Transcript
Pima Community College Perspectives
“How PCC and the University of Arizona benefit the community”
Guests: Dr. Roy Flores, Chancellor, Pima Community College
Dr. Robert Shelton, President, University of Arizona

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

(Nina Trasoff) Hello, and welcome to Pima Community College Perspectives. I am Nina Trasoff, and it’s my pleasure to bring you what I think is going to be an extraordinary show today, because along with Dr. Roy Flores, who for the past—has been, for the past eight years and will hopefully long continue to be Chancellor of Pima Community College, we have with us as a special guest, Dr. Robert Shelton, who is the President at the University of Arizona. And oh my gosh, the two groups, higher education, talking to each other! And in fact, what we’re going to be talking about is the fact that you two work together so closely, and the two institutions are partnering in such extraordinary ways to benefit the students in Pima County. It’s quite extraordinary. So, how did this all begin?

(Dr. Flores) Well, it actually precedes us. The College and the University had good relationships, and that enabled us to build on it. We actually never stop talking with each other, so, uh, I’ll turn it over to Robert to—to begin description of some of the things we’re doing together. There’s quite a, quite a bit, actually.

(Dr. Shelton) Now, I want to take this opportunity to give Roy full credit, because he was the veteran when I arrived in July ’06. And even before I came here, he reached out to me in the spring after my appointment had been announced and said, “Look, here are some of the collaborations that have historically been productive between Pima and the U of A. Uh, let’s see how we can build on those; let’s see how we can move forward.” And, and with his guidance and his experience, we’ve done just that.

Uh, I guess the obvious one is, uh, the U of A, we benefit tremendously from transfer students that come from Pima; about 1200 a year. We’re trying to figure out how to make that 2,000 and then 3,000 a year. But we get a lot of transfer students. Uh, we’ve implemented, uh, joint appointments; we’ve implemented advisors on each other’s campus so students don’t have to go off their home campus to find out, uh, how they transfer, how classes can be taken, uh, back and forth. Maybe isn’t as well known, uh, huge numbers of the University of Arizona students take classes at Pima. Because either we don’t offer them, they can get them at times that are convenient for them, because Pima’s very flexible that way. Uh, so our graduation and retention rates would, uh, take a real hit if we didn’t have Pima here, right next-door to us.

(Ms. Trasoff) But you’ve done some very specific things in the last four or five years with—with the articulation and—and the making sure that the coursework at Pima is accepted easily by the U of A and other state four-year universities.
(Dr. Shelton) Yeah—yeah, that’s exactly right. Um, in particular, there’s one class that is sort of preparing students to transfer, giving them advice to ensure that they take those classes that do, uh, transfer over to the U of A, they don’t lose time. And just this last year, uh, the University of Arizona, with it’s, uh, agreement with Apple, has started to entice more students into that with, uh, MacBooks, and, uh, iPads, uh, as part of the, uh, the enticement. So we’re trying to demonstrate that students at Pima that want to transfer to the U of A, we feel, from the very beginning, are U of A students.

(Ms. Trasoff) And that’s a, that’s a change in mindset, because, a—at least, I mean, I’ve been in this town for 30-some odd years now, and it used to be that Pima was over here, and Pima is where students went who weren’t necessarily looking to go on; they just wanted to get some training. And it’s so, it’s become so much more sophisticated, and these partnerships have to make a difference in that.

(Dr. Flores) Right, uh, I think they do, almost at every level. Robert and I get together and we talk about forming partnerships like sharing faculty, joint appointments, uh, on a regular basis. We’ve had a, one of our faculty work half-time at the University in -in counseling; uh, we’ve had one of our counselors at the University has a recruiter at—at the College, and so on. But—but beyond that, there’s so many challenges that, if we don’t work together, um, there’s no way we can begin to meet the demand.

And we can’t, also, not forget what the University’s doing with University of Arizona South. And that, that also improves our ability to collaborate around very specific programs like in Business and Education and this kind of thing. But the reality is that we need many more bachelor’s degrees, and we know that we’re not going to have— we’re assuming that the Legislature’s not going to create a regional, you know, another regional university here, so it falls on us to see what we can do.

(Dr. Shelton) Yeah, let me pick up on Roy’s comment about UA South, because this is another example where the University has taken a page out of Pima’s book. Pima is very dedicated to serving all of the folks in, in Pima County, and they’ve done that in many ways, one of which is have multiple sites and locations to make it convenient for people to get to those classes. Oftentimes they’re working full-time, and you have to go to the students. Well, we’re learning more about how to do that.

In fact, at Pima East, we have a, a joint program there with UA South where students can go through there and get a UA degree without ever having to come on the Main Campus. Now, we welcome them on the Main Campus, but they don’t have to, so it’s a convenience factor. There are select degrees, just as Roy mentioned; we don’t offer the full array, but we try to offer those degrees that are relevant to the people in that section. And in the very short time ahead, we’ll be opening up similar kinds of joint projects at Desert Vista and the West Campus. So again, we’re taking a page out of Pima. We’re trying to learn from them and see how we can reach out and be more effective in the community.

(Ms. Trasoff) And it’s the community that benefits from this. Because both of you are economic drivers for this community. Roy, you were talking about the fact that we don’t have enough bachelor’s degrees.

(Dr. Flores) Precisely.
(Ms. Trasoff) If we’re going to attract the kinds of business that we want and need for the jobs that we want and need in this community, you two, your organizations, institutions, play an incredibly important role.

(Dr. Flores) We do at several levels. Um, we’re also a—a big employer, so we have an immediate economic impact. But the—the handoff, the—the transfer part is very important. Beyond that, let’s not forget the University is world-class and cutting-edge in many of the sciences, in biosciences, and these kinds of things, so we’re trying to grow those sectors. Now, for every, for every scientist, you’re going to have to have technicians to support that scientist, an—and I see more collaboration at that level. Uh, I’ve seen data before, and I’m not sure how accurate it is, but for every, say, for every, every scientist in the biotech area—arena or area, you’re going to need at least four technicians to support that individual’s work, and I think that’s where a partnership would be beneficial for everybody.

(Dr. Shelton) And the recent jobs report, just out yesterday, today, uh, indicates that there are growing jobs in the healthcare and the biomedical sectors. So the more we can prepare students for those, whether they are M.Ds or PharmDs, or bachelor’s degrees, that—that are handling the real critical technical work, the better off we are. This is something I hope people around the state understand, that education at the community college level, at the university level, at the graduate and professional level, really is essential for the future of this state. We have to invest in it, because otherwise, as you just said, Nina, employers aren’t going to come here if they can’t find the trained workforce. Trained at all levels, an A.A. degree, B.A. degree, and on up.

(Ms. Trasoff) Also, all peoples. And you’re a land-grand institution. And that speaks volumes for your approach to bring—making education available for everybody. Pima does that in a—in a very dramatic way as well. And you’ve talked about UA South and the many campuses at Pima. But I’d like to have you talk about some of the work that you’ve done to recruit people who are not your traditional students, um, for example, the Native American population. Dr. Shelton, I know you’ve made a special effort to make the University theirs.

(Dr. Shelton) Yes, we’ve had, um, great success in the last few years in increasing our ethnic diversity, uh, of students at the University of Arizona in—in all ethnicities. This fall, for example, we had a record number of Native American students, uh, join the University, a record number of Hispanic students. Uh, the final numbers aren’t in yet, but it’s going to be very close to about 37% of our freshman class comes from ethnic minorities, although “minority” takes on a whole new meaning as we see the demographics of the state changing. I think a lot of that is people understanding that they can afford an education at the U of A, even as our tuition goes up.

Uh, we just pumped out $120 million in financial aid just this last week when classes started. We have the Arizona Assurance program. That has grown; it’s now in its third year. In its first year, we had about 590 freshmen take advantage of it. The second year, last year, we had about 680. And this fall, I’m told, it’ll be over 1100 new students in that program. And so the word is getting out that education is important, and if you work hard and study hard, you get the grades, we will work with you to make sure you can afford a good education. And in many cases, that is in tandem with Pima. As I said earlier, a lot
of our students take classes at Pima, and that helps them move toward graduation, helps them finish in a four or five-year timeline.

(Ms. Trasoff) And you’re talking about moving towards graduation, and we’re talking about different segments of the population of students. And several weeks ago, Dr. Flores, we talked with, um, a, a student-- who also has a Veteran’s group-- about the many things that Pima is doing to make it easier for—for veterans returning from combat to take advantage of the new G.I. Bill.

Dr. Shelton, we talked—we spoke before the program. You were, you were mentioning the nationwide retention rates and what the U of A is doing to try to assure that vets get their shot at a really good education.

(Dr. Shelton) Yeah. Thanks—thanks for raising this topic, because I think the, um, the program at the U of A is, is nothing short of spectacular and really is a national model. And I can say that, because I don’t get any credit for that; it was the veterans themselves. The one thing smart we did was we went to the veterans and said, “Tell us--” this was a few years ago, “--how should we design this.” We have a Vet Center on campus, we have transitional courses that they take. And the numbers you referred to, nationwide, the first-year retention rate for veterans is about 6%. Single-digit, 6%. That’s appalling. We have found over the last couple of years, when students take these three transitional courses, when the returning vets take these courses, their retention rate is over 90%. Now we’re trying to export that model. Yeah, it’s staggering...

(Ms. Trasoff) That’s just an astounding difference.

(Dr. Shelton) It is! And credit to the veterans, credit to the people who design those courses. We’re trying to export that model nation-wide to see if that kind of dramatic statistic can be replicated across the country. Uh, on October 1st, Tucson will have a visit by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs-of-Staff; this is Admiral Mullen. And, uh, we are going to have an event on campus that afternoon. Pima’s going to be actively involved in it. He’s going to talk about how the whole community needs to engage to support these brave young men and women that are coming back. And what better community than Tucson?

(Ms. Trasoff) Absolutely. Uh, I—I agree, and this is not without historic precedent. Um, we, again, shortly before, uh, coming on-air, we were talking about the impact that returning G.I.s had after World War II, and that they really changed the whole concept of advanced education in this country. Um, this is a topic that I would like us to come back after our break and talk a little bit about this next phase. Go back to the history, because I think that foundation is important for people to understand. And then we need to talk about the democratization of education and what is the future for public education, as these are very scary times. So we’ll be back in just a minute, please just stay with us.

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(announcer) 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. We are talking with Dr. Roy Flores, Chancellor of Pima Community College, and Dr. Robert Shelton, President of the University of Arizona. And just before the break, we were talking about the retention rates at the U of A for returning veterans, which is extraordinary, um, more than ten times the national average. So that is such a hopeful, uh, piece of information for looking at how we can say “thank you” properly to people who have been serving the country. But, Dr. Flores, this is not without historic precedent. Um, after World War II, when G.I.s had the first G.I. Bill, um, it really changed education.

(Dr. Flores) It changed the entire country. Before the G.I. Bill, right after World War II, education was, uh, reserved for a small group of Americans. Not everybody who graduated from high school had any aspirations to go to college. And if you did, many went to private schools, and those that went to public schools often went to either the land-grant institution, like U of A, or a local Normal Schools that taught teachers, prepared teachers. But with, with the G.I. Bill after World War II, that enabled the average person, uh, to get a college education, and they became judges and senators and governors and, uh, university presidents, and, uh, really transformed the country. It, it also planted the seed that, that the college degree is—is important, and it should be available to everyone.

(Ms. Trasoff) And that public education is something that really set America apart, I think, in the world community.

(Dr. Shelton) It truly has. And sadly, I think, it's something that we, as citizens, are forgetting, uh, not just in Arizona, but nationwide. When you look at the transformation that occurs as young people go through college, the way it, not just adds to their paycheck in a general sense, but the way it lifts their horizons, the way it informs them about serving the community, uh, you can see how valuable it is. It, the U of A is a land-grant institution, as Roy mentioned. We are aware, every day, that it's our obligation to serve the people of Arizona. To work on the really critical issues of society today, to inform the decision-makers, to do the research, to educate the students with the mind-set, with the orientation
that they’re supposed to give back to the community they’re in. And I think without the great landgrant institutions in this country, we would see a very, very different America emerge.

(Ms. Trasoff) We’re going to talk in a moment about some of the economic challenges we’re facing for the future, or, almost present future. But before that, if we didn’t have to worry about money, if that weren’t an issue, if you were looking at the education system, what would you do to change it? Because you two, you two, representing your specific organizations, have developed such a strong partnership where you talk, you collaborate, and you assure smooth transitions. But we have silos; we have K-12, and then we have PCC or junior colleges, 2-year colleges, and then we have 4-year colleges. How should the system work? If—if you had a magic wand and just could make it what it should be, what would it be?

(Dr. Flores) Well, uh, this will take a week to talk about. There’s so any aspects to this. I think in part, to change the system, we would have to begin outside of the system and have people really sort out, what is it that we want education to be for us? And how are we going to organize around that? Right now, we have, by way of example, we have K-12, is organized around the idea of small communities selecting their own Board members who will govern a very small school with simple finances and simple challenges. But now, the, the schools are enormous; they require a lot of resources; they—they have to do more than teach reading, writing, and ‘rithmetic. They have to deal with students who are, who are challenged, they come from homes that are, used to say “broken homes.” There’s drugs in the streets, there’s gangs, and all these kinds of things. So it’s—it’s very complicated. I’m not sure that the same governing structure, in that setting, will hold us in good stead. I think we need to look at, at—at that carefully.

And then have the people insist that there be real, genuine connections between the institutions that facilitate what Dr. Shelton and I have talked about. We, for example, do not have a, a community college board. Uh, they have the Arizona Board of Regents, and there’s no, they can’t communicate with the colleges, in a—in a meaningful way, because there’s no, there’s no equivalent organization. So we—we need to really spend a lot of time thinking about this.

(Dr. Shelton) I—in addition to what Roy said, I would add, uh, these thoughts. I think all of us, K-12, community colleges, universities, we need to focus more on, on the outcomes and how we’re doing, in this case, on producing, not just the number of degrees, but the quality. You know, it’s very easy to just count noses, uh, but it has to be high-quality, because that’s what’s going to launch these young people into success in society. Uh, and so if we focus more on outcomes, then you realize, certainly, we do at the U of A, that we are entirely dependent upon K-12 and the community colleges for the readiness, the preparedness of the students that come to us.

Uh, the number of students that come in and, uh, take our math placement tests and don’t qualify for any university-level math is appalling. And so how do we then, through our College of Education, through our College of Science, how do we then work with, uh, the K-12 system, because that’s part of our responsibility as well. When I think about the responsibilities that society justifiably, uh, loads on higher education, both community colleges and—and universities, um, I’m very proud that society
thinks we can do all of that, and I’m staggered by the thought that we—we need to do all of that. So, you mentioned, uh, if—if money were no object, um, [chuckle] does that really exist? I—I would really, uh, focus on turning out more high-quality degrees and then try and take that thought throughout the educational chain from K-12 on up. That would be my driver.

(Ms. Trasoff) So what’s—what’s the obstacle? Is it an antiquated system that needs revamping? But then, we’re dealing with, I don’t want to say “fiefdoms,” in the completely pejorative sense, but it’s just that people are used to having control over this and this and this; do we need to step back and rethink the whole thing?

(Dr. Flores) I—I think there’s a lot of that. There are fiefdoms. There are fiefdoms that, you know, Robert and I will probably confess in private moments, within our own institutions where it’s—it’s hard to get folks to work together. Not impossible, obviously, to get together, but each has a particular, uh, perspective, and it’s difficult to move them all in the same direction. But beyond that, you know, I go back to Pogo: “We met the enemy, and the enemy is us.” Uh, if we—if we don’t insist that our children learn early on, if we don’t participate in their learning, and if we don’t support, uh, local schools and then continue to support higher education, we—we’re, we are not magicians. We work hard; I’m sure that Robert gets up very early, works very hard, as the staff does and so do faculty, but we can’t perform miracles. We simply cannot.

(Ms. Trasoff) And it goes back to the awareness that, just because my kids have graduated doesn’t mean I’m not responsible for helping to pay my property taxes for the next generation. It, and even if it’s just selfish, it is going to impact my life if we have a better-educated populace.

(Dr. Flores) Absolutely.

(Dr. Shelton) This is the, the real large question that society addresses, either consciously or unconsciously, year-in and year-out, and that is, of an educated populace, how much of that should be a societal support, and how much of it should be, uh, supported by the individual? Because when I get an education, that’s a private gain. I certainly benefit. As I said, my horizons are raised, I probably earn more money, I’m just generally having a higher quality of life. I’m speaking in general, now. But, I—there’s also a societal benefit. And we have seen, over the last decade or more, uh, society saying, “No, we don’t want to pay for the societal component of an educated populace, at least, not as much as we used to.” It’s shifted more toward the burden on the individual, and, in the case of, in many cases, their families.

So, are we at the right place? Do we have the right mix of societal versus personal support for education? I—I fear that we’re moving a little too far in that direction when you can see the cost of education. Nevertheless, the cost of non-educating, uh, is even higher. It’s just that there’s a longer term for that to play out. And let’s face it, we, in society here, uh, wherever we are on the political spectrum, want instantaneous results.

(Ms. Trasoff) True. So if we look at this instance where we don’t have the luxury of unlimited funding, how are you, and—and, and that play that you were talking about, Dr. Shelton, between private benefit-
public benefit, who pays? There’s a threat out there that the U of A could take $100 million in cuts in the next year. And Dr. Flores, in previous programs, we’ve talked about the, that Pima has really scaled back its reliance on some of that public funding. But is there not--

(Dr. Flores) Not by choice.

(Ms. Trasoff) Right. But is there a mindset that, I mean, what is going to happen to public education, which really is a foundation of democracy?

(Dr. Flores) I—I think Robert’s got it right, that we have to have this discussion among ourselves as a society. We started with the idea that public education was important, that that came early on. And right now, the College, by way of example, receives only 6% of our, of our revenues from the state. And it—it, at what point, at what point should we go back to the public and say, “Should the state help fund community colleges?” And if the answer is, “No,” let us know, then give us a five-year transition, and then, you know, have to close down a campus or two. But if that’s what society wants, it’s better than bleeding to death. And Robert mentioned early, the idea of ensuring quality. We have to have resources to ensure quality, more and more, because students need more preparation.

(Ms. Trasoff) So, “bleeding to death,” using Dr. Flores’ words, is this bleeding you? Slowly and painfully?

(Dr. Shelton) Yeah, at—at the U of A, we are in the middle of a major transformation where we have eliminated dozens of programs, consolidated dozens of departments. Um, we are making hard choices on how we can go forward, because we have lost $100 million in state support over the last two years. We’ve gone from $440 to $340 million. Those are real dollars. And some of that is made up by tuition increase, but only about a third of it. The rest of it has come through cuts.

I think the real, the real key question here is what kind of education system Arizonans want. And it’s not just in Arizona. It’s around the nation. And it’s not just one side, one political party; it’s across the whole political spectrum. We have people in our legislature that want to support education; we have people that are saying that their goal is to eliminate all public funding for higher education, period. And so how do we balance that? Uh, one quick statistic: last year, our students enrolled for more credit hours per student than ever in the history of the University. How did they do that when we’ve cut all this money out? We did it because our teachers, our instructors, our graduate teaching assistants, are working longer hours, they’re working in more sections, and they’re delivering those courses. So, it’s—it’s a tough challenge.

(Ms. Trasoff) And these are difficult times. And I think the more the public is aware of what is happening and how it impacts them—there’s the "brain drain" at the U of A, and the economic viability of this community, thanks to the U of A and Pima as partners. Um, it’s something that we all need to consider. I think this past half-hour has helped enlighten people. I hope it has. Dr. Shelton, thank you for being our guest on Pima Community College Perspectives.

(Dr. Shelton) Thank you, Nina.
(Ms. Trasoff) Dr. Flores, always a pleasure when you are able to join us. And thank all of you for listening in this evening. Hope you join us for the next edition of *PCC Perspectives*.

[station identification]

(male announcer) K-J-L-L, South Tucson.