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HOLYOKE

HCC president chosen for national fellowship

Royal part of inaugural group of Aspen fellows

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Holyoke Community College President Christina Royal has been selected for a prestigious national fellowship.

Administered by the Aspen Institute of Washington, The Aspen New Presidents Fellowship is a new initiative designed to support community college presidents in the early years of their tenure to accelerate transformational change on behalf of students. First-time college presidents are eligible.

Royal, who lives in Northampton, and Luis G. Pedraja of Quinsigamond Community College in Worcester were the only two community college presidents chosen from Massachusetts. They are part of the inaugural group of 25 Aspen fellows selected from more than 100 applicants nationwide.

The leaders, all of whom are in their first five years as a college president, will engage in a seven-month fellowship

beginning in June 2020.

"The Aspen Institute has a reputation for excellence, and I am honored to be selected as part of the inaugural group alongside President Pedraja," said Royal, who started working at HCC in January 2017, after three years as provost and vice president of Academic Affairs at Inver Hills Community College in Minnesota.

"Higher education is experiencing a lot of disruption as the world changes. We are being challenged in greater ways to alter the ways we educate and provide support for students as demographics shift and their needs and preferences change," Royal said.

"It is an exciting opportunity to be in the company of other scholars and community college presidents who want to grow and learn in an intense environment that exposes us to new models of thinking."

The fellows were selected for their commitment to student success and equity, willingness to take risks to improve outcomes, understanding of the importance of community partnerships, and ability to lead change.

"We know more than ever

before about how community colleges can improve outcomes for students, both in and after college," said Josh Wyner, executive director of the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program. "And the urgency for them to do so only increases, especially for students of color and low-income students. These fellows have shown they are fully, urgently committed to excellence and equity, and we look forward to working alongside them."

Nearly 80% of community college presidents nationwide plan to retire in the next decade. Through this fellowship and its other leadership programs, Aspen is committed to helping to replace those exiting the presidency with a capable and highly diverse talent pool.

According to the American Council on Education, only 36% of community college presidents are female, and 20% are people of color. The incoming class of Aspen fellows is 48% female, and 40% persons of color. Their institutions span 15 states and vary widely, from a rural college with fewer than 2,000 students to a statewide system that educates more than 150,000.