

KATHRINE SWANSON

Kathrine Swanson earned a B.S. in business management from Northern Michigan University, a M.Ed. in Adult and Higher Education Administration from Montana State University, and an Ed.D. in Higher Education Administration (Student Affairs cognate) from the University of North Texas.

Dr. Swanson has dedicated her career to higher education, with over 21 years in the community college sector and seven years as a vice president. She is currently the Vice President for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management at Montgomery County Community College (Pennsylvania), where she has served since 2005. She leads the following functions: admissions, financial aid, enrollment services, registrar's office, dual enrollment, academic advising, counseling, career services, transfer services, disability services, veterans' resource center, international student services, testing and assessment, judicial affairs, student leadership, community and civic engagement, athletics, campus recreation, and child care. Her previous roles at MCCC were Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness and Enrollment Management and Associate to the President for Institutional Effectiveness and Strategic Initiatives. Prior to joining MCCC, she served Collin County Community College (Texas) in progressively responsible roles with her most recent position as Associate Dean of Students. She started her student services career at Montana State University and Northern Arizona University.

Recent professional accomplishments which have prepared Dr. Swanson for success as the Senior Vice President of Student Services include:

- Re-designing student entry and academic advising processes to improve persistence and completion, supported by a Gates Foundation Integrated Planning and Advising Support grant (2013-present).
- Leading a state-wide initiative for the 14 Pennsylvania community colleges to implement a common prior learning assessment process and online platform (TAACCCT grant funded), which launched in February 2015.
- Implementing an integrated enrollment services one-stop model (2011).
- Co-leading, with the Vice President for Academic Affairs, MCCC's involvement as an Achieving the Dream Leader College (2006-present).
- Developing data-informed enrollment projections and enrollment management plans (2008-present).
- Advocating for financial support for students at the state and federal levels and represented community colleges on the Pennsylvania State Grant Advisory Committee (2010-2012).
- Leading policy development through collaboration with college governance systems and the Board of Trustees (examples: Admissions, Student Code of Conduct, and Transfer of Credit).
- Leading partnerships with K-12 and transfer institutions, to include creating dual enrollment pathway programs, increasing dual admissions transfer agreements (examples: Lehigh University, Saint Joseph's University and Dongseo University in South Korea), establishing a Gateway to College program (2012), and initiating the University Center (2006).

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Question A: What most inspires you about the mission of community colleges and why?

Answer:

While I am committed to the multiple missions of community colleges, whether it be meeting the transfer, workforce development or lifelong learning needs of the communities and students we serve, my true passion is for the student access and success mission. It is the stories of our students that inspire me every day: the mother of three who proudly completed a semester in spite of having to move into a safe house for domestic violence victims mid-term; the dual enrollment student who is on track for completing an associate's degree with honors a few weeks before graduating from high school; the homeless student who had been incarcerated four times before realizing that education was his ticket to a different life; or the student athlete who enrolled to play sports and in the process discovers his purpose and a career direction. Through our access mission, we change lives for students and their families, many of whom would not have the opportunity without their local community college.

Just as important as providing access is the student success work in which we are engaged. This is an exciting time to be a part of the community college movement, as we focus more on how we help our students successfully cross the finish line. I am committed to attending to the student experience through the full lifecycle from connection and entry through completion and transition. I enjoy working on policies, systems and processes that remove barriers and support student success, because I know the impact of this work on individual students. Sharing those moments with them and their families throughout commencement week activities motivates me to do more to ensure that every student has the opportunity to get to that moment of completion, confident and well-prepared for their transfer and/or job transition.

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Question B: Describe your leadership philosophy and your core leadership principles.

Answer:

My leadership philosophy is deeply rooted in my student development training and background. Through a framework of cognitive development theory, I seek to provide the appropriate balance of support and challenge for those I am leading, knowing they will grow professionally and perform to their maximum when I get that balance right. Too much support and they may not learn to be better than what they thought they could be, too much challenge can shut down the productivity, creativity and passion.

I seek to inspire others through shared vision and values. My core leadership principles are:

- Empowering the team is crucial to success.
- People perform best when there are clearly communicated goals and expectations which they help craft, and when there is alignment of goals within the organization's mission, vision and strategic plan. It gives meaning and purpose to their work.
- Multiple perspectives are necessary to develop the best approaches, systems, processes, and solutions. I use teams within and across units and seek stakeholder input.
- A culture of evidence using analytics is required for effective decision-making.
- I value integrity, respect, commitment and accountability as it relates to our student access and success mission. I expect this of myself and of others.
- I believe in strengths-based leadership, recognizing and appreciating the strengths each member contributes to the team.

For those familiar with the Clifton StrengthsFinder, my strengths are: Learner, Strategic, Ideation, Achiever, and Intellection. Those who work with me can expect these to play out as follows: I am energized by the journey of learning; I am able to sort through clutter, see patterns and identify alternative paths; I seek connections and new perspectives; I need to accomplish something each day; and I enjoy reflection, thinking through issues and problem-solving. These strengths influence who I am as a leader.