I am so honored to be asked to give the opening keynote before this very august group of educators. I must begin with a strong endorsement of Gerardo de los Santos, and his visionary leadership of the League for Innovation. As I am learning to see myself as one of the “elder stateswomen” among community college advocates, I am buoyed and strengthened by the vitality of those who will come after me, and those who are committed to continued development and building of strong and dedicated professional leaders. Gerardo is key among those who give me joy and hope.

The title of my talk, *Minding the Dream: Community Colleges and a Passion for the Possible*, is inspired by two different things. The first is the book that I co-authored with Dr. Cynthia Heelan, *Minding the Dream: The Policy and Practice of the American Community College*. We wrote this because we felt very strongly the need to further strengthen the number of advocates for community colleges. We wrote what I hope is an accessible book that provides the scope and power of the community colleges and then designed it for a range of audiences: new faculty who have come to teach at our colleges but do not really understand the place of community colleges in the higher education infrastructure, or Board of Trustee members who are supportive but do not fully understand the mission, or legislators who can only see us with old eyes. Our goal was to write a book that would not only inform, but hopefully inspire.

Community colleges embrace a radically inclusive student body. They don't select, but rather welcome all post-secondary students. The open-access community college is the only form of higher education that has its genesis in the U.S. The difference between two and four year colleges, between colleges that select their freshman class and those that welcome everyone -- is profound. In our book, we argue that rather than selecting the “cream of the crop,” community colleges in America make cream. And that's our value proposition!

The second impetus comes from a quote from Nelson Mandela, the extraordinary activist and first democratically elected president of South Africa:

*There is no passion to be found playing small - in settling for a life that is less than the one you are capable of living.*

It is from these two points of passion that I want to remind those of us gathered here tonight to celebrate the power and the promise of the American Community College. We come together tonight knowing that ours is the sector of higher education most central to and emblematic of a belief in democracy. It is in this way that we “mind the dream”, by tending to what is best and most noble in the human endeavor of
advancement without regard to anything other than human potential. Community colleges welcome all ages and ethnicities and income levels, and we are richer and stronger for it.

The acknowledgement of this shining idealism must become heightened, however, as America moves forward, because community colleges still labor under the weight of misunderstanding of who we are as a system. Community colleges were a disruptive force, a new paradigm for higher education when we first inched our way into the higher education structure. I will argue tonight that we still haven't pushed hard enough to truly enact all the elements of what an open-access community college, tied tightly to its local community, can achieve. I will encourage you to think not only about what your community college could and should be, but to look at a wider horizon and understand that so much of the world needs you to be leaders and models if we are to educate those around the globe who so desperately need higher education to make a life for themselves and to embrace the potential of positive growth in their society.

In some ways, I want to argue that we haven’t taken ourselves seriously enough. Community colleges are fundamental to our country’s democracy, our economy, our ability to function in a world rife with political and economic threats, as threatened by terrorists as we are by our own inability to educate and care for all of our people. There is no sector of education other than the American community college system that is so pivotal. And yet, too often, community faculty and staff are muted, even inarticulate, in the face of frontal assaults on who we are and the quality of our work.

In large part, this is because we have not sufficiently studied ourselves so that we are armed with the information and outcome data that is essential to the advocacy needed for our sector. In this way, I also particularly want to speak to faculty. Your president is more likely to know the facts I am going to put before you tonight, but too often faculty do not. And faculty are the key to the next phase of community college advancement - so listen up!

I will exhort you, plead with you, to know and share the data about community college students nationally and for your own college. I watched Dr. Byron McClenney conduct this survey two years ago at an “Achieving the Dream” presentation, so I am going to steal it now. Raise your hand if you know the following:

1. How many of you know the proportion of undergraduates in the US taught by community colleges?
2. How many of you know the enrollment of undergraduates at your own college?
Let me show you the data:

Let’s start by looking at who we are – who goes to college in the U.S.? Looking only at credit students, over 6.5 million undergraduates attend community colleges, and just over 7 million attend four-year colleges. Community colleges therefore educate about 46% of all undergraduate college students. An additional 5 million students attend community colleges for non-credit education, which I will discuss in a minute.

Beyond enrollment numbers, the impact of community colleges on higher education in the U.S. is even greater. The next graph shows the number of students graduating annually with a baccalaureate degree, about 1.5 million students. But look at what happens if we subtract from these graduates the number who transferred from a community college – the number decreases by over 300,000. If we also subtract the students who used community colleges incidentally as well as “reverse” transfers (those who started in a four-year college, returned to a community college, and subsequently completed a baccalaureate), the overall total of U.S. baccalaureate degrees would decrease by over 700,000. Even when we are looking solely at four-year college graduates, our higher education system would not function without the contribution of the community colleges.
So, you must know these numbers, and you must calculate them for your own community college. As the local state university brags about the increases in their entering freshman class SAT scores, ask how many of their graduates started in a community college. For many, it’s almost half. We are instrumental to their success; we help create their headlines.

You must also understand the funding of community colleges. When program officers from major philanthropies ask me what things I think could dramatically improve the success of students in community colleges, they often constrain my answer by saying “other than more money.” But we have to look squarely at the dollars. And as community college advocates, you must know these numbers.

In the U.S. in 2007, national expenditures for public two-year colleges were $39 billion ($38,602,497,000). This is just 21% of the $177 billion ($177,191,847,000) expended by public four-year colleges and universities. The disparity is shocking. American community colleges, despite enrolling almost half of all undergraduate students, spend 80% less than their public four-year sisters.
LaGuardia Community College

We can look at this another way. Per capita spending, that is, the average, annual amount we expend to educate each student, is also strikingly different. Public community college spending averages $10,481 per student, while spending for 4-year public college students averages $31,882 a year. Thus, we spend three times more to educate each 4-year college student than we do for each community college student. We are therefore funding those students most prepared to go to college at proportions well above those who need the highest level of support.

This funding, as you might imagine, then ripples through the community college structure, affecting our ability to offer excellent educational services, as well as the support services that help keep students in school. The financial data I just presented under-counts the way in which community colleges are financially hobbled, because our faculty teach many more classes each semester than faculty at four-year colleges, usually twice as many. Community colleges also have a much lower percentage of classes taught by full-time faculty, and they have so few support staff that it can sometimes verge on the ridiculous.

In order to be effective advocates, (dare I use the term “lobbyist” for community colleges?), you must also know the national and international context for the centrality of our work.
- By show of hands, how many of you know the percentage of students who start out in elementary school in the U.S. who actually complete high school nationally?
- Do you know this percentage for your local feeder high schools?
- By different gender, racial or ethnic categories?
- How many of you know the percentage of adults in your community who have a high school diploma or GED?

Let me show you some more data.
I was honored to be part of a blue ribbon commission that looked at the issue of adult literacy in the US. I take this first graph from the report that resulted from our two years of research, entitled *Reach Higher, America: Overcoming Crisis in the U.S. Workforce*, was authored by the Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy. It outlines the incredible crisis the U.S. faces because of adults’ lack of education and skills necessary to lead a productive life. Of the 150 million individuals 18-64 who are in the labor force, over 88 million have at least one educational barrier. Look at how this breaks out, with the overlaps (that is, those who, for example, don’t have any college and also do not speak English very well) shown on the Venn diagram. We have over 26 million adults with no high school diploma, 18 million adults who are not sufficiently proficient in English, and 56 million adults who have a high school diploma but no college.

Nationwide, the overall high school graduation rate for the class of 2001 was 68%, with nearly one-third of all public high school students failing to graduate. In New York City, only 40% of black males are graduating from high school. This is unacceptable.
There are also millions of adults older than traditional college age who need to be educated. This slide shows the number of adults who speak English poorly or not at all broken out by state. About one in eight individuals living in the U.S. today is not native-born. Community colleges are the essential link for these individuals to enter American society productively.

The results of the lack of an education are all too clear. If you don’t have a high school education, as almost 29 million Americans don’t, you are very likely to be poor, unhealthy, and if male, incarcerated.
Those are the achievement gaps on the national front, and comparing ourselves internationally is no rosier. America still has the best educated workforce in the world, but not for long. When the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) evaluated the 30 wealthiest countries in the world to measure the percentage of adults with at least an associate's degree, we rank 8th. Note in particular that the U.S. is the only country where people of my generation are more educated than those of younger generations. Any edge we used to have because of education is rapidly slipping away.

Why are these data all important? Because the world has changed. The business writer, Charles Savage, had it correct in 1990 when he laid out the historical eras’ source of wealth and tied them to organizational structures. As you look at this slide, you see Savage's framework for the relationship between what drives the economy of an era, and his analysis of the kind of organizational structure most likely to thrive. I agree with his analysis that, in the knowledge economy, it is a networked, open access, multi-nodal system that must characterize the best organizations. Many community colleges reflect this organizational structure.
Yet the disproportionate focus, and concentration of funding, within the elite universities in the world is reminiscent of the late industrial era at the end of the 20th century, where you had vast corporate interests with access to huge amounts of capital and functioning within deeply hierarchical organizational structures. Today, we still have a small group of elite universities with access to “super-sized” capital investments—vast endowments and the bulk of government support—who are sitting on top of a steep hierarchy of rankings that ensured their success – in the past. (Community colleges, parenthetically, receive less than 1% of all philanthropic dollars.)

But our world has changed dramatically. Name any industry – banking, international finance, the music recording industry, energy development and sales – and you will see old structures that used to create profitability either morphing into different structures or dying because of the digital revolution and the way in which innovation, taking a global perspective, and anticipating consumer needs to create efficient products (like GM cars!) are fundamental to success. In an odd way, the Knowledge Economy or the Age of Innovation – or whatever you wish to term this emerging socio-economic era, is a perfect setting for the business of higher education.

It is so clear that knowledge is the current coin of the realm, and colleges are its purveyors. Yet I want to argue tonight that we have the calculus wrong for the new century. Right now, we stand the pyramid on its head. We place the most resources in service to the fewest numbers of students. That worked well in the old hierarchical structure of society and commerce. It won’t work any more in a globally networked world.
The pyramid needs to be inverted. Greater emphasis must be placed on imparting skills to the broadest group of citizens. This is how we maintain a middle class, how we make our commerce globally competitive, and how we educate those who will partake in an innovation society because they can think creatively and analytically and therefore contribute to the “knowledge economy.”

What I have laid out so far are the challenges and the inequities that community colleges face. And, as I noted earlier, we need advocates, lobbyists, missionaries, proselytizers, and, like the President of the United States, community organizers, who are going to effectively push for change in how community colleges operate and in how elected officials (and private donors) spend the pool of higher education dollars.

While these times are very tough, I think there’s many reasons to be hopeful. In Washington, we heard President Obama in his first speech to Congress highlight the work we do when he said, “…I ask every American to commit to at least one year or more of higher education or career training. This can be community college or a four-year school; vocational training or an apprenticeship. But whatever the training may be, every American will need to get more than a high school diploma.” Community colleges have a substantial investment in workforce development and job training dollars coming out of the stimulus package. In Washington, influential think tanks—including the Brookings Institution and the Center for American Progress—are advising public officials that investments in community colleges are needed to make America competitive in the global economy. And major foundations, the Lumina Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, are putting dollars into examining and strengthening community colleges. Now, as President Obama says, is our time!

So, your role, in addition to running your colleges, teaching classes and advising students, is that you must become the advocates for community college. And, we need to be advocates in many ways and with many different audiences.
First, we need to be advocates for funding. Let’s aggressively fight to get our fair share of the higher education pie. We need to not only reach our lawmakers on a local, state, and federal level, but also garner the support of business and labor leaders, community organizations and others who can incorporate a “Community College First” agenda into their own efforts.

Next we need to advocate for changes in how we assess community colleges. We need better assessment tools not only to be in a better position to push for a right-sizing of the pyramid, but also to hold ourselves accountable. Right now, our federal and state governments do not measure community colleges nor hold us accountable to standards that align with our real missions. For example, IPEDS – the national metric for colleges - in its focus on “first-time, full-time” only students, asks me to report on only 14% of the students who attend my college.

Community college’s total impact on the education and training of our students and subsequent social and economic impact is muted, if not lost, because of old measures. The work of the Lumina Foundation’s Achieving the Dream Initiative, spearheaded by many in this room, has taken an extraordinarily important leadership role in this arena. They have encouraged community colleges to identify “momentum points”, which are steps along a students’ academic career where success or failure pivots. It might be completing the first developmental class, or completing the first credit course after that developmental class, or staying an entire 15 week semester, or accumulating 15 credits. Whatever it is, the colleges identify those momentum points, create a baseline, and then develop and measure activities designed to improve those momentum points. The ultimate goals of graduation and transfer and passage on national certification examinations are all still just as important. But to develop these more finely calibrated measures of success can both help a college improve its long-term success by constantly monitoring where and why students are falling through the cracks and then provide the opportunity for colleges and students to celebrate achievement of the steps along the way. And in the future we need to go beyond what has begun in Achieving the Dream, to include measures of non-credit certificates, changes in family income, and related measures that reveal the power of community colleges to change lives and change communities.

So, a second area where we must develop accurate measures is to calculate the amount and quality of pre-college and workforce development education and training that occur at community colleges. Bill Green, the CEO of Accenture, heads the US Business Round Table’s Committee on Education, Innovation and Workforce. With his support, Jim Jacobs and his team at Macomb Community College in Michigan and LaGuardia Community College, and the support of the Community College Research Center at Columbia, have been working to propose a simple way to uniformly measure non-credit education. Right now, there is no formal metric that captures the FIVE MILLION individuals who study at the community college. They are ghosts, invisible. Here is a beginning calculus.
Community college impact is defined by Non-Credit Classes + Credit Classes = Community Impact. Right now, the U.S. government, most state governments and almost all local governments look at the credit side only, leaving out almost half of the equation.

We know that non-credit training raises workers’ wages and the effect appears to be very strong; and there is some evidence that training also raises a company’s productivity as well. So the fact that America does not evaluate this critical aspect of the education and training offered by community colleges is just one more way in which the invisibility of our educational services can undercut our own accurate understanding of our contribution. All of us in this room deliver a vast amount of pre-college education (ESL, GED, ABE) and an extraordinary range of workforce training, yet traditional measurements of higher education totally ignore this aspect of our work. At a time when federal stimulus dollars are providing needed increases in workforce development services, particularly after steady decreases over the past years, no one even has an “apples to apples” measure of the 5 million individuals in the non-credit education and training.

Classifying Workforce Activity

1. **TYPE of BENEFIT** (Economic impact vs. Personal impact)

2. **FOCUS of OUTCOME** (Benefit to Individuals vs. Benefit to Organizations)

3. **PURPOSE** (Academic Outcome vs. Employment Skill Outcome)
In our preliminary work on a uniform measure of non-credit education, LaGuardia and Macomb are proposing that we evaluate the type of benefit (economic impact vs. personal impact) the focus of outcome (benefit to individuals vs. benefit to organizations) and the purpose (academic outcome vs. employment skill outcome) of the training. Imagine what we would learn if we could codify just this much about every one of those 5 million adults who study with us. We will continue to refine this measure, in consultation with our funders, the US Business Round Table and the committee leader, Accenture CEO Bill Green. But it is a beginning to just be able to specify the kinds and amounts of workforce training that is occurring below the radar screen to government and funders.

The reality is that competition for stimulus funds will be fierce. I am convinced that community colleges offer the highest quality education and training services that truly seek to create career opportunities, and career ladders, for individuals. But, while I can look closely and critically at the successes and gaps in the workforce programs at my college, we are not yet in a position to compare our track record with others because there is no standard of measurement. This must change. We have to push for greater accountability and new tools for measuring workforce training. If we had this data right now, I am convinced that the case to the Obama administration and the Congress about why the best workforce stimulus package would be one where the community colleges are at the lead would already be made.

Why should we be the ideal single item in the stimulus plan? Look what David Jones and Patrick Kelley of NCHEMS demonstrate happens if we committed ourselves to having those without a basic education complete an associate’s degree. The United States’ citizens would gain $848 billion in personal income. This graph, then, shows us who should be in college. If American higher education increased its effectiveness with those we currently serve, and added these individuals who should be in college but are not, the future of our country would be assured.
We need to be advocates for the students we teach and the extraordinary faculty who teach them. There are at least four areas of advocacy where we must excel:

1. Advocate for a more complete understanding and assessment of our students’ lives
2. Advocate for more open and flexible institutions
3. Advocate for dramatic improvement in basic skills pedagogy
4. Advocate for innovations in teaching

The faculty and educational leaders in this room perform miracles every day. I cannot tell you how weary I am of the endless list of reports that has come out in the past year that talk about “why community colleges don’t do better”, but never mention funding or differential measurement. We must be clear that we are taking and embracing a student body that other colleges WOULD NOT TAKE!

Let me show you the dimensions of our challenge: At LaGuardia Community College, my crack IR staff led by Dr. Nathan Dickmeyer, decided to try to tell our story numerically by imputing SAT scores. They compared what our students’ imputed SAT scores would be to the range of scores in our sister four-year colleges in the City University of New York (CUNY) system. This is what we found – if we were lining up our students in a race, they are not only starting “behind,” they are starting WAY behind.

And this is just on the easy-to-obtain demographic information. What I never see mentioned are the multiple ways in which our students might be behind. One of our students briefly discussed a paper she wrote for her psychology class on depression, in which she says “if you really read it, you will learn a lot about my mother.” What I know is that this young kid, just back from Iraq at the time, was coping with a severely depressed mother after she came home from working at JFK baggage handling all night, and going to college in the early morning. When you talk to our students, you uncover these deep
and invisible challenges that make academic life more difficult—mental illness among family members, a boyfriend’s family who relies on a young woman’s emotional support, a father’s child who is severely dyslexic and acting out in school, a best friend whose house just burnt down, and for my immigrant students, the post-trauma of what they have faced and what their extended families in other countries are still facing. I never see these real issues identified in the reports stating that community colleges should do better by their students. But there is often a reason why “equally academically trained” students choose to stay at their community college while the comparison group goes to a four-year college. We must never forget that so many of our students are heroes, and that their success is such an amazing triumph of their will and determination married to a faculty member’s unwavering support and inspiration. We need to constantly remind decision makers and opinion leaders of the students we serve, of the enormous social and economic challenges they face.

We need to be advocates within our institutions for creating open and flexible institutions. We have to be advocates for creating internal policies, as well as statewide policies, to ensure that we create seamless ladders for students to climb. Too often, we have yet to align our own internal systems. There are hundreds of community colleges in this room who offer ABE (adult basic education) and GED classes, but how many of us are effectively doing the alignment work necessary to move these students seamlessly into the credit classes? When we look at the workforce training non-credit programs, how many colleges across the country have robust systems that counsel the non-credit student toward a career ladder that eventually merges with a credit credential? What have we done on our own campuses to treat all of our students — credit and non-credit — as a single group of individuals for whom the community college is the only, and probably the best, answer for a better life?

Basic skills advocacy should consume a large part of our consciousness. We must be vocal advocates for ensuring that we have the resources and competency to improve our success in moving students through the basic skills sequence at higher numbers with higher levels of academic preparedness. Our ability to take students and provide them with the academic skills necessary to succeed in college-level classes is of paramount importance. It is the only way that we can truly “Mind the Dream,” because without success in our basic skills classes, even though failure might be despite our best efforts, we have squashed the dream when students do not succeed. Dreams are ashes if developmental students do not subsequently succeed in a credit class.

To get a student through basic skills is sometimes one of our greatest miracles, but we don’t create these minor miracles for enough students. Community colleges are successful with about 50% of high school graduates who need remediation to achieve high school level skills.
Let me show you a graph that is my screen-saver on my computer in my office. It was created by Ria Sengupta and Christopher Jepsen of the Public Policy Institute of California. It shows all of the credit, non-credit, GED, Adult Basic Education and skills training students in the California Community College system. No matter who they are, there is a precipitous drop off after the first semester, and a devastating one after the first year. We all have to look at these data, every semester. We need to take responsibility for each line. And we have to determine how to change the inflection - the slope of the line - with relentless work until we have created another, a bigger miracle. We must change the percentage of students who make it through basic skills from 50% to 80%.

How? I have come to believe that there is really only one answer, and that is to support faculty so that they can create the kinds of pedagogical breakthroughs we need to enact the hopes and dreams of America. LaGuardia has made major investments of time and money in providing sustained, systemic, faculty-led professional development programs. Our faculty has created pedagogical innovations which incorporate technology in order to serve our adult, minority and immigrant students. New structures include ePortfolios and digital storytelling. By using narrative, faculty are able to weave the lives of our students into the fabric of the curriculum, so we can advance deep, reflective learning while still incorporating the lived experience of our students.

At my campus, faculty are encouraged and allowed to innovate, and then rigorously measured to ensure that only those experiments that are successful are implemented throughout the curriculum.
If we are to make the kind of difference in students’ lives – where we care about students as academically-achieving individuals as well as whole human beings, we must learn to teach differently. Therefore, we need to be advocates for innovations in teaching. We need to experiment, evaluate and incorporate into our pedagogy those innovations that truly work. But, to do that, we must advocate the creation of an atmosphere, both within our institutions and within the community college “movement,” that stimulates pedagogical creativity.

We need to teach, lecture and cajole policymakers so they understand the full picture of what we do. We need to be able to both measure and communicate information about, for instance, the number of new businesses a community college has helped to start in its community, or the number of small businesses who use the community colleges’ training to increase profitability to the point where they can offer their employees health benefits.

It is not enough to just tell the story of the number of students who transferred to a four-year-college. It is as important to explain the way in which the rising educational level of a community surrounding a community college has an improved availability of child care, or increased the number of new local theaters, or supported the growth of grocery stores with actual fresh fruits and vegetables – these changes are as important as highlighting the semester-to-semester retention rate. But have you ever been asked by a legislator to estimate these impacts? It is as critical to tell the story of the number of new immigrants who now can speak enough English to take the bus by themselves and converse with their child’s teacher as it is to share information about the percentage increase in the number of students in science and mathematics.

The urgency of the American situation is that we have to do much, much more. And there is no one else in America better suited to this task than the extraordinary individuals with me in this room tonight. Yes, we are underfunded. Yes, we often get ignored in the press, or even worse, critiqued mindlessly. Yes, we are evaluated with inadequate yard sticks. But I want you to understand that yes, we can and must do more. We must because we have not yet lived up to our promise to ourselves.

That’s the glory and the problem. It all matters. What you do, everyday, in the one thousand, one hundred and ninety-five community colleges across this country, all matters. So my final exhortation to you tonight is to use your passion. You came into this work for a reason. Don’t deny or hide it. You have to know the facts, about community colleges nationally and about your own community college. You have to argue forcefully and with a full set of quantitative information if you are going to be successful in challenging the misconceptions of community colleges.
We have to demand more of ourselves and our colleagues – don’t hire that person because they’re the most available, don’t turn your back if you know one of your colleagues is not effective with students, don’t let your students leave your class without achieving the highest standards. Demand that your colleagues at four-year colleges recognize the quality of the education you deliver, if it’s there, and if the quality isn’t there, you fix it.

Stop being timid. Advocate vigorously for funding equity. Turn the pyramid on its head. Make sure that your local funding is equal to or better than that which is provided to other sectors of education. Explain to your friends, family, and that uppity uncle who used to have a job in a bank how critical your work is to the future of this country.

Let me close with a quote from the American anthropologist Ruth Benedict. “The happiest excitement in life is to be convinced that one is fighting for all one is worth on behalf of some clearly seen and deeply felt good.” That is what you all do, everyday. I am extraordinarily proud to be one of you.