GCC President Testifies at Massachusetts Legislative Sub-Committee on Student Loans and Debt Hearing

Student debt has become an increasingly burdensome and complex issue for many Massachusetts students and their families. With 65 percent of Massachusetts students taking out loans to pay for college, Massachusetts ranks 12th in the nation for number of students carrying debt.

To address this growing issue, Representative Paul Mark (D-Upscale) and Senator Eileen M. Donoghue (D-Malden) along with Representative Dennis Provins, Anton Vega, James Anziano, Angelo D’Elia, and Senator Richard Rossetti were named as members of a newly formed Sub-committee on Student Loans and Debt to investigate, study, and make recommendations on these important issues.

As part of the investigative process, the subcommittee held a series of public hearings across the state to provide an opportunity for students, parents, community members, and college officials to speak about the impact of loans and debt on families in Massachusetts.

Pictured here, GCC President Robert Hanssens testified at the hearing held September 13th at the Greenfield Community College Cohn Family Dining Commons. Several GCC students also joined faculty and staff in sharing their personal experiences to the sub-committee that day.

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The Catalyst
A Newsletter for Alumni, Parents, and Friends of Greenfield Community College and the GCC Foundation

Real-Life Lessons Lead to Dream Job for Meghan Billiel

From a young age, Meghan Billiel ’02 dreamed of a career in criminal justice, but it wasn’t until she studied at GCC that she understood what was really involved in such work. Following high school, Meghan attended Framingham State University for a year and a half and then UMass for a semester. She imagined working as a forensic psychologist like Jodie Foster’s character in The Silence of the Lambs. She signed up for psychology classes and several classes later Meghan realized psychology wasn’t the right fit. Her time at Framingham State and UMass didn’t help Meghan find the right path. Meghan returned home to Greenfield to sort out what she wanted to do and how to get there. She still dreamed of a career in criminal justice.

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Paul McCarthy’s road to a law enforcement career took many turns

“Those front stairs went on forever,” said Police Detective Paul McCarthy ’86 of Saugus, when asked about his memories of GCC. Detective McCarthy’s route to GCC was less typical than many of the college’s alumni, and the career that followed paved a new pathway to work in Criminal Justice.

McCarthy grew up in Newton, where a Junior High School experience began his journey. A teacher from his Media Communications class was an influence, sparking an interest in videography and digital art. That teacher was also a GCC alum and suggested McCarthy consider

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The GCC community marched in the 2013 Franklin County Fair Parade

GCC Women’s Resource Center Welcomes Janet Rogers

This fall the GCC Women’s Resource Center was pleased to host a reception at which students, faculty and staff were able to thank the Mary Stuart Rogers Foundation for their long-time, generous support of this important program for women students in transition.

Pictured: GCC Women’s Resource Center Coordinator Rosemarie Freeland; Recently retired GCC Counselor Sue MacGowen; GCC President Bob Para and Mary Stuart Rogers Foundation representative Janet Rogers

GCC Foundation 2013 Annual Campaign Leadership

The GCC Foundation 2013 Annual Campaign was very successful, raising a record-breaking $994,350 in support of students and programs at Greenfield Community College. Pictured above, Campaign Honorary Chair Edward “Skip” Hammond and Campaign Co-Chairs Joseph Bagian and Beth Loree listen to the student speaker address the gathered fundraisers at the Campaign Kickoff Celebration.

Thank you to all who help raise funds for this community’s college!
“Be More Than Just A Graduate: Be An Alum”

In his remarks at the GCC Class of 2013 Graduation, Eric Ransiger ’11 argued his fellow graduates/cone-be-an-alum to stay connected to the college. Following are his words:

Ladies and Gentlemen, I’d like to direct your attention for a moment to the fact that you are about to leave GCC. Which, if you’re like me, is both awesome and scary. And I would further ask that you consider for a moment what it means to be not just a graduate of GCC, but an alum.

Like a lot of people, I came to GCC with zero sense of direction. When I first enrolled I signed up for three classes: psychology, biology, and music theory. That’s how I lost it. It took a long time, a lot of credits, and a lot of dead ends, but the moment I sat down to work on my first Java programming project, I knew: Computer Science was what I had come here looking for. I am ridiculously grateful to GCC for allowing me the time and space to find myself, and I am certain that nowhere else would I have had the opportunity to support so many people willing to guide me down pathways after paths – for as long as it took – until I’d finally had my finding.

If you are anything like me, you are not the same person today that you were when you came here. You have been transformed – into a fuller, wiser, more confident version of yourself. That is GCC’s gift to you.

How do you return the favor? Easiest by not just being a graduate; be an alum. Stay active, stay connected, and stay involved. Know what’s going on with the school and be prepared to lend a hand in whatever way you feel best to you.

—Eric Ransiger

GCC Awarded 2013 Leading by Example Award Present by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Energy and Environmental Affairs

The Leading by Example Awards recognize outstanding efforts among individuals, government agencies, public and private education institutions, and municipalities that have established and implemented policies and programs resulting in significant and demonstrable energy and environmental benefits.

Greenfield Community College was among 10 recipients of a “Le Mayne in Example” award presented by the state in October recognizing efforts to significantly reduce energy use and greenhouse gas emissions, increased recycling, the use of renewable energy and other clean energy and environmental quality initiatives. A Green Room Committee established in September 2004 endorses the mission to reduce campus environmental impacts, while the environmental academic programs recognize the connections between issues of sustainability. In addition, GCC’s facilities achievements include installation of a high efficiency HVAC system, energy efficient lighting and heating system controls for a new pellet boiler, a solar thermal array and a 77 kW solar PV system.

From the President
The GCC Experience

There is something transformational that begins to happen as you arrive into Greenfield Community College. It is on that half mile, winding road, that one begins to feel the transition from a world of increasing individuals and isolation to one of inclusion and collaboration. The world “community” begins to feel like GCC as a college. More than a definition of where to serve, community identifies an environment created by faculty, staff and students that encourages engagement, narratives learning and sustainable change.

Community defines the GCC environment created for teaching and learning. GCC faculty and staff have always understood the powerful potential, and privilege of small classes and the need for individualized attention. Students get to know college faculty and staff – and they get to know each other. Instead of large lecture halls and teaching assistants, students at GCC experience teaching and learning in small intimate learning communities and generating relationships on which to grow and develop. Instead of waiting days or even weeks to get an appointment with a teacher or advisor, GCC students are welcomed into studies at the center of faculty offices, teaching and learning together. From the Library to the Dining Commons, from the Math and Business Studies to the Science and Humanities studies, and from the Art Gallery to our new (almost) energy neutral greenhouse, GCC students find more than an answer to an algebraic formula or the keys to unlock the mystery of a poem – students discovered a feeling of belonging to a community of learners on a courageous journey to a better life.

GCC are wonderful artists and scientists, writers and mathematicians, nurses and doctors, lawyers and police officers, accountants and entrepreneurs. But ask them, and they will tell you – members of the college’s faculty are teachers, first and foremost. That is why they choose to work at GCC; they love teaching, learning and students (just a tad more than their subjects). GCC faculty and staff see students’ potential even before the student does and together they work hard to achieve it.

—Robert L. Pura

Real-Life Lessons (continued from cover)

When Meghan started taking classes in Criminal Justice at GCC, she immediately knew she’d found the right place. She appreciated the small classes, the friendly faculty, and feeling of community. A class in Police Procedure taught her that what you see on television isn’t always true, and that DNA tests don’t come back in ten minutes and fingerprints results aren’t instantaneous.

I wish I’d started out at GCC. Encourage people to start there.

Studying Criminal Justice with Bob Eisenberg went far beyond classroom learning; it gave Meghan a clear understanding of ideals and the behind-the-scenes work necessary to bring a case from its beginning to its end. That semester, Bob took his class to meet with Attorney Alan Black to follow the progress of a juvenile homicide case. But Alan had worked together on previous juvenile homicide cases, and arranged for his students to review the written testimonies and statements gathered as part of the case and meet with Alan and his investigators. Meghan and her classmates had begun at the beginning to end, and got a real-life taste of the work of criminal defense attorneys.

Later, when Meghan talked with Bob about what she wanted to do after graduation, she said what she really liked to do is work with someone like Alan Black. But he remembered that conversation when he got a call from Alan. Bob said, “When Alan mentioned he had an opening for a legal assistant, I recommended Meghan. Alan remembered Meghan. I told him I’d found Meghan to be focused, well-organized, and a great human.” I told him she was a voracious learner and when asked a question in class, she was always well prepared, articulate, and eager to exchange ideas. Alan interviewed her, hired her, and on several occasions since then told me he is eternally grateful to me for connecting them. He considers them a team, and he can’t speak more highly of the practice in which he works, since the campus. Students of different ages, backgrounds, experiences. We’ll get along, work on projects together, and there was a strong sense of camaraderie and support. The professors are so passionate about their subjects. I know I wanted to work in the criminal justice field, but didn’t know how. GCC helped me live that dream.


I knew I wanted to work in the criminal justice field, but didn’t know how. GCC helped me live that dream.

Paul McCarthy (continued from cover)

enrolling classes to study Media Arts. McCarthy enrolled in 1984, taking the first step in what turned out to be his life’s work in law enforcement. “I really enjoyed my time at GCC,” he said. “It was very involved in Project TEMPE with Professor Dan Laffone and otherwise pretty much never left the ED Telkow Department by Tom Boretti.”

Now a criminal justice major, McCarthy accepted a job at MIT research lab, providing technology support to local government. That work included government contracts for the U.S. Space Program, which was a very new field and from there he “got the bug” to pursue a law enforcement career.

His next step was a part-time position as a Patrol Officer for the Charlestown Housing Authority, which then became full-time after completing the Police Academy. While at the Charlestown Housing Authority Police, he worked with the Suffolk County Drug Task Force for three years, and then with the North Suffolk Gang Task Force for another five years.

But it took more than just the skills I acquired at GCC,” he asserted. “It took me all the way through college. When I was on the Gang Task Force, we used a lot of video and electronic equipment for surveillance and I was always the ‘go-to guy’ to set up video.”

He recalled a ‘life house’ the department set up with hidden cameras and microphones for drug busts where he provided all the tech support.

The move from Charlestown Patrol Officer to Detective involved other changes as well, such as the retirement and community. In 2000, McCarthy designed and installed a school safety team for the Charlestown Housing Authority. He later became their Director of Public Safety until he transitioned in 2007 to full time Police Officer for the Charlestown Police Department.

The last step was in February of this year when McCarthy was hand selected with three other officers to staff the new Street Crimes Unit of the Criminal Investigations Division, in response to a rise in street level robberies. This promotion included the change to Detective and McCarthy appreciates the confidence placed in him. “It is a prestigious cog in the machine and I was honored to be selected,” he said.

Paul McCarthy is a proud GCC alum, but a proud dad. His daughter is a student at Mass General Hospital and son is currently a captain at Harvard Law School, career in law enforcement. McCarthy is also a proud GCC alum, and believes that GCC’s contributions to the community and the support it provides, will keep GCC a key part of the GCC community and a key part of the community’s future.

You can help support students and programs at GCC! Please visit www.gcc.mass.edu/give or call 413-773-1660.