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# PATHWAYS

HOWARD COMMUNITY COLLEGE MAGAZINE





With only one commencement ceremony held each May, Howard Community College pulls out all the stops to celebrate students for their achievements. The ceremony showcases the pomp and circumstance that is expected at a commencement, including a formal procession with gonfalons, greetings from elected officials, and speeches.

To ensure all students, faculty, staff, and family can attend and

participate, the college holds its ceremony at the Chesapeake Insurance Arena at the University of Maryland Baltimore County. One of the highlights is the confetti drop, which has become a favorite for graduates.

The 2022 commencement had 1,163 candidates for graduation, representing 1,260 degrees and certificates. Graduating student Jazmiera Smothers celebrates her degree below.



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BY JOE BURRIS

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I am so proud to be the president of Howard Community College. When I stepped on stage at Smith Theatre during my interview process, I felt a joy that I had never before experienced in my higher education career. It was like I was coming home, joining a college community that respected me as a leader, an educator, a mother, a wife, and a daughter.

After 10 months at the helm, I continue to feel that same sense of joy every day I set foot on campus. I find that joy when I stop to talk with students, talking with them about their classes, and their educational goals and challenges; when I meet with faculty and staff, listening to their ideas for making HCC even better for students; or when I connect with community leaders, collaborating on how we can connect with those residents who need HCC to move ahead. In these conversations, I always strive to embody the culture of care and belonging that has been a hallmark of HCC. As I look to the future, there is so much more that we can do together to provide an equitable, excellent experience for students and employees.

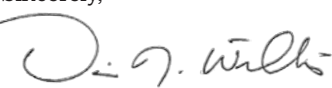
To find out what drives me, I invite you to read this issue’s feature article in which I talk about my own collegiate experience and what pushes me to keep the doors of opportunity open to all Howard County residents. The article is filled with voices from my personal life and my professional career, sharing their recollections and stories. And you cannot miss one important object in that article – my bold pink couch, which is the centerpiece of my aptly named “Conversations from the Couch” Instagram Live series.

“Conversations from the Couch” provides me with 30 minutes to tell the HCC story through my dialogue with faculty, staff, students, and community members. Through these conversations, I am uniquely positioned to talk about the HCC I know, the HCC that may not always be seen. While Howard County is often touted as one of the wealthiest counties in America, that fact overshadows the struggle of many county families to make ends meet. Please take a moment to view this issue’s By the Numbers, which outlines the students we serve and the challenges they face. Another article showcases the work of a local Girl Scout troop to raise money for the college’s food pantry, which is one important step in addressing food insecurity among students.

By the time you read this, the board of trustees will be holding the formal installation ceremony for my presidency, an important tradition in higher education. While the ceremony celebrates my leadership, it must also be a recognition of the quality work performed by faculty and staff, of dedication found in students striving to achieve their goal, of devotion of alumni and donors who support the vision for a better Howard Community College, and of trustees and community members who envision a Howard County enriched by its college.

Thank you for your ongoing support of Howard Community College. Together, we are providing pathways to success.

Sincerely,



Daria J. Willis, Ph.D.  
President

*“After 10 months at the helm, I continue to feel that same sense of joy every day I set foot on campus. I find that joy when I stop to talk with students, talking with them about their classes, and their educational goals and challenges.”*

DARIA J. WILLIS, Ph.D.

## PATHWAYS

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BENEFITS STATEMENT

This issue of Pathways was printed on paper derived from well-managed forests. The use of this environmentally-friendly paper saves the following:  
Trees: 6  
Energy: 4 million BTUs  
Greenhouse Gas Reduction: 693 lbs. of CO2  
Waste Water Reduction: 3,091 gallons  
Solid Waste Reduction: 242 lbs.  
*Environmental impact estimates were produced using the Environmental Defense Paper Calculator.*

# Spotlight

**“Your commitment to empowering students at Howard Community College is inspiring, and the board of trustees looks forward to continuing to work alongside you to lead the college into the future.”**

*Christopher G. Marasco  
Chair, Howard  
Community College  
Board of Trustees*



### NOTEWORTHY

## Dr. Willis Named to List of Influential Marylanders

The Daily Record named Dr. Daria J. Willis, president of Howard Community College, to its 2022 list of Influential Marylanders. The honorees were selected by The Daily Record editors for their significant contributions to their respective fields and for their leadership in Maryland. “Congratulations to Dr. Willis on this

well-deserved honor,” said Christopher G. Marasco, chair of the Howard Community College board of trustees. “Your commitment to empowering students at Howard Community College is inspiring, and the board of trustees looks forward to continuing to work alongside you to lead the college into the future.” ♦



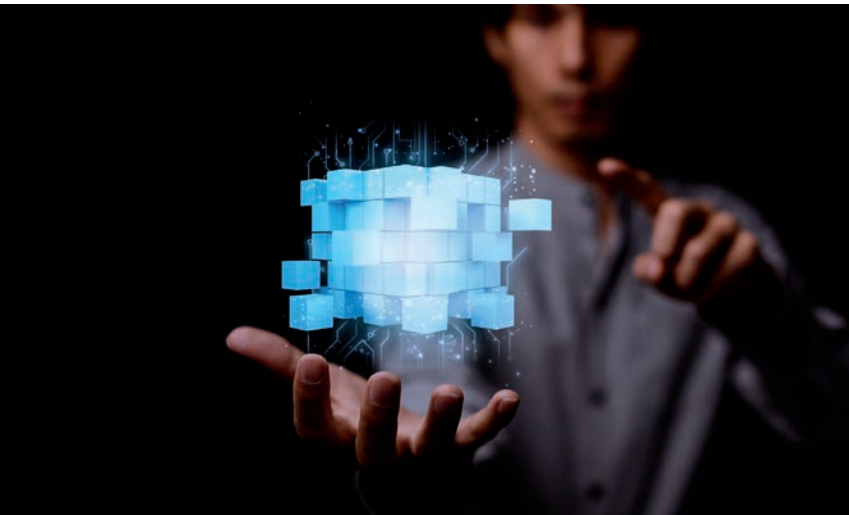
## College Creates Win-Win with Two New Apprenticeship Programs

HCC is launching two new apprenticeship programs — surgical technician and plumbing — to support students who want to earn while they learn. Apprenticeships combine on-the-job training and classroom instruction with full-time employment. This approach is a win-win, providing students with full-time employment while they are still learning and employers with a pipeline for the recruitment and retention of staff.



The surgical technician apprenticeship is for aspiring healthcare professionals who want to work in the hospital operating room environment. The University of Maryland Medical Center and Howard County General Hospital will fund their apprentices' tuition and fees, in addition to paid, full-time, entry-level work. The first students in the program will start in November with a new skills lab available for training.

The second new apprenticeship in plumbing is in partnership with the Associated Builders and Contractors Greater Baltimore. Developed in response to market demands, this apprenticeship will begin in the spring 2023 semester. ♦



## Grant to Support Virtual Artificial Intelligence Incubator

HCC has been awarded a \$40,000 grant from the American Association of Community Colleges, Dell Technologies, and Intel, as part of the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Incubator Network Initiative. In partnership with Mind Over Machines, HCC will teach AI through a noncredit workforce development program and certification courses to support business automation transition. HCC will also recruit students from the Women in Technology Club to

complete an AI project and upper-level courses in their computer science degree. The plan is to develop an associate degree in AI and machine learning. Only 15 colleges across the country were selected for this grant. ♦

## Three New Vice Presidents Join HCC

Under the leadership of Dr. Daria J. Willis, three new vice presidents recently joined the college.

**Dr. Melissa Curtis**, vice president of student success, comes to HCC from Austin Community College, where she served as associate vice chancellor of enrollment management for the district's 11 campuses. She holds a Ph.D. in educational administration from University of Texas at Austin, a M.F.A. in creative writing from Texas State University, and a B.A. in oral tradition in African American literature from Vassar College.



Dr. Melissa Curtis



Dr. Carl S. Moore



Joe Whalen

**Dr. Carl S. Moore**, vice president of teaching and learning, most recently served as the associate vice president for learning engagement at the University of the District of Columbia. Dr. Moore has a doctorate in urban education from Temple University and M.A. from The Ohio State University.

**Joe Whalen**, vice president for talent, inclusion, and workplace culture/chief human resources officer, was formerly the vice president of human resources at Everett Community College. He holds a M.B.A. in human resources management from St. Edward's University, a B.B.A. in human resources management from Eastern Washington University, and an associate degree from North Idaho College.

### SPORTS SHORTS

## National Championship Win in Esports

In just the second year of the HCC esports program, the Dragons have won a national championship as the Overwatch team defeated Concordia University of Wisconsin with a score of 4-2 in the best of seven series.



The Dragons earned a spot in the National Esports Collegiate Conference (NECC) national tournament after winning its conference championship in the fall season.

The eight-team national tournament included top teams from across the country. Howard won their first-round match over Concordia Wisconsin and then defeated Carthage College in round two. In the semifinals, the Dragons cruised by Marywood University to earn a spot in the finals. The championship battle saw a rematch with Concordia Wisconsin.

The Overwatch team was one of three HCC teams that earned a spot in the nationals. The Rocket League team made it to the elite eight round before their season ended and the League of Legends team's run came to a close in the final four.

## Softball Players Celebrate Honors in Debut Season

Three HCC softball players were named to the All-Region Team during the college's debut season for the sport. Katelyn Burdette, who led in batting average and other categories, earned first team and ended the year with the female student-athlete of the year award from the college; Sage Huber, who played shortstop and excelled on defense with a team high of 17 bags, made second team; and Grace Tolle, who was catcher and went 9-9 with stolen bases, received honorable mention.

Additional honors went to pitcher Samantha Hobert who received All-MDJUCO honorable mention for her efforts on the mound and at the plate, and Erika Goodwin and Melanie Czepinska who were named at NFCA All-American Scholar Athletes. ♦

### ON THE LIST

## Get to Know Dr. Willis

Howard Community College's Board of Trustees selected Dr. Daria J. Willis as the first African American to lead the college in its 52-year history. Want to know more about the leader? Read the full feature article in this edition of Pathways, and then see if you can answer the dozen trivia questions about Dr. Willis (answers are in the article).

Think you know all 12? Email your answers to [prmarketing@howardcc.edu](mailto:prmarketing@howardcc.edu) to win prizes!

1. In HCC's Instagram Live series, "Conversations from the Couch," what color is the sofa that Dr. Willis and her guests sit on?
2. During one "Conversations from the Couch" episode, Dr. Willis plays a song entitled, "Flawless." Who recorded the song?
3. Prior to HCC, Dr. Willis served as president of Everett Community College (EVCC). Which state is EVCC located?
4. What is the name of the president of Prince George's Community College?
5. Dr. Willis was selected among more than \_\_\_\_ candidates for the HCC presidency.
6. Which country did Dr. Willis and her daughter visit for her daughter's graduation present?
7. Name a favorite movie of Dr. Willis and her family?
8. What is Dr. Willis' husband's first name?
9. What is Dr. Willis' mother's first name?
10. At what Florida school did Dr. Willis receive her Ph.D.?
11. What is the name of Dr. Willis' hometown in Georgia?
12. What was Dr. Willis' father's occupation?





# Words of Wisdom

**Rachel Adams**, assistant professor of communication studies, started out as a journalist before transitioning to admissions work at a four-year university, where she discovered her passion for teaching. In addition to the classroom, Professor Adams serves on the HCC Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee and Safe Zone Committee, and is the former advisor for the Sexuality and Gender Alliance student club.

**Terrell Bratcher** serves as a completion specialist for HCC’s Howard P.R.I.D.E. program and as an adjunct instructor. Howard P.R.I.D.E. is an academic support and mentor program for minority men. Serving as their academic advisor, Mr. Bratcher advocated for African American history as a course at HCC, built the curriculum, and served as the instructor until fall 2021. He is a proud first-generation college student.

Together, Professor Adams and Terrell Bratcher have co-taught the college’s Anti-Racist Book Colloquium for faculty and staff. Their collaboration led to their selection as the 2022 commencement speakers.



**In your speech, you share your advice with graduating students. What were your words of wisdom for students poised to change the world?**

**Professor Adams:** *Number one:* Vote. Vote in school board elections, in county council elections, in mayoral and gubernatorial elections. The President of the United States isn’t the only person who gets elected, and often the people who will affect your lives the most are the ones who hold office right in your community.

**Mr. Bratcher:** *Number two:* Speak up. Nobel Peace Prize winner Desmond Tutu said, “If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor.”

**Professor Adams:** *Number three:* Be kind. We’ve seen a lot of students come and go at HCC, and if there’s one thing we notice about you it’s that you are uniquely empathetic, accepting of differences, and open to learning more about new cultures and people. Don’t ever lose that brilliant spark of humanity.

**Mr. Bratcher:** *Number four:* Remain curious and persistent. There will be people who are going to tell you “that’s just the way it is....” You don’t have to accept that as an answer. Ask why. Seek out the opinions of others. From those opinions draw your own ideas. Challenge yourself and the beliefs you hold. Allow yourself the space to evolve and then share that experience with the world. That’s how you become a change agent. ♦

**“Speak up. Nobel Peace Prize winner Desmond Tutu said, ‘If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor.’”**

*Terrell Bratcher*

**“Vote... Often the people who will affect your lives the most are the ones who hold office right in your community.”**

*Rachel Adams*

**Terrell Bratcher**  
*(left)*

**POSITION**  
Completion Specialist,  
Howard P.R.I.D.E.

**EDUCATION**  
B.A., M.A., Virginia  
State University

**Rachel Adams**  
*(right)*

**POSITION**  
Assistant Professor,  
Communication Studies

**EDUCATION**  
B.S., Mansfield University,  
M.A., Western Kentucky  
University

**“There will be people who are going to tell you “that’s just the way it is....” You don’t have to accept that as an answer. Ask why.”**

*Terrell Bratcher*





# Rachel Carver

**Rachel Carver** graduated magna cum laude from Howard Community College with an associate of applied science in culinary arts and baking and a certificate in baking and pastries. She hopes this education and experience will allow her to convert her cake business into a wholesale food business in the future. Carver shared her success story as a guest on Dr. Daria J. Willis’s “Conversations from the Couch” Instagram Live series.

**What was it like to be a student parent at HCC? What resources were available to help you get to this point?**

This is my second time graduating from college. Prior to HCC, I got a bachelor’s degree, and I found that once you get a degree, you can’t get financial aid anymore. All you can really do is apply for scholarships. Luckily, HCC has many donors. And thanks to them, the entire time I was at HCC, I had a full ride.

The first semester I paid for my knife kit but after that, I went to the admissions office and learned about the Career Links program for single parents. The program staff helped me access other scholarships and loaned me all the books I needed for my classes.

**As a community college, HCC is dedicated to supporting students wherever they are in their journey and helping them find their unique pathway to success.**

**“Persevere and don’t give up... remembering why you started and holding on to that will help you get to the end.”**

Rachel Carver ’22



**How do you feel about your community college experience?**

I absolutely love this community college. I wish I would’ve done this route first, not just for the resources, but because HCC is smaller. I have gotten to know a lot of different people, both staff and students, and the connections that I’ve been able to make here — you don’t get that from a large university. It is just a different experience altogether and I have truly enjoyed my time.

**Do you have any words of wisdom for those just starting their journey at HCC?**

I would say persevere and don’t give up. You never really know what is going to come and what sort of obstacles are going to be in your path, but remembering why you started and holding on to that will help you get to the end. ♦

Students with high academic honors have the opportunity to audition to be a student speaker at the May commencement ceremony.

For the 2022 commencement, a committee of faculty and staff choose Rachel Carver as the student speaker. Her story touched graduating students and their families.



**“Luckily, HCC has many donors. And thanks to them, the entire time I was at HCC, I had a full ride.”**



# Inclusive Education

Howard County is often recognized as one of the wealthiest counties in the United States. But this county is also home to families who struggle with the high cost of living and want to change their lives through education.

Since its doors opened in 1970, Howard Community College has served a diverse student body who need support from the moment they apply until they walk across the stage at commencement.



## HOWARD COUNTY

**\$124,042**

Median Household Income in Howard County

**\$56,000**

Per capita income

**37.3%**

Percentage of residents without a bachelor's degree

**21.2%**

Percentage of population born outside the United States

**25.9%**

Population speaking language other than English at home

## HOWARD COMMUNITY COLLEGE

**Majority Minority**

Students represent every race and ethnicity

**28%** Black

**15%** Asian

**11%** Hispanic/Latino

**6%** Two or more races

**6%** Unknown

**<1%** American Indian/Alaska Native

**<1%** Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander

**33%** White

**83%**

Percentage of students attending part time

**46%**

Students who received some financial assistance

**52%**

Percentage of students receiving financial aid who are at or below the poverty line

**1,346**

Students who receive financial aid who have a child or dependent at home

**\$1.29**million

Scholarships distributed during the 2020-2021 academic year

**\$3.5**million

Unmet need remaining to pay for tuition, books, and fees

## IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Howard Community College serves students from all corners of Howard County, the state of Maryland, and even across the world. For students, their reasons for choosing Howard Community College are equally as varied, reflecting the broad diversity of the community.

For this issue's "In Their Own Words," we asked students and recent graduates what drew them to the community college for their education.

## Why did you choose Howard Community College?



CECILIA REYES



TREA KEYS



PAKEEZA AWAN



NICO JEFFRIES

"I had my daughter in 2017 and decided to come back to school for a better future... Ambiciones [a program at HCC for Hispanic and Latino students] means 'ambitions' in Spanish. It helps you feel more comfortable being with someone who speaks your language. Even though you're speaking English, it helps you out because that's not my first language. They helped me choose the right classes, fill out the paperwork, find scholarships, all those types of things."

Cecilia Reyes

"A lot of my friends already played on the [basketball] team and I knew it was good. I've known Coach (Mike) Smelkinson for a few years now and I was already comfortable with the coaching staff. I saw this as a second chance to play college basketball and get a great education. Also, the fact that it's close to me, I wouldn't be losing out on anything. I saw it as the ideal spot."

Trea Keys

"Since my sophomore year [in high school], I knew I wanted to come to HCC. I just fell in love with the campus. I loved the professors and the resources, and the campus is close to home so I knew that this would be the pathway for me."

Pakeeza Awan

"After serving in the United States Air Force, I earned my bachelor's degree in mathematics and taught high school math for over six years in Baltimore City. The changes in my profession brought on by the global pandemic drove me to explore other career opportunities. I loved teaching, but I was ready for a change, and a career in accounting appealed to me. Howard Community College offers a CPA candidacy certificate for people who already have a bachelor's degree, but do not have the required coursework to sit for the Certified Public Accountant exams."

Nico Jeffries



*“Sometimes students say, ‘You’re just a president, you don’t understand me.’ And I say, ‘No, I’m a president, but I’m also a wife, a mother of three children, a daughter, granddaughter, and sister.’”*

*HCC President Dr. Daria J. Willis*

# A Whole New Day

BY JOE BURRIS

During Howard Community College’s “Conversations from the Couch,” episode four, HCC President Dr. Daria J. Willis sat on a plush, hot pink sofa and accentuated the school’s name with such oomph and swagger that even the stodgiest alumnus would admit that it rarely sounded so good.





**“Dr. Willis is shaking things up! The biggest change I felt, almost immediately, was a cultural shift. ‘Conversations from the Couch’ is a great opportunity for Dr. Willis to connect and be accessible to the college community”**

*Grace Anastasiadis,  
HCC arts and culture  
public relations manager*

“I’m soooo excited for our last episode of the first season of the spring 2022 semester at THEEE Howard Community College!” said the Columbia school’s new president, rhythmically gesturing with her hands for emphasis. The Instagram Live show that also airs on YouTube is quite popular with students, faculty, staff, and the community: Episode Four featured 2022 commencement speaker Rachel Carver. During a Women’s History Month episode, Willis invited Lakey Boyd, president and CEO of Columbia Association, to the pink sofa to discuss women’s leadership. During one point of the segment, they pretended to fling back their hair as Beyonce’s hit song, “Flawless” blared in the background and digital fire lit up the screen.

The 37-year-old visionary and scholar launched “Conversations from the Couch” less than a month after her tenure began in January, and already it reflects her penchant for resonating with an HCC community that lives on social media, engages in matters of social justice, listens to hip hop, and insists on being heard. Willis has brought this change to HCC by amplifying what is already there, using the internet and a magnetic in-person presence to inspire students, captivate the community, and bring cohesiveness to a campus that some say felt disconnected.

“Dr. Willis is shaking things up! The biggest change I felt, almost immediately, was a cultural shift,” said Grace Anastasiadis, HCC arts and culture public relations manager. “‘Conversations from the Couch’ is a great opportunity for Dr. Willis to connect and be accessible to the college community and the Howard County community at large. It is also a great way to connect with people we haven’t connected with before.”

“She is very accessible; you see her walking down the halls. She has focus groups where students can meet her,” said Mia Ahmed, alumna and former president of the HCC Student Government Association. “She meets with HCC student government once a month. The fact that students actually know that there is a president, and who that president is, is a huge shift for us.”

“Conversations from the Couch” is born out of Willis’s penchant for quickly learning a community college’s landscape and uniqueness. She sees herself in many students on campus, because she became pregnant at 19 while an undergraduate. She juggled parenting and schoolwork, often with scant financial resources, to earn three college degrees and fostered a school/life/work balance that has propelled her career in a short time. HCC has taken to her, and she says the feeling is mutual.

“I love the college and this area,” Willis said. “When I came for my interview, I could tell that it was a different culture here. People really care for each other. They care about the students, and you just feel that culture of care and belonging. There’s always someone here to help you.”

The school’s culture helped make implementing new changes like social media offerings easy, Willis said. With “Conversations from the Couch,” she added, “Each month I invite special guests to join me on this fabulous pink couch as we dive into some honest conversations about topics affecting our community, our students, our employees, our state, our nation – all the things.”

Willis is HCC’s fifth president and its first African American in its 52 years. She embodies a school that is 67% students of color, and she is just 13-years older than the average student age. She is part of a generation that is calling for changes in systems that were not set up for Black, Indigenous, and people of color.

“When I walk on my campus or in the halls [of HCC], I can’t tell you how many Black and Brown students will just stop and say, ‘Can I take a picture with you, because I never thought I’d see this day,’” said Willis. “It is such an amazing, out of body experience. I was the first at Everett, but it is a different feeling in a community that is so diverse with a majority-minority campus.”

Her aim is to ensure that those students have all the tools they need to succeed in the future.

“We need a radical change in higher education,” said Willis, “and in order for us to survive in the future, we have to get rid of some of the things that were never meant for our beautiful Black and Brown students, who comprise most of the students attending community colleges. We need a system that is flexible, agile but is not reactive and is proactive. COVID-19, in my opinion, taught us that. In the early days of the pandemic, the same faculty who said, ‘We can never teach this class or this math class online,’ were the first ones to say, ‘We can teach that class online; make a decision and make it happen.’”

The HCC Board of Trustees named Willis as president on November 4, 2021, as many institutions were still seeking to navigate through higher education’s instability, brought upon by the COVID-19 pandemic. Not only did trustees select an accomplished yet buoyant and down-to-earth scholar worthy of succeeding former president Kate Hetherington, they selected an educator who can guide one of the most prominent community colleges in the country into the future.

“We wanted someone with a track record of success, which Dr. Willis certainly had,” HCC Board of Trustees Chair Chris Marasco, who added that Willis was selected from a field of more than 50 candidates. “She was someone who was very energetic, very passionate. She really did a lot in a short period of time, which was impressive.”

“And when you met her, it was clear why she’s been so successful,” added Marasco. “She had a great presence about her when she walked in a room. Her passion for the students and her ability to relate to the students easily came through. It’s a different mindset of today’s college attendees. They’re more tech savvy. They want to be able to do more things online and do more on social

**“When I came for my interview, I could tell that it was a different culture here. People really care for each other. They care about the students, and you just feel that culture of care and belonging.”**

*Dr. Daria J. Willis,  
President*

Dr. Willis chats with Dr. Joy Stephens, associate director for mental health counseling at HCC, in preparation of the Instagram LIVE show, “Conversations from the Couch.”



platforms. And Dr. Willis had the pulse of that.”

Said Eric Clark, HCC assistant professor of criminal justice: “She is an advocate for students, social justice, and equity and she really has a sense of what a student experiences when they are going through college. When she went to college, she was a single parent and young. So, she knows about the struggles students go through. She really keeps the well-being of students at the heart of her work.”

Willis’s innovative spirit and engaging persona has enabled her to be impactful while other college presidents would still be learning everyone’s names. She had a similar impact at Everett (WA) Community College, where in just over two years, Willis led EVCC to the adoption of the Guided Pathways framework across the entire campus to help promote student success and achievement. She also secured \$43.5 million from the Washington Legislature to fund a Learning Resource Center.

Said Everett Community College trustee Dr. Betty Cobbs: “She really learned about the college and all aspects of the college, and she saw things that we didn’t see and know. She sought to tackle increasing our school’s declining enrollment. She showed us how to be more proactive in responding to student inquiries, to use more social media and to support students in completing applications and financial aid forms. She told us, ‘Sell yourselves.’ [As a result] our enrollment

went up very fast, and it went up at a time when COVID was just starting.”

Willis came to HCC at a time when more schools of higher learning are selecting more Black women to lead their institutions. Others include Debra L. McCurdy, Ph.D., who became the 14th president of Baltimore City Community College in 2019; Dr. Falecia Williams, who started at Prince George’s Community College in 2020; Dr. Theresa Felder, who joined Harford Community College in 2021; and Dr. Annesa Cheek, who started her presidency at Frederick Community College July 1, 2022.

Oddly enough, the move to HCC might not have happened had Willis not taken it seriously after HCC expressed interest. She arrived at Everett Community College less than a year before the city became home to the first known case of the novel coronavirus in the country. Willis joined the advisory board of the Everett hospital that admitted the first COVID patient and delved deeper into the Everett community.

“[HCC] inquired, and I didn’t respond too quickly,” said Willis. “I was in the throes of the pandemic and working out things in Everett. I was 100 percent committed to making it work and making it happen for the students and community there.”

Plus, the more she learned about HCC, the more she considered a presidency “unreachable” at that point in her career. Willis’s husband Dr. Isiah David Brown thought otherwise.





*“When I walk on my campus or in the halls, I can’t tell you how many Black and Brown students will just stop and say, ‘Can I take a picture with you, because I never thought I’d see this day.’”*

— Dr. Willis



**“She believes in her three eights in a day. She’ll say, ‘I’ve got eight hours of rest. I’ve got eight hours to take care of the family and eight hours to work.’ It’s important for her to try to make time for people so they know: ‘I hear you, I see you and I will do anything to support you in any way I can.’”**

*Dr. Isiah David Brown, Willis’s husband*

“My thing was, ‘I don’t think they would call you and ask you to apply if they didn’t think you were a serious candidate,’” Brown told his wife. “It was just like Everett; she didn’t think she stood a chance, and lo and behold, she got the job. Every job she’s ever applied for she would doubt herself in the beginning and then she’d come through with flying colors.”

And she has remained remarkably grounded while she and her husband, an online professor at Oswego (NY) State University, prioritize family time for their three children—daughters Lyric and Imani and son Isiah. The family’s favorite movies: “The Lion King,” “Top Gun,” and the first “Coming to America.” Christmases are for family cruises, to ports that include Mexico and Honduras. When the eldest graduated from high school, Willis treated her with a vacation to Italy. Her son recently got mommy time that included a visit to New York City and tickets to the “Lion King” musical. Imani visited her grandmother in Atlanta and went to the Georgia Aquarium.

All this while continuing to make her mark in higher education.

“She believes in her three eights in a day,” said Brown. “She’ll say, ‘I’ve got eight hours of rest. I’ve got eight hours to take care of the family and eight hours to work.’ Sometimes, the sleep may suffer, but it’s important for her to try to make time for people so they know: ‘I hear you, I see you and I will do anything to support you in any way I can.’”

Willis was reared in Stone Mountain, Georgia, a predominantly African American town about an

hour northeast of Atlanta. Though known for its Confederate statue carvings in the mountain that bears the city’s name, Stone Mountain is home to middle class affluent Black families, and it helped lay the groundwork for Willis’s passion for education, enabling her to complete high school in three years.

Her father Thomas, a firefighter, died of complications from AIDS when Willis was six. Her mother Sherry, who grew up poor and was denied a higher education due to her impoverished background, raised Willis and her brother as a single parent making sure they had opportunities Sherry hadn’t. In 2021, Willis was named an Aspen Institute Ascend Fellow, part of a group of leaders who are moving ideas to action for children and families in the U.S., and she gave a fitting tribute to Sherry on her profile.

“My father died of HIV in 1991 leaving my mother to raise two children alone,” said Willis. “She was a single parent, without a formal education, but she sacrificed everything so that I could have access to the opportunities she was denied. It is because of her courage and perseverance that I exist, so I have dedicated my life to serving others, the same way my mother gave to me.”

Willis received her bachelor’s and master’s degrees at Florida A&M University and earned her Ph.D. in history at Florida State University, successfully defending her dissertation, “The Life and Times of Adella Hunt Logan: Educator, Mother, Wife, and Suffragist, 1863-1915.” While many dissertations delve in subject matter only a thesis committee would understand, Willis chose to highlight a

**“It is because of [my mother’s] courage and perseverance that I exist, so I have dedicated my life to serving others, the same way my mother gave to me.”**

*Dr. Daria J. Willis, President*



light-complected African American scholar and activist whose depression and horrific public suicide uncovered troubling issues among the Black elite, particularly those whose skin tones enabled them to pass as white.

Prior to her presidency at EVCC, Willis was provost and senior vice president of academic affairs at Onondaga Community College in Syracuse, New York. In 2018 she was named the American Association of Women in Community Colleges’ 40 under 40 Award; the award recognizes outstanding female leaders under the age of 40 working at a community college.

“I look to Daria as the future,” said Dr. Casey Crabill, former president of Onondaga Community College. “With the potential of community colleges exploding as the working world changes and people look at their careers following this two-to-three-year lockdown. People are going to come back to higher education and say, ‘I want to carve out a new life.’ Community colleges are the place to do that, and Daria is well positioned to make sure Howard helps its community tackle the challenges coming out of the pandemic.”

Willis has also become an advocate for student parents. She participated in a briefing on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. about the impact of childcare solutions for parenting college students. Among those who joined her in the briefing was Nicole Lynn Lewis, a former student parent and founder and CEO of Generation Hope, a nonprofit organization that provides sponsorship and support to teen parents who are attending college.

Said Lewis about Willis: “She [understands] what it was like to be a student who was marginalized, who had a different background, who didn’t fit whatever mold we have for who a college student should be. She very much recognized that and talked about how the benefits of that and really talked about it shaped her leadership.”

Her passion for supporting student parents and for lifting up others with similar experiences led Willis to the Ascend at the Aspen Institute, a selective program designed to build leaders and equitable systems for the nation’s youngest children and families to thrive.

“As a proud mother herself, Dr. Willis understands what it’s like to pursue a postsecondary education while raising a young child. With that lens always on top of mind, Dr. Willis creates academic

experiences that are compatible with students’ caregiving duties,” said Anne Mosle, vice president at the Aspen Institute and founder and executive director of Ascend at Aspen Institute. “She deeply believes that parents don’t need to sacrifice their educational ambitions. Rather, schools need to partner with parents to create an educational setting that sets them up to succeed.”

Willis said her aim is to continue to use “Conversations on the Couch” and other unique ways to meet students where they are. “It’s not about the ‘likes’; it’s about getting a video out there where they can see I’m working on their behalf. Sometimes students say, ‘You’re just a president, you don’t understand me.’ And I say, ‘No, I’m a president, but I’m also a wife, a mother of three children, a daughter, granddaughter, and sister.’”

It’s no coincidence that Willis themed her social media show around a comfy sofa, soft lighting, and occasional sprinkles of pulsating music and digital effects. “Conversations from the Couch” is more Chicken Soup for the Soul than Education Week, becoming a salve for a college community still navigating its way out of the COVID-19 pandemic. As Willis navigates her way through HCC, she is making good on her commitment to foster a culture of care and belonging for students, faculty, staff and the community. She is laying the groundwork for moving HCC into a future, where community colleges design a framework that connects to higher education’s most diverse demographics. If what lies ahead is anything like its first 10 months under Willis, HCC is in for unprecedented strides. ♦





# Baking Their Way to Perfection

Ever wondered what culinary students do for their graded course projects? Well, you won't find a paper or a speech here. Rather, students create delicious masterpieces as they are learning the skills of the trade.

For students in the Cake Decorating course, “They start out learning different types of icing and cakes, then progress to piping skills, practicing on cookies,” explained Chef David Milburn, assistant professor of baking and pastries.

One day, his students even surprised him with a cookie decorated in his likeness. “I have a gingerbread man cookie cutter shape, but not a chef’s hat. The students actually cut and created the hat themselves.”

In another popular course, Candies, Confections, and Showpieces, students sculpted intricate designs out of edible products. Students built an Eiffel Tower completely out of sugar icing. As a final project, students made sugar-spun creations that looked almost like glass, giving life to a magical underwater scene.

The semester-end project for the Cake Decorating course was a three-tier wedding cake. Students made flowers out of gum paste, covered the cake in rolled fondant, and decorated the cake with royal icing. Once the final flourish was in place, students served the cake to students and employees, allowing everyone to taste the result of their hard work.







## STUDENT PARENTS

**“There were finally other people that were going through the same struggles and challenges that I was.”**

*Susan McGrath*

# CAREER LINKS

**HCC PROGRAM CONNECTS STUDENT PARENTS TO SUCCESS**

BY JOE BURRIS

When she started at Howard Community College, Susan McGrath knew nothing about HCC’s single-parent support program Career Links. That meant the Laurel resident juggled the work/family/school balance mainly on her own, paid out-of-pocket for college expenses and had no one encouraging her when coursework was most challenging.

McGrath discovered in her second year what many successful student parents at HCC already knew: Career Links has been around for three decades, easing student parents’ financial, emotional, and social challenges. The structured program is designed to meet single parents where they are along their college journeys, and it offers resources tailored to address the specific needs of college students with young children — as well as those whose children recently left the nest.





“Everyone is trying to make higher education more accessible.”

Maureen Marshall  
Associate Director,  
Career Links

Offering links to services at HCC and throughout the surrounding community, Career Links delivers support through:

- **Personal counseling:** for managing issues such as co-parenting, stress, and divorce.
- **Financial coaching:** working one-on-one with students for help with budgeting, establishing and understanding credit, building good credit, homeownership goals or savings goals.
- **Group social events:** Students support and encourage one another at weekly meetings at HCC’s Cafe on the Quad (food vouchers provided).
- **Scholarships:** ensuring that student parents maximize financial aid.
- **Resources:** including loaner laptops for school-work during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Career Links will even help pay for textbooks.

“That’s big, because books can run a couple hundred dollars,” said McGrath, “and if you don’t have the financial aid to cover that, you have to get the money out of your personal [accounts] that you’re trying to use for your kids for food, for rent, for gas. When that was offered, that was such a huge benefit.”

Like many other single parents at HCC, McGrath took full advantage of Career Links upon learning about the program and used it to connect her with other like-minded adult learners at the college. The program is designed specifically for single parents who are heads of household, married student parents whose spouses are not working and single pregnant women. It is open to current and prospective students.

“We’re here to support them on their educational journey to get their degree, get the career they want and increase their earning potential so that they can provide for their families,” said Maureen Marshall, associate director of Career Links.

“We are fortunate that for some of our students, their children follow them to HCC upon graduating high school,” Marshall added. “We really like to see multigenerational connections. Student parents have always been there. Everyone is trying to make higher education more accessible. Anything that helps support that accessibility is welcome.”

Many of the parent students served by Career Links are not unlike HCC’s new president Dr. Daria J. Willis, who became pregnant when she was 19 and found resources and support to continue her education. She helped launch programs at her previous employer, Everett Community College.

“I’m all about children and families,” said Willis, “due to my own experience as a single parent and knowing what it’s like going through college and not having.”

Career Links serves about 165 students, with about 30 graduates annually. Some participants turn to Career Links after their children become adults; those participants seek help while reentering the workforce after a lengthy hiatus.

“We’re here to create a community for those parents,” said Marshall, “so they can feel seen and supported. We make sure that students are maximizing financial aid. We link them to resources in the community: Say if they need clothes for interviewing; there is a nonprofit we partner with. If students need referrals for food insecurity, HCC has its own resource, our Fueling Dragons program, which includes a food pantry. But sometimes we have connected students to other food pantries or help them apply for SNAP benefits. We’re taking a case-management approach.”

Career Links began at HCC about 30 years ago to help women return to the workforce after raising children. It later shifted to a program for all parents, with more men participating. Most participants are in their 30s and 40s, but some have been 60 years old and others directly out of high school. Some participants have bachelor’s degrees but turn to the program due to being out of the workforce for extended periods.

A human resource officer with the State of Maryland, McGrath began at HCC in 2010 after working in the corporate sector for years without a college degree. “I was an adult learner, so it was a really difficult obstacle to overcome, being not the same generation of most of the students that were there,” said McGrath. “I kind of kept to myself a little bit because I was trying to test the waters.”

And why not? Student parents are navigating a higher education system that was not designed for them. There’s the schedule: making sure class times align with pickup times for children at school or daycare. Then there are classes that are in the evening, which may cut into family time and adds to childcare expenses.

“When I found Career Links, it was wonderful, because there were finally other people that were going through the same struggles and challenges that I was,” McGrath added. “I was sorry that I had a whole year not knowing this even existed. We had events where all the parents would come together and network. We started to say, ‘What classes are you taking and what time are you taking? Let’s try to take classes at the same time so we can have at least another adult learner in the class with you and work on the homework together.’”

That’s why McGrath became one of Career Links’ first peer mentors, providing guidance and support to other HCC students as they, too, juggle schoolwork, family, and career.

“I would meet once a week with the people I was assigned to, go over their schedules and find out where their challenges are,” said McGrath. “I would offer information regarding scholarships and financial aid. I would connect them to resources within the college.”

McGrath also went from someone without a college degree to earning two associate degrees (business administration and business technology) from HCC,

a bachelor’s degree in psychology at University of Maryland College Park, and master’s degree in education at Penn State.

Career Links helped McGrath chart a course for continuing her education as a single mom.

“It would have been extremely more challenging [without Career Links] than it already is,” said McGrath. “You really need support. You need some coach or cheerleader in your corner saying, ‘Keep going. You can do this. How can I help you?’ For me, just having someone that I could talk to who understood where I was coming from was huge.” ♦

“You really need support. You need some coach or cheerleader in your corner saying, ‘Keep going. You can do this. How can I help you?’”

Susan McGrath



Students in Career Links gather for an orientation to the program.



# Support

## Althea Hanson

“My dad would never pass up an opportunity to sing or dance at the arts events that Howard Community College (HCC) used to put on. When he passed away, we thought about giving back to students in the arts. We knew that would have made him happy,” said Althea Hanson, founder and CEO of Althea’s Almost Famous, a food truck and catering business with Caribbean-inspired food.

Hanson’s father, Roy Peart, was a long-time employee at HCC. When he passed, Althea and her siblings, Nicholas, Lashley, Kerecha, Sandra, Latoya, and Josette, set up the Roy Peart Scholarship to support theatre, music, and dance students through the HCC Educational Foundation. “The college has been incredibly supportive of ev-

erything we’ve wanted to do for my dad,” Hanson said. “Both of my parents worked here, and both of my sons are in attendance. We felt it only fitting to support HCC students in honor of our big family history here.”

To launch fundraising for the scholarship, Hanson and her family hosted a celebratory day on campus with her food truck. All funds went to the scholarship.

“The kickoff day at the college is one of my favorite memories with the food truck,” said Hanson. “The event was a huge success, and people stood in line for hours, eager to support our dad’s foundation.”

Hanson hopes the scholarship will help students pursue their passions like she did. She and her husband quit their long-time careers, built the food truck, and launched their business in 2021. She encourages students to expect the unexpected and work hard.

“Perfect your craft and work as hard as you can. Plan ahead and know that things will go wrong. However, don’t let anyone tell you that your idea is crazy. Crazy ideas are the best ones.” ♦

BY VICTORIA CAIN

**“Don’t let anyone tell you that your idea is crazy. Crazy ideas are the best ones.”**

*Althea Hanson*



Althea Peart Hanson, family, and friends of Roy Peart gather at a fundraiser for the Roy Peart Scholarship.

BY JULIA SINGLETON

## Local Girl Scouts Grow It Forward

Howard County’s Girl Scout Troop 10329 is giving to HCC to help fund fresh and healthy food options for college students.

“When you are hungry, it impacts your daily life. It impacts your thoughts, your mood, your energy level, any number of things,” Matthey said. “And when you are in college and you are trying to get your degree and move your life forward, put yourself out there in the workforce, food insecurity can become a huge barrier towards students’ success.”

After the Girl Scout Troop 10329 presented the college with a check for \$800, Michelle Adamson, HCC garden

Girl Scouts plant seeds in the Howard Community College garden. The fresh produce grown includes mixed lettuce, bok choy, kale, and herbs such as rosemary and cilantro.



BY THE NUMBERS:

**1,712**

Visits to campus food pantry by students over the year

**25,508**

Pounds of food distributed to students at the pantry

**“Part of what is so exciting about this moment in our food pantry and garden is that we can increase the diversity of foods and fresh items that are available to our students.”**

*Michelle Adamson  
HCC Garden Manager*

HCC’s food pantry is organized to teach students to make healthier choices, cook, and develop life skills through educational experiences and workshops. The pantry gives over 2,300 pounds of a variety of frozen meats and vegetables, fresh and non-perishable goods each month to students in need.

“The Girl Scouts’ support of the garden hoop house will help us extend the growing season by two months by providing fruits and vegetables to HCC’s campus pantry,” said Anne Johnson, HCC director of resource development. “It helps our students and encourages them to try new vegetables while they learn lifelong cooking skills.”

At the Girl Scout event, Missy Matthey, executive director of the Howard Community College Educational Foundation, explained that resources like the college’s food pantry and the Girl Scout Troop 10329 donation will help improve the college’s garden.

manager, took them on a tour of the garden and explained how it supports the college’s food pantry. During the tour, Girl Scouts helped Adamson prepare and plant carrots in the garden.

“Part of what is so exciting about this moment in our food pantry and garden is that we can increase the diversity of foods and fresh items that are available to our students,” Adamson said. “With this generous funding and through volunteer work, we can expand the amount of time that students are in the garden working and learning towards understanding healthy foods and sustainable practices, which will help develop lifelong practices.”

Are you interested in supporting the college’s food pantry and garden? Volunteers can host a food drive, participate in service at the pantry, or participate in a service learning activity. Contact 443-518-4950 to learn more. ♦





Mark your calendars for the next **Vino Scholastico** on **April 23, 2023**.

The special pre-event reception starts at **6:30 p.m.**, followed by the general tasting at **7:30 p.m.**

For more information: [howardcc.edu/vino](http://howardcc.edu/vino).



**Vino Scholastico:  
Raising a Glass  
for Scholarships**

For 16 years, the Howard Community College Educational Foundation has been encouraging Howard County residents to raise a glass and raise money for scholarships. The 2022 *Vino Scholastico* event in April proved to be another night to remember, kicking off with the featured winery reception with Big Cork Vineyards and a tasting of four of their wines. The evening continued with the general tasting, which has expanded beyond wines and now includes tastings of craft beer and spirits. *Vino Scholastico* also brings together local restaurants and caterers to offer samples of their favorite food.

This year’s *Vino Scholastico* brought hundreds of donors, community leaders, faculty, staff, and friends of the college together. The result was a resounding success with approximately \$130,000 raised to support students. ♦



Wine Bin sommelier Maria Bell pours a glass of white wine to taste (top photo). Howard Community College Educational Foundation (HCCCEF) Board Member Charlie Camp of M&T Bank (far left, second photo) celebrates the winners of the Tin Lizzie Wineworks package, Amy Holland and son, with Dr. Daria J. Willis, HCC president; Vivian Lawyer, HCCCEF board chair; and Missy Matthey, HCCCEF executive director. In third photo, guests at *Vino Scholastico* celebrate inside the HCC Academic Commons. (Bottom photo) Dr. Daria J. Willis and her husband, Dr. Isiah David Brown, pose with HCC employees Lynn Coleman, Julie Jones, and Grace Anastasiadis.

**Up Close**

As an institution committed to the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion, Howard Community College proudly selected the steel sculpture “BLM” as its ARTsites piece for the 2022-2023 academic year. HCC and 11 other outdoor locations around Howard County received a sculpture to display for one year through the Howard County Arts Council in an effort to “increase accessibility of public art.”

In “BLM,” artist Jack Howard-Potter captured the powerful symbol of the kneeling body with a raised fist that came to represent the Black Lives Matter Movement. Starting on social media, the movement galvanized a nation in an effort to protest police violence against unarmed Black men and women. In 2016, National Football League quarterback Colin Kaepernick took a knee during the National Anthem to protest discrimination against Blacks and ongoing police brutality.

To find “BLM” on campus, visit the steps at the northeast entrance to the Science, Engineering, and Technology Building.







10901 Little Patuxent Parkway  
Columbia, Maryland 21044

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## Calendar of Events

**NOVEMBER 18-19, 2022**

### DANCE SHOWCASE

7 p.m. each evening

#### Tickets:

\$15 general admission

\$10 students and seniors

\$10 for military with ID

#### Howard Community College Smith Theatre

The Howard Community College Dance Showcase features the works of student, faculty, and guest choreographers. Their work embodies diverse choreographic voices and ideas.

More information about this and other dance department events is available at [howardcc.edu/danceconcerts](http://howardcc.edu/danceconcerts)

**DECEMBER 4, 2022**

### HCC SINGERS & HCC-BAIN CENTER SENIOR CHOIR CONCERT

4 p.m.

#### Tickets:

\$10 general admission

\$10 students and seniors

\$10 for military with ID

Free admission for children 12 and under

#### Howard Community College Smith Theatre

Join us for this concert featuring ensembles of students from the music program.

More information at [howardcc.edu/concerts](http://howardcc.edu/concerts)

**MARCH 6, 2023**

### SILAS CRAFT COLLEGIANS DINNER

12 – 2 p.m. or 4 – 6 p.m.

Pick up dinner at Hunan Manor

6:30 p.m. – Silas Craft Collegians  
virtual program begins

**Tickets:** \$45

#### Virtual

Come hungry, leave fulfilled by partnering with the college to support the virtual version of the Silas Craft Collegians Dinner and raise funds to benefit the Silas Craft Collegians Endowment and program. The virtual program features student stories and special guests. Purchase tickets at [howardcc.edu/silascraftdinner](http://howardcc.edu/silascraftdinner)

**APRIL 23, 2023**

### VINO SCHOLASTICO

6:30 p.m. – Pre-event reception

7:30 p.m. – General tasting

#### Tickets:

\$75 general tasting

\$125 pre-event and general tasting

#### Howard Community College Academic Commons

You're invited to mix and mingle over wine and food, while raising money for student scholarships. This will be the 17th year for this popular event organized by the Howard Community College Educational Foundation.

More information at [howardcc.edu/vino](http://howardcc.edu/vino)

## Thank You

*“The stress of paying for school can definitely kill motivation and burn you out really, really easily. I had the privilege of being awarded grants and scholarships. Having those and academic recognition definitely just propelled me to keep moving forward.”*

Maheen Ahmed '22

