



Inaugural Address of BCC President Laura L. Douglas

Thursday, May 31, 2018

Thank you and good afternoon. I am honored to have you all here today and I am truly honored and humbled to have been selected as Bristol Community College's Fourth President.

Standing before you as the president of Bristol Community College in many ways feels like destiny. I have returned to the place where my ancestors became Americans and I am thrilled to be a part of the Spindle City story.

You see, my great grandparents emigrated from Ireland to Fall River during the potato famine. I am told that they were lucky that they spoke English and could get jobs in the cotton mills.

My great grandfather repaired the cotton looms, and my great grandmother worked the looms after her childbearing years.

My grandfather was born in Fall River and he grew up on Buffinton Street. He lost half of his siblings to disease and he lost an eye to Scarlett Fever. But he survived and was the only child in his family to earn a high school diploma. He attended Durfee Tech, which is now Durfee High School.

And here I am today, President of Bristol Community College, where I drive past Durfee High School every day. It certainly is a feeling of coming full circle. And it brings me great joy to be serving the higher education needs in a region that is so deserving of economic growth and success.

This is not a unique story. This region is rich in diversity and cultural relevance with many first and second generation citizens. The opportunities are limitless, and it is our job as educators, to make sure our community knows it and believes we can achieve anything. At the core is the need to instill in each and every individual in our region the notion that college is their destiny.

First, I want to thank the teachers in my life that shaped my school experience in a positive way. For so many, this is not the case. Without positive learning experiences, one's success with postsecondary education may be more challenging.

I am grateful for my Amherst, Massachusetts nursery school teacher, Roger Garis, who made me love reading through Uncle Wiggly stories.

Mrs. Winkler, my 7th grade Spanish teacher, who fostered my love of learning foreign languages.

I am grateful for the social work faculty at the University of Southern Maine, who taught me how to think critically and apply my learning to community service, especially working with refugee populations.

And to Professor Richard Alfred from the University of Michigan's Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education, who took me under his wing, mentored me and shared his community college leadership expertise with me.

I am so blessed that he is here in the audience today. Thank you Professor Alfred for all of your guidance and support. I know that I am very privileged to have learned from you, the guru of community college leadership.

I'd like to thank the Bristol Community College Board of Trustees for selecting me for this important role and trusting my leadership of this esteemed institution.

I'd like to thank the faculty at Bristol Community College and the other colleges where I have worked. You have helped me better understand what takes place in today's classrooms and you have challenged me, helped me, and made me a better leader.

I would also like to mention the amazing staff at the college who keep the nuts and bolts of the organization moving every day and offer our students the welcoming, encouraging, safe, inclusive, and helpful environment that they deserve.

I would like to thank all of my colleagues at Bristol Community College, for their readiness to share their ideas, take leaps of faith, and innovate. You have given my vision meaningful guidance and direction.

I want to thank the many community partners for welcoming me to the area and for inviting me to be at the table in solving the challenges that we face. Together, we will build a robust culture related to education.

It is so wonderful to be surrounded here today by an amazing legislative delegation, our elected officials, and business leaders who give so much to make our community better. Our school superintendents, leaders and teachers who prepare our young people for college and careers.

The members of our community that I so enjoy working with from the Chambers, Rotary, and the various boards on which I serve. I am incredibly impressed by the caliber of leaders driving our region forward and grateful for the kind sentiments shared during the video.

I am grateful for the first responders in all of our local towns. And today's support from the Fall River Police Department, thank you Chief of Police Albert F. Dupere and the Fall River Fire Department and EMS, thank you Chief John Lynch. How about that gorgeous flag! Also, to the Vietnam Veterans Honor Guard. Thank you for your service.

Thank you, presidents from the community colleges, CONNECT partnership and from the region who have reached out to me and supported me over my first year. You have helped me to learn my job and navigate the complexities and nuances of higher education in Massachusetts.

Thank you to Bristol Community College's president emeriti, Eileen Farley and Jack Sbrega. Your kindness and guidance have been so appreciated. I am grateful for the strong legacy that you have left for me to build upon and respectfully accept the challenge of taking the reins.

Last, but not least, I would like to thank all my friends and family who made the journey to be here today. To my childhood friend Shayne, who always let me know I could do whatever I set my mind to, and to my friends from the Midwest, Ted, Laura and Matt, who bring laughter, joy and perspective to life.

I would like to thank my Mom and Dad, who did not give up on me despite my nickname of "School Angel, Home Devil;" my sisters, Holly and Diana, and their families; to my mother and father-in-law Caroline and Harold Johnson, and my husband Gregg Johnson. Gregg was the first to know of my dream to become a community college president. He has been at my side throughout my career, and he has made endless sacrifices to get me here today. Thank you, Gregg, for making this moment possible.

Although education was not what I studied in college, my professional journey has always been in education.

And it has taken me to many places around the world. I spent a college semester in Mexico, taught and worked in colleges and universities in Japan for seven years, and provided education and training services to Cambodian refugees in Thailand.

I feel so happy to be in this region where I can connect once more with Cambodians and Central Americans, and, where I am learning about the Azoreans, Madeirans, and Cape Verdeans, who like my Irish relatives, made this place home.

My husband and I enjoy attending the festivals and trying new foods. I'm even trying to learn Portuguese.

I now know the difference between Chourico and Linguica, what makes a good queijada (it's the crust!), and the dangers of too much Madeira wine. The jury is still out on whether Lydia's or Holiday Bakery makes the best Portuguese pastries in New Bedford, or whether Marzilli's or Marcucci's makes the best grinders in Fall River. But I know that in Attleboro you can't beat Bliss Dairy, and in Taunton, La Familia is a favorite.

My new position has already taken me to Cape Verde to learn about their higher education system and foster new partnerships there. And this summer my husband and I will take our first trip to the Azores, which will give us the opportunity to learn more about the region of Portugal that we are so connected to in our new community.

We love our new home. In less than one year, my life has become so completely connected to Bristol Community College. Rosa, the manager of my favorite grocery store, is a Bristol student. My realtor, Joanne, is a Bristol alum. As is Jeremy, the owner of my hair salon. My dental hygienist, Colleen, is a Bristol grad, and so are the nurses in my doctor's office.

My bank is filled with Bristol alum. College trustees and foundation board members are alumni, and in Rotary I am surrounded by Bristol graduates who foster goodwill and peace around the world. And finally, so many of my colleagues here are proud alumni who were so inspired by their education that they have dedicated their careers to higher education and are giving back to Bristol Community College students.

While today celebrates my dream of becoming a community college president and my unwavering dedication to our local community needs, I know that I am fortunate to be at Bristol Community College. I know that the fit is right and that I can make a difference.

I chose Bristol because of the dedicated and compassionate faculty and staff; our rich diversity; the comprehensive nature of our mission which serves credit, literacy, and workforce students; four unique locations—that serve 20 cities and towns in the greater regions of Attleboro, Fall River, New Bedford and Taunton—that are accessible to our constituents and reflect the immediate needs of those communities; the support of the community, including elected officials, educators, business and industry; the partnerships the college has with other institutions of higher education; the reputation of the college; and the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of the people in our region as we build a new economy together.

If you ask me, who does our college serve? The answer is clear. Everyone. Every single individual in this region is somehow, some way touched, influenced, inspired or a product of – Bristol Community College.

It is my job, our opportunity and mission to ensure everyone knows and takes advantage of this very special place. With any new leader comes change. But so much more is changing around us.

The winds of change and opportunity are blowing—both literally and figuratively.

When I began my tenure of president of Bristol Community College I knew very clearly what my legacy needed to be: to create a college-going culture in Bristol County.

You see, the high school economy is gone and is not coming back. High school graduates can no longer expect to have successful careers without a college degree. The jobs that are growing at a rapid rate are what we call middle-skill jobs. They do not require the education and training of a four-year degree, but they do require more education and training—the kind you get at Bristol Community College.

Right now, middle-skill jobs account for 46% of Massachusetts' labor market, but only 35% of the state's workers are trained to the middle-skill level. But by 2020, 72% of all jobs in Massachusetts will require more than a high school diploma.

Massachusetts is the most educated state in the nation, with more than 50% of its residents having earned bachelor's degrees. Yet in Bristol County, only 29% of our population has bachelor's degrees and 15% of all adults do not have a high school diploma. Our public high school graduation rates in Bristol County, despite the Herculean efforts of our K-12 educators, range from 66% to 87% in the cities where Bristol Community College has campuses or centers.

If you are Black, Latino, speak a first language other than English, or are a student with a disability, your chances of graduating high school are significantly lower.

In Bristol County, our two largest cities are New Bedford and Fall River. In Fall River, our estimated median household income is \$39,000 and in New Bedford it is \$43,000, while the overall median income in Massachusetts is \$75,000. There is a link between educational level and income, and now, more than ever, is the time to raise the educational attainment and income levels of Bristol County to that of the rest of the Commonwealth.

But we are making progress, and I am proud that Bristol Community College, with the help of our local schools, is providing students who are first in their families to attempt college with successful college experiences. In fact, to illustrate the point, I attended Durfee High School's first-ever college signing day two weeks ago and learned that 70% of their graduating seniors were attending college this September, and that a third of all college-going seniors are headed to Bristol Community College this fall. This is amazing progress.

We live in a place where mills, manufacturing, construction and fishing have provided jobs for decades. A place where many jobs did not require a college degree.

But the mills and factories of yesterday have gone away. Manufacturing has changed, and so has the fishing industry. As our economy shifts and technology plays a major role in all we do, we need to raise the level of education in our region and prepare our community for new jobs that will lead us to greater prosperity.

The future is not bleak. In fact, it is so incredibly exciting. We are facing a tremendous era of transformation in Southeastern Massachusetts: the era of offshore wind.

Massachusetts, as it turns out, is positioned to produce more energy from offshore wind than any other state. Here in the northeast, right off our coastline, are some of the richest wind resources in the world.

With annual average wind speeds of seven meters per second, an ocean shelf off the coast that makes it easy to affix wind turbines to the ocean floor, and the key industrial port of New Bedford, which is the closest of its kind to 25% of all offshore wind reserves—our region is in the right place at the right time.

Our energy potential with offshore wind is 19 times Massachusetts' annual electricity consumption, which allows us to sell offshore wind power way beyond the borders of the Commonwealth.

Major companies such as Johnson & Johnson, Ikea, Bank of America, Biogen, Facebook and Google have committed to powering their operations 100% through renewable energy. Southcoast Health, too, has pledged to use energy from offshore wind.

While offshore wind energy used to be more expensive, the cost to produce wind energy has significantly declined. In fact, the cost has been cut in half in the last two years alone. The technology is better, turbine blades are bigger, underwater cables that bring the energy to land now last more than three decades, and wind projects in other parts of the world have been able to reach new levels in terms of scale. I know this first hand having visited the United Kingdom this year to study the industry in preparation of our own build-out here in southeastern Massachusetts.

I am proud to say that Bristol Community College is at the forefront in helping to build the offshore wind industry in the United States.

In a recent study that was co-authored by the college, we know that offshore wind will create thousands of jobs. The report found that between 140 to 255 operations and maintenance jobs alone will be created and sustained annually throughout the 25-year life of a wind farm.

We also know that it will generate between 675 and 800 million dollars in direct economic output in Massachusetts. And when taking into account the jobs that are directly and indirectly generated, we estimate a total economic impact in the Commonwealth of between 1.4 to 2.1 billion dollars.

More importantly, what are the jobs that will be created from this new industry and how will it impact OUR region? Engineers, wind technicians, environmental scientists, logisticians, project managers, financial specialists, advanced manufacturers, paralegals, hospitality and tourism workers, web developers, graphic designers, marketing specialists, IT and cybersecurity specialists, firefighters, event planners, and more.

These are jobs that require more than a high school education and Bristol Community College is the place that educates and trains for these jobs. These are good paying jobs that enable the hopes and dreams of our graduates and will support them and their families for decades to come.

When we create a college-going culture, where students graduate and assume good jobs, we change lives for the better.

Individuals with college degrees are healthier. This is because college grads are more likely to be employed and have job benefits such as retirement and health insurance. They are also less likely to smoke. By developing a college going culture, Bristol County, which is now ranked as the second unhealthiest county in Massachusetts, could see significant declines in tobacco, alcohol and drug use; improved diet and exercise; as well as better access to health care and safe housing. So it is not surprising that college graduates have a life expectancy that is seven years longer than those who hold a high school diploma or less.

Research shows that college graduates report a greater sense of personal well-being and life satisfaction. They tend to be more engaged in the civic movement, are more likely to vote, and volunteer at a rate 2.3 times higher than those with a high school diploma or less. They participate in community organizations which results in safer neighborhoods.

Higher educational and occupational attainment also leads to greater marriage and family stability. Couples with college degrees are less likely to divorce, because they share intellectual interests, more equally divide household roles, and are less likely to struggle with financial issues.

College graduates are almost five times less likely to be jailed or imprisoned than those who have not graduated from college. College graduates also use about 39% fewer government resources, such as emergency assistance and jails, and contribute hundreds of thousands of dollars more in local, state and federal taxes over their lifetime.

I make this promise today. In the years ahead, we will create a college-going culture here in Bristol County. And we will do it together through hard work, partnerships and collaborations.

The winds are changing. But together, we can align our work and form the community that we want to be.

Moving forward, Bristol Community College will need to do more. We will need to build stronger relationships to further early childhood education so that our babies and children get a healthy start to life and are prepared to learn in school.

We will need more Mr. Garis' and Mrs. Winkler's to inspire our children and we will need to find the resources to support them, because it begins long before they reach college age. Students and their parents should understand the necessity of at least a

community college degree or certificate. And they should know it is not too late for them to attain the same.

We will need to continue our good work in preparing students for careers in STEM. And we must greatly expand our dual enrollment opportunities for students to take college courses while they are still in high school.

We will need to work more closely with our regional vocational high schools and find ways to share resources as we prepare our workforce for high-tech jobs on high-cost equipment.

It is imperative that we work together to prevent students from dropping out of high school.

For those who have dropped out, the 15% of adults in our community, we will need to enroll them in our literacy programs. And we will need to envelope them with support and guidance so that they build the confidence to earn their high school equivalency and continue on to complete their associate degrees.

We will need the help of our local businesses to underwrite these programs and help us educate the workforce so that once they have their basic skills we can train them for sustainable, high-paying jobs.

We will need the help of our local businesses to be champions for higher education and invite us to the workplace so that we can talk about the benefits of college. We will need these same businesses to commit to scholarships or tuition reimbursement for their workers and to allow time off from work in order to complete that college degree.

We will need the help of our organizations, such as our chambers of commerce and local service organizations, to establish college attainment goals for Bristol County and to help us convene the people, the time and the resources necessary to align our work and to convey a unified message.

Today Americans believe that community colleges are the basis of a strong workforce, are worth the money to attend, and prepare people to succeed. In fact, the community college sector is the most positively perceived of any other sector of higher education today. The high-quality, highly respected degree or certificate received from a community college, your community college, Bristol Community College, is going to change the future of our region. Not in 20, 10 or even five years. TODAY. Starting now.

And we will need all of you to be a part of this work.

Kylie and Paul are examples of what a community college can do. So many of our graduates go on to receive excellent jobs or earn a four-year degree or higher.

As student loans skyrocket, community colleges have become more popular with those who planned to attend 4-year schools directly from high school. 1125 Bristol Community College students transferred to 4-year institutions in 2017.

The University of Massachusetts Dartmouth and Bridgewater State University remain the most popular transfer institutions for our students. Of the Bristol Community College students who chose to transfer after completing their education, 66% transferred to 44 different four-year public institutions. 22% percent transferred to 76 four-year private institutions including Brown, Harvard, Cornell and Georgetown. Our students receive \$2 million in scholarships a year from the 4-year institutions where they are transferring.

Our Foundation, through your generous support, provides scholarships that are so important to the success of students, as well. Even scholarships that will help them at their next institution.

When you speak to our students you learn what your donation has done for Bristol Community College students. And kudos to those of you who earmark your donations to your 4-year alma maters specifically for low-income, community college students who are transferring in to complete their 4-year degrees. It so greatly helps our students achieve their academic goals and it significantly moves the needle in our college attainment rates.

My new home is Bristol Community College and there is no place that I would rather be. As president, I pledge to do my very best.

I often think of my great grandparents and what they would have thought of their great granddaughter returning to the community they loved so much.

I owe it to them, to you, to work together to make a difference for your families and friends.

This position will be the culmination of my life work, where my education, experience and passion come together to elevate the work of the college, strengthen the economy, and lift up the community. My legacy will help create personal empowerment, independence, pride, economic growth, a healthier and safer community – how? By creating a college-going culture here in Bristol County.

And yes, we will do it together through hard work, partnerships and collaborations.

The winds are changing. But together, we can align our work and form the community that we want to be.

Thank you.

About Bristol Community College

Bristol Community College is a leading resource for education and workforce development in Southeastern Massachusetts. BCC has locations in Fall River, Attleboro, New Bedford, and Taunton, along with flexible online offerings that lead to an associate degree, a career-ready certificate, or the ability to seamlessly transfer to baccalaureate colleges throughout the state and country.

The College's Center for Workforce and Community Education provides customized training for businesses and the community including healthcare, workforce and sustainable initiatives, and corporate services.

The BCC Foundation, a non-profit organization utilizing community donations and partnerships, supports the College's mission to meet the lifelong educational needs of the community. For more information, visit <http://www.bristolcc.edu/about>.