

# **Community and Collegiality...a Journey of Gratitude**

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I first want to express my appreciation for the Carmen Powers Legacy Lecture nomination along with four of this year's other MCC retirees. It is indeed an honor that also allows me the opportunity to share my sincere thanks to many of you who have made my MCC career so rewarding. Here I found and grew into a job that allowed me to embody my life intent – to support the development of student potential wherever and whenever possible and to strive to be a person who was able to help create pathways for others, especially those who have endured significant life challenges.

When I first came to the college in January 1983 as an adjunct instructor in the ESOL Program, the TRS and ESOL offices and classrooms were located on the fourth floor of the Library. I soon got to know former librarian Chuck Speirs, whose office was on the first floor near the entrance, and I quickly learned that Chuck was a longtime supporter of international and immigrant students at MCC. As a “newbie”, Chuck took me under his wing and we got into the habit of having lunch together in the former Faculty Dining Room, on the ground floor of the old Campus Center. Having been at the college for a number of years, Chuck introduced me to many MCC teaching faculty and staff and I soon began to get a sense of the spirit of community and collegiality that was very much alive at MCC. I was impressed and quickly began to feel comfortable within my new MCC surroundings, and I credit Chuck for getting me off to such a positive start at the college.

In the ensuing 38 years, that sense of community and collegiality among staff and faculty endures. As I reflect on all of you with whom I've worked – a number that has long ago been impossible for me to count or fully name – I am profoundly grateful for the privilege and pleasure it has been to have known and collaborated with colleagues, joined in purpose and shared commitments, always striving to see the possible within the college and our students. You have all been essential in my role as mentor, navigator, advisor, and counselor to MCC's refugee & immigrant students over many years. A particular expression of thanks to all of the staff in Financial Aid, Registration & Records, Advisement & Transfer Services, Testing Services, Admissions, Student Accounts, Career Center, and Counseling Center & Disabilities Services, who have always been there over the years to support me in facilitating required and often complicated processes with and for our ESOL students. Any degree of “success” I have had in this area is due to your competence, training, and ready willingness to help!

I have also come to realize how fortunate I've been over the years to have had such supportive supervision, particularly during my earlier years at the college when my position was evolving. I'm grateful for supervisors – especially Liz Neureiter-Seely, Carol Adams, Kate Smith, and Pat Kennedy - who trusted me and allowed me the freedom to carry out the college's mission in ways that worked best for me *and* the students I was committed to serving.

My one-on-one engagement with hundreds of new refugee and immigrant students each year has certainly become a major source of my learning. These students continue to inspire me by their respect for education, their noble life aspirations, and their limitless resilience in the face of daily challenges crossing multiple cultural boundaries and constructing fresh identities as “new Americans”. It has been a privilege to see them come to understand MCC as one of the very real promises of this “land of opportunity”.

It has always been important for me to remember the primacy of “mattering” – aspiring to be sure students feel listened to, supported, and understood. I came to realize that making many of our refugee and immigrant students - often marginalized and “invisible” - feel that they matter doesn’t have to be complicated. Rather, small gestures of encouragement, engaged listening, or an empathetic presence can often make the difference that allows a student to persevere.

I must also recognize the solid faculty partnership of 15 years with the longstanding MCC Model UN team of Shirley Batistta-Provost, Lou Andolino, Louis Silvers, myself, and more recently, Andrea Kingston. We have been through a lot together (ask Shirley!) and they are all dear friends. To observe students being transformed by this unique, team-oriented, hands-on, high-impact opportunity year after year has been a true gift for me and my colleagues.

In addition to my gratitude to the MCC faculty, staff, and students for the gift of your partnership and friendship over the past three plus decades, I’m also thankful to the college for allowing me numerous opportunities to develop my passions within higher education – comprehensive/whole-person academic advisement; diversity and inclusive excellence; campus-wide internationalization; global learning (knowledge, skills, and attitudes); and intercultural communication and competence. These four vehicles of college-supported professional development have had the most profound impact on my MCC teaching and advising:

- Twelve years of professional training at the Summer Institute for Intercultural Communication in Oregon
- Numerous AAC&U diversity and global learning conferences
- Involvement with ACE’s Internationalization Laboratory Task Force to internationalize general education curricula and assist faculty in developing global learning outcomes
- MCC Teaching & Creativity Center’s annual conferences, workshops and other training sessions (Having been involved with the TCC from its early days – no budget, no staff, no campus “home”! – it’s rewarding for me to see how the Center has evolved into such a rich and effective professional development medium and achieved such an elevated status within the college community.)

Aside from the ongoing, committed planning and ever-expanding services of the TCC during my time at the college, other significant changes that I’ve seen as both positive and necessary include the establishment of a Chief Diversity Officer position and its recent movement into the President’s Cabinet. This is exactly where this office and its concerns should reside organizationally. It represents visually both the central priority the issues of diversity, inclusion, and equity hold within the leadership of MCC, and the understanding that we are all responsible for supporting and practicing them.

Another positive change in recent years at MCC is the evolving definition of “global education” as incorporating the clear reality that in our world today, “global” is truly “local” as well as “international”. When I first came to the college, it seemed to me that many of our administrators saw our international students as being rather “exotic”. Now as we all know by observing the changes in our student population in classrooms and hallways, “local is indeed global and global is local”. This reframing of what it means to be “globally aware” and “culturally competent” has already had an impact on curricula (the SUNY COIL program being one example) and learning outcomes at MCC, as well as on-campus conferences and training opportunities. With the incorporation of my position, which has primarily responded to the needs of the college’s refugee and immigrant students, into a new Global Education & International Services Office (GEIS) two years ago, it symbolized the integration of campus support services for both our resident immigrant/refugee students and our international visa students in ONE location on campus. Over the past two years, I have had the rewarding opportunity to work with three superb, dedicated colleagues and the ESOL Program faculty in supporting the academic success of these students and advocating for the inclusion of their voices, values, and life experiences in classrooms, co-curricular and college event programming, and campus life in general. With my departure, it is my hope that the college will eventually be able to provide consistent, adequate staffing for the GEIS office so that all of the services our immigrant and refugee students have come to rely on can be continued.

I would also encourage administration to work more collaboratively with faculty/staff by seeking their input before decisions are made that impact not only the faculty/staff involved, but the students they work with. Questions such as “Does this work for students and those who help them, not necessarily for our “model” or plan or system?” need to be asked. We need to pay attention more often to be sure we are “walking the talk” of access, equity, and inclusion, and being a truly student-centered institution.

Finally, I’ll leave you with a favorite quote to remember from British anthropologist/primatologist Jane Goodall:

***Each of us makes a difference with our life. Each of us impacts the world around us every single day. We have a choice to make the world a better place – or not to bother.***