

# **AAUW Annual Meeting – June 11, 2015**

**Grand Hotel, Poughkeepsie, NY**

**Pamela R. Edington, Ed.D.**

**President, Dutchess Community College**

**Thank you for the very kind introduction. The best thing about introductions is that I've never heard one that doesn't extol only the virtues and accomplishments of the person being introduced. What you didn't hear in those remarks, for example, was all of the times that I made a mistake, disappointed, or fell short of my goals. If there is one myth that is worth blowing wide open is that anyone has a straight shot to the top without struggles, detours, and mishaps! So while I've had my share of all of them, I'm happy to say that it was all worth it.**

**I know what a privilege it is to be the first female president of Dutchess Community College. Despite the fact that community colleges serve close to half of all undergraduates in the United States and that since 1985 more than half of all community college students have been women, only 28% of community college CEOs are female. So I am a member of an elite group of higher education leaders, and as such, I understand and feel a**

**particular responsibility to do something important in this position. I came to Dutchess Community College because I believed that there is unlimited potential for the college to make a difference in the lives of Dutchess County residents.**

**In choosing my remarks, I decided to focus on what Dutchess County women have done to promote post-secondary education and how we might work together going forward to accomplish even more in the future. I hope the conversation we have this evening will lead to powerful new and expanded partnerships between the AAUW and Dutchess Community College which will translate into even more progress for the greater good.**

**In 2009, my Dutchess community college colleague, and professor of history, Dr. Andrew Rieser addressed the annual meeting of the AAUW here in Poughkeepsie and talked about the connection between the founding of Dutchess community college and this organization. I think it safe to assume that many of you were here on that occasion. It is clear from his research, that women activists were pivotal in the development of a community college in**

**Dutchess County. Members of the AAUW, along with the YWCA, the PTA, and the League of Women Voters became an unstoppable force for establishing the need for a community college in Dutchess County.**

**Founded in 1957 by the citizens of Dutchess County with the foresight to understand that widespread access to post-secondary education would be an essential element of a vibrant and dynamic society in the mid-Hudson Valley, it's hard not to slip into hyperbole in describing the impact Dutchess Community college has had on individual lives and this community as a whole since its inception. To date, more than 43,000 degrees have been granted and more than 172,000 individuals have earned credits here. When you consider the additional hundreds of thousands who have participated in non-credit, community service, college-sponsored events and campus activities, it is the rare household in this area who has not had direct interaction with our campus facilities, our college faculty, staff, or students.**

**Graduates of Dutchess have gone on to become political leaders, creative artists, business owners, social activists,**

**architects, educators, lawyers, entrepreneurs, chief executive officers, and community volunteers. More than half of DCC graduates choose to live, work, play and worship in the mid-Hudson Valley. They established families, raised children; pay taxes, and invest in the community. It is simply undeniable that the quality of life in Dutchess County, past and present, has been and is significantly affected by the outcomes of Dutchess Community College.**

**Imagine how life in Dutchess County would be qualitatively different had there not been forward thinking leaders, primarily women, who agitated more than 50 years ago for the development of a local community college. I think we could speculate that significantly fewer people would have been able to pursue a college education, that those who did go on to college would have paid more and had more debt, that there would be fewer businesses, less civic participation, more poverty, crime and despair, without a local community college. I think we can fairly say that a significant amount of talent would have been squandered if Dutchess**

**Community College had not been part of this county's landscape.**

**I am going to propose to you this evening that Dutchess Community College is at a turning point in its history not unlike the one that contributed to its founding decades ago. This time it is not whether there will be a community college, today it is whether our community college will have the resources it needs to stay a vital part of the social and economic fabric of Dutchess County.**

**I am going to argue that a woman-led coalition is once again needed to ensure that the college that women fought to establish remains a valued and appropriately resourced public institution in Dutchess County. Back in the founding, the women surveyed the County families, started a letter-writing campaign and made phone calls to urge legislators to establish and fund the college. At that time, the message was, if you fail to support the college, we're going to vote you out of office. I'd like our message to be, if you support the college, we will support you!**

**According to Professor Reiser's research, the community college was put forth by women as a solution to a three-part crisis - demographic, economic and strategic, that threatened to undermine the stability of the post-war family in the 1950s.**

**Essentially those same three factors remain pertinent today - demographically, its not the baby boomer issue of an exploding birth rate that dominated in the 1950s, in fact, the majority of school systems are seeing a marked decline in the number of students in K-12, as are colleges and universities, because the baby boom generation bubble has now burst. The current demographic factors that are challenging educators are an increase in the number of students who struggle to succeed at college levels of achievement, along with an increasingly diverse population seeking higher education as the most likely opportunity for advancement. This is a student population with a desire to learn, but with a new set of preferred learning styles, and a different set of external challenges.**

**It is incumbent upon our institutions to adapt to the changing context; to be effective, we have no choice but to identify and implement new strategies to increase and sustain student success. To adapt to the changing realities in post-secondary education, the college needs to make a number of investments. We need to invest in the professional development of our faculty and staff; we need to further diversify the ranks of our educators so that there is full range of role models on our campus to inspire students to aspire to new heights; and we need to experiment with research based practices that have shown to be successful for the new population of college students.**

**The second factor that influenced the development of the community college was economics. Women founded the college because they believed a college education was going to be necessary if their children were to have a chance to be successful in an increasingly competitive economy. The importance of having a post secondary credential has only increased over the ensuing decades. By 2020, it's estimated that 2 out of 3 jobs will require a post-secondary credential.**

**The most valuable credentials will be ones that combine theoretical knowledge – book learning - with actual experience – applied learning. Individuals who are good critical and creative thinkers, with advanced communication and problem-solving skills will be, currently are, the most sought after employees.**

**This is one of the reasons that Dutchess Community College is developing a strong applied learning focus, including a service learning initiative that will launch next Monday with a three day Institute that will bring 25 community agencies to our campus to discuss how Dutchess coursework, our faculty and students, can be linked with community-identified needs. To say that I am excited about this work would seriously underplay my expectations for what these emerging collaborations can mean for student learning and community development.**

**As Dutchess County looks to diversify and revitalize its economic base, ensuring that local residents have the education and experiences to meet employers needs must be part of a comprehensive strategy to attract new business, to grow current ones, and to encourage**

**entrepreneurs to develop their personal dreams right here in the mid-Hudson Valley. This was true in the 1950s as it is now - a highly educated workforce attracts employers and economic resources to a region. Since only 42% of Dutchess County residents over the age of 25 have a college degree, there is a tremendous opportunity to significantly increase the percentage of Dutchess County residents with a post-secondary credential. Why couldn't we be the most highly educated of all New York counties?**

**I am suggesting that DCC is the most likely local institution to close the college degree gap and to ensure that a majority of Dutchess County residents are prepared for the high wage jobs in the new economy. What better local resource is there to assist with this vision than a strong community college, with open access, flexible scheduling, supportive faculty and staff, delivering innovative programming and effective pedagogies?**

**This is an economic aside, but yesterday, the college, in conjunction with the Poughkeepsie Journal, held the 21<sup>st</sup> luncheon for businessperson of the year on our campus. Of the 21 individuals who have been recognized since**

**1992, I couldn't help but notice that only three were women. Let's agree right here and now that together we can change that statistic!**

**The third factor that Dr. Rieser's research indicated as influencing the development of a local community college in Dutchess County was strategic, meaning that there was a prevailing anxiety that the U.S. was falling behind the then Soviet Union in the technology race to the moon. There was growing concern that American education did not sufficiently focus on math and science. Sound familiar?**

**Our current focus on promoting Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, the STEM disciplines reflects the belief that these four subjects are critical to local, state, and national advancement in the modern economy. Locally, we were able to capitalize on this priority by successfully competing to bring a NY state Pathway to Technology grant to the City of Poughkeepsie. The collaboration between Dutchess Community College, the City of Poughkeepsie school district, Central Hudson Gas and Electric, and Chazen companies. We've made**

**tremendous progress in developing the initiative and in just a few weeks, 50 rising City of Poughkeepsie 9<sup>th</sup> graders will spend three weeks at Dutchess Community College beginning their journey to earn both a high school diploma and an associate degree in electrical technology or engineering within the next six years!**

**I find the PTECH program fascinating but what is truly exciting about this partnership is the opportunity it presents to develop strong collaborative partnerships between a local urban school district, major local employers, and the community college. My expectation is that this initial collaboration will multiply and result in many more exciting and innovative partnerships throughout Dutchess County.**

**So you see, the three prevailing factors of demographics, economics, and strategic position that contributed to the development of Dutchess Community College in the 1950s are strikingly similar to the challenges of today. In other words, the need for a local community college is as strong today in Dutchess County as it was close to 60 years ago! I believe that then as now, women can be the driving force**

**that solidifies support for Dutchess Community College. Plus, and I hope you agree, we now have the added advantage of a woman-led institution!**

**That's why I am asking you to lend your collective and individual voices in support of the college's institutional budget which will have a public hearing and be subject to a county legislature vote on July 13. The budget that we brought forward to the county requests an increase in county support after seven years of flat funding. The request also sets a modest increase in tuition of \$120 per semester. Even with this increase, Dutchess will continue to have the lowest tuition in the SUNY system by far. I can't change that this is an election year and that our sitting and aspiring county legislators are nervous about any tuition increases. What I hope to convince them of is that low cost without high quality is no bargain!**

**From what I have been told and can see tonight, the Poughkeepsie Chapter of the AAUW is a natural ally of Dutchess Community College. You provide community leadership in education, strengthen the entire education pipeline with your early literacy efforts, nurture the**

**development of young girls interest in math and science, and support DCC graduates with transfer scholarships. Because of your fundamental purpose and continuous involvement in promoting education in Dutchess County, I felt compelled to complete this membership application and to become an active member of this impressive organization.**

**In closing, I was happy to find out that Eleanor Roosevelt was a supporter and friend of the AAUW. Eleanor Roosevelt always impressed me but when I moved to her home territory here in Dutchess County I had a renewed interest in her life, her work and words. My husband and I live in the President's house on the DCC campus, which once hosted Eleanor Roosevelt for lunch. In our dining room, I have a picture of her with the first president's wife standing by our front door. When I am in that room, I can't help but think about Eleanor and aspire to emulate her in my professional life. When I go to my office each day, the first image I see is also of Eleanor, as I moved a picture of her outside my office door as a daily inspiration of her courage, persistence, and resilience. I often catch myself thinking, what would Eleanor do? Invariably, the answer**

**that comes back to me is that she would do something brave, she would take risks, she would seek ways to foster collaboration, she would promote social justice and make equity a priority. If I can in any measure apply her example to my decision making as president of Dutchess Community College, I will be satisfied that I have done my best to lead a college.**

**In closing, the anthropologist Margaret Mead is famous for saying, “*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.*” I don’t think she would mind my adapting her words this evening by saying, Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed women can change Dutchess County. Indeed, they already have and there is no end in sight!”**