of this publication, please contact us at: [ccallian@fsu.edu](mailto:ccallian@fsu.edu)

**Closing the 'Difference Gap': Philanthropy at Community Colleges** (continued from page 1)

talking about my own experience allows donors to connect with a real person's life. But a president without such experience can also talk about a real student in order to build that connection—or even have students share personal stories of how scholarships have benefitted them.

Getting donors to identify with students who maybe are "different" from them is one step. Another is demonstrating how a specific program can help such students to be successful. MC has several programs that target first-generation students, generally from low-income families. Achieving Collegiate Excellence and Success (ACES) and Achieving the Promise Academy (ATPA) both provide extensive support for students, not just in paying tuition and fees, but in succeeding academically. Academic coaches help them with everything from academic issues to financial planning. Presenting such programs can be complex, particularly if donors have no personal experience with the challenges that students face. Many students arrive at MC with inadequate high school preparation, ignorance about how to apply for financial aid, registration deadlines or processes, and other challenges faced by first-generation college students. Demanding work schedules, long commutes, and child- or elder-care duties may also impinge on study time for low-income students. Narrating these realities for donors can lay the groundwork for their support. Again, having students tell their stories, particularly on camera and in person, can be very effective. For this to work, solid collaboration between the development office and the College's marketing and communications department is vital.

**Understanding students' financial need can also be transformative for donors.**

Narrating the student experience is important, but **showing clear outcomes is also valuable**. Some donors may come from the business community or private industry in which quantifying impact is standard practice. Since many of my college's student support programs are highly interpersonal, tracking how many times a student will meet with a coach in a semester and for how long, is one approach. In our Achieving the Promise Academy, students must meet with a coach once a week for at least 30 minutes and attendance is strictly recorded, with notes on what was discussed. Our community engagement centers track visitors and their queries to create a sense for how much traffic there is. In a recent pilot of a "pop-up" community engagement center, we had 900 visitors in the first six months. Our two other community engagement centers have drawn 12,000 over three years. Since the work of these centers takes place off campus and in the communities, they are sometimes difficult to visualize, so showing impact is increasingly important.

**Understanding students' financial need** can also be transformative for donors. I recently testified to the U.S. Senate's Health, Education, Labor and Pension Committee on the importance of Pell grants and reported to them that 8,000 of MC students receive Pell grants. Of that group, half of them have family incomes of under \$25,000 a year—and that's in a county where the average income is \$100,000 a year. It was a powerful contrast. Making those realities clear to donors can help them appreciate the urgency of supporting students. Additionally, showing that a college is working hard to

support students in other ways can **create the feeling that donors are part of a larger movement**. At MC we are using open educational resources so that students can save on books (about \$1,500 per year). We also have mobile food markets to combat food insecurity (125,000 pounds distributed this year), and loaner laptops to bridge the digital divide (hundreds in a year). This helps the College demonstrate creativity in meeting students' needs so they can concentrate on classroom success.

**Having a foundation to raise funds and disperse them provides more flexibility for public institutions to address difference gaps and engage donors and the community in this effort.**

Finally, a note on diversity. As our student populations become increasingly diverse, donors may express interest in supporting a specific group of students with scholarship funds. Since this is allowable only through a foundation, the Montgomery College Foundation has been able to create scholarships for underserved populations, such as African-American, DACA, Latino, and LGBTQ students. Having a foundation to raise and disperse funds provides more flexibility to address difference gaps, engage donors, and the community.

I will close with a mission moment for you. Several years ago, an immigrant from Armenia came to Montgomery College, first to learn English, then to learn engineering. After a few years, he was able to become a U.S. citizen. With success as an entrepreneur and inventor, he looked for ways to give back to the College. His first step was to provide scholarship funding for veterans who fought for our country and people like him to have freedom. In his most recent commitment, his six-figure gift will support students in our ACES program so that other first-generation students can have clear pathways to degrees. He decided not to give in his own name, but to honor the first African-American county executive in our community. This story is the point of radical inclusion, of equity, of supporting diverse groups. It is one example of social justice through philanthropy that we continue to replicate at Montgomery Colleges—and at community colleges across the nation.

In 2010, **DeRionne P. Pollard, PhD**, assumed leadership of Montgomery College, a three-campus community college with 56,000 credit and noncredit students where she spearheaded the development of a new Montgomery College mission and strategic plan. Dr. Pollard is a member of the Community College Advisory Panel at the College Board and the Higher Education Research and Development Institute Advisory Board. She also serves on the Board of Directors for the AACC and is serving her first year as the president of the American Association of Women for Community Colleges. She was recently named one of Washington's 100 Most Influential Women by Washingtonian Magazine, won an Academic Leadership Award from Carnegie Corporation of New York, and was awarded a Visionary Award by the Washington Area Women's Foundation. She has also been honored by Leadership Montgomery, The Daily Record, Bethesda Magazine and the Washington Business Journal. Dr. Pollard received her PhD from Loyola University Chicago and her MA from Iowa State University.

