



**Communications
for Change**

interesting and useful information for clients and friends

douglas gould & co., inc. quarterly newsletter January 2005

COLUMNS

- notes from the field
- on my radar
- and another thing
- resources

● feature

Bridges to Opportunity

It's not an overstatement to say that America's community colleges are the key to developing a skilled, productive workforce that can compete in the rapidly changing global economy. For this reason, Douglas Gould and Company is proud to be involved in a multi-year community college initiative for the Ford Foundation. Researchers, experts, and advocates from education, business and government recognize the critical importance of community colleges that are high functioning, successful institutions with policies in place to serve the full range of needs of today's students.

Today's "typical" community college student is anything but typical. Increasingly, that student is a person of color who works full-time and is head of a household. She may be striving for a certificate or for an associate's degree, or just going back to school to refresh her skills. He may be taking English as a second language courses, or working toward his GED. The range of students is broad, as are the places they come from and the goals they seek to achieve. To respond to these needs, in 2003 the Ford Foundation established the Bridges to Opportunity Initiative designed to promote state policies that strengthen the capabilities of community colleges. The initiative aspires to promote the access of low-income students to community colleges and focuses on six states: Colorado, Kentucky, Louisiana, New Mexico, Ohio, and Washington.

Interestingly, although community colleges are fast becoming the primary resource for higher education for most Americans, there is a significant lack of information on how the public perceives these institutions. This situation makes it especially challenging to develop effective messages to promote policies that will help community colleges. Thus, Douglas Gould and Company, in collaboration with our research partners Belden, Russonello & Stewart, developed a national opinion poll and conducted focus groups to test attitudes toward community colleges and help identify supporters. Our research received supplemental funding from the Lumina, Kellogg and Heinz Foundations, which allowed us to include adults from an additional nine states in our sample.

Our survey indicates that community colleges are highly valued and perceived as integral to American society. These schools receive high marks from a majority of the public for providing quality education, in addition to opportunities for career training and advancement. However, community colleges are faced with many enrollment pressures including not enough room or enough classes to meet the demand.

We also learned that Americans place a high priority on supporting community colleges, even when faced with competing state funding issues. Although much of the public is unaware that state funding is critical to the survival of community colleges, seventy-nine percent polled said that “given the limited funding and the number of other demands on tax dollars” they would nonetheless “oppose cutting back spending on community colleges” in the short-term in order to balance their states’ budgets.

The survey findings have begun to generate public interest, and a message platform to further effective communications on behalf of community college policy and practice is now being disseminated.

Douglas Gould and Company has launched a new website www.communitycollegecentral.org where you can find the polling report and all research to date for this initiative, as well as other helpful links.

[top](#)



Unanticipated Controversy Involving “Rights” in On-Air Announcement Calls for Crisis Communications Assistance from Douglas Gould and Company

Ipas, an international reproductive rights organization based in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, never expected to come to loggerheads with its local NPR affiliate, WUNC-FM. For months, WUNC had aired Ipas’s announcement, which included the words, “reproductive health and rights.” Immediately prior to the election, the station made the sudden decision that “rights” could convey a political meaning and in so doing, might violate Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulations. Despite never having heard from the FCC, the station removed “rights” from the Ipas announcement in October.

Ipas abruptly found itself in the midst of a complex dilemma. The organization wanted to support its local NPR affiliate, but also wanted to accurately represent its own mission. Without the word, “rights,” in its announcement, Ipas could not convey the importance of a significant part of its work, which includes ensuring that couples and individuals can make reproductive decisions free of discrimination, coercion and violence. After learning that the FCC does not provide specific language on what constitutes political advocacy and that WUNC’s station manager had made an individual decision to censor “rights,” Ipas asked the station to reconsider its decision.


As soon as the first article on the “rights” controversy hit *The Chapel Hill News*, the issue created a stir in Chapel Hill, a community that has historically been supportive of Ipas. Douglas Gould and Company immediately provided crisis communications assistance to help the organization use the media to effectively explain the importance of supporting “rights”—even in a chilling, post-election political environment. We provided strategic advice on what messages to convey to the media and how to convey them. That work, combined with Ipas’s outreach to individuals who signed petitions in support of Ipas, generated dozens of radio and

newspaper hits. Frank Rich referred to the controversy in his weekly *New York Times* column Arts & Leisure. The increased media attention helped the organization to develop a more solid base of supporters and to raise the organization's media profile within North Carolina and nationally.

Unfortunately, even after repeated attempts to negotiate different language with the station manager, WUNC refused to allow Ipas to use "rights" in its announcement. Ipas was then forced to make the tough decision to revoke its underwriting support for the station. It did so, however, knowing that it had the solid support of over 1,000 individuals from around the world who had signed its online petition.

[top](#)



 on my radar

NCLB (No Child Left Behind)

Two months ago, I attended the invitation-only conference, hosted by The Campaign for Fiscal Equity/ACCESS, "NCLB: Developing a Common Agenda for Reform." The agenda was to discuss the current state of NCLB (No Child Left Behind), established in 2001 to ensure that all children are proficient in math and reading by 2014.

All participants agreed to the importance of closing the gap in achievement and excellence to ensure that all children get the best education. However, most also agreed that the reality of how this law is currently implemented indicates that the 2014 goal is not obtainable. While a major overhaul of the law seems impossible at this point, strides are being made to improve the methods used and money available to reach the goal. All hope is not lost.

In October, 2004 CFE, along with 30 other organizations, submitted a joint statement to Congress that offers suggested changes to the law in the areas of progress measurement, assessments, building capacity, sanctions and funding. All recommendations point in one direction—take the focus away from test scores and direct it towards an enriching and rewarding educational experience. To see the full statement, go to www.schoolfunding.info/news/federal/10-28-04jointstatement.php.

The conference reaffirmed the commitment to creating a national education agenda that is balanced, focused and fair and that uses methods and measurements that truly keep students' experiences at the forefront to ensure their success.

My firm was asked by the Ford Foundation and the Access Project to create and test a series of messages that advocates could use to discuss NCLB. This research shows that advocates should frame their messages in terms of the type of community they want to create and the role that public education plays in the process.

To learn more about Campaign for Fiscal Equity/ACCESS, visit www.cfequity.org.


In some recent related news, volunteers for DC Voice (District Community Voices

Organized and Informed for Change in Education) just finished researching 43 schools across the DC-area and revealed that over half had teacher openings the first day of school. To see the article, visit:

http://www.wusatv9.com/news/news_article.aspx?storyid=35332

[top](#)



 and another thing

Taking the Public's Pulse on Arts Education

Early in 2005, Douglas Gould and Company will complete the important first phase of researching messages for a bold new arts education initiative sponsored by the Ford Foundation. Having already conducted brainstorming sessions with engaged stakeholders in Dallas, Baltimore, Washington, DC and Alameda, CA we are learning from local communities as they try to raise awareness of the positive relationship between arts education programs and student achievement.

After completing this work Belden, Russonello & Stewart will conduct eight focus groups, two in each of the targeted districts, inviting the local collaborators to observe and help us understand the findings. Sample messages created and tested in these focus groups will inform a national poll to assess awareness of arts education and its impact in schools.

Opinion research is critical to understanding the public's perception of arts education and will be used to help craft messages that encourage public discussion that reflects the best interests of children and communities. Ultimately, we aim to create a communications strategy to weave the arts into everyone's understanding of quality teaching and learning, which is at the heart of the Ford Foundation's current education reform initiative.

[top](#)



 resources
online/offline

Online Resources

www.VotesforWomen2004.org

Votes for Women is a project of the Communications Consortium Media Center. They recently completed a survey to evaluate the differences in voting trends between men and women in the 2004 election. A full analysis of this survey can be found by following the link above.

www.womenemployed.org

A Chicago-based not-for-profit that focuses on advancing women's economic status, particularly low-wage working women. The organization just launched an online career coach service—a free tool that works to guide people toward

employers that offer a fair wage.

www.dcvoice.org

(District Community Voices Organized and Informed for Change in Education) is a collaborative that works to keep and grow an informed public to strengthen public education in Washington, DC.

www.communitycollegecentral.org

is a new website launched by Douglas Gould and Company where you can find all reports, research and related items for the Ford Foundation's Community College Bridges to Opportunity initiative.

www.culturalcommons.org

was created by the Center for Arts and Culture in Washington, DC. The website is an open forum for discourse on creativity and culture.

http://ww3.americansforthearts.org/services/arts_education/resource_center/

Americans for the Arts and the National School Boards Association have joined forces to create an online resource center that will provide easy access to extensive resources for local education policymakers.

http://www.wusatv9.com/news/news_article.aspx?storyid=35332

DC Schools Come Up Short On Basic Preparation—Article on DC Voice's research revealing that over half of all classes in 43 schools across the DC area had teacher openings the first day of school.

Offline Resources

"A New Framework for Building Participation in the Arts" by Kevin F. McCarthy & Kimberly Jinnett. Publisher: Santa Monica, CA: RAND, Copyright 2001. ISBN: 0833030272. To order, visit <http://www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR1323/>

"Keeping America's Promise" is a joint project between the Education Commission of the States and the League for Innovation in the Community College with support from The Atlantic Philanthropies, Inc. and the Lumina Foundation for Education. Copyright 2004 by the Education Commission of the States (ECS). For a copy, contact Janan at jcompitello@douglasgould.com

[top](#)



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