

# 2023 DALLAS HERRING LECTURE DISCUSSION GUIDE

## 2023 Dallas Herring Lecture | November 14, 2023

### Featured Lecturer:

Falecia D. Williams, Ed.D.  
President, Prince George's Community College

### Featured Respondent:

Shelley Y. White, Ed.D  
President, Haywood Community College

J.B. Buxton  
President, Durham Technical Community College

## Daring To Be Extraordinary: Transforming the Structure of How We Work

NC State's Belk Center for Community College Leadership and Research hosts the annual Dallas Herring Lecture in honor of W. Dallas Herring, whose transformative vision and tireless work culminated in the inception of North Carolina's community colleges. The Belk Center invites top community college leaders to speak on urgent and emerging topics, framing how to address the issues and proposing a path forward.

## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

President Williams' lecture focused on the thesis that community college leaders stand on the threshold of remarkable change, with shifting landscapes and challenges that demand their urgent attention, audacity and grace. After acknowledging the unprecedented impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on community college enrollments and operations, she described the pivot her institution made to embrace the opportunity to change the way they worked, create a "moonshot" dashboard of college indicators aimed at doubling current performance, set new standards of excellence, and redesign physical facilities to create greater access and opportunity for its students and community. She concluded with a call to take a bold stand to be extraordinary in our leadership, to rise above challenges and to lead with grace.

This topic is worthy of further reflection and discussion by community colleges and their allies as they seek to expand access to higher education, increase student success and build more equitable institutions and communities.

The questions that follow are discussion starters. Groups may wish to allocate 15 to 20 minutes to discuss each cluster of questions and then decide which ones to pursue in greater depth at a subsequent time. Richer conversations and more actionable responses are likely to happen if the discussions are grounded in disaggregated data on trends in enrollment, retention, completion, transfer and labor market success. Based on your discussions, what action steps have you identified to improve equitable student access and success in your community?

### The COVID-19 Pandemic: Catastrophe or Catalyst?

President Williams began her lecture by saying that shifting landscapes and challenges demand our attention and audacious and graceful response. She noted the upheavals caused by COVID-19 that led to reduced enrollments and exasperated concerns about the value of higher education. At the same time, the pandemic led to unprecedented federal investments in community colleges that many institutions used for faculty development and holistic student supports.

- *In what ways was the pandemic a catalyst for change rather than a catastrophe for your institution, organization or community?*
- *What lessons were learned about who stopped out during COVID-19, who is or isn't enrolled in college, and what do you understand about why that is so?*
- *What lessons have emerged about strategic resource allocation and strategic partnerships to better meet the needs of your community and the people who live there?*

- *Can you describe one or two sustainable strategies your institution has implemented to address the unique needs of adult learners? In what ways did the pandemic shift the landscape of providing resources for adult learners?*

## Leadership Audacity

President Williams described leadership as the audacious pursuit of the extraordinary. "It is the intentional and thoughtful endeavor of crafting meaning and direction by daring to envision a future state that is counter-intuitive to present circumstances... to reconstruct systems in a manner that would yield greater productivity, efficiency, and proficiency in achieving the organizational mission."

- *In what ways is your organization and community pursuing a bold vision for the future?*
- *Are there examples in your organization of how disruptive leadership has helped to improve productivity, efficiency, or proficiency?*
- *What systems are being reconstructed or need to be reconstructed to meet the needs of underserved populations in your community?*
- *What organizational assets have been or can be marshaled to support audacious reforms?*

## Prince George's Institutional Pivot

President Williams described a four-part strategy used by her college in their quest to become a high-performing institution that fosters extraordinary outcomes. She referred to it as "quiet reform." At the same time, she noted the necessity of creating a palpable sense of urgency to effectively recast the institutional vision, aspirations, commitments and economic value.

- *What data has your institution used to create a "palpable sense of urgency" for reform?*
- *Who is being invited into conversations about institutional vision and commitments? Whose voices may be missing?*
- *How does your institution or organization assess its economic value to the community and its residents?*

## A. Change the Narrative by Resetting Fundamental Agreements

*The first element of Prince George's four-part reform strategy involved revamping what Dr. Williams described as fundamental covenant agreements – creating a powerful vision for the college as the “region’s premier center for dynamic teaching and learning, strategic partnerships and community engagement that advances knowledge, economic equity and lifelong personal development.” The college also sought to change mindsets and expectations by affirming a students-first approach and elevating the values of achievement, continuous improvement, empathy, equity and integrity.*

- What cultural changes (or core covenants) has your institution embraced or needs to embrace to drive transformative, institution-wide reform?
- How are these values reflected in your organization's strategic vision and strategic plan?
- How are they communicated to different student groups and the community?

## B. Vision 2030 Strategic Imperatives - “Double or Better”

Prince George's Community College envisioned a “moonshot” dashboard to at least double its current performance while meeting or exceeding state averages. By 2030, the college committed to: exceed a 50% high school to college participation rate; exceed a 60% graduation rate for all degree seeking students; exceed a 70% four-year graduation and transfer rate; enable 50,000 workers to earn a credential aligned to high-skill, high-wage jobs; create public and private partnerships to finance at least 1,000 full-tuition scholarships annually; and create a system of campuses and centers that provide equitable access to residents – particularly those in communities characterized by low income and educational attainment levels

- *Has your institution set measurable “moonshot” goals to inspire and drive institution-wide reform?*
- *In what ways do your institutional goals address outcomes for all students?*
- *What strategic partnerships have been or could be created to help your college meet “moonshot” goals?*

## C. Setting New Standards of Excellence

Prince George's 2022-2025 strategic plan was guided by the theme: “Dare to Be Extraordinary.” President Williams described its four goals: equitable access, student success, learning and achievement, and innovation which were braided together to respond to the question, “What would happen if we approach our work as a college community with ingenuity, fortitude and focus for a sustained period of time toward an exemplary set of outcomes?”

- *What patterns or equity gaps exist at your college relative to different student groups enrolling in and completing programs offering the highest earnings and lowest debt?*

- To what extent is your organization having conversations about “extraordinary goals” for achievements such as equitable outcomes, improved teaching and learning, upward mobility, return on educational investment or community impact?

## D. Three Campus Comprehensive Model

President Williams described a new synchronized service model to respond to low enrollment patterns among residents of disenfranchised communities. While the college had multiple physical settings distributed across its service area, too often, students started at satellite locations but dropped out before finishing at the main campus which was perceived to have preferred programming. To better serve all students in the service area, the college established comprehensive program offerings and holistic student supports at each location with a goal of expanding professional services, growing talent and attracting economic investment. Physical campuses were also flanked by a virtual campus and a regional higher education center.

- *Has your college interrogated student outcome data, including early momentum metrics and credential attainment, in ways that help the institution understand differences in success for students attending different learning centers?*
- *In what ways is your college bringing equitable service options to different communities and populations in your service area?*
- *How is the college ensuring workforce programs at all learning centers are aligned with business and industry, and focused on equity, mobility and community vibrancy?*
- *In what ways is, or how could online instruction help increase access to programs in high-demand, high-paying occupations in your service area?*
- *What additional support services would be required to maximize effectiveness and impact?*

## Restructuring Work for Flexibility and Growth

President Williams described changes in work patterns, e-commerce and digital technologies that are reshaping how businesses, agencies and education institutions work. Just as the world evolves, so does the landscape of work. The concept of the future of work encompassed an informed outlook on potential shifts in work dynamics, driven by factors like digitization, automation, remote work, and other emerging trends. It also pertained to how workforces and workplaces can proactively adapt to these actual and anticipated changes, whether they are substantial or incremental. Among the changes Prince George's Community College has adopted are alternative work schedules to enhance work-life balance; the creation of a Virtual Student Success Center to provide assistance with recruitment, advising, financial aid and mental health counseling; restructured learning/classroom instruction for short-term credentials; and digital transactions that augment in-person services.

Integrating post COVID-19 wisdom in the evolution of our work is critical to our institutional efficacy. President Williams concluded with a call to action, “Let’s dare to be extraordinary, to rise above challenges, and to lead with grace, guided by the unity that binds us all.”

- *How is your organization redesigning the way it works to increase flexibility, increase efficiency and prepare for growth?*
- *How is the organization leveraging current technology to enhance learning, student support and impact? What are the possibilities for incorporating advanced technologies into your institution’s learning, student support and impact?*
- *What strategic partnerships could help modernize the way the college works with students and the community to increase student success, economic mobility and community vibrancy?*
- *What bold actions might your organization take if it dares to be extraordinary?*

## RESOURCES

### Adult Learner Guidebook

<https://belk-center.ced.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/128/2022/10/Belk-AdultLearnersGuidebook-2022.pdf>

A Guide to Recruit and Retain Adult Learners at North Carolina Community Colleges. This guide discusses how inequities in education have particularly affected adult learners in North Carolina.

**Agile College** by Nathan D. Grawe. This book provides an in-depth examination of how proactive higher education institutions are preparing strategically for the challenges posed by demographic shifts, including recruitment programs, retention programs and collaborative actions, as well as diverse case studies, which provide insight into the future of higher education.

**America’s Hidden Economic Engines: How Community Colleges Can Drive Shared Prosperity**, edited by Robert B. Schwartz and Rachel Lipson. Five case studies of community colleges that prioritize career advancement for all learners across all programs – credit and non-credit; includes discussions of how their leadership interacts with the regional economic ecosystem.

**Business As Usual: A Futurist’s Unorthodox, Unconventional, and Uncomfortable Guide to Doing Business** by Jack Uldrich. As business leaders face an environment of accelerating and unpredictable change, the author presents 10 transformative Big AHA ideas emphasizing awareness, humility and action.

**Equity Toolkit: A Research-Based Guide to Operationalizing Equity**. October 2023. Achieving the Dream. Case studies of the work of 10 ATD colleges to address equity issues at their institutions provide tips on ways teams of leaders at other institutions can develop strategic racial equity plans and implement actionable change efforts.

### Knowing Our Students: Understanding and Designing for Success

<https://www.achievingthedream.org/KnowingOurStudents>

A resource for institutional leaders and student success teams who are ready to talk openly about the students they serve and who are eager to learn practical strategies from national experts and peer institutions.

**Seven Practices of a Mindful Leader**, Marc Lesser. Among the practices described in the book is letting go of a mindset of scarcity and cultivating awe and wonder.

**The Great Upheaval: Higher Education's Past, Present, and Uncertain Future** by Arthur Levine and Scott Van Pelt. A detailed examination of the transformation of American higher education in the context of a significant shift in society is presented in this book, offering insights and a detailed agenda for navigating the uncertainties associated with the global economy.

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