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# TRUSTEE

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## QUARTERLY

*The Voice of Community College Leaders*

PRE CONGRESS ISSUE

A portrait of Dr. Jill Biden, a woman with blonde hair, wearing a blue button-down shirt and pearl earrings, smiling. The background is a blurred green outdoor setting.

# Showcasing America's Community Colleges

DR. JILL BIDEN'S NEW ROLE:  
To highlight the importance of the  
Community College movement

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# Community Colleges

Q & A



DR. JILL BIDEN'S NEW ROLE:  
TO HIGHLIGHT THE IMPORTANCE OF THE  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE MOVEMENT

DR. JILL BIDEN, THE WIFE OF VICE PRESIDENT Joe Biden, has been an educator for the past 28 years and continues to teach English classes at Northern Virginia Community College. Dr. Biden has a long history of activism in her community, and she continues to work to raise awareness on education, military families, and women's health issues. Given Dr. Biden's professional experience and passion, President Obama has asked her to help highlight the importance of America's community colleges, and she frequently visits community colleges and speaks with students, parents, and teachers around the country as part of this outreach.

In an exclusive interview, Dr. Biden spoke with *Trustee Quarterly* about the new awareness initiative and the source of her commitment to the community college movement.

Dr. Biden addresses graduating students at Kingsboro Community College, City University of New York in June.

“By supporting community colleges and encouraging increased community college graduation rates, the Obama-Biden Administration is laying the path to success for millions of Americans, and I could not be more pleased to help spread the word.”

**Q:** On May 8, President Barack Obama announced that you will “lead a national effort to raise awareness about what we’re doing to open the doors to our community colleges.” What does this national effort entail?

I have always said that I believe community colleges are one of the best-kept secrets in America — and now my job is to get that secret out through various events, outreach, and media. By supporting community colleges and encouraging increased community college graduation rates, the Obama-Biden Administration is laying the path to success for millions of Americans, and I could not be more pleased to help spread the word. I will continue to visit campuses around the country, speak to groups of parents, teachers, and students, and work to increase media attention around the value of a community college education.

**Q:** How do you think President Obama’s recognition of the value of community and technical colleges compares with the attitudes of past administrations?

It’s clear from the President’s recent announcement of the American Graduation Initiative that not only does he believe in community colleges — he is willing to commit a landmark federal investment to support them. I believe that community colleges are the way of the future, and President Obama recognizes their importance to the students, their families, and the economy. The President has asked me to spread the word about community colleges, and he has also encouraged me to recruit more teachers.

**Q:** You’ve taught in public schools as well as community colleges, and you have been quoted as saying, “I really feel, especially in a community college, I can make a difference.” In what ways do community colleges have a greater impact on students’ lives than other education systems?

There was never a question in my mind when we moved to Washington, D.C., that I would continue to teach at a community college. I have witnessed firsthand the power of a community college education to change lives, and I think that the smaller class sizes, the nurturing environment, and the personal contact make a difference in supporting students. In my classes, I get to know my students well, and I am able to partner with each of them to help them succeed.

**Q:** Your doctoral dissertation focused on community college student retention. If you were to write that dissertation today, would it be different?

I would say that getting community students into community colleges (and college generally) is one step, but keeping them there and ensuring their success is another. That is why I am so pleased the President announced the American Graduation Initiative in July. As part of that initiative, the President wants

community colleges to get the resources they need to graduate an additional 5 million students in the next decade.

**Q:** You have said that your goal is “to reach out to as many people as possible to explain how this administration is committed to supporting Americans who could benefit from community college educations.” What can community college trustees and other advocates do to build upon your outreach efforts?

The challenge grants the President announced [recently] are competitive and will only fund programs that have proven outcomes or that will be closely evaluated. Institutions should use this opportunity to find new and better ways to help students succeed and to forge meaningful partnerships with industry.

**Q:** If you were serving on the governing board of a community college right now, what would be your three greatest areas of priority?

My first priority would be increasing student retention and completion. While community colleges serve a variety of missions, we cannot understate the importance of graduating students. In response to data showing that the number of jobs requiring at least an associate’s degree will likely grow twice as fast as jobs that don’t require any college, the President set a new national goal of 5 million community college graduates over the next 10 years. And he has shown the administration’s commitment to giving community colleges the resources they need to meet that goal.

Access and affordability are also pressing priorities. Community colleges should work with the larger community to identify ways they can serve the potential students in the area by making them aware of their options. Enrolling in a community college can actually be much more affordable than people may think. The President has increased the maximum Pell Grant award to make community colleges a low-cost, high-quality option for many students. The administration is also working to make community colleges affordable for the unemployed by allowing them to continue receiving unemployment benefits while getting job retraining at one of these institutions. Displaced workers can go to [www.opportunity.gov](http://www.opportunity.gov) to learn more about job retraining options available to them.

Finally, affordability and graduation rates mean nothing if education is not high quality.

These institutions need to ensure their programs are relevant and meet the needs of all the student populations they serve. Students need to be adequately prepared for their next steps — whether it’s training for jobs of the future, transferring to a four-year university, or working toward an associate’s degree. This will involve innovative curriculum development, and cooperation between community colleges and local, regional, and national industry to develop training programs that will give students the skills they need to succeed in the workplace.

## ACCT LEADERSHIP CONGRESS KEYNOTE SPEAKERS SHARE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGES.



JAMIE P. MERISOTIS

President and CEO

Lumina Foundation for Education



JAMIE P. MERISOTIS LEADS LUMINA FOUNDATION FOR EDUCATION, one of the nation's 45 largest private foundations and arguably one of the greatest advocates for community colleges. Under Merisotis's leadership, Lumina employs a strategic, outcomes-based approach in pursuing its mission of expanding college access and success, particularly among low-income, minority, and other historically underrepresented populations.

Before joining Lumina in January 2008, Merisotis founded and served for 15 years as president of the Washington, D.C.-based Institute for Higher Education Policy, one of the world's premier education research and policy centers. He previously served as executive director of the National Commission on Responsibilities for Financing Postsecondary Education, a bipartisan commission appointed by the U.S. President and Congressional leaders. Merisotis also helped create the Corporation for National and Community Service (AmeriCorps), and has served on numerous national and international boards of directors, including Scholarship America, the European Access Network in London, and Bates College in Maine.

**Q:** How much of Lumina's efforts relate to community colleges?

A significant portion. Lumina Foundation was established in 2000 and has been a supporter of success in community colleges from the beginning. We've spent most of the last few years focusing on this big goal of dramatically increasing the number of Americans with high-quality college degrees and credentials. This big goal has effectively become the President's goal. We like to think that we made a contribution toward creating the conditions that made that proposal a possibility.



“We need to stop being modest about the important role of community colleges.”

**Q:** What are your thoughts on President Obama’s initiative?

The initiative is consistent with the Achieving the Dream initiative because it focuses on student success, the need to create a paradigm shift, and on creating incentives for institutions to improve their developmental education efforts to better the first-year experience and to help improve transfer and articulation rates. All of that is exciting and timely, and something the federal government can have a dramatic impact as far as moving the needle.

The biggest gap in the public conversation about higher education is that we haven’t really been able to make the clear linkage between workforce development and our postsecondary education system. We’ve been trying to say, particularly in this time of economic crisis, that we don’t need to develop a workforce development system — we already have one. It’s our colleges and universities. And the community colleges are a critical element of that because of the array of opportunities that they provide. So this initiative, this opportunity to have a measureable difference on the nation’s workforce development and having those 5 million more graduates in the pipeline able to contribute to our economic and social health in the country, is very, very encouraging.

**Q:** Do you think there will be any challenges in getting the initiative passed through Congress?

There will be a lot of conversation about the level of resources, about how to successfully measure, about ensuring that the resources are being applied toward creating the conditions for success. That’s the right conversation. I don’t think that the government can really treat this as stimulus funding for community colleges. It needs to be targeted in a different way around success, and that’s what the President has done.

The real challenge is going to be to ensure that once it’s passed, the regulations and the implementation stay true to that goal of ensuring student success. That’s going to be hard because we’re facing a long-term economic challenge in this country, and community colleges are really going to be hampered in this environment with a lot more pressure in terms of burgeoning enrollments and fewer local and state resources that they’ll need to do their job well.

**Q:** What can trustees do to take advantage of new public goodwill and public awareness efforts and maintain the momentum?

Trustees have two very good opportunities to help. One is to take part in that public will-building. Trustees tend to be community leaders, and they need to be a part of that advocacy and awareness process in communities. Many colleges and universities in this country miss the opportunity for their boards to be effective advocates. And that means using them as spokespeople in the media, interacting with policy makers, and getting out into the community and really making the case.

The other is to meet their fiduciary and other obligations —

to ensure the focus of their colleges is the success of students. That may sound obvious, but as we all know, there is a lot of pressure on colleges to do a lot of different things, and community colleges are asked to play multiple roles — everything from GED training sites to community training centers. Those roles are terribly important, but the focus of the institution needs to be on the academic and social success of students. That means that trustees need to make sure that resources are applied toward making students successful.

**Q:** How does the Lumina Foundation define student success?

Our definition of student success is measurable, transparent learning outcomes for students. We’re interested in ensuring that students know, understand, and are able to do something with their postsecondary credential. That means being able to demonstrate proficiency both in whatever program the student is in as well as in generalizable skills, such as the ability to analyze problems and express oneself effectively. Both can be measured. It also means we should do a better job of measuring and evaluating the success of student outcomes.

Graduation rates are one tool in the toolbox, but the current way in which we measure graduation rates is quite ineffective for a variety of reasons. At the national level, we really only have the capacity to measure first-time, full-time students, who are the minority of students at community colleges. So if we can do a better job of creating graduation-rate calculations, graduation rates could be a better measure. But we have to focus less on that than on the question of what students are learning and what they are doing with that knowledge.

**Q:** With all of the new pressures from increased enrollments, what can trustees do to maintain the focus on student success and meet the needs that were there before the recession was a factor?

Boards are the public conscience of these institutions, and in that role, they need to be the ones who [ask], “Are our programs relevant to the needs of this community or this region?” That’s easy to say and hard to do, because you’ve got the reality of employees and contracts, for example, that you’ve got to work through. But maintaining a focus on workforce relevance is something boards can do particularly well.

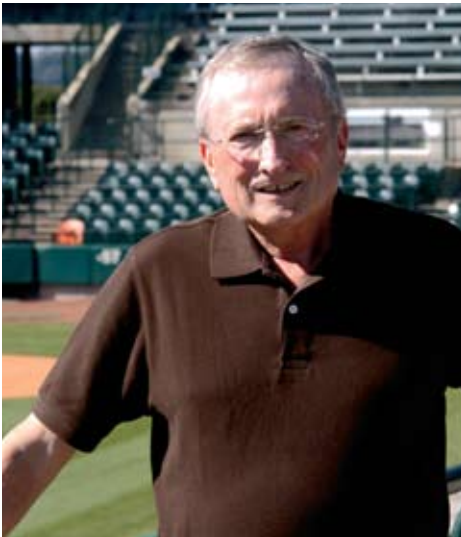
They can also use their own stature in their communities to elevate the profile of the college. I come across too many community colleges and too many community college leaders who use the line that “community colleges are one of America’s best-kept secrets.” We need to stop being modest about the important role of community colleges. There is some lingering stigma for some people associated with community colleges, which you can see reflected in popular culture, and boards can help de-stigmatize what community colleges do and help elevate their profile within their communities.



## DR. GENE A. BUDIG

Professor and Senior Presidential Adviser

The College Board



DR. GENE A. BUDIG HAS A UNIQUE BLEND OF PRACTICAL AND academic experience to back up his advice on economics and higher education. Before taking on the role of professor and senior presidential adviser, he served as a scholar in residence at the College Board, immediately following two years on the faculty at Princeton University. Dr. Budig served as president of the American League of Professional Baseball Clubs (or, simply, the American League) for six years and oversaw the operations of 14 clubs and the construction of \$2.2 billion worth of new ballparks. He was a senior adviser to Major League Baseball, a \$5.6 billion-a-year enterprise, from 2000 to 2003.

Dr. Budig is also an accomplished author, having written *The Inside Pitch, And More*, a book on the economics of baseball, for the West Virginia University Press in 2004, and *A Game of Uncommon Skill*, a book on leading the modern college and university, published by the American Council on Education Series on Higher Education in 2002. He chairs College Ed, a national program funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, designed to increase college attendance. Dr. Budig is a member of the National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges, and the National Center for Innovative Thought. He credits his community college education as the foundation for everything he has accomplished.



“My associate’s degree, which I display in my office in New York, is the only academic degree I have on my wall. It is a reminder to people who come to the College Board in New York that the community college deserves the recognition it is now receiving. Now is an ideal time to win the general public’s gratitude and lasting favor. This opportunity cannot be passed up.”

**Q:** You are passionate about the community college model. Where does this passion come from?

When I was young, I realized the importance of education, but I was without the resources to pursue it. So I worked at the local newspaper and saved enough money to go to McCook Junior College in Nebraska [now McCook Community College]. It was perhaps the smartest decision of my life. That program led me down the road to the University of Nebraska, where I completed three degrees: the baccalaureate, master’s, and doctorate. My associate’s degree, which I display in my office in New York, is the only academic degree I have on my wall. It is a reminder to people who come to the College Board in New York that the community college deserves the recognition it is now receiving.

**Q:** In your book, *The Inside Pitch*, you describe lessons learned from the economics of baseball. Can you apply any of these lessons to give advice to trustees about the internal economic workings at community colleges right now?

I am a co-owner of the Charleston River Dogs, a baseball team that draws 300,000 people a year. There is something to be learned from how minor-league baseball operates: It is a grassroots organization — as is a community college. People understand the team and what it is about, and that explains our enormous success over the years. The baseball team is important to attracting people to this community. All of this is true of a strong community college: it is a factor to individuals looking for places to locate and lay roots.

**Q:** How have the perceptions of elected officials changed over the years?

Any responsible public servant will support the community college movement if that individual understands [its] economic reach and potential. Political leaders are hungry for answers. We have seen this at the state level, where many are now embracing community colleges with enthusiasm.

I also would point trustees to a new and encouraging interest in community colleges at the national level. The College Board did a large-scale study on community colleges called “Winning the Skills Race and Strengthening America’s Middle Class: An Action Agenda for Community Colleges,” which received considerable national

attention and had a measurable impact on the views of community colleges by political leaders across the country, at all levels.

The President understands well the role of the community college. He gained key insight into their workings during his career in the state senate and, later, in the U.S. Senate. He knew what they stood for and what they meant to the future of his state. There will be no true economic recovery until the political world at all levels clearly understands the fundamental difference that community colleges can provide.

**Q:** The Obama Administration has shown appreciation for the ways in which community colleges can impact the economy, particularly with job training. Can you think of any specific examples of how community-based job training programs can have a positive economic impact?

There will be no true economic development in the United States until we are able to address the shortage of practicing medical doctors. No business or industry will locate in a community without strong health services for employees. There is enormous interest in the College’s Board’s Pipeline Project, which will be implemented by major universities in cooperation with community colleges to identify outstanding students, support them in years three and four [of college], and lead them to admission to medical school with a special interest in general practice. I predict that within six years, this project will be a major piece of the medical solution.

**Q:** Do you think most community colleges have a good mechanism to measure their economic impact in the community?

It is getting better and better with each year. In the past, too many community colleges assumed that the opinion makers around them knew what they were doing. They need to be reminded in forceful terms so they can go out and support the mission.

Nothing happens by accident in education. Community colleges have a strong record of employing graduates. Politicians understand this. Business and industry clearly understand this and what it means to the future. But you cannot expect them to be at the forefront if you are not explaining the economic impact. That is an inescapable obligation of community college leadership.



**DR. JUDITH S. EATON**

President

Council for Higher Education Accreditation



AS PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL FOR HIGHER EDUCATION Accreditation (CHEA), the largest institutional higher education membership organization in the United States, Dr. Judith S. Eaton represents 3,000 degree-granting colleges and universities on accreditation and quality-assurance issues. CHEA is the only private-sector organization that officially recognizes accrediting organizations; at present, some 59 accrediting organizations have received CHEA recognition.

Dr. Eaton has spent more than 20 years at community colleges, including serving as chancellor of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities and president of the Community College of Philadelphia and the Community College of Southern Nevada. She has also served as president of the Council for Aid to Education and a vice president of the American Council on Education.

A sought-after speaker on higher education issues both in the United States and internationally, Dr. Eaton currently serves on a range of boards and has authored numerous books and articles on higher education and accreditation topics.



“The standard-setting leadership of our institutions has been key to our effectiveness. Because trustees are routinely engaged with students, the community, and the business sector, they are most effective in determining what needs to be done for a specific institution. The higher up you go, the more vanilla and generic things can become.”

**Q:** What is the biggest issue currently facing community colleges?

The biggest “issue” is the recent and enormous investment of faith and funds that the Obama Administration is making in community colleges. Two-year institutions are being viewed as a vital part of the solution to our economic challenges and essential to a viable future for our country. In my 20 years in community colleges, I have not seen this level of investment, nor this singling out of community colleges. To have the President of the United States saying that investment in community colleges is paramount is — simply — wonderful. It underscores not only the importance of community colleges, but also advances their legitimacy.

I do have questions about this intended investment. First, are liberal arts or general education, going to be a part of this? Yes, employers want technical skills, but many surveys show that they want general skills as well. I am a long-time advocate of keeping education balanced, and this requires attention to liberal education, general education and the liberal arts. And, as others have pointed out, where will the jobs to match the community college training be available as the economy improves? Community colleges have historically played a central role in economic development — working with the local community and the state and forging partnerships with employers and potential employers.

**Q:** What are the long-term implications of this change in federal policy?

We have all seen the diminution of state and local resources of funding over the years. The recent federal dollars will diminish the pain of this loss, at least temporarily, for which many are grateful. However, if some of these new federal funding streams become permanent and involve channeling federal dollars not only to students, but to operations as well, that could have a transformative effect on the role and positioning of community colleges. Years ago we expressed concern that community colleges would be forced, for financial reasons, to pay more attention to state issues at the expense of attending to local issues. We worried about the impact on our profound commitment to serve local needs. Will we now worry about the federalizing of community colleges, going beyond both state and local needs?

**Q:** What specific accreditation challenges do community colleges face?

The accreditation challenges faced by community colleges do not strike me as any greater or markedly different from

the challenges affecting all of us in higher education. We need more attention to successful transfer of credit and more partnerships with four year-schools. All colleges and universities are facing challenges around transparency, evidence of student achievement, and accountability.

**Q:** How have you seen the increased demand for accountability and transparency translate into policy at the state level?

States are not only holding colleges and universities accountable, they are expanding state investment in data collection and analysis, becoming more explicit about information on student success, developing longitudinal databases, seeking information about, for instance, successful transfer, graduation, and job placement. Perhaps of greatest significance, more and more states are working together to develop common expectations of accountability, such as using terms that are defined in the same way and collecting the same data.

The standard-setting leadership of our institutions has been key to our effectiveness. Because trustees are routinely engaged with students, the community, and the business sector, they are most effective in determining what needs to be done for a specific institution. The higher up you go, the more vanilla and generic things can become.

**Q:** With the movement toward increased international education, what questions involving accreditation should boards keep in mind?

The quality premise upon which accreditation of international activity is built is that the quality of education and the meeting of standards that we experience in the U.S.-based work of our colleges and universities will extend to our international activity. For example, if a college is opening a branch campus in Berlin, what is the evidence that the quality of academic operations is comparable to the home campus in Idaho?

**Q:** What is the ultimate value of accreditation to institutions?

Accreditation is important and valuable to assist colleges in affirming that their commitment to quality is realized. It is a powerful signal to students and society about the reliability and legitimacy of institutions. It is a valuable opportunity for colleges to address strategic planning, make strategic changes, and build future investment in serving students and society.