

Interview with Dr. James Underwood

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Interviewer: Philip Pogue

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Pogue: My name is Phil Pogue. We’re on the campus of Kaskaskia College, Centralia, Illinois. It’s May 22, 2013. This is the project on Illinois community colleges, their history and development. We have with us today Dr. Jim Underwood, President of Kaskaskia Community College, and we’re happy to have him as part of our project. So Dr. Underwood, could you give us some background about yourself?

Underwood: Absolutely, but first let me say how pleased we are to be participating with you on this historical project, which will have great emphasis and importance for the future. I am now serving in my forty-third year in community college education. I’m pleased to have had a wonderful career in the movement of community colleges, starting in 1970 as I was just returning from a tour of duty in Vietnam and was employed by a community college. I started in the business office working in finance, eventually progressed to the controller’s position and then later on to become the chief financial officer. I spent several years in the CFO role, then moved into the chief academic officer role and the last seventeen years I have served as a college president for two different community colleges. I’ve been at Kaskaskia College for the past twelve years.

My educational background is, I’m a community college graduate—a **proud** community college graduate, I might add—and transferred to the University of Nebraska for my bachelor’s degree at Kearney, Nebraska. Then

I earned an MBA at the University of Arkansas and a doctorate at the University of Arkansas in higher education administration.

Pogue: As far as your experiences then with community colleges, you mentioned Kaskaskia. Were there any others?

Underwood: I started my employment, as I mentioned, after being discharged from the army from active duty, at Central Community College in Hastings, Nebraska. I spent fourteen years with that institution, serving the last several as a CFO. And then I joined Westark Community College in Fort Smith, Arkansas, as the CFO and I spent eight years there. During that time I was attending college at the University of Arkansas. There were five years at Richland Community College in Decatur, Illinois, as the chief academic officer. That was followed by six years as a college president at Northeast Community College in Norfolk, Nebraska. I was given an opportunity to return to Illinois and to join Kaskaskia College, and I did so, in 2001; I've been serving as president since that time. I might add that I'm originally from a small rural area south of Corinda, Iowa, southwest Iowa. I grew up on a small farm, one of eight children. Our father had passed away when I was twelve years old; my mother raised eight children on that small farm and did a remarkable job. So my background is very much rural and my career has been, you know, primarily rural, as well.

After being discharged in 1970 from active duty, I was assigned to a reserve unit and I completed twenty-five years of service, retiring as a Lieutenant Colonel, Army Infantry, and had a great career going as a reservist as well as an active duty officer. My last command assignment was, I served as Lieutenant Colonel, Battalion Commander, at Fort Polk, Louisiana, during the Gulf War, training recruits as replacement soldiers for the Gulf War.

I might add that my wife is a retired teacher. We just celebrated our forty-eighth wedding anniversary. We have two children: a son Jess who's a high school principal in Nebraska, and our daughter Randa is the managing equity partner of the largest CPA firm in Oklahoma. She lives in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and her husband, our son-in-law, Rowland is a school administrator at Bixby, Oklahoma, and they have two children. Our son and his wife Christie; she's an interior designer and has a great, a great career going; they have two children, our two grandchildren, and they are the delight of our life, I might add.

Pogue: When you talked about CFO, what kind of responsibilities does that have?

Underwood: Well, as a Chief Financial Officer, you're the treasurer of the school and you're held as custodian of institutional funds. Along with that, you have the auxiliary enterprises as well as other support services that you manage, to include physical plant, IT and HR and other programs, but your primary goal is to be the chief financial officer for the institution. That is not only

managing funds, but its also creating, you know, accountable investments of idle funds as well.

Pogue: Before we talk specifically about Kaskaskia, since you had experience in other states with their community college system, how does Illinois compare or differ from those experiences?

Underwood: It's an interesting question because Nebraska, where I started in 1970, is a highly decentralized system with a locally governed and elected board that has elected board members fully empowered to manage and run the system, with some coordination and oversight at the state level. Highly decentralized. Conversely, when I moved to Arkansas—primarily to attend graduate school was the motivation—at the same time I was able to acquire a position as a CFO at Westark Community College. I might add that Central Community College, my first appointment, is a multi-campus community college of three campuses and a central office, and so there was a multi-campus environment that was extremely interesting and enjoyable to work within. Then when we moved to Arkansas to Westark. Westark is about a five thousand student institution that is a single campus. It's a one-site institution, but Arkansas is highly centralized as a state institution. The control was very much at the state level, involving the state Department of Higher Education as well as the governor's office, but most all major decisions were highly centralized. There was a local board, but it was, in reality, more of an advisory board in overseeing the institution and making recommendations on programs and that sort of thing.

After completing my doctorate at Arkansas, accepted a position at Richland Community College, and that was my first exposure to Illinois. Illinois is a locally governed system with oversight and coordinating functions by the Illinois Department of Higher Education as well as the Illinois Community College Board. So we have a wonderful system in Illinois where we are supported by the state through the two agencies that I mentioned, but there's a lot of authority and a lot of flexibility for the institution to be responsible to its citizens, within the geographic distance certainly, that comprises a community college district. Every school district or every county in Illinois is in a community college district, therefore, the entire state is covered by a community college. I might add, one of thirty-nine districts and forty-nine formal campuses are established within this state.

Kaskaskia College is known as the first community college that was established under the Community College Act of 1965. In fact, in '66, there's a referendum passed overwhelmingly by the citizens of our five primary county districts—we have parts of four counties—but the five major counties of Marion, Clinton, Bond, Fayette, as well as Washington. The charter was then established, and KC is the first college to be formed under that enabling legislation in 1965. We're very proud of that, and that's the reason why we're noted as Illinois Community College District 501 as the first one. I might also

add that our roots go back to, actually, 1940, as an institution, when Centralia Junior College was established. At that time the junior colleges were provided legislative authority to form as a two year extension of high schools. And the founding president of what is now Kaskaskia College, Centralia Junior College at that time actually, Oscar Corbel was the superintendent and in 1937 he personally wrote the legislation that was eventually enacted by the legislature to create the extended junior colleges, or two years of extension to the high school, that high school districts then could elect to establish a junior college within their high school district. And the multi-campus and multi-county Community College Act of 1965 followed that 1939 legislation that created the junior colleges in Illinois. And so in '65, comprehensive multi-county community colleges could be formed by a successful referendum of the taxpayers under the act at that time in order for the junior colleges to be expanded to a multi-county district from a single high school district. Or an area could create a new community college district if you did not have a junior college within that geographic area. KC was an extension of Centralia Junior College, so our roots go back to 1940 as Centralia Junior College and then subsequently, Kaskaskia College. We're very proud of the seventy-three years of history that we have now for this institution. There are a few community colleges in Illinois that were created as new community colleges under that 1965 act that previously did not have a junior college in their district, but there's only one of two ways in which you can create a community college by the 1965 act.

Pogue: You've talked about some of the demographic information about the college. Could you give us a little more about student enrollment, the type and numbers of faculty, the number of programs now offered at Kaskaskia?

Underwood: I'd be happy to. In fact, for the last twelve years, Kaskaskia College has grown exceptionally. In fact, we have the largest credit-hour growth over that period of time than any other institution of higher education in Illinois; we oftentimes say we're the fastest growing institution of higher education in the state over that period. We reached right at twelve thousand students on and off campus; that's all credit and non-credit as well. Total people we've reached and served in our programs, and total as an unduplicated headcount, right at twelve thousand. Our credit hour reimbursements that had been earned—that are earned per year—are right now about 111,000; we've been, you know, fluctuating between 115,000 and 111,000 the last several years. What's important to note is that we achieved the twelve thousand headcount enrollment three years ago, and prior to that time we've had a steady increase in our enrollments, starting in 2001 at just right at six thousand students, to nearly well right at double our enrollments over that period. But we have sustained those numbers in recent years, and that is significant given the economy as well as the inability for so many students to have a college education and attend the college experience because of the lack of finances; much of the out-migration has taken place certainly in southern Illinois. We're very proud that we are sustaining and maintaining the enrollments that

we have achieved, which means we're reaching new populations and we're gaining market share of those institutions who are moving on to a higher education career here in south central Illinois. Our employees: we have 253 full-time and part-time faculty currently, and in total of all employees, part-time and full-time, there are 503 current employees. Our board has done a wonderful job in maintaining affordable tuition. We're proud to have been, and we're currently the thirteenth lowest tuition rate of all of higher education in Illinois, and that's a rate of a \$104 per credit hour. We've had modest increases over the years, but it's still very affordable given the comparability with other institutions, community college as well as four-year public and private institutions. I might add that our report card is very clear that our data shows graduates of Kaskaskia College who are seeking employment: 91% of those graduates are employed and of that total, 79% are employed full-time and 21% percent part-time. And 97% of our students are employed in the State of Illinois. We're preparing people for jobs in the state, which really refers to community colleges to a great extent as the engines of economic development by preparing people for good paying careers for jobs that exist but require training beyond high school; we're very proud of the fact that we're able to have a comprehensive set of programs that address that on the schedule at the present time. We have right at eighty occupational programs and those lead to certificates and Associate of Applied Science degrees. And then we have the Associate of Arts and Associate of Science degrees for those students who are declared majors with the intent of gaining a baccalaureate program in a baccalaureate field with a university.

Pogue: When you talked about the eighty programs, who determines if a community college will operate a specific program?

Underwood: The initiative for creating a program starts with the community college. In working with its public, we identify through advisory committees and various forms when there are jobs available and trained technicians and other staff are required. And so it's the relationship you have primarily with business and industry that generates the idea of addressing a program. In some cases, it may be an extension or an option to an existing program. As an example, we just created a parts management program in our automotive technology area; you can get a parts management certificate where you can go out and get a job working in a parts department of a parts store or dealership, or you can have that parts management certificate tied right into an Associated of Applied Science degree in automotive technology. So it provides students with a quick access to a good paying job that focuses just in parts management or a degree that deals with automotive technology.

But all certificate proposals are cleared through the Illinois Community College Board; they look at the needs analysis, you know, material that's provided for them, as well as existing programs, so that they can ensure that we don't have unnecessary duplication and among other community colleges, and that we don't saturate the market with a program

that would not have a long lifespan. The degree programs for community colleges require the approval of the Department of Higher Education, and some of the same needs analysis materials and justifications are submitted to the Illinois Community College Board, through them with a recommendation to the Illinois Department of Higher Education.

I might also add that there are a number of customized programs that we provide for business and industry in training and retraining that are not designed in terms of certificates, but merely customized offerings that we have the authority to work with that business and industry for providing the training that they need for their specific business. That's a major program that most all community colleges have.

Pogue: What is the current mission of the college and has that changed?

Underwood: Yes, our mission has changed immensely over the years. In fact, the current mission is that the college is committed to lifelong students learning in a lifelong learning environment and the college providing a quality, comprehensive education. At one point our focus was narrow, because we served and focused merely on the constituents within our college district, but we now have a number of regional programs that really serve a larger area beyond the district that the college has. Allied health programs are a very good example of being regional in nature versus just a geographic community college district. So the mission has expanded. We've inserted the language of lifelong learners. We do believe and subscribe to lifelong learning; as in many cases, Kaskaskia is the beginning, not the end, of a student's higher education career. We also have two other words that are critical in our mission statement. One is certainly quality and to sustain quality programs, but the third is to provide a comprehensive array of programs that relate to the jobs and the degree materials that are sought by students. So, in our mission statement, *lifelong quality*, as well as *comprehensive* are three of the key words within our mission statement.

Pogue: Since you're talking about lifelong learning, does that mean that the age of the student and the type of student that's now coming to the community college has changed?

Underwood: It really has. Our average age this past year is twenty-nine years old. We have students in various programs in their sixties, you know, into their late teens; it really varies. What's important is that the college has provided an environment where everyone is comfortable when you have adults reentering the higher education field after having been displaced through many years of serving in an industrial firm, and now they're looking for and designing their career for a new field of an occupation. And individuals who are seeking upward mobility and promotion within firms, we find lots of adult learners in our managerial and leadership programs at the institution. We also have another major component that we address extremely well, and that's our adult-

based education. In fact, we're so committed to the GED and the ESL programs, that every GED graduate of Kaskaskia College receives a two-year scholarship into credit programs. As a result, we have gone from roughly twenty to two hundred students a year matriculating into college credit, whereas before they tended not to. So we have removed the obstacle of finances for students to gain a certificate or a degree at the associate level through GED. And I believe, to my knowledge, we're the only institution in the country that provides that scholarship for GED graduates. In fact, it's so important that when the President set a goal of sixty percent of the adult population having a college education by the year 2025, that it became clear to us that we must start with those students who did not complete high school for one reason or another, give them another chance and to promote them into higher education, and through the GED program, was the vehicle we chose to do that. And we're reaching more and more students through that and the costs are marginal. They're filling seats that are vacant within the various sessions and classes that we offer, so it's not an overwhelmingly expensive proposition, but it works. It really is addressing the lower economic status of our student clientele and is something that I think is very noble; we're proud to be reaching these students at that level. One other dimension I might add, and this would be true with other community colleges, some other community colleges in Illinois, we have a wonderful program at two correctional institutions. One's a federal institution in Greenville where we have educational programs in the men's as well as the women's units at the Greenville federal institution. Then we have a comprehensive set of programs that are with the Centralia Correctional Center as a state Department of Corrections program; those programs are preparing inmates for careers once they exit the institutions. And they tend not to return; the return rate is very, very small. It's typical non-existent. And so through education, we're really saving the state a lot of money in the long run for these inmates who graduate, through our programs finding employment and launching careers and becoming taxpayers. The one characteristic that is new, that is noteworthy, is that the college and the Department of Corrections instituted a new delivery methodology this past year, where we're now offering programs over interactive video technology to the Centralia Correctional Center. So we're able to transmit in real time, in a life setting, instructional programs from the main campus to the correctional center in business and the fine arts and sciences that we couldn't do before, but now we can afford to do it through technology. Those classes are full and students are receiving a great benefit and the process has been refined, is very accountable and it's working, and the Department of Corrections are extremely happy with how that model is working. And I think it will be emulated throughout the state in the future now that we have perfected the model for the corrections sites throughout Illinois. It's a very inexpensive way of having an effective educational delivery.

Pogue: As far as working relationships, do you have any unique ties to the other neighboring community colleges or technical schools or some of the industry that's somewhat unique?

Underwood: Well, we do, and I would say at Kaskaskia College we do all that we can through partnerships. Partnerships is a part of our culture at this institution. Let me start with our university partners. We now have formal agreements under our university alliance model. These agreements are with universities, private and public. The Southern Illinois University at Carbondale and Edwardsville are a part of it, as well as Illinois Eastern and University of Illinois, in working with the institution on several fronts: one, two-plus-two type agreements, transfer agreements, and of course, the articulation of our programs, and a number of AAS degrees have now been articulated in addition to the AA and the AS degrees.

We have a number of private universities, such as McKendree University, Greenville College, as well as Lindenwood over in Missouri, that are working directly with the college for the seamless transferability of our students, but also for these universities to migrate programs to our college district for upper division courses that will lead into baccalaureate programs, as well as graduate programs. In fact, we recognized recently one of our students who completed her associate's degree at KC, her bachelor's degree at KC, as well as just this last year completed her master's degree at KC. That's all through the affiliation partnerships that we have created with these universities.

And then we have agreements with three or four online universities where programs will be presented that are totally online. I might add that Kaskaskia College has developed a comprehensive number of online offerings. In fact, this past year we received accreditation of approval through the Higher Learning Commission for online degrees that are now possible from the college, as well as degrees now can be offered at any one of our educational centers throughout our college district, as well as on campus. So those three achievements this past year in receiving continuous and reaccreditation for our college, and that's the Higher Learning Commission. And we're an AQIP school; it's a quality control institution on case improvement. We can offer degrees on the main campus, we can offer those degrees by being accredited through our educational centers as well as online. About 20% of our enrollments now are online credit hours generated by the institution. So it has grown immensely in recent years as more and more students are looking at the convenience and ability to hold a job down and to have other commitments and then working their education into the times they have available; online is a great structure for them, for place-bound as well a time-bound students.

Pogue: On the other side, working with the high schools that are found in your district, you're offering dual-credit type programs and online. Are there other issues that you've been working with, with the high school districts?

Underwood: Dual credit is certainly one of those expanding programs. This past year we served 2700 unduplicated headcount, high school students in dual credit. We have dual credit programs with each of our seventeen high schools within our district and that has grown, you know, considerably over recent years. I can remember about seven years ago we had 74 students taking high school dual credit programs. That's happened because our faculty work very closely and intently with the high school faculty and we insure that the competencies and the course materials and objectives that we have within the campus courses that have been articulated with the universities, that all of the dual credit courses have the same objectives within those dual credit courses as what we have in high school to insure the same materials are being taught and learned and that we're consistent in our quality. And I will tell you our dual credit students test well and the record is quite high of how well they do after they graduate from high school and when they enter the college ranks. When we put in dual credit and started expanding dual credit, it was done for several purposes, one of which was to provide an opportunity for students who could successfully meet the challenges of college credit and to have those opportunities to do so, and also to save money, that we don't charge tuition; we're able to do that because of the partnership we have with the school districts, the high schools. We insure that the high school teachers are not only certified as they are with the schools, but also meet our credentialing requirements at the college level. What we're now discovering—and rightfully so—that high schools are advertising for vacancies for faculty to have both the higher education credentials as well as the secondary certification credentials; that has really helped us expand our programs using the dual credit model.

In terms of savings, let me share with you that last year these 2700 high school students, their parents saved a little over \$2 million, \$2,003,000 in tuition, collectively, and so that's a bargain. And that's a result of the high schools and the college working together. If those same credit hours would have been taken at one of the public universities in southern Illinois, the cost would have been \$6500 to \$7500 instead; well, let me rephrase that, from \$5.9 million to \$7.4 million, from the \$2 million. So, there's not only a savings with Kaskaskia College, which is \$2 million, but had they not had the dual credit options to use and had gone directly to a major university in southern Illinois, their cost would have been \$5.9 to \$7.4 million in cost. So there's a major savings that has occurred because the colleges are working together with the schools as well as the universities in bringing about the offerings.

One other area I might speak to for a moment is the college going rate and college preparation that last year. I'm just very proud of the fact that fifty-three percent of all the high school graduates last May enrolled at Kaskaskia

College from those high schools within our college district. Fifty-three percent of them enrolled at KC in the fall after they graduated from high school. That's phenomenal. When you look across the country, it's quite normal to see 20% to 25% of the students coming out of high school directly into the community college. We're double that at 53% and that's certainly evidence of schools and college working together to make that happen.

A major project that's underway at Kaskaskia College is that we have a pilot that has been started for preparing students for college, and it's the college readiness program, that will help, although we have great coordination underway now, we're now taking it a step further and really working at the high school courses that are needed as prerequisites to the college courses in detail. We've got math faculty, we've got science faculty, we've got English faculty, social sciences and natural sciences faculty working together from both institutions, the high schools as well as the college, in mapping out the objectives through high school and into college, all with the goal in mind of having high school graduates college ready and without the need for remediation or developmental and we call those studies as transitional. But we're seeing great cooperation take place through this model project that's underway at the moment, and we see great things coming out of it as well.

Pogue: As far as your current economic challenges that the college has, you talked about the needs to meet the challenges for students, what does the college face because of today's times?

Underwood: Suffice it to say that the state funding hasn't kept pace with the economy, the cost. We're being appropriated this year, dollars that were appropriated, you know, back in 2000 and 1999, that the level of funding is about at that level. Over the past thirteen years it hasn't kept pace, and as a result, more of the burden of reduced state funding has been shifted to students. We have tax caps on local property taxes, so there's limitations there, other than the growth that you might have in assessed valuations, but that has been very modest over the years. But the real issue now is to have equitable state funding to the community colleges that would be appropriate for reimbursement of our cost. It hasn't kept pace. And number two is the fact that the state, because of its lack of finances, has been unable to keep current its payments once the appropriations are made—all of higher education is experiencing this, as well as the schools and other organizations—the delay in payments that's causing a real burden on the institution and a requirement to maintain sufficient cash flows, we could pay our bills while these delays are occurring. I know the state has made some progress this spring. We're appreciative of that. There's been a real concerted effort to make payments more promptly, and it's getting better. I think as the economy improves we'll see the payments improve as well, but it's still a major concern in the college meeting its obligation, but it's the reduced state funding that's the most difficult. The fact that our enrollments are holding and growing in many respects and we don't want to have to start turning students away: that's our challenge. If you're going to

maintain the programs that are vital to a college district, you've got to have funding to support those; short of having the funding requires regression, requires reduction in force, and in some cases program elimination. That's hurtful when you know you've got people who are trying to get skills in those areas where there might have to be reductions. Very hurtful, and it's just difficult, extremely difficult to address.

Pogue: As far as your time in Illinois, what federal and state laws have had impact upon the operation of the college?

Underwood: We've been fortunate over the years to be successful in acquiring some federal grants. There are some issues relative to the number of grants that have been reduced and the size of the grants. In particular, I would add, in the dislocated worker program, the training programs, they've been cut drastically in recent times. Through the dislocated worker program that has been a savior for southern Illinois with the large number of plant closings that we've experienced and closings for various reasons, relocations being one of those, but that's put a lot of workers into a difficult situation. Those funds were more plentiful in the early 2000s and they've been progressively over time reduced, and that's very hurtful. Fortunately, the federal government has sustained the financial aid PELL Grants¹ that helps a lot of students. There are some other adult education grants that have been available in the past that have been reduced, that are hurtful.

At the State level, I can focus for a moment on the MAP grants, the Monetary Awards funds Program. And, you know, we're funding at the State about half of the amount that qualifies. In fact, for the most part, dollars run out at the end of the first semester and very few dollars are left for those students who enroll in the spring semester of every year, because it's on a first come, first served basis. We really need to help students financially through the MAP grant and we're hopeful that the state will, as its economy increases and improves, that we'll be able to see a surge in the MAP funds in the future, but that's a very, very critical area.

Then another one at the state level, and as a military veteran myself, we support veterans. This college is veterans friendly, and we have a lot of programs for helping veterans. There's a veterans grant that, I believe, when fully funded is \$14 million statewide; it's down to zero this year and projected to be zero funding next year, so there's \$14 million statewide of an unfunded mandate to serve veterans, and the colleges are, in effect, required by law to provide these waivers, with no income to offset the waivers. And again, we support veterans, but that's an unfunded mandate that I think should be addressed by the state.

¹ Pell Grants were created by the Higher Education Act of 1965. These federal funded grants are not like loans, and need not be repaid. Students may use their grants at any one of approximately 5,400 participating postsecondary institutions. [see *Wikipedia for more detail.*]

Pogue: As far as the building issues, that community colleges started with oftentimes temporary facilities, they added buildings throughout their years and then added extension sites, how has that worked for Kaskaskia?

Underwood: This institution went several years with temporary buildings that they tried desperately over many years to get those replaced. We finally in 2005 received the state funding to eliminate the final group of temporary buildings that were on the main campus. It was a long process, but one that eventually was resolved with temporary buildings, and we're very grateful for the funding for that purpose. Capital funding over the last several years has not been very plentiful, and in fact, the list of capital funding [needed] for community colleges is quite lengthy, and there's just not much relief that's taking place. We're fixing up facilities or we're trying to raise money privately through campaigns, as one approach, and issuing local bonds as another approach, to try to gain the facilities that we need to meet the programs and enrollments that we have. So we haven't had a capital bill for three or four years and now we do have. This college has a project in the 2009 capital bill: \$5.6 million for a building in Vandalia that we are now designing; we hope those dollars will flow soon as this design is completed, and we're ready to construct.

But we've got several other buildings that we have requested for expanded programs, our Ag programs as an example. Enrollments have grown 54% and we're borrowing space everywhere to accommodate those programs as, you know, we're in an Ag community and there are more and more students who are selecting Ag and Ag-related fields for their careers. We have the obligation to serve those students. We're working on some plans now to try to gain space to where we can adequately serve those students in agriculture, in particular.

Nursing is another area that we're in desperate need for space. We've got two projects that we're planning for off-campus that we're using private money and through campaigns as well as some bond money, and that's for an educational expansion at Trenton in Nashville. We've raised \$1.1 million thus far in Trenton to go into an expanded facility at that location, as we've just outgrown what's there. Again, we won't be turning people away, so we're trying desperately to provide the facilities to where we won't have to do that. The Nashville campaign will start soon, but I will tell you that it will be a \$1.2 million campaign and we haven't even started it. In fact, it's being planned, and we've already got over a hundred thousand dollars committed to that campaign before it ever started. But that shows, to me and I think to our public, the support we have for helping students gain the knowledge and skills so that they can be employed and in a good paying job in this area without having to migrate out of the area. That support's out there, and people are reaching into their pocketbooks to help this institution meet those obligations through these fundraisers.

Pogue: Because of the various sites and the fact that the main campus is located outside the main city of Centralia, do you have any unique challenges as you work with city, county officials?

Underwood: Well, we have had over time. We've worked agreements with South Central Transit on transportation, as an example. They have been, you know, just very responsive in providing schedules as well as low-cost transportation for our students. The college provides transportation for adult basic education, as an example. We have our own vehicles for assisting students with that. The foundation has been extremely effective in raising money for emergency funds to help students get started in education with scholarships. The foundation, over the last ten years, in total, has raised over \$15 million for this institution, and I would venture that's among the top fundraising efforts of any community college in Illinois for that same timeframe. Again, we're finding individuals who are stepping forward to help the institution in so many ways. The counties, the cities, the villages, they're all very supportive of our need. The tax rates that we assess each year has been about the same over the years. We do have tax limitations, but they've been very supportive as, in my view, they've looked at the taxes they pay to Kaskaskia College as more as an investment than as a cost. And when they see results of students coming out with graduating from these programs and being successful, that's evidence in itself of the good work our faculty members are doing.

Pogue: As we kind of deal with the last one or two questions about Kaskaskia, where do you see the community colleges moving over the next decade? You've kind of covered how some of the major changes have gone in the last ten years. Where do you see us going in the next ten?

Underwood: I think what's going to be critical is that we have the resources to keep current with technology. Obviously, you know, the power of the microchip is doubling every eighteen months, and with all the new products on the market and the need to update to where obsolescence doesn't set in, technology is going to be one of the critical measures that we have in our labs, as well as classrooms. And we're got to keep our faculty current with technology, as well.

Then I think a continuation of the outreach efforts—I mentioned earlier, the outreach function of this institution—that is, take education to the people at times and places convenient to the learners, is the philosophy that will be expanded in the future. I think universities will be expanding their goal in access; we'll see more opportunities out in rural Illinois in educational opportunities in the future than ever before because of the universities and community colleges working together in making education accessible, either through technology or on site, or many programs are being designed around a hybrid model where part of the instruction is online and part is on site, in particular a lab component, as an example.

But we see these changes having already occurred. When I mentioned 20% of our enrollments are on-line students now, and not just in Illinois, they're from around the world. In that regard, one thing we're very proud of is that, with the Iraqi as well as the Afghanistan wars, we've had a number of reserve and National Guard units mobilized and activated and deployed. That has affected many of our students who were enrolled at the times of their deployment; our faculty worked in changing schedules to where the employed military personnel could continue their education on-line working with our faculty. And we've changed our schedules to fit their schedule, and when they're off duty, using technology they are able to continue their course work and so we're able to support them at a time when they're supporting us in their military occupation. I'm very proud of that. It shows the flexibility of our faculty and the commitment of our faculty in serving those who are serving us, and that just is pride. We've had many students return, you know, after being deployed and thanking us for allowing them to continue with their studies and meeting some of their education objectives without a long period of time in which they have an absence. So due to technology they're able to do it, but also because of faculty who are amending their offering to accommodate it. I think that's really pretty nice.

Pogue: Our last question: Because of your extensive involvement with community colleges in your lifetime, how do you perceive that the public has accepted the role of community colleges, from where you started as a student and as an administrator in other states to where we are now?

Underwood: That's a good question. I would say that without question that there's been a major change in perceptions, that back in the early days of forty years ago, there were transfer issues. Those have been alleviated to where it's transparent now and that's because colleges are working together, and when you have articulation initiatives—like in Illinois we have a major academic course of initiative, the Illinois Transfer Initiative—so credits are received by the universities and, you know, just without question, graduates of Kaskaskia College, in particular, associate degree programs transfers as juniors. That was a little bit more difficult forty years ago. You might say community colleges have paid their dues. I think the success of our students is what's caused that change to occur where the educational programs are seen as quality programs. From all the data that I have, on average, the community college student from KC who transfers to a state university does better on a GPA basis than a native student who starts at a university, on average. That depends, and that's our program. That in itself is evidence of the quality of education at a community college.

I also believe that community colleges have done a wonderful job in the movement over the last forty years that has made opportunities more accessible to students, to our clientele, to our citizens and our public, and that wasn't the case forty years ago. Now, through educational centers and through various delivery systems that we have—interactive video being one of

those, online another—that the opportunities are just unlimited as to the students’ ability to gain a higher education experience.

Thirdly, I would say that the community colleges have done a wonderful job over the years in maintaining low tuition. When you look at comparability studies, the community college costs, not only cost of doing business—the expenses of doing business are reasonable and accountable—but also the tuition rates that fund those costs are also manageable and affordable, and that’s the key. It’s those kind of things.

I might add a fourth: Equally important, is the ability to be comprehensive. The offerings that community colleges provide are so comprehensive that students have choices, and if they have an aptitude for health occupations, there’s a number of health programs and nursing programs, as an example, that they can choose upon. If they have an inkling to be in an occupational area, whether it be transportation or business or IT, they have many, many opportunities to select a career of their choice. That’s the other thing that’s changed, and that’s attitude. Guidance counselors today will advise students, high school students in particular, to look at a career choice based on what they think they will enjoy doing as a career. They also advise them—as we do here at this school—if you explore a career, a cluster as you will, and want to make a change, there’s nothing wrong with that. You can explore different areas, but be what you enjoy and don’t do what in the past we did, and that was to funnel people into various professions based on what we thought we wanted them to do; there’s a lot of truth to that back beyond forty years ago.

Another point that just came to mind that I think is so prevalent, and that is that the occupation had become very respectful. It makes no difference if you’re an electrician, if you’re an information technology technician, if you’re in a health occupation or if you’re a draftsman, auto mechanic, auto body collision technician, it makes no difference, all of those professions—carpenter, a welder—all of those professions are respected. And I think that’s a big change in our society that occurred over time. You find leaders of those professions, leaders of companies in those professions, that are now community leaders and leading our country. I think the respectability of the professions has really been enhanced over the last forty years.

Pogue: Thank you very much, Dr. Underwood, for reviewing your involvement with the community college network and also your experiences here in Illinois at both Richland and Kaskaskia.

Underwood: Thank you, and it’s been a pleasure visiting with you today. The best of luck to you and your organization, Phil, on the continuation of and the conclusion of this project.