

January 26, 2026

Berkshire Community College
1350 West Street
Pittsfield, MA 01201

Dear Chair Bowen, Trustees, and Members of the Search Committee,

It is with great enthusiasm that I ask to be considered for the position of president of Berkshire Community College (BCC). As educators, we are privileged to work together to transform lives and strengthen the communities we call home. As I look to my next chapter, particularly from my current seat at this moment in Minnesota, our responsibility to be agents of growth and empowerment has never felt more important. The position profile and strategic plan describe an institution deeply connected to the community, intentionally centered on students, unwavering in commitment to equity and inclusion, and unified in the goal to ensure all students have the resources they need to transform their lives. I cannot help but want to be part of this critical work.

Thirty years of experience in rural higher education and two Aspen Institute fellowships focused on equitable student success have prepared me for this opportunity. Currently in my tenth year as president of Central Lakes College (CLC), a comprehensive, two-year institution dedicated to “building futures,” I am honored to work with an outstanding team of colleagues to empower students and strengthen communities through the power of education. The fact that our institutions have many similarities makes this an exciting and natural transition.

Our colleges are dedicated to serving students to help them achieve their greatest potential and positively impact the rich, rural regions we call home. We are committed to developing pathways to professions to meet the demands of the new economy while honoring liberal arts education that fuels personal and civic development. We wrestle with the complexities of strengthening enrollment in rural regions amidst the opportunities and challenges associated with demographic shifts, population declines and even the sustainability of free tuition. We consider diversity, equity, and inclusion to be imperatives and are proud to serve traditionally underrepresented student populations. Over 75% of CLC’s students are individuals of color, the first in their families to graduate from college, come from income-limited backgrounds, or live with a disability. Both of our institutions exist in competitive, resource-limited environments. This requires us to be creative, innovative and bold as we celebrate that which we do exceptionally well, creating learning environments that bring students to our institutions and help them reach their greatest potential as humans. As compelling as our work is, we cannot do it alone. We rely on partnerships - private industry, non-profit and philanthropic - to ensure we have the resources to uphold our missions. At our very core, we exist to make our communities and the world better places.

Developing a Shared Vision. Our institutions have never been more important to society. Yet, we are under pressure to evolve to meet the demands of the changing landscape. Upon joining CLC, I was fortunate to become part of a team of deeply passionate faculty and staff. The college also had a limited position in the community, a significant budgetary shortfall, enrollment decline, a dearth of new programming, faltering work around equity and inclusion, and low employee morale.

Together, through extensive conversation, exploration of best practices and data analysis, we have repositioned the college for success by bringing it out of the shadows of the community and reaffirmed our mission to become an ever-present beacon. We’ve developed two bold strategic plans, anchored in intentional conversation about student impact, return on investment and being ever cognizant of the risk of initiative fatigue. These roadmaps have led to the clear and impactful centering of students, equity, culture and community. We have redesigned the student experience to meet the needs of underrepresented populations, realigned our mission to emphasize upward social and economic

mobility, and transformed our culture into a strong “culture of caring.” We’ve established public-private partnerships and developed a culture of philanthropy while aggressively investing in recruitment, retention, and new program development to live up to our mission and meet the needs of our region. Today, we are a college with strong enrollment, an award-winning student experience, improving equitable student success metrics, healthy fiscal positioning, the largest endowment of the two-year institutions in Minnesota, and a robust culture to support our employees and students.

There is no question that your next president will join the college at a time when opportunity is plentiful. I would look forward to learning from the faculty and staff to understand the rich BCC culture and protect the many aspects of the college that are strong and undergirded by tradition. Together, we would center equitable student success and develop a strategy to ensure the college continues to be the economic catalyst of the region, dedicated to developing opportunities in both transfer and workforce education to meet changing needs.

Advocacy, Fiscal Strength, and Community Engagement. To fulfill our missions, our institutions must be visible beacons and have the resources necessary to make a profound impact on students’ lives and the communities we serve. This requires attention to fiscal strength and resilience, strong government relations, a culture of philanthropy, the development of alternate revenue streams and partnerships to support the work.

Over the past ten years, I’ve enjoyed ensuring that the community became reacquainted with the long-quiet CLC. As a rural-serving, state-funded institution, the importance of governmental relationships cannot be overstated. Working with state and federal legislators has led to support for initiatives such as open educational resources, workforce scholarships, the development of critical programs in agriculture, food, and natural resources, and the Northstar Promise, Minnesota’s free-tuition program. Through civic organizations, serving on boards, volunteering, and giving many presentations, the college has reemerged as a visible and highly respected partner to our external constituencies. It is certainly a privilege to tell our story. Working with passionate supporters to raise both friends and funds has been powerful. During my tenure, we engaged in the first capital campaign in many years, doubled annual giving, nearly tripled the Foundation’s assets, and are now completing the largest renovation in the college’s history. We’ve also worked to generate revenue through sponsorship models, auxiliary enterprises, partnerships, and dramatically increased revenue from grants. These efforts have allowed us to renovate facilities, invest in programs and services, provide emergency support for students and award over \$500,000 in ongoing scholarship support.

Engaging with the community is also critical to our ability to understand the region’s changing workforce needs. Conversations, convenings, and data have resulted in my institution initiating over 20 new programs ranging from 2+2 transfer pathways in fields such as Exercise Science and Social Work to high-demand, technical programs and micro-credentials in Dental Hygiene, Manufacturing, and Meat Cutting and Butchery. As president, I would look forward to becoming deeply engaged in the region, working with business and industry leaders to identify opportunities and tell the BCC story to garner support and develop strategic partnerships.

Culture, Inclusion, and Belonging. If you were to ask people about me, they would tell you about my belief in the power of people and importance of investing in an institution’s culture. I give relationship building the highest priority. I strive to create a culture that facilitates the open exchange of ideas, fully embraces shared governance, encourages taking risks to benefit students and ensures that every individual has a voice in the institution’s future. This culture requires an undergirding of trust and integrity, which are responsibilities of every member of our leadership team. I consider it critical to know every person on campus, to take time to learn about the culture and traditions, and ultimately, to earn the right to be considered part of the college family. I am humbled by the fact that CLC has been recognized as a “Great College to Work For” six times, highlighting confidence in senior leadership, shared governance, and communication as strengths.

An inclusive culture is far more than a nicety; it is an imperative. At my current institution, investment in a strong and inclusive “culture of caring” has resulted in resilience and a single-minded commitment to our mission, particularly in the face of challenges such as budget retrenchment, transformation, and even the political and humanitarian crisis currently occurring in our state. I’m proud that we are known as a uniquely inclusive place for underserved students from many backgrounds, including individuals of color, students with disabilities, and members of the LGBTQIA+ community – quite a feat in our small, rural community. Most importantly, it’s making a difference. Student success rates, including retention and completion, are on the rise, and our equity gaps are narrowing. Of course, to fully achieve our missions, colleges must be spaces in which everyone feels welcome. Your strategic plan’s commitment to being “equity centered, equity minded” resonates deeply.

There is no question that BCC’s future is bright and inspiring. As president, I would embrace the opportunity to honor and build on the college’s ethos, while courageously addressing the substantial challenges facing higher education and society. An institution united by both mission and culture is well-equipped to make the bold changes necessary to enhance enrollment, advance student success, build partnerships, and achieve the financial sustainability necessary to live up to the promise of its mission.

Academic Excellence and Student Engagement. Serving students requires a commitment to academic excellence paired with an engaging student experience. BCC’s dedication to innovative pedagogy, enriched by applied learning, student life opportunities, and strong community impact is clear. I am particularly excited by your work to become an ATD Leader College and initiatives such as the Center for Teaching and Learning.

Engagement with the college fosters the sense of belonging students need to navigate the academic and personal challenges they encounter. For this reason, I am eager to learn more about the work of the Office of Student Engagement and the reinstatement of Falcon Athletics. At my current institution, the student experience is so fundamental that we assess engagement through our strategic goals and key performance indicators. Each day, I see the impact of this focus as students learn, grow, and become more resilient.

It is a true privilege to cheer at every home athletic game, to marvel at performing and visual arts events, and to engage with student life whenever possible. I never would have predicted that my career highlights would include receiving a pie in the face from a student, jumping through the Minnesota ice with students and colleagues in a “polar plunge,” having an athlete leap over my head to dunk a basketball or getting to know students’ names, families, and dreams while walking around campuses. Not only would I be privileged to be present and engaged with the BCC community, I wouldn’t have it any other way.

I certainly understand the challenge you face in finding the right individual to build on the history and tradition of such a special college. Today, I consider myself very fortunate to be able to help students change their lives. Tomorrow, I would be honored to work together to ensure BCC continues to provide transformative opportunities to propel the strength and vitality of the Berkshire region.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Hara D. Charlier". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Hara D. Charlier