Transcript

Pima Community College Perspectives
The PCC Board of Governors

Guests: Marty Cortez, PCC Board member, District 5
Scott Stewart, PCC Board member, District 4

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

(Trasoff) Hello, and thank you so much for joining us. This is *Pima Community College Perspectives*, and I am Nina Trasoff. I’m delighted you can be with us for what I think is going to be a very interesting conversation, and an important one. It deals with how the Board of Governors works for the community. I have two guests today who are members of the Board of Governors. Now, there are five members on the Board, who represent specific electoral districts within Pima County, and they serve six-year terms. And the Board is responsible for the mission of the College, setting the goals, over—overseeing the finances, and for selecting the administrative head of the District. Right now, we have the five board members, are Vikki Marshall, Dr. Brenda Even, David Longoria, and our two guests, Marty Cortez and Scott Stewart. Uh, Miss Cortez has been a Board member since 1994; boy, that is a long time for doing very difficult community service, and it’s appreciated.

(Cortez) Thank you.

(Trasoff) She’s retired from Northern Arizona University, where she was a senior advisor for statewide academic programs. Miss Cortez was the first female Hispanic school principal in both Nogales and Amphitheater School Districts. She serves on the Board of the U of A’s Hispanic Alumni Association and many other civic boards. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education, a Master of Arts in Elementary Education, a Master of Education in Counseling and Guidance, all from the U of A. Um, Marty, welcome to the show; I’m glad you could join us.

(Marty Cortez) Thank you so much for having me.

(Trasoff) It’s an impressive background. I’ve known you for years, and I didn’t know all of this, so it’s delightful to learn another side of you.

(Cortez) Thank you.

(Trasoff) Our other guest is Scott Stewart, who has been on the Board since 1998. He is an optical engineer and manager at Raytheon Systems Company. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Astronomy, a Bachelor of Science in Physics, a Bachelor of Arts in Russian, and a Master of Science in Optical Sciences, all from the U of A. And he maintains proficiency in technical Russian. Scott, I’m delighted that you could join us.

(Scott Stewart) I’m very glad to be here too, thank you.
(Trasoff) It is a very interesting mix of expertise.

(Stewart) Well, I’m an engineer, and I bring an engineer’s perspective to the Board. And I work in the private sector, if you can call aerospace the “private sector;” it’s closer to the private sector than, than government service. So I, I bring a different perspective to the Board, and, uh, I really enjoy it.

(Trasoff) That’s good. It’s that blending of expertise that I think is important. But, Marty, talk a little bit, um, for, about what it is the Board does. Because it’s intensive work, and it’s a tremendous responsibility.

(Cortez) Well, the Board of Governors determines the mission and sets goals for the College. Uh, we need to offer programs that students need and that the community must have to develop economically, and I would say, culturally and socially, because it’s, a community is made up of a blend of all of those. And an important way for the Board to set the direction of Pima is through approval of the College Plan. And the 2008-2011 College Plan is a detailed road map designed to improve the instruction and services of PCC to students and residents of Pima County. The Board of Governor—Governors approved the College Plan this past May of 2008, so we’re currently working this most recent plan.

At its regular monthly public Board meetings, the Board hears policy proposals from Dr. Flores, our Chancellor. Upon hearing the proposals, the Board may propose modifications, ask for more information, or approve or reject the proposals. So there’s sometimes discussion regarding, uh, each proposal from Dr. Flores and other proposals that are presented through the administrative process.

(Trasoff) So a key part of, of the five of you is to bring your different perspectives, your different expertise, different contacts in the community to bear on making the decisions about how the College serves this community.

(Stewart) Yes. One way that I like to describe what the Board does is, “The Board is the voice of the community to the College.” Uh, it’s not the voice of the College to the community; we have public relations folks who do that. But the Board is expected to bring lots of different perspectives from the community, listen to lots of different segments of the community, and bring their expectations, as well as their needs, uh, to the College, so that priorities can be set in the Plan.

(Trasoff) Over the weeks that we’ve been doing this program and highlighting different Pima programs, it’s always been with the intent of seeing how Pima interacts with the community. The—the impact Pima and its programs has, have on the community itself. One of the things that I find interesting is the technical advisory committees that you have set up. Tell me a little bit about those.

(Cortez) Well, we have various business, uh, representatives serve on our advisory committees to Pima College, and that keeps the College current in what the needs are for the employers, plus what the latest curriculum and certifications, uh, requirements would be, so our students can be up-to-date in their skills, working with the equipment that they’re going to be working on when they get out in the field. So it’s very important that we keep current, and our business community provides that information that’s so vital for our students.
(Trasoff) And the technical side, I would imagine, it’s especially critical.

(Stewart) Yes, and I’m more familiar with the technical side than, than the business side. Um, the Tech Advisory Committee represents, uh, things from Nursing, Aviation, the Radiology programs, local industry, electronics, and several companies work on that. The Aviation side, there’s a couple of major ones like Bombardier and Hamilton, and I’m sure there are others whose, whose names I can’t recall offhand. But they bring a lot to the College, say, for our Aviation Technology program. In addition to the advice, they also donate lots of equipment to help keep the, the start-up costs down for certain—for certain programs.

(Trasoff) I remember, at a conversation several weeks ago with Joe Snell, who heads Tucson Regional Economic Opportunities, one of the economic drivers in this community. He was talking about the importance of a program like Pima, or the programs that Pima offers, because you do have a real agility in creating programs to specifically meet the needs of an employer we’re recruiting to this community or an employer we’re working to retain and expand.

(Stewart) Yes, particularly with respect to flexibility. That we can start something up relatively quickly in response to specific employer’s needs.

(Trasoff) But also with the educational foundation to make sure that you’re meeting the—the excellence and the criteria that you have to, ‘cause we also talked about your certifications, which are impressive.

(Stewart) Yes, uh huh.

(Cortez) Correct. One of the examples that has been changing through the years very rapidly is the automotive indus—industry. And we have a partnership, uh, with, uh, our automotive dealers here at, to work with the programs so that the students can keep up with the latest modifications. Now that we’re going hybrid, and all of those modifications that are happening, those students need to know, uh, how to, to service those kinds of automobiles and to keep their skills, uh, current. And, of course, this is just the beginning, because automobiles will continue to change, and students will have to, as they work in the community, learn the new, the latest technology that comes along after.

(Trasoff) It’s true in almost every field; nursing, certainly, there are constant changes in equipment with which they’re working. I think we—we also spoke about a nursing—the Nursing program and it’s relevance a few weeks ago. I think one of the things that is important to the community, and that I know I’ve found impressive in listening to these conversations, is your students graduate and can walk smack-dab right into a job, because they have the current skills. And they’ve done internships in the community.

(Cortez) That’s true. And there are different levels of skills that the student can set as a goal. We have entry-level, with the very basic beginning, uh, kinds of skills an employer may need in a particular field. Or they can advance their skills with a larger, expanded curriculum and come to the employer, then, with more to offer, right off the bat. So, the student has a variety of choices, and sometimes that initial
smaller number of units in pre-level will propel the students, then, to begin to seriously think about setting their goals higher in—in working hard to attain mastery in their field.

(Trasoff) I think one of the things you teach younger students, or even returning students, is how to learn, and get them excited about learning. Is...

(Stewart) Absolutely.

(Trasoff) Um, it’s—it’s just, it—it’s unique. I—I think, I—I think, what I see is, Pima has a unique role in the spectrum of education. I know you have a strong relationship with the U of A for those who get motivated and want to keep moving on through to a four-year, or post...

(Stewart) [interrupting] Yes, and that’s a large fraction our students. But a larger fraction of our students are those who are, uh, coming for maybe shorter-term educational goals. Uh, maybe making up for the deficiencies that they had in their K-12 education, to see how, how much further help, how much further they could go, uh, or specific training for a technical program. Lots of people are just filling in uh, maybe gaps in their educational program for the U of A. They’re U of A students, but they come over for one or two classes just to, uh, fill in some gaps, uh, at more conveniently scheduled times or things of that variety.

(Cortez) At this particular time, economically, we have a lot of students coming to Pima because they’ve been laid off from their work and need to retrain, and companies sometimes provide their employees that they let go with training monies that they can apply to a new career. So, we have the appeal in the community, we hope, to be able to serve those different needs: the underemployed, the unemployed, single moms, people needing, as Mr. Stewart said, a second chance in getting their G.E.D. Our average age of a Pima College student is 27 years old, so these are people that probably have families and have, um, children, and—and they need to find a method of being able to go to school and upgrade their skills, or if they’re employed, to be able to attend on a different schedule so that their employment can continue.

(Trasoff) Terrific, when we come back we’ll continue the conversation. I want to talk about the transparency and the protection of the public interests in your role as, uh, members of the Board of Governors. We’ll be back in just a moment with more of Pima Community College Perspectives.

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(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. I’m Nina Trasoff with *Pima Community College Perspectives.* My guests today are Marty Cortez and Scott Stewart, who are members of the Governing Board of Pima Community College. I suppose one of the questions that people really might be curious about, because this is an unpaid position with a lot of work and a lot of responsibility, why? Why did you choose to serve?

(Cortez) Well, my background is education, and I think education is the key to improvement, not only of individual lives, but to the community. As you have the more educated population, then you’re going to have less demand and stress on social services; you’re going to have less people in the prisons; you’re going to have more people being involved in the community, volunteering time, and helping the community to grow in a positive, safe, and enjoyable atmosphere. It’s such a win-win situation all the way around.

(Trasoff) And Scott, why?

(Stewart) Well, I agree with those, those same reasons, but I was more interested in the dynamics of education. As you saw from my, uh, my background, that I’ve spent a lot of time getting educated. With, um, three Bachelor’s degrees and a Master’s, and I’ve always been interested in the dynamics of education, and how it gets done, what the challenges are. And I’ve always wanted to be, uh, a part of the decision-making process on what the priorities ought to be. So you can naturally imagine that I emphasize the technical education a lot, because I think it’s very important. But, uh, I do believe that people should be well-grounded in other subjects as well. But most importantly, educational institutions have to *perform.* And Pima does a good job of that, I believe, and I believe we’re more part of the solution than we are a part of the problem.

(Trasoff) Well, let’s talk about the solutions and the performance and the dynamics of governing, uh, a college that is this vast and plays such a critical role in the community. One of the key elements in your responsibility as members of the Board of Governors is the finances for Pima. And there’s a lot of, people raise so many questions about; is it, are the dollars going where they should go? How do you weigh these things? And what are the—what is the role, and what are the challenges?

(Stewart) It’s, uh, very challenging, actually. Um, when I first got on the Board, uh, I would make the administration go through really long, elaborate presentations on the budget. And over the years, we’ve managed to, uh, streamline that and hone it down a little bit. But, uh, it was very important to
me, uh, that, believing that Pima College does a good job, that we could see that we did a good job and prove it. So, um, we have this, uh, model, that we call the “three-legged stool” for our funding, which is local property taxes, state aid, and tuition. And over the years, and even in good economic times, the state Legislature has been cutting state aid, putting more pressure on tuition and local property taxes. And local property taxes has a pretty tight constraint, which fortunately we live in a growing community, is enough to offset a lot of the state cuts without having to increase tuition a lot. Uh, the U of A does not have that option, so every time the state cuts their budget, they’ve only got one other place to go, tuition.

Um, and then you look at the various programs and how well they’re run, or in some cases, not. You know, it’s, no institution is going to be perfect. But I looked closely at all the programs that I thought I was qualified to evaluate. So, physics, technology, some languages. And every problem that I found in those organizations, or in those programs, and they were generally small and at the margins, were not problems that would be fixed by less money.

(all laughing)

(Trasoff) I’m trying to think of a, I guess there are some things less money could help, but it’s few and far between.

(Stewart) That’s right.

(Trasoff) Marty, how do you approach all of this? The public transparency has to be very important.

(Cortez) It is. And, uh, that’s why we invite the public, prior to adopting the budget each year, to come and be informed and, and review the budget before it’s adopted. So we try to be as transparent as possible. We have to look at each program, and each program is evaluated on a regular basis. So we’ll review programs, the cost, the benefits, whether it’s sustainable or not, whether it’s appropriate anymore for the community; sometimes programs are outdated or outmoded, and so we have to really look at that and ramp up and get ready for the programs that we do need to provide. So it’s a constant, um, evolution of reviewing each program and setting the budget accordingly. The state used to provide about 19.2% of our budget, and now it’s down to about 7%.

(Trasoff) That’s a dramatic change.

(Stewart) What I like to call our “the state’s going-out-of-business curve.”

(all laughing)

(Cortez) And yet, in the, um, in the last two years, we’ve had a almost 15% increase in students at Pima College. And many of those are, of course, due to the economic times that we, we face. So we’re being asked to do more with less money. Fortunately, we have not had to lay off any of our employees, but we have cut, in the sense that we’ve not filled vacancies. So, we have eliminated 14 administrative positions.
(Stewart) Fourteen percent of our administrative positions, which we, we kind of anticipated that money was getting tighter, so we held positions open for a long time. Then we reorganized and redistributed that work and went to a 40-hour work week. The College, for a long time, had a 37.5-hour work week, that I have no idea where it originally came from. Um, but this, you know, economic crisis was also an opportunity, in that we could, uh, expand the work week, uh, serve the community a little bit better, and get, um, coverage for longer hours, and at the same time, be able to save everybody’s jobs.

(Trasoff) But it—it’s hard because, Mart—Marty, you were talking about the increase in the number of students. Tuition does not cover the cost of the education at any institution that I know of.

(Stewart) No.

(Trasoff) So, you’re getting more students with less support. That has to be challenging.

(Cortez) Yes, it is. And that’s where we have to look carefully and review all of our programs. Um, plus the fact that we put a moratorium on sabbaticals. So we’ve looked at the internal cuts that we could make, the efficiency. Uh, some of our properties are being converted to be more “green,” so that we can save in the utilities area. We’re looking at our, our vehicles. Uh, we’re looking at just everything that’s possible. We may have to also have a differentiation on our tuition for our students, because some programs, like the Dental and the Machine Tool programs, are more costly to run and are regulated by the state on how many students you can have in a program where there’s a safety issue and supervisory issue that needs to be there. So, we’re considering all the options that we have. I’m very grateful that right now we have Chancellor Flores as our chancellor, whose background is economics, so he brings a wealth of information and guidance to, to the College.

(Trasoff) I’m—I’m intrigued by that. The ones that you mentioned are also professions that people can walk in, walk out, having secured their degree and earn a very good living right away.

(Stewart) Yes. Very important that we take care of those programs, and they are, obviously, more expensive than the others. So we have to take care of those programs, but they produce people who quickly become taxpayers instead of tax consumers.

(Trasoff) And—and that’s a very good point. You do so much of that with all of the levels of education, whether it’s the Developmental Ed, which you talked about the number of students that come in who aren’t prepared for college, uh, yet. And, I think that’s such a baseline course, but it—it’s only an introduction to then get them into the next levels.

(Stewart) Yes. There—are there other programs that we offer, other classes that we offer, the various community enrichment things that, that don’t cost as much, that people wonder why we have them if, you know, there’s so much pressure to keep these other programs. Well, their mission is to at least break even, regenerate surpluses to help support these other programs.

(Trasoff) That’s, that’s true. I’ve participated in a couple of those, and I—I thoroughly enjoyed them. Now, you, um, the Board of Regents, obviously, you have no formal relationship with them, but I know
that they’re trying to—to put a lot more of the elementary, the, the first two years of college, onto the community colleges. And the U of A and—and Pima have a wonderful relationship. I don’t know that that’s the case throughout the state.

(Cortez) Uh, we’re looking to—to expand that relationship, uh, with the University. Sometimes what happens are that, that the curriculum at the University may change for a particular College, and then the community colleges need to be in synch with those changes so that our students, uh, come prepared with the correct credits in order to transfer in to that College seamlessly and not have to duplicate courses or take different courses because, uh, the requirements now are different.

The other thing that we’re hoping that the University will work with us on is to be able to provide programs to students at different hours of the day, in evening format, or weekends. Uh, we, right now, have a number of online classes that students can take, because it facilitates our older students who have jobs or, or have more limited time, and they can work from home and complete some of those classes. So there are several ways that we can modify what we’re doing and partner better with the University of Arizona. And I think that’s the kind of thing that the Board of Regents is expecting us to do in partnership with the U of A.

(Trasoff) But this kind of work is so important for the community as a whole, because the educated workforce you both alluded to, how important that is for the economic future of the community. I—I, the conversation just seems to keep reiterating Pima’s role in facilitating maybe the less typical student getting into the education and developing the future for themselves and actually creating role model for their kids.

(Stewart) Well, I would argue that the less typical student, now, is the student who goes straight into the four-year college, um, with the idea of getting a, a degree straight out of high school. That’s becoming increasingly unusual, I think. That, uh, we serve a greater population, greater—greater student head count than the U of A does. And...

(Cortez) Well, I think, Scott, you got, you have made a good point there. And one of the things that we need to look at is financial aid, because so many scholarships and—and so much of the funding is geared towards the high school graduate and not for the transferring student. So we need to look at the economics of how we can facilitate student learning at different times when they enter the University.

(Trasoff) I think that’s one of the high, one of the consistent points with Pima, of facilitating, making it easier for whoever it is, whether it’s the returning veteran, the high school student, the person who never managed to get the education to come back into the system. Marty Cortez and Scott Stewart, thank you so much for joining us today to talk a little bit about the role of the Board of Governors.

(Stewart) Thank you.

(Trasoff) It’s been a pleasure. Have a good day.

(Cortez) Thank you so much.
(male announcer) Tucson’s Jolt.

(male speaker) Tiny impulses of electric current are produced.