

Vision for the Role of Rural Community Colleges

Community colleges are some of the most democratic and welcoming institutions in our country, and that role is magnified in rural regions like the Berkshires, where access, economic mobility, and community well-being are interconnected. As the first community college in the Commonwealth, and an Achieving the Dream institution, Berkshire Community College (BCC) is uniquely positioned to serve as both an open door to education and an engine for the regional economy and vitality of the community.

My philosophy of community college education is rooted in my unwavering belief that every student—regardless of zip code, income, background, or identity—deserves access to a high-quality education that leads to a real opportunity to achieve their personal and professional goals. However, this requires more than just a statement of support. It demands that leadership consistently apply an equity lens to all significant decisions, such as which programs to offer, how to design flexible scheduling, the course modalities to prioritize, how to recruit and support employees, how to allocate resources, and how to build and sustain community partnerships. In a rural context, it also means taking an honest look at barriers such as transportation, internet and technology access, childcare needs, and wage instability, and then committing to address those barriers through concrete, measurable initiatives rather than asking students to navigate them alone.

Rural community colleges also carry a unique responsibility to serve as an anchor institution for their regions, and BCC clearly embraces that responsibility through workforce offerings, transfer pathways, and a lifelong learning mission. I would seek to extend and deepen this role by aligning academic and workforce programs with the region's economic priorities, encouraging faculty to co-design curriculum with employers, and expanding apprenticeships and stackable credentials so that students can not only remain in the Berkshires, but build stable and meaningful lives here. My experience as both a professor and a community college leader includes building strong partnerships with K–12 systems, universities, local employers, community organizations, donors, and government officials to elevate the value of community college and create clear pathways into family-sustaining employment.

BCC's mission centers equitable, accessible, and transformative learning opportunities that respond to community need, a charge that carries particular weight in a rural environment. For Berkshire, truly living that mission will require ongoing investment in hybrid and online learning designed specifically for rural students, coupled with necessary supports to ensure that course flexibility never comes at the expense of quality or real human connection. Throughout my leadership, I have championed this work by expanding flexible scheduling, investing in technology to support high-quality online and hybrid instruction, and prioritized faculty development and holistic student supports so that students experience both rigor and relationship, regardless of how they attend college.

If I serve as the next president of BCC, my philosophy will guide both daily decisions and long-term strategy for the institution. This would shape how budgets are prioritized, how programs are evaluated, how schedules are built, and how success is defined—while always assessing whose needs are being met, whose voices need to be heard, and how we can continually expand opportunity. This would also inform how I enhance shared governance and collaboration across our community, ensuring that faculty, staff, students, trustees, and community members are engaged as partners to advance the mission of BCC. Ultimately, I would strive to strengthen BCC as a place where students feel they belong and where the college is viewed as an indispensable, forward-looking partner in the long-term vitality of the Berkshires.