CHARTING THE PATH TO EXTRAORDINARY:
THE POWER OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEADERSHIP

FALECIA D. WILLIAMS, ED.D. PRESIDENT
PRINCE GEORGE’S COMMUNITY COLLEGE
2023 DALLAS HERRING LECTURE
NOVEMBER 14, 2023
Dear Colleagues,

Looking back on the Belk Center’s last five years, there are so many memories and accomplishments that come to mind – but among the many highlights, our annual Dallas Herring Lecture ranks high. It not only encapsulates so much of our work here at the Belk Center, but also serves as a poignant reminder of why we do what we do: to create tools, convene leaders and catalyze change for stronger, more resilient communities.

Year after year, our speakers deliver impactful, insightful, inspiring messages to drive our work forward – and our 2023 lecturer, Dr. Falecia Williams, did just that. As the ninth president of Prince George’s Community College, Dr. Williams demonstrated remarkable leadership in the thick of the COVID-19 pandemic – turning challenges into opportunity and change into long-lasting transformation. Sharing her insights with 1,500+ attendees joining in-person and online, Dr. Williams encouraged community college leaders to boldly reimagine the future to drive extraordinary outcomes.

This spirit of resilience and expectation captures well the legacy of our lecture’s namesake, Dr. Dallas Herring. Herring was keenly aware of the challenges of his day, but remained hopeful, confident and persistent in his efforts to extend educational opportunity to all. Reflecting on the ever-evolving nature of society, Herring once remarked, “In an age that is far from static itself, especially in the demands it makes upon the people, [we] must become the masters of change, rather than its victims.”

Dr. Williams opened her lecture with this same sentiment, noting that change is a constant force in our lives – but one we can seize to drive innovation in our institutions. Sharing Prince George’s Community College’s own journey with change, Dr. Williams discussed how the institution formulated a strategic plan and set moonshot goals in pursuit of a brighter future.

J.B. Buxton, president of Durham Technical Community College, offered several diagnostic questions to help community college leaders assess growth areas and opportunities to drive transformation in urban areas. Dr. Shelley White, president of Haywood Community College, then illustrated the importance of responding swiftly to emerging challenges in rural communities.

Suffice it to say – the 2023 Dallas Herring Lecture inspired our team at the Belk Center to continue pushing the boundaries of what we believe possible. We remain dedicated to serving community college leaders across North Carolina and beyond with practical research and resources that enable them to respond swiftly to the ever-changing needs of those they serve.

I hope that Dr. Williams’ remarks, which are included in full in this booklet, challenge and inspire you as well. To advance the work you are doing at your own institutions, I also invite you to watch the recorded event and work through our DHL 2023 Discussion Guide.

Finally, I would like to express my appreciation for my colleagues at the Belk Center – including Monique N. Colclough, Nohemi Ramirez and Jane Walters – who made this year’s event a success. I also want to extend my thanks to NC State’s College of Education for supporting the lecture, and to our friends at the John M. Belk Endowment. Their unwavering commitment to our work, our community colleges, and our state is unparalleled.

Cordially,

AUDREY J. “A.J.” JAEGER, PH.D.
W. Dallas Herring Professor, NC State College of Education
Executive Director, Belk Center for Community College Leadership and Research
Dr. Falecia D. Williams is the ninth president of Prince George’s Community College (PGCC), a role she has held since 2020 following more than two decades of progressively responsible leadership positions at Valencia College in Orlando, Florida. She is a transformational leader who values learning as much as leading and understands the power of inspiring others. With a proven record of advancing catalytic change in higher education, Dr. Williams demonstrates a covenant to equity and excellence that goes beyond the buzzwords and focuses on helping individuals attain their highest quality of life.

Dr. Williams is currently implementing the Prince George’s Community College strategic plan and its bold new vision, “Dare to Be Extraordinary,” leading the institution toward exemplary outcomes in student learning, workforce attainment, business partnerships, and community engagement.

To know Dr. Williams is to be changed for the better. Her transformational servant approach that meets people where they are is a refreshing reminder that effective leadership has always been more about influence than power. Named one of Washington’s Most Powerful Women by Washingtonian, Dr. Williams has been published in the Washington Post and Washington Business Journal for her achievements and is an in-demand keynote speaker throughout the region.

THE 2023 DALLAS HERRING LECTURE

Good afternoon, esteemed colleagues and friends. I am honored to welcome you to this significant gathering where we explore the profound impact of a constant force in our lives: change. Whether planned or unexpected, change has the ability to shape our personal and collective journeys, revealing the courage of our convictions and the true impact of our actions.

In the face of challenges confronting community colleges, I see this moment as an opportunity for innovation. Rather than merely seeking stability or clinging to the past, we have a unique chance to guide our institutions toward increased viability and vitality. As we navigate the evolving landscape of leadership in community colleges, we stand on the brink of remarkable transformation – requiring our unwavering attention, and a response characterized by boldness, balance, and poise.

Since 2015, the Dallas Herring Lecture series has provided valuable insights from esteemed higher education leaders. Today, I stand before you as the ninth speaker in this series, following in the footsteps of leaders such as Dr. Karen Stout, Dr. Pam Eddinger and Chancellor Mike Flores who share a deep belief in the power of education to drive access, success, and mobility. It is a tremendous honor to contribute to a legacy that uplifts communities through higher education in a state rich in academic institutions.

I strongly believe that our journey at Prince George’s Community College (PGCC), the impactful changes we have initiated, and our vision for an extraordinary future align with the best practices and aspirations of community colleges nationwide. As Dallas Herring emphasized in a letter to Dr. H.L. Trigg on December 10, 1957, “It is not enough simply to survive...we must keep public education responsive to our traditions and the changing times—a challenging task.” I challenge you to reflect on this moment within your institutions and consider how you can steer the course toward the extraordinary.

Thank you for engaging in this crucial conversation about the transformative power of education and our role in shaping the future of community colleges. Together, we contribute to the vibrancy of our democracy and impact the lives of America’s most valuable assets – our diverse human race.
Let me take you through the journey that shaped my perspective on leadership and purpose. Growing up in the old citrus belt of Florida, where college was not the norm for Black individuals, I faced material poverty but was extremely rich in spirit and culture. I was raised by a blind mother and equally amazing grandmother whose strong work ethic and selflessness influenced me profoundly.

Working at Winn-Dixie, where I once had a high school job, I encountered former teachers and eventually accepted a teaching position at my alma mater.

Living and working in my hometown highlighted the pivotal role of education, especially a college degree, in breaking generational stereotypes. Witnessing the stark differences in opportunities based on education, I transitioned from K-12 to postsecondary education, driven by a desire to contribute to societal change.

My journey crystallized the belief instilled by my mother and grandmother that a good education – a higher education – opens doors to better opportunities. This realization led me to the postsecondary education sector fueling the vision of providing everyone with an authentic opportunity to “Dare to be Extraordinary.”

My mother’s resilience, demonstrated throughout her life as she worked despite her limitations, and my grandmother’s dedication as a custodian at the local hospital, were my early lessons in work ethic, integrity, and compassionate care. Despite financial constraints, they prioritized our education, emphasizing its transformative power.

After graduating as a first-generation college student, my life took a detour when my grandmother fell seriously ill. I postponed graduate school to care for my family, facing challenges in a community that overlooked my qualifications.

Established in 1958, our college holds a significant place in history as the first educational institution in Prince George’s County to integrate under national desegregation laws. While we have evolved over time, we have transformed into a predominantly Black institution in the last 35 years, mirroring the development of Prince George’s County into the largest and second most affluent majority African American county in the United States.
Today, we proudly bear the federal designations of a minority-serving institution and a predominantly Black institution, and we’re on the rise as an emerging Hispanic-serving institution. Of nearly 25,000 students, 96% are students of color, 47% identify as first-generation, and nearly 66% receive some form of financial aid – of which 29% receive a Pell Grant. We embody diversity and inclusivity.

Leading this institution since August 2020, amidst the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, I’ve witnessed the resilience and ambition that define our campus.

In these unprecedented times, we faced a myriad of challenges that were certainly familiar to you in North Carolina – declining appropriations, enrollment losses, disruptions to in-person instruction, and an impacted workforce. The pandemic forced a shift from face-to-face teaching to remote instruction, affecting not only our educational mission but also the well-being of our community.

Yet, despite the difficulties, our community rallied. We embraced remote instruction, hybrid operations, and virtual events. However, the challenges triggered a range of emotions – pride in adaptation but also low morale due to isolation, digital struggles, loss, and the broader sociopolitical unrest.

Upon assuming my role, I recognized the importance of unlearning. To lead effectively, I had to shed preconceptions from prior experiences and understand the unique needs of our institution. Unlearning, a transformative process, compelled me to evaluate systems and processes critically to ensure lasting change.

As we navigate these complexities, let us ask ourselves: What worked? What didn’t? How can we build better?

Unlearning is the key to deconstructing and reconstructing, and it empowers us to make revolutionary changes leading to extraordinary results. Together, we have the power to shape the future of our illustrious institutions.

**CROSSROADS: CATALYST VERSUS CATASTROPHE**

Today, we find ourselves at a critical juncture, grappling with a profound question: Did the COVID-19 pandemic act as a catastrophe or a catalyst for change? This question weighs heavily, particularly in higher education, where community colleges stand at the heart of this dilemma.

The world watches, contemplating whether we, as educators, will seize this moment. Will we learn, proactively adapt, wildly reimagine, and create new paradigms aligned with our mission? Or, do we risk becoming relics, overshadowed by systems embracing technological advancement, cultural competencies, flexibility, and personalized learning?

While we await the full impact of the pandemic on education and employment outcomes, one thing is clear: Enrollment has been significantly affected. Community college enrollment, already on a gradual decline for nearly a decade, faces challenges from shifts in demographics, a robust job market, and heightened competition from online and four-year institutions. In contrast, four-year colleges and universities experienced slight enrollment increases.
This impact extends beyond state borders. In North Carolina, enrollment witnessed a significant drop—coupled with a 13% reduction in faculty and staff over the past two years, strained resources, and limited human capital. Although there’s a slight uptick in enrollment across North Carolina, levels from 2019 remain elusive. Additionally, disaggregated data reveals disparities—with declines for Black and Latino men more acute than for other student populations, and their recovery slower.

The aftermath of COVID-19 presents other challenges to higher education, including the surge of remote learning and virtual employment, the digital divide, incongruence within human capital, and questions about the value of higher education. Community colleges must navigate an unprecedented transition, and despite these challenges, it falls upon us, as leaders and practitioners, to declare that the pandemic was more of a catalyst for transformation than a harbinger of our downfall. We must respond with thoughtful, strategic, and innovative frameworks, models, and operational practices that position us for remarkable change and progress.

UNUSUAL: THE NEW NORMAL

As leaders of community colleges, it is crucial to break free from conventional thinking and set bold objectives. Reflect on these questions: What would it take to significantly enhance student success outcomes? Imagine achieving these results at a fraction of the current cost. Envision offering students a tenfold improvement in convenience, efficiency, or cost-effectiveness. While these goals may seem daunting, global futurist Jack Uldrich urges us, “Unconstrain our thoughts and set unreasonable goals. The future is malleable, and we have the power to shape it. To succeed, let’s embrace the extraordinary, explore the inconceivable, value unconventional wisdom, and challenge established norms.”

LOOKING IN THE MIRROR AND BEYOND

Esteemed colleagues, friends, and students, we gather today to reflect on the audacity of leadership amidst challenges, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis. True leadership, as we’ve experienced at PGCC during these trying times, surpasses mere stability; it’s a collective effort that dares to be extraordinary.

Our journey through the pandemic underscored the power and responsibility we hold to grow and progress even in the most tumultuous times. Instead of accepting a “new normal,” we found ourselves at a crossroads, where the familiar past had vanished. It was crucial to view this disruption not as a disaster but as divine order, propelling us to become a more vital asset for our community.
Yet, amidst our substantial accolades, a pressing issue emerged. Despite our community connections, our student success measures were dismal, ranking us in the bottom third for retention, progression, and completion among Maryland community colleges. Our graduation rate fell below accreditation thresholds, revealing a gap in equity and student success in our institutional narrative.

Initiative fatigue, cycles of improvement, and racial stereotyping had cast a shadow on our commitment to student success. However, recognizing the need for change, inspired by John Kotter’s principles in “Leading Change,” we pivoted institutionally. Creating a sense of urgency, we rallied 75% of our leadership to embrace a compelling vision for the future.

Celebrating achievements, we emphasized shared goals, collaboration, renewed scholarship, professional development, and higher standards.

**Shifting focus, we envisioned promising outcomes, expanded our definition of success, and engaged in open dialogue about higher education’s state and our role.**

Urgency stemmed not from deficit thinking, but from exploring our institutional and community assets and amplifying our qualifications to meet local needs. We held fast to the belief that quantitative and qualitative data, perspectives, and perceptions were invaluable to us as we prepared to focus on achieving extraordinary outcomes – and we sought diverse feedback from internal and external audiences. The insights sometimes appeared to step on our toes or kick us in the shin, yet we trusted the authenticity of the process and integrity of the people involved – knowing that honest and accurate feedback was necessary.

We conducted surveys, focus groups, and analyses. We reviewed plans, consulted scholarly literature, and drew on our prior experiences with educational initiatives such as the Learning-Centered Initiative, Bellwether College Consortium, American Association of Community Colleges’ Pathways Project, and Achieving the Dream. The resulting data led us to envision a new path to excellence, one that required significant changes in our mindset, frameworks, models, practices, and organizational structure – a holistic proposition that dared us to be extraordinary.

**SHARED AGREEMENTS**

Ladies and gentlemen, we were thrilled to witness the college community unite around key elements of this vision. Following this, we directed our efforts toward crafting a plan for its realization. As Peter Drucker wisely noted, “Culture eats strategy for breakfast.” Regardless of the strength of vision and planning, success hinges on a shared organizational culture. Thus, we must either endorse or reshape our beliefs and values to foster innovation.

Effective change requires robust leadership and support across the organization. Yet, this is just the beginning. To navigate change successfully, a coalition of influential individuals is essential. They must draw power from diverse sources, work cohesively, maintain urgency, and underscore the need for change.
Armed with insights and a formidable change coalition, we embarked on shaping a new vision and strategic direction. Even amid crises like COVID-19, I firmly advocate that organizations must not only address disruptions but also prepare for a new future. This period of change allowed us to introduce conditions that maximized our impact, leading to aspirations focused on equity and excellence. We redirected attention to student outcomes, promoted new models of collaboration, and emphasized innovative operational practices.

Building on these themes, we initiated a cultural reset by defining a new vision, mission, and core commitments. Our vision is for PGCC to be the region’s premier center for teaching, learning, and community engagement – advancing knowledge, equity, and personal development. The mission centers on measurable progress for students in personal development, professional advancement, and economic prosperity.

Our core commitments – students first, achievement, continuous improvement, empathy, equity, and integrity – guide our actions and define our community’s mindset. These commitments will soon be complemented by behavioral indicators, becoming core skills in our shared employee curriculum. This way, we assess them akin to how we measure students’ thoughts, knowledge, and actions.

Today, I am excited to share with you the essence of our ongoing innovation encapsulated in a few examples from our strategic plan, which we boldly named “Dare to be Extraordinary.” This title serves as an inspiration, urging us to reimagine our practices and the potential for powerful results. It prompts us to answer the question, “What if we approach our work with ingenuity, innovation, fortitude, and focus for a sustained period toward exemplary outcomes?”

Our first goal revolves around equitable access to PGCC, with a focus on making our credentials, certificates, and degrees economically valuable and accessible to all residents in our county. Unfortunately, our students, like yours, face challenges in reaching their academic and career goals due to limited access to necessary courses and services. To address this, we must redefine accessibility – focusing not just on physical proximity, but also on the economic productivity of the available credentials and the sensibility of navigating our institutional systems and environments for as many people as possible.

To achieve this, we’re adopting a synchronized service model, closing stand-alone extension centers, and introducing three comprehensive physical campuses, a virtual campus, and a
revitalized regional higher education center. Picture a future with northern, central, and southern campuses – each fully offering a set of degree programs, workforce programs, and innovation hubs of value that lead to a high-wage job or transfer to a baccalaureate degree. Imagine a virtual campus with online options, deploying traditional and self-directed, competency-based learning models for adults. Visualize a regional higher education center where PGCC collaborates with local universities to drive completion beyond the associate’s degree to bachelor’s degrees in high-wage career fields.

GOAL 2
Enhance Equitable Access and Value for Enrolling at PGCC
Enable students to define, plan, and achieve their academic and career goals in a timely manner and subsequently thrive at the baccalaureate level or in the workplace.

The new campus distribution model has three key objectives. First, it aims to enhance accessibility for educational achievement, job opportunities, lifelong learning, and overall well-being, especially for marginalized communities. Second, it provides pathways for expanded education, better-paying jobs, homeownership, and partnerships for workforce development. Third, it serves as a beacon of opportunity in the region, contributing to professional services, talent growth, and economic investment.

Our vision for goal two is centered on student success by optimizing pathways for students to graduate and then transfer or enter the workforce with a family-sustaining wage. Despite the progress made by developing guided pathways, too many students, especially students of color, lacked a clear academic plan, were enrolled but not making sufficient progress toward a degree or credential, or didn’t know where to turn for guidance.

Remember, 47% of our students are first-generation, making them more likely to drop out without strong guidance and wrap-around support.

This was the case for Malynda. Malynda arrived at PGCC three years after high school, unsure of her path. She knew that college offered an opportunity to improve her life but was uncertain about which courses to take. She received a Pell Grant but faced academic challenges in her first semester and eventually stopped coming to classes.

To address challenges faced by students like Malynda, we’ve adopted an appreciative advising case management model and advising curriculum aimed at enhancing student retention, progression, completion, and post-completion success.

Goal three reflects our commitment to enhancing learning and achievement through impactful practices. We aim to create optimal conditions and environments for student success, promoting academic rigor, strengthening integration, and empowering student voice and choice. A deeply held big idea that I bring with me from Valencia College is, “Anyone can learn anything under the right conditions.” Achieving the right conditions requires significant investment in people, infrastructure, and program design.
The introduction of a Teaching and Learning Center, as well as instructional certifications for faculty, reflects our dedication to supporting faculty in optimizing learning environments and programmatic offerings. By spring 2024, 100% of faculty teaching online or hybrid courses will be certified. I’m aware that North Carolina’s Teaching and Learning Hubs are having a tremendous impact – and that in two years, over 1,000 instructors have positively impacted more than 70,000 students.

Finally, goal four focuses on increasing workforce innovation and strategic partnerships. To position PGCC as a dynamic partner for economic mobility, we are creating forward-thinking services, forming strategic alliances, and strengthening community partnerships. We envision every student exiting with a credential, certificate, or degree will be well-prepared for the workforce.

With an emphasis on twenty-first-century skills integrated into every program, we have worked with industry partners to design micro-pathways as entry-level ramps to employment that are scaffolded within associate’s degrees of economic strength. For each micro-pathway, the value proposition of employment is realized through strategically negotiated arrangements for aligned companies to hire completers who wish to immediately start a career.

In conclusion, our push for innovation is about new ideas and methods, with an essential and personalized focus on growth and measurable gains. As we “Dare to be Extraordinary,” let us continue striving for excellence in our pursuit of better outcomes for our students and community.

At this time in our lives, not only do leaders need audacity to inspire progress, but we must also establish “unconstrained” and “unreasonable” standards to gauge the impact of change. As Jack Uldrich emphasized, “You can’t incrementalize yourself or your company into the future.” To “Dare to be Extraordinary,” we couldn’t settle for gradual progress; courageous moves were necessary to make rapid advancements in student success. Turning to the data, we identified significant outcomes aligned with our new vision and mission, which led us to key imperatives. In phase one of accelerating exponential improvement, our aspirations for 2030 are ambitious:

At PGCC, these measures represent “double or better” moves in each category, challenging us to think beyond constraints and pursue what some might deem unreasonable. We genuinely view these goals as extraordinary pursuits.
Remember that “Dare to be Extraordinary” is as much about our people – our human capital – as it is about the outcomes they facilitate. Organizations exploring the post-pandemic future of work will need to tailor their approaches to their unique contexts. In North Carolina, where 80% of the counties are rural, the future of work will require access to affordable broadband, transportation support, and other forms of flexible assistance, as well as increased skill development for workers.

First, organizations need to answer two critical questions about the nature of work. How do we achieve our mission? And, what methods do we use to accomplish our work? By connecting these answers to the organizational mission and optimal outcomes, we can establish clear organizational priorities and tools to realize our strategic vision.

Second, the most valuable asset for any organization is its people. Preparing for the future means understanding your current workforce (supply) and the workforce you will need (demand) in your transformed state. Clarifying both aspects can reveal where you might have too much or too little talent, allowing you to take proactive measures to address potential talent gaps before they become a functional or competitive disadvantage.

Third, the workplace includes both the physical location and the norms and practices that define it. In the past, companies often centralized work in large factories or industrial centers – but recent technological advancements are driving a shift towards bringing work to the people. Accordingly, more flexible, long-term remote or hybrid models are becoming increasingly prevalent.

At PGCC, we consider the imagined possibilities of future work as present probabilities, and we believe radical provisions will contribute to an optimal work and learning environment for employees and students alike.

Let me share a specific example at PGCC of how achieving extraordinary results involved reconfiguring our senior team. While creating the college’s new vision, mission, and core commitments, we realized our senior-level executive positions were no longer aligned with the most important aspects of our work and desired outcomes. We created three new vice presidencies, redistributed the aligned oversight areas, and renamed areas to better reflect the language of our foundational agreements.

Another example of our innovative response in the area of work is our refreshed thinking about the workplace. This led us to adopt alternative work schedules – that is, telework, compressed work weeks, and adjusted core work schedules based on employee roles and responsibilities. It aimed to foster convenience, flexibility, and stronger collaboration while driving innovation and employee and student satisfaction. This restructuring was a crucial step toward executing the college’s mission, vision, core commitments, and strategic plan.
THE SIGNS ARE ALL AROUND US

PGCC is already experiencing positive outcomes. We’ve seen quantifiable results in terms of budget-saving efforts, including cost reductions and improved financial stability. We were able to forgo the furlough altogether and offer every laid-off person their job back within 12 months. We did this while also offering a modest salary improvement each year. In examining student success data, we see early signs of recovery in leading indicators such as progression – including a 4% increase in the three-year graduation rate for fiscal year 2022, a projected 8% increase for assessment year 2023, and a 71% growth in completion of certificates and degrees from fiscal year 2020 to fiscal year 2023. Furthermore, survey evidence highlights increased staff satisfaction and engagement via alternative work schedules. We’re pleased to be moving in a positive direction and recognize a sustained focus on these innovative strategies will be necessary to attain the extraordinary outcomes we’ve established.

THE AMERICAN DREAM IS REAL

Today, your presence and participation are both inspirational and humbling. As Dallas Herring stated, “[It is]... simply gratifying to see the desire you have to be of some service, to influence the course of human events.”

In the tapestry of American education, community colleges are the vibrant and vital threads that weave the dreams of countless individuals into the very fabric of our nation. They are, without a doubt, the lifeblood of America, offering an unparalleled opportunity to grasp the American Dream through education.

Our institutions serve as stepping stones to successful living, bridging the gap between ambition and achievement. They empower students to forge their paths, whether those lead them to the broader workforce or back to serve in their communities, thus keeping the circle of growth and giving unbroken.

What’s truly extraordinary is that community colleges nurture diverse students who become leaders for America and the global community – and who stand as a testament to the strength of America’s ideals made real.

From the beginning, I challenged you to reflect upon this moment at your institutions and consider how you can chart the course toward the extraordinary.

- How do you define extraordinary in your context?
- Which metrics at your institution are no longer good enough?
- In what ways can you reimagine the structure and operations of your institution to better serve your students and employees?
- How will you know you are making progress?
In a world growing ever more interconnected and diverse, our institutions serve as incubators for talent and champions of inclusion.

Our missions mirror the very essence upon which our nation was founded – the promise of opportunity, equality, and the pursuit of happiness. Within the halls of community colleges, we find first-generation college graduates whose stories – like mine – exemplify the transformative power of these institutions.

Every student matters. We cannot afford to lose any of them. In all this, we are reminded of Dallas Herring, a visionary who not only understood, but passionately championed, the “why” behind community colleges. His legacy lives on through the countless lives touched and transformed. Let’s remember him and the lasting call to action – to continue pushing the boundaries of innovative leadership for the contexts you serve during these challenging times.

And remember, the faces and stories of our students are our “why.” They are our compelling mission.

As we conclude, let us recognize that community colleges are not just educational institutions; they are the cornerstones of hope, the pathways to success, and the true embodiment of what it means to dare to be extraordinary.

ABOUT DALLAS HERRING

Born in 1916 in Rose Hill, North Carolina, W. Dallas Herring made it his life’s work to build a system that would serve all of North Carolina’s residents by preparing them for productive work and active citizenship. He began his career in public service in 1939, when, at the age of 23, he became the mayor of his hometown, making him the youngest mayor in the country at the time. Beginning in 1955, Herring served on the North Carolina State Board of Education for almost 25 years. For 20 of those years, he served as chairman of the board. During his tenure on the State Board of Education, he oversaw the development of a statewide system of technical education institutes that eventually became the North Carolina Community College System. Throughout his career, Herring was guided by his vision of educational “opportunity for all the people.” In a letter to Community College Review in 1973, he wrote: “The only valid philosophy for North Carolina is the philosophy of total education: a belief in the incomparable worth of all human beings, whose claims upon the state are equal before the law and equal before the bar of public opinion; whose talents... the state needs and must develop to the fullest possible degree. That is why the doors to the institutions in North Carolina’s system of Community Colleges must never be closed to anyone...”

When asked how he wished to be remembered, Herring shared that his hope was to be seen as “human (and I hope humane), imperfect, persistent, bull-headed...” Today, nearly 60 years after the state’s community college system was founded, we reflect on Herring’s accomplishments as those of a leader who grappled with the issues of his day and dared to, in his words, rock the boat. By planting seeds that have since transformed our state, Herring and his legacy live on through his many contributions to education in North Carolina.
Our work is made possible by the generous support of alumni, foundation partners, and friends who share our belief in the power of transformational community college leadership. Gifts to the Belk Center Fund have an immediate impact by providing resources we can use to advance our key priorities:

- **Developing exceptional leaders** - Our award-winning doctoral program in community college leadership is educating a diverse pipeline of aspiring executives, while the support the Belk Center provides to new and experienced leaders provides them with the knowledge and skills they need to prepare for and thrive in their roles.

- **Anticipating and responding to colleges’ needs** - Guided by a national network of partners, the Belk Center acts as a catalyst for change by setting a research agenda that encourages colleges to consider what’s possible and providing the customized tools and support networks leaders and their teams need to make informed improvements.

- **Advancing innovative partnerships** - Together with college leaders and their teams, the groups and governing bodies that support them, and like-minded organizations that recognize and center the value of community colleges, the Belk Center builds trust and a shared vision of what’s possible in the future, along with a collaborative plan for how to get there.

- **Advocating for equity** - Through efforts like our Trailblazer Profiles, the Belk Center is committed to creating an equitable future where colleges promote access, opportunity, and achievement for students while increasing the representation of diverse leaders.

Gifts to the W. Dallas Herring Professorship Endowment support the work of the Dallas Herring Professor in developing, implementing, and growing the Dallas Herring Lecture Series.

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