

Change and How We Can Cope With It



As a child, I grew up in a small town in upstate New York. I went to a little school that emphasized rote academics, and my sister and I always spent the hours after school at the kitchen table, doing homework drudgery like memorizing vocabulary and multiplication tables, and later on, computing complex trigonometry problems without the benefit of a calculator. The television set was never turned on until after dinner, and then there were only three channels to choose from. Our parents always chose what we would be allowed to watch. Programs that lasted past nine p.m. were not permitted, because that was our bedtime. Our sole source of intellectual stimulation came, not from school, but from our evenings spent exploring the books in the public library. I

encountered my first experience with political and religious opinions that differed from those of my parents and grandparents in that old Carnegie public library and from my mother's "Funk and Wagnalls" encyclopedia, purchased one volume at a time as part of a grocery store promotion program.

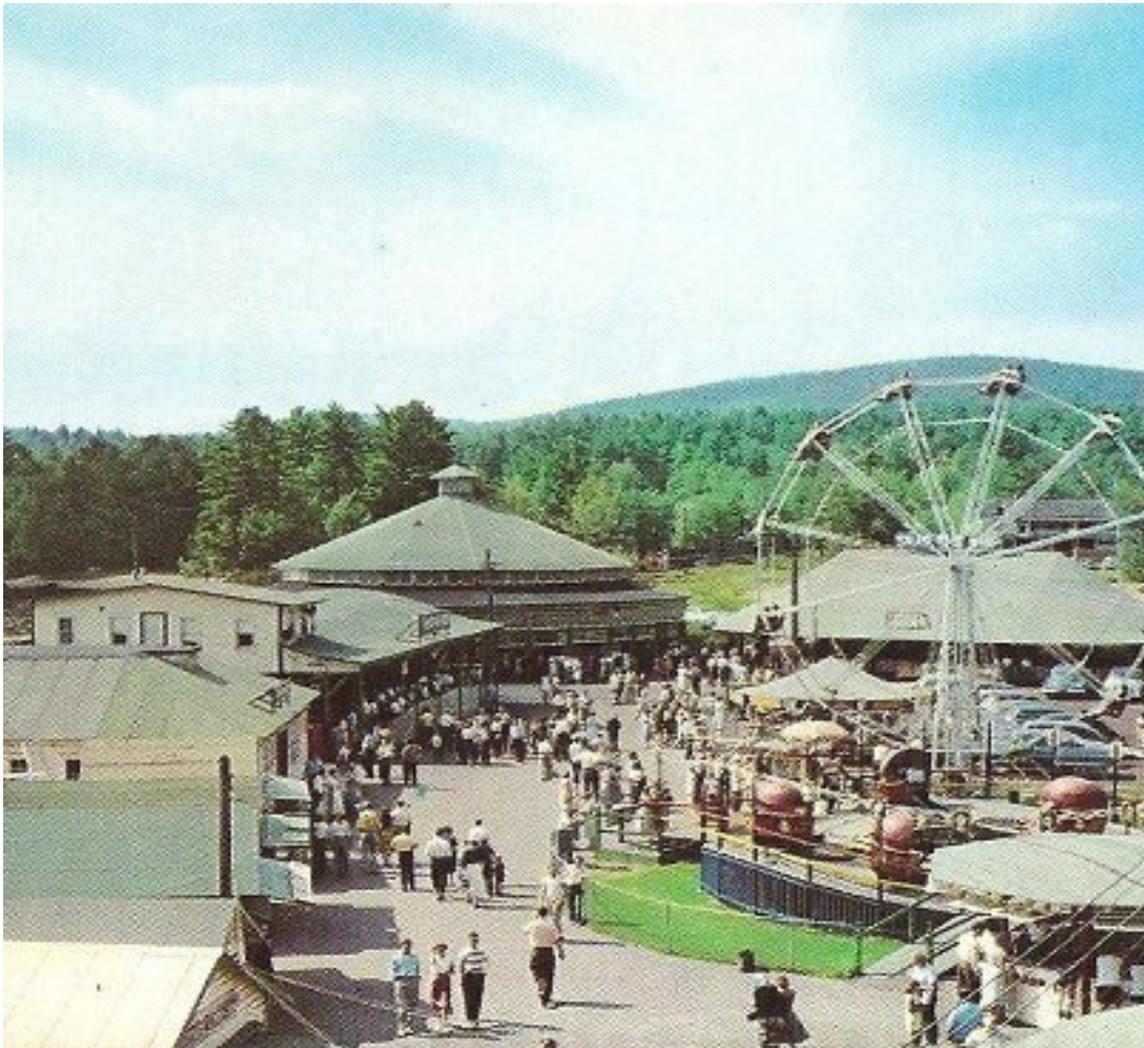
Our playmates were our many cousins who lived in the same little town and, on the weekends, we ran through the backyards that connected our houses to one another and moved back and forth between one another's homes as if they were all part of one big house. It's amazing to think of all this now: there were eleven of us, from four families. Our stay-at-home mothers made our clothes, supervised our softball games, and ran the Girl Scout troops and the P.T.A. After dinner, some of our fathers were involved in Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts and Babe Ruth baseball.



West Caroga Lake Inlet

As soon as school was out in June, our mothers dragged us all up to a compound of family camps at “the lakes”. None of these camps had running water or indoor plumbing. However, summer at the lakes was supposed to be healthier than staying in town, where polio was thought to put children in danger. We spent those summers reading and playing card games when it rained (which it did... a lot...I saw Moonrise Kingdom this summer and recognized the terrain and the weather, even if it did film on Narragansett Bay in Rhode Island rather than in New York state’s Adirondacks). We ran around in the woods, swam in the little muck-bottomed lake, and in the afternoons, rowed our rickety little rowboat over to the opposite side of the lake, to

Sherman's amusement park. At Sherman's, if we were lucky, we might be able to pool together enough allowance money for a ride or two or for some popcorn to feed Trixie, the park's spider monkey.



Sherman's Park in 1940's/50's

I thought Johnstown was a pretty terrible place in which to grow up, compared to the lot of my more sophisticated

and fortunate cousins who lived in what today we would all recognize as an early “nuclear family” in the big city. My city cousins seemed always to be “up” on the latest fashions and the newest games, movies and popular music. By comparison, our lives seemed static.

When the time came to go to college, there were no community colleges and all of us were expected to move away from home and live in residence halls and study at either Catholic colleges or the new and growing S.U.N.Y. system that Governor Rockefeller was building, and scattering around the state. I befriended my first ethnic minority students at Harpur College. I also encountered my first classroom arguments, or “discussions” at that college. My college years were quite an eye opener for me.

My early rote academic training made a physics and math major easiest for me, and the Sputnik launch a few years earlier gave me a good financial aid package for that major, so that’s the direction I took. There really were no “electives”, to speak of, in my college curriculum. All freshmen and sophomores were required to take a four-semester, seminar-based sequence in the humanities and social sciences, plus some fine arts classes, at the end of which one was expected to be a literate and civilized human being and to be prepared for

the responsibilities of citizenship. These seminars were quite a challenge to me, given my fairly constrained early intellectual background, but I loved the challenge and the program shaped my idea of an essential and transformative college general education experience.

In the years after I left my hometown for college, much in Johnstown changed. You may have seen similar changes in your own lives. The textile companies that supported the economy of our little upstate town all moved south, or even offshore. My father's business ran into trouble, requiring him to refinance the company. My mother, along with her friends and her sisters, began working, and renter families moved into many of the big old houses in our neighborhood. These renting families were obviously under great financial and social stress. My youngest sister, seventeen years my junior, had a very different school experience from mine, in the same schools but with poorer classmates and more challenged teachers. I first recall hearing from her during those years that, according to her teacher, girls were not supposed to be able to handle mathematics. This was a foreign concept to me until then. My sister did go to college, but unlike the older kids in the family, she did not major in mathematics or science.

Richard Russo has written much about the changes in this community because he grew up in the same one. You may have seen one of his movies or read one his novels: Nobody's Fool, Empire Falls, or Bridge of Sighs, which were inspired by this upstate New York town, fallen on hard times at the end of the Twentieth Century.

During those years, a community college opened up in town and many people who could never have left town for college took advantage of FMCC. Fulton-Montgomery Community College saved many lives in this changing little town. I think my own fascination with community colleges and the way the people who built them could intervene positively in people's lives started from my early awareness of the impact of this little upstate college on its financially and socially stressed community.

Both my experience at Harpur College and the stories my younger cousins and my old neighbors shared with me about their own experiences at FMCC have burned into my brain an awareness about what is primary to a good college education in any field.

The Distillation of One Person's Life as a Learner, in One Easy Lesson:

- ***We pass on what we best have to offer our students through the civility and frequency of our interactions with students-as well-educated people, discussing and applying challenging content and topics with them. We do this both inside and outside the classroom, and this is what we do best, rather than simply imposing rote absorption of new facts and ideas in a one-way communication such as the lecture.***

This has been the primary value that has illuminated my career in education for over forty years. It is why I intentionally chose a career in a small-college environment. What we do for our students is as much about the “special place” we create together for them to learn and grow in, as it is about the information we convey.

My own generation, straddling two very different cultures, grew up in one era and then in the next era, tried to “have it all,” in the current parlance. As Nora Ephron once said in a commencement talk at her alma mater, Wellesley College, that it is indeed possible for a woman today to do that - i.e., to “have it all” - but she

must prepare herself for the fact that “it all” will be just a little bit messy...

As I tell this story now, I don't want to give the impression that I see change as necessarily a bad thing. I know that the lives my female cousins and I have lived have been much richer and more fulfilling than those earlier constrained lives of my mother and her sisters. But thank goodness for the new community college in town, which liberated many women from my mother's generation, as well as others, from some of the intellectual stasis of their backgrounds. When we think about what the liberal arts mean, we must never forget this primary role: to liberate minds.

So much of our culture changed in the 1960's and 1970's, but we don't often think about those years as shaping a whole new country, even though that is exactly what they did. Sometimes one has to look back from a great distance, to see how profound the cultural changes in our country have been. I believe the last thirty years have continued to produce even more change, this time more clearly economic in nature. These new changes have perhaps been more profound even than those early cultural changes of the 1960's and 1970's that shaped my own early life.

I don't know whether the more profound change I am now aware of is the result of 50 years of globalization on the country's economy and therefore on its culture, or if I am just noticing something more personal, and just very visible to me, because of my moving just over 14 years ago from one part of the country to another very different one. I think probably this dislocation in both space and in time has been the shaping factor for my change in worldview. Still, it was only my seeing "Moonrise Kingdom" this summer that brought home to me just how very different our current students' lives are from those early lives many of us lived.

And now again, change is upon us, this time perhaps even more profound, and with more power to touch the professional and personal lives of every single one of us, than ever before.

So let me bring my story down to the present place and time: the last four years in Western Nevada. *The college has been shaken by forces that will affect every single one of us, and will change how we conduct ourselves and measure the significance of our work from this point on.* In a word, we are again in the midst of the tempest. So buckle your seatbelts. There is a big storm coming.

The Coming Storm



It is clear from this vantage point that something very dramatic started to happen in Nevada four years ago. A social change just as dramatic as that which happened during the most tumultuous times of the 1960's and 1970's is about to occur again. Indeed, we are in the middle of that change right now and it is critically important that we recognize it. Neither we, our students, our communities, nor the college will ever be able to go back to the way things were as recently as 2007.

I think we are starting also to see the true shape of the technology revolution, and its future impact on our lives and on our work, at the very same time that we are seeing the culmination of that earlier American cultural revolution I have described as starting nearly 50 years ago.

Just to enumerate some current forces that will change our lives in the months ahead:

- 1) Since 2009, the college has lost nearly 30% of its state general fund budget, with a major resulting loss of faculty, staff, programs and services. It is clear from every interaction I have had with community, business and political leaders that most believe these cuts must be seen by us as permanent. We will not recover these resources in the future, and therefore must alter our way of doing business to protect our mission.
- 2) A major demographic shift within Nevada may result in our college, along with Great Basin College, losing another 30% of our budgets by June 30, 2013. A major rationale for the cuts, as presented by N.S.H.E.'s consultant, is that, because of available new technology, it is no longer necessary to deliver small, face-to-face course sections to rural students

(sometimes called the rural factor), and so the disparity of dollars per FTE between the small northern Nevada institutions and the large southern ones, can no longer be countenanced. Effective erosion in the rural factor has occurred over the past several biennia as the system has stopped using the funding formula. Reduction in rural education funding is also about to be applied to state support for K-12 education.

Two remaining major contributors to the funding disparity are our explicit state O&M support, formerly outside the base funding formula, and substantial economy of scale factors threaded throughout the previous funding formula. Both these sources of funding are to be discontinued or drastically reduced. These three factors together could cost Western Nevada College and Great Basin College 4.5 million dollars each, if the new formula is approved. That is about a third of the budget for each institution.

- 3) Many of our students have experienced a personal crisis in their families in the last four years. Indeed, many live in homes where the major breadwinner is unemployed or underemployed.

Some may have even lost their homes to foreclosure or a short sale since Fall 2008. These new students know that higher education will no longer be just a nice option for them, but rather a difficult but essential step to protect their futures. They will be coming to us with occupational rather than life-changing expectations of us, but we will have to respond on both fronts. They must be prepared for employment, but as we know, we also need to prepare them, as only a good college education can, for life.

4) Our rural communities have been losing population, with the largest losses among families with school-age children. The loss of these productive young families will further devastate rural Nevada. Our rural communities, many never very healthy to begin with, are now under increasingly severe challenges, at the same time other political forces in the state will now press to decrease the availability of rural, onsite higher education opportunities.

5) The board of regents, by formal action in 2011, indicated its unwillingness to underwrite additional expense for “quality of life” courses for seniors, or indeed, much of any instruction that does not

directly lead a student to an academic credential. The newly proposed funding formula will continue policy in this direction. The part of our mission to provide services to non-degree seeking students will be severely constrained by this change, if it doesn't disappear altogether. We have already seen college enrollment drop steeply because of this change.

- 6) The college lost 25% of its headcount last year, largely because of the effects of the 2011 legislative session. We also chose to cut L.O.A. budgets in 2011 rather than to make further cuts in full time faculty-dependent programs that serve small numbers of students. But these L.O.A. cuts exacerbated last year's enrollment losses. Although this year we are using new student tuition dollars to increase available L.O.A sections, we have not seen any resultant improvement in rural enrollment figures. This could hurt us in the next biennium, where enrollment along with a tough new funding formula could work in tandem against assuring Western a decent, mission-supporting budget. As between making cuts of lightly enrolled programs versus eliminating individual L.O.A. course sections, we cannot afford to make the same mistake again.

In addition to all these external forces and their impact on the college, it is hard to escape the conclusion that the same major, technology-based dislocation that has already occurred in other areas of the American economy (such as bookstores, magazines, newspapers, local retail stores) is about to hit higher education.

I believe we are actually in the middle of this change right now if we can but recognize it. In the last year, a number of major efforts have launched free, Internet-based curriculum for students of higher education (consider the Khan Academy, Udacity, Coursera and OCW/EDx). Their major remaining challenges are: integrity of assessment, lack of interpersonal interaction, and the fundamental flaw in their business model: how they pay for themselves. These newest methodologies have been moving quickly to resolve these challenges however and once established I believe they will profoundly challenge our own way of doing business.

Indeed, I think we will see the impact of this technology-based dislocation on our own mission in the next two to three years, regardless of the budgetary decisions made by the legislature and the Board of Regents next spring. In that event, what should be our response?

Skirmishes and Belief-based Actions



There are two distinct ways to respond to a crisis as complex as the one the college now faces. The first is to deal with each external challenge as it arises, and to fight multiple external skirmishes on all these individual fronts. That is something the college administration has been doing, and we will certainly continue to do.

The second kind of response, and I believe the more important, will require a commitment from every single member of the entire college community, a greater response than anything I have ever asked of you before. And I know that in recent years I have asked a lot of all of

you, and most of you have responded. But this next request I have for you is much bigger than anything I have ever asked you to do before...

Each of us must look within ourselves, our beliefs about our individual roles at the college, and our resulting behaviors. What is our college's mission now? Do we each in our hearts still believe this college's mission is a viable one, and if so, how are we as individuals acting to support it? Are there some individual acts that we as members of this college community can do to protect the college and its mission? I will tell you that I still believe in that mission, but there are *many at the state level who do not*. What are you prepared to do to prove them wrong? Whatever it is, it must be done between now and June 2013, but one core belief I have is that it is not too late. If we all truly "get it", and act, not as individuals, but as a college, we can change the trajectory that has been shaped at the state level over recent months.

In a minute, I will distinguish between the "skirmishes" that I and the other members of the administration have been engaged in during the last few months and will be continuing to deal with throughout the year. But I also want to tell you about some of those individual actions we must all take if we still believe in the core mission of this college--actions based on our core "beliefs" about the

college and what its role is. The skirmishes are tactical battles only. But the belief-based actions are more personal and fundamentally more powerful, and they deal with matters no president can orchestrate by herself. Only you, all of you, acting in concert, can have an impact. Regarding these core beliefs and their resultant actions, we will only succeed if every single member of this college community is deeply committed to belief-based action. And if you are committed and your colleague-friend or office neighbor is not, then you are going to have two jobs this year: the second one will be to bring your colleague around.

First, the skirmishes:

Skirmish 1: We are certainly challenging the validity of the NSHE consultant's proposal that face-to-face instruction is no longer needed in rural Nevada. I have had conversations with many of our local legislators and they are well-versed regarding the problems for our college, related to the new funding formula proposal, a proposal that I believe is more political in nature than it is fair, clearly reasoned or educationally sound. If there is anything they can do to help us, I think they will work hard to do it.

Skirmish 2: On our behalf, the chancellor is asking the governor for some time to allow the small colleges to prepare for state cuts, should these proposed formula changes be actually adopted. We will need at least two and more likely four years, to prepare adequately for a 30% cut in state funding. Because no legislature can bind over the next one, we will have to settle for commitments one biennium at a time. So a victory this year will be just if we manage to get two years of hold harmless support from the 2013 legislature.

Skirmish 3: I am asking strongly of all people in a position to help, that the help we get be “hold harmless” in nature and not “stop loss”. With our current enrollment loss, we can’t afford *any* cut this year. Our reserves are down to \$400,000 per year, lower than they have ever been. One major crisis, such as losing a boiler, would wipe out these reserves. This number is too low to support another budget cut. The chancellor also understands that, if we are to protect our mission, we cannot lose so much funding in this biennial session that it makes any future planning moot.

Skirmish 4: In this regard, we are now looking for college funding from non-state sources. This could include private money and grants, but also there are currently proposals before the governor, the legislative

funding study committee, and the counties to consider picking up a portion of the cost of the community colleges using a new, local revenue model, with local community control.

Western Nevada College may emerge from these various skirmishes as a new, stronger college, more embedded in its own communities and less beholden to any statewide authority. However, we cannot win these tactical skirmishes without a unified college community that believes in the importance of preserving a “local” mission for the college and protecting that locality.

This brings us to what we need from all of you. A commitment that every one of you shares our core beliefs about our college and the viability of our mission and values, and that your individual actions this year will follow from those beliefs.

The New Strategies

- ***What does the student need? Are we delivering?***
- ***Breaking the 15 week semester lock***
- ***The centrality of locality***
- ***Proximity as a value***
- ***The value of the college community and the college's communities***

- *Active Learning*
- *Flip: Lectures for homework/activity in the classroom*

Belief 1: QUALITY SERVICE TO STUDENTS COMES

FIRST. The faculty did much last year to move the college to a better place with regard to the quality of our distance education services. I am particularly grateful to the distance education committee for its actions in 2012. We have adopted quality distance education as an essential piece of our master plan. I am grateful as well to the SPFIE committee for their thoughtful work here. I believe every one of you knows that this technology is not just some cheap substitute for a humane intellectual interaction, but a piece of our strategy to offer our students a better, higher-quality educational experience.

Belief 2: STUDENTS' NEEDS SHOULD DRIVE THE WAY

WE SERVE THEM. Our own technology division, working with Dave Steiger and the new college workforce and economic development center, has made outstanding progress in developing academic programs that are immediately responsive to our students' needs. Since I requested action last fall, this division has entirely reorganized its programs and taken on a new role in our community which is more closely focused on the needs of

local employers and therefore, in the end, on the needs of our students. I am very proud of this division!

Every time I meet with state political and business leaders, it becomes apparent to me that they are all familiar with the outstanding work Professor Eastwood did producing NIMS certified machinists last spring. That is work that can only occur in a locally established, responsive campus and we will press this home with regents, business leaders and elected officials every chance we get. This summer, Ed Martin, Dave Steiger, Kevin Gaffney and Dusty Cheney completely retrofitted the welding laboratory at the Fallon campus. If our rural communities are to enjoy the benefit of a skilled workforce, they will need more than distance education to deliver those skills.

Belief 3: COMMUNITY IS PRIMARY. In recent weeks, some of our faculty have engaged members of their community regarding the importance of supporting their community college. I applaud our faculty for this action. They will need to continue to act to protect their campus, and to maintain active engagement in protecting their campus and projecting its importance to both their students and their community.

If any of us thought the distance learning technology would make possible a telecommuting lifestyle, now is the time to get over it. There may be professors who are teaching for Udacity, Coursera or Edx for whom that will be an option. College faculty at institutions which put a priority on community support cannot afford to disconnect from their communities. We all will have to be more, not less, engaged locally to provide our students with a quality education, if the state is to be convinced local, face-to-face education is worth paying for. Propinquity and locality must become our bywords and strategic advantages in interacting with our students and our communities.

How will the new technology affect our mission? I maintain it will do it beautifully! This is the perfect new technology to help us implement active learning and quality assessment across our curriculum.

As Bill Gates, Sebastian Thrun, Daphne Koller and others have pointed out, we are moving into a world where the college curriculum will “flip.” Major university superstars will increasingly be available to lecture our students. For many of us, our own class time can be spent reinforcing the material from these lectures with active learning: problem solving, lab and studio exercises and exciting seminar discussions.

The Flipped Curriculum



I have personally now had the experience of both teaching and learning from this new technology. An early version of MIT's EDX included outstanding physics lectures by M.I.T. Professor Walter Lewin. The semester Professor Collier retired, we needed a second year physics professor. I volunteered, but was savvy enough to know I would cheat our students if I attempted to do all the instruction after so many years out of the classroom. So I became Professor Lewin's teaching assistant. He did the lectures, and I helped students with problems, labs and understanding the material. It was

fun and I am fairly confident my students got a very good course. I am not too proud to share my success with Professor Lewin. And he didn't charge us anything!

My second experience with distance learning has been as a student this summer in University of Michigan Professor Gautam Kaul's *Introduction to Finance* "Coursera" class. I am now in week four of the ten-week class and I am happy to tell you I am still passing. Actually, more than that, I love this class, and have registered to take a physiology course taught by two Duke University professors in the spring. These are superb courses taught by star university professors with national and international reputations. I went into the experience skeptical about whether Professor Kaul would be able to keep my attention or if I would get enough from the material such that it felt like I was taking a real course. On both counts, I will say yes. This is a real and meaningful and, remember, *free* course.

You have material regarding Thrun, Ng and Koller in the email I sent you last week. If you have not reviewed it yet, I encourage you to do so. This new format is real and it is going to challenge us unless we find a way to make it work for us. I believe we can do that. In fact, I believe these new classes will allow us to finally succeed in truly "flipping" our curriculum and helping our students to

learn more via active learning. We should not fear this change, but rather embrace it to make us more powerful at what is our own particularly strong strategic advantage, defined years ago in our own Principles of Community. So I suggest this new Teaching Principle:

***A Proposed New Principle for Western Nevada College,
in the Age of Technology***

- ***We pass on what we best have to offer our students through the civility and frequency of our interactions with students-as well-educated people discussing and applying challenging content and topics with them. We do this both inside and outside the classroom, and this is what we do best, rather than simply imposing rote absorption of new facts and ideas in a one-way communication such as the lecture.***

Note that every member of the college community can educate by applying this principle, not just those of us fortunate enough to serve in the classroom.

We should not be afraid of these new technology challenges. They are exactly what we need to assist in what has been our goal all along. How perfect that this

new technology has matured at this point in time, when we are most in need of it, to protect our mission!

If we are to be successful in convincing state leaders that distance learning technology cannot by itself replace what we do, or in garnering local support to replace state funding, we must have our communities' understanding of the *centrality of locality* to our mission. That means every member of the full-time faculty and staff must be seen also as a full-time, contributing member of the local community. Students must find it easy to interact with us in person. The fashionable word for that is propinquity and I can tell you from my own experience as a Finance student that distance-learning technology by itself cannot yet replace it. I am betting that, when it comes to serving new young college learners, propinquity will always be a key requirement for the best quality education. Why should any of our young students be deprived of this?

Your active engagement in the three belief actions mentioned earlier cannot be a directive from the president. It must be a directive we all give to one another, if we value the future of all of our campuses. Our campuses are only at risk because certain state leaders do not understand the importance of locality to our communities and propinquity to our students. Help

me convince our leaders of the importance of these essential parts of our mission.

As Woody Allen has said, 95% of success is just showing up. We must all show up this year and if we do, I know our college will be safe.

To Survive with Our Values Intact, let this be our mantra for the year: The college can only overcome our new challenges as a community, and as an integral part of our larger communities, not as a collection of individuals.

- ***Every test in our lives makes us bitter or better.***
- ***Every problem comes to break us or make us.***
- ***The choice is ours: whether we become VICTIM or VICTOR.***

