



The Inauguration of Anne M. Kress: Inaugural Address April 10, 2010

Thank you, Kenneth, for your generous words, and my gratitude extends to all of the current and past MCC Trustees, many of whom are here today. Your vision, commitment, and passion for the college are reflected in its enduring quality and have set the stage for its incredible future.

Thank you, too, to the many civic, community, and state leaders who have joined in today's celebration of MCC. The college's pivotal role in the economic development, quality of life, and future growth of the region is evident in your presence and remarks.

One leader deserves special mention. From the minute my appointment was announced, County Executive Maggie Brooks has been a positive and supportive presence. Her belief in the college's mission is deep and true, and I thank her and the County Legislature for their commitment to the value of MCC.

Please let me also recognize those who participated in the procession, including my friends and colleagues: college presidents and their institutional representatives. Our collaboration, during these times especially, is essential to serving our students and our state, and your sharing this day is emblematic of your support for MCC.

I want to extend my sincere gratitude to Trustee Eunice Lewin for being here today and representing the great State University of New York. I have had the great good fortune to begin my tenure at MCC just as Chancellor Nancy Zimpher joined SUNY and deeply appreciate her kind remarks. Nancy is a transformational leader whose vision is already moving SUNY forward in groundbreaking ways, including the creation of the new 2020 strategic plan to unleash the Power of SUNY. With the aid of the Governor, Assembly, and Senate, the Chancellor and the SUNY Trustees are certain to fulfill the system's mission: to learn, to search, to serve.

The sight of our student leaders processing with their community partners makes manifest the deep, meaningful, and life-changing connections that MCC has with the Rochester area. Our students learn and serve. They are at the center of MCC, and the quality of their engagement in and out of the classroom will shape the future of our city, our region, and our state. As you can see, we are in good hands.

Monroe Community College is a special place. As I shared with the Board and the college when I interviewed more than a year ago, I didn't want to be *a* college president—I wanted to be the president of Monroe Community College. Today, I stand before you humbled by the great opportunity that lays before me, and my sincerest appreciation goes out to each and every business, education, and community leader; to MCC's inspiring and amazing students, faculty, staff, alumni, distinguished retirees, and friends; to those here in the gym today and those here in spirit. Thank you.

And, I would be remiss if I did not express gratitude to friends and family who have joined me on this special day.

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Dr. Suellyn Winkle is simply one of the smartest, kindest, and coolest people I know—and I am lucky to be her friend. And, she makes a great chicken soup! Today would not have been the same if she were not here.

Dr. Larry Tyree, former interim MCC President and current President of Florida Keys Community College, has always been in my corner and is the very model of a community college president and caring leader—and I thank him.

Dr. Portia Taylor, Vice President for Student Affairs at Santa Fe College and a much honored community leader in Gainesville, Florida, is representing my former professional home. Portia's dedication to students is perhaps equaled by only one thing—her love for UNC basketball, and her leadership has been an inspiration. She is accompanied by her husband, Dr. Curtis Jefferson, whose career includes administrative and faculty positions at two League for Innovation in the Community College institutions. Curtis has been a steadfast and true mentor to me through the years, and I couldn't be happier that he is joining Portia here this afternoon.

My gratitude and love goes out to my parents, Arno and Mary Lou Kress, who are unable to travel but have supported me greatly through the years. To my great delight, my sister, Eileen Amos, has ventured north with one of her three children, Tyson. I have told Ty that we do this every week at MCC, so I would appreciate it if everyone sticks with that story. Eileen, I seriously doubt that either one of us thought that playing school all those years ago would come to this.

My children, Harper and Penn, fill my life with joy, light, and balance, and their loving and generous hearts reflect all that I aspire to be. I am delighted they can be here—and on their best behavior--to see me play dress up.

I do not have the words within me to thank my husband, Ned, for simply being who he is, so I will borrow a few lines from a favorite poem, and express my purest gratitude for always letting me know “how the burden of the other comes to be light as a feather blown, more quickly vanishing.” I would not be here or anywhere were it not for him.

Dozens of MCC faculty and staff have spent many, many hours planning today's celebrations, and each moment dedicated to the inauguration was stolen from other aspects of their days. Months ago, I asked that the committee please make the day about MCC and our connection to the community we serve. And, they have succeeded in this task beyond measure: as befitting a true star, MCC is glowing golden in the spotlight. Some of you seem to be glowing a bit, too, but that might simply be the aftereffect of your participation in the run/walk/bike event earlier today—our students thank you for the scholarship dollars you raised. Others of you are glowing with generosity because of your donations of children's books and blankets to the Rochester Education Foundation's Book and a Blanket drive. You have given two of the best gifts in the world: knowledge and comfort. Thank you!

To all of you who have played a role in making the inauguration possible, I will simply say: you rock! The care you have put into this day reflects the care you put into serving our students each day. Special appreciation goes to co-chairs, Cynthia Cooper—Assistant to the President for College and Community Relations—and Terri Tugel—Professor of Biology and former president of the Faculty Senate. The committee can now exhale—the end is in sight!

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But, in this case, the end—as in so many cases—really just marks the beginning. Today, my words introduce me formally and ceremonially to the community that I will serve.

If there is a theme to my remarks today, it is a simple one, paraphrased from a line of poetry by Emily Dickinson: *We dwell in Possibility*. To my mind, this is the genesis of all that we do every day in community colleges across the nation and here at Monroe Community College: *We dwell in Possibility*.

To support this notion, let me share a quote:

Higher education in our Nation is confronted today with tremendous responsibilities. Colleges and universities are burdened by great overcrowding and a shortage of teachers. Most importantly, however, we are challenged by the need to insure that higher education shall take its proper place in our national effort to strengthen democracy at home and to improve our understanding of our friends and neighbors everywhere in the world.

The words seem to capture the very challenges we face today: the pressure on colleges during the economic downturn to do more with less; the drive to promote civic and cultural engagement among our students; the need to expand our curriculum to incorporate the issues of globalism and internationalization that are shaping our world. These words are so familiar that they might have been spoken just minutes ago, maybe even by the president in signing the recent student aid bill. And, indeed, they are the words of a president, but they belong not to President Obama but to President Truman, who wrote them more than 60 years ago in his introduction to the first volume of a report that would forever change the course of community colleges in America: *Higher Education for American Democracy*.

In 1947, the Truman Commission called for the creation of a new higher education sector: “a network of public community colleges that would charge little or no tuition, serve as cultural centers, be comprehensive in their program offerings with an emphasis on civic responsibilities and would serve the specific needs of the areas in which they were located” (AACC). As a direct result, for more than 60 years, longer than the history of MCC itself, community colleges have been dwelling in possibility—in the possibility that an open door of access to higher education could strengthen the American democracy, economy, and citizenry.

To be clear, broad access to higher education is a uniquely American ideal. As Stephen L. Carter, bestselling novelist and Yale professor of Law, has observed, “In Europe with its aristocratic traditions, liberal education was available only to the few because liberty as such was available only to the few. In the United States, where our conceit is that liberty is available to the many, it follows that higher education must be available to the many.” He adds that “The idea of a liberal education was . . . to be able to make right use of liberty.” (Bates College Address, 2003) In other words, access to higher education makes possible access to democracy—and all the rights and responsibilities implied therein.

And, no institution better reflects this ideal of the possible than community colleges. In 1960, at the start of a decade that would see the founding of more than 450 community colleges including MCC, Leland Mesker, then Vice Chairman for the Study of Higher Education at the University of California-Berkeley, wrote one of the first studies of this new educational movement. He observed that “Without doubt one of the forces [in the growth of community colleges] is the growing belief that educational opportunities beyond the high school must be equalized. Any society which puts a premium on higher education for all who can profit from it and which recognizes the college as an aid in developing talent of many kinds and degrees must make sure that economic and social barriers do not result in the

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development of an educational elite.” It is striking that Mesker’s comments in 1960 find such resonance in President Obama’s recognition of the importance of community colleges in 2010. Both men have identified a national responsibility, perhaps even an obligation, to make access to higher education possible for all who could benefit from the world of opportunity that is behind that door of access—and they find a locus for this work in community colleges. Why?

We dwell in possibility.

In working through this speech, I’ve thought about that phrase quite a bit. What does it mean for MCC to dwell in possibility? In the context of the history of Rochester, it means quite a bit. This is a community imbued with the spirit of those who dreamt of what one day might be possible. Nathaniel Rochester, who saw the potential in the wild frontier of Western New York; Frederick Douglass, who gave voice to a future of freedom for all people; and Susan B. Anthony, who worked to secure participation in our American democracy for all citizens. This is a community with a legacy of innovation and invention, and the incredible success of these ventures has created a commitment to philanthropy that has secured a future of possibility and opportunity. This is a community that gathered together almost 50 years ago, in 1961, to found Monroe Community College, recognizing that it would take leadership, resolve, and action to move from the possible to the realized.

That fall, 720 students gathered on Alexander Street, in an abandoned high school that was the unlikely new home of the possible in Rochester. And, from that moment on, MCC benefitted from a series of extraordinary leaders, whose legacy has made it possible for me to stand here today.

Dr. Samuel J. Stabins saw the need for a prepared workforce for the growing healthcare sector in Rochester and planted the seed for MCC. Founding president, Dr. Leroy V. Good set the bar high, establishing a reputation for academic excellence at the college that has continued through the decades and attracted accomplished and dedicated faculty and staff. More recently, presidents Peter Spina and Tom Flynn have each moved the college forward, keeping MCC at the leading edge of community colleges. MCC’s membership in the League for Innovation in the Community College is a direct result of Pete’s vision; the college’s state of the art facilities—including the PAC Center, the Wolk Center for Excellence in Nursing, and the aptly named Flynn Campus Center—can be traced back to Tom’s leadership.

And, throughout, the presence of one singular and remarkable woman has helped to guide MCC each of its 49 years. She is here with us today: Dr. Alice Holloway Young. Dr. Young’s intelligence, strength, grace, good humor, and—that rarest of all commodities—good old common sense have made the impossible possible at the college for nearly half a century. Dr. Young has done it all with enviable beauty and style. To continue in that Emily Dickinson poem, her leadership has made for MCC “an everlasting roof” that is “the gambrels of the sky.”

My responsibility is to build upon this dwelling, making room for new windows, opening new doors. Throughout my first nine months (a span of time that has no small meaning for a female president who is also the mother of two young children), I have been listening to and engaging with the community inside and outside of the college, meeting with CEOs of large corporations and small businesses, with civic leaders and educators, with residents from all corners of the region we serve, with individual MCC faculty and staff and departments and divisions, and with students and their families. What has been born of this work is a much clearer vision of MCC’s future. And, this afternoon, I would like to share a glimpse into this direction.

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This past fall, MCC served almost 25,000 students. We need to let that sink in. In the past 49 years, MCC has grown from 720 to 25,000 students. They represent the extraordinary diversity of our community—regardless of the demographic—and there is enormous power in this diversity: it forms the crucible of ideas that strengthens MCC. The richness of college life has grown over the years in proportion to the multiplicity of cultures and perspectives found within our walls. At a time when we carefully measure each carbon footprint, our students are rich with energy, charged with electricity, and sometimes in perpetual motion.

Each comes to the college with goals and aspirations, seeking our assistance in a quest to achieve a better future. Our students grow into extraordinary leaders—as our Alumni Hall of Fame documents—because of their singular and life changing experiences at MCC: a collaborative biology experiment that shows the beauty of science; a chance to interview a prize winning author that sparks creativity; a retreat that teaches the true meaning of team building; a locally-sourced meal cooked in the islands that captures an entire culture; a day spent designing and painting a bench to be seen by thousands; a walk to raise funds for clean water in Sudan; a tearful conversation about failure that leads to a hard won insight about success; a morning at a dig site that reveals surprising Rochester history; a book written with local school children that stirs the joy of reading; a last second goal that sends a team to the next championship round. Each of these moments swirls and gathers others, one amplifying the next, making the whole much greater than the sum of its parts.

MCC has long set high expectations for student learning and faculty teaching excellence—and these expectations produce a culture of quality and creativity. MCC has long set high expectations for student achievement and exemplary student services—and these expectations produce a culture of engagement and encouragement.

We dwell in possibility.

The door that opens into MCC is for many a first step on a path that will end with a bachelor's degree—or maybe even a doctorate. Our students transfer to all of the colleges represented here today and well beyond: to Ivy League schools and large public research universities.

We are firmly committed to the principles and scope of a college experience grounded in the liberal arts and sciences, believing that it provides the foundation essential for success in a world in flux. As the Association of American Colleges and Universities recently noted, “In recent years, the ground has shifted for Americans in virtually every important sphere of life—economic, global, cross-cultural, environmental, civic. The world is being dramatically reshaped by scientific and technological innovations, global interdependence, cross-cultural encounters, and changes in the balance of economic and political power.”

We share AAC&U's belief in the power of a practical and even non-traditional approach to liberal education, one that empowers learners and develops the skills today that will be necessary for world tomorrow. We know that the most important skill any student can take from MCC is the ability to learn and the most critical value is the love of learning.

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To this end, we will expand our involvement in undergraduate research, furthering students' engagement in and ownership of their learning. Our students' achievements were on display at the 2nd Annual Scholars' Day celebration held just last weekend. We will continue to create space for outstanding interdisciplinary activities such as the Sixth Act; the Holocaust, Genocide, and Human Rights Project; and the new Diversity Studies program. We will increase partnerships with universities and faculty both in and outside of the US to offer our students access to the world of knowledge that will shape their future. And, by this time next year, we will see the new iteration of MCC's Honors College, providing our students with the opportunity to create and play in new fields of learning—or in the words of Julie Damerell's exquisite poem, "to make our work another name for honor."

Conversely, there is also—and always—honor in work. As President Obama noted in his speech at Macomb Community College last summer, "Time and again, when we have placed our bet for the future on education, we have prospered as a result - by tapping the incredible innovative and generative potential of a skilled American workforce." Each day, students come to MCC and place bets on their future by enrolling in one of our career and technical programs. And, these bets pay off in extraordinary ways.

At a time when all of higher education is rushing to measure outcomes and assess learning, today you can see the outcome of the collaboration between faculty and students at MCC's Applied Technologies Center: they designed and created the gorgeous medallion and chain that I wear proudly today. You can see the outcome of the leadership skills taught at our Public Safety Training Facility: Mayor Robert Duffy is a proud graduate and member of MCC's Alumni Hall of Fame. And, if you have the great misfortune to trip in your rush to the reception, you will likely be transported to the hospital by a graduate of MCC's EMT program, treated by graduates of MCC's Nursing and Radiographic Tech programs, and have your hospital records managed by a graduate of MCC's Health Information Management program. That's right, we are everywhere!

In fact, 93% of MCC career graduates stay within this community. They work for businesses large and small—and increasingly, start their own with skills learned in MCC's Entrepreneurial Studies program. As Mark Peterson of Greater Rochester Enterprise likes to remind us, Rochester has the highest Intellectual Density Quotient of any region, and a high IDQ is an indication of a region's potential for productivity and sustainable economic health. All of this is why we will soon add a first of its kind cabinet level position, the Vice President for Economic Development and Innovative Workforce Services and why we are now full board members on Greater Rochester Enterprise. It's why MCC was invited to testify in front of the Governor's Task Force on Higher Education and Industry; why we were on the keynote panel at the recent Eyes on the Future seminar that attracted over 1400 participants; why we hosted the first ever Rochester Pathways to Entrepreneurial Success workshop. Why?

We dwell in possibility.

As a member of the local and global community, MCC is engaged in the central issues impacting higher education today: college readiness, globalism, sustainability. And, MCC has never been a passive observer—we act.

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Groups including the American Council on Education, GradNation, the Lumina Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Jobs for the Future and many others have identified with great alarm the college readiness crisis. As students walk through the open door of access, are they ready for college-level work? Too often the answer is no. At MCC, these students register for Transitional Studies courses, and because of their incredible success with underprepared students, two of our faculty are among just 26 community college faculty members nationwide participating in the Gates Foundation's highly anticipated Global Skills for College Completion project, with a goal of identifying best practices in teaching developmental courses and sharing them widely.

To reduce the likelihood that remediation is ever necessary, MCC is partnering with the Rochester City School District on multiple projects. The Gateway to College program, providing students who are unlikely to graduate high school with an opportunity to earn both a high school diploma and college credits. The new Early College High School, serving students who seek degree acceleration. And, at Rochester's largest high school, East High, we have begun work to promote high school completion and college readiness, so that students see college attendance not just as possible but as inevitable.

And, when these and so many other students come to MCC, they will find not just a community of learners but a world of ideas. The college is putting the finishing touches on a comprehensive international education plan to be launched in the coming months because, in the words of a recent report on higher education, "If we are to maintain our place at the forefront of the world's institutions of learning, we must truly be universities and colleges of the world. . . . we must internationalize our mission—our learning, discovery and engagement" (NASULGC, Task Force on International Education). In keeping with this effort, next week, I will participate in the Clinton Global Initiative University, a gathering of college and university leaders and students around today's global challenges. Because any meaningful discussion of internalization intersects with global responsibility.

And, global responsibility intersects with sustainability. At MCC, sustainability is not a jargony buzz word. Just next week, we will be honored by the Rochester Business Journal for our **long term** commitment to environmental leadership. Responsible environmental practice guides our day-to-day operations and sustainable concepts are integrated into the curriculum by faculty who are honored with the coveted "Green Apple" award. MCC's LEED certified facilities, the silver Wolk Center for Excellence in Nursing and the gold PAC Center, are the first for the County, and the director of the college's sustainability plan was recently named an at-large director for the Society of College and University Planners.

We will be integrating "green" features into the upcoming renovation of the Gleason Hall of Science and Technology, which will also be the first building on the Brighton Campus to include studio classrooms and interactive informal collaborative learning spaces. As the way we teach and learn changes, the spaces in which we teach and learn also need to change. As Diana Oblinger, of Educause, writes, 21st century learning spaces "are flexible and networked, bringing together formal and informal activities in a seamless environment that acknowledges that learning can occur anyplace, at any time, in either physical or virtual spaces." So, as we upgrade our classrooms to reflect this view, we are also upgrading our online engagement with students, through a redesigned website that will be unveiled in late summer and an increasing social media presence—you can now friend us on Facebook and follow me on Twitter!

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And, the location of our most anticipated learning space—our new downtown campus—will be announced this year. The new Damon City Campus will truly be a destination campus, a campus at the forefront of the revitalization of Rochester, a campus that matches the dreams and aspirations of the incredibly talented students we serve.

Julie Damerell ends her inaugural poem with the image of “hands joining to walk through the open door.” Each day, students walk through MCC’s open door at Damon, Brighton, the Applied Technologies Center, the Public Safety Training Facility—and our hands join with theirs: sometimes to pull them, sometimes to push them, and most frequently, to applaud their remarkable discoveries, their bright and shining successes.

We dwell in Possibility.

Emily Dickinson also concludes the poem from which I have drawn this line with an image of hands: hands that “spread wide to gather paradise.” As I stand before you today, I could not be more honored to join my hands with yours in this paradise of possibility: Monroe Community College.

Thank you!

