

President's Report
State Board of Community Colleges
Dr. R. Scott Ralls

Friday, November 20, 2009

If I had the power to declare a "Month of Leadership," I would choose November. Why? Because, having served as a community college president in an Eastern North Carolina community, I developed a special fondness for November as it includes both the Marine Corps Birthday and Veteran's Day. Veteran's Day is an important national holiday, but in North Carolina – a state that includes Fort Bragg, Camp Lejeune, Marine Corps Air Stations Cherry Point and New River, Seymour Johnson and Pope Air Force Bases and Air Station Elizabeth City – it holds special significance.

Serving as a college president in a military community, I developed a deep appreciation for the great examples of leadership demonstrated by members of the military and their families who daily exhibited leadership through their local contributions while also making great personal sacrifices through their national contributions to our country. When I taught the Leadership Class at Craven Community College, I never had to look far for amazing examples of real world leadership.

And if we want to find the finest examples of leadership in the North Carolina Community College System, we are fortunate that we do not have to look too far. That's because our boardrooms, classrooms and offices are filled with leaders and heroes – veterans and active duty service members – who have or are currently serving our nation and who help make our community college system the greatest in the world through their involvement with us. There are folks like Dr. Linwood Powell, the Vice Chair of this Board; Dr. Ron Lingle and Dr. Larry Keen, community college presidents serving two of our military communities; George Millsaps, our Small Business Center Director, who is currently deployed; and thousands of other staff, instructors, students and alumni who give us great pride throughout the year, but particularly perhaps in this month of November.

And this month, we should also include Sgt. Kimberly D. Munley, a member of the Killeen Police Department and a Cape Fear Community College graduate, who gained recent national recognition in the days following the tragic events at Fort Hood, as one of the brave officers who put personal safety aside to engage the shooter responsible for 13 deaths.

I have frequently used the phrase “heroes in the hallways” to describe the brave efforts of our students, particularly adult, non-traditional learners, but a recent student story from Fayetteville Tech gave a whole new meaning to that phrase. Seems one of our students was participating in a distance education class while deployed in Iraq. A fire fight broke out, so the soldier – our student – logged out of the class and picked up his weapon to participate. Thirty minutes later, with the combat completed, our student returned to pick up his computer and continue his other role as a North Carolina community college student.

These important people to North Carolina – our soldiers, airmen, marines, midshipmen, Coast Guard and National Guard who honor us by also being our students – deserve our very best. And when I watch what our community colleges are doing, I think they are getting it.

One way this can be seen is in our leadership in distance education programs. I had a proud moment when, during a recent technology meeting, the subject of distance education came up, and a knowledgeable observer, not connected with our System, spoke up to say that if you want to see leadership in distance education, the place to look is the North Carolina Community College System.

We are lucky to have System leaders like Sandra Williams, Bill Randall, and Wanda Barker as well as the many local college leaders who have put us on the map as the leaders in distance education – and for our many non-traditional and military students who depend on strong distance education opportunities to successfully complete their programs – that forward-thinking is essential.

Last year, we had 131,688 unduplicated curriculum degree students take an average of 2.35 online courses, and this number does not include the significant number of continuing education students taking online courses. Thanks to

Governor Perdue's leadership, and the leadership of our Board Member and Chairman of the E Learning Commission, Lt. Governor Dalton, our State rolled out the new E-Learning portal this week – www.elearningNC.gov – that will provide an electronic “open door” to seamless distance education for our state's citizens. This portal includes all of the distance education programs of the North Carolina Community College System.

Now before we move out of the month of November, we can't conclude without mention of another very important holiday to all of us – Thanksgiving. And for those of us here at System Office, our words of thanks this year will include thanks for the opportunities each of us have had to work with a very special friend and leader and colleague, Dr. Delores Parker.

The many contributions of Dr. Parker were again exemplified this month with the very successful Minority Male Mentoring Conference that was attended by over 600 participants. The luncheon, which was the conference highlight, featured an inspirational panel of four successful recent alumni, superbly moderated by our State Board member, Jimmy Ford. I noted at that luncheon that I felt the Minority Male Mentoring program has been one of the great shining stars of the North Carolina Community College System – a recent initiative where our System has collectively demonstrated extraordinary leadership.

And I also noted that like many efforts of greatness, the success of this initiative has not been because of any single person. But like many great efforts, you can point to a single person who, without their impassioned leadership, the collective outcomes may not have been so significant. And in the Minority Male Mentoring Program, that person has been Dr. Delores Parker.

North Carolina Community College students have been fortunate that this initiative has been only one of the many efforts championed by Dr. Parker during her noteworthy career. For all of us who have had the opportunity to be a colleague of Dr. Parker, our lives have been made better, and for countless students, their educational experiences have benefited from the great talents and impassioned leadership Dr. Parker has brought to her 30-year career. So in this a month of thanksgiving, when examples of leadership abound, I want to say thank

you Dr. Delores Parker, on behalf of all your colleagues here at the System Office, and on behalf of the thousands of community college students – former, current, and future students – who may not know your name but whose lives will have been made better by the extraordinary contributions you have made throughout your career.



(From left to right: State Board of Community Colleges Chair, Hilda Pinnix Ragland; Sr. Vice President and Chief Academic Officer, Dr. Delores Parker; NC Community College System President, Dr. Scott Ralls.)