

# Perspectives

Community College Leadership for the 21st Century

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*If you are truly dedicated to racial justice in education, recognize that it is not for the faint of heart, not for the thin-skinned, and is not for those looking for easy and comfortable victories.*

- Tyrone C. Howard

*Our country must unite to combat and dismantle racism and discrimination in all its forms and denounce race-related violence, including police brutality. Enough is enough.*

- David Skorton & David Acosta

## Combating Systemic Racial Discrimination While Creating Real and Sustained Change: A Clarion Call for Community Colleges

**Beverly Walker-Griffea, PhD**

President  
Mott Community College  
Flint, Michigan

"I can't breathe" became the words that rekindled a movement. An incomprehensible act caught on video that has led to an uprising of anger and rage across the nation. Watching the video, I was once again appalled and disheartened that such disregard for humanity continues to rear its head in our country. At Mott Community College we value diversity, equity, and inclusion. Our Board of Trustees has set becoming the leader in DEI as the institution's highest priority to attain.

Our "Mott Strong" Strategic Brand is an emblem for the daily work that undergirds our belief that we exist to better the lives of those we serve. As we work together to ensure that our students succeed and our community is sustained, we have begun to examine our systemic barriers and biases. Never wanting to be blindsided, we are creating a community college environment that is not afraid to self-reflect and self-examine in order to create change that supports an inclusive region, state, and nation. The goal is to create systemic inclusiveness that ensures MCC's strategic vision, mission, priorities, and foundational beliefs are achieved through current policy, operations, and College actions.

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Many students on community college campuses cannot breathe as well. They are facing food insecurities, transportation deficiencies, homelessness, and insufficient childcare. Resources and familial support are nonexistent. Early on in my tenure as president of MCC, I found many students were working three part-time jobs while taking classes. Their bandwidth was nonexistent as they attempted college courses, believing that there was a better life to be lived. Their success so often is dependent on the College's recognition of that fragility and the systemic measures used to engage them as students.

Currently, community college students are experiencing new stressors and traumas that would have been thought unbelievable at the beginning of last year's fall opening of classes. The sudden change to a remote college experience in March was unfathomable and created confusion and high emotion as students tried to adjust to the new requirements of classes, loss of income, and school-age children learning at home. More students were facing food shortages,

couldn't pay their rent, and were considering dropping courses. I had the opportunity to observe some of MCC's remote courses and found students trying to learn in chaotic home environments with limited technology. I spoke with students fearful of taking face-to-face courses because of the risk of COVID-19, but also fearful of taking remote courses because they did not want to lower their GPA. The multitude of stressors surrounding the pandemic increased student anxiety exponentially and paralyzed some of them from completion.

*As community college leaders, we must have a clear vision that understands our foundational role as a trusted entity in our communities to support the creation of an equitable society.*

The pandemic also ushered a heightened awareness of the world around us. Suddenly all of our distractors were gone or diminished, and we saw a video that showed that racism, inequality, discrimination, and hate exist for Black and Brown Americans. The reality of seeing the many names and incidents that have occurred toward Black and Brown Americans through the years could not be ignored and individuals began to recognize systemic racial biases of oppression that create discrimination. Black and Brown students and employees' racial stress and trauma that had once been concealed was brought to the surface with raw and sometimes explosive emotion. During my Presidential Listening Tour sessions, I saw and heard the pain of employees from all races while tears were shed and pleas for equity were sought. Many in the sessions shared their desire for real and sustained change in a culture that has not been self-aware. Black and Brown employees discussed a determination for eliminating systemic racial and other biases students face that drive them from completing a credential.

As community college leaders, we must have a clear vision that understands our foundational role as a trusted entity in our communities to support the creation of an equitable society. We have received a clarion call to ensure that these senseless acts of devastation do not continue and to have a shared vision that treats all people with dignity, respect, and kindness. The unique role community colleges play in many communities can help move real change to occur. Community colleges provide the support systems, pathways, and partnerships to economic and social mobility through offering credentials that lead to high-wage opportunities. Discourse and debate in safe college spaces led by knowledgeable and skilled faculty can support understanding and challenge individuals to act. Statistics

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## EMERGING LEADER PERSPECTIVES

Presently, our community colleges are strategizing how best to host classes on campus again during this period of great uncertainty. In doing so, it has become clear that it is important to turn our focus to the pressing matter of racial unrest in our country and how community colleges might take the lead in promoting racial unity on campus and in the community. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders. Their answers appear below.

### QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

**How can community colleges help promote a campus culture of inclusion, safety, and racial harmony during these challenging times?**

#### Loyce Seals Brown, MS

Director of Employee Development/Equity and Title IX Coordinator  
Delta College  
University Center, Michigan

Leading through uncertainty is one of the most significant challenges leaders must face. The sudden impact of COVID-19 on our families, communities, and our nation has challenged us to rethink the way we live, work, and engage with our college community members. It seems that as we worked to develop strategies that could create and maintain safety for ourselves, families, and campuses, we were impacted by another virus...the virus of racial injustice.

The senseless murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor mobilized an uprising that took our nation by storm. The ripple effects of the response created waves of awareness and fear throughout our country. With newfound awareness and an outpouring of compassion, many of us stood in solidarity with our family, friends, and colleagues. For others, we stood in fear and concern for our lives and the lives of our loved ones. Still, four months later, the echoes of fear and hatred continue to swell across our country, leaving many of our students and staff concerned about their safety from known and unknown sources.

As leaders, it is our responsibility to ensure that we create and maintain inclusivity and safety on our campuses. The mission of the community college requires it of all leaders. We can begin this work by first clarifying our commitment to diversity and inclusion for our campus. We must remind our campus of the values in which community colleges were founded and our determination to uphold them daily. Hold forums in which all voices can be heard and validated. Vulnerability and authenticity can change lives in so many positive ways. As leaders, we must model tolerance and empathy in every interaction. Leaders set the tone and the expectations for behaviors.

**...[I]t is our responsibility to ensure that we create and maintain inclusivity and safety on our campuses.**

If, as leaders, we fail to engage ourselves and our community in social justice strategies, harm may come to our campus for our most vulnerable groups of students and employees. This failure would be counterproductive to our missions as the issues surrounding safety and inclusion are significant and encompassing for our campuses and communities. To be safe is to be included and valued. Inclusion and validation of all lives embody who we are as leaders of our nation's community colleges. Moreover, when we live in ways that promote social justice, we move closer towards inclusion.

We may not be able to predict the changes or eradication of the COVID virus. Nevertheless, we can inoculate ourselves and our campuses from the hatred and racial disharmony that continues to permeate our society. By intentionally embedding empathy into every facet of our relationships and work, we create a starting point by which we invest in a future where safety and inclusion become the norm for all.



Loyce Seals Brown, MS, serves as Director of Employee Development/Equity and Title IX Coordinator at Delta College. Her professional philosophy is that every workplace and institution of education should be diverse and inclusive to provide a solid foundation upon which to begin the building process of a great society for all citizens. She earned her MS from Florida State University and is enrolled in the Ferris State University DCCL program.

#### Leonor Calderon, MA

English and Humanities professor  
Lee College  
Baytown, Texas

This VUCA climate has brought about immediate and drastic changes, forcing staff, faculty, administrators, and constituents to make decisions that have and

will continue to unequivocally affect student success, welfare, and inclusion in countless ways. This moment in history will provide life-altering teachings and ideological experiences for current and future leaders. Furthermore, the one imperative certainty that should be recognized is that everyone in higher education is fighting for the literal survival of their most underrepresented population, low social-economic people of color.

Racism and microaggression will continue to reign havoc if the experiences of the voiceless and vulnerable go silenced or ignored. Institutional presidents and top-tier administrators must publicly acknowledge the experiences of their marginalized students and employees. Lee College's president, Dr. Villanueva, released a powerful statement in the Baytown Sun that resonated with countless. Her words addressed a history of exclusion and prejudice that exists within the community and campus's "own structures and policies," which were "shaped by the effects of structural racism." She is committed to changing the systematic exclusions and prejudices that lie hidden in the walls of the institution. Her vocalism led to the creation of the Equity and Anti-Racism Committee. This committee of diverse administrators, faculty, and staff have developed the campus's first equity plan. The goal is to collect data focused on the perception of the institution's commitment to equity and racism, race and ethnic gaps, and the implementation of curricula of inclusion.

Marginalized students have always required resilient frameworks that increase and support their success and commitment. Professors confront these contingent factors which consistently affect the success of these populations. However, the uncertainty of two global pandemics, COVID-19, and racial injustice, require pedagogical practices that deliver: normalcy, empathy, and belonging. The current climate should alter the role faculty plays in their students' academic and personal experiences — forever. They must ensure students know they are valued and belong in academia. Lee College instructors are working diligently to revise their curriculum to provide inclusion, equity, and social reform throughout various teaching modalities. Through innovative projects in cultural appreciation, community service, global empathy, and social awareness, they are implementing lessons that produce safe environments where students can explore and voice their experiences with these fatal factors: a pandemic and social injustice. Professors are obligated to remind students and the community that when we give voice to the voiceless, we empower everyone.

Even in a time of bleakness and uncertainty, countless marginalized citizens will turn to college because it guarantees one thing, the American Dream — a possible better future. Community colleges play a significant role in the social, political, and economic climate of America, and they can never forget that the success of underrepresented students impacts everyone.



Leonor Calderon, MA, serves as an English and Humanities professor at Lee College. Her teaching experience ranges from secondary to the collegiate level. She has sponsored organizations focused on teaching and learning about cultural appreciation and continues to involve herself with initiatives to eliminate inequality and racism. She earned her MA at Texas A&M International University and is currently a student in the DCCL program, Texas Cohort 2.

## NATIONAL LEADER PERSPECTIVE

Presently, our community colleges are strategizing how best to host classes on campus again during this period of great uncertainty. In doing so, it has become clear that it is important to turn our focus to the pressing matter of racial unrest in our country and how community colleges might take the lead in promoting racial unity on campus and in the community. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders. Their answers appear below.

### QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

**How can community colleges help promote a campus culture of inclusion, safety, and racial harmony during these challenging times?**

## Ensuring Racial Harmony at Community College Campuses

**Alford A. Young, Jr., PhD**

Associate Director of the Center for Social Solutions and Faculty Director of Scholar Engagement and Leadership for the National Center for Institutional Diversity  
The University of Michigan  
Ann Arbor, Michigan

I begin with a disclosure; I have never attended a community college nor have I ever taught in one. Indeed, my first exposure to public higher education of any sort was when I accepted a position on the faculty of the University of Michigan in 1996, where I have remained. Prior to beginning my career, I attended private higher educational institutions, Wesleyan University and then the University of Chicago.

However, I consistently think about community colleges and their students. I do so because I spend much of my time researching and teaching about the plight of African-American men. It is no surprise to anyone that these men are often at the bottom end of the distribution in terms of socioeconomic status and opportunity. Some of these men have garnered upward mobility through higher education. A portion did so by attending community college. The story about those men is more complicated than can be explained here. However, the simple point of the matter is that community college has been important for many African-American men, and many others, to pursue success. In each year between 2000 and 2017, between six and eight million people enrolled in these institutions (American Association of Community Colleges, 2018). Their purpose for being there is to move from disadvantage to possibility and promise. In short, community colleges serve people who are most at-risk but most desiring of achieving the American Dream.

***It is the responsibility of educators throughout the higher education system to partner with community colleges in pursuing this effort.***

During each year of the past two decades, no less than 40% and up to 70% of community college attendees throughout the country were students of color (American Association of Community Colleges, 2018). Taking regional differences in enrollment patterns into account, it remains that community colleges provide opportunities for white American students to interact with students of color in more sustained and consistent ways than is common for many students in American higher education. If America is going to improve in achieving racial harmony and mending the wounds produced by social difference, the social exposure and experiences engaged by community college students can serve as an important model for doing so.

This being the case, it is imperative for academic leaders and instructors in those institutions to cultivate and incorporate race and ethnic awareness throughout the curriculum. This is especially imperative for courses tailored to professional opportunities and trade-related skills. Students in these courses are learning the skills required for working in an increasingly complex business world — in skilled manufacturing, industrial, and technological labor sectors — that will draw from people of vastly different racial and ethnic backgrounds to fulfill their employment needs. Ultimately, these individuals will be working in a country that has a vastly changed demographic portrait over the next twenty years. America is projected to

reflect a “majority-minority” population by the middle of this century (Taylor, 2015). Therefore, learning how to work with people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds will be an essential for surviving in the world of work in the immediate future.

Those who participate in elite private education have the luxury of thinking that such change may not bear upon them as immediately. The fact of the matter is that elite circles in America will not as quickly reflect the kind of diversity unfolding in other spheres of America. Given the diversity already embedded in the community college system, it can best exemplify interracial efforts in the pursuit of mobility and attainment. The project of building racial harmony through education and extracurricular social interaction stands before all of American education, from preschool through graduate training. However, given its population base the community college occupies a unique place in this effort.

What, in particular, remains to be done? Courses involving professional skill building should have a deliberate emphasis on interracial team building and teamwork. Classroom instructors should also dedicate some time to exploring the history of the temporary circumstances of race and ethnic relations within the professional sectors that they are preparing their students to enter. Professional training should also be met with personal training and support that helps students to understand what challenges or obstacles they may face as being a part of a changing demographic presence in the sectors they desire to enter into.

It is the responsibility of educators throughout the higher education system to partner with community colleges in pursuing this effort. If we do so, I suspect that some of the most important students for learning about effective change will be the educators in these other higher educational sectors. That is because we will be afforded a unique opportunity to observe how preparation for change unfolds in frontline territory for such an effort: the community college.

### References:

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- Taylor, Paul. (2015). “The Next America: Boomers, Millennials, and the Looming Generational Showdown.” Washington, D.C.: Pew Charitable Center.

**Alford A. Young, Jr., PhD**, is the Arthur F. Thurnau Professor of Sociology, Afroamerican and African Studies, and the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy (by courtesy) at the University of Michigan. His primary area of research focuses on low-income African American men, particularly how they construct understandings of various aspects of social reality (i.e., notions of social mobility, social inequality, and social structure in American society, the constitution of good jobs and work opportunity in America, and what the constitution of fatherhood and successful family life).

Among other work, Young has published *The Minds of Marginalized Black Men: Making Sense of Mobility, Opportunity, and Future Life Chances* (Princeton University Press 2004) and *Are Black Men Doomed?* (Polity Press 2018), and *From the Edge of the Ghetto: African Americans and the World of Work* (Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2019). Young has also researched how African American scholars conceive of the social utility of race-focused scholarship, and how higher education faculty who are committed to advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion take account of their teaching experiences. He coordinates the Scholars Network on Masculinity and the Well-Being of African American Men, an assembly of scholars in the humanities, social sciences, and professional fields who aspire to influence social policy and broader public understanding of the condition of African American men.



## QUICK TAKES Highlights from the Field

### Speaking Truth and Acting with Integrity: Confronting Challenges of a Campus Racial Climate

by Adrianna Kezar and Sharon Fries-Britt

Given the resurgence of overt forms of racism in society over the past several years, race-related incidents are manifesting more frequently on college campuses, resulting in an increase in hate incidents, including displays of racist symbols and verbal and physical assaults. This report focuses on the University of Missouri system and lessons learned from the recovery from its 2015 racial crisis.

Access this work here: <https://bit.ly/3hmYKCG>

### Dismantling Racial Hierarchies, Building Equitable Communities

Edited by Tia Brown McNair

This AAC&U report on the first ten Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation (TRHT) Campus Centers created to address and resolve racial divisions at a number of select American colleges and universities presents outcomes at a moment when higher ed institutions are engaged in a challenging and painful national conversation about race and racism. The campus narratives of those first ten centers are featured.

Access this work here: <https://bit.ly/3ikLGI>

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### Racial Discrimination: A Clarion Call for Community Colleges (continued from page 1)

show, however, that our Black and Brown students are still facing academic and financial gaps that limit their prosperity.

What did Mott Community College do during the protests, the statements of anti-racism, removal of monuments, and facility name changes? How did we challenge ourselves to be better? How did we guarantee our College would uphold a declaration of systemic equity based on the words, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that everyone is created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness?" How would we ensure Mott Community College employees and students value humanity and treat each other with respect, fairness, civility, and joy?

At MCC we lead with the foundational beliefs of commitment, civility and compliance. We are committed to provide a welcoming culture for students; inform, guide and support students; develop academic and workforce pathways for students; and embrace partnerships that increase student success. The College's core value of civility is represented through respect, honesty, kindness, caring, support, helpfulness, and acceptance. But that has not been enough to ensure that systemic biases are eliminated within our institution. We also have had to commit to self-examine our institution to uncover the hidden and unconscious biases that are hindering students' and employees' success. It was time for the College's employees and students to push themselves and get uncomfortable to find the nexus of systemic biases and have the courage to confront and abate those discoveries. Mott Community College has accepted the challenge and will look for unimaginable solutions that will increase positive student success outcomes that transform lives.

Immediately before the pandemic began, an Inclusive Spaces Task Group was appointed that would recommend to the president best practices and strategies to support immediately, creating an inclusive and welcoming learning environment from a facilities and campus space perspective. Ironically, the group's presence was never felt more as we looked at reopening plans and had the opportunity to create more safe spaces that impact the health and wellness of students and employees.

I had the opportunity to go on a three-month weekly virtual Presidential Listening Tour that sought to actively listen and understand, and hear the stories, challenges, and experiences of staff, administrators, faculty, students, African Americans, People of Color, LGBTQ+, males and females. It was quite humbling and moving to hear their perspectives of how this moment in time was affecting them as an individual and an employee or student. The Listening Tour also created a forum for group members to provide me with recommendations to create sustained change and foster systemic inclusion.

A recommendation that was repeatedly suggested during the tour sessions was to offer opportunities to learn about other cultures from one another through discussion sessions. "Telling Our Stories" is a monthly event offered to MCC employees and students that can build more inclusive relationships through sharing personal stories to yield universal truths. Selected employees and students will share a moment, event, or experience that has defined them. The stories give the listeners an opportunity to learn more about each other and build more inclusive rather than transactional relationships.

The MCC Council has been created and will start meeting during the fall semester to promote systemic inclusiveness and ensure that the College's strategic vision, mission, priorities, and foundational beliefs are achieved through

current policy, operations, and College actions. Members will listen and act upon College-wide concerns, facilitate dialog and give voice to constituent groups, and forward recommendations to the president designed to strengthen the Institution's commitment to inclusiveness.

The Board of Trustees is seeking to pass policy during the fall semester that will change immensely how Mott Community College students and employees will train, learn, and work with others different from themselves. The BOT is seeking to require Trustees, employees, and students to take annual College-sponsored DEI and Title IX trainings.

*We understand that we are not just our brothers' and sisters' keepers in this community. We ARE our community.*

MCC is bridging the digital divide by offering faculty stipends to train on innovative concepts for teaching remotely and provided reimbursements for technology equipment requirements that would enhance their instructional capabilities. Students were provided Chromebooks and hotspots to ensure they had technology that supports class success.

Students are also assigned to success teams that will provide wraparound support for academic, career, and personal needs. Teams consist of interdisciplinary staff and faculty led by student success coaches. The teams create community and give new perspectives to decision making and developing critical core values.

MCC is strategically working toward having a campus where all individuals are treated fairly, respectfully, and have equal access to the highest standards of advocacy, opportunities, and resources. We understand that we are not just our brothers' and sisters' keepers in this community. We ARE our community.

*Dr. Beverly Walker-Griffea became the seventh president of Mott Community College (Flint, Michigan) in August 2014. MCC has a legacy of student success and academic excellence and has been recognized by the Aspen Institute's College Excellence Program as one of America's top community colleges for high achievement and performance four times during her tenure. Dr. Beverly, as she prefers to be called, has been a long-time advocate for student success, serving community college students in various capacities for more than 30 years. Dr. Beverly is the first female and first African American president in MCC's history, and is committed to academic excellence, student access and success, dynamic industry partnerships, and significantly impacting local economies.*



*Since joining MCC, Dr. Beverly has worked together with faculty, staff, administrators, and students to chart the college's preferred future which is "Mott Strong." Together, MCC has established new programming, created structured student completion pathways, reduced potential enrollment and retention barriers, revamped the College website, improved and remodeled facilities, created new and innovative funding streams, and continues to foster a safe and healthy college environment. She has served nationally as the President for the American Association for Women in Community Colleges and as a member of the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) Board of Directors, as chair and co-chair of several AACC Commissions, and on numerous local Boards and organizations. A native of Tulsa, Oklahoma, she holds a PhD from Texas Woman's University in Denton, Texas, and a MEd from Virginia State University in Petersburg, Virginia.*