

**Testimony of
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**Before the Committee of the Whole of the
Council of the District of Columbia**

**On the Implementation of an Independent Community College
In the District of Columbia**

**Friday, November 20, 2009
John A. Wilson Building, Room 412**

Chairman Gray and members of the Council of the District of Columbia: thank you for inviting me to testify today on the vitally important issue of higher education for residents of the District of Columbia, and in particular, the development of the Community College of the District of Columbia.

Trinity educates more D.C. residents than any other private university in the nation --- nearly 50% of our 2,000 total students are D.C. residents. In the College of Arts & Sciences (CAS), our full-time undergraduate women's college, 40% of our 800 young women are from D.C., representing every public high school and almost all charter high schools in the District. Trinity has a strong track record for success in the education of D.C. residents. As the chart at the end of this testimony reveals, 61% of the D.C. Tuition Assistance Grant students who have enrolled at Trinity since the D.C. TAG Program's inception in 2001 are either still enrolled or have graduated, one of the best persistence/completion records among all of the universities serving D.C. students.

Trinity invests heavily in the success of D.C. students. This year, the 328 D.C. residents enrolled full-time in our undergraduate College of Arts and Sciences receive Trinity grants worth \$2,244,075 in direct tuition support. 274 of these students qualify for D.C. TAG grants, totaling just about \$600,000. About one-third of our D.C. residents received enough in grant support from Trinity, Pell Grants, D.C. TAG and other sources to cover the entire tuition price (\$19,360¹). Another 39% received combined grants sufficient to cover two-thirds of the tuition price. With the addition of federal loans and other sources of financial aid, 58% of our full-time D.C. students have all of their tuition charges covered by grants and loans, and many have additional aid to cover a portion of room and board or other expenses.²

¹ Note that Trinity's tuition price of \$19,360 is well below the \$26,273 national average for four-year private colleges. That additional "baked-in" discount is worth an additional \$2,267,464 for the 328 D.C. residents in Trinity's full-time undergraduate program in Fall 2009. Trinity also heavily discounts adult tuitions in the School of Professional Studies.

² This means that the majority of D.C. residents at Trinity do not have immediate out-of-pocket expenses for tuition. The Brookings/Applesseed report lists Trinity's tuition on p. 12 without mention of the discounts and other financial aid, hence, creating the impression that Trinity is too expensive for low-income D.C. residents. In fact, with the generous institutional aid and other aid, Trinity is *less* expensive than many public alternatives.

Trinity also has a longstanding institutional commitment to the education of adult students in D.C. In 1985, Trinity started a path-breaking program for adult working women in the city, the Weekend College. The success of that program led to the creation of our School of Professional Studies (SPS), now offering associate, baccalaureate and master's degrees to men as well as women across a range of disciplines. The tuition in SPS is deeply discounted for all students.

Because of our institutional commitment and strong track record to serve students in areas of need in our city, Trinity created an associate degree program (associate of arts) at THEARC³ in southeast Washington to provide collegiate opportunities for adults who live east-of-the-river. This program has been hugely successful; among the early A.A. completers, every one has gone on to matriculate into the baccalaureate programs on our main campus, or at other universities, and several have already completed their B.A degrees with honors. Given the success of this program, and the fact that about one-third of our D.C. students hail from Wards 7 and 8, Trinity is planning to expand our program at THEARC into the daytime to offer collegiate gateway opportunities for younger students, including young men as well as young women in those neighborhoods.

To ensure the success of this program serving low-income students in the high poverty neighborhoods east-of-the-river, Trinity set the tuition price for the associate degree program very low; the tuition currently is just \$160 per credit (compared to \$490 per credit in our adult baccalaureate programs in the School of Professional Studies), and students are able to afford most of the cost through Pell Grants. Trinity has operated this program with a modest deficit for the last three years because we see this program as a great service to the community; our business plan calls for slightly larger enrollment to break even within the next two years.

In addition to providing the extensive financial support described above, Trinity has also developed special expertise in meeting the academic challenges of D.C. students. Our students from D.C. have great ambition and many valuable skills, not the least of which is tremendous resilience, the ability to work very hard, and a willingness to persist through setbacks.

Unfortunately, too many students from D.C. have unacceptably low levels of academic preparation, and so Trinity must devote considerable time and resources to improving their foundation skills for collegiate success. At the same time, many of these same students struggle with the academic impact of the social challenges they face: generational poverty, parental illiteracy, domestic violence, teen pregnancy, drug abuse, poor health care, mental health challenges, undiagnosed learning disabilities. Equally challenging, the students we serve have very high financial need --- 56% of the D.C. students enrolled full-time at Trinity this fall have "zero Expected Family Contribution" in the federal calculation for how much money they or their families can contribute to their college education. For academically at-risk students beset with astonishing personal and familial challenges, the struggle to come up with even a thousand dollars to pay for books and transportation to school can be daunting. Often, the most at-risk students are those who are also working 40 hours a week in menial jobs, sometimes late at night, which means that they have less time to study or to take advantage of precisely the kinds of academic support services they need to overcome prior learning deficiencies.

³ Town Hall Education, Arts and Recreation Campus, see <http://www.trinitydc.edu/thearc/index.html>

For all of these reasons, Trinity welcomes the initiative of the University of the District of Columbia to create the Community College of the District of Columbia. Our experience tells us that the creation of CCDC is an important addition to the academic opportunities available to D.C. residents, and this new collegiate level will ensure that collegiate gateway programs and services are more systematically throughout the city than the present higher education community is able to provide. As a well-known and successful provider of higher education to D.C. residents, Trinity welcomes CCDC as a potential extraordinary partner in the development of our own programs and services, whether through articulation or providing greater options for pre-baccalaureate developmental learning or opening platform programs into professional areas of study that will be gateways to more advanced professional study at the bachelor's and master's level. Trinity applauds the Brookings/DCAppleseed report's recognition of the lifelong learning opportunities inherent in the creation of the community college.

In terms of structure, funding and governance, Trinity has no expertise in public higher education, and we leave those issues to our colleagues at UDC, CCDC, the Council and Mayor. However, Trinity does have considerable academic expertise in the education of D.C. residents who are both of traditional-age and adult working students, so we urge consideration of the following principles in the development of the community college:

1. The Essential Importance of an Outstanding First Year Experience

Trinity's First Year Experience (FYE) Program, developed at a cost of more than \$1 million⁴ three years ago, has proven to be one of the best investments we could have made in student success. Already, we have seen an improvement of more than five percentage points in retention from first to second year, a very large point of progress in a short period of time. Moreover, students who have been through this program are showing considerably greater readiness for upper-division courses, and hence, improved persistence which will lead to improved completion rates.

The key elements of Trinity's successful FYE are similar to those found in other programs⁵, both public and private, around the nation, and these include:

- Entrance assessments for every student, using the results of these assessments to place students in the appropriate Math, Critical Reading and Writing courses aligned to the student's entrance level;

⁴ Trinity first year experience cost data developed through participation in a study funded by the Lumina Foundation of the costs of successful first year programs serving at-risk students. "Investing in Student Success" was managed by Jobs For the Future in cooperation with the Delta Project on Postsecondary Education Costs, Productivity and Accountability. See <http://www.deltacostproject.org/initiatives/index.asp>

⁵ Also see a report released this week by the Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education on "Bridging the Gaps to Success: Promising Practices for Promoting Transfer Among Low-Income and First-Generation Students" in which the authors found three essential characteristics for successful transfer: "structured academic pathways that aptly prepare students to enroll at four-year colleges, a student-centered culture that emphasizes personal attention, and culturally sensitive leaders who understand the backgrounds of their students." As reported in the Chronicle of Higher Education (November 19, 2009) at <http://chronicle.com/article/Report-Highlights/49210/> and see also the full report at http://www.pellinstitute.org/pdf/COE_Pell_Report_layout_3.pdf

- Consistent learning objectives across all courses for Critical Reading skills; Trinity's full-time senior faculty incorporate these learning outcomes into course syllabi in the disciplinary areas, whether History or Sociology or Philosophy, etc.
- Learning communities for all FYE students, lead by senior faculty who are the student advisors, which enable the students to develop a vital relationship with their teachers and with each other, while also focusing the attention of senior faculty on the development of every student's potential; deans carefully place each student in a learning community according to a full review of her entire application dossier, assessment results, academic interests and learning support needs;
- "Intrusive advising" such that students who miss class or who are failing to complete assignments, or showing academic risks, are sought out, counseled, and directed into academic support services appropriate for their needs;
- Specialists in Math, Reading and Writing who provide not only instruction in formal gateway courses, but also additional workshops and tutoring for students whose assessment results or in-class performance indicate a need for additional instruction.

2. Critical "Wrap-Around Services"

In addition to the core academic structure that supports student learning, Trinity also has learned that success with at-risk students requires:

- A range of Academic Support Services available in a centralized location --- tutoring (both "live" and online), disabilities support, learning skills development, writing support --- so that students who want to get help on specific issues can readily access professional help;
- Physical and Mental Health Services to support a wide range of needs among a population of students who may never had had consistent access to such services in the past;
- Emergency social service partnerships "on call" so that students who reveal specific risks --- homelessness, domestic violence, hunger, child care crises --- are connected immediately to other agencies in the community who can provide these services.

3. Understand Unique Demographic Issues

Trinity is a comprehensive university that grew from one of the oldest Catholic women's colleges in the nation, and we maintain our women's college to this day. As well, more than 90% of our campus population is female, even though three of our four academic units are now coeducational. Trinity has a core competency in women's education, and this is an important niche in educating the city's residents. Trinity's student body, predominantly female, is also 65% African American and 15% Hispanic. White students, who once were the majority, now comprise about 5% of the population.

At the same time, Trinity recognizes the obvious fact that African American and Hispanic males are often left out of higher education. While affirming our commitment to women's education, we also believe that more attention needs to be paid to the large gap in academic attainment for men in this city. We see this as an area where a well-designed local community college could bring special expertise to building school-to-college pathways for the young men at-risk of dropping out of high school, and older males in their 20's and 30's who need to recoup lost years of education more quickly. With the distinctive and creative focus that the community college model could bring to this challenge, more baccalaureate gateways could open among all universities who may desire to serve this population but who are unable to figure out how to build the bridge from the earlier educational setbacks. Trinity's School of Professional Studies, our coeducational undergraduate unit, is eager to work in partnership with CCDC on this issue.

4. Make a Clear Commitment to Baccalaureate Articulation and Lifelong Learning

The community college concept will be stunted in its potential and ability to gain traction if it becomes only a place for people who have no larger educational ambitions than taking a few courses or possibly earning an associate degree. The best community colleges recognize the importance of lifelong learning, and work closely with baccalaureate providers to ensure that the spark of intellectual power unlocked in the first years of college can grow into a continuous source of growth, satisfaction and earning potential through advanced education.

In the Washington region, the Knowledge Economy requires not just basic education, but truly advanced learning. The community college should not shy away from the ambition to launch great careers in advanced learning, some stages of which will occur in other institutions, but the seeds of which will be planted in the community college.

5. Support Need-Based Aid for D.C. College Students

D.C.'s considerable investment in developing a community college will fall short of the city's ultimate goal of improving educational attainment for all D.C. residents (thereby to ensure a thriving local economy and better life for all) if this movement stops with the associate degree. We call the Council's attention to the considerable needs that continue to exist for support for D.C. students in baccalaureate programs and beyond. In September 2005, I testified before the Council about the critical importance of need-based aid for D.C. residents. Four years later, we have made no progress in developing need-based aid for D.C. students.

Those 328 D.C. residents attending Trinity full time this fall have \$8.8 million in total need when calculated on the total cost of attendance (including tuition, living expenses, transportation, books). Trinity provides \$2.2 million of that in Trinity grants, and we leverage a total of \$7.2 million in all financial aid; that leaves a gap of \$1.6 million.

The D.C. TAG program was not created to support needy students; it was specifically created to provide incentives to keep wealthier taxpayers in the city. Unfortunately, that means that the program provides disproportionate benefits to students of greater means than students who have considerable financial need from the lower income parts of the city --- students who are also unlikely to win acceptance into, or be able to travel to, the expensive flagship universities in

other states that the D.C. TAG money supports in millions of dollars. For example, in 2008-2009, 211 Trinity students received D.C. TAG grants amounting to \$474,000 for an average grant of \$2,246. By contrast, 139 D.C. TAG recipients attending the University of Maryland at College Park received a total of \$1,258,902, for an average grant of \$9,056. That \$6,800 gap between my students and those who get much larger D.C. TAG grants to go to College Park is a grave injustice for my students who are among the most impoverished residents of our city.

Trinity, not a wealthy institution (our endowment is just about \$9 million), extends considerable support to our D.C. students. Since the inception of D.C. TAG in 2001, Trinity students have received a total of \$2.2 million from D.C. TAG grants over the eight year period, while Trinity grants to this group exceed a cumulative total of \$9.5 million. Trinity cannot do more.

We believe that D.C.'s commitment to improved educational opportunity, and to strengthening higher education opportunities, will not be realized until the city addresses the absence of a robust program of need-based aid for its own citizens. Most states have such programs. In the context of this discussion of the community college for D.C., the ability of this new entity to flourish will include making sure that its graduates will be able to continue their educations with appropriate support beyond the associate degree.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Report on DC Tuition Assistance Grants at Trinity (DCTAG) (11-16-09)			
	ALL DC in CAS	DC TAG	Notes
Total DC Residents in CAS Fall 2009	328		40% of CAS total
<i>"CAS" = College of Arts & Sciences</i>			
Total Cost of Attendance (Tuition, Room/Board, Books, Transportation)	\$9,923,571		
Total Financial Need	\$8,881,146		
Total Financial Aid	\$7,290,732		
GAP between Total Need and Total Aid	\$1,590,414		
TOTAL DC TAG RECIPIENTS 2009-2010		274	83% of all DC
Total DC TAG Awards		\$306,220	Fall 09 Semester
TOTAL TRINITY GRANTS 2009-2010	\$2,244,075	\$1,526,500	Full Year
	(25% of need - 31% of aid)		
ALL DC TAG RECIPIENTS SINCE 2001		875	
Still Enrolled or Have Graduated		535	61%
Cumulative Awards From 2001 to 2009 To D.C. TAG Recipients at Trinity			
TRINITY GRANTS		\$9,538,673	
DC TAG		\$2,261,451	