FIRST 100 DAYS

Honoring our past by focusing on our future

Eric Heiser, PhD
CCC President
Dear CCC community,

My family and I have been so warmly welcomed to our new home in Coconino County, and I have been busy in my new role as the sixth president of Coconino Community College. My priority upon assuming the post was to embark on a wide-ranging tour of the communities served by CCC to get a better sense of what is expected of your community college. In essence, I came prepared to learn. That meant listening to students, faculty, staff, community members and leaders, alums, partners, champions and even critics, as they spoke to me about what they find works for their community college, what challenges the college faces and what can stand improvement.

I heard stories filled with passion. I heard stories of dedication. I heard stories of how this college and its people have helped change people’s lives. I learned of CCC’s history, of how each of the college’s locations and programs work as a whole. I have had time to process all this information. This report on my first 100 days, which organizes what I learned from all the conversations and meetings I had or attended throughout the county, is my attempt to put my thoughts into perspective as well as offer insight on a path forward into the future.

It is the future this report will address. Informed by the past, firmly rooted in our present practices to help with student success, I am dedicated to challenging us all to envision – and then implement – strategies and actions that will help steer the college and our students into the future successfully as our institution, our state and our country continues to emerge from the effects of a global pandemic. I am asking us all to honor our past by focusing on our future.

Education is the opportunity for people to create meaning in their lives, and to have that chance, people need access to education – whether it be to acquire certification for new skills, to begin a journey toward a four-year degree, or simply to continue fulfilling a desire for personal enrichment. It is why I am in the field of education, and I am graced by every moment I get to be helpful in student journeys in creating meaning for their lives – to raise a family, to become better people, to find their passions and to hop on for the ride to take them wherever they may lead.

Access is key. A successful first-year experience is crucial. Completion is the ultimate goal. Therefore, this report will detail a plan forward that takes access, first-year success and completion into account. There will be many partners on the way, and this focus will need the selfless effort of you, the entire CCC community.

I express my gratitude and thanks to the CCC District Governing Board, NAU President Jose Luis Cruz-Rivera, CCC’s students, faculty and staff and most of all, the residents of the communities served by Coconino Community College. I eagerly await working with all of you in partnership to make our college a place known for its desire to help all who come to our doors an opportunity to create meaning in their lives by providing access, a successful first-year experience and a certificate or degree in hand when they are ready to head out into the world. In doing so, may we all honor CCC’s past by focusing on the college’s future.

With warmest regards,

Eric Heiser, Ph.D.
President, Coconino Community College
What I did …

366 appointments throughout northern Arizona and the state. Nearly four hours every working day was spent listening and learning.

- Education groups
- Nonprofit groups/social service agencies
- Government agencies
- Diversity and inclusion groups
- Conferences/events
- Faculty group/individual meetings
- Staff group/individual meetings
- Student meetings
- Educational institutions
Emergent Categories

The following pages will contain a summary of what I heard during my time of listening and learning about what CCC should focus on in the future.

These 11 EMERGENT CATEGORIES contain themes that can help steer CCC’s talented faculty and staff in the direction that prospective and current students will find helpful as they navigate their educational journeys to achieve the goals and dreams to which they aspire.

Those categories are: Expand Educational Offerings; Enhance Student Support and Success; Make Mental Health a Priority; Enhance Communication and Transparency; Foster a Growth Mindset; Clearly Communicate CCC’s Vision; Foster Collaboration and Unify Culture; Emphasize Professional Development; Embrace History and Focus on the Future; Democratize Data; and Enhance and Grow Partnerships.

I look forward to working with CCC staff and faculty, community members, and business, nonprofit and governmental leaders to help our college be of maximum benefit to all students who come to us with educational dreams – where it is possible to “Start Small, Go Big” with CCC.
Expand Educational Offerings

What I heard
CCC needs to focus on expanding educational offerings, with specific focus on career and technical education (CTE) programs.

What I’m thinking
The tax reset has given CCC a tremendous opportunity to both expand CTE programs and serve the most pressing needs of our community.

The path forward
CCC must engage with college faculty and staff as well as our community partners to choose programs that make the most sense for Flagstaff and the surrounding areas. New programs take much time and effort to develop. We need to be sure we’re serving the highest needs while keeping earning potential for our students at the forefront of the conversation.
Enhance Student Support and Success

What I heard
CCC needs to focus on – and put resources (budget) behind – enhancing student support services to ensure success on their educational journey.

What I’m thinking
Community Colleges are being forced to reckon with the idea that we need to serve the whole student, not just the academic side. We need to focus on a holistic student support model that ensures our students can be successful even with life happening at the same time. Success in the classroom depends on students having needs met outside the classroom.

The path forward
Continue to engage the internal college community on what it will mean to transform our student support services. Identify our lead team to support membership in Achieving the Dream. Ensure the lead team has the budgetary support to get the job done.
What I heard

The mental health of CCC’s employees and students needs to be a priority as we move forward from the pandemic.

What I’m thinking

Even before the COVID pandemic, issues with mental health were growing in the United States. Flagstaff is no different. We need to ensure that we create an environment where mental health is prioritized and not stigmatized.

The path forward

Design a robust mental health and wellness program. Put specific emphasis on ensuring faculty and staff are utilizing the tools and resources to achieve good mental health. Lead by example.
Enhance Communication and Transparency

*What I heard*
CCC must maximize communication among employees to ensure effectiveness in our vision and mission as a college.

*What I’m thinking*
We can do a better job when it comes to communicating the vision for CCC. Communication needs to be a two-way street. It can’t just flow from the top down. We must ensure that all employees feel heard and valued.

*The path forward*
Ensure that administration is accessible to faculty and staff. Provide ample opportunity for faculty and staff to weigh in on proposed changes. Convene special committees whose focus will be to achieve and end goals by a specific date. Be visible. Humanize our administration by focusing on the person and not the title.
**What I heard**

CCC needs to focus on the exciting and new possibilities for the next 30 years—move to a growth mindset.

**What I’m thinking**

Nearly every session I attended, at least one person talked about the college needing to shift the focus from a deficit mindset to a growth mindset. While things have not always been great regarding our budgetary situation, we’re on a great path now. Let’s focus on the positives and show, by action, the potential for the future.

**The path forward**

Work with faculty and staff to support professional development (both personally and for each department). Support as many requests as possible. Focus on the positive that comes from the development more than the expense. Make it a priority to give every employee an opportunity to showcase their own work or learn new skills that will enrich both the employee and the college.
Clearly Communicate CCC’s Vision

**What I heard**

The college must clearly communicate its educational vision for the communities we serve based on a firm understanding of those communities by their members.

**What I’m thinking**

We need to focus on the most important goals and do everything we can to ensure we attain them. Using the process designed by the Covey book, “The 4 Disciplines of Execution” we will put a laser focus on the most important goals and make sure that we have the resources and support needed to achieve them.

**The path forward**

Beginning fall of 2023, engage all internal staff on a process of identifying our WIG (Wildly Important Goal). Once the WIG has been identified, it will be at the forefront of everything we do, starting with setting priorities for our budget. We will “keep score” on a weekly basis to ensure we’re tracking in the right direction. Wins will be celebrated. We will learn from those things that don’t work.
Foster Collaboration and Unify Culture

What I heard

CCC must dedicate itself to fostering collaboration as well as unifying the culture within the walls of the college.

What I’m thinking

There is work to be done to ensure that we create an environment that truly values collaboration and cross-departmental communication and camaraderie.

The path forward

We will pilot a “common hour” model in the summer of 2023 where all areas are able to close for up to an hour to keep all employees abreast of changes and updates. Common hours will happen once per week with one week dedicated to cross-departmental meetings. We’ll take what we learn from the pilot project and adjust accordingly for the fall.
What I heard
CCC should provide more opportunities for faculty and staff to further themselves with professional development.

What I’m thinking
Many faculty and staff I visited with during my first 100 days cited a strong desire to seek new and innovative ways to teach and serve our students. This enthusiasm for innovation is invigorating. However, due to prior years’ budget cuts and the crimp that COVID put on travel, faculty and staff are unsure if they can still participate in professional development opportunities, especially when it comes to travel out of state for such activities.

The path forward
CCC will refocus our efforts to ensure that faculty and staff who are willing to be bold and innovative in searching for ways to serve our students are rewarded. An enhanced emphasis will be placed on the availability of professional development funds. Starting this fall, the President’s office will launch a campaign to highlight some of the cool things happening around campus in an effort to spur more thought around how we can improve for our students.
**What I heard**

All of us should acknowledge CCC’s 30-year history as a college and keep that history in mind as we focus on the next 30 years and beyond.

**What I’m thinking**

There was ample discussion of the past 30 years among my meetings with faculty and staff. It is clear that our employees value the roots and heritage of CCC. As we move forward, the focus will need to shift towards thinking about the next 30 years. We are writing a new chapter for CCC and everyone has the chance to be an author.

**The path forward**

We’ll honor our past by focusing on our future. COVID changed the way we looked at how we do just about everything. We’ll need to change the way we serve our students as their needs have changed since the pandemic. We can honor the past of the institution by ensuring that what we do for the next 5-10 years sets us up for the next 30 years.
What I heard

If CCC is to focus on the future, data must provide insight into how best to move forward, and that data needs to be publicly and easily accessible.

What I’m thinking

One of the key themes that emerged from my meetings was the fact that we do not have a good way to interpret or talk about data. It is also not easily accessible to the broader college community. Many employees have no idea what our current student profile is and who we serve.

The path forward

We need to ensure that data is accessible and easy to understand, not just to folks who are accustomed to reading data for a living.
Enhance and Grow Partnerships

What I heard

CCC must continue to cultivate and nurture partnerships with businesses, nonprofits and government agencies.

What I’m thinking

CCC has a great reputation in the community. Overall, community members are happy with the college. More can be done to enhance our image by serving the community and meeting needs as they arise. While members of the community have a positive perception of the college, very few have any idea of the things that we do.

The path forward

We will focus on letting the community know exactly what we do for them. CCC is an asset to the communities we serve, and we should not be shy about tooting our horn. We must also ensure that we remain relevant and responsive to our community partners by constantly asking how we can help them succeed. The success of the community college is the success of all the communities CCC serves.
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