



Now Connecting You

BY ROBIN MATROSS HELMS

ONE OF MY FAVORITE MOMENTS FROM MY FIRST SIX MONTHS at ACCT took place during the Friday evening gala at our 2022 ACCT Leadership Congress in New York. The dinner and awards presentations had gone off without a hitch, and I was taking a little breather on the balcony of the ballroom. As I was reflecting on the conference and watching award winners and their colleagues take photos and enjoy their celebration, the DJ turned on the speakers and announced that the dance floor was open.

Kool & the Gang's "Celebration" flooded the room, and the ACCT membership responded! The dance floor was immediately packed, and for the rest of the evening, all of us in the ballroom enjoyed the music, the energy, and each other's company. This celebration was the culmination of a great week of community, collegueship, and mutual learning, which in my time at ACCT so far, I have come to realize are the cornerstones of our organization and membership.



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Global learning and international education are my area of academic expertise, and program implementation in this field has been a focus throughout much of my career until now. By creating study abroad and exchange programs, facilitating international student enrollment in the U.S., and producing comparative research on critical topics in education, I have sought to build connections and relationships that are the foundation of global understanding and ultimately, a more peaceful world. (More on what this means for community colleges in a future column in *Trustee Quarterly!*)

Having made my professional home in the higher education association space – most recently, I spent 10 years at the American Council on Education – I have developed a deep appreciation for the convening and connecting power of these types of organizations, and of the roles they play in identifying collective priorities, furthering good practice, and spurring innovation. The energy and sense of shared purpose I’ve seen among ACCT members is unmatched in my experience, and I am excited to build on existing connections and further amplify the excellent work of this special community.

So what does it mean to “connect” ACCT in 2023?

First, it’s about **connecting our members to each other**. At the ACCT Leadership Congress,

our Governance Leadership Institutes, and other events I’ve helped to implement so far, I have been struck by both the depth of expertise in the room and the willingness of our members to candidly share strategies, challenges, and opportunities. In the coming year, you’ll see an amplified emphasis on interactive learning in our in-person programs, and additional spotlighting of innovative practice in boardrooms and at institutions. And in the spring, look for the debut of **ACCT Connect**, our new online learning and networking platform available exclusively to ACCT members.

Second, we’re focusing on **connecting our members to the information you need to be great trustees**. We are building ACCT Connect as a hub of practical information, for new and seasoned trustees alike. Our first online course, Governance 101, is almost ready for launch, and we expect it will become the go-to resource for board members who want to brush up on their governance knowledge, and the starting point for new trustees as they begin their leadership journeys. Later this year, look for a newly redesigned ACCT website, where resources and research on critical topics will be available to the broader higher education community. And the latest season of our *In the Know* podcast is about to launch, featuring insights from members, our board, staff, and experts in the field on a wide range of topics – interesting conversations with interesting people in a portable format.

Third, look for additional opportunities to **connect with ACCT leaders and staff**. Complementing our president’s visits to

member institutions throughout the country to get to know you and your communities, we’re continuing to build our expertise and capacity to provide targeted services to your boards and campuses through board retreats and evaluations. We plan to stick with our members over time, though a suite of services to help institutions and boards prepare for and manage transitions, and navigate the ups and downs of community college governance.

Finally, on a personal note, I look forward to continuing to connect with and get to know all of you. I am grateful for the warm welcome I have received so far, and I have already learned a tremendous amount about community colleges and governance from ACCT staff, our board, and our members. We’ll have many opportunities to connect in person and virtually at meetings and events in the coming months, and you’ll hear more about my background and our work in subsequent columns. But also never hesitate to pick up the phone or drop me an email to let me know what’s on your mind. The more points of connection we find, the stronger we and our institutions will be. Best wishes for a great start to 2023!



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