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Aug 19, 2018

Forging new partnerships in higher education: CU and CMU

By ALVIN RIVERA

Colorado Higher Education funding continues to receive marginal resources given its tremendous value to the state. As the flagship educational institution, the University of Colorado system has charted the course for Colorado since 1876 — a date easily remembered since my Ph.D. from CU-Boulder was the Centennial Year, 1976.

My most important entry into higher education started at Trinidad Junior College. Those formative years set the foundation for advanced degree programs, but, it did far more. It provided me the opportunity to learn how rural communities provide for the overall "common good" of Colorado and society in general. I have never forgotten that valuable lesson. In the case of Colorado Mesa University, it has the same history evolving from a community college to a university. In that sense, we certainly share a common historical bond.

In recent years, I have repeatedly encountered "excellent academic students" choosing to attend other higher education institutions closer to home or community/junior colleges due to the high cost of Colorado universities. This is such a potential loss of educational talent. Too often these students attending community/junior colleges never get to the universities because they drift away to accept jobs offered by businesses, other financial mainstream groups and government at several levels, city, county, state and federal level. Fortunately, now, Colorado Mesa University can help fill that gap.

Colorado support for public education is shockingly ranked 42nd out of the 50 states. Where are the voices of CU leadership in the halls of the state legislature to change this situation? We need the CU leadership to partner with CMU leadership to change this situation.

I am concerned that the quality of education for every child in Colorado is becoming more and more costly every year. We need to stop it.

We need to be proactive at every educational level. There is a need for others who are clearly

advocating on behalf of affordable higher education in Colorado. I am proud of the CU partnership we have established at Colorado Mesa University in engineering, and now the CU Advocates Program is establishing a presence as well. We need more of these types of partnership with institutions and corporations.

As the inaugural "CU Advocate of the Year in 2013," I was pleased to have earned the title since CU had 2,300 advocates. At that time, I strongly encouraged CU to work more closely with Pueblo, and we have done so since then, and annually we have a recognition and celebration buffet dinner in Pueblo every summer for the incoming CU students and their parents attending our four campuses from southern Colorado. Every year the number increases and last two years it numbered over 300 students and parents. Our success in this effort has expanded to the Grand Junction and Montrose areas, and I have been consulted by the CU leadership at every turn. Also, the number of total CU Advocates now is over 4,000.

In my opinion, we have a lot of work to do if CU is going to remain a quality flagship institution and Colorado Mesa University a strong presence in western Colorado.

Alvin Rivera, Ph.D. is a Pueblo resident and veteran, graduate of CU, DU, CSU-Ft. Collins and Trinidad Junior College. He worked in two presidential administrations, the National Academy of Science, George Washington University, and he was one of nine Colorado Presidential Electors for Barack Obama in 2012. He is the Democratic candidate for CU Regent, Congressional District 3, in the November election.