

# HIGHER EDUCATION



**Community Colleges:  
Past, Present & Future**

**Hosted by Steven Roy Goodman, UDC-TV**

## Higher Education Today

E-Booklet

Community Colleges: Past, Present & Future

Conversation with Dr. Jonathan Gueverra, CEO, Community College of the District of Columbia, and James A. Boyle, President, College Parents of America

Hosted by Steven Roy Goodman, Educational Consultant and Co-Author, *College Admissions Together: It Takes a Family*

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(part 2)



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## Community Colleges: Past, Present & Future

Hello. I'm Steven Roy Goodman, host of *Higher Education Today*, a production of the University of the District of Columbia. The purpose of this program is to connect you to contemporary issues, people, institutions, and organizations involved in the business of higher education in our nation and the world.

Today we'll be talking about the role of community colleges in the United States. My guests are two well-known experts in higher education. Dr. Jonathan Gueverra is the chief executive officer of the Community College of the District of Columbia. He is the former provost of the Alexandria campus of Northern Virginia Community College. Dr. Gueverra received an exemplary leadership award from the Chair Academy and is a member of Phi Theta Kappa. At the invitation of Dr. Jill Biden, Dr. Gueverra supported UDC with student Shane Johnson's attendance at yesterday's first-ever White House Summit on community colleges.

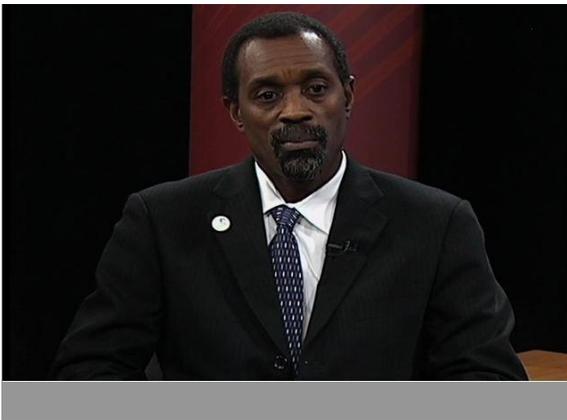
Jim Boyle is President of the College Parents of America, the only national membership association dedicated to advocating and to serving on behalf of current and future college parents. Through grants and loans, Jim received his bachelor's degree from Northwestern University as a first generation student from Detroit. Jim worked for many years on Capitol Hill before devoting his time to pocketbook education issues.

**Goodman:** If I could start with you Dr. Gueverra, I was kind of interested in your vision of a community college. Not only of community colleges generally, but what you're hoping to do with the community college here at UDC. What your vision is and where you plan to take it. And what you think community colleges should be doing in the United States generally?

**Dr. Gueverra:** You know that's a very complex question, and I think that the historic event yesterday at the White House really brings that to the forefront. Community colleges have been around for well over 100 years, and it's within the last 10 years or so that community colleges have gotten any real recognition for the value that they add to society in general. When you talk about everything from workforce development to people going on to get baccalaureate degrees, community colleges play a big, significant role in that. Close to 50 percent of first time freshman start out at a community college for a variety of reasons. With close to 40-50 percent in some cases, in some school districts...in our district 80 percent of students who come to us from public schools require one or more developmental education classes. Where are they going to get it? Should they go to a four-year institution and do it there? Or should they come to a community college? Well from a fiscal standpoint, the community college is the place to do that. So there are a variety of roles that community colleges have been called to play over the many, many years. But in terms of a vision of what I think and where we ought to be going, is that we certainly need to be addressing the workforce and economic development and sustainability issues. But we really ought to be focusing on completion, the completion agenda. That is, completing the developmental work that people started, but also completing those degrees. We know that students who complete those associate degrees are more than likely to go on and complete those baccalaureate degrees when they begin. You mentioned me being at Northern Virginia. When I was at

Alexandria, we worked with UVA (University of Virginia) and they brought one of their baccalaureate programs to our campus, because they realized that our students did just as well if not better than their native freshmen. So they decided, they need to get more of these students on our campus.

**Goodman:** Great. And Jim, you run a national association that represents parents. Do you work with a lot of parents who are going to be sending their kids to community colleges and if so, why do you do that?



**Dr. Jonathan Gueverra**



**James A. Boyle**

**Boyle:** I have to say when we started the association, which was seven years ago, we envisioned it as an organization that would support parents of what I would then call traditional college students—those who are going off to attend a four-year college or university. But we saw right at the beginning and its accelerated to today, the fact that a lot of parents, a lot of students, think it makes an awful lot of sense to start college at a community college. Some of the reasons have already been cited, fiscal, being number one among those. If at the end of four years, a student is going to get a BA degree, just from a purely financial standpoint, if the price of the first two years of that degree is significantly less than it would have been at the four year school and in the end they get that piece of paper, that's great. For many years, I was one who interviewed potential employees in organizations where I worked. I actually gave a leg up...I think at first it was sort of subconscious. But then as I thought about it, very consciously, I felt very strongly that if a student succeeded in a community college, and then showed the wherewithal to move on and get their bachelor's degree, they were someone who really cared about their education. They pulled themselves up, got their community college degree had moved on and advanced. I saw them as excellent candidates.

**Goodman:** Assuming that we all agree, and I think that we do agree that community colleges are important to the future of the United States, I guess my question to both of you then would be, why is there now such a focus on this? You could make the case that community colleges have been around for awhile, as you did a moment ago, Dr. Gueverra, but why are we paying attention to them now? Is it because President Obama is president? Is it because the economic situation is forcing a lot of students to do that? Why now? Why are we thinking about this right now?

**Boyle:** Well, not many people refer back to President Bush, but I will in this context. Because he, I think, was the first president to focus quite a bit on community colleges and on technical colleges. Not only by doing events there, but also by pushing for additional funding to support these schools and their workforce development. I think that's been expanded upon by the Obama administration. And I so I think it's been kind of a rolling wave of greater attention really over the past decade, being paid to community colleges.

**Dr. Gueverra:** Aside from those sort of presidential initiatives, it has become remarkably clear to many of us in higher education...I started my higher education career in community college and then went on to work for universities and four-year institutions, and then came back to the community college. One of the things that I saw is, not a narrowing, but sort of a dwindling in the success rate of students coming out of community colleges. Many people start and when you consider that we talk about the browning of America and the majority of people in community colleges—Latinos, African Americans—are more likely to go to community colleges, those are the populations that are increasing. And if we're not able to do something about those groups...so aside from presidential initiatives, community college leaders themselves, the Lumina Foundation, the Gates Foundation have started to say, "If we want to continue to have a world class society, we need to do something about this." I often joke with my students, and I say, "When I'm being wheeled out in a wheelchair somewhere where somebody is going to put me in the sun at my ripe old age, I want to make sure that the person who's going to stick that needle up my arm, has done the right things." I think also in terms of things like first responders, a significant number—it's well over 70 percent—who are actually trained at community colleges. So we're sort of seeing a wave that started and the presidential initiatives have just taken that up to another level.

**Goodman:** Let's take this to the public policy level and the community college level together and intersect them. So why is there so much controversy then about the for-profit schools that from what I understand, essentially compete against some of the community colleges? Then why is there so much controversy about that if what we're trying to do is graduate more students and help to make sure they're better first responders and stuff like that, why wouldn't we want to basically have more people doing that?

**Dr. Gueverra:** And there's no question about that. The for-profit schools provide a much needed service. Their tuitions are much higher. But they do graduate more of their students. There are some who would argue about the quality of those students. That's not an issue I'm going to address at all, because I'm not an expert on looking at curriculum at that level. The reason why so many people go

there are varied, but one of the reasons that so many of the students end up there...take a typical, whether it's a single mom or dad, but an adult student who is working a full-time job and wants to go back to school. If you went to a community college, if you came to my institution, we're always short. I mean look at my eyes, I've got bags under my eyes—with people working 10, 12 hours a day to make this happen. We had a projected enrollment this fall of just over 2400 students. We enrolled close to 2700 students and had to shut the door on some students. We just did not have the physical space to do that. The controversy for the for-profits, however, is for those people who don't graduate and who aren't able to continue in those professions—the loans, the high debt that they end up with. That's where the controversy begins.

**Goodman:** In terms of the funding for non-profit institutions like yours that you run, where does most of your money come from? Does it come from grants? Does it come from the district government? Does it come from the federal government? If the for-profits are dealing with basically tuition, and of course I think you're correctly pointing out that the tough issue there is whether or not there should be that kind of loan debt on the burden of those students, where does your money come from as an institution?

**Dr. Gueverra:** Community colleges in general are creatures of the public dollar funding. So the money comes from a variety of, in most community colleges, it's state, it's local, and of course there's always some level of federal. In the district, we've received the same dollar amount, and I mean absolute dollar amount for about twelve years, for public higher education. So the money that comes to the community college is money that we eek out of the university's budget. It's going to take a lot; the city leaders—in terms of the executive and legislative branches—need to come to grips with how do you support a community college in the district if you want it to be successful.

**Goodman:** And Jim, is this a problem around the country as well, in terms of community colleges, in terms of the funding? Do we see this around the country?

**Boyle:** Well higher education funding in general face pressures around the country. I think it's fair to say in good times and in bad over the past twenty-five years, states have been decreasing the amount that they make available for public education. Part of the reason for that is they look around them, everyone drives the roads. They know they have great healthcare through the Medicare system, a burden on many states. But not everybody, although we'd like to of course increase the rate, participates in higher education. So for the state legislator who's facing decisions about where the money should go, they look and see this great demand for both community colleges and for four-year colleges and people willing, it seems, to pay these higher prices. So they make decisions to ratchet back the amount of subsidy they provide and then when that happens, tuition goes up. The cost of higher education for community colleges and for four-year colleges and health care have been the highest cost drivers over the past twenty years. But people know that they need to get these degrees in order to succeed in today's society. And so people continue to pursue higher education.

**Goodman:** Fair enough. But in terms of the work that you're doing, are you lobbying on behalf of trying

to get increased funds for institutions? Or are you lobbying on behalf of parents? If you don't mind saying a word or two about that.

**Boyle:** Absolutely. A little bit of both. When I testified before Congress, I said to Congress that they often get states looking to them. "We need more money for this program." In this case it should really be the other way around, just as much. It should be an eyeball to eyeball in the sense of looking out to the states and pointing out to them the importance of higher education in each state—the history of subsidy of higher education in each state and here in the district, and how it makes total sense from an economic development standpoint for a state to invest in higher education. Look at college towns around the country; that's where real estate values have stayed up. Look at college towns around the country in nearby communities; that's where jobs are being created. So the workforce and the knowledge economy is being created at community colleges and four year institutions. So the smart states need to recognize that and support higher education because it's good for the long-term economic development of those states and the success of the citizens who live there.

**Goodman:** Fair enough. So if I can ask you gentlemen, what do you think we should be doing as a society, in terms of encouraging more students to go to community college? Are we reaching out to enough students who are basically not going? And if not, what can we do to do more outreach?

**Dr. Gueverra:** That's a very complex question. In the Northern Virginia, Montgomery, Prince George's area, when I've talked to school superintendents, and if you look at the data, about 25-30 percent of the kids coming directly out of high school will go to a community college. That many, even though these are some of the best school districts. About 50 percent will go on to four-year institutions, and there's all kinds of questions about what happens to the other 20 percent.

Everyone's really surprised that in less than two years worth of operation, we have over 2600 students and that doesn't include those who come in for short-term training in the district. And yes we should be encouraging more people to go to community colleges. But we've got to dissect that. We've got high school students; that's just one group. But you have lots of adults who have some college and no degree. You have lots of adults who have never been to college. They're finding their way through life. But given the knowledge economy that we now live in, it becomes a complex thing for them to do.

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We have to encourage more people to go to college period. Because we know that part of the economic health, not just of that family, but of the nation, depends on how well educated we are. Over the years, in looking at data, we can look at all sorts of data, but if you want to point to something,

and Jim maybe you can shed some light on this as well, if you want to point to a factor that determines whether if a young woman goes to college or not, check to see if mom went. If mom went to college, then there's a greater likelihood. The other thing that we now know, and we've been devising programs to deal with that, if you take a young person to high school and you expose them to some form of earlier college—whether it's through dual enrollment, or some other kind of program—the ones who complete some college work in high school are likely to go on to college. Those who complete fifteen credits or more, there's a greater likelihood that they will go and they will complete. Part of what we need to do is to find every method possible. We've got to work with parents. We've got to work with teachers. We've got to work with the kids themselves.

We did something a little unusual this summer. We had a college readiness institute this summer. And Jim you would love this. And people say that's great, so how many students did you have? No, this was not for students; this was for high school teachers. And you would be surprised to find out how many of us went to college and forgot what it was like your first year in college. And they were so amazed to find out that there was so much that they were missing that they said we should offer this for all of the high school teachers in the DC public school system. So there a lot of things that we can do; there are some things we're doing already. You probably have a question in there about the financing of education down the road, so I'll hold my remarks, so I can let Jim say a few words in there.

**Boyle:** There are a lot of complexities to these issues. First of all, I should have said this at the top. I think it's great that you're doing a program about community colleges, because so much of the focus in the media is about the selectivity of college—how tough it is to get in, how expensive it is. The fact is, is that the vast majority of colleges are very reasonably priced, thanks to community colleges, and that the vast majority of colleges—there was no room at the inn here at the University of District of Columbia's Community College at the start of the school year—but the vast majority of colleges are looking for students, welcome students, want to embrace students, and students have an opportunity to study throughout the year. So young people should look at this as a continuum. Some students do blossom early and have wonderful high school records. They and their parents and the media are focused on who will get into the Ivy League schools. But, many are late bloomers, or many have had distractions of one sort or another during their K-12 years, but they're still bright; they still want to learn. And so they can then enter the higher education system in a community college, and prove themselves, and perhaps they really want to get a degree after two years and enter the workforce, because they have to for financial reasons. But perhaps they want to use it as a stepping stone to a four-year degree. Or perhaps they are entering it a bit later after they've been in the workforce for awhile and they realize they need some specialized training or another degree. So that's where the community colleges can play a role throughout each of those steps in the process, for an 18-year-old, for a 24-year old, for a 40 year-old.

**Goodman:** How do other countries do it? Do other countries have a community college system like ours?

**Boyle:** From the research I've done, not many have a community college system that's like ours. Many countries in the industrialized world have a pretty rigid higher education system—where you're either on track to go to a university or not. And then, rather than community college, it's often what is referred to as a technical school that a student will then enter after the equivalent of their high school degree. Here I think the strength and the lack of clarity in our system makes it perhaps more difficult to navigate for a student. The strength is that there can be flexibility. You're not just consigned to never being able to get your four-year degree, but also it's less clear for you what your options are if you are not on the university track. And so you have to be self-motivated to investigate community college and other options.

**Dr. Gueverra:** And you're absolutely correct. When I grew up in Trinidad and Tobago, we had the British system. And that flexibility just wasn't there. You were either on the track to university, or you ended up at some technical school. Closer to what's happening today in places like South Africa, India...I was in Brazil a couple of years ago, and we were looking at helping the Brazilian government because they were looking at I think something to the equivalent of 500 new of what would be the equivalent of community colleges. It was so humbling, because here we are struggling with all these issues, and they're asking us, how can we do this? One of the things that I said to them, I said, "Look as you go through this process adding more capacity to your higher ed system, keep thinking that the students that you've always been used to getting and putting through universities are going to be unlike the ones that you'll be putting through these new community colleges that you're trying to create." So all the people at these suffates as they called them, they kept on thinking, "Oh I think I understand what you're saying." I said, "No, I'm not sure you understand." We're struggling with these issues because we're dealing with students who come to us with very different sets of issues and you've got to find ways to deal with that.

Canada has this community college system as well too, not unlike ours in many ways. Same kinds of issues. And so for many of the other countries, they're now beginning to realize if you democratize education, then you're going to have all of these host of other issues to deal with that you didn't have to deal with when the system was as rigid as it was.

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**Goodman:** And speaking of democratization, if you don't both mind saying a word or two about your vision for the democratization of education in years ahead, and advice to our viewers in terms of what they would get if they came to your school and what they would get generally if they came to a community college.

**Dr. Gueverra:** I think as a society, we absolutely cannot settle for where we are. If you look at all of the cycles...the Higher Education Act that made it so that so many returning veterans could partake in higher education is a perfect example of what that has done for our economy. And we have to think about education in those ways, because it's not just about learning for the sake of learning. And there are those who argue that, well, learning for the sake of learning is what we ought to do. But the truth is education has always been a commodity. We have to know where things are. What I'd like to see us do much better on the education end is to be able to address emerging areas because we tend to play catch up. We notice that we may need jobs in these areas, and while we cannot always focus on every single job as one that is market driven, so to speak, we must focus there first and foremost so that we're meeting the needs of our society right away. At CCDC, that's what we're doing.

**Boyle:** I think one of the things that's always confusing to families in terms of the progression of higher education, is the ability to take classes at a particular school and then when he or she does try to transfer, whether those classes will count. And I think that some balance has to be struck between preserving the intellectual and academic integrity of individual institutions, which is a hallmark of the way higher education has worked in our country for two hundred years, but also have some easy to understand sort of pathway for a student and their parents to look at so that they can see that classes at a particular institution will be taken as credit at the next institution and so forth. So that there's more of a clear goal that they have in mind when they start their education.

**Goodman:** Terrific. Thank you both. If you would like additional information about the Community College of the District of Columbia or the College Parents of America, please visit their websites at <http://www.ccdc.usdc.edu> or <http://www.collegeparents.org/>.

Thank you for watching. We will continue to bring you quality discussions about important matters in today's college and university world. Please join me again for another edition of *Higher Education Today*. I'm Steven Roy Goodman, and you've been watching *Higher Education Today*.

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