



Going forward, ACCT is creating more opportunities for our members to experience the power of place and gain this gut-level understanding of our unique colleges and their contexts.

You're Going *Where*?

BY ROBIN MATROSS HELMS

AS I WRITE THIS IN MID-AUGUST, SUMMER TRAVEL season is just wrapping up, so everyone's comings and goings have been a primary topic of chit-chat before yoga class, at the pool, and during Zoom meetings. Amid the usual refrains from Washingtonians, such as "I'm going to the Delaware beaches," or "I'm spending the weekend in NYC," and "I have a work trip to LA," my contributions were, "I'm going to Waterloo, Iowa, and Jackson, Mississippi."

Say what? Frankly, I was a little surprised by what a conversation stopper this was, as all heads turned in my direction. "You're going *where*?" "Why are you going *there*?" Each time I explained that I would be attending ACCT's annual board retreat in Waterloo, home of Hawkeye Community College and our board chair, and going to Jackson for our annual summer Governance Leadership Institute, hosted this year by Hinds Community College. People's interest was piqued, and initial chit-chat often turned into longer conversations about my work with community colleges and governance. As the





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summer progressed, I came to feel a sense of pride in these conversations, and reveled in saying, “That’s right! Waterloo and Jackson — and how cool is it that I get to go there?”

The trips themselves reinforced this sense of pride and highlighted what a privilege it is to be able to spend time in communities that are off the beaten track of typical travel destinations. In Waterloo, I saw firsthand how deeply interconnected Hawkeye Community College is to the local community and economy; with teaching sites throughout the city along with its main campus, the college is quite literally interwoven throughout the gorgeous landscape of rolling hills and lush corn and soybean fields. ACCT board members and staff toured a robotics teaching facility across the street from the John Deere factory, an anchor of the local economy, which underscored the responsiveness of our colleges to rapidly evolving local industry needs and the pathways they create for our students to enter and advance in the local workforce. We also spent an evening at the Cedar Valley Arboretum and Botanic Gardens, operated on land owned by the college, which showcases local flora and fauna, and serves as a community nature and event hub — another illustration of how the college engages with and serves the community in such a localized and meaningful way.

Similarly, at Hinds Community College, we were welcomed by President Dr. Stephen Vacik and learned about Hinds’s key role in building the healthcare workforce in Jackson and new efforts and programs designed to fulfill this critical mission. Like Hawkeye does in Iowa, Hinds has facilities throughout

the Jackson area, designed to meet students where they are and illustrating the depth and breadth of our colleges’ community roots.

Of course, this deep connection between our colleges and their communities, industry, and the local economic ecosystem is a core component of the community college value proposition and narrative; my colleagues on ACCT’s public policy team eloquently and effectively articulate data on economic and workforce development to our legislators, as evidenced by policy wins and an overall favorable view of our sector among the public. But it’s when we embed ourselves in a place — even briefly — to see these interconnections in action and feel how they play out in very different ways in Waterloo and Jackson and around the country, that we truly feel these deep ties and their power.

In my last *Trustee Quarterly* column, I wrote about taking a delegation from the Indian Embassy in Washington to visit Wor-Wic Community College in Maryland. Delegation members had the opportunity to hear about how Wor-Wic works with the local electrical collaborative, to see training equipment, and to discuss credentials, credit hours, and other nuts and bolts from an intellectual perspective. But in my follow up conversations with them, it became clear that even more impactful for their understanding of the work and role of our colleges was being able to walk the campus, meet students, and really feel the community and the college’s presence within it. They were impressed, and more enthusiastic than ever about the possibility of creating ties between our institutions and Indian counterparts.

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the power of place and gain this gut-level understanding of our unique colleges and their contexts. This column will be published in conjunction with our 2024 ACCT Leadership Congress in Seattle; in addition to visiting the deservedly popular local landmarks, I encourage you to connect with colleagues from local colleges and learn about their interconnectedness with the city, and the smaller communities within it.

And in 2025, we’re taking our national Governance Leadership Institutes on the road once again — to Hawaii in the spring, and to a location yet to be determined in August. Perhaps your college would like to host us? Keep an eye out for the request for proposals. You might also consider a visit to a neighbor college in your area — ACCT State, Province, and Territory Coordinators can help make connections with fellow trustees nearby. And finally, you’ll be hearing shortly about opportunities for partnerships with colleges outside the U.S., and ways to both showcase our institutions on a global stage and give our students the chance to experience the power of place in other parts of the world.

Hope to see you soon — on or off the beaten track!



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