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OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 24 • VOL. 95 • ISSUE 2



MAKING CONNECTIONS

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Adjusting social media
strategies to keep up with
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Building bridges to the future

BY SUNNY COOKE

As community colleges, we play a vital role in the educational landscape of the United States. We serve as gateways to higher education and careers, especially for students from underrepresented groups, non-traditional learners and those looking to upskill or transition into new professions. When supported by federal, state and local investments, the work of our colleges is amplified, and the impact is magnified.

Federal grants can bring together likely (and unlikely) partners around a common focus. In the case of MiraCosta College, these opportunities have allowed us to partner with local universities to recruit underserved populations into science. It's also allowed us to recruit businesses and municipalities to provide paid internships through support for student stipends or wages. Finally, we've also partnered with other community colleges across California to coordinate training programs within crucial industry sectors across our state(s), such as biotechnology, life sciences and STEM. These efforts enable community colleges to deliver outcomes across traditional boundaries and expand their impact.

Several years ago, the National Science Foundation (NSF) invested in community colleges, helping other community colleges through Mentor-Connect and the community college president's initiative to make community colleges more competitive at competing for and obtaining these

valuable NSF grants. This has been a very successful model in helping community colleges obtain initial NSF grants to attract many into STEM fields and diversify our STEM workforce.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) has funded programs that create Bridges to the Baccalaureate for community college students in STEM, partnering with prestigious universities like the University of California, San Diego (UCSD), and California State University, San Marcos. These programs support underrepresented students transitioning smoothly to four-year institutions and pursuing biomedical research careers. Beyond financial aid, they offer research opportunities and mentorship, equipping students with the skills to thrive in competitive fields. UCSD's NIH-funded STARTneuro program similarly supports community college transfer students in neuroscience, underscoring our commitment to diversity in science.

In addition to NIH funding, we've secured over \$5 million through the California Apprenticeship Initiative for bioscience, biotechnology, food safety and advanced cell and gene therapies programs.

The Bioscience Workforce Development Hub at MiraCosta College is at the core of these efforts. This Hub is dedicated to aligning our training programs with the needs of the bioscience industry and providing experiential learning opportunities to help our students develop technical skills and thrive in diverse work environments. Through partnerships with around 40 college bioscience programs across California, dual enrollment and articulated programs with high schools, we're building a pipeline of talent ready to contribute to the bioscience industry. These efforts don't just help individual students succeed—they also contribute to the broader economic health of our state.

The Small Business Administration (SBA) supports entrepreneurs through regional Small Business Development Centers, many of which are on college campuses. At MiraCosta College, we're also proud to host a Veterans Business Outreach Center, which tailors SBA services to veterans, helping them start or grow their businesses and connecting them with our entrepreneurship programs.

Federal grants are more than just financial support—they reflect the trust placed in us to fulfill our mission. They also position community colleges at the forefront of inclusive economic development. We're deeply grateful for the continued support from federal agencies. We're excited about the inclusive, innovative future we're building together. By investing in our students today, we invest in the future of our workforce, industries and society.

Dr. Sunny Cooke is president of MiraCosta College in Oceanside, California, and chair of the AACC Board of Directors.

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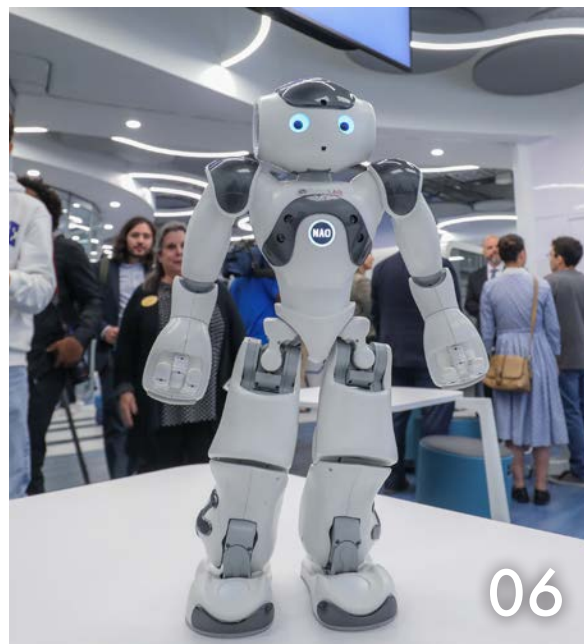
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Community College Daily/ccdaily.com

- More high school grads are enrolling and persisting in college
- Success coaching helps boost student retention
- Why community colleges are a top option for the teacher pipeline



21st Century Center/aacc21stcenturycenter.org

- Florida college helps students overcome math anxiety
- Providing successful transitions for students with disabilities



ON THE COVER

Students at Las Positas College in Livermore, California.
// RON ESSEX PHOTOGRAPHY

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Fall enrollment numbers up

BY AACC STAFF

More students headed back to school this fall, as evidenced by rising fall enrollment numbers at many community colleges.

Big booms

Though final fall numbers weren't available as of Sept. 15, some colleges say they are experiencing their highest enrollment growth in years.

On average, Oregon's community colleges saw a 5.7% increase in enrollment from fall 2023 to fall 2024. But Rogue Community College (RCC) reported an 18.9% increase in full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment from fall 2023 to fall 2024. And enrollment for fall 2024 is still underway.

College officials report the increase is due to "the college's recruitment initiatives, strong community support and commitment to high-quality education," according to a press release.

At the Alamo Colleges District in Texas, preliminary records indicate enrollment is up 13.7% over last year, with 77,191 students. More than half those students (37,097) are continuing students. In fact, continuing student enrollment increased by more than 11%.

The district also is welcoming 6,700 new AlamoPROMISE Scholars. And dual-credit enrollment in the district is up by nearly 17%, to 16,518 students.

The role of dual enrollment

Across Alabama, higher education institutions are seeing increasing enrollment numbers, but growth is particularly high at the state's community colleges—an average of 7.3%, according to preliminary data released by the Alabama Commission on Higher Education (ACHE). Undergraduate growth at four-year universities averaged 2.6%.

The enrollment increase was due, in large part, to dual enrollment.

For example, Coastal Alabama Community College's overall undergraduate enrollment went from 6,786 to 7,744 students, a 14.1% jump. The college had a 32.8% boost in dual enrollment, an increase of 666 students.

Another example: Beville State Community College's overall enrollment edged up by 12.7%, from 3,856 to 4,344 students. Dual enrollment at the college increased by 25.7%, from 1,783 to 2,184 students. That increase means that dual enrollment

comprises half (50.3%) of the college's total enrollment.

Dual enrollment also contributed to enrollment increases at North Carolina's Alamance Community College (ACC). The student population rose by 13.7% over this time last year, standing at 4,705 as of August 26, compared to 4,139 on the same date in 2023.

The number of high school students taking free Career and College Promise (CCP) credit courses increased by 9.9% over last year, bringing CCP enrollment to 1,496. Additionally, the FTE numbers for CCP students went up 2.5%.

Of the enrollment increases, ACC President Ken Ingle said, "It's been a total group effort on the part of our faculty, staff, advisors, and marketing efforts to let our current and prospective students know we are here for them."

Statewide numbers

Other states are seeing similar enrollment increases.

The Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) announced a 9.3% enrollment increase for fall 2024. Total enrollment across the 22 technical colleges in the system has risen to 148,746 students. This is the highest number of students enrolled at TCSG since 2013.

All of Georgia's technical colleges as well as 23 University System of Georgia institutions are participating in the

Georgia Match program, where letters are sent to high school seniors urging them to apply for admission.

The program sent 132,000 letters promising high school seniors admission based on their grades and a streamlined application. All Georgia high school graduates are eligible to apply to a technical college, and the letters indicate which state colleges and universities a student is eligible for.

Applications to technical colleges rose 26%, while those to public universities and colleges rose 10%.

And in Maine, early fall enrollment is up 9% at the state's community colleges, putting the seven colleges on track for another historic high enrollment this year.

Enrollment is up, in part, thanks to a free college scholarship that covers 100% of tuition and mandatory fees for recent high school graduates. The scholarship, which started in fall 2022, was intended to re-engage people whose high school and early college experience was disrupted by Covid.

Other enrollment increase factors include a boost to the number of high school students taking early college courses, expanded hours with more nights and weekend classes, and increased capacity in popular academic programs that traditionally had waiting lists, according to a press release from the Maine Community College System.

The colleges also are seeing more returning and continuing students from last year's record-breaking fall enrollment of 19,477 students.

More good news

Lake Area Technical College's (LATC's) student body grew by 6.1% for the 2024 fall semester, topping the former high set in 2018. The South Dakota college's fall semester enrollment stands at 2,312. The incoming student population grew 13.9% and high school dual - credit enrollment rose to an all-time high of 495.

A few states over in Michigan, Grand Rapids Community College's fall 2024 enrollment has increased 2.1% over the previous year—and that number is expected to grow as students continue to sign up for classes.

The college also saw nearly 11% growth in the numbers of Hispanic/Latino and 3% growth in Black/African American students.

In Illinois, Lake Land College saw a five-year high in fall enrollment. According to the college's official 10th-day enrollment report, the total number of students attending this fall is up 7% over last year's count, with 3,960 students enrolled.

Additional highlights of the report include a nearly 20% increase in new students and growth in both dual - credit and certificate program enrollment, which both increased by about 8%.

Final fall enrollment numbers will be available in October. For that data, check out ccdaily.com. ■



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Creative partnerships built through ATE

BY MADELINE PATTON

Miami Dade College's two AI centers are open to students, faculty, staff, and the community.



On the Web

Approximately \$69 million will be available for new ATE awards during the 2025 fiscal year and another \$5 million will be available for continuing awards that will be made to proposals that were submitted by October 3, 2024. Going forward, ATE proposals will be due the first Thursday in October. Experienced ATE principal investigators suggest two-year college faculty start working with partners nine to 12 months in advance of this deadline to refine their ideas for improving the education of the skilled technical workforce. See the program solicitation (NSF 24-584) at <https://www.nsf.gov>.

Partnerships with industry and academic institutions are required for Advanced Technological Education (ATE) grants. But how recipients of these National Science Foundation awards form and utilize partnerships is not prescribed. Consequently, the two-year college educators who have leadership roles in ATE grants can be quite creative. Here are some examples.

Helping veterans enter the nanotech workforce quickly

Outcomes from the four community college-university pairs that participated in the Microelectronics and Nanomanufacturing Veterans Partnership (MNVP) were so promising after three semesters that Penn State University added three more pairs of institutions. They began offering the intense 12-week hybrid nanotechnician education program to veterans and veterans' dependents this fall.

Penn State's Center for Nanotechnology Education and Utilization

provides the two-hour live lectures virtually Monday through Friday for 12 weeks. Each community college and university pair works out where participants view the lectures, how they get to the university, what hands-on lessons they do in the cleanrooms, and the types of academic support that community college instructors provide outside the labs.

In Arizona, Rio Salado College has enjoyed strong enrollment in the certificate program it offers with Arizona State University, which provides the space and instructors for the labs.

"ASU has been a tremendous partner ... But we were partners with ASU well before this [the MNVP] ever came into existence, and I think that's why we have a little bit of a leg up," said Rick Vaughn, chair of STEM Initiatives at Rio Salado and occasional instructor of nanotech and other subjects. He also praised the work of Jessica Arroyo, the student success coach he calls "a rock star" at recruiting veterans and helping them find jobs.

Arroyo has developed partnerships with the veterans' services offices at all 10 Maricopa Community Colleges and KJZZ, the community college district's National Public Radio station. Wide brochure distribution, lots of one-on-one encouragement from Arroyo and veteran services personnel, and radio announcements yielded so many applicants that Rio Salado's fall 2024

cohort has 13 students and 24 will start in January 2024.

When she began work in 2023, Arroyo focused on introducing herself and the program to micro- and nanotechnology employers in the region. Some were officially partners of the project, but everyone was still figuring out how they fit in. “The industry partner wants to be engaged, but they’re not going to offer. They’re going to wait for you to invite them,” she said.

In spring 2024, she asked five companies to conduct mock interviews with the six veterans then in the program. “I really wanted to put the participants through an interview without any repercussions ... I wanted the employer to really tell the candidate, ‘Your resume is good,’ or ‘Here’s what you need to change.’ And so I wanted that specific personal feedback for the participant so they understood how to go forward.” With resumes truly polished by the end of the semester, four students were hired by companies involved in the mock interviews. Another participant had a nanotech job by midsummer.

Reaching out to tribal college educators

Key deliverables of the Environmental and Natural Resources Technology (EARTH) Center at Central Carolina Community College are the augmented virtual reality (AVR) simulations its team creates to teach hazardous waste site safety and about expensive personal protective equipment in a low-stakes environment.

Another aspect of the center is the professional development it offers for tribal college educators. This outreach builds on relationships initiated by the Advanced Technology Environmental Education Center (ATEEC), a previously funded ATE center, and the National Partnership for Environmental Technology Education (PETE), an affiliated council of the American Association of Community Colleges.

In May, EARTH Center leaders convened a summit with 12 tribal college educators and a tribal community elder at Saginaw Chippewa Tribal College (SCTC) to gather their insights for a best practices guide.

Sharyl A. Majorski, EARTH’s Tribal College consultant and an adjunct instructor at SCTC, moderated discussions among tribal college educators with whom she has developed relationships as part of her previous outreach work for ATEEC and PETE.

“The key to sustaining partnerships is respect. Often, people come in with good ideas for improvement, however, they do not include the people they are wanting to help, until last minute. True respect values the people from the very beginning of a concept and listens to what they have to say throughout. Communication begins with listening to concerns and listening to what is needed, not in coming in with what is perceived,” she wrote in an email.

The summit participants also recommended that EARTH’s weeklong Fellows Institute for Tribal Faculty in June 2025 on Beaver Island, Mich., focus on water quality issues, the impact of climate change in tribal lands, and what environmental jobs are available in tribal communities.

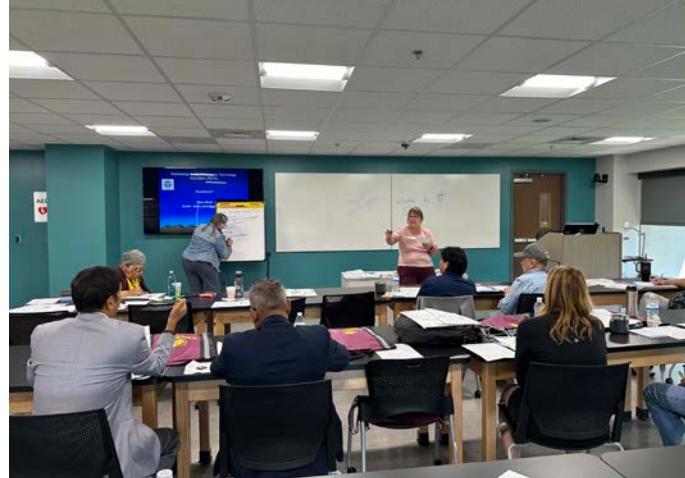
Launching artificial intelligence programs

The new National Applied Artificial Intelligence (AI) Consortium utilizes an especially democratic approach. It was funded in August with a grant to Miami Dade College (MDC). However, Principal Investigator Eduardo Salcedo says the consortium will be an equal partnership between Miami Dade, Houston Community College, and the Maricopa County Community College District.

Usually when multiple institutions have partnered on ATE center grants, one faculty member at the host institution is in charge. Salcedo, an assistant professor of technology at MDC, would usually be that person. But, he said, “We are equal partners ... I think it’s important that we know that everybody has an equal stake.”

As “pioneers” of AI degree programs at community colleges, faculty from the three colleges are ready to share what they have learned about how to launch AI programs.

The new consortium also taps the expertise of the three colleges’ tech



giant partners for its Business Industry Leadership Team (BILT). This management model, which was developed by the National Convergence Technology Center—a formerly funded ATE center—has industry representatives identify the knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) that are most important for AI technicians to know. To keep up with the rapidly changing technology, the consortium’s BILT members will meet three times a year to review the KSAs and vote on which KSAs to include in the curriculum the consortium develops and disseminates.

In 2026 and 2027 the consortium will provide mentoring and other assistance to help 10 community colleges launch AI programs. ■

Madeline Patton is a writer based in Ohio.

Top photo: Sharyl A. Majorski, EARTH’s Tribal College consultant, facilitates discussions with tribal college educators. Lower photo: Military veterans participating in MNVP at Georgia Piedmont Technical College learn semiconductor fabrication processes in Georgia Tech’s cleanroom.

The American Association of Community Colleges, with the support of the National Science Foundation, will host the 2024 ATE Principal Investigators’ Conference in Washington, D.C., October 23-25.

MAKING CONNECTIONS THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

Colleges continue readjusting strategies to keep up with students' preferences, sensibilities

BY ED FINKEL







ocial media has been part of community colleges' communications strategies for 15 or 20 years. But whether they're trying to reach prospective students or stay in touch with current matriculants, the rapidly changing nature of these media—driven by new channels and changing tastes—requires marketing communications executives and their staff to stay nimble.

One case is Northwest Arkansas Community College (NWACC) in Bentonville, which recently launched a rebranding effort with social media front-and-center as part of its work. Others include Las Positas College in Livermore, California, which has been focused on telling authentic student stories since marketing efforts have been pushed down from the district level; and Skagit Valley College in northwest Washington state, which has invested recently in TikTok, combining serious and silly content, and earning national recognition for its efforts.

The Brand at NWACC

At the outset, the NWACC effort launched into market research to determine what the rebrand should encompass. To do so, the college used social media to both raise awareness

and push out a survey to students, faculty, staff and community members through various channels to gain insights and preferences. About 2,000 responded, which the survey consultants whom NWACC hired said was a strong result, according to Aaron Messer, digital marketing specialist.

As the date for the relaunch approached, the college kept it quiet until about two weeks beforehand and then “lit a match again,” Messer says. “We put a post out and ended up dropping short-form video content on the day of the rollout, pushing the new branding. With that, we transitioned most of our main accounts to the new branding right away.” The department-by-department transition soon followed, he says.

Although the look and feel of the social media channels has not radically changed as a result of the rebranding, NWACC has made “tweaks” to which channels it uses and how, based on the survey feedback, leaning more into short-form video content than it has in the past, Messer says.

“We got a lot of good feedback, and we’re using different channels to target people differently,” he says. “As we continue to grow the department, we are focused on getting more short-form video content out. ... For the ads, one of the videos we used was a testimonial of a first-generation parent, still fairly young, just being able to draw in a lot of

people who have the possibility to relate to her. That’s what we are going for: someone being able to picture themselves in that student’s shoes.”

To micro-target messages to different audiences, NWACC uses Facebook primarily for parents, a combination of Facebook and Instagram for older “nontraditional” students, Instagram and TikTok for college-age students, and LinkedIn for alumni, Messer says.

For both cohorts of students, “Instagram is easily the biggest, based on the metrics I’m seeing

Northwest Arkansas Community College uses different messages and platforms to reach different audiences. //NWACC



daily, weekly, monthly,” he says. “Copy-wise, it’s mostly going to be the same.”

Regarding alumni on LinkedIn, he adds, “People want to know what’s happenings at the schools they went to. There are a lot of community members on LinkedIn. Anytime there’s community events, or community classes, that gets pushed out on there.”

NWACC uses paid media to reach prospective students—using a combination of Instagram, Facebook, TikTok and YouTube—resuming its campaigning in mid-summer, after a short pause as the rebranding was salted into place, to prompt enrollment before the fall semester started Messer says. “And then to keep them engaged, we try to post consistently,” he says. “We have a lot of things going on in the college. During the school year, we post pretty much daily. There’s a lot of content that can be pushed out organically.”

While TikTok is officially banned on state-owned devices and computers in Arkansas, educational institutions are not covered by that prohibition, and NWACC had an additional “in” given that its chief of staff and executive director of communications, Grant Hodges, is also a state representative, Messer notes.

“We called the governor’s office and got verbal approval to use it,” he says, adding that in any case, all community colleges, because they’re educational, are opted out. “We are definitely trying to post more and more on it. We had a position that had been open for a while for a videographer. Now that that’s full, we’re trying to push out more [TikTok] content.”

Local authenticity at Las Positas

At Las Positas, all marketing had been handled by the Chabot Las Positas Community College District until a couple years ago, when new positions were created both at Chabot Community College and Las Positas, says Chip Woerner, director of marketing at the latter.

“We have a concentrated team of one, at the moment,” he says. “What we’ve done is gotten the students involved. We’ve formed focus groups, gotten them together and had them review previous content. They’ve suggested new approaches and talked about different channels.”

The overall focus has been centered around “up-leveling” the quality and frequency of the social media content, from what had been mostly focused on static flyers posted on an ad-hoc basis, Woerner says. “Now, we have a social marketing calendar, and we mix up our types of content, making it much more dynamic with a lot more video, and a lot more content that features students and is student-produced,” he says. “We’ve increased our audience size and engagement levels [by about 2½ times]. But we’re at the early stages.”

While attending higher-education marketing-related conferences, Woerner has learned that other colleges have

Faculty lean into social media to varying degrees

Community college faculty make use of different social media channels as they see fit (and as often as they see fit) to promote their classes or other activities, according to marketing and social media staff who work with them or help promote their content.

At Northwest Arkansas Community College, a large number of departments and programs have their own social media pages, mostly on Facebook and Instagram, while the counseling center posts on TikTok, says Aaron Messer, digital marketing specialist.

“Some of them are able to post a couple times a week; some of them, a little less often,” he says. “That’s how they’re able to reach kids in their programs as well as trying to do organic content and ads,” including an ad that ran for one of NWACC’s departments in the health field in late spring.

Faculty who would like to post only work directly with Messer when they are looking to create a new social media account—he creates it and sets an initial password—as well as when the person managing a given account leaves the college and a new person needs to take it over, he says.

Chip Woerner, director of marketing at Las Positas College, often gets involved in a more hands-on way when faculty would like to post, which they do on various channels but most often on the college’s Instagram channel.

“Often times, an instructor or professor will say, ‘I’d love to promote this particular class or this offering’ he says. “I’ll typically meet with them and we’ll produce a video. Whenever possible, we’ll include a student who’s familiar with the class. They usually will either reach out and say, ‘I have this idea, can you help?’ Other times, they’ll produce some content. ... It’s ready to go. Ones I’ve worked with in the past will say, ‘Can we include this, or do a collaboration?’”

Feedback from students indicates that they would like to see a nice mix of content coming from their professors and adjunct faculty, Woerner says. “It shouldn’t be all focused on, ‘We have openings in this class,’ or promoting a certain program,” he says. “They also want to learn more about individual students’ experiences [in a class], and what their plans are, once they get their associate’s degree.”

Faculty at Skagit Valley College mostly become involved on LinkedIn, and their frequency of posting varies widely, says Sofie Poulton, communications and social media manager. “Certain faculty are very involved,” she says. “One art professor has about 30,000 followers. He makes TikToks about what it’s like to be a professor.”

Some faculty are very adept at social media, and Skagit Valley College has been trying to lay some groundwork to help those who haven’t delved into it as deeply get more up to speed says Marisa Pierce, executive director of strategic marketing and communications. “We’ve issued a social media policy that has good stuff in there, so we can help make sure faculty and everyone else is on a consistent page, on the social media front, going forward,” she says. “We’re excited about that.”





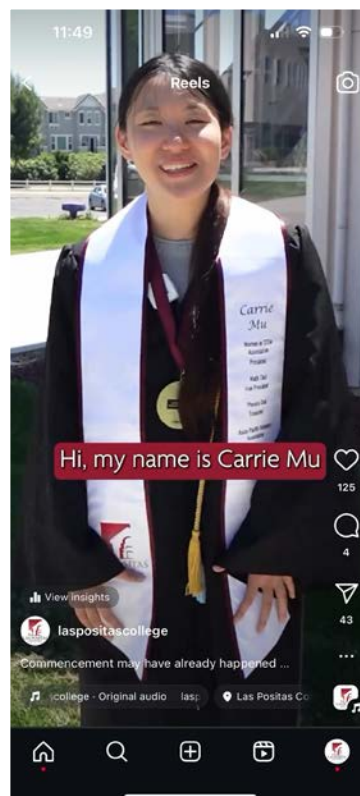
Las Positas Community College works to tell authentic stories of students. //RON ESSEX PHOTOGRAPHY / LAS POSITAS

dedicated social media teams, with a separate person on each platform, such as Facebook, Instagram or TikTok. “They’re much further ahead than we are,” he says. “This year, we’re making a concentrated effort to increase our audience further.”

Las Positas has focused on Instagram first and foremost, Facebook a decent amount and LinkedIn just a bit, and more for community outreach, Woerner says, adding that the college hasn’t created a TikTok but that it’s fully legal in California. Las Positas promotes its social channels to current students during various events on campus, as well as to prospective students during tours and open-house events.

Primarily, Las Positas has worked to tell authentic stories of students, Woerner says. “It’s having students talk about their experiences,” he says. “We’ve seen engagement levels five times higher than if we have somebody else from the college singing its praises and saying, ‘We have great programs.’ If a student says, ‘I absolutely love my anthropology instructor for these reasons, it’s the best class I’ve ever taken,’ we get much higher engagement levels.”

Woerner and his cadre of students have created a series called, “Tour LPC With Me,” in which students walk around campus and talk about new and existing buildings, including where they like to study, play or eat the most. “We’ve seen super-high engagement on that series,” he says. “We will still occasionally post a flyer. But whenever we can, we want to



post video content and feature students in that content.”

The students who have gotten involved are mostly volunteers, some of them helping to promote their own groups on campus, although work-study students are also part of the mix, Woerner says.

“At the student life center, there’s a student who’s very social-media savvy; she does a work-study program with that facility,” he says. “Occasionally she will lend her help. It’s mainly volunteer students who just have an interest. Student government is very active and very helpful in terms of generating content. I will reach out to student government and say, ‘I would love to highlight a student resource fair coming up. Can you produce a

30- to 45-second video?’ And not provide a script—just have them do it naturally, organically.”

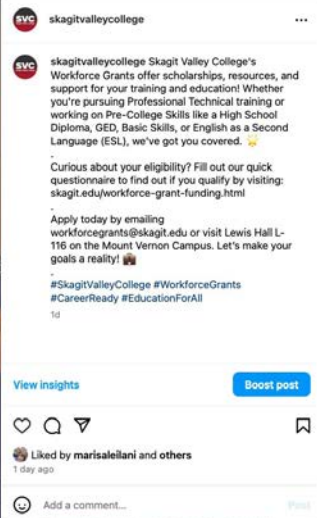
After such spots run, Woerner will circle back to his focus groups to gather students together and review content. “What did you find engaging? What missed the mark?” he says. “We get some really useful information from those sessions.”

Serious, silly and award-winning

Skagit Valley College, which has campuses in Mount Vernon and Oak Harbor (on Whidbey Island, in Puget Sound), heavily uses Facebook and Instagram, including the Reels function, and the college started on TikTok last year, says Sofie Poulton, communications and social media manager. The college still uses X (formerly Twitter) but not as much as in the past.

“The college is on all of those channels,” she says. “We do a diverse amount of content for different platforms, highlighting different programs, student stories and spotlights, and we show testimonials about the college. We’re also doing silly things like keeping up with TikTok trends. Gen Z is in the comment section the most when we’re doing silly dances on TikTok. We’re not afraid to be goofy on the internet, even though we’re an institution.”

Goofy or otherwise, Skagit Valley’s efforts have earned a couple of awards from the National Council for Marketing and Public Relations. At the national level, the college won a bronze for a post about a student who 3-D printed a prosthetic hand for a young boy in the community, and another bronze for video content for a holiday-related spot, which Poulton credits to a videographer on the team who has “mad skills.”



NCMPR awarded Skagit Valley College a silver award for its Instagram page. // SKAGIT VALLEY COLLEGE

At the district conference of NCMPR, encompassing several northwestern U.S. states and Canadian provinces, Skagit Valley took home a silver award for its overall Instagram page as well as a bronze for a post profiling a particular student on the campus, she says.

On the paid side, Skagit Valley is using Instagram, YouTube and Facebook, and leaning heavily into streaming video, says Marisa Pierce, executive director of strategic marketing and communications. “We’re pushing out similar content, but more defined than silly stuff,” she says. “It’s small bits, like student stories—nothing longform. Most everything we’re doing is video; almost nothing is static. That, we’ve seen, has the most engagement.”

“The big thing for me was analyzing [the viewership numbers],” Poulton adds. “We look at social and see how the platforms are doing, and what posts do well. We figured out video is doing better. We’re shifting toward video content on Instagram.”

Pierce says the college has shifted to TikTok for ads aimed at the high-school audience, for its Running Start dual enrollment program. “That’s an area of priority for the college,”

she says. “We’ve seen the enrollment increase. We’re going to continue that this year and planning to dedicate a lot of resources to that.”

Skagit Valley also plans to target ads for Running Start to websites for local high schools’ athletic programs, where students and their families can go and watch themselves and their peers play sports. In years past, such advertising typically was not allowed, but that’s changed, Pierce says.

The college still maintains a presence on Facebook, especially for certain types of technology programs, because that’s where older “non-traditional” students tend to still visit, Pierce says. “But we’re definitely shifting resources onto new social spaces where we haven’t been before,” such as TikTok, she says.

And to date, Washington state continues to allow the use of TikTok. “I’ve been biting my nails thinking [a ban] was going to happen, but it hasn’t,” Poulton says. ■

Ed Finkel is an education writer based in Illinois.



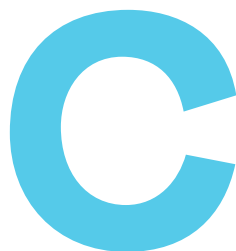
TAPPING INTO FEDERAL RESOURCES

How colleges can team with government
agencies to meet their goals

BY DENNIS PIERCE







Community college leaders know the value of partnerships. They regularly forge strong relationships with local businesses and nonprofit organizations to support the needs of their communities.

But help doesn't just exist locally. It also resides in Washington, D.C., and in satellite offices run by the U.S. government.

Federal agencies such as the U.S. Census Bureau, the Small Business Administration, and the Labor and Agriculture Departments are powerful allies of community colleges. They offer numerous grants, tools and other programs to help institutions fulfill their mission.

Some of these resources are widely known. But others might be flying under the radar.

As community colleges seek to understand the needs of their stakeholders and build programs and curricula that aptly respond to these demands, here's how they can leverage the work of federal agencies more effectively.

Census Bureau

Most people associate the Census Bureau with administering the national census that counts the U.S. population every 10 years, the results of which affect the nation's political representation and the distribution of trillions of dollars in federal funding.

But the Census Bureau also conducts surveys on virtually every aspect of U.S. life. It produces data about the American people and economy that are invaluable to the efforts of community colleges.

"Our work is critical to helping the public better understand our country—its population, resources, economy, society and culture," said Director Robert L. Santos. "For example, a community college might use Census Bureau data to apply for grants, offer courses and training that align with jobs in its local area, or better understand the demographics of prospective students so that programs can be tailored to meet student needs."

Census Bureau data also can be used to expand student enrollment or even attract partnerships with local businesses and industries, Santos said.

Surveys that have proven useful to community colleges include the American Community Survey, which provides a treasure trove of socioeconomic data; the Current Population Survey, which tracks unemployment and wages; and the Economic Census and Annual Business Survey, which measure business-owner demographics.

The Census Bureau offers many data visualizations as well. For instance, the Census Business Builder combines local economic and demographic data to present a complete picture of a state, county, city, or neighborhood. And the Post-Secondary Employment Outcomes Explorer shows earnings and employment outcomes for college and university graduates by

characteristics such as degree level and major. Among other applications, community colleges can use this tool to help students choose a possible career path.

"If you're thinking about majoring in accounting, for example, you can see what kinds of jobs and what salaries other students who majored in accounting have one, five, and 10 years after graduation," Santos explained. "That can give you a sense of whether it's the right major for you."

The Census Bureau also provides special services to help community colleges understand the data available to address their particular needs and challenges.

"Our data dissemination specialists can provide one-on-one and group trainings—in person or virtually—on what data are available and how to efficiently access this information," Santos said. "We also have tutorials that provide step-by-step instructions on how to access and utilize our data, and our locally based Census Information Centers and State Data Centers have staff ready to help with [colleges'] data needs."

Santos, who began his professional journey by attending a community college himself—San Antonio College—noted that Census Bureau data can help institutions develop a diverse, next-generation workforce. He encouraged community college leaders to sign up for the agency's partner newsletters to receive regular updates at public.govdelivery.com; reach out to their respective census regional office; or email census.partners@census.gov to explore further partnership opportunities.

Agriculture Department

When most people think about the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), they think of its oversight of the nation's food production and farming industry. But through its Rural Development mission area, the agency also is committed to improving the economy and quality of life in rural America.

It does this by offering loans, grants, loan guarantees and technical assistance to create jobs and support services such as housing, healthcare, high-speed internet access and other essential infrastructure within rural communities—and community colleges play a key role in these initiatives.

"Community colleges have been instrumental in supporting the people in rural America," said Rural Housing Service Administrator Joaquin Altoro. "We recognize that colleges in rural areas often drive economic development, and we're eager to partner with them in working toward this goal."

One competitive program that community colleges might be eligible for is the Community Facilities Programs (CF), which awards grants and low-interest loans to build, renovate or expand facilities that provide healthcare, education, safety, and other public services in rural areas. Since 2021, Altoro said, the program has invested \$353 million in more than 60 U.S. colleges—many of which are public community colleges.

A sub-program within the CF initiative, called Tribal College Initiative Grants, provides funding to help tribal colleges

“COMMUNITY COLLEGES HAVE BEEN INSTRUMENTAL IN SUPPORTING THE PEOPLE IN RURAL AMERICA.”

-Joaquin Altoro, administrator, Rural Housing Service, USDA



purchase equipment and make capital improvements to their educational facilities.

In 2023, Navajo Technical College in New Mexico used a Tribal College Initiative Grant of \$350,000 and their own contribution of \$18,480 to purchase a mobile vet clinic for their veterinarian school. The new custom-built RV mobile veterinary provides animal surgeries and wellness visits as well as veterinary animal education in Navajo Nation Eastern Agency communities.

USDA has created a Community Facilities Direct Loan Program Guidance Book for Applicants to help institutions apply for CF funding.

In 2023, USDA partnered with the Community College Alliance for Agriculture Advancement to provide community college students in the Midwest with skills and resources that will help them succeed in agricultural and rural economic development careers.

As part of a memorandum of understanding, USDA's Rural Development branch will coordinate with the alliance to help students develop leadership and job skills through agency internships and networking opportunities, such as the Rural Workforce Innovation Network. It will also provide opportunities for students to shadow staff leading key USDA initiatives, such as the Rural Partners Network.

USDA Rural Development is unique in that its staff live and work in the communities they serve, Altoro said. The

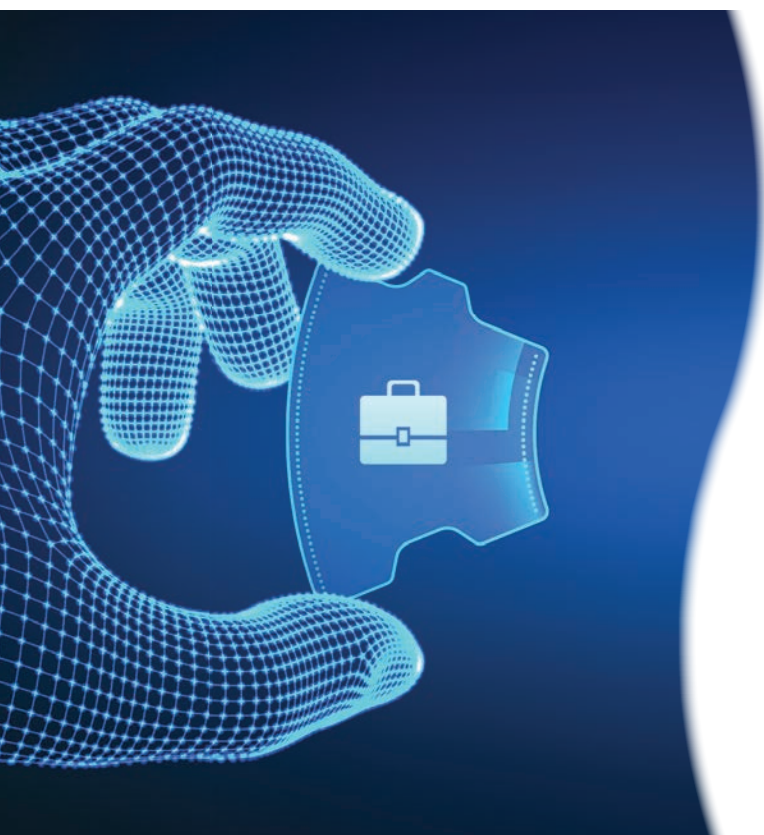
agency has 47 state offices and nearly 400 area offices. For more information about how to partner with the agency, he encouraged community college officials to go to www.rd.usda.gov and search for their state office, then contact the leadership in that office.

Small Business Administration

With 68 field offices and a staff of more than 3,000 employees, the Small Business Administration (SBA) provides support to entrepreneurs and small businesses nationwide. “Our relationships with community colleges are extremely important” in helping to fulfill this goal, said Aditi Dussault, acting associate administrator for the SBA's Office of Entrepreneurial Development.

SBA supports more than 900 Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs) throughout the country, which provide free counseling and free or low-cost training services for the nation's 34 million small businesses. The agency also supports over 150 Women's Business Centers (WBCs), which assist women who want to start, grow or expand their own business. Many of these centers are located on a community college campus or engage college faculty in delivering their training services.

SBA provides federal grants to community colleges and other organizations that must be matched by additional funding sources. Funding for WBCs is capped at \$150,000 per year, with



“DOL HAS MANY FREE TOOLS THAT MEAN COMMUNITY COLLEGES DON’T HAVE TO USE THEIR OWN LIMITED RESOURCES TO DEVELOP SIMILAR RESOURCES.”

-Cheryl Martin, manager, Community College Investments Unit, DOL

a 50% match from the sponsoring organization during the first two years and a 100% match each year thereafter. SBDCs have a 100% matching requirement, and the amount of SBA funding they receive is contingent on the size of the population they serve, with awards ranging from \$777,777 to \$8.3 million in FY 2024.

Community colleges that are interested in becoming an SBDC can contact the lead center in their state or territory to receive more information, Dussault said. Opportunities to become a WBC are not available on a set schedule; it is dependent on available funding. Organizations interested in becoming a WBC should connect with their local SBA district office to be informed of those opportunities for funding, as they are made available.

In addition, SBA has developed courses and training materials to help entrepreneurs plan, launch and grow their own business. “As a public resource, this is free content that community colleges can use in their own business and workforce development programs,” Dussault noted.

Labor Department

With the shared goal of strengthening local economies and preparing the nation’s future workforce, it’s not surprising that community colleges and the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) should consider each other significant partners.

“We’ve been working with community colleges to build their capacity in fields such as IT, healthcare, and advanced

manufacturing for many years,” said Cheryl Martin, manager of DOL’s Community College Investments Unit.

From 2011 to 2018, the agency invested nearly \$2 billion in community college training and capacity building through the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) grant program, and DOL also recently closed the application period for its fifth round of Strengthening Community Colleges (SCC) Training Grants. The \$65 million in new SCC grants will bring the total amount invested in that program to \$265 million over the last five years.

To help institutions apply for grant funding, DOL has created a free Grants Application and Management Community. But the agency offers much more to community colleges than just grants.

“One well-kept secret is a map of all current DOL grants that community colleges can use to connect to grantees in their community,” Martin said. “Beyond that, DOL has many free tools that mean community colleges don’t have to use their own limited resources to develop similar resources.”

Some have been around for a long time and are being enhanced every year, like CareerOneStop, where community college students can find jobs, explore careers and take assessments to learn which career paths might be right for them. Some are brand-new, like the Wage Pyramid Dashboards, an exciting visualization tool

that DOL will be launching soon. It uses data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics to identify potential career pathways to higher-paying jobs within various sectors and occupations.

SkillsCommons is a free online repository of open educational resources (OER) dedicated to workforce training. Developed by DOL in partnership with California State University as part of the TAACCCT grant program, the platform includes course syllabi, presentations, assignments, and assessments for a wide range of industries, including manufacturing, healthcare, and IT.

Even though the number of downloads has surpassed 10 million, “it’s still kind of a hidden gem,” Martin said. “It’s a great resource for faculty to use in developing curriculum, particularly at underresourced colleges.”

DOL’s Career Trajectories and Occupational Transitions Dashboard helps users identify “launchpad” occupations associated with higher wage growth. The Competency Models Clearinghouse helps community colleges and their employer partners identify the key competencies required for credentials

in a particular field. Both of these tools can support curriculum planning and evaluation.

Apprenticeship.gov has valuable information for career seekers, employers, and educators. The tools for educators include an occupation finder, partner finder and standards builder. Community colleges also can take advantage of the free services offered by Registered Apprenticeship Technical Assistance Centers of Excellence to support the expansion and modernization of registered apprenticeship programs.

Community college leaders should set up an account on Grants.gov to track the latest grant opportunities and receive an alert as soon as these are posted, Martin advised.

“We encourage all community colleges to be in close touch with the person in charge of apprenticeships in their state and to develop relationships with their publicly funded workforce boards, if they haven’t already,” she added. “That’s something we look for in the projects we fund.” ■

Dennis Pierce is an education writer based in Boston.

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THE WORLD IS THEIRS

Study abroad programming returns to near full capacity in the post-Covid era

BY DOUGLAS J. GUTH



Prior to her first trip overseas, Jamey Yaeger had embarked on family vacations to cruise destinations such as Jamaica and Mexico. Yaeger's maiden global adventure took her to Japan, a 7,000-mile journey made possible by the study abroad program at Polk State College (Florida).

Yaeger, who recently graduated with her associate degree, traveled to Japan in May as part of a humanities course that studied the nation's customs and culture. Alongside the usual whirlwind of shopping, site visits and cultural immersion, the 10-day program encouraged students to be travelers rather than tourists.

To that end, Yaeger and her friends took public transportation and put into practice phrases such as "Thank you" and "Where is the bathroom?" Although Yaeger's Japan connection was limited to her sister's interest in video games and anime,

she thought the country would make for a unique first passport stamp.

"I figured it was an opportunity that not many people could take," says Yaeger. "There's a reason why you have the title of student while in college, because you're still learning. There's no better way to do that than see the world first-hand."

Study abroad is widely recognized in higher education as a high-impact practice that exposes learners to new ideas, locations and cultures. In an April survey by global engagement platform provider Terra Dotta, about 90% of student participants called study abroad "somewhat or very important" to their personal and professional growth.

These students further pointed to adaptability and resilience (58%), cross-cultural communication (50%) and problem-solving (48%) as skills they learned while in-country. Equipping students for the international marketplace is especially critical for individuals who, in some cases, have never ventured beyond their home state, notes Kimberly Simpson, program coordinator of global initiatives at Polk State.

"We are preparing students for the global workforce with international experience that employers seek," Simpson says. "There are many international companies located in Polk County—students with that experience can deal with working across currencies and time zones because they've already been introduced to them."

BUILDING CAPACITY

Polk State offers exchanges to destinations across all world regions: England, Brazil, Morocco, Panama and more. Programs run five to 14 nights during spring and summer, with administrators collaborating alongside faculty and foreign contacts to select optimal destinations for each academic field.

Ahead of a recent excursion to Guadalupe, for example, Polk State partnered with the University of the Antilles through a Transatlantic Mobility Program grant. The cross-cultural faculty team developed curriculum around water quality and fauna in the south Caribbean island chain.

The college's overseas programs, curtailed for nearly three years by Covid, returned to full operation in 2024. With more students hesitant to study abroad, Polk State is hoping to extend outreach through a recently acquired U.S. Department of State grant.

The college joins 36 other U.S. institutions in receiving the Increase and Diversify Education Abroad for U.S. Students (IDEAS) grant. At Polk State, the nearly \$35,000 award is earmarked for capacity building in faculty training, developing global alliances, and internationalizing curriculum. Virtual exchanges with the Instituto Tecnológico de Mérida in Mexico are another key initiative supported by the grant.

"WE KNOW HOW CRITICAL THESE PROGRAMS ARE, SO WE HAVE TO MAKE THEM FIT STUDENTS' SCHEDULES A BIT BETTER."

—Beth Pitonzo, senior vice president of instruction, Guilford Technical Community College



Guilford Technical Community College learners joined fellow students from the U.S. and abroad during a journey to Bordeaux, France, in June. //GTCC

“It’s about creating these partnerships so our students can use their classroom experiences for hands-on activities,” Simpson says. “They are also meeting students for cross-cultural community opportunities.”

Guilford Technical Community College (GTCC) procured a \$35,000 IDEAS grant for study abroad marketing and faculty development, says senior vice president of instruction Beth Pitonzo. The gift will bolster short-term programs GTCC is

already delivering with partner community colleges across North Carolina. Upcoming trips for fall and spring include Portugal, Ireland, Japan and Costa Rica.

Pooling resources through a consortium model helps reduce travel costs for member institutions, says Pitonzo.

“We banded together and said, ‘Let’s share the responsibility of who’s going to lead the program, then invite students from all of our schools to take part,’” Pitonzo says. “This gives us enough students to keep the costs down.”

Ideally, the IDEAS grant will enable GTCC to increase participation for expeditions typically attracting around six or seven students since the pandemic. Programs are slated for



GTCC was awarded an IDEAS grant, which will enable the college to increase student participation for future trips. //GTCC

one or two weeks, a perfect getaway for a population often bearing different responsibilities than the traditional university student, says Pitonzo.

“Sixty percent of our students go to school part-time, or are older and have family obligations, so it makes it harder to schedule a full-semester program for them,” she says. “We know how critical these programs are, so we have to make them fit students’ schedules a bit better.”

OUT OF THE COMFORT ZONE

GTCC prepares study abroad programming in coordination with other consortium colleges. In addition to exploring museums and landmarks, students network with native

peers pursuing similar career paths. An upcoming journey to Ireland, for instance, will link manufacturing-focused learners to a similar program under development in Ireland. Initiatives are based on the Federation of Advanced Manufacturing Education (FAME) model used by Toyota and other advanced manufacturing companies.

The IDEAS grant will support this program along with future career technical field trips, a unique prospect considering study abroad is often centered on wider-ranging areas such as art and psychology, Pitonzo says.

“We are opening this to career tech students who may be working for international companies here like Toyota, Honda and (aerospace manufacturer) HAECO

Americas,” says Pitonzo. “North Carolina is booming with businesses coming from other countries. If you don’t have an understanding of global cultures, it puts you at a disadvantage in the jobs market, especially with more companies coming to the U.S.”

Yaeger, the Polk State student recently returned from Japan, envisions a future career in project management and international communications. Along with exploring Japan’s prefectural system, Yaeger interacted with locals during a tour of Hiroshima. Seeing history up close provided its own learning experience, she says.

“It shows you that, during war, it’s a bunch of innocent people who end up suffering,” says Yaeger. “To see this on the ground rather than class, it’s one of the best things someone can do to learn more about history.”

Navigating travel by taxi and Japanese bullet train provided Yaeger with unexpected leadership opportunities, especially when her group got lost.

“I helped us figure out where to go and had to push myself out of my comfort zone,” Yaeger says. “It was nice to see myself in that position, because in the professional world, you need to be comfortable with being uncomfortable. Especially as a woman in business, you can’t be nervous to speak up.”

A DIVERSE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Pellissippi State Community College (Tennessee) has a long history providing international learning opportunities for its student population. Last year, the college sent 150 students abroad, an increase from 116 in the 2021-22 academic year. Assisted by a state consortium, more than 380 Tennessee community college students went abroad to study in 2023.

Pellissippi State, which recently received IDEAS funding to train other two-year systems in creating their own study abroad initiatives, ran 27 programs during the 2023-24 academic year.

General education courses are buoyed by programs tailored to specific industries, like a business/hospitality management track exploring Greece’s tourism sector.

“Study abroad is based on academic needs—like, are there areas where there’s a methodology or cutting-edge technology that we want our students to see,” says Tracey Bradley, executive director of the Tennessee Consortium for International Studies (TnCIS), the state’s provider for study abroad programs. “Faculty will say this is the best place to go, but those are not necessarily the places that students are interested in seeing. Asia has become a popular destination because of anime and K-pop, but we have programs in Africa and South America as well.”

Through the IDEAS grant, Pellissippi State is partnering with The Forum on Education Abroad to mentor three community colleges or college systems on study abroad curriculum

TOP 5 COMMUNITY COLLEGES FOR STUDY ABROAD



*2023 Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange

creation. Faculty leaders will be part of the program development process, attending workshops at Pellissippi State and throughout the consortium.

Pellissippi State is ranked among the nation’s top five community colleges for sending learners overseas, according to the Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange. Popular experiences like Japan draw 40 students from across the Tennessee consortium, while industry-specific programs usually attract between 10-15 students.

College-sponsored study abroad programs provide a multifaceted learning experience for attendees, says Bradley.

“There’s class in the morning, utilizing an extra room in our housing or a coffee shop,” Bradley says. “After getting in that traditional class time, the professor will lead an afternoon excursion to see the city, or area of the country related to what they learned in class.”

A CONNECTION LIKE NO OTHER

Study abroad participation at Pellissippi State is nearly back to pre-pandemic levels, says Bradley, who adds that the college did not need new outreach initiatives to recruit students for the program.

“There were plenty of students who did not get to travel when we had to cancel programming, so we had a good number of students wanting to get their first experience under their belt,” says Bradley. “We did lose a class of students who never got to have the experience, but for the most part, we’ve been pleased by the overall interest.”

Two-year institutions including Bradley's know that fear of the unknown may prevent some candidates from taking the study abroad leap. At Pellissippi State, designated campus representatives advise students on cost, course selection and the passport application process. Pre-departure orientations cover program schedules, a destination's cultural norms, and even packing essentials.

As some new travelers have never flown, program leaders will relay information about customs and immigration procedures, along with what to expect at security.

"We recognize that students don't make these types of decisions overnight — this is a process and we're equipped to assist them through it from start to finish," says Bradley.

The Forum on Education Abroad is a vital resource for the best practice standards in our field, Bradley adds. For example, some medications legal in the U.S. are prohibited in Asia, meaning a student must contact their doctor for an alternative. Moreover, the water in some countries is not safe for consumption, requiring savvy explorers to have bottled water on hand.

"WE ARE PREPARING STUDENTS FOR THE GLOBAL WORKFORCE WITH THE KIND OF EXPERIENCE THAT EMPLOYERS LIKE."

—Kimberly Simpson, program coordinator of global initiatives, Polk State College

Other precautions are of the common sense variety, says Simpson of Polk State: Don't walk alone at night, or leave valuable items out in hotel rooms. Stay away from protests, and avoid flashy items that might catch the eye of pickpockets. Polk State exclusively travels to countries designated Levels 1 -2 by the U.S. State Department, indicating a lower degree of caution is advised for visitors.

Health and safety education is extended to the disabled population, including understanding the legal rights and accessibility infrastructure of host countries. With the pandemic putting extra emphasis on communicable disease, Polk State looks to the state department and Centers of Disease Control and Prevention for additional guidance.

Though travel preparation can be meticulous and time-consuming, the benefits are undeniable for both students and the institution, says Bradley, the Pellissippi State official. Since 2018, the retention rate for first-time students studying abroad averaged 95%, compared to 50% for the general first-time freshman population. Likewise, students who studied abroad over the same time frame averaged a three-year graduation rate of 79%, in contrast to 40% for general enrollment.

"For underserved students, we have passport scholarships through the IIE American Passport Project," says Simpson. "There's also foundational scholarships that give preference to these students, who are building life and communication skills while being introduced to new cultures. Students gain soft skills when traveling with others, while being exposed to new experiences like cultural foods and foreign currency."

Student Yaeger is already anticipating her next Polk State travel adventure—a jaunt next spring to London and Amsterdam. For this project, Yaeger is helping create an itinerary that may include visits to the Anne Frank house and Van Gogh Museum.

Yaeger embodies a "just do it" mentality for any fellow student considering a study abroad voyage.

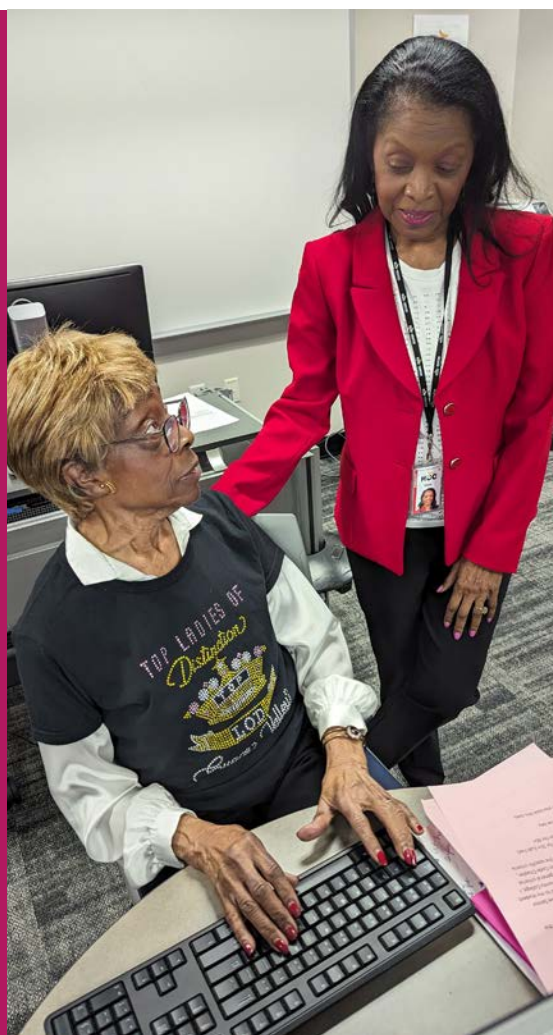
"Explore the world while you're still young—the connections you make while on these trips are nothing like any other," Yaeger says. ■

Douglas J. Guth is an education writer based in Ohio.





Above: Jamey Yaeger embarked on a study abroad trip to Japan this spring as part of a humanities course at Polk State College. // JAMEY YAEGER Below: Pellissippi State Community College study abroad students stand outside the National Gallery in London, England. // PELLISSIPPI STATE



Promoting lifelong learning to benefit older adults in and out of the classroom

BY DONALD SPARKS

When Lille Lacy graduated from Southern University at Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in 1961, she began a lifelong journey

of reading, learning and pursuing her passion of inspiring children as a librarian. It was something about being in a classroom or in the library surrounded by books, that felt like the perfect environment for her as she continuously sought opportunities to keep her mind engaged in learning.

Now at 84 years old, Lacy has returned to an environment conducive to learning as she is one of more than 150 seniors over the past year who has enrolled into Houston Community College (HCC) Central's South Campus for leisure learning, credit-bearing computer and Spanish classes as part of an initiative to promote lifelong learning and digital literacy among older adults.

"This has been a blessing as I've learned so much, I get to interact with others and I feel good about myself," Lacy said. "I am recommending to all my senior citizen friends 65 and over, my sorority friends, and people at my church to sign up for classes. I can't say enough what coming here to HCC has done for me."

Across communities in the United States, the number of older adults is growing and aging seniors are independently engaged in gaining new knowledge, staying mentally sharp, and enhancing their self-development.

With the increase in America's aging population, college campuses are providing new opportunities and resources for those older adults, while addressing barriers to support older students in higher education. Opportunities which have allowed Lacy and others like her to return to an academic environment.

Driven to present learning opportunities and expand inclusivity for seniors, the college district's board trustee representing one of Houston's underserved communities sought HCC Central's leadership to rethink how to serve this marginalized demographic.

Led by then-HCC Central College President Muddassir Siddiqi and Associate Dean of Student Services and

Engagement LaTonya Brown, in 2023 the college customized curriculum by designing computer classes and an introductory conversational Spanish class specifically for older adults focusing on basic Spanish.

Courses also included basic computer skills, such as logging into their student accounts, internet navigation, email, social media, and Microsoft Word applications; all taught at a slower pace and in a supportive environment to accommodate the learning needs of older adults.

"Community colleges serve as an essential resource for older adults, offering them opportunities to enhance their skills, engage in lifelong learning, and integrate into today's digital economy," Siddiqi said.

Siddiqi recognized that community colleges, such as HCC Central, has an obligation to serve communities where intergenerational learners exist and offer curriculum and programs designed to attract not only younger students, but also meet the needs of older adults.

In fall 2023, the total enrollment of the 55+ classes were 91 older adults, and the spring 2024 enrollment of the 55+ classes was 66.

To attract senior students, Brown and Annette Lott, HCC Central enrollment management officer, sought to build internal and external partnerships to raise awareness of HCC's presence in the community and promote HCC as a welcoming campus. As part of a community engagement plan, Brown mentioned the following strategies were implemented for rolling out the program to be successful:

Targeted Senior Outreach: HCC Central established a dedicated outreach program targeting seniors in the community where they live, work, and play inviting them to two large workshops specifically tailored to their interest in computer and Spanish needs. HCC offers discounted or free classes at the South campus for students ages 55 and

older. At the workshop vendors such as Metro (Houston's major public transportation agency), student services departments, other leisure learning departments within HCC, and a sign-up for free laptop computers were provided for attendees.

Partnerships with senior centers and churches: HCC Central collaborated with local senior centers and churches and found these partnerships to be an effective way to reach out to mature adults who may be interested in taking computer classes at the college.

Flexible scheduling: HCC Central offered flexible scheduling for computer and Spanish classes to accommodate the needs of the mature adults. Offering early morning classes, offering breaks for lunch and unlocking access doors to make it easier for seniors to get to their classes was a strategy used to prevent fatigue.

Technology programs: At the start of the initiative, the Business Technol-

ogy department, under the leadership of Mia Taylor, managed the Silver Eagle program through a grant funded program, which allowed older adults aged 55 and older who applied for the program and enrolled in classes to receive a free Dell computer. This free laptop program was extremely popular, and word of mouth spread quickly enticing the older adults' friends to inquire about the free or reduced computer and Spanish classes offered at Houston Community College.

Senior-specific courses: Community colleges frequently offer non-credit courses and workshops specifically designed for older adults. Areas like computer literacy, social media usage, financial planning, and health are all covered in these programs, which are crucial for seniors seeking to remain active and involved in their communities. Such courses not only provide valuable skills but also foster social

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“Regardless of your age, learning never stops.”

- Lille Lacy, HCC lifelong learner

interactions and community building among participants.

Besides skill development and personal enrichment, community colleges serve as a gateway for older adults to engage in civic and cultural activities.

“Regardless of your age, learning never stops,” Lacy said. “You just got to be out here. When I drive up and see this building, I have such enormous pride. I can get out of my house and be active. This was the best decision HCC could have ever brought us.” ■

Donald Sparks is the communications director for Houston Community College Central in Houston, Texas.

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Tabitha Whissemore Manager, Publications



Supporting international students in and out of the classroom

BY PERZEN AKOLAWALA

International students bring invaluable diversity and global perspectives to our classrooms. However, adjusting to a new educational system and cultural environment can be challenging. Here are five essential tips that community colleges can do to provide robust support to these students, ensuring their success, well-being and a sense of belonging.

Create a “home away from home” by creating a welcoming campus community

Creating an inclusive and welcoming environment starts with campus culture. At Lone Star College (LSC), we encourage faculty, staff and students to be open and approachable. Simple actions like greeting international students by name, encouraging them to attend campus events and

promoting cultural awareness can make a significant difference.

The Lone Star College Office of Honors and International Education (HIE) has a team of international student officers and international faculty fellows at most campuses who provide engagement activities to help with integration. Almost all campuses have an active international student’s club/organization where not just international students, but internationally-inclined students come together which creates a sense of family.

International Programs is establishing a peer exchange program where domestic honors students act as buddies to help international and global scholars acclimate. Making international students feel like a part of the campus family is key to their comfort and integration.

Provide comprehensive orientation programs

Orientation is a critical time for international students to understand the academic and social landscape of their new environment. More importantly, students are here on a regulated visa type with study requirements and work restrictions. At LSC, we have a series of pre-departure orientations for newly accepted students, visa workshops and other information sessions. Once the student arrives in the country, we have a compliance orientation and an acclimation orientation at seven main campuses.

Our orientation program covers not only academic expectations but also practical aspects such as navigating public transportation, understanding local customs and accessing healthcare services. Providing information in multiple formats (e.g., in-person and online) and ensuring it’s available in different languages can further enhance its effectiveness. We are piloting a health insurance information session for Spanish speakers this fall.

Colleges should regularly update these programs to reflect the latest best practices in international student support and apply them to the ever-changing landscape of international student services.



Offer tailored academic support

International students may face unique academic challenges, including language barriers and different educational backgrounds. Offering academic support tailored to their needs, such as writing workshops, language labs and tutoring services, is essential. However, providing additional resources for understanding academic integrity and expectations in the U.S. education system is important. At LSC, we have piloted a unique function where honors and international students have a dedicated academic advisor to help students with their unique academic/transfer needs. These academic advisors are part of our orientation process and are trained to be familiar with this student population to ensure they follow a correct degree path and are transfer- or career-ready.

Enhance cultural adjustment services through campus and community engagement

Cultural adjustment can be one of the most challenging aspects for international students. Setting up dedicated support services, such as counseling

and cultural adjustment workshops, to address these issues will help mitigate feelings of isolation.

The International Programs team provides resources and workshops throughout the semester about local cultural norms, social practices and community resources that can help students feel more at home. Students are encouraged to get involved in the clubs and organizations on campus.

We also facilitate opportunities to participate in local festivals and plan field trips to local attractions.

Identify unique needs while emphasizing belonging

Understanding that each international student has unique needs—ranging from academic to personal—is crucial. LSC implements regular check-ins at the start, mid and end of every semester to gauge these needs effectively. Although LSC has a group of employees to assist international students specifically, we must always strive to maintain a strong sense of community by treating international students as integral members of the college family.

“

Making international students feel like a part of the campus family is key to their comfort and integration.

This balance helps them feel valued and supported and enhances their overall college experience.

Many international students are first-generation, and their opportunity to study in the U.S. is often the result of significant sacrifices made by their families. For many, this is also their first experience in the U.S., making their time at LSC is not only crucial to their academic journey but also to their overall impression of the country. Whether this experience is positive or negative largely depends on the support and environment we provide. ■

Perzen Akolawala is the executive director of International Programs through the Office of Honors and International Education at Lone Star College in Houston, Texas.

Photo: International students at Lone Star College gather. //LSC

Investing in the next generation of leaders

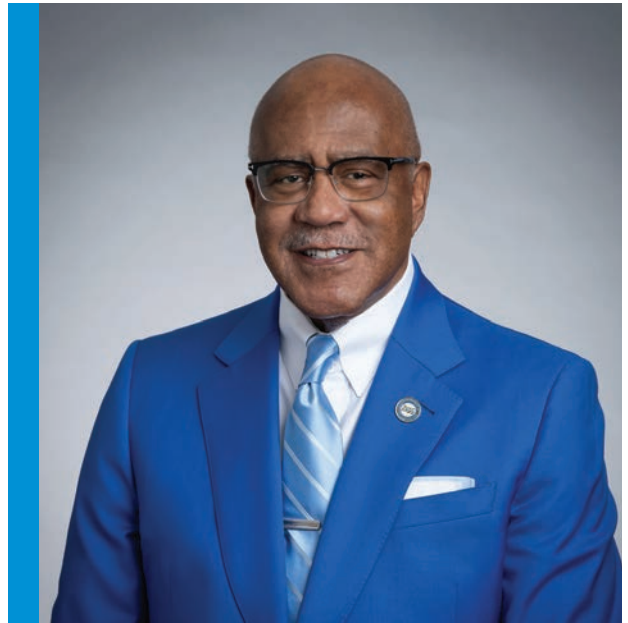
BY WALTER G. BUMPHUS

In a recent report from the Center for Creative Leadership, they outlined the top challenges faced by more than 48,000 leaders at various levels in more than 7,000 organizations. The report specifically focused on any shifts in reported challenges since the pandemic. While the research is not community college specific, the stratification of the different types of management and accompanying challenges aligned with the reporting structures at many community colleges.

It was interesting to learn that mid-level managers cited personal limitations as the most pressing concern which has increased since the pandemic. Some of you may have heard of imposter syndrome, which I dare say has impacted all of us at one point or another in our careers. Considering the increase in remote work and hybrid office schedules, newer or mid-level managers may have to lead a team they rarely see in person. The flexibility of remote work is one of its many benefits, but the culture of an organization and the behaviors of its employees may be more difficult to navigate with the process and structure that in-person office time creates.

Not surprisingly, mid-level managers also cited competing priorities and day-to-day business challenges. What stood out to me was the role that influence plays in their perceived success as a manager. The report notes that when leading from the middle, managers noted a greater need to influence others toward successful completion of a common goal. Specifically, they cited building credibility across functional groups, developing and fostering cross-organization relationships and partnerships as key requirements of their leadership. I find that to be very insightful as it is a key leadership competency for any sector or business.

Senior leaders reported challenges shifted since the pandemic. Limited self-awareness was a frequently listed challenge prior to the pandemic. These leaders are looking to better understand how they are perceived by others and how they can improve their communication style and projected confidence to better represent the organization.



The most recent data shows that since the pandemic that challenge still exists, but the need to build credibility as the organization's leader topped the most recent list. They are looking to enhance visibility and gain trust from stakeholders. These "credibility gaps" have become a more pressing issue since the pandemic.

The report was informative and continues with tips to address these leadership issues across the organization. They suggest that all levels of management need to develop fundamental leadership skills and competencies.

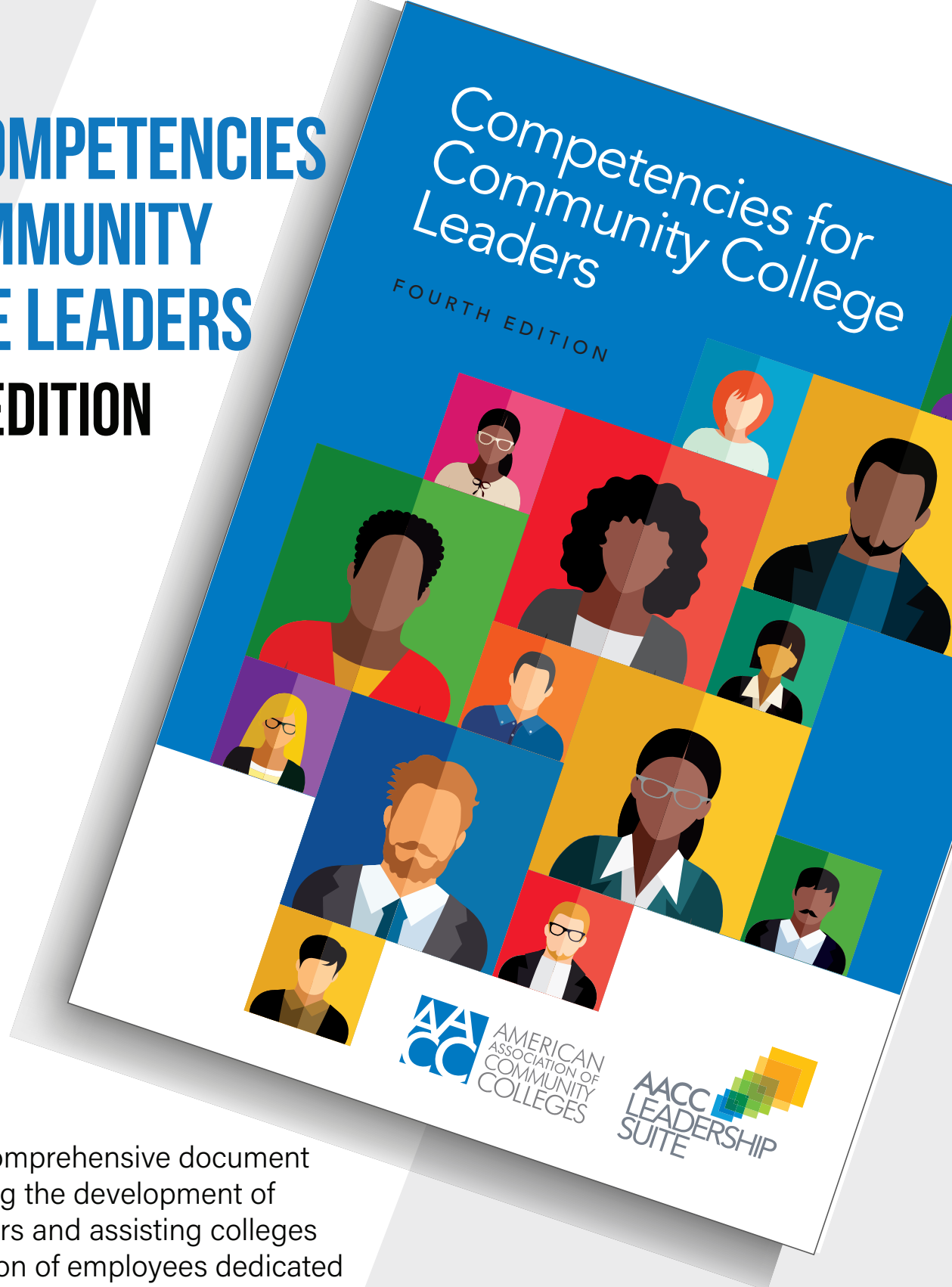
For community colleges, the AACC core leadership competencies can help you do that for yourself, or perhaps more importantly, they can help you to advance the next generation of community college leaders. Whether you utilize AACC's professional development or not, I believe that a crucially important part of being a leader is to cultivate other leaders.

I know I have written about this before and it bears repeating. I have had amazing mentors throughout my career and hope that I have paid that forward in some way. Paying it forward requires intentionality and an understanding that in some cases you are investing in a leader that will likely leave your organization and use their talents to benefit another college. While that may be true, it is also true that incredible individuals may come to your college well prepared to lead because they invested in their personal and professional growth or had a mentor who invested in them.

Wherever they serve students, investing in the next generation of leaders will always pay dividends. These leaders will serve students and be better informed and prepared to overcome the leadership challenges they face. ■

Walter G. Bumphus is president and CEO of the American Association of Community Colleges.

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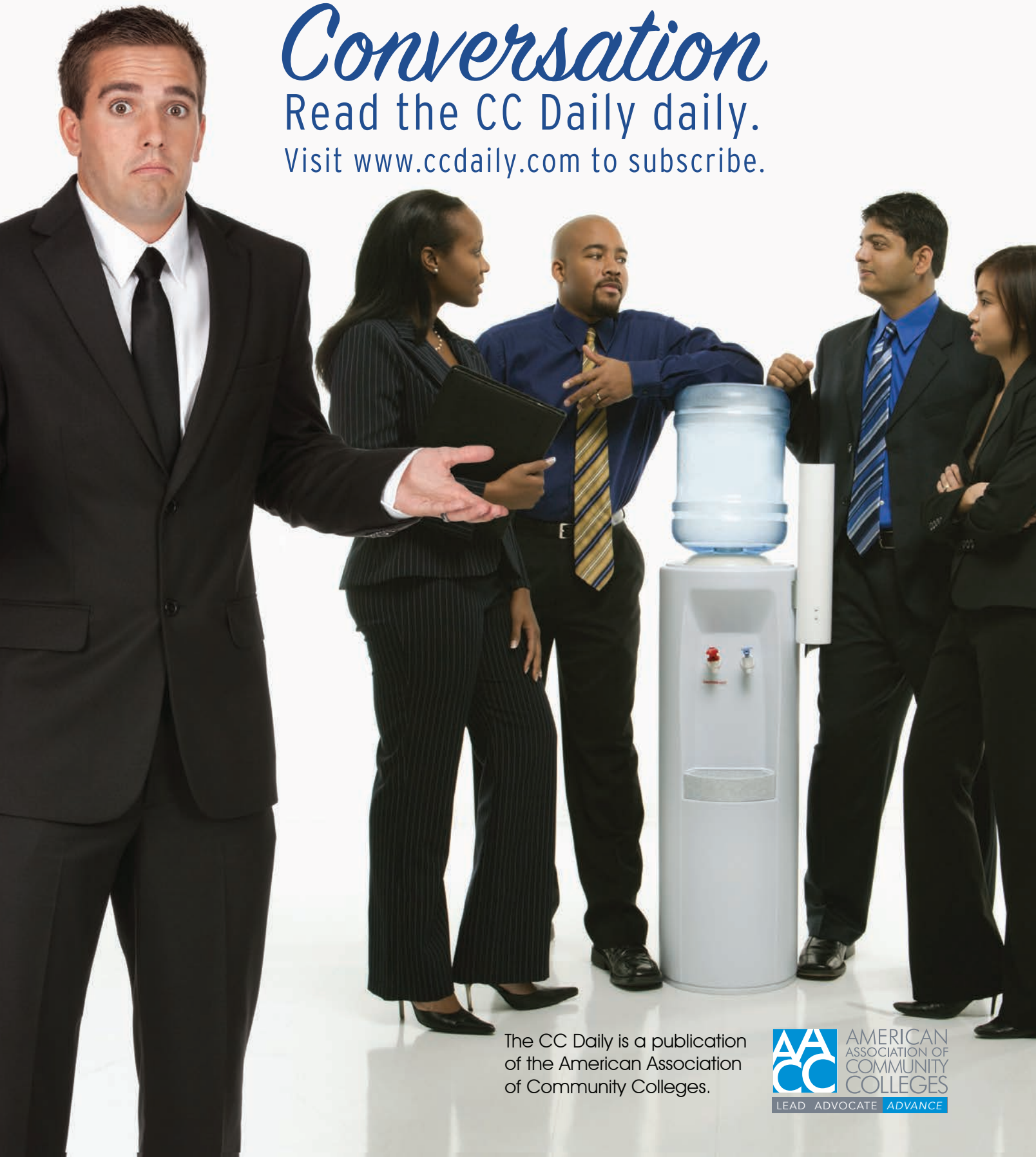


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