(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 thank you so much for joining us for *Pima Community College Perspectives*. I am Nina Trasoff, and it’s my pleasure to be hosting this program for Pima Community College. With me today, as usual, is Rachelle Howell, who is the Assistant Vice Chancellor of Pima Community College. And our topic today is one that’s very close to my heart, um, how PCC’s arts programs benefit the community. And Rachelle, I think it’s so under-- there—there’s so much, people don’t understand that the arts play an essential role in education, on *all* levels, and that they add so much to the student and the community.

(Rachelle Howell) They—they really do, and P—and PCC takes art and its arts program very, very seriously. [clears throat] And, you know, the College is really a fabric of the community in so many ways. And our dedication to arts and arts programs is just another example of how we’re—of how we’re involved. And, of course, you would expect, as a higher educational institution, that we would offer the traditional programs in arts: dance, theater, music, visual arts. But we also have a vibrant digital arts program that offers programs, uh, in film animation, web design, video game production, a lot of other cutting-edge types of disciplines. Uh...

(Trasoff) And these are jobs where kids can earn, young people can earn very, very good livings.

(Howell) They can earn very, very good livings, in particular, in digital arts, when you get out. If you have a Digital Arts degree, and you get out, you can be in really, really high demand really, really quickly. Uh, so, and it—it’s a neat field. But getting back to the traditional, the more traditional programs, dance, music, theater, and visual arts, we have such a—a vibrant array of programs and degrees that are offered in these areas. But beyond the programs, we’re part of the local arts scene and local arts community by offering performance, uh, performance venues at the—at the Center for the Arts complex at West Campus. We have, uh, two theaters and a recital hall that is used by the community year-round, um, and we also have the—the Louis Carlos Bernal Gallery, which is a local, acclaimed art gallery. And those are just a few of the ways that, that we are really actively involved in the local arts community.

(Trasoff) And you also are reaching out into schools; so that you help the younger kids get excited about the arts.

(Howell) We are. We have productions for children every year. Uh, currently, this fall we’ve got *Charlotte’s Web*, and all of our school performances are already sold out.
(Trasoff) Wow.

(Howell) We’re going to have more than 2400 school children attending. And we had sold-out matinees, uh, and performances for last year’s Cinderella. And this is one of the areas that we see really growing. And we’re doing more and more outreach into schools. Um, and the, they’re really responding, the kids; the kids are beginning to look forward to these productions every fall.

(Trasoff) Well, I love that, not just because of the joy that you’re bringing to kids and the educational value, but I think it’s also helping youngsters if, seeing something like this, realize that this is attainable for them. That Pima Community College is part of their community, and as they become comfortable with it in grammar school and middle school, it makes it more part of their future-- a reality that could be achieved.

(Howell) It—it does, and there are a lot of good career futures in—in the arts, in general. Uh, and exposing children to this at a young age just shows all sorts of different career paths that they might not have thought of.

(Trasoff) Well, we have somebody who’s had an interesting career path himself, who is the Chair of Pima’s Performing Arts Department, and that’s Dr. Mark Nelson. Mark, thank you for joining us.

(Dr. Nelson) A pleasure to be here.

(Trasoff) Um, I—I was fascinated looking at your bio that to go from, uh, double-bass to tuba. [laughs] Explain your transition, because you are a musician.

(Dr. Nelson) Funny. That’s true; I am a musician by—by training. Uh, that was an interesting transition, not necessarily of my doing. I started on string bass because they picked the three tallest kids in the class.

(Trasoff) And you are very tall.

(Dr. Nelson) That, that is correct. I’m, if you want to make a comparison, um, the basketball player Michael Jordan is two inches shorter than I am. [chuckles]

(Trasoff) Oh, my. [laughs]

(Dr. Nelson) Anyway, at the transition area, we didn’t have an orchestra in junior high, so the band director put his arm around me and looked—and pointed me towards the tuba and said, “Why don’t you play that instead? It’s the same kind of bass clef instrument playing in similar roles.” I started that and been playing it for 40 years.

(Trasoff) Do—I’ve always wanted to ask this, forgive me, this is off-topic, but, do you feel the vibration of the tuba as you’re playing it?

(Dr. Nelson) You do, actually. And it’s—it’s quite a nice feeling, not only, uh, physical, but just mentally, knowing that you’re performing, playing on an instrument.
(Trasoff) And it's such a foundational sound for an orchestra or a band.

(Dr. Nelson) It certainly is.

(Trasoff) Uh, subtle, but without it, you'd miss it even if you don't notice it.

(Dr. Nelson) That's true.

(Trasoff) Very good. So you are now a professor; you have your PhD. Um, so there are a lot of paths a musician can follow, and I would imagine that holds true for the students who are within the Performing Arts division at, uh, Pima.

(Dr. Nelson) That's absolutely true. There are many paths. In my own field of music, one can go into the performing world and play in an orchestra or be a rock musician or be a part of a community of chamber musicians, um, many paths in that particular direction. Emerging fields in music industry, becoming producers or becoming, uh, part of the business side of music. A lot of fields there. Uh, I think one of the under-represented fields is to become a patent lawyer, so that you are protecting people's copyrights for music. Uh, and that's another path that you can follow. So there—there are many ways. And there are traditional ways of teaching. That's certainly one of the largest we still have is to teach in the arts. Um, and you can go into, uh, history, criticism, theory, and other traditional venues.

(Trasoff) There are so many doors that open. I—I know, um, in these times, when there is so many cuts going on, the first thing people say, it's not athletics, it's, "Oh, cut the arts; it doesn't matter." But arts provide so much, in terms of education; even if it, a—a student never goes on to become a performer or even stays within the music industry.

(Dr. Nelson) That's absolutely true as well. And I think that when one looks at the larger picture, uh, the arts also provide lots of students at a relatively modest cost, uh, opportunities to be part of what defines us as a civilization, which is not just having a job, but also expressing one's self in many different ways.

(Trasoff) That—that's so true. Um, with the various options, um, that you mentioned, it seems that a common thread in all of that is the arts teach, not just the music, the musicality, and the soul enrichment, but also a teamwork, um, a sense of common, uh, of—of, of confidence, a sense of community.

(Dr. Nelson) Yes.

(Trasoff) Is—is that, would you agree with that?

(Dr. Nelson) I—I really do. I think one of the models that has proven to be very successful in life is teamwork. Uh, we often, in our educational system, stress the importance of the individual, yet when an individual works within a team, each person in that team is strengthened. Certainly that's true in ensemble work, such as playing in a band or an orchestra, being in a theater company, working with a dance production; all of these themes are common, which is working together for a common good.
(Trasoff) And then the, the basic benefit, if you want to get down just to academics, for people who just say “academics.” I know on the, on the elementary school level, math scores are, go way up when students are also studying music.

(Dr. Nelson) Also true, and research has proven that. Uh, we certainly like to cite those kinds of statistics as, as how the arts are a part of the fabric of the community. And I do believe that, uh, because of this, the arts are essential, not necessarily extra, in—in terms of how we should be shaping our society.

(Trasoff) And you have students who may not be majors but are able to take theater appreciation and other arts appreciation courses at Pima.

(Dr. Nelson) Yes. We have hundreds of students that go through our program each semester in a variety of situations. Many of these students are looking for self-fulfillment. They’re looking for options to train or become better at what they do. Not necessarily to have a position or a job, but because they need that, they want that, they crave that. And certainly, when you look around Tucson, for example, there are many opportunities for people to be involved in the arts as a lifelong passion; not necessarily making a living at it, but being part of an arts community.

(Trasoff) And you have some true excellence amongst your students. Because I—I have seen many of them and many of their performances, and I know some of your teachers that, you have some very high-quality people there.

(Dr. Nelson) I think that we do have a, like a magnet that draws a lot of very qualified individuals into our programs, uh, both as instructors and in, to some degree, as students as well. And we’re very, very happy with the faculty that we have at this point in time.

(Trasoff) Talk about the, um, the relationship with the community and the performances that you offer. What can I, as a person who lives in Tucson and loves the arts, what kinds of performances can I see out at Pima?

(Dr. Nelson) I think one of the things to keep in mind is that with our Performing Arts complex, the Center for the Arts, we are a performing venue like other venues in town. And because of that, we—we have a number of performances that happen all the time. In dance, we have two major productions, one in the fall and one in the spring. And there are multi-days in which you can see this, uh, including a—a matinee performance for high school students or any other student that cares to come. In the theater, we offer four plays a year, including a major musical. This particular year, we’re going to do Anything Goes by Cole Porter.

(Trasoff) Oh, my. [chuckles]

(Dr. Nelson) And this is the fully-staffed, pit orchestra, scenes, costumes. Uh, it’s gonna be huge. And we have two weeks of performances for each of our theater plays. In the music per—uh, world, we have not only faculty recitals, guest artist recitals, but we have our traditional performing groups every semester: jazz combos, jazz ensemble, concert band, orchestra, two choirs. It—there’s literally
something to do practically every week. In addition to all the things that Pima offers, which is, you know, probably a hundred performances a year, plus, we also have community members that rent the facility to put on their own productions. So the Center for the Arts is a very vibrant arts center.

(Trasoff) [speaking over] It’s a beautiful facility.

(Dr. Nelson) It’s filled practically all the time with somebody performing in there or rehearsing in there.

(Trasoff) The theaters there are just amazing. The acoustics, the, the site, the line of sight; everything about them is so special. Plus, parking’s easy.

(Dr. Nelson) And we’re now celebrating our 20th anniversary this year.

(Trasoff) No! Has it been 20 years?

(Dr. Nelson) It has.

(Trasoff) My goodness. Wow. Why do students choose to study the arts? Are a lot of them really considering a fine arts career, or is it just a next step, and then they’ll go on to the University, possibly in something related in some way?

(Dr. Nelson) I think both. Uh, we have, in each of our programs, students who want to major in that particular discipline, such as theater or dance or music. Uh, and that comprises maybe 30% - 40% of our total student population. And they are committed to wanting to work in the field. We also have a lot of students who are not necessarily using the arts classes that they take as a pathway towards occupation, but as an enrichment in their own lives, because they are interested in doing maybe something else for a living but want to keep the passion of the arts in their lives, uh, for the rest of their life. And that’s one of the things that arts can do. One can perform, literally, your entire life and will be involved in the arts, as a patron, or somebody in backstage, all of your life. And I think that’s one of the things that Pima really stresses, is lifelong arts, not necessarily arts while you’re here for two years.

(Trasoff) And it’s also lifelong education. It’s also one of the things I most admire about Pima, is that you really do make it possible to be learning and growing throughout your life.

(Dr. Nelson) Yes. And there—it amazes me every semester to have classes in which I may have somebody who’s in their 60’s playing clarinet in my concert band and doing a wonderful job, loving every minute of it, next to an 18-year old fresh out of high school sitting next to him. I mean, the—the possibilities just with the interaction, intergenerational, are probably more extant at Pima than, perhaps, at the University.

(Trasoff) And probably more in the arts than anywhere else, as well. Tell me about, a little bit more. Rachelle was talking about the digital, which is such an exciting area within.

(Dr. Nelson) Yes, uh, I know, uh, a lot of the faculty in the digital arts area. Uh, it’s not my field, nor it is part of my department, but they do amazing work with computers. And one of the newest degrees they’ve done is a Gaming degree, which is really part of the fabric of our community now, fabric of the
whole nation, for that matter. And they’ve hired some really top-notch people to create the curriculum so people can learn how to do this and go right into the job field. I mean, direct employment. They do very good work with web design, they do excellent work with other aspects of digital arts, and uh, they win Addy Awards every year, which is one of the, uh, awards that is offered for this particular field. And in many cases, Pima is leading the way.

(Trasoff) Uh, one final question. Are they integrated with the fine arts? I mean, do they—do your dance performances, for example, take advantage of some of the digital opportunities out there? Are they starting to?

(Dr. Nelson) I think the possibilities certainly exist. In one of the areas we actually have students designing posters based upon music that was played in our class piano, and then we hang the posters in the music building.

(Trasoff) Oh, fabulous. Mark, thank you so much for joining us. Um, you really have such a full program out there; it’s exciting to learn about it. Thank you so much. And we’re going to take a break, and we’ll be back in a moment to talk with a professor in Speech Communications at Pima, who’s also very active in the theater in Tucson.

[music]

(male 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.

[music]

(Trasoff) Welcome back to Pima Community College Perspectives, I’m Nina Trasoff, and with me is Rachelle Howard, Howell, excuse me, Rachelle. And we’ve been talking about the fine arts and the important role they play at Pima and how it benefits the community. And we’re joined this seg—uh, this segment by Cynthia Meier. And, uh, Cynthia is a faculty member in Speech Communications, primarily
teaching public speaking skills at Pima. And that is such an important skill for people to learn, no matter what they want to do in life.

(Meier) Absolutely. Uh, one of the things that I enjoy so much about teaching the classes is to see students grow in their confidence and their ability to put their thoughts together and organize their ideas. And that’s a valuable tool, no matter what you do in life, whether it’s in business, or, or the arts, or teaching, or nursing, or anything that you might want to do. Having the ability to speak clearly is important.

(Trasoff) How do you approach that, because it isn’t just, a lot of people have, um, microphone jitters, or they don’t like getting up in front of people, and that’s one element. But before all of that, to be comfortable doing that, you have to have the ability to organize your thoughts. How do you approach that with the students?

(Meier) Well, one of the first things we do in class is just a lot of, um, exercises of getting people up in front of the rest of the class, so that they get comfortable standing on their feet and talking. And so we do a lot of improvisation exercises and—and things just to get people comfortable being in front of—having other people look at them. And then, once they feel a little more confident about just this whole structure of standing and having everyone look at them, then we begin to work on the organization of their thoughts. And we really approach it like you would tell a story.

Every story has a beginning, a middle, and an end, and so does every speech. Every presentation has a beginning, a middle, and an end. And so we approach it from the, the point of view of storytelling; how do you tell a good story and get people’s interest, and then organize what you want to say, and then wrap it up or summarize at the end. So it’s a simple process. But it’s mostly the repetition in class that gets people feeling confident and comfortable with what they’re doing.

(Trasoff) Do you have students who come back later, who have gone on into whatever field, and talked with you about the impact that kind of skill has had on their life?

(Meier) Mostly I see students uh, later, who have gone on to the U of A or have gone on, um, further college, and they talk about how important having those skills has—have been for them to speak in their classes and, and even write papers. You know, having those basic organizational skills helps with their writing, of course, too.

(Trasoff) That’s true. Of course it does.

(Meier) Yeah, yeah.

(Trasoff) Now, we’ve been talking—throughout this program, what we try to do is help the community better understand how Pima impacts our community. And, Rachelle, I would say that there are probably a lot of people out in the business community now who have gained some basic speech communication skills at Pima Community College that have enabled them to really excel in life.
(Howell) I—don’t think you could have said it any better. And, no pun intended, as we’re talking about speech communications. [Others chuckle] But having those kinds of skills in the business world is, is invaluable, are invaluable. And, you know, as we said at the top of the show, Pima is just really part of the fabric of the community, and just more and more examples emerge so regularly as we’re having these conversations. And, and something that doesn’t, on its surface, appear to have a big impact on, on, uh, on individuals, I think, it becomes such a part of how you approach just any sort of interaction. If you’ve had speech communication and had any sort of training and had any sort of this, this, uh, getting up and speaking in front of people, even a little bit of an exposure to that just helps anyone in any profession, as Cynthia said. And I think it’s invaluable.

(Trasoff) And Cynthia, you’re an example also of Pima faculty that is also very active in the community, because you are the co-founder of Rogue Theater, which is a fabulous, fabulous small theater group in Tucson. And if you haven’t checked them out, you really need to. So how does that tie work for you?

(Meier) Well, it’s a, it’s a wonderful, uh, combination of things to, to do. I love teaching. I love being in the classroom, and I love working with students. And I love being in the community and working on plays and—and doing creative projects out in the community. And so I find that the, the two really feed each other, that, um; I learn things from my students that I take to the theater; I learn things in the—working in the theater that I bring back to my students. It’s—it’s got some real, uh, synergy doing both at the same time. Sometimes I get tired, but, [laughs] but for the most part, it’s really an energizing thing to do both.

(Trasoff) And Rogue Theater took part; this is from the community back now into Pima, that you took part in the first Pima, uh, Speaker Series, on Samuel Beckett.

(Meier) Yes. Um, I was asked by Provost Miles to set up a Faculty Lecture Series. And in thinking about what I would do for that presentation, at the time, we were working on a couple of short plays by Samuel Beckett at the Rogue Theater, and so I decided to, uh, bring the research that I was doing for that project into the lecture series. And so it kind of, um, reflected back on, on, uh, the work that I’m doing in the theater at Pima.

(Trasoff) How else do you involve the community? Um, I mean, with the speech communication, we’ve talked about the business implications. You also, it also, obviously, helps train actors or potential actors.

(Meier) Absolutely. It’s interesting. From time to time, I—I get theater students in my public speaking class. And, you know, it’s a very different thing to play a character on stage and to just speak from your heart as yourself. And so, sometimes, uh, actors are just as nervous about speaking as anybody else who’s never been in a, a public situation. And so it’s fun to see actors learn how to speak just as themselves, too, which is, which is an interesting thing.

(Trasoff) No, that, that’s just a good point, because I’ve heard that from many actors; that they’re fine on stage in front of however many people if they are playing a role, but when they have to be themselves and figure out who they are and what they want to say, and then they have to actually look at an audience, as opposed to the, the mythical “fourth wall” that, uh, actors use onstage.
(Meier) Right. And it’s a—it’s a, it’s a really good tool too, because it also helps with scene work, of course. If you actually learn to speak truthfully and look somebody in the eye, it really helps you be a better scene partner as a, as an actor, as—as well. But the, um, one of the things I really emphasize with my students is having genuine eye contact with their audience and really talking to the people that are in the room. Because I think that’s where communication really happens, is when you are genuinely looking at someone and talking to them, rather than just spouting your ideas out into the universe.

(Trasoff) That’s really a valuable point, because I know when I’ve talked with people who get so nervous talking, or are not especially good speakers to large groups, if you can get them to stop spea—because nobody speaks to a group.

(Meier) Right, mm-hmm.

(Trasoff) There’s no “group” you’re speaking to; it’s a series of individuals. And you’re talking about the eye contact for the individual. It changes the whole tone of your voice and the way you communicate, it seems to me.

(Meier) Absolutely! You should come in and—and be a guest speaker at one of my class, Nina. [Trasoff laughing] It would be great! But that’s exactly the sorts of things that we talk about in class.

(Trasoff) And those are lifelong skills. Wow.

(Howell) Mm-hmm, yeah.

(Meier) One of the things that I’ve often said to my students is, it may not feel right now like there’s any position that you’ll have where you’ll be doing public speaking, but someday, somehow, there’s going to be something important, whether it’s advocating for your child, um, at their school, or, or something that you need to speak out about. And so it’s important to have those skills.

(Trasoff) And, would—you couldn’t give up one or the other, could you? You want to, you need to do the community work, and you need to do the teaching. They’re both part of you.

(Meier) I sure love doin’ ‘em both. I really do.

(Trasoff) I think, Rachelle, that’s another point about Pima. Because the role that you play in the community—we talk about the educational impact Pima has on the community, in terms of jobs, in terms of training for specialized fields, but it’s also the richness of your faculty participating in the community and adding to that tapestry, as you put it.

(Howell) That’s true. We all—we all live, and work, and play here, and, uh, take our involvement in the community really seriously. And I think you—you’d find that across the board with all of our faculty and staff, in the, in the different things that they do and—and help bring to—to our community, uh, as residents, as educators, um, as—as part of the fabric.

(Trasoff) And within the community of Pima, I’ve, obviously, there’s interaction between the different departments too, which adds richness across the—the departments there.
(Meier) Oh, absolutely. I, um, share office space with several of the writing faculty members, and so it’s great to share, um, information and ideas with them as well.

(Trasoff) Cross-pollination, fabulous.

(Meier) Yes.

(Trasoff) Cynthia Meier, thank you so much for joining us today. It was a great conversation. And thanks to all of you for joining us today, again, for *Pima Community College Perspectives*. I hope you’ll join us again next week.

[station identification]

(announcer) Local talk at its best.

(male speaker, with drawl) What are you talkin’ about?

(announcer) Local talk at its best.

(male speaker) What are you talking about?

(announcer) Tucson's Jolt, KJIL, South Tucson.