Why Pima Matters

(male announcer) Welcome to *Pima Community College Perspectives*, a look on how education enriches our community. And now, here’s your host, Ms. Trasoff.

(Nina Trasoff) Thank you. And thank you so much for joining us for the first edition of *Pima Community College Perspectives*. I am Nina Trasoff, and it’s my honor and pleasure to be hosting this program along with Chancellor Roy Flores and Vice Chancellor Raul Ramirez. And over the next 13 weeks, we’re going to be looking at Pima and its role in the community. And we’ll be joining you—rather, we hope you’ll be joining us, every Monday at 6 pm and Sunday morning for a replay at 11 o’clock in the morning.

And it is important that the community has a better understanding of Pima Community College. We know aspects, each of us, but we may not understand the full program and—and the vast outreach Pima has in our community. Dr. Flores, h—what do you see as Pima’s role in the Tucson community?

(Roy Flores) In a word, Pima’s role is to provide learning experiences for every member of the community without exception. I mean those that are old enough to read, quite honestly. And to flesh it all out is going to take a full 13 weeks, but let me just start by saying that in the last five years, over 350,000 students—different students have enrolled at Pima Community College. And since its founding, since our founding 40 years ago, three-quarters of a million people, different people, have attended Pima Community College.

There are, rare is a family that does not have a direct experience with the College. And this experience takes many forms. There are people coming to us, uh, for a second chance. Next week, we’ll be talking with a young veteran who’s coming to us for the first time to put his life together and, and—and move forward after providing wonderful service to the community. Um, we also have folks who already have doctorates. We probably enroll more people with doctorate degrees than NAU has in their graduate program. And that’s because they have, uh, found that Pima offers learning experiences for them as well. So we try to cover everything. And I think we do a good job, and over the next 13 weeks, we’re going to get specific.

(Trasoff) Well, I am one of those people. I have taken classes at Pima, as has one of my sons, so I understand firsthand the importance of—of what Pima does in this community. And Dr. Ramirez, Pima’s mission is, "To Develop the Community Through Learning." But how does an educational institution, or better phrased, how does Pima Community College make our community better?

(Raul Ramirez) The, um, College, because of its wide range of people that it serves, um, also connects with a lot of the, uh, business and economic development that’s going on in the
Tucson area, and the societal development as well. And so, what we do is we make sure that those programs fit what is needed in the community. More than any other institution in the country, we seek to find out what the community needs, and we meet those needs. Rather than being, um, what some people would say the “ivory tower”, coming up with programs that may be, uh, important programs, may be very good programs, but don’t necessarily have a direct impact on the community that it’s serving.

(Trasoff) That’s such a wonderful point, because I know that-- and we’ll be talking with the Tucson Mutual Economic Opportunities in a few weeks-- that you will really gear a program in order to attract a particular employer by making sure we have the right-skilled employees available.

(Dr. Flores) Exactly. And we also, uh, have contracts with, uh, hundreds of employers to improve their workforce now. So it’s not just new employers coming, locating here, helping us compete with other regions, but also making our employers more prosperous, so that the economy, the local economy, will be more prosperous.

(Ms. Trasoff) And small businesses, the, the generation of about 85% of our jobs, and certainly in this recession, we need those jobs, and we need those jobs here in Tucson. Um, how, given again, the economic times that we’re in, does a degree from Pima help? Does, does education help somebody have a better chance of weathering a recession such as this?

(Dr. Ramirez) A much greater chance. Um, obviously the recession hits everybody, and it’s leveling the playing field as much as any catastrophe could do. So, it’s not, doesn’t mean that an educated person is guaranteed a job. What it’s saying is an educated person will have a better chance of getting a job, and not only getting a job, but a job that is much more meaningful, uh, pays better, um, has long-term, uh, abilities or capabilities to stay in that job. So consequently, many of the students that we get are those that are finding that the recession is causing their particular business or their particular aspect of life to change.

For instance, financial, fiscal, uh, people that work for banks, uh, mortgage companies, and so on and so forth, that are finding their, um, uh, institutions waning in this recession, coming back to learn new skills, um, not only, uh, learning skills, not only business skills, but skills that will help them in the long term to learn better how they’re going to do, that—that job from now on. As technology changes, they have to change. They have to, uh, be prepared to, um, evolve with, with, with the, uh, with the various things that are happening in society, recession being one of them. So, that’s the, one of the important aspects of, of Pima.

Like Dr. Flores says, we have doctoral students that are coming back. Why? Because they’re looking for a new change in life; they’re looking for opportunities; they’re looking to start small businesses; they’re looking to, uh, to see what else there is out there than what they’ve been doing for the last 20 or 30 years.

(Ms. Trasoff) Sometimes it’s just enrichment. Dr. Flores?

(Dr. Flores) I—I think the question is, is a fair question, and, and it’s really a question that gets at the heart of the matter. Uh, and I’d like to rephrase it this way: “Does education matter?”
And education, I believe, matters personally, because the, the—the more knowledge you have, uh, the more enriched your life is going to be, other things not being equal. But, does education, more education matter, uh, in, in order to make a living, or will it improve your chances of, uh, of being successful and competing in an economy? And I think the resounding answer is yes.

I—I think if you ask yourself, “Well, would the contrary be better? Would it be better not to have any education?” And I think every sentient being would say, “No, of course not.” The question becomes, “Is education beyond high school important?” We at Pima Community College, and I think most of society, would say, “Yes, it is,” for the reasons that Dr. Ramirez has, uh, has spelled out. We know that if there is a recession or a depression, people will be unemployed, and this will be PhDs along with folks who are high school dropouts. But the economy cycles, and over time, it will become abundantly clear that, that over a lifetime, people with more education are more likely to make more money and be—uh, be employed longer

(Ms. Trasoff) Statistics from 2009 demonstrate that just in that micro-section of time that the unemployment rate for high school graduates was 9.7%, for those with an associate’s degree, it was only 6.8, and for those with the bachelor’s, it was 5.2. So there’s a tremendous differential in there. What is the role Pima plays in the continuum of education? Why do people choose, for those who are really looking to get their first solid education, why do they choose to come to Pima as their choice?

(Dr. Flores) Well, well many reasons. One, uh, increasingly, for those that want to pursue a bachelor’s degree, I think, families are finding it uh, uh, efficacious to send their children to Pima Community College for the first two years and then transfer to various universities, including our, our good partner, the University of Arizona, simply because of financial constraints. So that—that’s going to be one reason. But there are many other reasons why they choose Pima. Um, our classes are smaller; we have more interaction between students and faculty than the larger universities do. And some are married and have children, and they live here in Tucson, and we’re available, and we’re a good bargain for them.

(Ms. Trasoff) I also found it interesting that, there was a statement made that an educated populous is a healthy populous. How does education, is there, can you figure out why it is? Is it just that people are better educated, therefore, they’re going to take better care of themselves or know better how to do that?

(Dr. Flores) Well, it—uh, [chuckles] I was thinking, maybe it’d be wonderful if, once you got an associate degree, you never have a craving for a Snickers bar.

(Ms. Trasoff) [laughing] That’s not the case.

(Dr. Flores) Not the case. Maybe Dr. Ramirez has the answer to this one.

(Dr. Ramirez) It—I, I think it’s a little bit of both. I think it’s because we have the, uh, more knowledge, and, uh, so we can take better care of ourselves, but more importantly, we have confidence in ourselves to look for the proper healthcare, the proper health, uh, lifestyle, um, nutrition, um, and those kinds of things. And also, benefits come with a job many times. And so
if you have a better education, you might have a job that has benefits that helps you provide healthcare. If you don’t have a job, even though you have some safety nets, they’re not as good as your own private insurance or your own personal, uh, care physician that you can have trust, have confidence in, work with, talk to, those kinds of things. So I think education fits in, um, in a multitude of ways with health. But it’s the fact that you can, you now have the ability to dialogue with, with the physician and with healthcare institutions and read books that help you improve your lifestyle.

(Ms. Trasoff) And I—I think that’s such a wonderful point. Because confidence comes with education, uh, or it can; it can just be the deciding factor. As you learn more, you’re willing to speak more on your own behalf and others. But we’re—we’re in challenging times. We talked about the recession; everybody talks about the recession. How is Pima doing with that in terms of the challenges for fundraising, because I can’t believe that tuition comes close to paying the actual cost of the education.

(Dr. Flores) No, it doesn’t. The, uh, it costs about $6500 per student, um, at Pima Community College, and we’re one of the lower-cost structures in, in the state for all community colleges, and certainly, much lower than, than universities. Um, but tuition is about $100 per year, so that’s, there’s a huge gap. We also have to keep in mind that, that the, uh, state is providing less and less. We’re down to 6%. When I got here a few years ago, the state was providing 16% of our operating revenue. That’s 6% and headed south, and if they have a, as I understand, another special session coming in the fall for more, more, uh, more budget cuts, it’s going to go down to around 4% before too long. So, uh, finances are always a struggle for us. They are now, anyway.

(Ms. Trasoff) What have you done to go from 16 to 6%? And there’s sometimes a perception that administrations are bloated, but I—I don’t believe that’s the case at Pima.

(Dr. Flores) No, we’ve, uh, eliminated 14% of the administrative positions; we have, uh, we have campuses that only have one, one Dean, uh, and very few administrators. And I’m concerned that we have enough oversight, enough, enough administrators to pro—to, to provide proper oversight for the resources that we do have.

(Ms. Trasoff) Okay, we’re going to take a break for a few minutes, and then we’re going to come back and talk more about PCC Perspectives with Doctors Flores and Ramirez, and I hope you’ll stay with us.

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(male speaker) For more than 40 years, Pima Community College has helped prepare the citizens of Tucson and Pima County for good jobs and better lives for themselves and their families. We don’t do it alone. We appreciate your ongoing investment in education, especially during these extraordinarily tough times. Your tax dollars, combined with student tuition, make it possible for thousands of Southern Arizonans to get a jump start before transferring to a university, to get the training they need to stay competitive at work, and to prepare for the jobs of tomorrow.
Many of our students are seeking to restart their careers after losing their jobs, and some, their homes, during the recession. All of our students know, as you do, that the more you learn, the more you earn. We know that today’s students are often juggling work and family, as well as school. That’s why Pima offers classes at night and on weekends at six campuses, more than 180 other locations, and over the Internet. Our programs deliver education how you want it and give you the opportunity to achieve your goals at your pace.

Today’s Pima Community College students will be tomorrow’s firefighters, nurses, police, teachers, and small business owners, the backbone of a safe, healthy, prosperous Tucson and Pima County. Thank you for your support as we continue to help you and your family build a better tomorrow. For more information, contact us at 206-4500, or visit us on the Web, at pima.edu. Pima Community College, Developing our Community Through Learning.

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(Ms. Trasoff) Welcome back, I’m Nina Trasoff, and this is Pima Community College Perspectives. I’m talking with Chancellor Roy Flores and Vice Chancellor Raul Ramirez about why Pima matters and the important role Pima Community College plays, the multi-faceted role that PCC plays in our community. And Dr. Ramirez, you mentioned, we had talked earlier about the, the many roles of Pima, one of which is as a stepping stone for students coming from high school before they enter the university. Talk a little bit more about that, please.

(Dr. Ramirez) Sure. Um, many families and many students don’t have the ability to go to a major university for various reasons. Either the, for financial reasons, there—they can’t afford it, they don’t have the ability to get, um, the, uh, scholarships that are available, um, and for other various reasons, as Dr. Flores pointed out earlier. Um, geographic reasons; um, in this day and age, um, traveling does cost, even if it’s just inter-city travel. So, uh, the college, community college system in this country was based in the fact that we would have, uh, opportunities for education, higher education, post-secondary education, as close to the community as possible. Pima does that in a very, very, very good way, uh, by providing six campuses, many, uh, uh, learning centers, and so on and so forth, that are geographically located throughout the, uh, county. So, for these reasons, people choose to go, students choose to go to community colleges.

Now, the stepping stone comes where we have to be able to prepare those students to go on to a university and to do well at a university. So we have to have a curriculum that is based on university, to—to take the students properly into the university. Um, the, uh, the, uh, proper amount of science, proper amount of, uh, social studies, proper amount of, uh, languages, uh, mathematics, and all of those things, built into this transfer, um, um, curriculum. The, um, without the stepping stone, very, very few students would have the opportunity to get the post-secondary education that is needed today.

Again, as Dr. Flores pointed out, you can’t, you can’t survive in this society today with a high school degree. There is no company store or company, or, uh, community business that people go to work for, like, uh, my father did with, uh, uh, the places, you know, the lumberyards and so on and so forth, the textile mills and those places, um, that were available that everybody went
to work for and got a decent wage, and those kinds of things, and were able to raise a family. You can’t do that with a high school education now. You need that stepping stone to post-secondary education. Now, we do have, what we call, um, uh, programs that lead to direct employment, like nursing, and so on and so forth. But that doesn’t mean that they stop there. They can go on and get their Bachelor's degree in Nursing and become, um, Unit Nurses and administrators and those kinds of things. So there’s, there’s a stepping, it’s, to me, it’s more than a stepping stone. It’s more like a step-ladder, uh, rather than a stepping stone, because it’s not just one step these students are going to take at the post-secondary, it’s several steps.

The other thing, I think, that makes this stepping stone so important is that, that we know that educated families pass that tradition on to their, to their children. So we want, we want to create a tradition in those individuals that have never had that opportunity before. So that’s what makes that stepping stone, or step-ladder, so important.

(Ms. Trasoff) I like the concept of the step-ladder. And you said it earlier, about educating breeding, education breeding confidence, in relation to healthcare, at that point, but it also, what Pima does, is help give students who may have been challenged in high school or needed to find their learning style or maturity, gives them the confidence for them to go on for the bachelor’s degree.

(Dr. Ramirez) Absolutely.

(Ms. Trasoff) And, Dr. Flores, we have international challenges that are talked about all the time, about whether we have an adequately educated workforce to compete on an international level. Um, what is—it seems this is a crucial, crucial time for education in Arizona, and Pima’s role in that.

(Dr. Flores) It’s a crucial time for education, uh, in this country, actually. Uh—if, several levels. With respect to—to, um, higher education, here’s what we’re finding. We’re finding that the United States of America is no longer the most educated country. We—we find that we’re about 15th or 16th, as I recall now, in terms of the proportion of the population with bachelor’s degrees. More troubling than that, we find that—that the generation, that my generation, uh, has a greater proportion of bachelor’s degrees than the generation that’s entering the workforce, the 25-30, uh, 34-year olds, meaning that we’re going backwards. The American dream is, is—is, uh, is not being fulfilled for the next generation. In this country, we’ve always said that the next generation will be better educated, will have a better life than the previous generation. Well, that’s not happening now; we’re at a standstill, uh, going backwards, indeed.

Now contrast that with, with other countries. Let’s take Korea, for example. Korea, the, the young, young part of the workforce, younger part of the workforce, those that are age 25-34 years old—years of age, about 34% of them have bachelor’s degrees, and only about, uh, 9% of the people my age, that—the other, the other part of the spectrum. So that in one generation, they have, they have increased the number of folks with bachelor’s degrees from 9% to 34%. That’s, that’s a four-, easily an enormous, an enormous increase— you know, just simply do the math— almost a five-fold increase. And in our case, we’re going, we’re going in the opposite direction.
So we do have some serious challenges. And I think that— and of course, Arizona is behind the nation. I’ve been given national statistics, and Arizona lags even, even beyond that. So we feel, we at Pima feel that we have an important role to play to make sure that we have more bachelor’s degrees here in Arizona. In Arizona, we require, to be average in the nation, 68,000 more bachelor’s degrees, right now, today. That’s, that’s an enormous challenge. We only have three universities. How do we generate 68,000 more bachelor’s degrees? Well, we think that Pima has a role to play in helping people transfer, not only to our fine universities, but to other universities around the nation.

(Ms. Trasoff) What are the biggest challenges Pima does face now?

(Dr. Flores) Well, in terms of, um, one of the enormous challenges we face is that many of our students, many of the people coming to us, are not prepared for college. Eighty percent are lacking, uh, the skills necessary to go straight into a college math course. And about 30% require some, some developmental reading. And, you know, we, as a nation, have to fix that. We—we can’t, uh, we can’t ignore that. I think that’s the nation’s Achilles’ heel.

(Ms. Trasoff) There are so many challenges that are being confronted, uh, by Pima, that you’re really trying to step up, but the economy has to be hitting you pretty hard, as well.

(Dr. Flores) Yes, it is. You know, we talked a little bit about the fiscal challenges, uh, we have. Uh, those are hitting us very hard as an institution, and we’re looking for ways around that, or to offset those cuts. Uh, Dr. Ramirez is spearheading our effort to increase the number of grants that, that we’re receiving. We have, by way of example, more Title V grants than any other college or university in the nation, and we’ve been successful in doing that. We’re not going to raise much money from the local community because of the recession, so we’re looking for these methods. And I’d like for, uh, for Dr. Ramirez to comment on that.

(Dr. Ramirez) Yes, absolutely. The, um, we know that the state is not going to provide us more money; we know that the local community is pretty much tapped out. Uh, tuition fees are probably at the maximum, uh, and we can’t, you know, there’s a point of diminishing returns after you’ve raised those tuitions to a certain point. So there’s, there’s only one other source of revenue, and that’s either— it’s external funds— either through the federal government, through foundations, through grantors of all kinds. We’ve been concentrating on both ends, but in my area, we’ve been concentrating on the federal grants, the U.S. Department of Education, um, National Science Foundation, U.S. Department of Labor, um, and, uh, HUD., and, and those areas.

Um, the good news is that they, they are letting out monies through the, um, uh, efforts of the, uh, current administration. In getting the stimulus going, they—the money is coming out. Um, the—the not-so-good news is that the competition is very, very hard, very stiff, uh, and we have to compete with all of the other communities in the United States, uh, that are pretty much in the same boat we’re in. But we’ve been extremely lucky. We have a very dedicated staff, a dedicated faculty, that understand that this is one of the, uh, only sources of revenue that’s left to us in the immediate future. And so we’ve been extremely successful in the past, uh, year.
We’ve gotten pretty close to $5 million in federal grants since January, um, to help students, to help faculty, to build, uh, um, a, um, infrastructure.

Uh, we have a wonderful program, Title V, that we’ve worked with at several of the campuses; one of them’s at the Downtown Campus. We’re going to have a grand opening, uh, sometime in October, and—and showcase the, uh, they’ve taken a model where they can be very flexible in their learning environment, and the faculty have an ability to really change their learning environment pretty instantaneously so that they can meet the needs of the students’ learning styles.

(Ms. Trasoff) And that’s such an important point, that flexibility, on so many different levels.

(Dr. Ramirez) Absolutely.

(Ms. Trasoff) Because different children learn in different ways, and too often, it’s become cookie-cutter and test-oriented, as opposed to learning, really—really finding the way a child learns, so that he or she can succeed.

Well, I appreciate the conversation; this has been interesting. And over the next several weeks, we have some very interesting topics. We’re going to be talking about economic development in much greater detail as it relates to Pima Community College, and the Governing Board, because people want to know how these dollars are being spent. Are they being spent wisely, and is there good oversight? And we’ll have two members of the Governing Board who will be coming on to talk with us. We’ll also be talking about nursing programs. And veterans is the topic for next week’s program here on Pima Community College Perspectives, right here on The Jolt!, 1330 AM, every Monday evening at 6 pm and Sunday mornings at 11. I do hope you’ll continue to join us.

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