

From the President's Desk: Why Community Colleges Matter

By David Roland Finley, Ph.D.

Last month, I had the privilege of hearing a talk by internationally renowned journalists James and Deborah Fallows, whose reporting on the civic and economic revival of American towns led them to a compelling argument: Community colleges are the most crucial part of this era's American educational system.

The Washington-based reporting duo, authors of *Our Towns: A 100,000-Mile Journey into the Heart of America*, drew from their experiences visiting small and medium-sized communities across the continental U.S. in a single-engine prop plane over a five-year period. As international correspondents for *The Atlantic* magazine, the couple used the same lens in the U.S. as they had learning about a variety of overseas locales during their career. Here's what they found.

- 1) **Community colleges provide the most critical educational component of today's economic puzzle.** This education matches the opportunities of an era with the needs of an era. As we've evolved from an agrarian society, to a manufacturing-based society, to today's creative economy, educational needs have changed. High schools in the late 1800s/early 1900s educated the children coming off the farm to participate in the Industrial Revolution. Today, we educate the children of parents and grandparents who worked in manufacturing to prepare them for high-tech positions and/or knowledge-based careers that require additional credentialing.
- 2) **Community colleges serve as regional connectors in rural America.** Towns that thrived in previous generations can become too small to be independently sustainable. To sustainably grow, the communities that comprise Northern Michigan must work together to find regional solutions to housing, transportation, childcare, a shortage of skilled trades, etc. North Central Michigan College aims to become the convener of these important conversations.
- 3) **The leverage for making real change is local – not national.** This is where we as individuals have the greatest ability to create an even better world for generations to come. As hyper-local educational institutions, community colleges are uniquely qualified to best serve the students of a particular region and to meet the talent needs of employers in that region.

As digital technology re-shapes the economics and politics of our world, the role of community colleges becomes even more important. North Central provides the opportunity for individuals of all ages to participate in this economic revolution, equipping learners to face the challenges and promise presented by automation (robotics) and artificial intelligence in the coming decades. This, in turn, lifts our host communities, so that they too remain vibrant in this new paradigm.

Do enjoy what remains of our summertime warmth and discover the many reasons why *YOUR Community's College matters!*