

# Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

ONE OF AMERICA'S GREAT NEWSPAPERS



## Quintin Bullock: Colleges that do great things with little

**QUINTIN BULLOCK**

Special to the Post-Gazette

APR 27, 2023

In times of change community colleges are more important than ever, given our ability to quickly adapt to changing circumstances. Deeply rooted in local communities, we provide easy access to affordable, flexible programming options.

As the country began recovering from the coronavirus pandemic, higher education across the U.S. experienced enrollment declines, and other challenges. Community colleges have been hit especially

hard since we serve a more diverse adult student population. Changes in life circumstances for many of our students affect their decision to pursue higher education.

These declines are continuing. Some, like Columbia University's Hechinger Report, have pointed to the problems some community colleges have as evidence that community colleges have failed.

They haven't. Colleges like the Community College of Allegheny County (CCAC), where I serve as president, offer a gateway to higher education for millions of Americans that many students would otherwise not be able to access. Enrolling nearly half of all college students, community colleges provide educational opportunities students and their communities need.

For example, our schools provide the health care education needed to treat the sick and keep the nation safe. They offer career training for individuals looking to enhance their career or pursue a new one in the only way that works for most of these students, with flexible course options that enable them to benefit from family-sustaining education and career opportunities.

They haven't. Colleges like the Community College of Allegheny County (CCAC), where I serve as president, offer a gateway to higher education for millions of Americans that many students would otherwise not be able to access. Enrolling nearly half of all college students, community colleges provide educational opportunities students and their communities need.

For example, our schools provide the health care education needed to treat the sick and keep the nation safe. They offer career training for individuals looking to enhance their career or pursue a new one in the only way that works for most of these students, with flexible course options that enable them to benefit from family-sustaining education and career opportunities.

We do what four year colleges don't usually do, and which some can't, and which in almost every case are much more expensive. And we do it with less money. The Hechinger Report notes that community colleges received \$8,695 in state and federal funds per student, while four year colleges get \$17,540.

The education that community colleges provide generates substantial value to the national economy. According to a 2022 report by the American Association of Community Colleges, one out of every 18 jobs in the U.S. is supported by the activities of former community college students. As a result of their education, these students receive higher earnings and increase the productivity of the businesses that employ them.

In fiscal year 2019–20, alumni of America's community colleges generated \$898.5 billion in added income for the national economy. That's approximately 4.1% of the total U.S. gross domestic product.

Pennsylvania's community colleges are the commonwealth's largest providers of undergraduate public postsecondary education. Fifteen community colleges educate 230,000 students annually and offer over 1,400 credit programs that match workforce training to workforce needs.

Community colleges, which also offer the lowest tuition in the state, enroll more first-generation and low-income students than any other sector of postsecondary education. And, 42% of enrolled students are from minority or other underrepresented segments of the population. What's more, many community college students graduate debt-free. At CCAC, 75% of our students do so.

Community colleges are working creatively with what we have. Though we operate with less government funding and much less expensive tuition, we work to secure federal and state grants and gifts from donors to support scholarships and other needs.

At CCAC, these needs include loaned laptops and emergency funding for unexpected expenses, tutorial services and tuition assistance for high school dual enrollment classes. Our “navigators” assist students in securing essentials such as housing, behavioral and mental health services, medical and dental care, child care, transportation, food, and clothing.

We will soon open the new Center for Education, Innovation and Training, designed to fully integrating workforce development and industry-recognized credentials with credit degrees. Programs that will soon be available at the center include culinary arts, hospitality, information technology, cybersecurity, business systems technology, additive and advanced technologies and robotics.

These facts and more prove the value of community colleges as an investment in the long-term economic vitality of the nation, the state and our region. We have persevered. We are still standing and will continue our mission to provide access to affordable high quality education for all.

*Quintin Bullock is president of the [Community College of Allegheny County](#).*

*First Published April 27, 2023, 12:00am*

<https://www.post-gazette.com/opinion/guest-columns/2023/04/27/ccac-community-hechinger-quintin-bullock/stories/202304280002>