

Forging connections: Officials from Colombian university visit SUNY Broome

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More than 2,400 miles lie between Bucaramanga in north-central Colombia and SUNY Broome. The distance, however, hasn't prevented the college from forging partnerships with its Colombian counterparts.

More than a half-dozen *docentes*, or teachers, from the Universitaria de Investigación y Desarrollo (UDI) in Bucaramanga paid a visit to the SUNY Broome campus from June 22 to 24. UDI has agreements with SUNY Broome in business administration, accounting, graphic design, electrical engineering and international business.

"Buenos días, everyone," SUNY Broome President Kevin Drumm greeted the group, Colombian coffee in hand. "We are developing a number of partnerships in Colombia."

Colombia is a major trading partner of the U.S., noted President Drumm, who has visited the South American nation almost 10 times so far. He noted that upstate New York bears a certain resemblance to Colombia, with its small cities and focus on agriculture.

"The history of both of our countries is written around our coastlines, rivers and mountains," he said, while Dr. Alberto Miller, director of SUNY Broome's Department of International Education, translated into Spanish for the guests.

During the group's three-day visit, President Drumm discussed the community college system in the United States, while Miller addressed the SUNY system and globalization and innovation in education. Executive Vice President Francis Battisti led a panel on the college's administrative practices and academic programs, while Vice President Debbie Morello discussed the development of educational proposals and different methods of funding.

While trade has historically forged links between Colombia and the United States, the community college system may offer a new means of connection, President Drumm mused. It system can provide a means to grow – or, in the case of the current United States, rebuild – the middle class, while keeping up with a 21st century global economy.

As Colombia expands its manufacturing and technical sector, community colleges can help, he said.

In the United States, community colleges had their start in 1901, when Joliet Junior College was founded at the University of Chicago. While higher education was traditionally limited to the sons of wealthy families, Joliet and

other junior colleges permitted local students of more humble means to study the classics and rhetoric.

The aftermath of World War II saw the transformation of junior colleges into community colleges, and the development of their dual mission: to prepare students for either a four-year university or entering the workforce.

Today, community colleges educate more than 12 million people in the U.S. every year and comprise half of the college enrollment in New York State. About 90 percent of first-responders, more than 60 percent of nurses and more than half of engineers receive at least some of their education at community colleges, President Drumm noted.

President Drumm is himself a community college graduate, as is the college's chief financial officer Regina Losinger and chief academic officer Francis Battisti. While all went on to achieve bachelor's and master's degree and, in the case of Drumm and Battisti Ph.D.s, an associate's degree has a value in and of itself.

Take Dr. Drumm's sister, for example, who has an associate's degree in health science.

"She's had more job offers in her lifetime than I have had," he said.

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