

TO: Public Affairs Officer  
FROM: AACC/ACCT  
DATE: January 15, 2010  
SUBJECT: Op-ed Text and Instructions for Placement

To help call attention to your institution's need for increased financial support, a draft for an opinion editorial is attached. As with the template for letters to state legislators, the text provided can either be used as it is with your institution's specific information added or can be the starting point for your own language and call to action. Ideally the op-ed should be bylined by your president and/or the chair of your board of trustees.

Once your op-ed has been finalized, you can submit it to either your local newspaper or the paper in your state's capitol. Information on how to submit the op-ed can generally be found on a newspaper's Web site. You can also call the newspaper outlet and ask to speak with the individual best suited to answer questions on submitting an op-ed. Some newspapers provide a general e-mail address, such as [oped@\[newsoutlet\].com](mailto:oped@[newsoutlet].com). While you can send to this e-mail address, try to identify the editor of the op-ed page's e-mail address as well and also send the op-ed to him/her. It may also be useful to send to the higher ed reporter as an FYI document.

Below are tips for increasing the chances of having the op-ed placed:

- Check the newspaper's online guidelines for the preferred word count for op-eds and adjust the length of the piece to fall within the paper's preferences.
- Submit the op-ed by e-mail as a Word document or embedded in the text of the email; do not send a PDF.
- If possible, have the signer of the op-ed send the e-mail. Editors tend to pay greater attention if the president sends the e-mail, requesting review and placement.
- Ask in your e-mail correspondence for confirmation of receipt of the message and op-ed.
- Follow up by telephone the following day to the op-ed page editor or submission contact to ask if you can answer any questions and see if he/she is interested in running the piece. If no decision has been made, ask for an anticipated timeline and call back in advance of the decision date.
- Follow up to any requests for edits or additional information as quickly as possible.
- If the preferred outlet is not interested, consider other community or regional papers. There may be online-only outlets to consider as well.
- It is not advisable to submit an op-ed to more than one outlet at a time, so allow your piece to make it through the necessary review process. Sometimes editors fail to respond. After waiting a week, move on to the next media outlet.

Once the op-ed has run, post a hyperlink to it on your institution's Web site. Share the link with staff and faculty through intranet postings, school newsletters or other established communications vehicles. The president can also send a copy of the op-ed to key "influencers", including members of the state legislature, business leaders and other community members.

Should you have questions about next steps, please contact Norma Kent at [nkent@aacc.nche.edu](mailto:nkent@aacc.nche.edu) or 202/728-0200, ext. 209, who will be happy to provide additional guidance.

## **Community Colleges: A Proven Return on Investment in Economically Challenged Times**

Because so much capital has been directed toward short-term consumption in our recent past, the nation has neglected long-term investment in sectors such as education that generate high economic output and stable jobs.

Policymakers – both locally and nationally – would do well to re-set priorities toward revitalizing education to drive economic recovery now and to ensure economic prosperity in the future.

Globally, our competitors are investing more in education, with an emphasis on greater creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship. Such investments are what made our country a dominant economic and military power in the 50 years following World War II. We invented the model and its time to reinvest in it.

No institution better reflects American ingenuity and innovation than community colleges. Uniquely American, our 1,200 community colleges serve virtually every community in the nation, enroll almost half of all U.S. undergraduates and power economic activity that changes lives and communities every day.

Community colleges contribute over \$35 billion annually to the nation's economic growth – representing 7 percent of the nation's Gross Domestic Product. Community colleges have added more than \$620 billion to the current economy, representing roughly 6 percent of the nation's average annual growth.

The ROI is impressive: community colleges return an average of three dollars to the public for every dollar invested. Community colleges help to sustain the entrepreneurial life's blood that so many mid-sized and small communities depend upon, fueling increased job creation. Along with economic health, the colleges safeguard the security and well-being of our communities, credentialing 80 percent of the nation's first responders and preparing more than 60% of health care professionals nationally.

But continued stellar results are in jeopardy. Enrollments skyrocket as students seek affordable education and training, but state and local funding continues to decline. Ironically, the colleges are being victimized by the very negative economic spiral they are designed to prevent. The downward funding trend can not continue with impunity: according to the firm Economic Modeling Specialists, Inc., if funding for the nation's community colleges were curtailed, 10 percent of the workforce would lose access to critical education and training opportunities. This would reduce personal earnings by \$1,500 per year, or \$44,000 over the course of a working lifetime. More significant, however, state and local taxes on businesses and employers would increase by \$1,100 per year, and nearly \$60 a year for individual taxpayers.

As we all work to put America's economic house in order, re-investing in community colleges represents an intelligent and responsible step that every policymaker can take during the upcoming legislative session. The return is both proven and compelling.