

EDUCATION

LOCAL COLLEGES IN THE NEWS

'Together HCC' Campaign Earns National Recognition

HOLYOKE, MA – Holyoke Community College has been named a finalist for a national Bellwether Award in recognition of its “Together HCC” fundraising and social media campaign.

HCC was one of 10 U.S. colleges selected as a finalist by the Bellwether College Consortium in its Workforce Development category, which identifies strategic alliances that promote community and economic development. Bellwether finalists represent leading community colleges whose programs and practices are considered outstanding and innovative.

The college launched “Together HCC: A Campaign for Caring” at the end of March in direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The campaign sought to raise money for students facing economic hardships and collect stories to motivate and inspire them during a period of extreme disruption.

“We realized pretty quickly that our students needed extra financial help and support to get through this stressful and challenging time,” said

Amanda Sbriscia, HCC vice president of Institutional Advancement,

whose office spearheaded the campaign. “Community colleges serve some of the most vulnerable populations, and COVID-19 has amplified existing inequities in society and highlighted critical needs the Together HCC campaign was created to help address. It’s very satisfying and encouraging to see the campaign celebrated as a national model.”

The Bellwether College Consortium is a group charged with addressing the critical issues facing community colleges. The consortium honors community colleges with awards in three categories: instructional programs and services; planning, governance and finance; and workforce development. The Bellwether Awards are widely regarded as one of the nation’s most competitive and prestigious recognitions for community colleges.

HOLYOKE
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

HCC was the only community college in Massachusetts selected as a 2021

Bellwether finalist.

“The Bellwether College Consortium prides itself on identifying and celebrating replicable, scalable and results-based programs and models and disseminating these highly lauded examples of institutional success to peer institutions,” said Rose Martinez, director of the Bellwether College Consortium, based in San Antonio, Texas.

After COVID-19 broke, HCC saw a dramatic rise in the number of applications to its Student Emergency Fund. In three months, the Together HCC campaign raised about \$40,000 from nearly 200 private donors for the emergency fund, which also received a lift of \$75,000 in COVID-19 relief funds from the Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts.

Since March, the HCC Foundation has distributed almost \$90,000 from the emergency fund to 130 stu-

dents.

For another key component of the campaign, HCC solicited uplifting anecdotes and images from alumni, faculty, staff, students, family members and friends that were shared on HCC’s social media channels using the hashtag #TogetherHCC.

“Together HCC wasn’t just about providing financial support,” Sbriscia said. “It was also about providing moral support and reminding students and other members of the college community that we are all in this together.”

Finalists for Bellwether Awards are invited to join the consortium and take part in consortium workshops, events and other activities. Award finalists will undergo a rigorous second and final round of review before the winners are announced at the virtual 2021 Community College Futures Assembly in January.

For more information, please visit the Community College Futures Assembly website, www.bellwethercollegeconsortium.com or email rmartinez1702@alamo.edu ■