
The Board Chair

Embedding AI Skills

Re-Enrollment

FALL 2026

Trustee

QUARTERLY



Changemakers

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Arizona Western College, AZ



Many Board Members, All Alike in Dignity...

...IN FAIR LAKE TAHOE, WHERE we lay our scene. (I hope you got the Shakespeare reference!)

Greetings! This summer, I was thrilled to host the ACCT Board of Directors and senior staff in my hometown of Lake Tahoe for the association's annual retreat and meeting. Much of the retreat was dedicated to reviewing progress to date on the board's 2026 – 2028 Strategic Priorities — “from thought leadership to taught leadership,” as President and CEO Jee Hang Lee says in his letter on p. 4. You will read about that progress in this fall's State of Association Report — suffice it to say, ACCT's staff, consultants, and partners have been making incredible advancements toward our priorities and our goals.

What I would like to focus on here is another topic the board discussed at some length this summer: Dignity.

We live in a time of strongly polarized opinions, most often based on partisan political leanings. I couldn't sugarcoat the reality if I wanted to. It's too obvious to all of us. But that doesn't mean that we should accept contemptuousness as the new normal. Personally, I feel strongly that we should not. But as a matter of board governance, the truth is that we *cannot*. Boards work in harmony, and they fail when the voices of their members are cacophonous and discordant. But can we actually do anything about it?

Yes! We can! This summer, the ACCT Board of Directors was graced with a presentation by Tami Pyfer, chief impact officer and co-creator of the Dignity Index. The Dignity Index is an interactive process designed to ease divisions, prevent violence, and solve problems through the application of an instrument that scores *phrases* — language, not people — on a scale ranging from contempt to dignity. I am blessed in that the ACCT Board of Directors is made up of truly dedicated and selfless public servants who never demonstrate contemptuousness, but that doesn't mean the workshop was not thoughtfully provocative and ultimately a unifying experience. The foundational tenet of the Dignity Index is that *all people have inherent dignity as human beings*, and as long as we respect that, we can work through challenges with mutual respect.

And in the spirit of mutual respect, I hope to see you at the 2026 ACCT Leadership Congress, where we will be addressing leading with care. If we truly care for our colleges and our communities, we will also care for one another.

CAROL DEL CARLO

Nevada System of Higher Education, NV

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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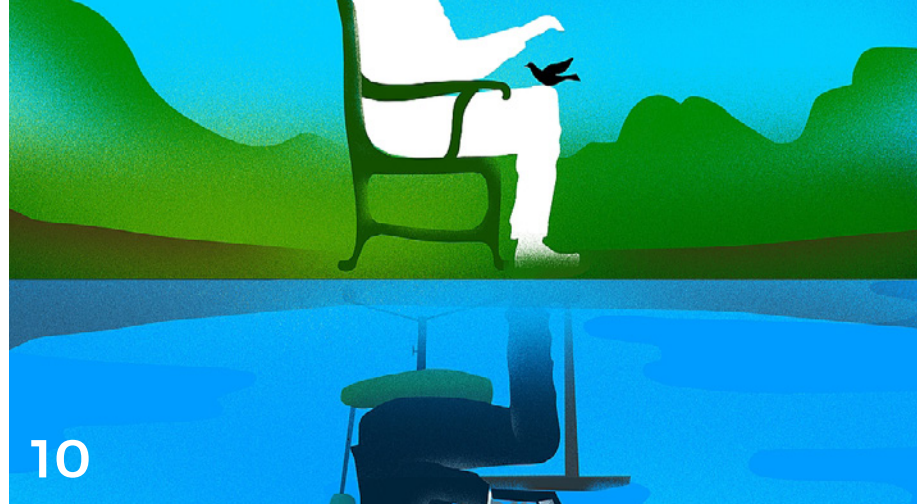


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Public community college governance is a “job” unlike few others. There are no formal requirements, there’s no perfect way to prepare, and the only compensation for most trustees is the personal satisfaction of public service.

Taught Leadership

DEAR ACCT MEMBERS,

Several years ago, we launched the ACCT Connect platform to — well, to connect our members with one another. But the platform was designed from the start as a learning management system. Initially, ACCT Connect was an online repository of educational resources. Today, it is a true online education platform that features a growing number of courses organized into guided pathways under the new ACCT Excel governance recognition program. Our first cohort of “graduates” completed the first level of education this summer — see page 8 to find out who they are — and we’re off and running with the second cohort now.

Current interactive courses include Governance 101, Advocacy 101, and Data-Informed Governance. This year, we will add a foundational course by Dr. Pamela J. Fisher to prepare excellent board members to be extraordinary board chairs. As I read Dr. Fisher’s article (page 22), I was reminded that the real value of “thought leadership” is when it becomes taught leadership — and this is primary to ACCT’s purpose.

One of the accomplishments I am most proud of since having become president and CEO of ACCT a few years ago is the extraordinary staff that the association has developed. From advocacy and public policy to membership, education, and communications to board services and executive searches, the work being done by our staff and our consultants is entirely dedicated to the needs of community colleges, and it is always

thoughtfully evolving. I am grateful to the ACCT Board of Directors for authorizing this work and for their strong strategic guidance.

Public community college governance is a “job” unlike few others. There are no formal requirements, there’s no perfect way to prepare, and the only compensation for most trustees is the personal satisfaction of public service. I can tell you confidently that all of us at ACCT understand and respect the dedication of our members, and we take our commitment to be a resource to you seriously. Making your dedication as a board member worthwhile is our motivation because of that respect. You teach us as much as any of us teaches you — especially at the annual ACCT Leadership Congress, where the vast majority of over 100 educational sessions are taught by member trustees to member trustees. I look forward to seeing you and to learning from you this fall at the ACCT Leadership Congress.

JEE HANG LEE

ACCT President and CEO

NEWS & NOTES

ACCT, NHSA Release Second-Year Kids on Campus Progress Report

ACCT AND THE NATIONAL HEAD Start Association (NHSA) released the Year Two Annual Report of the Kids on Campus initiative, which advances the success of parenting students and supports the school readiness of young children from low-income backgrounds by expanding Head Start classrooms onto community college campuses. The five-year initiative aims to establish at least 50 such partnerships by 2029.

Nearly one in five undergraduates in the United States — approximately 3.14 million students — are parenting while pursuing their college education. For many, access to high-quality, affordable, and convenient child care remains one of the biggest barriers to completing their degree.

The core philosophy of the initiative is rooted in two of the most effective strategies for reducing poverty: providing high-quality early childhood education and increasing adult economic mobility through education, training, and workforce pathways. Together, these approaches support two generations simultaneously, strengthening children's development while helping parents pursue long-term economic success.

"When we support parents, we uplift students," says Francisco Solis, president of San Antonio College in Texas, which has a long-standing partnership with Head Start. "When families thrive, our community thrives. This is the power of a two-generation approach."

The annual report outlines the

rationale behind ACCT and NHSA's work, progress to date, next steps, and opportunities for community colleges and Head Start programs to engage with Kids on Campus.

As of March 2026, at the end of year two of the initiative:

- 110 community colleges and 130 Head Start programs have taken initial steps to connect and engage with Kids on Campus.
- Partners have identified 43 potential matches between community colleges and Head Start programs interested in exploring partnerships across 19 states.
- Five new Kids on Campus partnerships have launched in California, Illinois, Massachusetts, Maryland, and Texas, with two additional partnerships in advanced stages of development in Texas.

"Before I found the Head Start on my college campus, it was extremely difficult," says Cristina Medina, a student parent at Palo Alto College, one of the newest Kids on Campus sites. "I was on the edge of mentally and emotionally giving up because being a full-time mom while going to school and work was hard with no support."



To learn more, visit www.kidsoncampus.org/annual-report.

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.*

2026 ACCT Regional Awards Recipients Announced

Regional awardees to compete for national-level recognition in October.



THE ASSOCIATION OF Community College Trustees (ACCT) is pleased to announce the recipients of its annual Regional Awards for community college trustees, equity programs, chief executive officers, faculty members, and professional board staff members. The 2026 ACCT Awards program is sponsored by Edamerica.

ACCT's Regional Awards recognize the tremendous contributions made by community colleges and their leaders to meet the needs of their communities.

"ACCT's member colleges and the individuals who serve them work tirelessly, often with little recognition," said ACCT President and CEO Jee Hang Lee. "We are proud to shine a spotlight on some of the nation's best public servants and professionals through our regional awards program." The full list of awardees follows.

2026 ACCT Regional Awardees 2026 Trustee Leadership Award

CENTRAL REGION

William F. Kelley

William Rainey Harper College, Illinois

NORTHEAST REGION

Donna Mihalik

Finger Lakes Community College, New York

PACIFIC REGION

Doug Mah

South Puget Sound Community College, Washington

SOUTHERN REGION

Zuzana Steen

Northern Virginia Community College

WESTERN REGION

Clint Kingsbery

Alamo Colleges District, Texas

2026 Impact and Success Award

CENTRAL REGION

Marion Technical College, Ohio

NORTHEAST REGION

Mohawk Valley Community College, New York

PACIFIC REGION

South Puget Sound Community College, Washington

SOUTHERN REGION

Forsyth Technical Community College, North Carolina

WESTERN REGION

Northeast Community College, Nebraska

2026 Chief Executive Officer Award

CENTRAL REGION

Avis Proctor

William Rainey Harper College, Illinois

NORTHEAST REGION

Anthony J. Iacono

County College of Morris, New Jersey

PACIFIC REGION

José Fierro

Cerritos College, California

SOUTHERN REGION

Joe Pickens

St. Johns River State College, Florida

WESTERN REGION

Joe Schaffer

Laramie County Community College, Wyoming

2026 Professional Board Staff Member Award

CENTRAL REGION

Keith Everett Book

Jackson College, Michigan

NORTHEAST REGION

Jaime M. Segal

UCNJ Union College of Union County, New Jersey

PACIFIC REGION

Trisha Haggerty

Peninsula College, Washington

SOUTHERN REGION

Sara Singleton

Forsyth Technical Community College, North Carolina

WESTERN REGION

Denise Wilson

Alamo Colleges District, Texas

2026 Faculty Member Award

CENTRAL REGION

Amani Wazwaz

Moraine Valley Community College, Illinois

NORTHEAST REGION

Alexis Vogt

Monroe Community College, New York

PACIFIC REGION

Sharon Mitchler

Centralia College, Washington

SOUTHERN REGION

Millie Massey

Midlands Technical College, South Carolina

WESTERN REGION

Sherry Rogers

Dodge City Community College, Kansas

Regional ACCT Awards were announced via ACCT's LinkedIn and ACCT Connect accounts.

Individuals and colleges recognized at the regional level will contend for the national-level recognition of the following ACCT Association Awards:

- M. Dale Ensign Trustee Leadership Award;

- Impact and Success Award;
- Marie Y. Martin Chief Executive Award;
- ACCT Professional Board Staff Member Award; and
- William H. Meardy Faculty Member Award.

One outstanding award recipient in each category will be announced during

the Annual ACCT Awards Gala on Friday, October 23, in Chicago, Illinois, in conjunction with the 2026 ACCT Leadership Congress.



STAY UPDATED ON EVENTS
www.acct.org/events

20 ACCT Member Colleges to Receive Complimentary Board Services

IN LATE AUGUST, THE Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) announced the next 20 member college boards that will be receiving complimentary board services as a way of giving back to its membership.

ACCT President and CEO Jee Hang Lee randomly selected the following college names via a live broadcast.

Allan Hancock College, California

BridgeValley Community and Technical College, West Virginia

Butler County Community College, Pennsylvania

Chief Dull Knife College, Montana

Community College of Allegheny County, Pennsylvania

Glen Oaks Community College, Michigan

Hagerstown Community College, Maryland

Indian Hills Community College, Iowa

Iowa Western Community College, Iowa

Monroe County Community College, Michigan

Middlesex Community College, Massachusetts

Mid-State Technical College, Wisconsin

Mt. San Jacinto Community College District, California

Northeast Wisconsin Technical College, Wisconsin

Oglala Lakota College, South Dakota

Roxbury Community College, Massachusetts

Stone Child College, Montana

SUNY Broome Community College, New York

Virginia Community College System, Virginia

Wor-Wic Community College, Maryland

“Board retreats and workshops are essential for proper board functioning,” said ACCT President and CEO Jee Hang Lee. “These events cultivate understanding and maintain harmonious relationships among

board members so that the board can focus on alignment of policies and realization of goals. I am grateful to the ACCT Board of Directors for supporting this giveaway so that more members can benefit from these important services.”

ACCT Vice President for Membership & Educational Services Robin Matross Helms, Ph.D., hosted the event. “It's exciting to be able to give back to the ACCT member trustees who give so much to their colleges and communities,” she said.

“Changes in board composition can impact how the board functions,” said ACCT Director of Retreats and Evaluation Services Hollie Chessman, Ph.D. “An ongoing board training and onboarding program can help to make those transitions smoother. Investing in board development can strengthen the board-CEO relationship and trustee-to-trustee cooperation and can lead to a more effective board.”

ACCT congratulates the member boards selected for complimentary retreats or workshops in the coming year.



Learn more about ACCT's Governance Services at
www.acct.org/governance-services.

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) Updates do the work for you.

LAW Updates are 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 signing up for LAW newsletters. 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 Launches Second Cohort of the India-U.S. Partnership Lab

ACCT IS PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE the launch of the second cohort of the India-U.S. Workforce Partnership Lab. An initiative of ACCT's Global Workforce Coalition, the Lab is designed to establish and strengthen workforce- and skills-focused partnerships between U.S. community colleges and higher education institutions in India.

Building on the success of the inaugural cohort, the second cohort will bring together three U.S. community colleges and three Indian institutions for a year-long collaboration designed to foster innovative approaches to workforce development, global skills

and competencies, and institutional partnerships in the training sector. Supported by the Cognizant Foundation, the paired institutions will work together to develop collaborative programs that prepare students for careers in an increasingly interconnected global economy, with a particular emphasis on the practical and responsible application of artificial intelligence across workforce disciplines.

Participating U.S. and Indian institutions and more information can be found at www.acct.org/news/acct-launches-second-cohort-india-us-partnership-lab.

Congratulations to the Inaugural ACCT Excel Level 1 Certificate Recipients

ACCT IS PROUD TO RECOGNIZE the members of the inaugural ACCT Excel cohort who have earned the **Level 1 Certificate of Achievement**. As the first participants to complete this milestone, these trustees have demonstrated an extraordinary commitment to strengthening their leadership, expanding their knowledge of governance, and enhancing their ability to serve their institutions and communities.

ACCT Excel is a cohort-based professional development program designed to help community college trustees build the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to lead effectively. Through a combination of self-paced online learning, live educational opportunities, and stackable digital badges, participants create a personalized learning

pathway while developing a strong foundation in community college governance.

The Level 1 Certificate represents more than the completion of a series of learning modules. It reflects a trustee's commitment to continuous learning and to the principles of informed, effective governance. To earn the certificate, participants completed foundational learning experiences focused on the essential responsibilities of community college trustees, governance best practices, and the legal and ethical considerations that guide board service.

Strong governance is critical to the success of every community college. Trustees who invest in their own professional development are better equipped to make



thoughtful, informed decisions that support student success, strengthen institutional leadership, and advance their colleges' missions. By completing the Level 1 Certificate, these trustees have taken an important step toward ensuring they are prepared to meet today's challenges while helping shape the future of their institutions.

We extend our sincere congratulations and appreciation to these pioneering trustees for their dedication to lifelong learning and for their willingness to be part of the inaugural ACCT Excel cohort. Their participation has helped lay the foundation for a program that will continue to support and inspire trustees across the country for years to come.

Congratulations to our inaugural Level 1 Certificate recipients:

- **Angela L. Mathews**, Lansing Community College, Mich.
- **Bogyong Kim**, Lower Columbia College, Wash.
- **Cheryl Sellers**, Brazosport College, Texas

- **Clint Kingsbery**, Alamo Colleges, Texas
- **Courtney Wooten**, Edmonds College, Wash.
- **Daniel Jaquez**, Waubonsee Community College, Ill.
- **Donald L. Heller**, Delaware County Community College, Pa.
- **Erin Greenawald**, Chippewa Valley Technical College, Wisc.
- **Israul Marrero**, Roxbury Community College, Mass.
- **Jack Kramer**, Kirtland Community College, Mich.
- **James Meyer**, William Rainey Harper College, Ill.
- **Joe Davis II**, Everett Community College, Wash.
- **Jonathan Hill**, McLennan Community College, Texas
- **Linda Hoskins Sutton**, Kansas City Kansas Community College, Kan.
- **Reza Jafari**, Chesapeake College, Md.
- **Shawn Coates**, College of Southern Maryland, Md.

- **Tarie Zimmerman**, North Idaho College, Idaho
- **Trisha Murakawa**, El Camino Community College District, Calif.

Insights from Founding Cohort Members

"This program was most useful in the fact that after being a trustee for over 15 years, this took me back to why I became a trustee and the work that goes with it. Great reminder for all of us."



Learn more about ACCT Excel at <https://acct.org/trustee-education/excel>.



Pursuing this exercise provides an opportunity for colleges to reflect and the opportunity to open a broader dialogue within its region if desired.

An Opportunity for Reflection

U.S. Education Secretary McMahon's August 3 letter provides an opportunity for boards to consider their institutions' missions.

BY CARRIE WARICK-SMITH

IN THE MIDDLE OF HIS SUMMER VACATION, ACCT CEO Jee Hang Lee knew he was going to receive some phone calls when he saw the news that U.S. Department of Education Secretary Linda McMahon had issued a call to action to higher education institutions. In ACCT's initial response to members, we shared the news, the principles behind the questions posed, and a reminder that the effort is voluntary.

Over the next month, "the 8.3 letter," as it has become known around Washington, has continued to be a topic of conversation in federal policy circles, even if it has not throughout the rest of the country. As the conversations have continued, a theme has emerged: an opportunity for mission review, but with what target audience?

In discussion, Jee Hang said to me, "these principles can serve as a grounding exercise for the board and the president to consider their institutions' missions." He continued, "In a time when colleges talk of doubling down on mission, the mission needs to be reviewed or refined."

With that sentiment in mind, ACCT posted a mission-focused guide for reflection and response by community college boards on the NOW.ACCT.org blog on Sept 1. The topline recommendations include:

1. **Begin with a robust discussion about whether and how to respond to the Education Secretary's call to action.**
2. **Decide the right level of response** — should it be from the institution, the system, a regional collaboration, in partnership with a state association, or some combination thereof?

3. **If your college decides to respond, identify which questions apply to the college's mission** — as shown below, some questions apply more directly than others.
4. **Ask for a policy inventory from the president and senior leadership.**
5. **Document existing strengths.**
6. **Identify improvements worth making.**
7. **Adopt a concise public statement** — and decide where and how to promote it.

The topics posed should be topics of continual discussion by governing boards to ensure that the mission of the institution stays aligned with the needs of the community it is serving.

The principles cited in Secretary McMahon's letter, listed below as summarized in the letter's accompanying press release, apply in varying degrees — or not at all — to community colleges:

- **Transparency and Merit in Admissions**
- **Free Speech and Open Inquiry**
- **Intellectual Pluralism and Academic Vitality**
- **Affordability, Value, and Student Outcomes**
- **Academic Standards and Rigor in the Age of AI**
- **Safeguarding Research Integrity from Malign Foreign Influence**
- **Prioritizing American Interests**

Many of these principles are intertwined with why community colleges exist: to serve the needs of the immediate community by ensuring all individuals have affordable, open access to an education that can help them further their goals for knowledge and employment while contributing to their community. In a century whose rate of change is extraordinary, continually reviewing mission and goals will serve a college in remaining adaptive to ever-shifting technologies, populations, and their impact on the workforce.

Pursuing this exercise provides an opportunity for colleges to reflect and the opportunity to open a broader dialogue within its region if desired. Boards should guide any

response in a calm, factual, and locally grounded way that is separate from any type of partisan politics, institutional defensiveness, or sweeping claims. Instead, they should emphasize evidence: tuition levels, completion rates, transfer outcomes, workforce partnerships, student supports, program review, and community impact.

Colleges that choose to respond should focus on where they are already living up to the values described in the letter and where they are working to improve. Colleges could also consider sharing goals set via strategic plans or internal review processes to demonstrate that the college is continually working for improvement.

The Bottom Line for Trustees

Once again, it is important to note that the call in the Education Secretary's letter is voluntary. Boards should treat Secretary McMahon's letter as a governance prompt and opportunity for reflection, not as a mandate to reinvent the institution. Participation (or lack thereof) comes with neither carrots nor sticks. If a college chooses to respond, or to participate in a broader, coordinated response, it should reaffirm its mission, strengthen transparency where useful, and explain plainly how the college delivers value and how it will work to maintain and increase that value.

For more detail on how to do that, read the Sept. 1 post, "Response Consideration to Education Secretary McMahon's August 3 Call to Action," at NOW.ACCT.org, or reach out to me via publicpolicy@acct.org.



Carrie Warick-Smith is ACCT's vice president for public policy.



Christina's leadership has brought the ACCT Excel trustee-excellence program to life. A second cohort has been launched to continue refinements before the program is opened nationwide to all ACCT member trustees.

Spotlight on Trustee Education

**Meet Trustee Education and Events AVP
Christina Simons.**

BY ROBIN MATROSS HELMS AND CHRISTINA SIMONS

IN THIS COLUMN, YOU'VE HAD A CHANCE TO GET to know me and hear my take on the Membership and Educational Services division and our priorities. With our ongoing and deepening focus on member relationships and ACCT Board of Directors Chair Carol Del Carlo's emphasis on wellbeing, over the next few installments of this column, you'll have a chance to get to know the people behind the email addresses you may have encountered while working with ACCT staff — the people who make it all happen.

In each "staff spotlight" profile, a Membership and Educational Services staff member will tell you a bit about themselves, their work, and what they do outside of ACCT. And the "Robin's Refrigerator" section will highlight an aspect of their work that I am particularly proud of — akin to a special piece of artwork or an A+ assignment from one of your kids or grandkids you might post on your fridge.

This team does amazing work — I'm excited for you to get to know them a little better!

Staff Spotlight

Name: Christina Simons

Title: Associate Vice President of Trustee Education and Events

ACCT tenure: 20 years this September. Christina was hired as an office assistant immediately after she graduated from American University. She worked in educational services before advancing to becoming the director of educational events and now as associate vice president of trustee education and events.



What she does: Christina provides strategic leadership for ACCT's flagship conferences and educational initiatives and oversees the planning and execution of nationally recognized events, trustee professional development programs, sponsorships, and year-round educational offerings that advance the association's mission.

Where you'll see her: If you attend the ACCT Leadership Congress or the Community College National Legislative Summit, don't be surprised if you see her hustling through the hallways making sure every room is set, every speaker is where they need to be, and everything is running on schedule. The rest of the year, you'll find her virtually — welcoming new trustees into ACCT Excel, cheering on our cohorts as they earn badges, and helping members continue their learning journey through ACCT Connect.

When she's off the clock: You'll usually find her spending time with her husband Jesse and their four-year-old daughter Maya. "Whether we're exploring a new playground, planning our next family adventure, or tackling a fun arts and crafts project, I love making memories together," she says. "I'm also always dreaming up our next trip, spending time with friends, or searching

for the best new local restaurants and experiences."

Favorite ACCT member moment:

"My favorite member memory is meeting M. Dale Ensign at the 50th ACCT Leadership Congress. As one of ACCT's founding members — and the namesake of our M. Dale Ensign ACCT Trustee Leadership Award — it was incredibly special to celebrate his legacy. He traveled all the way from Utah with more than 20 members of his family to join us in San Francisco, where we honored him during the Gala. When he took the stage to speak, there wasn't a dry eye in the room. I'll always cherish the conversations I had with him and the genuine passion he had for ACCT and its mission. His love for this association was truly inspiring."

Robin's Refrigerator

Christina's leadership has brought the ACCT Excel trustee-excellence program to life. A second cohort has been launched to continue refinements before the program is opened nationwide to all ACCT member trustees.

Applications for our next cohort will open soon — join us and grow your governance expertise.

Learn more about ACCT Excel at <https://acct.org/trustee-education/excel>.

Quotes from pilot participants

"We are likely going to have new trustees seated every year for the next three years, which is a lot of transition! I'm looking forward to using the modules to help solidify our local onboarding process to help us maintain stability. I really couldn't have asked for a better set of materials at a more opportune time."

"I found the videos to be quite helpful and really enjoyed the content overall. The quizzes at the end were a good wrap up and ensured that I got some solid takeaways and a good way to verify my understanding of the material."



Christina Simons is ACCT's associate vice president of trustee education and events. Robin Matross Helms is ACCT's vice president for membership and educational services. She can be reached at rhelms@acct.org.

MEET THE CHANGEMAKERS



Three higher education leaders are reimagining their institutions for student success.

By Nhaim Khoury

***T**HIS FALL, WE'RE SPOTLIGHTING VISIONARY college and university leaders who weren't afraid to be bold when it comes to elevating education on their campuses. These three community college presidents are demonstrating that meaningful change begins by questioning longstanding assumptions — and removing the institutional barriers that stand between students and success.*

Higher education is navigating one of the most consequential periods of transformation in its history.

It isn't news that community colleges continue to grapple with enrollment pressures, shifting demographics, workforce disruption, and rising costs while serving a student population whose expectations look markedly different than they did even a decade ago. Today, the national conversation focuses on external pressures from artificial intelligence and workforce demands to demographic shifts reshaping the traditional college-going population.

Equally important, however, is the transformation taking place inside institutions themselves. Leaders are reexamining longstanding assumptions about the student experience and challenging whether those assumptions still reflect the needs of today's learners.

Although Dr. Roger W. Davis at the Community College of Beaver County (CCBC) in Pennsylvania, Dr. Ryan Ruda at Garden City Community College in Kansas, and Dr. Margaret McMenamin at UCNJ Union College in New Jersey lead very



Dr. Roger W. Davis



Dr. Ryan Ruda



Dr. Margaret McMenamin

different institutions, they have arrived at a remarkably similar leadership philosophy.

Each believes lasting institutional change begins by identifying and removing the barriers that quietly stand between students and success. But their work looks different on paper.

One rebuilt an institution after historic enrollment declines. Another prepared for demographic change years before it became a national concern. A third questioned everything from placement testing to graduation fees in pursuit of better student outcomes.

Together, their stories reveal a broader movement taking shape across higher education — one that is redefining leadership and not accepting the status quo of how it has been done before.

Supporting institutional transformation requires more than approving new technologies or strategic plans. It also means continually asking whether longstanding policies still serve today's students as effectively as they once did.

Reimagining What's Possible

When Dr. Roger W. Davis talks about change, he sounds less like someone preserving an institution's historical value and more like someone preparing it for what comes next.

That perspective was forged during one of the most difficult periods in CCBC's history. Enrollment had fallen to its lowest level, the pandemic had disrupted nearly every aspect of campus life, and students were balancing rising costs, transportation challenges, work, and family responsibilities. While many institutions concentrated on preserving existing operations, Dr. Davis saw an opportunity to rethink how the college could better serve students.

"My vision for CCBC's future is always guided by student success," he says. "We must knock down any obstacle that prevents students from completing credentials, transferring successfully, entering the workforce, and improving their lives."

Guided by that philosophy, the college redesigned academic pathways, strengthened its use of student data, and addressed one barrier that quickly emerged: too many students were beginning classes without the learning materials they needed. By implementing Cengage Unlimited, a campuswide digital course materials model, CCBC put resources in students' hands on the first day of class while reducing their costs.

Faculty champions helped shape the implementation, building trust across campus and reinforcing a broader culture of innovation. That same mindset later led CCBC to offer classes in local libraries during the pandemic, bringing education closer to students facing transportation challenges.

Those efforts are reflected today in stronger institutional performance, rebounding enrollment, and a culture that embraces change as part of its mission.

Preparing for What's Ahead

While Dr. Davis's leadership was shaped by responding to disruption, Dr. Ryan Ruda's was shaped by anticipating it.

Years before declining enrollment and demographic change dominated higher education conversations,

Dr. Ruda was already considering what those shifts would mean for Garden City Community College. He recognized they were already influencing how students chose colleges, balanced competing responsibilities, and evaluated higher education's value.

Rather than waiting for enrollment pressures to intensify, Dr. Ruda challenged the college to identify and remove barriers before they affected student success.

"Community colleges were founded on access and affordability," he says. "We have to be proactive, solution-focused, and mindful of how we solve the problems in front of us."

Preparing for the future, Dr. Ruda believed, required more than anticipating change; it required building consensus around a future vision. He assembled faculty, staff, and administrators to rethink enrollment management, student outcomes, and the college's long-term strategy.

"Ultimately any decision is about gathering information, building trust, making a decision, and seeing it through," he says.

Faculty piloted new approaches, departments retained flexibility, and student voices informed the conversation, creating broad ownership across campus.

One initiative was the college's transition to digital course materials through Cengage. Too many learners, particularly dual-credit students attending one of the college's nine partner high schools, began the semester without the materials they needed. Removing that delay through Cengage's unlimited digital course materials subscription allowed students to begin learning immediately instead of spending the opening weeks catching up or never having materials at all.

The impact extended to enrollment growth, improved retention, and a culture that viewed continuous improvement as an ongoing responsibility rather than a response to crisis.

Acting with Urgency

For Dr. Margaret McMenamin, removing barriers begins with understanding the realities students face every day.

"Students are human beings," she says. "They're not numbers."

That elegantly simple observation has guided nearly every decision she has made as president of UCNJ Union College. Dr. McMenemy begins with the students behind the numbers — the first-generation learner balancing work and school, the single parent whose childcare falls through, and the student weighing whether buying textbooks means sacrificing groceries. She challenged the college to examine every policy, process, and practice by questioning whether it helped students succeed.

The answers rarely came through sweeping reforms, but through what Dr. McMenemy calls institutional “housekeeping” or taking a closer look at practices that had simply become accepted over time.

“Is this an obstacle? Is it necessary?” she asked. If the answer was no, the conversation shifted from preserving tradition to removing friction, leading the college to expand scholarships, strengthen college readiness programs, revisit placement testing, encourage fuller course loads, and eliminate a graduation application fee.

Eventually, those same questions led to another barrier hiding in plain sight: textbooks. When the college discovered that fewer than half of students, on average, had the required course materials on the first day of class, it explored several approaches before adopting Cengage Unlimited. “It was never really about textbooks,” Dr. McMenemy says. “It was about removing one more roadblock to success.”

Like Dr. Davis and Dr. Ruda before her, she understood that sustainable change required more than introducing a new initiative. Faculty needed confidence that academic quality would remain intact, trustees wanted to understand long-term outcomes, and others focused on affordability or implementation. Rather than debating a particular solution, Dr. McMenemy continually returned the discussion to a shared objective: giving students the strongest possible opportunity to succeed.

Those decisions, combined with dozens of other student-centered reforms, improved institutional outcomes and contributed to UCNJ Union College's recognition as one of the Aspen Institute's Top 10 community colleges nationwide. Yet, Dr. McMenemy rarely measures success by awards or rankings.

Instead, she returns to a phrase from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. that has become something of a leadership compass: the fierce urgency of now.

Students experience higher education in real time.

Every semester spent debating change is another semester a student can lose momentum, postpone graduation, or quietly disappear from college altogether. For Dr. McMenemy, that reality leaves little room for institutional hesitation.

A Different Model of Leadership

Although Dr. Davis, Dr. Ruda, and Dr. McMenemy each approached change from different perspectives, their experiences point to the same conclusion: meaningful institutional transformation rarely begins with a single initiative. It begins by questioning longstanding assumptions and identifying the barriers that quietly stand between students and success.

Their work reflects a broader shift taking place across higher education. While many conversations focus on enrollment, workforce demands, artificial intelligence, and demographic change, these leaders demonstrate that some of the most meaningful transformation is happening inside institutions as they rethink policies, redesign processes, and challenge practices that no longer reflect the realities of today's students.

For trustees, that shift carries an important leadership lesson. Supporting institutional transformation requires more than approving new technologies or strategic plans. It also means continually asking whether longstanding policies still serve today's students as effectively as they once did.

Meaningful change will not always come from breakthrough innovations. More often, it will come from leaders willing to question assumptions, remove unnecessary friction, and create institutions that better reflect the realities of today's students.

Read the entire Changemakers series at www.cengage.com/changemakers.



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Employers Want AI Skills, Not AI Degrees

NOVA is embedding AI skills within proven programs with the space to evolve.

By Anne M. Kress



IT'S NO LONGER A SURPRISE THAT THE PACE OF change in today's labor market is being set by artificial intelligence (AI). Consider what the data are telling us. In just 18 months, the share of entry-level job postings requiring AI literacy has nearly tripled, according to research by the National Association of Colleges and Employers. Almost 30 percent of employers say they're looking for early career hires who can use AI in their work from day one. Research from Lightcast found the average job has seen roughly one third of its required skills change between 2022 and 2025, and in one quarter of occupations, as much as 75 percent of skills have turned over. The headline isn't job losses or job gains. Instead, it's that the jobs that exist today are fundamentally different from the jobs with the same titles that existed three years ago.

At Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA), what we hear from our own business and industry partners echoes the national data. Employers who serve on our program advisory councils and the President's Future of Work Business Advisory Council tell us they are not asking for narrowly defined AI degrees. Instead, they want graduates who can apply AI tools within their chosen discipline. Whether it's healthcare, construction, engineering, financial services or beyond, employers want workers who understand how to use AI as a practical, everyday power tool to drive productivity and innovation. Our regional employer surveys and labor market data confirm what we hear in the room. Employers want candidates with AI skills embedded within their fields, not standalone AI degrees.

Just as importantly, our partners have been consistent in telling us that technical AI skills alone are not enough. Students also need durable skills: creative and critical thinking, information processing and problem identification, research, collaboration, and communication. Characteristics like resilience, curiosity, and adaptability come up over and over again in our conversations with industry. Employers know that today's in-demand technical skills will keep evolving. What they're really looking for are graduates committed to being lifelong learners who can adapt as the tools change.

Listening to our partners has shaped how we have responded. At NOVA, our goal is to help our students become AI practitioners — teaching them to use emerging AI tools paired with those durable skills. Rather than building entirely new degree programs, we are creating

targeted opportunities for students to “buckle on” AI capabilities to the disciplines they are already pursuing. We introduced a Career Studies Certificate in AI and Data Analytics that has seen enrollment more than double in its first two years — a signal that students are hungry for these skills. This fall, NOVA launches Algorithms and AI, a computer science-focused certificate emphasizing the mathematical and computational foundations needed to design and evaluate AI-driven systems.

Sitting alongside these credit programs is a growing portfolio of short-term workforce credentials aligned with industry demand, called FastForward in Virginia. Through NOVA Workforce, students can pursue FastForward certifications in AI, as well as credentials tied to widely used platforms like Amazon Web Services. These flexible, stackable programs let students gain immediate workforce value while continuing to build skills over time. The throughline in this programming is integration: AI skills are a capability layered into what students are already studying — whether they are new to the workforce or longtime employees who need to reskill.

None of this works without dedicated and talented faculty. NOVA's ability to develop capable AI practitioners depends on supporting our exceptional teachers (and leaders) in adopting and adapting this transformational technology. Through NOVA's Center for the Advancement of Teaching Excellence (CATE), we have incentivized faculty to innovate, awarding more than 60 cross-disciplinary innovation grants to faculty willing to lead the way. The progress we are seeing is genuinely exciting: experiments with assessments redesigned to reflect AI-enabled environments, efforts to integrate GenAI and machine learning into courses, and work to develop AI microcredentials for students in liberal arts courses like English, Sociology, and 3D Fine Arts.

All of this work is being shaped by who our students are and what they are telling us. Internal surveys show roughly 70 percent of NOVA students are prioritizing AI skills as part of their education, and they need to find ways to build this learning into very complicated lives. Seventy-two percent attend part-time, most are working, and many are raising families. We cannot ask them to pursue yet one more thing on their own time. That is precisely why we embed AI learning within existing programs rather than treating it as an add-on: no matter how valuable AI

skills will be to their future careers, our students do not have the space in their lives to do optional. And when our bold and brilliant NOVA students have already developed AI skills independently (e.g., through self-paced Google certifications or projects at work), we have processes in place so they receive college credit for that knowledge.

Our AI ambitions go beyond the classroom door. NOVA is deploying AI-enabled software solutions to improve internal processes and the student experience. Our work teams are engaged in Microsoft Copilot agentic training to learn how to manage recurring tasks to free up capacity. We are also developing an in-house generative AI career coach to guide students through their academic and career pathways. That last piece matters enormously. The greatest potential of AI is its ability to deliver personalized support at scale so that every student is supported along their unique journey to success, and that is exactly what our students need.

As all trustees and college leaders navigate this same terrain, they should listen closely to their business and industry partners and be prepared to act on what they hear, even when it challenges comfortable assumptions. Students come to our colleges to advance their economic opportunity, and we have a responsibility to fulfill this promise. When employers expect that graduates have experience and even expertise with relevant AI tools and capabilities, we need to respond. At the same time, we must sharpen our focus on durable skills that are the center of most community college general education and liberal arts curriculum: learning how to learn (and learn again), being curious and adaptable, thinking critically and creatively, making ethical decisions, communicating effectively, and evaluating information responsibly. These are not new priorities. But in the age of AI, the way these skills are taught and assessed, authentically, will be very different, so faculty need your active support in the deep work of instructional innovation.

Second, boards and CEOs must resist the temptation to bolt on a new AI degree and call it a strategy. This degree will lose currency as soon as it's approved. Instead, embed AI skills within existing programs and evolve these skills as the tools evolve. Build short-term, stackable credentials that students can "buckle on" as they progress through their chosen field — and return to when the field changes, which it will. Such a strategy meets our students where they are,

TRUSTEE TAKEAWAYS

- 1 Ask business partners what AI skills make employees attractive and understand market data from sources like Lightcast.
- 2 Incorporate business partners' advice and data-informed insights into your academic offerings.
- 3 Don't confuse a trendy degree with a strategy: embed AI skills within proven programs and plan to evolve.

acknowledges and honors the demands on their time, and keeps their credentials meaningful and relevant in a labor market that is in perpetual motion.

Developing responsible, ethical, and effective AI practitioners is not just a student outcome. It is an institutional imperative. That means boards, CEOs, and college faculty and staff all need to be on the same page. Ultimately, this moment asks us to grapple with a deeper question about what it means to learn in the age of AI. How we answer that question will determine whether community colleges can continue to deliver on our promise of access to transformational opportunity.



Anne M. Kress, Ph.D., is president of Northern Virginia Community College.

TIMING MATTERS FOR RE-ENROLLMENT INITIATIVES

A statewide initiative yields insights into the best ways to re-engage stopped-out students.

By Justin Welliver

AS PART OF THE ACCT CORPORATE COUNCIL FOR OVER TEN YEARS, EDAMERICA HAS GAINED a deep understanding and appreciation for ACCT member colleges' needs. The past decade has presented radical technological and policy changes, but when ACCT surveys community college leaders about their needs, the enrollment, recruitment, and retention of students are always among the top five priorities.



Edamerica focuses on helping students enroll, complete their programs of study, and successfully repay any educational debt they accrue along the way. Because we have a unique view of the student lifecycle and particular expertise in the student loan arena, we quickly realized the link between student loan default and program completion. In fact, approximately 70% of students who default do so not because they have a large amount of debt, but because they stopped out before they received a credential.

In 2018, Edamerica partnered with a large state system comprised of universities and community colleges to re-enroll student loan borrowers with some college but no credential (SCNC) and reduce the risk of student loan default.

Over a seven-year period, Edamerica worked with the state system to re-engage more than 160,000 stopped-out students across 56 campuses. While the program was originally designed to reduce student loan default risk, the initiative evolved into one of the nation's largest re-enrollment efforts, and it eventually expanded to include students who did not use federal student loans as well.

Delayed Outreach Reduces Success

The project's findings showed what many enrollment leaders have long expected: Timing is one of the strongest predictors of successful re-engagement.

Students contacted within six months of leaving school were more likely to answer outreach, show interest in returning, and identify barriers that institutions could address. Once students had been away for more than six months, contact rates declined rapidly while personal circumstances became increasingly difficult for colleges to influence.

Students who stopped out within six months responded to outreach 35.9% of the time, compared with 23.8% of the students who had been away longer. Outreach to students who stopped out less recently was nearly 50% less likely to result in a live conversation.

The differences extended beyond simply reaching students. Among recent stop-outs, many reported planning to return in the next semester or indicated they were simply unsure about timing. These responses create opportunities for advising, financial aid assistance, and proactive registration support. Older stop-outs, by contrast, were far more likely to cite broad personal reasons for leaving, making successful intervention significantly more difficult.

Students without federal student loan debt demonstrated the strongest desire to return to college. More than half expressed interest in re-enrolling, their financial barriers were minimal, and nearly three-quarters expected to return

within one or two academic terms. These students were not disengaged permanently. Many had simply paused their education temporarily.

For institutions facing enrollment pressures, this data suggests that re-enrollment efforts should not treat all stopped-out students the same. Recent withdrawals deserve immediate, high-touch outreach that combines financial aid review, academic advising, registration assistance, and clear next steps during a single interaction. Students who have been away longer may benefit from lower-cost engagement campaigns that include personalized text messaging, scheduling links, and ongoing reminders until they are ready to reconnect.

When You Contact Students Matters, So Does How You Contact Them

The data also suggests an often-overlooked opportunity: improving how colleges contact students. A significant share of unsuccessful outreach consisted of unanswered calls or messages left behind. Multiple attempts to contact, varied contact methods, better caller identification, coordinated text messaging campaigns, digital scheduling tools, and more compelling messaging represent relatively inexpensive improvements that could substantially increase engagement.

Re-enrollment campaigns are more than an enrollment initiative. When adopted as a standard protocol, these campaigns are an important part of a long-term student success strategy, a workforce strategy, and a financial wellness strategy. Over the course of the project, 35,034 students re-enrolled, representing a 28.2% success rate. Participating institutions saw their cohort default rates drop — beating the national average by nearly 2 percentage points for four-year public institutions.

As states continue developing adult learner initiatives, one message from this experience stands out clearly. The goal should not simply be to reconnect with stopped-out students. It should be reconnecting them before the opportunity begins to disappear. Every month matters, and the first six months may represent the most valuable opportunity institutions have to help students finish what they started.



Justin Welliver is Northeast Region Marketing Director at Edamerica. He can be reached at JDWelliver@edamerica.net.

KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS OF THE EFFECTIVE BOARD CHAIR

This article is the second of a three-part series excerpted from *The Effective Board Chair: First Among Equals*, published by ACCT in 2025.

By Pamila J. Fisher

ONCE UPON A TIME, SERVING AS A BOARD chair was a relatively easy task and an enjoyable experience. Most of the chair's duties in the last century centered around board meetings and public events, including frequent ceremonial roles such as graduation. Board chairs could rely heavily on their college president to guide them, and some even tended to take their direction from the president. When given the opportunity to serve as board chair, almost everyone accepted the role and was able to handle it reasonably well and enjoy doing so.

That is no longer necessarily the case. Today, board chairs more frequently have to address major crises such as natural disasters, financial shortfalls, scandals, pandemics, and more. Changes in federal and state regulations and policies, accreditation issues, and even cultural expectations have made this role much more challenging and time-consuming than it often used to be. Even if the chair has served as a board chair for other public or non-profit institutions, they may be surprised to learn that the chair of a college governing board has responsibilities that are unique to higher education.

They may be further surprised to learn that many of those responsibilities are not visible to the public and are far more complex than commonly known.

Some highlights of those responsibilities follow. A deeper discussion can be found in ACCT's publications *Trusteeship in Community Colleges: A Guide for Effective Governance* (2021) and *The Effective Board Chair: First Among Equals* (2025).

Know Your Policies and Procedures

Most board bylaws or policies list the straightforward logistical tasks of the board chair. Board chairs should know those ahead of time. Board chairs also have a responsibility to understand all the board bylaws or policies related to board organization. Those are generally not extensive, and a chair should have read through them and at least know they exist, even though they cannot be expected to have memorized all the content.

What your policies may or may not include is the chair's responsibility to understand legal and professional guidelines related to state and federal laws, including but not limited

Get *The Effective Board Chair* and other titles on governance and advocacy by clicking "Member Portal and Online Shop" at www.acct.org.

to open meeting laws, confidentiality, parliamentary procedures, hiring practices, accreditation, negotiations, and more. The board chair does not have to have the degree of expertise that their college president or chancellor has, but they must have some familiarity in order to be successful. At a minimum, they must recognize when they don't know and seek guidance from their CEO. Ideally, they would seek opportunities to learn specific skills they may be lacking before assuming the role.

Not Entirely Independent

Local governing boards tend to assume they are independent bodies, especially if they are elected. However, even so-called independent public local governing boards are subject to federal and state law and regulations, and generally an education code as well. Board chairs must help other board members understand that sometimes actions the board unanimously agrees it would like to take are simply not legal and cannot occur.

Some of the most frustrating laws to many board members are the stringent restrictions related to *open meeting (sunshine)* laws. The purpose of these laws is to ensure that the public's business is done in public. It is important for a board chair to understand the only specific reasons that an executive (closed) session can be called. Once a board is meeting in executive session for a legitimate reason, the board chair plays a key role in reminding the board (and sometimes the president) that the discussion must not be allowed to wander. A reminder about serial meetings also is essential.

Confidentiality is another aspect of executive sessions that the board chair should repeatedly emphasize. Violations of either of these laws are not just unethical. They also can lead to legal sanctions.

Boards also are expected to follow parliamentary procedure, even when this expectation often is not monitored as closely as adherence to legal requirements. However, if a board fails to follow parliamentary procedure when making a decision, that decision can be invalidated on the basis of having failed to follow proper procedure.

Board members have been found guilty by local district attorneys, grand juries, and state attorneys general for violations of open meeting laws, confidentiality, and parliamentary procedure requirements. The consequences of those actions negatively affect publicity — or worse — and can jeopardize the college's accreditation status. The board chair should assure that parliamentary procedure is followed.

Accreditation standards are another source of guidance for boards. Non-educators who begin serving on college boards are surprised to learn that accreditation holds as

much authority over colleges as they do. It is important to remember that accreditation commissions are made up of one's peers (trustees, administrators, faculty, and staff). Most importantly, accreditation standards exist to guarantee to the public that the college's offerings and performance are excellent. Quite simply, public colleges cannot exist without affirmed accreditation.

While most accreditation standards apply to college operations, some apply specifically to board behavior. Over the last decade, an increasing number of colleges have received sanctions from their respective accrediting commissions because the board had not met that quality standard. The sanction is against the college even if it is only the board that has not performed appropriately. That can be devastating to college leadership and staff, and it definitely deters students from choosing the college.

Boards are empowered to make many critical decisions. But they must operate within the constraints of a fairly large variety of state and national laws and regulations. It is imperative that board chairs have at least a general familiarity with these parameters.

On Public Display

Whether elected or appointed, governing board members represent and serve the public. Perhaps the place where that behavior is most visible is their posted public meetings. Although that has always been true, since the COVID-19 pandemic made publicly broadcasted board meetings common, the public now has even easier access to those meetings. The open meeting of a college governing board is its opportunity to shine. If this meeting is well-planned and well-run, has a meaningful discussion about "big picture" issues, and demonstrates the professionalism of both board members and staff, the public is assured that the college is in good hands.

The board chair sets this tone and is positioned to maintain order. Perhaps one of the most challenging situations for a board chair is leading a board meeting at which dozens, if not hundreds, of college staff or community members attend the meeting due to a controversial decision that has been made or is being considered. Policies and procedures should be in place and intensive preparation should occur when this is anticipated. For better or worse, the board chair shares a huge responsibility for any meeting's success or failure.

Professional Development

Ongoing professional development for governing board members is critical to the success of any board. The board chair plays a major role in promoting and providing multiple

opportunities for the board to develop professionally. One that deserves special focus is board retreats.

Board retreats on a regular basis are one of the best activities for developing a cohesive, strong, and well-informed governing board. The chair must convey the value of conducting annual retreats that focus on the performance of the board/president team, a board self-assessment, and board goals (distinct from college or president goals) for the following year is a giant step toward maintaining and improving college excellence. There is an extended discussion of the value of retreats in the *Trusteeship in Community Colleges: A Guide for Effective Governance*, available at ACCT.org.

The Chair's Relationship with the College President

A board chair, of course, will work closely with the college president. Mutual respect, trust, and good communication are essential. Board members should understand that selecting a chair who they know does not respect the president will have serious consequences. At the same time, it is not healthy for a chair to become so close to the president that the relationship becomes based on friendship that includes socializing with their respective families. This can create a myriad of problems for the campus community, the board, and even the chair and the president.

That said, the importance of effective relationships is illustrated in the following set of principles:

A college cannot be successful without effective governance leadership.

A governing board cannot be successful without an effective president/chancellor.

A president/chancellor cannot be successful without an effective governing board.

A governing board cannot be successful without an effective relationship between its chair and the college president/chancellor.

The External Role

I would be remiss not to at least mention that more than any other member of the board, the board chair is expected to play a significant external role for the college. How expansive this role varies by college, but it usually is fairly extensive. As chair, you will be invited to many college events where you have a public or ceremonial role. You also will have a role in advocacy and with the media. Together, you will have a larger role that can sometimes be time-consuming, albeit pleasant. Be sure to plan accordingly.

To assess the extent of your experience and preparation for this critical role, continue your personal assessment, see the "How Well Do I Measure Up?" sidebar at right.

HOW WELL DO I MEASURE UP?

1. Why do I want to be board chair?
2. How much experience have I had serving on this board?
3. Have I served in other officer roles on this board?
4. Do I understand the specifics of open meeting laws and executive session requirements?
5. Do I know well the board policies related to board operations?
6. Am I comfortable with the basics of parliamentary procedures?
7. Have I taken advantage of numerous professional development opportunities?
8. Can I maintain complete confidentiality even with family, close friends, and former colleagues who are employees of the college?
9. Is my relationship with the college president cordial and strictly professional?
10. Am I willing and able to represent the college at multiple external events?

A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

I have had the opportunity to work with many board chairs. They have had different backgrounds and different styles. The overwhelming majority have the best interests of the college in mind and do a great job. Most do their best to run an effective meeting, but some fall short. Where they are most likely to run into trouble in a public meeting is when parliamentary procedures are not followed. Even though many people are not thrilled with parliamentary procedures, a chair who follows them fairly closely will be able to avoid or handle difficult situations with greater ease.

Another meeting challenge I have observed is when chairs lose control of the meeting and allow colleagues to dominate. Sometimes, community members will disrupt and take over a meeting, and a chair is reluctant to intervene. At the other extreme, I have observed board chairs run over their colleagues and attempt to make the meeting as short as possible or control the discussion that leads to the decision they favor.

Beyond fiduciary and student success responsibilities, a board chair's most visible role that affects the college is how well they know what they are doing and whether they manage board meetings effectively.



Dr. Pamela Fisher is a graduate of Modesto Junior College, former chancellor of Yosemite Community College District, and former interim chancellor of the City College of San Francisco. She has conducted more than 60 CEO searches and over 100 governing board retreats on behalf of ACCT over the past 15 years.

New Trustees Governance Leadership Institute

"This was a very informative program and covered a lot of topics. The table talks were great!"

"Both facilitators made the presentation intriguing, informative, and interesting... The information that was presented was very helpful and awesome to me because of the role I play in supporting both my board of trustees and president."

"Loved that it was at a community college — keeps us grounded in the institutions we serve."

Fifty-five community college board members and CEOs convened in Anaheim, California, this August 5 - 7 to become better acquainted with governance best practices and to forge strong working relationships.

The two-day New Trustees Governance Leadership Institute was hosted by Fullerton College and facilitated by Helen Benjamin and Monty Sullivan, along with support from ACCT Vice President of Membership and Educational Services Robin Matross Helms and Events Specialist Maggie Owens.

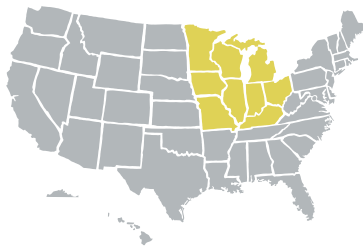
Mere steps from the iconic Disneyland resort, trustees from American Samoa, Arizona, California, Illinois, Michigan, New Mexico, Ohio, Texas, and Wisconsin gathered to learn about board basics, including the board's role in accreditation, the board as an advocate, and the complexities of ethics and other matters. Benjamin and Sullivan guided attendees through the material while engaging attendees' networking skills to glean even more knowledge from one another.

ACCT is immensely grateful to the team at Fullerton College for their warm hospitality and all the hard work they put into making the GLI feel right at home on their campus.



Go to acct.org/events to learn more about ACCT's educational events, or visit Connect.ACCT.org to access year-round educational content available to all ACCT members.

AROUND THE REGIONS



CENTRAL REGION

An **Iowa** community college is the first in the nation to earn federal approval for the Workforce Pell Grant program. Gov. Kim Reynolds, joined by U.S. Secretary of Education Linda McMahon and Acting Secretary of Labor Keith Sonderling, visited Iowa Central Community College to sign documentation providing federal approval for students in the college's EMT program.

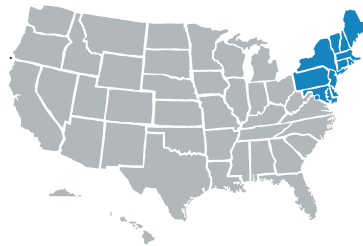
The Corn Belt Ports Rural Logistics & Maritime Training & Education Consortium was launched as a multi-state collaboration designed to strengthen the inland maritime workforce and support economic growth across the Midwest through a broad network of institutions of higher education from **Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, and Wisconsin**.

Michigan's free tuition program for adults to attend community college has lowered its eligibility to 21. Lawmakers included an additional \$25 million to expand the program for 21- to 24-year old Michigan residents for one year.

St. Louis Community College in **Missouri** plans to launch a first-of-its-kind scholarship program this January, aiming to cover tuition, housing, childcare and other support for 100 students working toward a two-year degree.

A coalition of more than 70 regional partners in **Ohio**, including Lorain County Community College, has been selected to bring up to \$160 million in advanced manufacturing investment to Northeast Ohio over the next decade.

Fox Valley Technical College in **Wisconsin** adjunct instructor Karl Arps was saved by students in his Emergency Medical Services (EMS) course after entering cardiac arrest. According to the American Red Cross, fewer than 10% of people survive cardiac arrest outside of the hospital.



NORTHEAST REGION

Connecticut lawmakers tabled a proposal that would have allowed colleges and universities in the state to offer three-year bachelor's degrees.

Maryland Gov. Wes Moore's apprenticeship pledge surpassed its goal of recruiting 500 new employers and 5,000 new registered apprentices in just one year.

The **New Jersey** AI Hub and the New Jersey Council of County Colleges (NJCCC) announced AI Ready NJ, a statewide framework for AI education backed by Microsoft TechSpark.

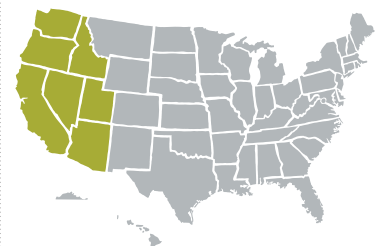
New York Gov. Kathy Hochul

announced an expansion of SUNY Reconnect and CUNY Reconnect to include associate degrees in supply chain/logistics, air traffic control and aviation management, and emergency management, as well as making it easier for adult learners to pursue nursing if they have a prior degree in a different field and including eligible associate degree programs at bachelor's-granting institutions.

SUNY Ulster and Ulster County signed an agreement to launch the state's first SNAP Employment & Training (SNAP E&T) partnership.

Pennsylvania's newly created State Board of Higher Education rolled out its first public higher education data dashboards, giving students, families and policymakers a view into college affordability, graduation rates, enrollment trends and workforce placements.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education awarded Luzerne County Community College a \$1 million grant to help rural students collect college credits while still enrolled in high school.



PACIFIC REGION

Arizona Gov. Katie Hobbs expanded the "Ready Tech-Go" workforce initiative to Coconino, Mohave, and Yavapai community colleges to support Arizona's growing technology sector. The workforce

program partners directly with major employers like Intel, TSMC, and Lucid.

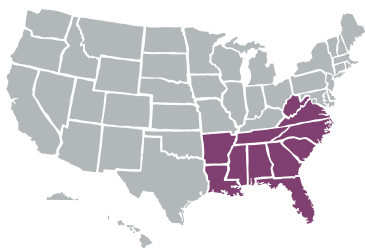
Compton College in **California** is launching a new plan that ties some basic needs supports to academic requirements to incentivize students to take steps toward completion.

A new law revised the **Hawai'i** Promise Program to ensure that additional scholarships or financial aid do not impact the aid provided through the program.

Oregon's Higher Education Coordinating Commission has approved five community colleges to offer the Bachelor of Applied Science in Education degree beginning Fall 2027.

High school seniors in **Washington** would need to complete student aid paperwork to graduate under a proposal by Gov. Bob Ferguson.

In the only program of its kind in the country, Highline College in Washington has paired students facing homelessness with housing vouchers provided by the King County Housing Authority.



SOUTHERN REGION

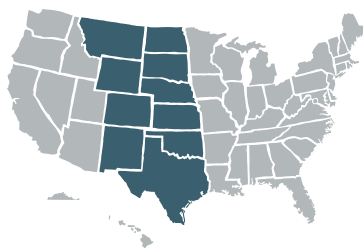
A \$500,000 National Science Foundation grant will help three **Alabama** community colleges prepare more students for careers in the growing semiconductor industry.

As part of an effort to reach younger students, the **Louisiana** Community and Technical Colleges System is in the process of launching its own charter school.

Mississippi Gov. Tate Reeves signed into law the UPSKILL (Upgrading Priority Skills for Key Industry Learning and Labor) Mississippi Grant program. The program, which would start as a pilot, will provide last-dollar scholarships to eligible adults who are 24 or older and seeking job training to earn a living wage.

North Carolina's 2026-27 budget includes Propel NC, the North Carolina Community College System's proposed funding overhaul, along with pay raises for employees and funds for ApprenticeshipNC and other workforce programs.

According to a Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond study, 64 of the 66 community and technical colleges in **North Carolina** and **South Carolina** reporting high school student cohort data had success rates for their high school students that outpaced their non-high school counterparts.



WESTERN REGION

The **Colorado** Department of Higher Education announced a

newly revamped Basic Needs Campus designation recognizing 17 colleges and universities for supporting students facing challenges such as food insecurity and mental health needs.

A new collaboration between Metropolitan Community College in **Nebraska** and youth development nonprofit The Bay will create a pathway for young adults to develop skills in an in-demand field: manufacturing.

Central **New Mexico** Community College (CNM) finalized a national demonstration framework to scale its workforce development template across the United States.

Three years after **Texas** reinvented how community colleges earn state funding to reward them for getting more students to graduation, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board officials adjusted the funding formula, trimming performance incentives to proportionately reduce funding for all community colleges and stay within budget. Nearly a dozen colleges would see state funding drop by at least 15%, according to THECB estimates.

Laramie County Community College in **Wyoming** announced plans to change the school's name to Wyoming State College.

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.

AFFORDABLE ACCESS IS STUDENT SUCCESS

Community colleges need more than low-cost course materials.

By the BRIDGE Coalition

COMMUNITY COLLEGES SIT AT THE CENTER of America's workforce pipeline. They prepare nurses, advanced manufacturing technicians, cybersecurity specialists, educators, health professionals, and skilled tradespeople who keep local economies moving. Yet many community college students are balancing coursework with jobs, family responsibilities, and significant financial pressures. For these learners, success often depends on having the right resources at the right time. That is why affordable access programs have become an increasingly important strategy for community colleges seeking to improve student outcomes while maintaining academic quality.

Research highlighted by Tyton Partners demonstrates the impact. At New York's Onondaga Community College and South Carolina's Technical College of the Lowcountry, students participating in affordable access programs were 27% more likely to earn a passing grade and 60% less likely to withdraw from a course than their counterparts not participating in these programs.

Affordable access programs — sometimes called inclusive access or equitable access programs — help ensure that students receive required course materials on or before the first day of class at below market prices. While the cost savings are important, the deeper value lies in eliminating a barrier that has historically disrupted learning. When students start a course without materials, they fall behind immediately. Faculty delay instruction, students miss assignments, and course momentum suffers. By contrast, day-one access enables every student to begin learning from the same starting line.

Since regulations ushered in affordable access programs, thousands of institutions have adopted the model to save students significant money and increase performance. At Dallas College in Texas, implementation of an affordable access model generated average student savings of more

than \$800 annually while also contributing to lower withdrawal rates.

But the conversation about affordability should not stop at price. Modern course materials are no longer just textbooks. Today's learning solutions often include digital courseware, adaptive learning tools, analytics, assessments, accessibility features, and AI-enabled study support. These resources provide instructional infrastructure that helps students stay engaged and helps faculty identify challenges before they become barriers to success.

The evidence is particularly compelling in gateway courses — the introductory classes where many students struggle. According to a recent white paper from Huron Consulting Group, Rowan-Cabarrus Community College in North Carolina saw pass rates in a developmental mathematics course more than double after adopting an adaptive courseware solution, while course withdrawals fell by more than half. At Cabrillo College in California, implementation of a similar solution contributed to a substantial increase in A grades and a dramatic decline in failing grades. These outcomes suggest that access to high-quality learning materials, combined with interactive learning tools, can play a meaningful role in student persistence and achievement.

Community colleges also serve a disproportionately large share of students who are working, returning to education after time away, or the first in their families to attend college. Many benefit from structured practice, immediate feedback, and personalized learning support. The Huron white paper points to growing evidence that adaptive learning platforms improve engagement, mastery, and course completion, particularly for students facing the greatest academic challenges. Rather than replacing faculty, these tools extend instructors' ability to support students at scale.

Faculty leaders see the value as well. Dr. Kelly Hogan, associate vice president at Columbus State Community

**“As community colleges evaluate course material strategies, the question should not simply be, 'What costs less?'
The better question is, 'What helps students succeed?' Affordable Access programs address both concerns.”**



College in Ohio, emphasized the importance of students having materials available on day one, noting immediate access is fundamental when institutions are focused on student success. She also stressed that learning platforms should serve as tools that help faculty create better learning opportunities rather than replace instructional expertise.

Another often-overlooked benefit is workforce readiness. Employers continue to report gaps in problem-solving, critical thinking, and job-specific skills among graduates. Modern course materials increasingly integrate practice opportunities, feedback loops, and applied learning experiences that help students build these durable skills while they progress through their programs. For community colleges, which are closely tied to regional workforce needs, course materials that connect learning outcomes to career preparation provide value that extends well beyond the classroom.

With recent changes in Washington, D.C., imposing a stricter accountability framework, it's more important than ever to double down on investments in student outcomes and workforce readiness.

As community colleges evaluate course material strategies, the question should not simply be, "What costs less?" The better question is, "What helps students succeed?" Affordable access programs address both concerns. They reduce upfront financial barriers while ensuring students have immediate access to learning resources that can improve engagement,

retention, completion, and career readiness. When affordability, access, instructional quality, and student support work together, community colleges are better positioned to fulfill their mission: opening doors to opportunity and helping learners achieve economic mobility.

Despite the model catching like wildfire on campuses across the country, our sector hasn't done a great job of spreading the word to policymakers in Washington. They've proposed changes to upend the program in the past and may consider doing so again. Tell your member of Congress how affordable access has helped your college:

- ✓ improve student performance and preparation
- ✓ increase competitive pressure and lower course material costs
- ✓ enhance access and transparency
- ✓ boost flexibility and convenience
- ✓ expand consumer choice for instructors and students

Before affordable access programs, textbook prices were rising steadily, forcing many students to go without required learning materials. These programs help solve the broken market. Eliminating or narrowing such programs risks undoing that progress and returning to higher prices, less access, and lower outcomes.

For institutions committed to student success, affordable access is not merely a purchasing model. It is a student success strategy.

To learn more, visit www.bridgecoalition.org.

From Single Parenting Student to Board Leadership

ACCT's Kids on Campus Director presents a trustee's story of purpose, persistence, and success.

By Miya T. Simpson



RIO HONDO COLLEGE Trustee Yarisma Rocha's journey from parenting student to board leadership is a powerful testimony of how self-determination, resilience, persistence, and a network of support led to college completion, professional success, and economic mobility. I had the opportunity to talk with

Trustee Rocha about her experiences as a student parent and how layered campus supports, including on-campus child care, helped her to achieve her personal and professional goals. She also offers advice to college leaders and parenting students for creating conditions for success.

When young Yarisma Rocha enrolled at Rio Hondo College, she was a recent high school graduate and Latina single mother carrying the weight of uncertainty, new parenting responsibilities, and financial insecurity — along with the stigma of being stereotyped as what she described as another “statistic” and perceived as a “failure to her community.” Today, Trustee Rocha is an alumna of Rio Hondo College and the University of Southern California (USC), an IT project manager for a prominent bank, and an appointed planning commissioner for the city of Pico

Rivera. She also serves as vice president of the Rio Hondo College Board of Trustees, where she brings her lived experience into the boardroom as an advocate for student parents and other communities that encounter challenges similar to those she faced. One of many notable actions during her board tenure has been supporting the approval of the partnership agreement between Rio Hondo College and Baldwin Park Unified School District to expand child care services through Head Start, bringing the Kids on Campus model to the California community college.

“College did not seem possible.”

After graduating from high school, Trustee Rocha recalls telling her older brother that she was not sure she could go to college because she was a mom. “I just didn’t think it was possible,” she says. Her brother disagreed and strongly encouraged her to enroll with a full course load. “I really, really appreciate him pushing me to do it,” she says with admiration. She immediately began taking online courses, performed very well — receiving three As and one B in her first semester — and strengthened her self-confidence.

Then, unexpectedly, during her third semester at Rio Hondo College, her daughter was diagnosed with leukemia. “That changed my life,” she says, “and made me see how life can change from one minute to the next.” Trustee Rocha devoted herself to her daughter’s treatment over the next

By investing in parenting students and providing access to convenient and affordable child care, community colleges can improve enrollment, retention, and completion while helping change the life trajectory and economic mobility of individuals and families.



three years while also continuing her studies. “I never dropped out of school. I knew that if I wanted to succeed in life and provide for my daughter, I needed to come out of college with the best job possible,” she says. “So I knew I had to sacrifice and dedicate myself.”

“Rio Hondo College was my home.”

Trustee Rocha credits the integrated network of support available at Rio Hondo for her success as a parenting student. “Having a campus that has resources for you and professionals with the proper training is so important,” she says. With the support of informed and compassionate staff, she was connected to multiple campus resources that enabled her to continue taking classes full time, obtain campus employment through work-study and additional opportunities in the tutoring center, fitness center, and as a student ambassador, and become an active member of the honor society and other student organizations. She also qualified for financial aid, Extended Opportunities Programs and Services (EOPS), CalWORKs, and public assistance services, which provided additional financial resources for tuition, books, transportation, food, and living expenses.

Rio Hondo’s Child Development Center was another invaluable resource for her and her then two-year-old daughter. For Trustee Rocha, the Child Development Center was the essential support that made it possible for her to focus on her studies and goal of transferring to USC, and to be fully engaged as a student. “I was at peace,” she says. “I was able to do all of these things because my daughter was in a safe place. And the staff was so helpful and kind — they understood my daughter’s unique situation as she was undergoing chemotherapy

and understood me as a single mom, a struggling mom just working so hard.”

Her daughter — who has since made a full recovery and is now a healthy, happy, thriving teenager — also still remembers the teachers, the care received, the cap-and-gown celebration, and the sense of belonging at Rio Hondo’s Center. “She’s an alumna too [of the Center] and gladly shares her experiences with others we encounter who are looking for child care support,” Trustee Rocha says proudly. She also acknowledges the broader two-generation impact of having access to on-campus child care where “parents can continue their education while their children learn in a safe, stable, and joyful environment nearby.”

“We need to have a place for the babies.”

Trustee Rocha looks back on her experiences at Rio Hondo College and the Child Development Center fondly and with great appreciation. However, one thing she wishes could have been different is being able to enroll her daughter sooner instead of having to wait until she was two years old to be eligible. Until then, Trustee Rocha recalls having to coordinate child care with her cousin, who lived several miles away in a different city and was also enrolled in college. This arrangement required meticulous planning and commitment to manage different (and at times competing) class and work schedules, her daughter’s medical appointments, and transportation logistics. While she is grateful for the family support, Trustee Rocha also still vividly remembers how difficult and exhausting it was for everyone involved to make it work.

This experience drives one of Trustee Rocha’s main policy priorities: expanding child care services for infants and toddlers. “We need to have those resources available for

parents right away,” she says. “We need to have a place for the babies.” If given the opportunity, she would like to see another classroom added in the Child Development Center for infants and toddlers.

“I had a desire to give back to my community.”

In reflecting on her pathway to public service and trustee leadership, Trustee Rocha reveals that she never aspired to be in a leadership or policy making role. But in realizing she was “one of the few who made it out of her situation,” she wanted to help others the way so many people helped her. “I had a desire to give back to my community,” she says. Along the way, she remembers being in rooms with local and state leaders and others who held impressive titles, which she found intimidating at times. However, she did not let that stop her, stating profoundly, “I had no title, but I had a purpose.” That purpose now informs her work as a trustee, especially her focus on parenting students and other populations that may encounter challenges and barriers as they pursue their academic goals, despite possessing the ability to succeed.

“We’re bringing in a population that wants and needs that opportunity to go to college and succeed.”

Trustee Rocha’s personal story illustrates the vital role of community colleges in supporting student parents. By investing in parenting students and providing access to convenient and affordable child care, community colleges can improve enrollment, retention, and completion while helping change the life trajectory and economic mobility of individuals and families.

As our conversation ended, I asked Trustee Rocha what recommendations or advice she would offer to parenting students, community college trustees, and other campus leaders. Her responses were quick, direct, and insightful.

For parenting students, she says to “pursue your dreams and do not be afraid. Ask questions. Be pushy. Speak up for yourself. Find and take advantage of the resources. And most importantly, don’t give up...there is a light at the end of the tunnel, and you will reach the other side.”

For community college trustees and campus leaders, she recommends the following:

- **Request and use data** on parenting students to inform policy and resource decisions.
- **Invest in child care as student success infrastructure**

that supports the college’s enrollment, retention, completion and workforce development goals, while also changing the lives of students and their families.

- **Expand infant and toddler care** so parents can receive support as soon as it’s needed and not have to delay their postsecondary plans if other options are not available.
- **Create an end-to-end model** that allows parenting students to take classes, study, work, and access care for their children — all located on campus.
- **Provide ally training** to help faculty, staff, and administrators better understand the unique and non-traditional needs, experiences, challenges, and layered responsibilities student parents must navigate. This also includes increasing awareness of available resources so they can assist students and provide appropriate referrals.
- **Elevate testimonies** of student parents, alumni, and leaders by inviting them to share their lived experiences with board members and the campus community so they understand the need. Hearing the stories of others also allows parenting students to “see themselves through other people and see what’s possible,” she says.
- **Build the partnerships, systems, and policies** that make persistence possible and create spaces where parenting students can pursue credentials with the assurance that their children are in a safe and comfortable learning environment in close proximity.
- **Explore opportunities to provide access to affordable, high-quality on campus child care** through Kids on Campus partnerships with Head Start/ Early Head Start and other state, local, community, and philanthropic partners.

To learn more about Kids on Campus and how your college can strengthen student-parent success by expanding access to child care and family-centered supports, contact Miya T. Simpson, ACCT Director and/or complete our interest form at www.kidsoncampus.org/engage.



Miya T. Simpson, Ph.D., is Kids on Campus director for ACCT. She can be reached at msimpson@acct.org.

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Legal Issues Impacting Community Colleges

Recent decisions on employment discrimination, Title IX, First Amendment, healthcare coverage, and other issues that affect community colleges.

BY IRA MICHAEL SHEPARD, ACCT GENERAL COUNSEL

The U.S. Supreme Court will decide whether Title IX creates a private right of action for employees to sue for workplace discrimination.

THE FOLLOWING LEGAL DEVELOPMENTS DURING THE past several months may impact the day-to-day operation of community colleges throughout the United States. This article does not provide legal advice; all readers are advised to seek legal guidance from their institution's legal advisors before acting on any of the topics discussed herein.

EEOC brings first “reverse discrimination” charge in ten years, alleging discriminatory hiring and promotion practices that target white males.

U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Chair Andrea Lucas, appointed by President Donald J. Trump, announced that the commission's lawsuit alleging that *The New York Times* has unlawfully discriminated against white male employees in its hiring and promotion practices is the first such action on behalf of white male employees brought by the EEOC in 10 years. The lawsuit alleges that an editor was denied a promotion because of his race and gender. Lucas announced



“I worry about my mom’s screen time, but it’s the only thing that seems to soothe her.”

that the intent of the EEOC is “to go back to neutral” and not focus on any particular group. However, the chair emphasized that the focus could be on groups less focused on in the past. The *New York Times* claims the lawsuit is politically motivated by the Trump Administration. (S.D.N.Y. No. 1:26-CV-03704; case filed 5/4/26.)

In a related action, the EEOC in February sued a Coca-Cola distributor, alleging male bias for convening a retreat of female employees. The EEOC is also investigating diversity initiatives by Nike and Northwestern Mutual.

Supreme Court to decide split in decisions on whether Title IX creates a private right of action for employees to sue for workplace discrimination. The U.S. Supreme Court has granted review to an Eleventh Circuit case decision on whether Title IX creates a private right of action for employees to sue for workplace discrimination in addition to the remedies given employees under Title VII. Eight circuits (the First, Second, Third, Sixth, Seventh, Eighth, Ninth, and Tenth) permit employees to use Title IX in addition to Title VII to pursue workplace discrimination issues. Two circuits (the Fifth and Eleventh) permit only students to pursue Title IX remedies. A decision by the Supreme Court affirming the right of employees in addition to students to use Title IX in addition to Title VII will allow them to directly sue for workplace discrimination in federal court, bypassing the requirement that a charge be filed with the EEOC or applicable state agency as required by Title VII. (*Crowther v. University Board of Regents of University of Georgia*; US no. 25-183, petition granted 5/18/26.)

EEOC votes to do away with employer EEO-1 filing and seeks to eliminate EEO 2-5 filing requirements that apply to state and local governments and public schools. The EEOC voted in late July to rescind the annual requirement that large employers file annual EEO-1 reports detailing workforce demographics including race, sex, and national origin. The proposal, which is slated for publication after review, would leave the federal government with much less information on the employment demographics of large private employers than is presently visible. The EEOC also is seeking to do away with EEO 2-5 filings that apply to state and local governments and public schools.

These annual EEO filings generally require employers with more than 100 employees to file annual reports on these data, which have been used in the past as part of the commission’s enforcement of EEO laws. Counsel should be consulted as to whether this proposal will alter the required filing for 2026, as the proposal must be published for comment in the Federal Register.

Former professor settles for \$1.9 million in First Amendment retaliation case following social media comments about Charlie Kirk’s assassination. A former University of Tennessee professor who was placed on

administrative leave with pay after her social media posts on Charlie Kirk’s assassination has settled the lawsuit for \$1.9 million with an agreement that she would not be reinstated to her position at the university. The Federal District Court judge assigned to the case had rejected the plaintiff professor’s motion for a temporary restraining order. Nonetheless, it appears the parties reached a settlement to avoid continuing litigation. (*Shirinian v. Plowman*, E.D. Tenn. No. 3:25-cv-00528; settlement notice 6/29/26.)

Class action case challenging employer’s “smoker’s charge” for healthcare coverage filed in court. A former Nestle USA employee sued the company in federal district court to challenge the company’s practice of charging an extra \$75 a month for health care coverage of smokers. The proposed class action alleges that the company failed to reimburse employees who complete a smoking cessation program and that the company failed to publicize that it will take into account a statement from the employee’s doctor before assessing the penalty. Federal law allows employers to assess penalties on smokers in these circumstances if certain conditions are met. Federal courts have reached different conclusions on more than 60 recently filed cases alleging employers have violated the rules concerning tobacco use penalties. Counsel should be consulted in this area before going forward. (*Hohl v. Nestle USA Inc.*, E.D. Va. No. 1:26-cv-00947; Comp, 4/7/26.)

Former tenured faculty member loses her discrimination complaint; appeals court affirms that case was dismissed because student complaints do not constitute discrimination. The First Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals affirmed a federal district court judge’s dismissal of a former tenured Spanish professor’s discrimination complaint on the basis of gender, race, national origin, sexual orientation, age, and religion. The professor was terminated following student complaints over her classroom teaching methods, which included criticism of her using the word “transvestite” in a negative way. The appeals court affirmed the trial judge’s conclusion that the record substantiates that the plaintiff was terminated because students disliked her teaching methods and possibly her personality, but concluded that there was no evidence tying the university’s decision makers to any discriminatory conduct. (*Crawford v. Salve Regina University*, 1st Cir. 24-1656; opinion issued 6/11/26.)



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

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.



RIDGEWATER COLLEGE, MINNESOTA

DR. CHERYL NORMAN

President

"Dr. Norman brings a proven track record in enrollment management, developing data-driven strategies that strengthen student recruitment, retention, and completion. Her ability to lead initiatives that drive equitable student success and post-completion outcomes will serve Ridgewater College and the Willmar and Hutchinson communities well."

- **SCOTT OLSON**

CHANCELLOR, MINNESOTA STATE

NORMANDALE COMMUNITY COLLEGE, MINNESOTA

DR. PAKOU YANG

President



"Dr. Yang is a strong leader who has successfully guided Normandale as interim president over the past 10 months. She excels at cultivating coalitions and consensus around what needs to be done and will no doubt continue to build upon Normandale's solid foundation to position it well for the future. Dr. Yang has devoted her career to serving students at Minnesota State colleges and universities, both in the classroom and in leadership roles on campus and at the system office. She has a proven track record of improving student success, increasing enrollment and retention, fostering shared governance, and championing the vital role community colleges play in transforming lives and strengthening communities."

- **SCOTT OLSON**

CHANCELLOR, MINNESOTA STATE



www.ACCTSearches.org

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.

WESTERN IOWA TECH COMMUNITY COLLEGE, IOWA

DR. TERRY LINDSAY

President



"Dr. Terry Lindsay has 32 years of experience in higher education, including 13 years in executive leadership roles. His background encompasses both public and private institutions, as well as small and large two-year and four-year colleges, along with Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). This personal experience fuels his passion for creating supportive and nurturing environments that empower all students to reach their full potential."

- LINNEA FLETCHER

BOARD PRESIDENT, BOARD OF DIRECTORS, WESTERN IOWA TECH COMMUNITY COLLEGE



PARADISE VALLEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE, MARICOPA COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT, ARIZONA

DR. JOHN HAMBLIN

Vice President of Student Affairs

"His work reflects a strong belief that institutions must intentionally design systems that remove barriers and ensure every student, regardless of background, has the opportunity to thrive academically, personally, and professionally. As a community college graduate and first-generation college student, he understands the importance of meeting students where they are and values each student's experience and story."

- DR. JANA SCHWARTZ

PRESIDENT, PARADISE VALLEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE



www.ACCTSearches.org

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.



ATLANTIC CAPE COMMUNITY COLLEGE, NEW JERSEY

DR. JASON ABREU

President

"On behalf of the Atlantic Cape Community College Board of Trustees, I am proud to welcome Dr. Jason Abreu as the College's tenth president. Dr. Abreu brings more than 20 years of higher education leadership experience, with a strong focus on student success, access, and institutional effectiveness. The board looks forward to working with him as Atlantic Cape continues serving students and strengthening our communities."

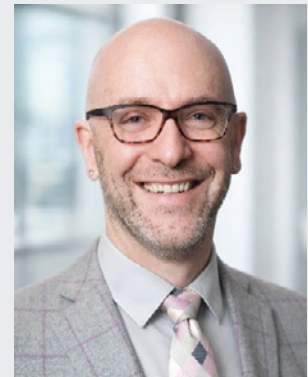
- DANIEL MONEY

CHAIR, ATLANTIC CAPE COMMUNITY COLLEGE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

RÍO HONDO COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA

DR. DON MOYA-MILLER

President



"Dr. Moya-Miller's deep understanding of our institution, demonstrated leadership, and steadfast dedication to student success make him the right leader at the right time for Río Hondo College. We are confident in his ability to build upon the college's strong foundation and help shape an even brighter future for our students and community."

- ROSAELVA LOMELI,

BOARD PRESIDENT, RÍO HONDO COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT
BOARD OF TRUSTEES



www.ACCTSearches.org

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.

MT. SAN JACINTO COLLEGE, CALIFORNIA

DR. TAWNY DOTSON

Superintendent/President



"Throughout this process, my guiding philosophy has been evolution, not revolution. In Dr. Tawny Dotson, we have found the ideal complement to the exceptional legacy built by Dr. Roger Schultz and the entire MSJC community over the past nearly two decades. Dr. Dotson brings a distinguished record of leadership within California's community college system and beyond, and we are confident that her vision, expertise, and student-centered approach will elevate the strong foundation already in place to new levels of excellence. We are also proud to welcome Dr. Dotson as the first woman to serve as Superintendent/President in the history of Mt. San Jacinto College."

- TOM ASHLEY

BOARD PRESIDENT, MSJC BOARD OF TRUSTEES



BAKERSFIELD COLLEGE, KERN COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA

DR. STACY PFLUGER

President

"Dr. Pfluger's leadership has consistently reflected a steady, thoughtful, and deep commitment to the students and communities we serve throughout her career in higher education. She brings a strong understanding of our college, our community, and the work ahead, and I am confident she will continue building meaningful relationships and moving Bakersfield College forward in positive ways."

- DR. STEVEN BLOOMBERG

FORMER CHANCELLOR, KERN COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT



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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.



BAKERSFIELD COLLEGE, KERN COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA

DR. JESSICA WOJTYSIAK

Vice President of Instruction

"She has dedicated her career to Bakersfield College and has played an instrumental role in several programs, including Bridge to BC, the launch of BC baccalaureate degree programs, and rural initiatives — direct support for our campuses in Delano, Arvin, Wasco, and BC Southwest. We are proud to have Dr. Wojtysiak continue her career at Bakersfield College and are appreciative of her dedication to our faculty and students."

- DR. STACY PFLUGER

PRESIDENT, KERN COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT

DELTA COLLEGE, MICHIGAN

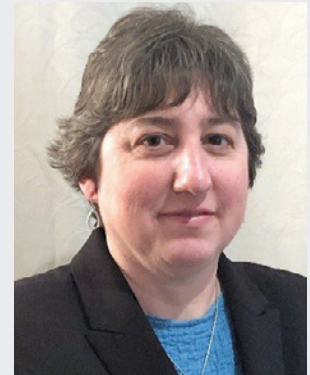
DR. MICHELLE ALLMENDINGER

President

"Dr. Allmendinger impressed us all with her inclusive, collaborative approach and her vision for innovation. I am confident she will be an outstanding leader for years to come."

- STACEY GANNON

CHAIR, BOARD OF TRUSTEES, DELTA COLLEGE



www.ACCTSearches.org

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.

GALVESTON COLLEGE, TEXAS

DR. TRACEE WATTS

President



"Dr. Watts has a deep understanding of the vital role Galveston College plays in expanding access to high-quality, affordable educational opportunities for the residents of Galveston Island. Her career reflects a strong and consistent commitment to student learning and success and institutional excellence. The Galveston College Board of Regents is confident that Dr. Watts brings the vision, leadership experience, and collaborative spirit needed to guide Galveston College forward and build on its tradition of service to the community."

- CAROLYN L. SUNSERI

CHAIRPERSON, BOARD OF REGENTS, GALVESTON COLLEGE



VENTURA COLLEGE, VENTURA COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA

DR. LUCA LEWIS

President

"Students are at the heart of every decision we make as a board. Dr. Lewis has consistently demonstrated strong leadership, a clear dedication to student success and social justice, and a commitment to ensuring Ventura College remains aligned with the needs of its community. We look forward to building on that momentum in the years ahead."

- GABRIELA TORRES

CHAIR, BOARD OF TRUSTEES, VENTURA COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT



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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.



RIVERSIDE CITY COLLEGE, RIVERSIDE COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA

DR. ERIC BISHOP

President

"President Bishop's lifelong engagement in education has uniquely prepared him for his new role as president of RCC. He is a driving force behind raising the standard of care at RCC and throughout the district. As we put new tools and software in place to help our counselors, advisors, and faculty better engage and interact with our students, President Bishop will ensure that these new resources are fully implemented. He is 100 percent committed to helping all of us serve our students with a higher standard of care."

- DR. WOLDE-AB ISAAC

CHANCELLOR, RIVERSIDE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

CINCINNATI STATE TECHNICAL AND COMMUNITY COLLEGE, OHIO

ROBBIN S. HOOPES, J.D.,

President

"We're in a strong place at Cincinnati State. We want to build on that momentum, and Robbin has the ability to think ambitiously about the future while also bringing faculty, staff, and community partners together around a shared vision."

- JANE GARVEY

CHAIR, BOARD OF TRUSTEES, CINCINNATI STATE TECHNICAL AND COMMUNITY COLLEGE



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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.

LEECH LAKE TRIBAL COLLEGE, MINNESOTA

DR. ERIN STRESOW

President



"Dr. Erin Stresow is a seasoned higher education executive and organizational strategist who brings nearly two decades of leadership experience from Tribal government, nonprofit organizations, and corporate environments to higher education. Throughout her career, she has championed student success, institutional resilience, and community-centered leadership. Her work is deeply rooted in a commitment to culturally responsive leadership, collaboration, and service. We are excited to welcome her to Leech Lake Tribal College and look forward to the positive impact she will have on our students, employees, and the communities we serve."

- JENNIFER CROSS

CHAIRWOMAN, LEECH LAKE TRIBAL COLLEGE BOARD OF TRUSTEES



KILGORE COLLEGE, TEXAS

DR. STACI MARTIN

President

"Selecting the next president of Kilgore College was one of the most important responsibilities our board has undertaken, and ACCT made that process seamless from start to finish. Their experience in conducting community college presidential searches helped us attract an outstanding pool of candidates, ultimately selecting the right leader in Dr. Staci Martin. We appreciate ACCT's professionalism, guidance, and commitment to helping our board make a decision that will benefit Kilgore College for years to come."

- JOSH EDMONSON

*CHAIR, BOARD OF TRUSTEES, KILGORE COLLEGE
COLLEGE DISTRICT*



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RETREATS & WORKSHOPS

Thank you to the following members who used ACCT Services between
May 2026 and September 2026.

Aims Community College, Colo.

Arizona Association of Community College
Trustees, Ariz.

Blue Mountain Community College, Ore.

Cecil College, Md.

Coconino Community College, Ariz.

College of DuPage, Ill.

College of Lake County, Ill.

College of the Canyons, Calif.

College of the Desert, Calif.

College of the Mainland, Texas

Community College of Beaver County, Pa.

Corning Community College, N.Y.

Diné College, N.M.

El Paso Community College, Texas

Gateway Technical College, Wis.

Gavilan College, Calif.

Germana Community College, Va.

Harper College, Ill.

Holyoke Community College, Mass.

Houston City College, Texas

Howard Community College, Md.

Iowa Central Community College, Iowa

Joliet Junior College, Ill.

Keweenaw Bay Ojibwa Community
College, Mich.

Laramie County Community College, Wyo.

Leech Lake Tribal College, Minn.

Little Priest Tribal College, Neb.

Los Angeles Community College District, Calif.

Metropolitan Community College, Kan.

Miles Community College, Mont.

Montgomery County Community College
(MC3), Pa.

Montgomery College, Md.

Mott Community College, Mich.

Mt. San Jacinto College, Calif.

North Idaho College, Idaho

Northwest State Community College, Ohio

Ohlone College, Calif.

Olympic College, Wash.

Palo Verde College, Calif.

Palomar College, Calif.

Pima Community College, Ariz.

Rio Hondo Community College, Calif.

Rowan College of Burlington County, N.J.

San Jose Evergreen College District, Calif.

Santa Fe Community College, N.M.

South Orange County Community College
District, Calif.

South Puget Sound Community
College, Wash.

Stone Child College, Mont.

Tarrant County College, Texas

Whatcom Community College, Wash.



Find out more about board retreats and workshops
at www.acct.org/governance-services



interface

PROFESSIONAL BOARD STAFF NETWORK 2026 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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Vacant

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ACCT Professional Board Staff Network

PBSN WEBSITE

www.acct.org/membership/PBSN



A Legacy That Continues Beyond Our Service

BY REATHA BELL

PRESIDENT, PROFESSIONAL BOARD STAFF NETWORK (PBSN)

AS I CONCLUDE MY TERM AS PRESIDENT OF THE Professional Board Staff Network (PBSN), I find myself reflecting not only on the work we have accomplished, but also on the people who make effective community college governance possible.

One word continues to come to mind:

Care.

Care is at the heart of what board professionals, board liaisons, and administrative professionals bring to their institutions every day. Much of your work happens behind the scenes. You prepare board materials, coordinate meetings, communicate with trustees and college leaders, preserve institutional knowledge, anticipate needs, navigate difficult situations, and help keep the important work of governance moving forward.

These responsibilities may appear routine to someone looking from the outside. We know they are anything but routine.

Supporting a governing board requires patience, professionalism, discretion, flexibility, and a deep understanding of people. Trustees bring different backgrounds, experiences, personalities, and perspectives to the board table. Presidents and chancellors face complex challenges



and competing demands. In the middle of all of this are the professionals who help bring structure, clarity, and continuity to the work.

That takes more than skill.

It takes care.

You care about doing the job well. You care about your trustees and leaders. You care about your institution and community. Most importantly, you care about the students whose lives are influenced by the work of our colleges.

And sometimes, caring can be exhausting.

There are difficult meetings, challenging personalities, long days, unexpected requests, and moments when the responsibilities seem to outweigh the recognition. Yet you continue to show up. You continue to prepare. You continue to listen, advise, organize, communicate, and support.

Why?

Because you understand that the work matters.

I believe many of us were **gifted with what it takes to do this work**. We have the ability to see what others may not see, anticipate what is needed, bring calm to complicated situations, and help others succeed. These gifts are not always recognized in the moment, but they make a tremendous difference.

We often hear the important message, *"Take care of yourself."* I wholeheartedly believe in that message. We must protect our well-being, recognize our limits, establish healthy boundaries, and make time to renew ourselves.

But I would add another thought:

Care for others as you care for yourself.

Care is not weakness. Care is strength.



PBSN Executive Committee. Not pictured: Cynthia Gruskos.



Care means listening when someone needs to be heard. It means being patient when circumstances are difficult. It means providing honest guidance when it is needed. It means knowing when to step forward and when to step back. It means understanding that supporting others does not require us to lose ourselves in the process.

And perhaps most importantly, care means remembering **why we do this work.**

Our community colleges exist to change lives.

Every student who walks through the doors of a community college brings a story, a dream, a challenge, or an opportunity. Some students are beginning their educational journey. Others are returning after years away. Some are seeking a better career, while others are trying to create a better future for their families.

We may never know every student whose life is touched by the work we support.

That is okay.

Our responsibility is not always to see the outcome. Sometimes our responsibility is simply to make sure the work is done well enough that someone else can benefit from it.

That brings me to the future.

Keep doing your job, because it matters for generations to come.

Our roles may change. Leadership terms come to an end. People move into new positions, retire, or begin new chapters in their lives. But the importance of the work remains.

Even when we are no longer physically present in the offices, boardrooms, and campuses where we served, the care we put into our work can continue through the people and students we supported.

The knowledge we shared remains with those who come after us. The relationships we built can continue to strengthen our institutions. The leaders we supported can continue serving their communities. And the students who benefited from our colleges can carry their education, experiences, and opportunities into the future.

We may eventually step away from the brick-and-mortar spaces where we served, but that does not mean our contribution ends.

Our work becomes part of something bigger than any one of us.

This is why I want to offer my sincere appreciation to every board professional, board liaison, and administrative professional who takes this responsibility to heart.

Thank you for doing the work even when it is difficult. Thank you for caring when no one is watching. Thank you for being the steady presence others depend upon. Thank you for understanding that your work is not simply about supporting a board or an institution — it is about supporting the mission of community colleges and the students we serve.

As my term as PBSN President comes to a close, I leave with tremendous respect and gratitude for the professionals who continue to serve our community colleges.

My encouragement to you is simple:

Keep caring.

Keep serving.

Keep learning.

Keep supporting one another.

And keep doing your job, because it matters.

It matters today.

It matters to the students sitting in our classrooms today.

It matters to the communities depending on our colleges today.

And it will matter to generations of students we may never meet.

Our time in a particular role may change, but the impact of caring professionals can continue long after we leave the room.

Long after our titles change, long after we step away from our daily responsibilities, and long after we cease our service in the brick-and-mortar spaces of our institutions, the work we did with care can continue through the lives we helped support.

We may not be here to see all that comes from the work we do today.

But we can trust that it matters.

Someone we may never meet, in a generation we may never see, may benefit from the care we brought to our work.

That is our legacy.

And that is why **care** will always matter.



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

Election of Board Committee Members 2027 Candidates for the ACCT Board of Directors

REGIONAL DIRECTOR

(1) Three-Year Term in Each Region

(1) One-Year Partial Term in the Northeast Region

Following is the slate of nominees as of July 1, 2026.

CENTRAL REGION

Kathleen Bruinsma*

Grand Rapids Community College, MI

NORTHEAST REGION

Allen K. Williams*

Monroe Community College, NY

NORTHEAST REGION TWO-YEAR PARTIAL TERM

Reza Jafari*

Chesapeake College, MD

PACIFIC REGION

Jose Alcala*

Riverside Community College District, CA

SOUTHERN REGION

Terry W. Atchley*

South Florida State College, FL

WESTERN REGION

Carol Scott*

Del Mar College, TX

DIRECTOR-AT-LARGE

(3) Three-Year Terms

Following is the slate of nominees as of July 1, 2026.

Maureen Banks*

Parkland College, IL

Donald D. Dantzler, Jr.*

Madison Area Technical College, WI

Trinh Nguyen*

Bunker Hill Community College, MA

Keyatta Priester*

Aiken Technical College, SC

Andrew Speer*

Mt. Hood Community College, OR

Oscar Valladares*

Rio Hondo College, CA

Olivia Zepeda*

Arizona Western College, AZ

** Candidates with an asterisk received the support of their respective Regional Nominating Committees.*

Note: Nominations will be accepted from the floor for all elections.

Elections of Regional Nominating Committee Members

Regional nominating committee elections will take place during the 2026 ACCT Leadership Congress Regional Caucuses and Meetings on Thursday, October 22, from 2-3:30 p.m. Based on the ACCT Regional Nominating Committee structure, each committee consists of five members elected for two-year staggered terms. No more than one member shall be from the same state. The following seats need to be filled for the 2027 – 2028 term:

CENTRAL REGION

Two (2) seats are available to members from the following states/territories: *Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin.*

Tom Riley (IA), Laura Wedekemper (IL), and Patty Wood (MO) will continue to serve in 2027.

NORTHEAST REGION

Two (2) seats are available to members from the following states/territories: *Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Maine, Maryland, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Rhode Island, and Vermont.*

Sheila Ireland (PA), Israul Marrero (MA), and Connie Walker (NY) will continue to serve in 2027.

PACIFIC REGION

Two (2) seats will be available to members from the following states/territories: *Alaska, Arizona, Hawaii, Idaho, Utah, Washington, American Samoa, Guam, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and Republic of Palau.*

Heather Brown (NV), Josephine Crenshaw (OR), and Greg Pensa (CA) will continue to serve in 2027.

SOUTHERN REGION

Two (2) seats will be available to members from the following states/territories: *Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, Bermuda, Puerto Rico, and Virgin Islands.*

Jennifer Curtis (SC), Archie Hall (LA), and Mary Schneider (AR) will continue to serve in 2027.

WESTERN REGION

Five (5) seats will be available to members from the following states/territories: *Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, and Wyoming.*

CURRENT STATE, PROVINCE AND TERRITORY COORDINATOR VACANCIES

ACCT is seeking one member from each of the following states and territories to serve as their respective state coordinator. If you are interested, contact ksavilaakso@acct.org.

Alabama, Alaska, American Samoa, Arkansas, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Maine, Marshall Islands, Mississippi, Montana, New Hampshire, North Carolina, North Dakota, Northern Mariana Islands, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Tennessee, U.S. Virgin Islands, Utah, Vermont, and Virginia.

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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- Board policy review
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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:

Hollie Chessman, Ph.D.
Director of Retreats and Evaluation Services
hchessman@acct.org

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Community College

DATE
FEBRUARY
7-10

LOCATION
Marriott Marquis
WASHINGTON, DC

2027

**EARLY BIRD
REGISTRATION
DEADLINE**

12.18.26

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IN NOVEMBER

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