

Demystifying AI

When Governance Backfires

Preparing for a New Administration

Trustee

WINTER 2025

THE VOICE OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEADERSHIP QUARTERLY

A portrait of Rich Fukutaki, ACCT Chair, wearing a blue suit, white shirt, and patterned tie. He has grey hair and glasses. A circular pin is visible on his lapel. The background is a blurred interior with vertical light streaks.

Action Figure

ACCT Chair Rich Fukutaki has a vision of what's needed to create "Trustee 2.0."

2025

AWARDS

REGIONAL AWARDS

Trustee Leadership
Equity
Chief Executive Officer
Faculty Member
Professional Board Staff Member

ASSOCIATION AWARDS

M. Dale Ensign Trustee Leadership
Charles Kennedy Equity
Marie Y. Martin CEO
William H. Meardy Faculty Member
Professional Board Staff Member

[WWW.ACCT.ORG](http://www.acct.org)

ACCT's awards program is designed to recognize and honor outstanding community college trustees, equity programs, presidents, faculty members, and professional board staff members at regional and national levels. In order to be considered for an Association Award, you must first submit a nomination at the regional level.

The Awards committees will select and notify the Awards recipients prior to the ACCT Leadership Congress. ACCT's Awards recipients will be honored at the 2025 ACCT Leadership Congress this October in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Visit www.acct.org for specific nomination criteria and to submit nominations online.

Call 202.775.4667 with any questions.

All nominations must be received by **June 23, 2025**.

NOMINATIONS DUE **23** 2025
JUNE



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Leadership Takes Real Intelligence

THE TYPE OF LEADERSHIP THAT WE as community college trustees must practice and demonstrate is as deceptively complex as generative AI’s chat-based interface: behind the output are countless calculations based on a combination of lifetimes of acquired knowledge and advanced reasoning abilities.

Artificial intelligence is so omnipresent right now and so intimidating to understand that it’s worth our time to reflect on the nature of intelligence itself.

Intelligence is “the ability to learn or understand or to deal with new or trying situations,” “the skilled use of reason,” or “the ability to apply knowledge to manipulate one’s environment or to think abstractly as measured by objective criteria (such as tests),” according to *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary*. Definitions aside, the concept of intelligence is a complex one — and something to keep in mind as we work to govern our colleges intelligently.

Anyone new to board service understands that one’s ability to learn and understand is tested by a myriad of factors — the dynamics of college systems, parliamentary procedures, what policies exist and how policies are made, and even the basic roles, responsibilities, and limitations of both the board and the college CEO who they lead. Dealing with new and trying situations? Board service never fails to challenge us in this regard.

After we acquire and assemble all this knowledge, we must apply our reason skillfully and judiciously. We must be able to assess, for example, how reasonable policies and leadership decisions are, how much

flexibility in enforcement is reasonable, and whether to involve the board. A real test of reason for many board members is understanding and remaining true to the commitment to uphold, and when necessary defend, the collective decision of a board even when we may not personally agree with the decision by recognizing that the proper functioning of the governing board depends on this.

Finally, what are the criteria by which a community college trustee’s knowledge and judgment are measured? I am excited to let you know that ACCT is currently working toward a new governance-badging program that for the first time will create measurable and demonstrable aptitude to serve on a board. This will create our very own guided educational pathways, and it will assure confidence in the governance of our institutions.

Artificial intelligence is not going anywhere, and ACCT is working diligently to identify more opportunities to use and manage the tool. At the same time, we know that the unique strength of board leadership is the unique combination of individual and collective *real intelligences* to govern in the interests of real students who function in a real world.

I am excited to see you in February at the 2025 Community College National Legislative Summit and to work with you as we continue to evolve together.

Rich Fukutaki
Bellevue College, Washington

Trustee

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Opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions and values of the Association of Community College Trustees.

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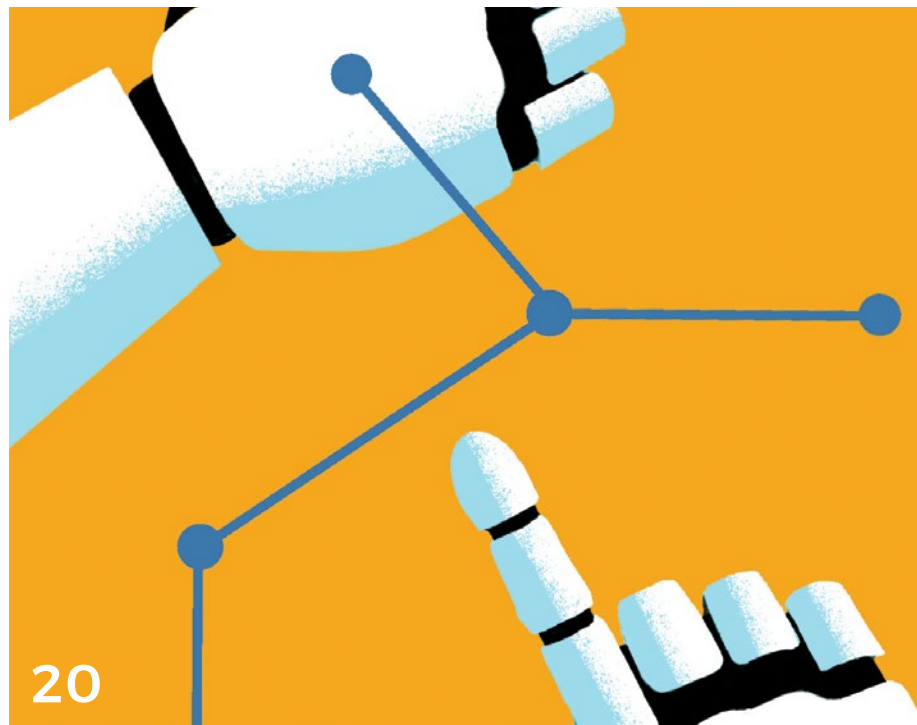


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When talking about evolution, we must also acknowledge AI — the proverbial elephant in every environment. There’s no hiding from it, there’s no outrunning it, and there’s no other way to escape it. So we must learn to work with it, and we must learn where to limit it.

Transitions and Transformation

DEAR ACCT MEMBERS,

OVER THE PAST COUPLE OF DECADES, it seems that the terms “disruption,” “change,” and “transformation” have been ubiquitous. Evolution marches onward as reliably as the moon revolves around our planet, as reliably as our planet revolves around the sun. But evolution doesn’t always move at the same pace. The past few years have been a whirlwind.

I became ACCT President and CEO at the tail end of the COVID-19 pandemic. When I think back to that time, the breakneck pace of change comes into clear focus. Leading up to 2019, more and more people were talking about the need for community colleges to take operations online, both in the interest of student access and competition from other institutions. Some people told me it would “never” happen. We can only wonder how prevalent online offerings from community colleges would be had the pandemic lockdown never happened.

ACCT hosted multiple conferences virtually during the pandemic, and we learned the benefits and challenges of online learning firsthand. Like your institutions, ACCT’s board, committee, and staff meetings moved online. It seems we all also learned the importance and value of working together, in person, as much as we can. One big lesson: Extreme circumstances can teach us the value of balance. We have learned that events like the Community College National Legislative Summit, the ACCT Leadership Congress, and Governance Leadership Institutes are most effective in person, where we can reunite with old friends, make new ones, and develop peer-to-peer relationships that facilitate our collective commitment to governing public higher education institutions.

When talking about evolution, we must also acknowledge AI — the proverbial elephant in every environment. There’s no

hiding from it, there’s no outrunning it, and there’s no other way to escape it. So we must learn to work with it, and we must learn where to limit it. ACCT is doing that work in partnership with you — our member colleges — and with policymakers, researchers, and others. You will hear more about AI from ACCT — but in balance with what we know you need from us: policy, thought, and governance leadership, face to human face and in person whenever possible.

As we evolve, we are merging intelligent human design with technology to improve and expand on the ways we educate our members. Our online learning and networking platform ACCT Connect now hosts 101-level courses on trusteeship and community college advocacy among an abundance of resources, including policy models, articles, and other reliable information. Soon, we will launch a new badging mechanism — a means by which trustees can test and demonstrate their knowledge of community college governance. As we identify expertise among our membership, we will tap into that expertise and share it with others — both online and face to face.

Speaking of which: When did we last see one another? Recently, I hope. Since I took the reins of ACCT over three years ago, I have traveled to approximately one member college per week. I have met with many of you on your “home turf,” and many thousands of others at ACCT events. If I haven’t been to your campus yet, please reach out. There’s a good chance I’ll be in your area in the coming year, and I’d love to see you. There is simply no replacement for the type of good, old-fashioned human interaction.

JEE HANG LEE
ACCT President and CEO

NEWS & NOTES

ACCT, AoC Launch International Partnership to Exchange U.S., UK Students



IN OCTOBER, ACCT ANNOUNCED the launch of the **U.S.-UK Community College and Technical Education Exchange**. With generous support from the **Cyril Taylor Charitable Foundation**, ACCT in collaboration with the UK's Association of Colleges (AoC) will pair U.S. community colleges with UK counterparts to develop student exchange programs focused on sustainability and green skills.

"We are enthused by this innovative opportunity to build on our longstanding

partnership with AoC," said ACCT President and CEO **Jee Hang Lee**. "It is our hope that the first phase will catalyze an expansion to include more colleges throughout the United States and the United Kingdom, given high interest levels on both sides of the Atlantic and the importance of the programs offered. We're excited to begin this collaboration."

"The Cyril Taylor Charitable Foundation is proud to be able to enable this innovative exchange between UK colleges of further education and community colleges in the United States," said **William L. Gertz**, a trustee of the Cyril Taylor Charitable Foundation and chairman of the American Institute For Foreign Study. "The focus on sustainability is indicative of our forward momentum and our investment in the best possible future for our students and our countries."

For the initial cohort, **Linn-Benton Community College** (Ore.) will partner with **Cambridge Regional College** in England to develop a program focusing on electric vehicles, and **Bergen Community College** (N.J.) will collaborate with **Southport College** in England in the field of sustainable construction. The four colleges were selected from a robust pool of applicants from both the U.S. and the UK, and will be supported by ACCT and AoC experts in designing their exchange programs.

"This new educational exchange partnership with Southport College is groundbreaking for Bergen's students interested in the green economy and sustainability," said Bergen Community College President **Eric Friedman**. "We see tremendous benefits from the cross-cultural learning and foresee the emergence of exciting new workforce pathways."

Linn-Benton Community College President **Lisa Avery** said, "I am very proud of our selection for the first exchange program with the United Kingdom, ACCT, and the Association of Colleges. For LBCC, this provides opportunities to globalize our skilled trades coursework, and it allows students the chance to enhance their skills across borders. Our faculty are excited to collaborate with their partners at Cambridge Regional College, and to grow this partnership in electric-vehicle technology. LBCC's mission involves transforming communities and building our regional economy, and this exchange is a great example of putting that into practice."

Following an initial kick-off meeting on October 18, the paired colleges will work together over the coming months to plan their programs. An in-person visit by U.S. institution leaders and faculty to their UK partners will take place in June, as final preparation for the launch of the student programs in

Model Standards of Good Practice for Trustee Boards

In Support of Effective Community College Governance, the Board Believes:

- That it derives its authority from the community and that it must always act as an advocate on behalf of the entire community;
- That it must clearly define and articulate its role;
- That it is responsible for creating and maintaining a spirit of true cooperation and a mutually supportive relationship with its CEO;
- That it always strives to differentiate between external and internal processes in the exercise of its authority;
- That its trustee members should engage in a regular and ongoing process of in-service training and continuous improvement;
- That its trustee members come to each meeting prepared and ready to debate issues fully and openly;
- That it endeavors to remain always accountable to the community;
- That it honestly debates the issues affecting its community and speaks with one voice once a decision or policy is made.

**The term "board" refers to a community college board of trustees or appropriate governing authority.*

ACCT, AoC Launch International Partnership to Exchange U.S., UK Students (cont.)

the summer or fall. A student scholarship pool will be available for participants in the first exchange cohort.

While the initial deliverable for the project will be a student exchange program between each pair of institutions, the cohort-based model is intended to lay the foundation for long-term partnerships that will grow over time to encompass an array of collaborative activities.

The associations' leaders renewed their memorandum of understanding on October 23 at the 2024 **ACCT Leadership Congress**, which brought nearly 1,800 community college leaders from throughout the United States and beyond to Seattle,

Washington, to advance good governance practice and cultivate skills for the future.

"In an increasingly interconnected world, community colleges and technical education have a critical role to play in preparing students to succeed in a global workforce, and in tackling the grand global challenges of our time," said ACCT Vice President for Membership and Educational Services **Robin Matross Helms**, who is leading the effort on behalf of ACCT. "We are excited to provide a pathway to collaboration for this initial group of colleges and hope this will open the door for many more workforce-focused global partnerships down the road."

ACCT, New America Partner to Advance Registered Apprenticeships at 20 Community Colleges

IN NOVEMBER, ACCT ANNOUNCED A NEW PROJECT THAT will enhance the important role community colleges play in expanding apprenticeships into emerging fields by improving their ability to serve as registered-apprenticeship sponsors. The project was previewed at a White House summit dedicated to career pathways. As registered apprenticeship sponsors, community colleges can effectively provide socioeconomic mobility opportunities for low-income students in high-quality careers such as cybersecurity, information technology, clean energy, healthcare, and advanced manufacturing.

Built on research from **New America** and funded by a \$2 million grant from **Ascendium Education Group**, ACCT and New America will work over the next four years with 20 community colleges to strengthen their capacity for sponsoring new apprenticeship programs. The project is designed to align with national investments to create good-paying jobs that do not require a four-year degree, with a focus on regional hiring needs and formalizing long-term community college partnerships with employers.

The **Institute for American Apprenticeships (IAA)** will bring experience and expertise to the development of tools and resources, and provide ongoing technical assistance to community colleges throughout the project. IAA has developed and implemented registered apprenticeship programs to serve nearly 2,000 apprentices in 22 different nontraditional, apprenticeable occupations for more than 30 regional and national employers.

"Community colleges are uniquely positioned to integrate the paid learning of apprenticeship with in-demand skills and credentials," said ACCT President and CEO **Jee Hang Lee**. "This project's approach will create systemic change within institutions that can be leveraged

to directly improve opportunities and outcomes for learners from low-income backgrounds."

"This project offers an incredible opportunity to support community colleges in developing apprenticeships that provide new pathways to economic mobility for students," said **Iris Palmer**, director of community colleges at New America. "By equipping institutions with the tools to manage and scale these programs, we can help colleges make apprenticeships an integral part of their offerings, benefitting students and employers alike."

The project will provide tools and capacity-building resources that deepen knowledge of the apprenticeship model and guide the design and implementation of internal institutional processes to develop, administer, and scale registered-apprenticeship programs. Some of these include:

1. Topic-specific planning guides for institutional process design;
2. Instructional video vignettes, templates, example standards;
3. Action plan template for developing institutional standard operating manual; and
4. Employer engagement guide focused on partnership development principles and processes within the context of apprenticeship.



For more information about this initiative, contact ACCT Center for Policy and Practice Associate Vice President Steve Jurch at sjurch@acct.org.

ACCT, SSTAR Lab Release Brief and Dashboard That Explore State Funding Models for Community Colleges

ACCT IS EXCITED TO PUBLISH A NEW BRIEF THAT EXPLORES how states fund community colleges based on the enrollment for their students, including those pursuing credit-bearing degrees and certificates, non-credit workforce programs, and those enrolled via dual-enrollment programs. An interactive data dashboard based on the findings of the brief, *Funding Models for Community Colleges: How states fund credit-bearing, dual-enrollment, and noncredit activity*, describes specific funding policies and funding levels for each state.

Research was conducted with project partners at the **Student Success Through Applied Research (SSTAR) Lab at the University of Wisconsin** and explored how each of the 50 states, plus Washington, D.C. and select territories, are funded for each of the three program types. The **American Association of Community Colleges (AACC)** and the **State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO)** served as resources and shared the resulting systems funding brief and map that will serve as a tool for college leaders and policymakers to compare how funding models vary across states. **Lumina Foundation** provided funding for the project.

The resulting inventory identifies the prevalence of state funding for credit-bearing, dual-enrollment, and noncredit activities across the U.S., along with identifying the policy mechanisms that states use to fund these activities. The inventory represents the first step in a new research imperative; it is not an exhaustive list, nor an indication whether the funding mechanisms provide adequate resources to support students. The findings reveal the need for a more comprehensive investigation into how community colleges are funded so that they can best support the students and the communities they serve.

“This work highlights an important knowledge gap for community colleges and demonstrates the critical need to understand the funding mechanisms so they can effectively support all three pathways,” points out ACCT President and CEO **Jee Hang Lee**. “We have to continue to provide these types of resources for community colleges so they can have informed discussions with policy leaders about this topic.”

Walter G. Bumphus, president and CEO of AACC, said, “This comprehensive analysis will inform future campus programs and services, and will influence local, state, and federal funding structures to benefit the 10 million students served each year at the nation’s community colleges.”

“This project provided a valuable information landscape for states undergoing funding model reviews to ensure they align with state higher education goals,” said **Robert Anderson**, president of SHEEO.

Lumina Foundation Strategy Director for Employment-Aligned Credential Programs **Kermit Kaleba** said, “Expanding our understanding of current community college funding models through this work reinforced our commitment to expanding access to and completion of high-quality degrees and postsecondary credentials and gave us a better understanding of what’s working to increase opportunities for learners.”

The brief of systems funding approaches and interactive dashboard can be found at www.acct.org/center-for-policy-practice/state-funding-models. For more information about this initiative, contact ACCT Center for Policy and Practice Associate Vice President **Steve Jurch** at sjurch@acct.org.

The systems funding brief and map will serve as a tool for college leaders and policymakers to compare how funding models vary across states.

LET THE LAW WORK FOR YOU

Timing is everything when it comes to advocacy, but not everyone has time to pay attention to pending legislation day in and day out.

ACCT's Latest Action in Washington (LAW) Alerts do the work for you.

Since 2008, nearly 1,900 people have signed up to receive ACCT's LAW Alert emails – brief summaries of legislative actions emailed to subscribers as legislation happens, giving community college trustees, presidents, and other leaders and advocates time to contact their representatives and exert influence before it's too late.

Please encourage your fellow trustees, presidents, and colleagues to stay up to date about legislation that affects their community colleges by joining the LAW E-Alert network. To join, simply email publicpolicy@acct.org with "LAW Alert" in the subject of the email.

For more information about ACCT's advocacy services, visit www.acct.org/advocacy.

ACCT Association Awards Winners

ACCT announced the recipients of its annual Association Awards for community college trustees, equity programs, chief executive officers, faculty members, and professional board staff members during the ACCT Awards Gala at the 2024 ACCT Leadership Congress convened in October in Seattle, Washington. Awardees were announced live during the gala on ACCT's Twitter (@CCTrustees). For photos and videos of the Association and Regional Awards, visit www.acct.org/awards.



2024 M. Dale Ensign Trustee Leadership Award
Judy Chen Haggerty
Mt. San Antonio College, California



2024 Marie Y. Martin Chief Executive Award
Christy Ponce
Temple College, Texas



2024 Charles Kennedy Equity Award
Joliet Junior College, Illinois



2024 William H. Meardy Faculty Member Award
John Sands
Moraine Valley Community College, Illinois



2024 ACCT Professional Board Staff Member Award
Perla Molina
Dallas College, Texas



For more information about the ACCT Awards program, contact awards@acct.org.

2024 M. Dale Ensign Trustee Leadership Award Winner



Judy Chen Haggerty

M. Dale Ensign Trustee Leadership Award

What does this award mean to you?

I am deeply honored and humbled to receive the M. Dale Ensign Trustee Leadership Award. Receiving this prestigious award was a very special surprise, and I am so thankful. Serving Mt. San Antonio College for more than two decades, and contributing to ACCT committees, has truly been a privilege. I share this award with my fellow trustee-colleagues across the country who have served as mentors, provided inspiration and support, and have worked alongside me in the best interest of our students. I am grateful for the invaluable experiences I have had and the friendships I have made.

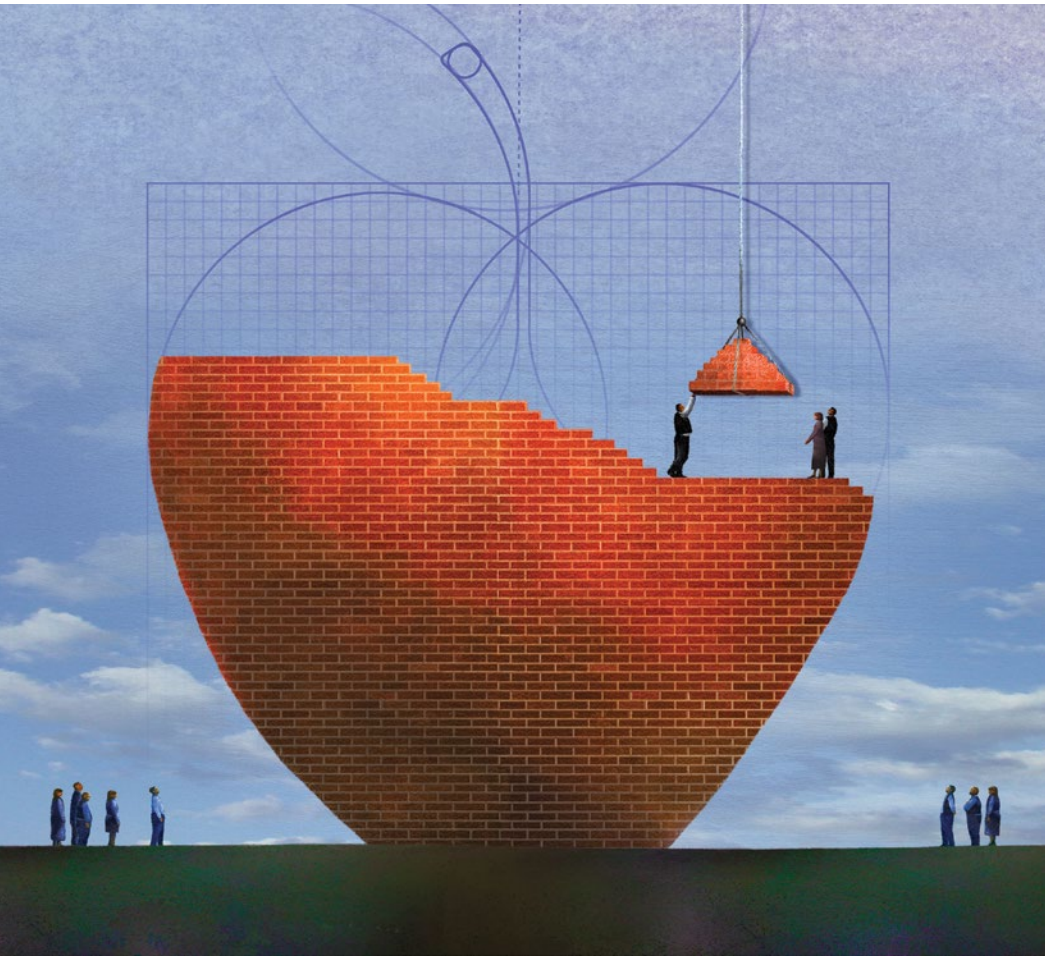
What advice would you give to other community college trustees in leadership?

As community college trustees, we must always remember that we are a catalyst in shaping the future by providing students with the skills, resources, and support they need to succeed. I would encourage new and veteran trustees to be intentional in engaging with the students they serve. This can be accomplished by attending student-led events or having real-time conversations about their experiences, both in their personal lives and at the college. It is both a privilege and honor to serve our students, and we must remain committed, through good times and bad, to helping them achieve their goals and making their dreams come true!

YOU could be the next M. Dale Ensign Trustee Leadership Award winner! Visit [ACCT.org/awards](https://www.acct.org/awards) to learn more about the 2024 awards program or to nominate outstanding board members.



Learn more about the 2023 awards program
at [ACCT.org/awards](https://www.acct.org/awards).



Bricks and Badges

BY ROBIN MATROSS HELMS

DURING THE 2024 ACCT LEADERSHIP CONGRESS, A FEW trustees and I had the opportunity to tour South Seattle College, with a particular focus on its workforce development partnerships. South Seattle College works closely with local industry in a variety of fields to provide apprenticeships, stackable credentials, and real-time training throughout the career lifecycle.

While the facilities and students were impressive, the faculty were the true stars. We met a number of instructors who received their initial training at South Seattle, and have progressed to expert status in their respective fields — often by returning to the college for upskilling and additional opportunities along the way — and are now committed to educating their colleagues and the next generation.

CONNECT



Whether in mechatronics, aircraft maintenance, shipyard welding, or a host of other fields, faculty across the board emphasized that acquiring a solid foundation of knowledge and expertise, focusing on the fundamentals (applied math for all!), and adopting a continuous improvement mindset (what can I learn next?) are the building blocks for a successful career. This was illustrated beautifully in South Seattle's bricklaying studio, where we saw students practice carefully positioning bricks and mortar row by row and from the ground up — with guidance from their instructor and sometimes a few re-dos — literally building the foundations of their careers.

As we head into 2025, foundations, fundamentals, and building blocks are on the forefront at ACCT. Behind the scenes, we have been shoring up our membership database over the last few months; under the leadership of Kielo Savilaakso, our director for member engagement, we spent many hours correcting and updating our college and trustee information in order to ensure we can communicate and serve our membership efficiently and effectively. If you haven't seen it already, we have a new member portal (underpinned by a new member database system) that we hope will make it easier for you to access our resources and stay in touch. The new system will also allow us to tailor our communication with you to make sure you're getting exactly what you need from ACCT.

And on the trustee education front, we have continued to build our base of resources on the ACCT Connect platform — much like the bricks in Seattle's South's bricklaying studio, we hope these will help you build a solid foundation for your trustee careers. New "bricks" we've added recently include a policy library, compiled by ACCT consultant Norma Goldstein, which includes over 120 sample policies from colleges around the country in areas such as fiduciary responsibilities,

board ethics, conflicts of interest, and AI/cybersecurity. And at the National Legislative Summit, we will debut our Advocacy 101 online course, designed and delivered by ACCT Vice President for Public Policy Carrie Warrick-Smith and her expert team.

With a firm foundation of resources now established on ACCT Connect, we're excited to launch the next phase of the platform and ACCT's efforts to ensure trustees acquire the fundamental knowledge they need to perform their role: A trustee badging program. Much like the students and instructors we met at South Seattle, trustees will be able to access structured pathways to advance and deepen their knowledge over time. Also following the example of our colleges, credentials will be stackable, and we'll continuously add and update content to meet the needs of individual trustees and the institutions they serve.

As we grow our trustee education programs, we also remain committed to other the other foundational "bricks" of ACCT's support for good governance at our colleges: Board services such as retreats and evaluations, and opportunities to network and share knowledge with other trustees. On the board services front, in addition to our customized retreats, CEO evaluations, and board self-assessments, we are offering policy reviews, facilitated by our expert consultants, to ensure that colleges' foundational policies are up to date and effective, and that boards have a clear roadmap for success. And in our Governance Leadership Institutes and conferences, we'll continue to provide opportunities for trustees to learn together about emerging issues such as AI and its implications for governance.

Solid foundations are also the focus of our newly launched global programs, the U.S.-UK Community College and Technical Exchange, and the India-U.S. Workforce Development Coalition. Each of these initiatives pairs U.S. community colleges with counterpart

institutions abroad to develop partnerships in key workforce-focused fields including electrical vehicle technology, sustainable construction, cybersecurity, and disaster management. While in the short term these programs will create initial collaborative activities such as student exchanges, our broader goal is — you guessed it — to lay a firm foundation for sustained relationships between the partner institutions that will endure and grow over time, providing opportunities for global learning to students, faculty, colleges, and communities.

Extending the building metaphor just a bit more, every time I visit an ACCT member college, I am re-inspired by the extent to which our institutions often are truly the cornerstones of their communities. Ensuring that our colleges' foundations are solid and strong allows for the creativity, agility, and expansiveness needed for them to grow and meet the evolving needs of our local economies and communities. At ACCT, we recognize that good governance is one of the most important bricks in a college's foundation, and we're here to help you establish, maintain, and build upon that foundation. We look forward to collaborating with you in the coming year!

**ACCT
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Connect.ACCT.org



Robin Matross Helms is ACCT's vice president for membership and educational services. She can be reached at rhelms@acct.org.



Preparing for Trump 2.0

The new administration may most impact community colleges in areas less likely to make headlines.

BY CARRIE WARICK-SMITH

AS I FINALIZE THIS ARTICLE, IT'S TWO WEEKS TO Inauguration Day. When the 1,200-plus leaders of community colleges converge in Washington, D.C., for the Community College National Legislative Summit, we will be at the beginning of a new presidential administration and Congressional session. And it's likely that we will have a new education secretary: Former World Wrestling Entertainment CEO Linda McMahon. Looking at what we know about her and comparing her statements to President Trump's on the campaign trail can give us insight into planning for our time together here in Washington and our year ahead.

During the transition period, President Trump named McMahon as his Education Secretary nominee. She served as the administrator for the Small Business Administration during the first Trump Administration, during which she received bipartisan praise from Congress and the media. NPR described her as "a workhorse, traveling the country to promote small business and the president's economic agenda while avoiding the scandals that have plagued several of her Cabinet colleagues." She has been a senior leader at the America First Policy Institute (AFPI) since then and is expected to move through the Senate confirmation process without serious objections.

In taking the helm at the U.S. Department of Education (ED), McMahon would lead a 4,400-person workforce that includes Federal Student Aid and its over \$1 trillion student loan program. One immediate challenge will be selecting the new leader of Federal Student Aid and ensuring they meet the new Congressional requirement to release the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) by October 1 this year.

McMahon has limited experience in education. In addition to serving on the Connecticut State Board of Education for one year, she has been a longtime trustee of the private Catholic Sacred Heart University

in Fairfield, Connecticut. While the process to become a private university trustee differs from that of joining a public college board, McMahon should understand the important role of trustees for their institutions.

A glimpse into McMahon's personal positions on higher education can be gleaned from her September 2024 opinion piece published in the Washington trade press newspaper *The Hill*. In "Workforce Pell Grants will create high-paying jobs for more Americans," she points out that "Workforce Pell is a bipartisan initiative because Americans on both sides of the aisle are ready to stop restricting Pell Grants to college degree programs. By expanding eligibility to include high-quality, short-term workforce training programs, [the Bipartisan Workforce Pell Act] can help more Americans access the education they need to succeed in today's economy." Her strong support for one of our top legislative priorities should be noted as Congress works again to make short-term Pell grants a reality for our students.

In this piece, she also echoed an often-repeated message of Trump on the campaign trail: that higher education has lost focus. In the Workforce Pell piece, which focuses on helping the American worker, she also stated: "Today...many degree programs have lost sight of their mission. And their one-size-fits-all solution to workforce development has become outdated. Our educational system must offer clear and viable pathways to the American Dream aside from four-year degrees."

McMahon's opinion piece and the Republican platform carefully state a "four-year degree" is their concern, but it is likely the rhetoric will push the broader narrative that "college isn't worth it." Yet we know, and have the facts to back up, that postsecondary education — whether a certificate, associate degree, or bachelor's degree — is indeed worth the investment for almost all students. As community college leaders, I encourage you to continue to demonstrate to your elected officials the impact of your institutions on your local communities — their constituents — and the regional economy.

Media coverage of the education agenda is focused on the dismantling of ED, often discussed by Trump and others. While this idea currently has more momentum and more detailed plans than in the past, it is highly unlikely to win the required Congressional approval. As such, the Trump administration may most impact community colleges in areas less likely to make headlines. One in particular is Trump's focus on completely rebuilding the accreditation process.

Trump is the first presidential candidate to make such a proposal on the campaign trail. If he dramatically changes how our

institutions are accredited, it could impact higher education for decades to come.

As we gather for our time in Washington, it is important to remember that much of what President Trump proposes requires Congressional support and action. Our greatest threats will likely come from the focus on cutting federal spending, which has far more support in Congress than eliminating ED does.

Congress will be facing a calendar year that includes the appropriations for two fiscal years — 2025, which will be six months late by the time it's passed in March, and 2026, which is due Sept 30.

Additionally, Republicans in Congress plan to attempt two budget reconciliation processes this calendar year — as one can be done in each fiscal year. The first will likely be focused on immigration and the second on renewing the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, passed by the same process during Trump's first term. This latter bill will give us the opportunity to advocate for another priority: ending the taxation on the Pell Grant and adjusting higher education tax benefits to better align to the needs of community college students.

Looking to the year ahead, community colleges face both opportunities and threats on the horizon. Secretary-Designate McMahon's support for Workforce Pell and the forthcoming tax legislation give us strong opportunities to move forward two top priorities. The nationwide conversation questioning the value of higher education — and the cost-cutting focus of the 47th Administration — pose challenges we must face.

The best way to do that is to build relationships with your members of Congress and be certain they know the value of your institutions and how their federal investment makes that possible. Traveling to Washington is important. But equally so is meeting with your members year-round in your state and inviting them to campus to witness your work and talk with your students firsthand. Making this connection for them between your students' successes and their federal investment is the best way to build champions for community colleges in the years ahead.

Please sign up for our Latest in Washington updates by emailing publicpolicy@acct.org.



Carrie Warick-Smith is vice president for public policy at ACCT. She can be reached at cwsmith@acct.org.

National Survey of Community College Trustees

We need your insights! ACCT has partnered with the Center for the Study of Community Colleges to conduct an important **Survey of Community College Trustees**, and we need your participation to make it truly impactful.

By taking a few minutes to complete this survey, you'll be contributing to a landmark initiative that will **inform critical decisions** and **guide future policies, and influence key changes** that matter to community colleges and their students.

Your input is essential.

Scan the QR code to take the survey on your mobile device or go to acct.org/trustee-survey to take the survey on your computer.



Center for the Study of
Community Colleges

Attention Board Chairs and College CEOs!

CEO Compensation Survey

We need your help!

We need your help to establish a community college CEO compensation database to serve as an ongoing resource for ACCT member institutions.

Why are we doing this?

ACCT is establishing a new database of comprehensive community college CEO compensation information that will be updated periodically.

Once ACCT has a robust database, we will be able to use the data to:

- Guide boards in best practices around CEO compensation and benefits, including regional or state data.
- Offer granular compensation data based on institutional size, region, state, urbanicity, and other data elements to help guide boards through the often-nebulous process of determining appropriate compensation when hiring or negotiating a CEO contract.

This information will enable boards to determine the appropriate compensation to attract and retain the best candidates for your institution.

Take the survey!

Take the survey at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/GYZ8VLN> or scan the QR code.

Questions?

Contact clopez@acct.org.





ACTION FIGURE

As ACCT Chair, Rich Fukutaki has a vision of what's needed to create "Trustee 2.0."



BY MARK TONER

THROUGHOUT HIS VARIED CAREER IN THE WORLDS of toys, entertainment, education, and technology, Rich Fukutaki has shepherded into being a range of action figures involving superheroes like He-Man and the Masters of the Universe. As ACCT Chair, he has come full circle, seeking to ensure that trustees hone their own power to help colleges navigate a fast-changing world. "With AI accelerating the pace of change, our community and technical colleges will have to innovate and adapt at a pace unseen before," Fukutaki, a trustee at Bellevue College in Washington, said during last fall's ACCT Leadership Congress in Seattle (see p. 20). "We trustees will need to keep up and stay sharp so we can each help support our administration, faculty, and staff as they prepare students for AI as an integral part of everyday life, education, work and play. Our task is clear — we must ensure that we are prepared."

The first Asian man and person of Japanese descent to be named ACCT Chair, Fukutaki points to his family's role in that history. "I am proud to represent the 120,000 Japanese Americans and their families whose lives and education were interrupted when they were sent to internment camps during World War II," he said in Seattle.

One of 13 children, Fukutaki's father immigrated to the United States in his teens. He was 17 years old and a senior at Pasadena Junior College in California when he, his siblings, and his grandmother were sent to the Gila River camp in the Arizona desert. While in the internment camp, Fukutaki's father ultimately was able to complete his studies and graduate. In 2012, what is now called Pasadena City College (PCC) would honor him and other students from the camps during its graduation ceremony.

After being released from the internment camp, Fukutaki's father was drafted into the Army, which sent him to occupied post-war Japan. There, he met his wife, whose own family's home was firebombed during the war. The couple returned to the United States, settling in Pasadena. Fukutaki's father took a few job-related courses, and his

mother took advantage of ESL classes, but "my sister and I believe that because education paths for both of our parents were cut off, this made them determined to have their kids earn a college degree and beyond," he says. "They gifted us with a drive for higher education."

Both Fukutaki and his sister, Dorothy, graduated from PCC before going on to earn advanced degrees; he recalls working full-time, "like so many of our students," while attending classes. Fukutaki went on to the University of California at Berkeley and the University of Southern California, ultimately receiving an MBA, but "I can honestly say that the quality and care of teaching in my experience was the best at PCC," he says. "The faculty focused on the students and our learning experience."

While studying for his MBA, Fukutaki discovered the emerging field of brand management, which involves the creation, introduction, and oversight of new products. After graduating, he introduced new food concepts for the parent company of Jack in the Box, including a precursor to what would become Hot Pockets, followed by a stint with the Carnation Company.

Fukutaki would ultimately find a niche working in the entertainment business. He managed toys for Mattel and other companies that were largely connected to television shows, movies, or sports — including He-Man, for which he introduced a sword with early computerized sound effects and lighting.

The characters Fukutaki has managed over his career are like a Who's Who of kids' entertainment — the Simpsons, Ren and Stimpy, the Incredible Crash Test Dummies, the Steven Spielberg movie Hook, the parent company of the Mighty Morphin Power Rangers, and more. He would go on to serve as vice president and general manager of a Seattle-based company called Wizards of the Coast, best known for the Magic: The Gathering card game and its later purchase of the Dungeons & Dragons game line. "The game industry was a step towards working with projects that were both challenging and stimulating," he says.



Moving to Seattle with his wife Jen and children Kai and Samantha, Fukutaki became an active member of the community. He currently serves as an elder and small group leader at Bellevue Presbyterian Church and as a service-day volunteer at Jubilee Reach Center.

Fukutaki also recognized the opportunity and signed the deal to launch the Pokémon trading card game, which became an instant blockbuster brand and influenced many of today's students. He then left Wizards of the Coast to co-found his own consulting business, SunBreak Group, LLC. As managing director of the company, which is focused on start-ups and early-stage companies, Fukutaki has relished his work with edutainment software and other projects that mix technology, games, and learning. Over the years, he has helped launch projects like Smarterville, the American Association for the Advancement of Science's Kinetic City, and Franchise Basketball, all of which encourage STEM learning in underrepresented groups.

"The projects that got me excited were about a variety of alternate ways to approach learning for students," he says. "That's one of the things I take into my mindset as I think about how our colleges are delivering education."

Fukutaki was appointed as a trustee at Bellevue College by Gov. Jay Inslee in 2015. During his tenure, the board has focused on improving its ability to work together to benefit students, he says, including the construction of a 69,000-square-foot student-success center that opened its doors in 2020. With three floors that mirror students' upward progression through their time at the college, the center brings together a welcome center and academic advising, a wide range of support for enrolled students including veterans, and career advising and support.

"Knowing what a difference our college makes in students' lives was really powerful," he says. "I also knew that we as community colleges can't afford to fail. I'm very passionate about making sure we do what we can to help students not only get through but succeed."

Another major focus of his tenure on the Bellevue College board has been improving the college's responsiveness to community needs. With many of his fellow board members working for the Seattle region's technology firms, Fukutaki points to their shared experience: "Higher ed moves at a much slower pace than what we may be used to in our working lives," he says. "We need to move the college to where we're able to keep pace with the community around it."

As part of this shift, Bellevue College now offers bachelor's degrees, including in computer science, and has introduced or strengthened programs in digital marketing, cybersecurity — and AI.

"When you're in fields like that, the rapid pace at which things move means we need to figure out how to continue to meet the needs of our student population at a pace that resembles what they're going to encounter when they get to the working world," he says.

After Fukutaki was named chair of the Bellevue College board, it made diversity, equity, and inclusion a top priority for the college's president. Fukutaki was also selected as the trustee representative on a workgroup that crafted a new vision statement that placed racial equity at the forefront of everything the state's community college system does and would later serve on the state board's leadership development committee.

Involvement in the Washington trustee association led to involvement in ACCT, including serving as a member of the Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion (DEI), Awards, and Finance and Audit, and Member Communications and Education Committees. He was



ultimately encouraged to seek a leadership position, first being elected to the board and becoming secretary-treasurer in 2021 before serving as vice chair and chair-elect.

“I felt I was a better trustee having had the experience of being in ACCT and continuing to be able to learn and benefit from the experience of the rich and broad range of people we interact with from around the country,” he says.

As ACCT Chair, Fukutaki is focused on the association’s education role in addressing the rapid pace of change in higher education and elsewhere.

“Students now are quite a bit different than students 20 to 30 years ago,” he says, “and the students that will be at our colleges in 12 to 15 years are probably going to be significantly different because of the very rapid adoption of AI tools in everything.”

As evidence of the rapid pace of change, Fukutaki points to how long it took previous technologies to become widely adopted by the public. The telephone took 75 years, television took nearly 40 — even the Internet took nearly a decade to become commonplace. But ChatGPT “took just two months,” he cautions.

“AI is going to change the face of education,” he says.

Fukutaki’s experience with AI goes back more than four decades, when he was exposed to the nascent field as a college student exploring cognitive sciences as a career possibility. “I’m now coming full circle,” he says. “I love to figure out how to use this for the benefit of students, especially the students who are the most resource challenged.”

This will require a major shift for trustees. Noting that the average trustee is 66 years old and that many serve on their boards for a decade or more, Fukutaki says his focus as ACCT chair involves

education that can help them lead their colleges through this technological revolution.

“We at ACCT have a responsibility to help our trustees be in a position to keep up and be as supportive as they can be as our colleges change more quickly than they’ve probably ever seen,” he says. “I think in the next two to three years, trustees may see more change on their campuses than in the last 20 to 30 years combined.”

Fukutaki stresses that he’s “eternally optimistic” about the sector and its leaders’ ability to meet these needs. “I’m looking forward to the next version of community colleges, given that they were invented sixtyish years ago in large part, and we haven’t changed the models very much,” he says. “We’re strategizing at ACCT on what we need to do to help prepare our trustees for this next version of our community colleges to more closely align with what’s going on in communities at the speed at which our industries are moving.”

So watch for another action figure — Trustee 2.0 or, as Fukutaki jokingly called the evolving, ever-more-technologically inclined role in Seattle, “the robo-trustee.” It might not make its way to toy store shelves, but Fukutaki believes it’s essential to ensure community colleges continue to serve their students well.



Mark Toner is an editor for Trustee Quarterly.

CATALYTIC CONVERTERS

The 2024 ACCT Leadership Congress focused on ways trustees can help lead their colleges through transformational shifts within and beyond their walls.

By Mark Toner





Left to Right: 2024 ACCT Board Chair Jay Nardini passes the gavel to incoming 2025 Board Chair Rich Fukutaki; Voting delegates at the ACCT Senate meeting

WITH ONE OF THE NATION'S HIGH-TECH HUBS as a backdrop, the 2024 ACCT Leadership Congress convened in Seattle last October with the future on the minds of the leaders who attended.

“We are in the middle of a major technological industrial revolution, and our colleges are challenged with keeping up with the times,” 2024 ACCT Chair Jay Nardini, a trustee at Hawkeye Community College, told attendees during the opening keynote session. “It’s going to require a lot from us — focus, attention, planning, engagement, and perhaps most importantly, supporting our leaders as they try out new ideas.”

That revolution involves many facets, opportunities, and risks. From forging new types of partnerships to embrace emerging fields such as semiconductor manufacturing to reshaping institutions to prepare students for how artificial intelligence (AI) will upend workplaces, careers, and the world, Congress attendees were briefed on ways their colleges can change their communities — and also must change themselves.

“I don’t need to tell you that education is at a critical juncture,” Paul Francis, executive director for the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, told attendees. “This is a challenging time, but it can also be an exciting time.”

COMMUNITY CATALYSTS

With the theme “Community Colleges as Catalysts: Cultivating Skills for the Future,” Congress sessions focused on institutions’

role in transformational economic shifts. Partnerships will play an even more crucial role in this work, as illustrated by a keynote session describing Intel’s \$100 billion investment in semiconductor manufacturing plants in Ohio.

“Economic development deals tend to be about land and water and incentives and those sorts of things, but the truth is those are short term. The long-term success of any of these [efforts] is going to be about the workforce we create,” said David Harrison, president of Columbus State Community College. “The understanding of the role we play in this space is inherent in what Intel does, and that’s incredibly exciting.”

Of Intel’s initial 3,000 hires, 70 percent will be technicians, Melinda Murdock, Intel university relations manager, told attendees. To meet this need, eight lead institutions across Ohio, including Columbus State, rapidly developed a one-year certificate program centered on semiconductor manufacturing. “This had to be done quickly, and the beauty of community colleges is that they can move quickly,” Murdock said.

As efforts to reshore semiconductor manufacturing accelerate, colleges and economic development officials in states including New York, Texas, and Arizona are partnering in similar ways. To inform these efforts, Harrison stressed the importance of collaboration across institutions and states, as well as stressing the need for trustee support. “Trustees need to have a high level of comfort with ambiguity,” he said. “[Economic development officials] think in decades. My college is focused on the next



Left to Right: Rich Fukutaki; Melissa Loble; Melissa Littleton

semester’s schedule. So the ability to align those two is really important.”

Kenny McDonald, president and CEO of the Columbus Partnership, agreed. “We’re at the beginning of a complete transformation of the economy,” he said. “[Alignment] will be the biggest thing you do for your community.”

NEW MODELS

As part of preparing for economic transformation, community colleges must adapt to fast-changing conditions in the workplace.

“The future of work could be quite nice for community colleges — but it’s your ball to drop,” Jeff Strohl, research professor and director of the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, told Congress attendees. “We need to think about how we avoid the pitfalls of the past while leveraging the great strengths community colleges bring to our country.”

Strohl said some trends — the growing demand for ongoing learning and alignment with workforce needs — bode well for the community college sector. At the same time, he pointed to how ineffective transfer policies, disparities in resource allocation, and a narrow focus on middle-skill jobs all run the risk of “trapping people in dead-end jobs” and continuing “dismal outcomes,” particularly for low-income and minority students.

In describing what he called a new “portfolio” model of education, Strohl urged Congress attendees to move away from

a linear, stackable approach to continuing learning to a more fluid “little of this, little of that” approach to “enable people to work in a multifaceted environment,” he said. To do so, institutions must improve transfer policies, create more fully articulated career pathways beyond the first job, invest in improved labor market data to more fully align programs with workplace needs, and build even more robust partnerships with employers.

Sessions throughout Congress highlighted new models and continued growth in transformational initiatives. Pointing to this year’s implementation of free community college in Massachusetts, which led to nearly 1,000 new students at Quinsigamond Community College this fall, President Luis Pedraja urged trustees to advocate for similar comprehensive programs in their own states. “Consider working with your legislatures,” he said. “It’s an investment in the future of your colleges and your state, and it’s life-changing for students.”

Another session focused on the rapid growth of another state-level initiative: community college baccalaureate programs, with more than 700 degree-granting programs now available at more than 190 institutions in 24 states. “There are still large pockets that don’t have that opportunity,” Angela Kersenbrock, president of the Community College Baccalaureate Association, told attendees. “We have a lot of work to do.”

ACCT President and CEO Jee Hang Lee highlighted an array of new ACCT initiatives focused on institutional leadership, including the ongoing Kids on Campus childcare initiative, new



Clockwise: 2024 ACCT Awardees; Lynn Tincher Ladner; ACCT Board members take the oath of office.

opportunities for global learning including a student exchange partnership with the UK’s Association on Colleges (see p. 5) and a US-India workforce development coalition, and upcoming surveys on CEO salaries and community college trustees (see p. 14).

Congress speakers also focused on the ongoing need to diversify governing boards. Carl B. Smalls, Danville Community College vice president of finance and administration, presented findings from a study of minority trustees and highlighted strategies to encourage people of color to seek positions on governing boards.

“Trustees of color can help ensure discussions around equity and inclusion are not superficial but deeply integrated and embedded in the college’s strategic goals,” added Bellevue College Board Chair Richard Leigh. “By fostering a governance structure that represents the communities they serve, [boards] can ensure that community colleges serve as the vital engine of social mobility and inclusion.”

In turn, trustees should focus on the growing scope of students they serve. Keynote speaker Melissa Littleton described her own transformational experience as a student at Tacoma Community College. “I see community colleges as crossing a bridge to a better tomorrow. Be someone that impacts other people’s lives and understands that it is a ripple effect,” said Littleton, now a regional outreach representative for Gov. Jay Inslee.

All of this requires institutional vision. To that end, NorthWest Arkansas Community College went through a “strategic foresight” process to develop a 10-year vision that will “help us grapple with

the future in a better way,” said Andrea Henderson, executive director of Arkansas Community Colleges.

“Be the kind of trustee that enables [this], and don’t discourage your president when they start thinking beyond the next semester,” said NorthWest Board Chair Mark F. Scott.

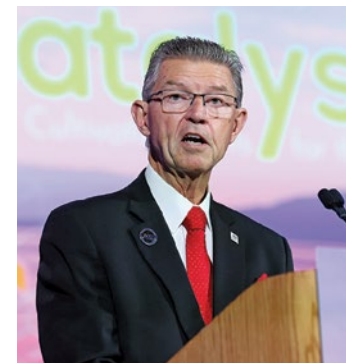
BRAVE NEW WORLD

Nowhere else was the future — and the present — more of a focus than with AI. Throughout the event, ACCT hosted a hands-on AI lab and multiple sessions on the potential and pitfalls of the technology. (For more on AI and community colleges, see the article on p. 30.)

AI’s double-edged nature was a constant theme. Keynote speaker Melissa Loble highlighted both sides of the coin: the need for data policies to ensure privacy and the danger of exacerbating the digital divide on the one hand, and the imperative to ensure that students, faculty, and staff all gain AI literacy as a requirement for a fast-changing world on the other.

“You’ll have deep conversations about AI, inspiring and scary,” said Loble, chief academic officer of Instructure. “The first step is really making sure that everyone is fully literate in how and why to make good choices with AI... It truly has the ability to have a significant impact on the work your institutions are doing.”

Kiran Kodithala, CEO of N2N services, highlighted how colleges can use dedicated versions of generative AI models to address these challenges while leveraging the technology to power chatbots, advising, and course design, keep student data secure,



Clockwise: Jee Hang Lee; Student trustees; Jay Nardini; Kenny McDonald, Gabriela Cruz Thompson, and David T. Harrison

and help identify potentially fraudulent applications. “There’s a huge opportunity for community colleges to be a true leader in education by using the power of AI,” he said.

And AI will be everywhere in institutions. During a session on clean energy, Michael Hines, director of education initiatives for Trane Technologies, noted that the HVAC giant is helping develop a practical AI certification program. Why? Because the company’s presence in 40,000 buildings around the world generates 50 million data points a day — something only AI can analyze at scale, he said.

Leveraging information in new ways, including bringing together siloed data from different departments and functions, will require institutions to double down on data governance. “It is the foundation that lets you build the technology on top of it,” said George Sotirion, CIO of Brookdale Community College in New Jersey. “Without ensuring you have that below the waterline, it’s extremely difficult.”

Community college leaders are key to this work. At Wake Technical Community College in North Carolina, “leadership has been out front in getting ahead of [AI] because are students are already using it and we need to get alignment of what our needs and our students’ needs are,” said Monica Gemperlein, associate vice president of workforce operations and assessment.

As the ceremonial gavel was passed to 2025 ACCT Chair Rich Fukutaki on the final day of Congress, he looked at community colleges’ past — including their role in educating his parents and other Japanese Americans interred during World War II — and its future (see profile, p.16). Noting that AI’s rapid adoption will lead trustees to rapidly “see more change on their campuses than in the last 20 to 30 years combined,” Fukutaki said that ACCT will help trustees prepare for that change through training and education programs around AI.

“We trustees will need to keep up and stay sharp so we can each help support our administration, faculty, and staff as they prepare students for AI as an integral part of everyday life, education, work, and play,” said Fukutaki, a trustee at Bellevue College in Washington. “Our task is clear — we must ensure that we are prepared.”



Mark Toner is an editor for *Trustee Quarterly*.

LEVERAGING SNAP Employment & Training

IN A PRE-CONGRESS SESSION, ATTENDEES LEARNED how SNAP Employment & Training program funding can help colleges scale existing student success initiatives, ranging from tuition support to utilities, childcare, transportation, books and supplies, and support services connected to these programs. “It is a very flexible and student-centered resource,” said Marc Goldberg, principal of Skills Strategy Consulting and former associate vice president for workforce development and continuing education at Portland Community College.

The workshop outlined how colleges and other third-party providers can use SNAP’s 50/50 program to be reimbursed for half of expenses involving training for SNAP recipients that lead to better jobs. That includes student success initiatives that support these students, coaching and career programs, and the staff time associated with these initiatives. It can add up to millions — or tens of millions — of dollars for institutions that serve SNAP E&T populations well, speakers said. More importantly, the fixed reimbursement provides money to support and scale programs as they grow.

“This program is so central to who we want to be as a college and what we want to do as a college to close equity gaps,” said Dr. Kenneth Lawson, president of Columbia Gorge Community College in Oregon.

To get started, colleges should connect with their state’s SNAP E&T program, each of whose programs differ from each other. “That’s an opportunity because colleges can influence and shape how that looks,” Goldberg said. “They can bring their strengths and expertise to SNAP agencies, and they can design [programs] together.”

To support this work, ACCT is developing a series of 12 planning guides, supported by webinars and videos. To learn more, visit <https://acct.org/center-for-policy-practice/SNAP-ET/OverviewBriefs>. And to learn why, listen to the students who receive SNAP E&T services. “Speaking from a student perspective, SNAP is very useful. It’s a resource on top of a resource,” said Shoniqua Thomas, a student trustee at Compton College.



Mark Toner is an editor for Trustee Quarterly.

TRUSTEE TROUBLES

Four archetypal approaches to governance that can backfire for a board.

By Steve Robinson and M. Richard Shaink

AS COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENTS WITH MULTIPLE DECADES OF EXPERIENCE WORKING WITH elected and appointed boards, we often reflect on the amazing contributions made by trustees to the work of our institutions.

Together, our perspectives span two generations of community college leadership. One of us retired ten years ago after a career spent leading colleges in Nebraska and Michigan. The other is currently four years into a second presidency, having served in that role in Ohio and Michigan. As colleagues and mentor/mentee, we have shared perspectives on community college trusteeship for nearly 25 years. Whenever we can, we take the opportunity to thank these individuals for their service as trustees. There are about 1,100 community colleges in the United States. Each of these colleges has an appointed or elected board with anywhere from five to 18 (or more) trustees. This means that there are thousands upon thousands of Americans donating their time and talent to their local community college in an effort to make their community a better place. We strongly feel that this collective national service truly deserves special recognition.

Like many effective community college boards, the community colleges where we have worked embrace a “policy governance” framework. At a policy governance or “Carver Model” college, the board function is specified as a policy-setting role where the chief executive is charged with achieving “ends” to board goals and priorities. The “means” of how to achieve those “ends” is work entrusted to the college president and the employees of the college. Trustees stay focused on the policy and goals of the community college, while the college president provides the leadership and management of the college’s activities.

A common concept in a policy governance framework is the idea of “executive limitations,” or specific things the chief executive is prohibited from doing in order to achieve outcomes. What follows — if we may be so bold — is a series of informal “board limitations,” or ineffective models for serving as a community college trustee. In our experience, there are four models of community college trusteeship that produce negative results, even when trustees have the best of intentions.

‘The Elephant in the Room’

The most important and lasting work on the negative side of trusteeship is Terry O’Banion’s short book *The Rogue Trustee: The Elephant in the Room*. Published in 2009 by the League for Innovation, O’Banion’s book remains the standard for understanding the toxic and destructive impact that can come from a trustee who, as he eloquently explains, “pursues a path other than serving the greater good.” Born from many years of collecting horror stories from dysfunctional boards, O’Banion’s book is a roadmap for community college leaders with trustees who are bent on distraction and destruction. In fact, one of us provided confidential information to Dr. Bannon in the early 2000s that he features prominently in this important work. We highly recommend this book to community college leaders and trustees alike.

Experience is the best teacher, and this book contains many hard lessons and effective strategies. While most of the book outlines jaw-dropping examples of dysfunction, this passage is important to highlight as we examine how trustees can unintentionally create problems:

The overwhelming majority of community college trustees are excellent and effective citizen leaders who are committed to governing the college to ensure that students and the local community are well served by a functioning institution (p. 98).

Our experience as community college presidents bears this out. **Disruptive trustees are not the norm.** Individuals usually seek appointed or elected trusteeship as a way to serve their community and do good things. Many are motivated by compelling personal stories about their desire to make a difference. O’Banion’s useful book describes what happens when a rogue voice on the board is determined to create chaos and deliberately cause problems. This phenomenon is very real and can have devastating consequences.

The more common problem, however, occurs when well-meaning trustees create issues by approaching board service with inappropriate models of what it means to serve.

Despite the best efforts of national organizations such as ACCT and the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), there are relatively few opportunities for training on how to be, as O’Banion terms it, an “excellent and effective citizen leader.” There are excellent training opportunities for trustees, but they also come with a confirmation bias: Trustees who seek training on how to be an effective trustee are likely predisposed to adopt a policy-governance viewpoint of their role on the board.

Absent formal training, most trustees approach the role by watching the actions of other trustees they admire. This is normal. Both of us have served on boards in our capacity as community leaders, and this is often how one learns to work within a specific governance structure.

Trusteeship: Four Unproductive Models

During our reflections on working with elected and appointed boards, we have identified four conceptual models of community college trusteeship that we find to be unproductive and unhelpful. These are archetypes or generalizations, and the examples we provide are based on our collective experience at multiple colleges over the years. In our estimation, each of these models starts from a genuine interest to do good things. In many cases, trustees are simply emulating what they see other trustees do in meetings and public interactions.

1. Trustee as Legislator

Many community college boards are made up of elected trustees. The citizens elected to these positions often have experience with other types of elected office, either as a candidate or political activist. Many of these elected offices are legislative in nature: city council, state house or assembly, even the U.S. Congress. So it should not be a surprise that when trustees are elected, they often replay that familiar Schoolhouse Rock cartoon in their heads about how a bill becomes a law.

Their idea of an effective trustee who *governs* a college is modeled on a state representative or member of congress who *governs* a state or a country: How do I get my “agenda” enacted into law? How do I gain the necessary votes I need for my piece of legislation? In this mode, trustees often speak of the priorities of their “constituents.” While some elected college boards are divided into “wards” or “territories” where trustees are elected to serve the interests of a specific community, most trustees are charged with representing the interests of the citizens at large, and especially the students of the community college. For this reason, the legislative model for community college trusteeship usually creates an undue focus on a particular trustee enacting a particular narrow priority at the expense of the larger interests of the college as a whole.

Disruptive trustees are not the norm. The more common problem, however, occurs when well-meaning trustees create issues by approaching board service with inappropriate models of what it means to serve.

Because trustees are either appointed through a political process or elected to office, they are by nature involved in local politics. Problems can arise, however, when board policy is not clear on the declared board authority when speaking with or responding to local and state officials. Since board members are elected or appointed to the board, individual trustees have the right to speak and converse with other officials on various topics. However, members should not have the right to intimate that the board has given them authority to speak on non-voted positions. For this reason, board policy should clearly outline who has the responsibility and authority to speak for the college and the board.

2. Trustee as Ombudsman

There is a legitimate role for boards to play when community members have concerns about the college, especially if those concerns are about the president or the college's procedures. In most cases, however, complaints and concerns directed to the board of trustees are more appropriately handled by well-established institutional processes.

It is inevitable that disgruntled students, employees, vendors, and community members will reach out directly to trustees to air their grievances. Unless those complaints relate to the president or the college processes themselves, those matters should be dealt with by the college employees charged with administering those processes and not by elected or appointed board members.

In too many cases, trustees can accept as fact the contents of a demand letter written by a lawyer, a student/faculty grievance, or civil rights complaint. Effective colleges have dispute resolution processes for all such disagreements and conflicts, and there is no appropriate role for the board or individual trustees to play in such processes unless the proper steps are not being followed or the president and college leaders have failed to act in the appropriate manner. Getting involved in such disputes also creates liability for trustees as individuals. Turning a governance board into a complaint department is always a bad idea and constitutes a very damaging model for how to approach community college trusteeship.

Trustees naturally wish to resolve disputes and complaints. Occasionally, a board member will direct the president or staff to take certain actions. In these cases, it must be remembered that the board speaks to the president with one voice, and that is through the board chair. It doesn't matter how divided the board is on certain issues; once the board votes on policy matters, the president takes direction from the chair in furtherance of that policy direction. In addition, staff only take direction through the president's administrative structure. Again, the board's governance policies and the college's procedures should serve as guardrails to prevent this from happening.

3. Trustee as Opposing Counsel

Formal board meetings can often resemble courtroom proceedings. Community college board rooms are often quite formal and professional. Trustees sit at a dais or table much like the bench of a courtroom, and the faculty and administrators who speak to at board meetings are often seated at tables with microphones. Like most formal meetings, the norms of discourse at board meetings provide for the use of formal titles and honorifics. This can create the atmosphere of an adversarial formal hearing.

Rather than asking questions to understand or gain insight on decisions to be made, this approach views trusteeship as "asking the tough questions" and "getting to the bottom of things." We have even seen trustees use cross examination techniques for the impeachment of witnesses, questioning the credentials of college leaders and consultants, and attempting to catch them in incontinences or trip them up.

This adversarial approach of treating college employees as "hostile witnesses" is antithetical to the mission and purpose of a board. While boards certainly have an oversight role to play, trustees and college leaders are literally on the same team. Approaching trustee/administration relationships as "us vs. them" conflicts is a recipe for dysfunction and lack of trust. For this reason, framing trusteeship from the vantage point of opposing counsel creates unnecessary animosity and conflict that rarely produces effective meetings.

There is a legitimate role for boards to play when community members have concerns about the college, especially if those concerns are about the president or the college's procedures. In most cases, however, complaints and concerns directed to the board of trustees are more appropriately handled by well-established institutional processes.

4. Trustee as Dean/Director

It is possible for a trustee to be so excited by the college where they serve that they begin to behave as though they were an employee of the college. These trustees often have the best of intentions. They take a special interest in an area or department. They attend the public meetings and events for the area in question. They approach the president and the staff with specific ideas for programming and initiatives.

One of us worked with a trustee who actually requested to attend department meetings, review budget proposals, and weigh in on key decisions involving a particular department. This obviously created the necessity for a difficult conversation. In this case, the president sat down with the trustee and explored the ideas presented, politely rebuffing requests to attend department meetings and provide input on line item budget allocations. Sensing frustration, the president asked if he could be candid. Having built a relationship of respect and rapport, the trustee provided assurance that the president could speak freely. "It sounds like what you really want," the president said, "is to be a dean." The discussion turned to how an effective trustee could empower deans and directors to make the kinds of positive changes this trustee was seeking and focused on what the president could do to create an environment where this could happen.

In another case, one of us worked with a board member who wanted to negotiate with one of the college's suppliers instead of the college administration because they were close business friends and could get the best deal. This is always inappropriate. It is never the job of board members to interfere in the institution's business relationships. Should a concern arise, the trustee should take the concern to the board chair, who in turn should work with the president to address the perceived issue.

As much as we hope trustees will be excited about community college work at the departmental level, it is an ineffective model to approach trusteeship from the perspective of "running" or "directing" a particular operation or element of the college.

Serving Our Students and Communities

While these four ways of approaching the role of trustee are unproductive, it is important to stress that they are thankfully rare. To repeat Terry O'Banion's wise words, most elected and appointed trustees strive to be "excellent and effective citizen leaders who are committed to governing the college." Given the fact that the many thousands of individuals who serve in these roles across the country come to their service with little to no experience in higher education, we find this to be amazing and uplifting. Our nation owes a great debt of gratitude to the citizen leaders who provide effective governance for our colleges.

In our discussions on this important topic, we have found that having names for these ineffective models can help in guiding college leaders and trustees in more effective and productive directions. In most cases, a return to the bylaws and governing documents of the college will underscore this point. In fact, both of the Michigan community colleges where we have served the longest have traditions of policy governance that attempt to guide trustees away from the four ineffective models presented here.

During our conversations with trustees over the years, just mentioning these unproductive models in contrast to a more productive "policy governance" approach is often all that is required to re-establish why we are all doing community college work in the first place: to serve our students and our communities.



Steve Robinson, Ph.D, is the president of Lansing Community College in Michigan. M. Richard Shaink, Ph.D., is president emeritus of Mott Community College in Michigan. Both Robinson and Shaink earned BA, MA, and Ph.D. degrees from Michigan State University.

DEMYSTIFYING AI

All of a sudden, artificial intelligence is everywhere.
Is your board ready? (Is anybody?)

By David Conner



Technology can increase productivity and efficiency, and human beings collectively can identify new work that needs to be done. Industrial revolutions require participatory co-evolution, and that requires ongoing industrial innovations and ongoing workforce education.

“THIS IS COMPLETELY OVERWHELMING,” SAID A COLLEGE leader in the “Demystifying AI” session at the 2024 ACCT Leadership Congress. “I don’t even know where to begin.”

Commercially available generative AI technology seems to have come out of nowhere. Barely two years ago, most people probably associated AI with science fiction — something from a speculative future that is usually depicted onscreen as dystopian. It doesn’t help that Nobel Prize-winning “Godfather of AI” Geoffrey Hinton speaks in similar terms about AI today, warning of its potential dangers to civilization as we know it, particularly as it remains unregulated anywhere by the federal government or any U.S. state. Scary speculation is good for ratings, so most of us have heard the worst-case scenarios about what will happen if generative AI gets out of control.

Other commonly stated concerns involve the potential of advanced AI programs to displace workers or potentially even render some types of professions, such as customer service agents, cashiers, legal assistants, financial advisors, and computer programmers (to name a few) entirely obsolete — just as has occurred during every industrial revolution. According to the Oxford Martin Programme on the Future of Work at the University of Oxford, up to 47% of professions may be replaced or significantly reduced by AI-based automation. This is an intimidating reality to confront.

Less frequently discussed, however, are the jobs created by industrial revolutions, from automotive production jobs created by the assembly line to electrical engineering and ultimately all tech-based jobs created by the electronics revolution, both of which rendered earlier professions obsolete. The Oxford study cited above observed, for example, that “back in 1900, over 40% of the workforce was employed in agriculture. Now it’s less than 2%.” That doesn’t mean that 40% of people don’t have jobs — other jobs have been created — and as a result of this industrial shift, agriculture is far more productive, with global food production having increased “by 89% in real terms over the past two decades” as of 2024, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

Technology can increase productivity and efficiency, and human beings collectively can identify new work that needs to be done. Industrial revolutions require participatory co-evolution, and that requires ongoing industrial innovations and ongoing workforce

education. And what industry sits at the nexus of all these roles? You guessed it: Community colleges.

We Have to Evolve with AI

If we can set aside the worries, the reality — for now, anyway — is that AI is here, there, and everywhere. Various permutations of it have been used for decades in all kinds of software, including software used by colleges and businesses. While “completely overwhelming” is a fair and understandable sentiment, the best place to begin is at the beginning. We need to demystify AI.

That was part of our goal at the 2024 ACCT Leadership Congress, which organically developed into an AI classroom, showcase, playground, and workshop. On October 24, a standing-room-only crowd packed a session dedicated to demystifying AI, featuring a panel of experts from CampusWorks, Cengage, Ellucian, Ferrilli, LightCast, McGraw Hill, and Oracle. These companies represent major players in the field of technology, but also in the fields of learning science, education administration, labor-market analytics, and others. Among the primary messages shared by these experts were that AI is not new — AI machine learning has undergirded technologies used in higher education for decades — and AI is omnipresent. If it plugs in, it probably uses AI in some fashion.

So, what if someone at a college feels so overwhelmed by AI that they choose to hide from it? Marcia Daniel, Ellucian’s chief client officer, told the audience to let them — they’ll only be able to hide for so long, and then they will have to do a little extra work to catch up with new technologies. It’s only human to feel anxious about the unknown, but we have no power to stop the world from evolving around us, and we ultimately have no choice but to evolve along with it.

Still, it is necessary to understand where we are now, especially for the sake of governing our colleges.

AI Regulation — Still in Its Wild West Era

According to the National Council of State Legislatures, “at least 45 states, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and Washington, D.C., introduced AI bills, and 31 states, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands adopted resolutions or enacted legislation” in 2024. The U.S. Congress has not yet enacted any AI-related regulations, with many members



stating that they don't have enough expertise to knowledgeably regulate this advanced technology. However, in October 2023, President Joe Biden issued the Executive Order on Safe, Secure, and Trustworthy Artificial Intelligence, which requires "that developers of the most powerful AI systems share their safety test results and other critical information with the U.S. government," "develop standards, tools, and tests to help ensure that AI systems are safe, secure, and trustworthy," "protect against the risks of using AI to engineer dangerous biological materials," "protect Americans from AI-enabled fraud and deception," "establish an advanced cybersecurity program to develop AI tools to find and fix vulnerabilities in critical software," and "order the development of a National Security Memorandum that directs further actions on AI and security."

In May 2024, the Council of the European Union passed an "artificial intelligence act" that, according to the Council, "follows a risk-based approach, which means the higher the risk to cause harm to society, the stricter the rules." Many in the U.S. tech industry are looking to this act as a foundational reference as domestic officials continue to deliberate.

Of course, higher education leaders want to know what they can and should do now, not to mention what they need to know. Our panel of experts noted that colleges' existing data-governance, technology, and privacy policies are good starting places, and that these should be applied to AI-related technologies. At the same time, it is also important to understand what technologies are already widely available and the detrimental ways in which they could be used. For example, generative AI programs can effectively and efficiently accomplish a variety of analysis and organizing tasks, and that may tempt people in a variety of professions at the college to enter information into programs such as ChatGPT. It is imperative that all staff understand how privacy policies apply to AI

use. Information entered into ChatGPT is collected by the company that owns it, OpenAI, and therefore student information, personnel matters, finance or accounting, legal, or any other confidential information should never be entered into it or similar programs. While college staff and board members may intuitively understand that privacy policies apply to protecting information from public disclosure, they may not realize that entering information into some AI programs is effectively no different than publicizing it.

This is a proverbial tip of the iceberg for higher education leaders to consider.

We Have to Evolve Together

In response to members urging ACCT to present more learning opportunities around AI, we plan to continue to build out AI-related resources for community college board members. ACCT is committed to supporting community college leaders as you navigate the new world of artificial intelligence's impact on higher education. We encourage you to share any policies or best practices your institution has developed with your peers at ACCT Connect. We'd also love to hear your concerns and ideas about how we can better support you. Please reach out and let us know as we evolve together.



David Conner is ACCT's director of strategic communications. He can be reached at dconner@acct.org.

Elevating Community College Success Through Technology: A Strategic Imperative

By Justin Louder

Community colleges are essential in addressing the varied needs of a diverse student population. At this crucial point, technology stands out not just as a tool, but as a strategic partner, providing essential support to students balancing academics, work, and personal responsibilities. For leaders aiming to not just meet but exceed expectations, embracing technological advancements is no longer optional. It is the gateway to improving retention, graduation rates, and institutional sustainability.

Mobile Learning: A Gateway to Ubiquitous Education

Adopting a mobile-first educational strategy is indispensable, as it enables students to engage with course content on-demand. This approach is corroborated by current trends, with a recent survey indicating a significant preference among students for technology-enhanced learning environments. For instance, Anthology's report on student perspectives underscores the paramount importance of adaptable and accessible education formats that align with students' increasingly digital lifestyles, with two-thirds of U.S. respondents indicating that accessing course content from their mobile device would be very helpful.

Around-the-Clock Support: Ensuring Uninterrupted Learning Trajectories

To initiate improvements and tackle the inherent challenges of digital education, such as technical complications, institutions should rigorously assess their mobile learning platforms for reliability and around-the-clock technical support. Establishing a resilient 24/7 support framework is essential. Moreover, this evaluation process presents an ideal moment to consider the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) tools designed to elevate both student and faculty experiences. For example, when a student-parent carves out precious late-night hours to study, encountering a technical issue can be a significant setback. Immediate and efficient technical assistance not only alleviates this frustration but also signals the institution's commitment to every student's educational journey.

The Power of AI: Streamlining and Personalizing the Academic Venture

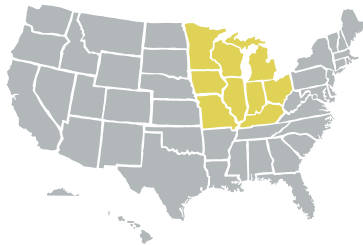
Artificial Intelligence (AI) enhances the learning process by automating routine tasks, freeing educators to focus on transformational aspects of teaching. AI can perform administrative duties, analyze educational effectiveness, and monitor student performance — tasks that otherwise consume considerable faculty time. Moreover, AI can significantly improve educational access and engagement through real-time language translation services, a feature proven invaluable as 61% of US students indicate that translating course materials into their native language would be extremely helpful. This capability not only enriches the learning experience for non-native speakers but also allows faculty to focus more on personalized teaching strategies and student interactions.

As we navigate through the digital transformation of education, it becomes increasingly clear that adopting technology is not an option but a necessity for community college leaders. By fully embracing technology — from mobile learning to AI-driven tools — leaders can break down educational barriers, improve operational efficiency, and, most importantly, ensure every student has a fair chance at success. This is not just the future of education; it's the pathway to a more inclusive, innovative, and impactful learning environment.



Dr. Justin Louder is associate vice president for academic innovation at Anthology.

AROUND THE REGIONS



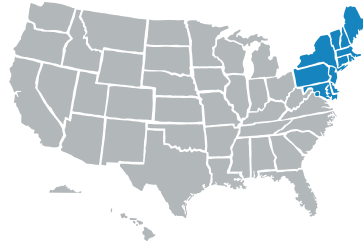
CENTRAL REGION

Illinois community college presidents launched a three-pronged effort to ease veterans' transition from war zones to school zones by hosting reintegration programs, establishing liaisons to work with military and veterans' agencies, and expanding on-campus veterans' hubs. Last year, about 11,500 veterans attended Illinois colleges.

Elgin Community College in Illinois will start the first phase of construction next month on its \$85 million Manufacturing and Technology Center — the second-largest of its kind in Illinois — that will help enhance programs in skilled manufacturing and address the nationwide labor shortage of skilled workers.

Fifteen **Iowa** community college presidents approved the Iowa Private Transfer Guarantee admission agreement with the Iowa Private Transfer Collaborative. The agreement aims to streamline the transfer process for Iowa community college and qualifying high-school students to private four-year institutions.

Waukesha County Technical College in **Wisconsin** officially opened its AI innovation center, the WCTC Applied AI Lab. The facility is designed for the exploration, discovery, development and application of AI technologies for entrepreneurs, as well as other business and industry professionals.



NORTHEAST REGION

Delaware Technical Community College will dedicate a campus building to First Lady Jill Biden. The college's recently renovated Stanton Campus Student Success Center will honor Biden's career as an educator.

Now in its second year, the new **Connecticut** State Community College system, CT State, is the largest community college in New England and Connecticut's largest higher-education institution, serving 25% of all undergrads across the state at 12 campus locations.

Maryland awarded \$1.8 million to the training center BCR Cyber and the Maryland Association of Community Colleges to bolster the state's cybersecurity talent pipeline. "Maryland's pathway to national leadership in cybersecurity runs through our community colleges," Gov. Wes Moore said at the ribbon-cutting ceremony at Howard Community College.

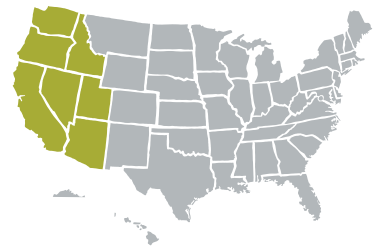
A free community college program in **Massachusetts** helped drive a 12% enrollment increase among adults ages 25 and older. An analysis found that 70% of MassReconnect participants came from households earning less than \$80,000 annually, slightly less than the state's median income. The racial diversity of grant recipients closely mirrored that of the state's overall student population. But the program's success has triggered the need for more funding, and state officials have created a new commission to assess campus and student needs.

New Hampshire's public higher education systems have created more than 100 direct pathways as part of a collaboration between the Community College System of New

Hampshire (CCSNH) and the University System of New Hampshire (USNH).

New York students wanting to transfer from community colleges will have an easier time enrolling online at any of the 64 SUNY campuses across New York following the creation of a state university-wide Transfer Student Task Force to help clear barriers to entry.

The **Pennsylvania** Commission for Community Colleges will advocate for a 6% increase for operating budgets and 6% increase in capital budgets for Pennsylvania community colleges, which would total out funding for the state's public community colleges at \$350 million.



PACIFIC REGION

Arizona Gov. Katie Hobbs announced a workforce development program including training for Maricopa Community Colleges students interested in the semiconductor industry. The program received input from industry partners such as Intel, The Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company and XP. The colleges will partner with the Arizona Commerce Authority for the program.

California voters approved Proposition 2, a bond to provide \$10 billion in funding for repairs and upgrades at thousands of public elementary, middle, and high schools and community colleges across California. Community colleges will receive \$1.5 billion.

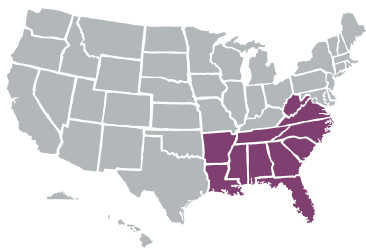
California community college presidents and chancellors are spending less time in their roles while the leadership ranks are becoming increasingly diverse, according to the Community College League of California's 11th biennial CEO Tenure & Retention Study. The report noted that

the average tenure of college leaders has declined to just 4.3 years over the past two years, down from a five-year average over the past decade. Only eight of the system's 139 current CEOs have held their positions for 10 years or more.

The Los Angeles Community College District introduced a guaranteed basic income program called Building Outstanding Opportunities for Students to Thrive, or BOOST. The program would give students majoring in health-related fields \$1,000 per month for a year with no strings attached.

A bachelor's degree in nursing will be offered to students who hold an associate degree by a consortium of six **Oregon** community colleges. The 15-month course should become available by the fall of 2026 at Klamath, Central Oregon, Linn-Benton, Oregon Coast, Chemeketa, and Treasure Valley community colleges.

Washington in 2026 will start automatically guaranteeing effectively free tuition at all its public colleges and universities to students from low-income families that receive food benefits from the federal supplemental nutrition assistance program, or SNAP. Students will find out as early as 10th grade whether they qualify.



SOUTHERN REGION

The **Alabama** Community College System is considering a nearly \$700 million budget request for fiscal year 2026, an 18% increase over current appropriations. Among other items, the system is seeking a \$10 million increase (25%) for dual enrollment programs.

Nearly a dozen changes could be made to the **Kentucky** Community and Technical College system under

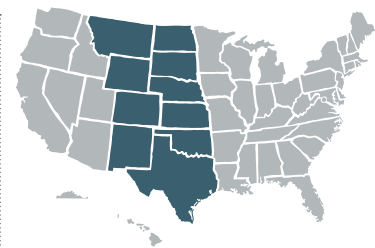
Senate Joint Resolution 179, passed by lawmakers last year. The Board of Regents' recommendations are aimed at improving the process to obtaining two-year college degrees and expanding options for students, including making it easier for colleges to offer dual and transfer credits.

North Carolina's Next NC Scholarship will provide thousands of dollars to eligible students attending one of the state's 58 community colleges. The scholarship was created in partnership by the North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority, the North Carolina Community College System, and the University of North Carolina System. State funding is provided in part by the NC Education Lottery.

The **South Carolina** Technical College System is asking legislators to add \$5 million to its budget next year to expand its dual enrollment program, particularly in more rural areas of the state.

The **Tennessee** Higher Education Commission (THEC) announced a record-breaking number of students applied for Tennessee Promise program, with over 67,000 applicants from the Class of 2025.

The **West Virginia** Community and Technical College System announced a 7.8 percent increase in total student enrollment for the 2024 fall semester, outpacing the 4.7 percent national increase in community college enrollment. Officials said the success reflects actions by Gov. Jim Justice and the West Virginia Legislature allowing students to access state financial aid without a current FAFSA on file following delays in the rollout of the new federal form.



WESTERN REGION

The number of graduates from **Colorado** community colleges has seen a marked increase. Colorado's six-year graduation rate for two-year colleges was 46.1 percent, up over the 2017 cohort's rate of 43 percent.

Northeast Community College in **Nebraska** will be the headquarters of a national agriculture consortium for two-year colleges, serving as the lead institution and fiscal agent for the \$9-million, four-year program.

As **South Dakota** technical colleges celebrate the 10th anniversary of providing Build Dakota scholarships, more than 3,900 scholarships have been awarded over the past decade. This year, the technical college system also reached almost \$5 million in industry partnerships.

Texas community college districts, which are outperforming their initial expectations during their first two years under House Bill 8, will ask the 89th Texas Legislature for more money and a new way to track graduates to determine if the students get a return on their academic investment. The college districts, which were allotted \$2.4 billion in the past biennium, want the legislature to include an additional \$47 million in a supplemental appropriations bill to fund the programs' additional accomplishments from its first two years.

Around the Regions provides an opportunity to share what's happening in the states and around the regions. This section focuses on state legislative and budgetary issues, economic development, and finance. Please e-mail items from press releases or newsletters to ACCT at acctinfo@acct.org.



Strengthening the Leadership Team of the Board

MARCH 16-18, 2025

Hosted by Windward Community
College, Oahu, Hawaii

Whether you're a seasoned board member or new to the role, this is your opportunity to strengthen your trustee-CEO relationships, collaborate as a team, and gain practical insights into the governance challenges community colleges face today.

Who Should Attend?

Maximize your experience by attending the ACCT Governance Leadership Institute (GLI) as a team, including your board chair, college president, and trustees who are poised to step into leadership roles. While not required, participating as a team enhances collaboration, strengthens relationships, and ensures a shared understanding of key governance principles.

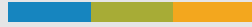
Attending together provides an invaluable opportunity to align your goals, build a cohesive strategy for the future, and foster a deeper, more effective trustee-CEO partnership. Take this chance to unify your board, elevate your leadership dynamics, and return home with actionable insights that will benefit your entire institution.



To register and make hotel reservations, go to: acct.org/events

For more information, contact:
Maggie Owens | mowens@acct.org

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Request and create public and private groups where you can share information and connect with other members.



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Legal Issues Impacting Community Colleges

First Amendment and Title IX litigation among recent legal issues involving higher education.

BY IRA MICHAEL SHEPARD, ACCT GENERAL COUNSEL

A judge noted that “in the context of a world-class university ... differences of opinion should be tolerated by those in authority, no matter that they are uncomfortable, so long as they do not incite violence or disrupt the school’s ability to function as a teaching institution.”

THE FOLLOWING RECENT LEGAL DEVELOPMENTS ARE IMPORTANT TO THE day-to-day administration of community colleges.

School district prevails in First Amendment challenge to anti-racism training. In a case with possible application to public higher education institutions and employee training, the Eighth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals affirmed the dismissal of a case brought by two Missouri public school workers who claimed that anti-bias employee training violated their First Amendment Rights. The lawsuit failed, and the court concluded that the plaintiff employees were neither asked to leave employment nor disciplined for expressing views contrary to the training. In addition, the court noted that they received professional development credit for attending the anti-racism training (*Henderson v. Springfield R-12 School District*, 8th Cir No. 2301374, 9/12/24).



“Add ‘the right to a speedy trial.’ I hate waiting for a verdict.”

The appellate court noted that the employees were not compelled to express certain views or refrain from expressing certain views during the training. The court, however, did reverse the trial judge's ruling that the plaintiffs were required to pay \$300,000 in attorney fees for filing a frivolous lawsuit.

Former student's Title IX claim dismissed as alleged university "internship" did not exist. A federal district court judge dismissed a former student's allegations relating to a sexually abusive internship because the former student did not prove that the internship actually existed. The court noted that the plaintiff acknowledged that she resorted to "lies and deception" in trying to establish that her alleged internship was a university-sponsored program. None of the usual formalities such as an application or a university authorization of an internship were established, the court noted.

As a result, the court dismissed the Title IX claims and allegations of failure to investigate sex harassment and abuse allegations, as the former student did not allege discrimination while "participating in or at least attempting to participate in" a university program or activity, and the University of Michigan prevailed in the case (*Doe v. Baum*, 2024 BL 340244 E.D. Mich. No. 4-21-cv-12492, 9/26/24).

Business school defeats professor's First Amendment complaint challenging "DEI-based ideology" as no adverse employment action took place. A federal district judge dismissed a business school professor's First Amendment claim that his speech was "chilled" following comments which were critical of "critical race theory and DEI-based ideology." The judge dismissed the case, holding that the plaintiff's alleged "unspecific threats" did not rise to the level of an adverse employment action (*Lowery v. Mills*, W.D. Tex. No. 1:23-cv-00129, 10/2/24).

The judge ruled in favor of the University of Texas business school, as no adverse employment action was properly plead. However, the judge noted in a footnote that the dismissal was not meant to approve of the university's actions and that "in the context of a world-class university like UT, differences of opinion should be tolerated by those in authority, no matter that they are uncomfortable, so long as they do not incite violence or disrupt the school's ability to function as a teaching institution."

Supreme Court to review split in circuits regarding when higher ed workers may file on ERISA claims alleging improper service provider fees. The U.S. Supreme Court has agreed to hear arguments over the split in circuit courts of appeals over when a higher education institution may be sued by employees who allege improper service provider fees charged to the applicable pension fund under the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974

(ERISA). Specifically, the employees are appealing an adverse Second Circuit holding that workers must plead that the alleged "prohibited transaction" by the service provider involved either "unnecessary services" or that the fees were "unreasonable" (*Conningham v. Cornell University*, US No. 23-1007 cert granted 10/4/24).

The Second, Third, Seventh, and Tenth Circuits all require an additional pleading alleging some kind of fraud or impropriety to allow the case to move forward. This contrasts with the Eighth and Ninth Circuits, which apply the "ERISA as written" rule which allows a plaintiff to simply allege that a transaction between an employer and a pension or welfare plan service provider occurred and proceed with discovery over whether fraud or some other impropriety exists. At the time of publication, the Supreme Court had heard oral arguments involving this case.

Court of appeals allows trial of an educator's claims that his sex harassment/Title IX investigation lacked procedural proprieties and was tainted by anti-male bias. The Second Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals ruled that an educator's claims that his school district's sex harassment probe, which resulted in a ruling against him, may have violated his Title IX rights and therefore should go to trial. The educator was accused by a student of inappropriate conduct and "touching" in the educator's nature van, which was used for educational purposes. The Court of Appeals noted that the alleged perpetrator was not given timely notice of the allegations, was not told what was specifically alleged, and was denied the chance to review the evidence and present evidence of his own. It reserved the trial court's decision and ruled that the alleged perpetrator be granted the right to a trial over his claims that his Title IX investigation was flawed and biased against him as a male (*Schiebel v. Schoharie Central District*, 2nd Cir., No. 23-01080, 11/1/24).

The appeals court also noted that despite other students and adults allegedly being present during the alleged incident, only one other student was interviewed, and that student did not confirm the allegations of the alleged victim.



Ira Michael Shepard is Of Counsel with the law firm of Saul Ewing, LLP, in Washington, D.C., and ACCT's General Counsel.

Q&A

Who Serves on Community College Boards?

Carrie Kisker, Ph.D., talks with *Trustee Quarterly* about findings from the ACCT-CSCC Survey of Community College Trustees.

LAST YEAR, ACCT BEGAN A COLLABORATION with the Center for the Study of Community Colleges (CSCC) to conduct a comprehensive survey of community college trustees throughout the United States and beyond. Sue Kater, Ph.D., an associate professor at Idaho State University and an educational consultant at the League for Innovation in the Community College, approached us about a pilot survey she and partner Carrie Kisker, Ph.D., president of Kisker Education Consulting and managing director of CSCC, had conducted. Preliminary findings were presented during the 2023 ACCT Leadership Congress. Our membership was interested in these findings — and so were we.

The survey is based on a broad and deep study of community college board members originally conducted decades ago by George B. Vaughan and Iris M. Weisman, which was published by ACCT. Weisman gave her blessing to Kater, Kisker, and their partners to conduct an updated version of the survey, resulting in the 2023 pilot. Together, we have expanded the scope of the ACCT-CSCC Survey of Community College Trustees to encompass community college board members everywhere for the sake of better understanding who serves on community college boards today, why they serve, what drives and matters to them, and much more.

As the end of our data collection period draws near, *Trustee Quarterly* spoke with Carrie Kisker about the project's origins and how we hope to apply the findings.

How did you come across the original research by George B. Vaughan and Iris M. Weisman? Why is it important to update the survey, and why now?

In 1997, ACCT published *Community College Trustees: Leading on Behalf of Their Communities*, a book based on findings from Iris Weisman's doctoral dissertation and co-authored by well-known community college scholar George Vaughan. Their seminal work included surveys of community college trustees, board chairs, and college presidents and is, to date, the most comprehensive and influential empirical examination of community college trustees.

Much has changed since 1997, both in community colleges and in the communities they serve. Arguably, today's trustees are tasked with guiding their institutions through a far more complex political and social landscape than 25 years ago. Current data about their beliefs, values, and decision-making processes will be invaluable for both scholars and college leaders. Findings from the ACCT-CSCC Survey of Community College Trustees can also be used to inform future professional development opportunities and highlight the important role community college trustees play in helping their institutions navigate contemporary challenges and opportunities.

What brought you and Sue Kater, Ph.D., together to work on an updated survey?

Sue has studied community college governance for many years, and a few years ago she approached me with the idea of revising and readministering Weisman's 1997 survey (having already secured Weisman's permission to do so). As a national organization with a mission to engage in and support research related to community college leadership, practice, and policy, The Center for the Study of Community Colleges (CSCC) was well-positioned to take on this project, and we successfully piloted the survey in 2023. Soon afterward, CSCC began collaborating with ACCT to administer the survey to its entire membership, and the rest, as they say, is history.

What has surprised you most about the survey findings so far?

The most surprising (and wonderful!) thing about our experience with the ACCT-CSCC Survey of Community College Trustees so far is the fact that so many respondents have volunteered to participate in follow-up interviews with our research team. Trustees across the country are eager to share their experiences and perspectives, and to talk about the challenges and opportunities their institutions are facing.

As scholars, we are thrilled to be able to contextualize survey findings with rich qualitative data.

Because the survey is still being administered, we have not yet conducted in-depth analyses of the data. However, a few surprising tidbits have emerged.

For example, did you know that 42% of trustees are themselves the first in their families to attend college? Or that 63% attended a community college? Another surprise is the fact that roughly one-third of respondents say they are somewhat or very likely to run for political office after their term has expired, indicating that many trustees view community college boards as a way of jumpstarting their political careers. We look forward to sharing more fascinating (and perhaps surprising) survey results with you in 2025!

Yes! We know that trustees come from a wide array of backgrounds and all have strong motivations for serving on a community college board, but we're excited to learn exactly what those backgrounds and motivations are. What do you think has been most significant about the findings so far?

By the time the ACCT-CSCC Survey of Community College Trustees survey closes in February 2025, it will have captured responses from between one-fifth and one-third of all active community college trustees, which will enable unprecedented analyses of trends, demographics, beliefs, and values at both the national and regional levels. This, alone, is incredibly significant, as it will provide trustees, college leaders, and researchers with empirically grounded data about what trustees believe their colleges need to do today to prepare for tomorrow's challenges.

Survey findings will also provide significant insights into trustees' beliefs and values and can be used to design future professional development opportunities, create more innovative and equitable institutions, and inform policymakers and the public about the very important work that community college trustees do. Findings will be especially useful if the data can be analyzed by state or region, which can only be accomplished if we receive enough responses from each part of the country. So if you haven't already taken the survey, please share your thoughts and experiences now and help make the findings as significant and useful as possible.

ACCT will continue collecting survey responses through the end of February. We encourage any trustees who have not yet taken the survey to complete it.

The ACCT-CSCC Survey of Community College Trustees can be found at: www.surveymonkey.com/r/ACCT-CSCC-trustee-survey.

EXECUTIVE SEARCH

The staff and consultants of the Association of Community College Trustees are pleased to have assisted in the search for the following community college executive officers.



COCHISE COLLEGE, ARIZONA

DR. JAMES PEREY

President

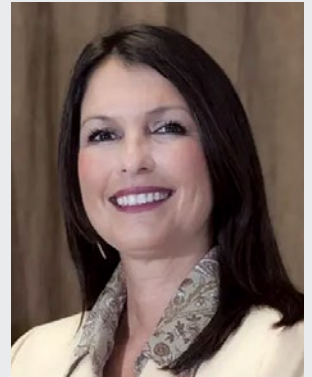
“James brings a wealth of experience that aligns with the college’s mission to serve students and the community. He understands and knows our college, the communities, and its leaders best. His optimism, visionary leadership, and genuine care for the college’s staff, students, and their families form a strong foundation from which he will fulfill his duties and responsibilities as the next Cochise College President.”

- **TIM QUINN, CHAIR**
COCHISE COLLEGE GOVERNING BOARD

ALLEN COMMUNITY COLLEGE, KANSAS

DR. LYVIER LEFFLER

President



“Dr. Leffler has work experience and leadership experience across the board in higher education. We believe she is the fit we have been looking for to lead Allen forward in the wide variety of ways we serve those looking to continue their education pursuits. A new year — a new leader — what better way to begin 2025.”

- **BECKY NILGES, CHAIR**
ALLEN COMMUNITY COLLEGE BOARD OF TRUSTEES



ALLEGANY COLLEGE OF MARYLAND

MR. DAVID R. JONES

President

“The Allegany College of Maryland Board of Trustees and the presidential search committee were impressed by Mr. Jones’ passion for our students and region. With a wealth of experience in higher education leadership, student and community engagement, partnership building, and fund development, Mr. Jones is poised to lead with vision and integrity as president.”

- **KIM LEONARD, CHAIR**
ALLEGANY COLLEGE OF MARYLAND BOARD OF TRUSTEES

EXECUTIVE SEARCH

The staff and consultants of the Association of Community College Trustees are pleased to have assisted in the search for the following community college executive officers.

CONNECTICUT STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

MR. TROY MILLER

Vice President of Enrollment Management



"I am confident that Troy Miller will bring a compelling vision to our student-centered institution that complements our mission of open access. He has a deep understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing higher education today, and his leadership will be instrumental in ensuring that we continue to serve our students and community with excellence."

- **DR. JOHN MADUKO, PRESIDENT**
CONNECTICUT STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE



CONNECTICUT STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

MS. ANNA KRUPITSKIY, J.D.

Vice President of Human Resources

"Anna's career is distinguished by her unwavering commitment to public service, social justice, and fostering diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging within the institutions she has served. As a seasoned leader, she has demonstrated a collaborative and strategic-oriented approach that has consistently yielded successful outcomes. We are confident that Anna's leadership will be instrumental in advancing the college's strategic priorities, particularly in fostering an inclusive, equitable, and supportive work environment for all CT State employees."

- **DR. JOHN MADUKO, PRESIDENT**
CONNECTICUT STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

NORTHLAND PIONEER COLLEGE, ARIZONA

DR. VON LAWSON

President



"The board's decision was based on extensive background checks, a review of comments from community members and NPC employees, and on personal observations of the candidates' interactions with students, faculty, and administrators. The process produced excellent candidates. Dr. Lawson is a strong relationship builder. You will soon discover that nobody is a stranger to him. You just haven't formally met him yet."

- **EVERETT ROBINSON**
NPC DISTRICT GOVERNING BOARD CHAIR AND PRESIDENTIAL SEARCH CHAIR

RETREATS AND WORKSHOPS

Thank you to the following colleges which have used ACCT to facilitate a board retreat, board self-assessment, CEO evaluation, policy review, or other board education services in recent months. We appreciate your trusting ACCT to assist you with your board development needs.

Alvin Community College, Texas

Anne Arundel Community College, Md.

Arizona Center for Community College Success (The Arizona Community College Coordinating Council), Ariz.

Atlantic Cape Community College, N.J.

Community College of Beaver County, Pa.

Chaffey College, Calif.

Dallas College, Texas

Garden City Community College, Kan.

Gavilan College, Calif.

Gillette College, Wyo.

H. Lavity Stoutt Community College, British Virgin Islands

Houston Community College, Texas

Kellogg Community College, Mich.

Metropolitan Community College, Miss.

Montcalm Community College, Mich.

Mount Wachusett Community College, Mass.

Nevada System of Higher Education, Nev.

North Idaho College, Idaho

Pima Community College, Ariz.

Santa Fe Community College, N.M.

Stark State College, Ohio

Tarrant County College, Texas

Yavapai College, Ariz.



Find out more about board retreats and workshops at <https://www.acct.org/governance-services> or email boardservices@acct.org



interface

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2025 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

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VICE PRESIDENT

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SECRETARY

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**PACIFIC REGION MEMBER-AT-LARGE
(AND MEMBER-AT-LARGE DESIGNEE)**

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FIND US ON FACEBOOK

ACCT Professional Board Staff Network

PBSN WEBSITE

www.acct.org/membership/PBSN



Our Future Shines Bright: Envisioning 2025

BY SHELBY FOSTER
PBSN PRESIDENT

WHEN THE Professional Board Staff Network (PBSN) gathers, remarkable things happen. Our presence at the 2024 ACCT Leadership Congress in Seattle was incredible. We connected, we engaged, we learned, and we brought out the best in one another. As a group, I am humbled by how much we support and motivate one another to accomplish our goals.

Our fantastic 2024 PBSN President, Cynthia Gruskos, led us in the development of an ambitious program. For the first time ever, PBSN led a Congress concurrent session! Our session, “Catalysts of Collaboration: The Strategic Roles of Trustees, College Presidents, and Board Professionals,” featured a panel with representation from Cerritos College in California and Lansing Community College in Michigan. The session was moderated by PBSN leadership and included questions that highlighted the importance of good communication, trust, and the ability to navigate college challenges effectively.

This proved especially meaningful as we were able to emphasize the essential role of the board professional to a standing-room-only crowd including trustees, CEOs, and college administrators. Please look for follow-up on this session on ACCT Connect.

This year, we dedicated most of our annual professional development session to using generative AI in our board support roles. The topic was also the focus of the Congress opening session. We learned ways to incorporate generative AI into taking minutes, drafting memos and policies, developing marketing content, and even clarifying parliamentary procedure. The session provided a safe space to practice using generative AI with real-time examples. One of our presenters, Dr. Sara Singleton, Southern Region Member-at-Large, put together a document outlining many free generative AI resources.



We will share the provided documents and continue the dialogue about generative AI with a follow-up online session later this year.

In addition to the session on generative AI, we engaged with one another through two roundtable sessions — one with our regional group peers, and another addressing “hot topics,” including Board Retreats, Board Orientations, Navigating Between the President and the Board, Board Recognition, and “New to My Role.” These roundtables provided an opportunity for open dialogue and the sharing of best practices.

The 2024 ACCT Leadership was indeed an enlightened space, paving the way for our bright future. During our annual meeting at the ACCT Congress, you elected a fantastic executive team. Cynthia Gruskos, who led us in 2024, will continue to serve on the team as Immediate Past President. Reatha Bell, who served as Secretary in 2024, is now Vice-President. Benita Duncan and Sara Singleton will continue in their roles as Central Region and Southern Region Members-at-Large, respectively. Caitlin Murphy will return this year with a new role as Communications Coordinator. Graciela Molina will return as Pacific Region Member-at-Large and our Member-at-Large designee. We welcome new perspectives with David Mohlman serving as Western Region Member-at-Large, Evelyn Cordova as Northeastern Member-at-Large, and Andrea Wittig as Secretary.

I am honored to serve as your PBSN President for 2025, and I am excited to come together to continue the 30 years of excellent service this organization has worked diligently to provide.

Your Professional Board Staff Network Executive Team is committed to offering you opportunities to grow and learn in your roles. This year, we will strive to stay updated on new technologies that will enhance our work as board professionals and meet the evolving needs of our work environments. We will be planning the PBSN sessions for the 2025 ACCT Leadership Congress in New Orleans and continue to grow our PBSN group page on ACCT Connect as a space for dialogue, questions, and a library of resources. If you haven't yet joined ACCT Connect, please visit <https://connect.acct.org> to sign up.

In addition to our follow-up session on the use of generative AI in board support roles, please look for opportunities throughout the year to participate in online Zoom sessions dedicated to the following topics: board retreats, board orientations, the desktop manual of responsibilities, and best practices for building professional relationships with your board. If you have a topic that you'd like to share or present on, we welcome it! Please feel free to reach out to me or your PBSN regional representative with your suggestions.

Let's shine bright in 2025!



Caption



Strengthening the Partnership Between the Professional Board Staff and the Board of Trustees

BY REATHA BELL, PBSN VICE PRESIDENT



IN THE DYNAMIC ENVIRONMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION, THE PARTNERSHIP between the professional board staff and the board of trustees is vital to the success of community colleges. In an institution with diverse students, there will be many challenges that will require cohesive collaboration. A healthy connection that stimulates trustworthiness, transparency, and a dual commitment to success and unification is vital for all parties involved, including stakeholders, students, faculty, and the community.

One of the most critical needs of community colleges is workforce development, which is offered to many who would not otherwise receive training and education in an affordable and accessible environment. To achieve this goal, the professional board staff works extensively to manage the day-to-day operations. However, trustee unity is crucial, as they are not just responsible but integral for making high-level decisions and strategies on behalf of the institution.

When healthy communication and clear understanding exist between the groups, professionals, and the governing board, it provides a dignified working relationship. It ensures that trustworthy governance, relevant academic programs, and sustainable resources are at the forefront.

A key factor in building a relationship between professional board staff and the Board of Trustees is "partnership" (Schindler, 2017). A noble trustee will recognize the importance of investing time in learning the operational aspects of the college without jeopardizing their understanding of the value of understanding the policy and governance of the institution and engaging with the staff who can provide essential insights into the college's challenges and opportunities. Conversely, staff members must appreciate what trustees offer through their fiduciary and strategic vision.

Effective communication is paramount for nurturing a healthy working relationship. Regular meetings — formal board sessions or informal working discussions — are necessary to keep staff and trustees aligned. During these meetings, the staff offers trustees guidance and data to help with risky decision-making. The trustees are responsible for aligning with the college's mission, which promotes healthy feedback and ultimately prevents communication barriers. Healthy communication is present, misunderstandings are less likely, and both parties focus on shared objectives.

When board members are equipped to perform their role in the institution's governance and financials, and the professional board staff obtain ongoing training in leadership development support to enhance their skills to embrace the college's evolving needs, the connection between the two parties strengthens.

Student success is inevitable when effective communication, genuine respect, and a shared commitment to strategic goals are at the forefront of both entities. Overcoming challenges through positive interaction fulfills the educational mission of community colleges, and mutual respect makes this possible.



Learn more at www.acct.org/membership/PBSN.

OCTOBER 2024 ELECTION RESULTS

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Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

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Tina Royal

Davidson-Davie Community College, NC

Doug Mah

South Puget Sound Community College, WA

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INCLUSION COMMITTEE

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Northeast Region

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Aiken Technical College, SC

Deborah Tappendorf

Eastern Iowa Community College, IA



ACCT DEADLINES

- ▶ ACCT Awards Nominations
June 23, 2025
- ▶ Director-at-Large Candidate Nominations
July 1, 2025
- ▶ Amendments to ACCT Bylaws
July 1, 2025
- ▶ Submitting Resolutions
July 1, 2025

Engage Your Board. Advance Your College.

ACCT Board Services provide opportunities to strengthen the unique role of board members and to develop an effective board.

Services Include

- Retreats
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- Presidential evaluations
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Call to learn more about ways to engage your board and make use of each trustee's skills and expertise.

Contact:

Colleen Allen
Director of Retreats and Evaluation Services
callen@acct.org

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ACCT LEADERSHIP CONGRESS

Reimagining Community College:
Innovation for a Changing World

October 22-25, 2025
New Orleans



Register in February at Congress.ACCT.org