

# Perspectives

Community College  
Leadership for the  
21st Century

NOVEMBER 2018

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

*Advocacy is more than pleading or arguing a case for support of the mission and goals of community colleges; it is the art of effective communication and relationship building.*

- Mary Ellen Duncan and Calvin Ball

*For nearly all community college advocates, the next level of work will require the courage to promote public transparency and performance accountability, along with the flexibility to change traditional designs and funding for higher education.*

- AACC

**Doctorate in  
Community College  
Leadership**

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



**ENROLLING NOW FOR  
THE NEXT COHORT**

## Advocates, Champions, and Governmental Relations

**Anne M. Kress, PhD**

*President*

*Monroe Community College  
Rochester, New York*

Over the past decade that I have been president of Monroe Community College (MCC) in Rochester, New York, much about my role and the roles of all community college leaders have changed dramatically. I have (half-) jokingly remarked that this job now requires a president to spend 100% of her time inside her college and the other 100% outside. Everywhere from city halls to county legislatures to Capitol Hill, presidents are expected to carry their community colleges' message, articulate their missions, represent their students, communicate institutional needs, and even embody their colleges' brands. As funding challenges increase and public perception of higher education wavers, community colleges need champions beyond their campuses. Successful presidents must be active, informed, and effective advocates at the local, state, and federal level; they must create a supportive network of relationships that build understanding, respect, and trust of their colleges in governmental offices and beyond.

***As funding challenges increase and public perception of higher education wavers, community colleges need champions beyond their campuses.***

Direct and focused advocacy, the mechanics of budget hearings and legislative meetings, the practice of governmental relationship-building and messaging, all of this is not a native skill set for most community college presidents. Rather, the majority of us still come to these leadership roles from academic affairs or student services. To have a real impact for their institutions in an environment where scarcity rules the allocation of funds to all of higher education, community college presidents need to accelerate their learning curve on governmental relations, policy, and advocacy. In my own education on these matters, I have come to value two key principles.

**Every Message Matters.** Shortly after I began at MCC, I was meeting a congressional staffer who stopped in mid-conversation and said, "Anne, I like you, but I've got to be honest, I simply have no idea what's going on at your college. It is just not on our radar at all. You should change that." I was brought up short and began asking questions: What would make a difference? Her advice: "Whatever you do, it needs to be brief and to the point." We took that and ran with it. Since that day, MCC has sent our local, state, and federal delegation single sheet, single topic monthly

briefs that include a mix of data, student stories, program descriptions, and the contact information for appropriate college staff. These one sheets have formed the basis for our elected officials' talking points, been repurposed for speaking engagements, and more.

As this story suggests, I fell into a key to good governmental relations: make sure elected officials and their staff members feel comfortable in being frank with you, especially when it is the opposite of what you might want to hear. So it was that after putting in the work on the one sheets, I was actually pleased when another staffer pulled me aside to share that these documents might be too long. MCC launched a weekly one item email: a profile of an award-winning professor; demographics on the students we serve; retention data on students who access our food pantry. We also track the open rate of these emails and the links that are clicked. It helps to target and refine our messages.

Each communication we send has a central goal: to build and sustain confidence in the quality, accountability, and value of MCC. When a constituent asks, "What in the world is MCC doing with my tax dollars?" or "Why should we fund MCC?" all of our elected officials have a ready answer. In addition to the monthly and weekly emails, they can point to our annual "Whatever Happened to the Class of ..." report to show how our graduates fare; to program analyses that show what programs add to student lifetime earnings; to our independent economic impact study that documents our value-add for our region. We provide all of our elected officials with data on how many of our students and employees live in their districts; how many students in their school districts save money by taking MCC courses while still in high school; how many employees we have trained for businesses in their backyards. We share MCC's proposed budget and its drivers with our county legislators early and often, taking their input seriously and answering all questions quickly and in full.

***Advocacy for our college has become a 365 day a year activity with each communication adding another layer of understanding.***

Advocacy for our college has become a 365 day a year activity with each communication adding another layer of understanding. Or as one of my colleagues observed, "The difference with MCC is that you know that every message counts and you're always on point." MCC is our community's college, and the opportunity and access we provide rests on the confidence we have instilled in our funders, on their sense of ownership for our College. Each time one of our governmental leaders calls MCC "the gem

*(continued on page 4)*

## EMERGING LEADERS' PERSPECTIVES

Today's community colleges continue to face significant challenges related to financial support on the local, state, and national levels, now further complicated by recent declines in public perception of the essential value of community colleges. As a result, it has become more imperative than ever before that community college leaders demonstrate a strong sense of urgency while focusing productive and comprehensive efforts on effectively advocating for their colleges. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders. Their answers appear below.

### Aimée Bélanger-Haas, MS

Dean of Business and  
Applied Technologies  
Clark State Community College  
Springfield, Ohio

There should be no doubt in anyone's mind that community colleges present tremendous value to the community by providing students with "in demand skills" at low tuition rates, which can often be reduced further through robust financial aid programs. Even students who desire to attend elite four-year institutions and pursue graduate education can significantly lower the cost of their education by pursuing core requirements at a community college.

Community college leaders need to advocate for their schools and champion the many positive benefits associated with these institutions – the hidden gems in our communities. Colleges are facing challenges not seen before due to economic factors, declining enrollments, and lack of awareness. Leaders have an opportunity to create an understanding of return on investment and opportunities that exist at community colleges, since not enough people understand the vital role these colleges play in their communities.

It is important that community college leaders excel at storytelling and fact-sharing as, unfortunately, negative and false impressions continue to be held by some in the community. From reports of low graduation rates, exorbitant debt, and being considered last resorts, the general message is negative and misleading. Leaders need to become proficient at celebrating their success stories and explaining their missions and open-door access. Leaders understand that students choose community colleges for different reasons, but these factors are not widely understood and must be propagated at every opportunity. Storytelling is vital to changing public perceptions and helping people recognize that we are meeting community needs.

Educational leaders at all levels need to be excellent orators and be able to tailor their message to the group with whom they are speaking. They also need to communicate effectively with all the different community stakeholders. This can be supported by getting involved in community organizations, and helping to expose industry leaders and the community at large to the multiple resources their local college can offer. By becoming engaged with and listening to businesses in the area, leaders can gain an understanding of their needs and meet them. In turn, these same business leaders can advocate and support community colleges when necessary. Relationship building is precious and cannot be ignored.

It is also of utmost importance to keep legislators engaged and informed about the work that is being done at our colleges. Leaders should form connections with legislators and explain what they can do to help advocate at the local, state, and national levels. Considering the challenges and benefits discussed, leaders of community colleges need to work in partnership with their legislators to frame what support is required to achieve a successful outcome for their mutual stakeholders and constituents.

**Aimée Bélanger-Haas** currently serves as the Dean of Business and Applied Technologies at Clark State Community College in Springfield, Ohio. She began her career at Clark State as an adjunct and was hired as the Geospatial Program Coordinator before moving on to the Assistant Dean role. She earned her MS in Geographic Information Systems from Penn State University, and is currently working on her doctorate in the Ferris State University DCCL program.



### QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

**What skills are needed for community college leaders to successfully advocate for their colleges and students today?**

### Jessica Pitstick, MS

Program Chair and Assistant Professor  
for Supply Chain and Logistics  
Ivy Tech Community College  
Lafayette, Indiana

An organization that effectively manages two extremes that are often in direct conflict with each other can be considered as having achieved "organizational ambidexterity" (Jansen, George,

Van den Bosch, & Volberda, 2008). Community college leaders today have ridden the pendulum between emphasis on general education to guide a student towards transferring to a four-year college, versus the technical degrees that navigate a student towards the workforce and a focus on career and technology. Community colleges are organizational ambidextrous, balancing the two ends of the education spectrum, adding in specialized on-the-job training for industry and dual credit. Leaders must accumulate a variety of skills to cater to the vast array of competencies needed to influence and support an ambidextrous organization. Leading organizational ambidexterity takes a strong, charismatic, inspiring cheerleader to ensure all parties are perceived to be included and supported (Jansen, et al, 2008). The dynamics that accompany an organization with multiple missions often include conflict, which usually occurs because there is competition over scarce resources, company vision, and different expectations (Jansen, et al, 2008). For an organization that is ambidextrous to be successful, it "requires the development of a strong and compelling shared vision" (p. 998). As a result, leaders today need purpose, passion, and persuasion to articulate the multiple goals of the institution.

**Purpose.** Strategic plans solidify the end goals for the institution. Since community colleges champion several institutional missions at the same time, it is imperative that college leaders act with a sense of purpose to convey the message of the strategic plan and propel the institution towards common goals. Using purpose and determination shows the enthusiasm of the individual leaders that come together collectively to drive their passion.

**Passion.** Community college leaders need to embody the multiple vision and missions of the institution, utilizing charismatic leadership to project their passion for their college, exuding confidence, inspiration, and motivation in everything they do. A leader's intrinsic dedication to the institution should be evident to internal and external stakeholders, and that passion should be articulated into a story to persuade and advocate for their organization.

**Persuasion.** Utilizing their fervent enthusiasm for the institution, leaders can influence internal and external populations to act on behalf of the institution. Advocating for the multiple layers of services that community colleges offer while being everything to everyone, compels leaders to be inspiring, encouraging, and enticing. Telling a compelling story that shows the significance of the organization, while exuding passion for the institution, will persuade people to act.

Leaders must act with a sense of purpose and passion to persuade their community stakeholders toward common goals, and in the pursuit of excellence to advance the diverse missions of the college.

**Jessica Pitstick** serves as a Program Chair and Assistant Professor for Supply Chain and Logistics at Ivy Tech Community College in Lafayette, Indiana. She also serves as the Statewide Program Chair for Supply Chain and Logistics. She earned her Master of Science in Business Administration degree from Indiana Wesleyan University, Marion, Indiana. Currently Jessica is pursuing her doctorate degree from Ferris State University in the Community College Leadership program.



## NATIONAL LEADER PERSPECTIVE

Today's community colleges continue to face significant challenges related to financial support on the local, state, and national levels, now further complicated by recent declines in public perception of the essential value of community colleges. As a result, it has become more imperative than ever before that community college leaders demonstrate a strong sense of urgency while focusing productive and comprehensive efforts on effectively advocating for their colleges. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders. Their answers appear below.

### **No Greater Odds: The Power of the "Student Story" in Community College Advocacy**

**James R. McCoy, MA**

Associate Vice President, Academic Affairs  
College of Southern Nevada  
Las Vegas, Nevada

Executive Producer and Co-Creator, Emmy-Nominated Film,  
*No Greater Odds*  
National Fellow, Complete College America

Do you remember when President Obama addressed the nation in 2010 and challenged American higher education practitioners to produce 8 million more college graduates by 2020? President Obama listed this as the single most important step we can take to ensure the nation succeeds in the 21st century. He went on to note that within the tapestry of higher education options, community colleges must play a vital role in helping people earn a credential of value. In fact, of the 8 million more college graduates needed by 2020, community colleges were asked to increase the number of associate degrees and certificates they award by 5 million, making these institutions responsible for over 60 percent of the graduates needed to reach the goal. With this in mind, it has become incumbent upon us as community college leaders to effectively advocate for our nation's community colleges, so they are perceived by stakeholders to be credible, first choice institutions of higher education.

Over the last few years, I have been passionately interested in how community colleges are perceived by various groups of people (high school students, parents of high school students, local, state and national policymakers, philanthropists, leaders of community organizations, and adults of all age groups) and how these perceptions are formed. I have wondered what factors contribute (or influence) different people's perceptions of who community colleges are, what their missions are, and what place they hold within the fabric of higher education in the United States. After all, if we are going to effectively advocate for our community colleges, we need to understand how perceptions of our community colleges are formed by a variety of audiences. We have seen that time and time again; media messaging and political commentary often weave a story (some accurate and some not so accurate) about the role community colleges play and how community colleges rank within the perceived pecking order of higher education institutions. I often wonder if the perceptions of how various people view community colleges are based on stereotype, media sensationalism, rumor, personal experience, political commentary, or some other means by which perceptions are formed.

As a community college leader and advocate, in 2015 I had an overwhelming desire to help tell the story of the community college. I had a dream of weaving together an inspiring narrative that authentically captured the real stories of the community college and the students who we serve. I knew if I wanted to connect with the heart and mind of an audience, I needed to incorporate the right blend of ethos, pathos and logos in the narrative. With this vision, *No Greater Odds* was born!

Told from the perspective of the students, their families, and the faculty, staff, and administrators who guided and inspired them along the way, this

#### QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

**What skills are needed for community college leaders to successfully advocate for their colleges and students today?**

**The power of the narrative in our advocacy of community colleges is an incredible medium that undoubtedly connects with diverse audiences.**

Emmy-nominated documentary underscores the mission of the community college and the students they serve. The film follows the inspirational stories of five community college students: Barbara, Carlos, Jaklin, Monique, and Tyrone. They each struggle with complicated family issues, financial difficulties, and other personal obstacles as they seek to better their lives and futures by experiencing their higher education at a community college.

As the film unfolds, the audience begins to see that each of the student cast member's stories is unique; and yet, theirs are the stories of millions of students who enroll in community colleges around the nation every year. There, they too can find strength, support, and success because of the care and concern of the faculty, staff, and administration at their community college.

Since its debut, *No Greater Odds* has reinforced both a positive position and perception of the community college, shedding light on the incredible impact that our people and programs have on our students. *No Greater Odds* is challenging misconceptions, igniting passion for higher education,

and inspiring audiences to understand and appreciate how community colleges lead the way with passion, purpose, and a charge to educate future generations of our local communities and of our nation.

*No Greater Odds* has been screened all over the nation at high schools, colleges, conferences, film festivals, and with

philanthropists, community leaders, and local and national lawmakers over the last few years. By focusing on the student story, *No Greater Odds* is helping to influence accurate perceptions and a positive reputation of community colleges in a time when the nation is looking to the future of affordable and accessible higher education for all people.

Storytelling works! The power of the narrative in our advocacy of community colleges is an incredible medium that undoubtedly connects with diverse audiences. I urge you to get out there and tell the story of your college and the stories of the students that you serve! This messaging will certainly lead to an increase in positive community college engagement in your community, and it just might help our nation reach our post-secondary completion goals.

To learn more about *No Greater Odds* and/or to schedule a screening in your community, please visit [www.nogreaterodds.com](http://www.nogreaterodds.com)

To view an extended trailer of *No Greater Odds*, please visit [www.vimeo.com/nogreaterodds](http://www.vimeo.com/nogreaterodds)

**James R. McCoy** is the Co-Creator and Executive Producer of the Emmy-nominated documentary, *No Greater Odds*. He currently serves as Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs at the College of Southern Nevada and is also a National Fellow for Complete College America. Since joining CSN in 2003, he has served as the Associate Vice President for Academic Success, as Chair and Lead Faculty for the Department of Communication, and is a tenured Communication Professor. His earlier work includes radio broadcasting and station program director. A highly sought-after national keynote speaker and presenter, James often talks about the important work that community colleges do in the United States. James had the opportunity to speak during the 2016 Democratic National Convention where he focused his remarks on the mission of community colleges and student success. He earned his MA in Communication from California State University, Fresno, and is currently pursuing a Doctorate in Community College Leadership at Ferris State University.





## QUICK TAKES Highlights from the Field

### **The Advocacy Toolkit** by the AACC

Effective community college advocacy is dependent upon active local, state, and national engagement, with AACC's national government relations efforts substantive and exhaustive in support of the sector. Yet, community college advocacy messages need to be transmitted locally from the college CEO to the stakeholders in a loud and persistent voice. These materials are designed to aid college leaders by breaking down the components of a successful institutional advocacy program.  
<https://bit.ly/2qLgdwdf>

### **Claiming Our Story** by Sue Cunningham

Cunningham, CASE President and CEO, notes that although the public perception of higher education is mixed today, education remains the key to tackling societal challenges. While evidence for the value and impact of education is clear to those working in the sector, it is imperative that we advocate to help close this understanding gap. Three key suggestions are offered for shaping the conversation on the importance of higher education.  
<https://bit.ly/2qBSnDE>



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)

## Advocates, Champions, and Governmental Relations (continued from page 1)

of our community," we know they know who we are. And, it makes all the difference.

### **It's Called Governmental Relations for a Reason.**

Community colleges differ in their funding formulas but are pretty much all the same in one key attribute: their budgets are built on governmental funds. Some of these dollars may be local (e.g., millage, county appropriations), some are state allocations (e.g., performance or enrollment based funding, capital allocations), and some are federal (e.g., student financial aid, grants). Presidents frequently see the advocacy for these funds as transactional: visiting an office during budget advocacy, offering policy testimony upon request. However, in my experience, effective governmental relations are built on longstanding relationships. Advocacy for community colleges is strengthened when these relationships are interconnected and purposeful, creating a coherent and cohesive multi-level network of champions. That is a mouthful, so let me provide an example.

Shortly after coming to MCC, I created a new division: Economic Development and Innovative Workforce Services (EDIWS). Under Vice President Dr. Todd Oldham, EDIWS combines credit and non-credit workforce education and grants. Over time, this division has also established a sophisticated labor market and workforce outcomes data capacity that assured programs were demand-driven and led to sustaining wage careers. By organizational design, MCC brought together a potentially powerful coalition of champions and advocates: employers, industry organizations, community-based agencies focused on employment, governmental agencies seeking outcomes data, school districts seeking opportunity for CTE for their students, and—of course—MCC graduates who connected education to employment.

**Advocacy for community colleges is strengthened when these relationships are interconnected and purposeful, creating a coherent and cohesive multi-level network of champions.**

Early on, the EDIWS division convened these stakeholders to understand, develop, and test responses to their needs. The division hosted dialogues; rebuilt advisory committees; conducted industry-based workforce surveys; and provided regional labor market information and workforce analyses. MCC collaborated with city, county, state, and federal offices seeking concrete data, research, and background information on skills gaps, workforce needs, private-public collaborations, and regional wages. Vice President Oldham and I shared the College's new workforce framework in meeting after meeting, presentation after presentation; we accepted every invitation to tell our story. The individuals in these rooms helped our message spread well beyond. MCC built a coalition of influencers who could and did support this increasingly important aspect of our mission. They advocated with us and for us because we had first listened, learned, and—then—acted not on our own, but together with these partners to find real, impactful solutions that improved the lives of our students and our community. We're still doing it.

The results speak for themselves. Over the past eight years, MCC has been awarded over \$20M in federal and state funding related to workforce education—plus

several million in private support solely for these programs. These funds have increased economic opportunity in our community in very real and well-documented ways. The College's innovative demand-driven approach to workforce development is a local, state, and national model. Former Vice President Joe Biden visited the College to tout our work, JPMorgan Chase cited MCC's data-centric model in its Skills at Work program, and last year, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo leveraged our model to drive state policy, observing that "the State does not currently have the data to map the workforce needs of New York's economy effectively. Monroe Community College currently utilizes an innovative data mining methodology to identify local workforce needs with more precision than BLS and Census data. The Director of Workforce Development will lead an initiative to take this methodology to scale, ensuring that all regions have access to the data needed to develop sector-based workforce development plans." All of this underscores that a college's successful governmental relations are grounded in real partnerships, real results, and real relationships.

**A commitment to building and sustaining effective governmental relations and advocacy is no longer optional for community college presidents; it is essential to the future of our institutions.**

A commitment to building and sustaining effective governmental relations and advocacy is no longer optional for community college presidents; it is essential to the future of our institutions. The success of community colleges is grounded in the ability to ensure access to affordable, high quality, transformational education for our students. Community college presidents cannot achieve this mission alone, nor should we imagine we have to do so. The communities inside and outside of our colleges are filled with potential champions: as leaders, we must value these advocates-in-waiting, build connections and understanding, so that their voices combine with ours to advance our institutions.

Since 2009, **Anne M. Kress** has served as president of Monroe Community College in Rochester, New York. She is proud to work and advocate for such an impactful, innovative, and inspiring college. Kress is particularly focused on the role MCC plays in assuring meaningful access to educational and economic opportunity in the region and MCC's nationally recognized leadership on issues central to community college student success. Kress currently serves as Co-Chair of the Finger Lakes Regional Economic Development Council, as a Trustee of the New York Power Authority, and on the Upstate Regional Advisory Board of the New York Federal Reserve Bank and the SUNY Research Foundation. Locally, she serves on the boards of the Greater Rochester Chamber, Greater Rochester Enterprise, and the Memorial Art Gallery. Nationally, Kress serves on boards, commissions, and councils for organizations including the League for Innovation in the Community College, the American Association of Community Colleges, the Community College Humanities Association, and the Council on Foreign Relations. Kress holds a doctorate in higher education administration from the University of Florida. In 2011, she was named a Woman of Distinction by the New York State Senate, and in 2012, she was named an outstanding alumna by the University of Florida's Institute of Higher Education.

