

DMACC
50th Anniversary Book Chapter
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Des Moines Area Community College – 50 Years of Community

The legacy of Des Moines Area Community College (DMACC) is one of dramatically widening access to the life-improving and business-building power of education. Students from all backgrounds find new career opportunities. In short, DMACC has brought democracy to education in Central Iowa.

DMACC's history is one of constant evolution to meet the changing needs of a very diverse array of students and industries. Since its founding in 1966, DMACC has grown from a metro-Des Moines-focused, vocational and technical learning center into to Iowa's largest community college, serving 11 counties and 75,000 credit and non-credit students annually on six campus locations and five learning centers.

Iowa's Largest and Most Diverse Community College

DMACC's legacy is one of diversity, found in the students it serves, the career tracks it offers, and in the demographics of the campus locations. As of 2014, DMACC offered 167 certificates, diploma and degree fields, by far the largest and broadest course offering of any Iowa community college. [DMACC 2014 Annual Data Summary Report](#) Every DMACC course created, and the thousands of adjustments to curriculum throughout its history were made in response to a community need. Each of the college's six campuses — Ankeny, Des Moines Urban, Boone, Carroll, Newton and West Des Moines — also grew out of response to community needs.

Determined Founders

In 1966, public school boards in a nine-county area created the original Merged Area XI Community College, which would change its name to Des Moines Area Community College three-years later. Since its first day of existence, DMACC has benefited from high-energy leaders committed to the vision and mission of the community college. The College's first superintendent (the equivalent of today's president) in 1966 was Paul J. Lowery, former Director of DeKalb Tech in Georgia, who set up shop with a skeleton staff at the old Ankeny post office.

Like its contemporaries in the community college movement during the mid-1960s, every early accommodation was temporary. DMACC leased a former grocery store and a skating rink in West Des Moines and converted the space into classrooms and labs for trade and industrial programs. The first DMACC classes in the spring of 1967 attracted 28 students in four vocational-technical areas: Industrial Electronics, Electrical Drafting, Medical Assistant and Secretary/Clerical. <https://go.dmacc.edu/about/Pages/history1960.aspx>

Not only did Lowery prove himself as a capable chief executive officer, he was a visionary who established concepts and philosophies that are reflected in the College today. He was also a tireless marketer, primarily using presentations to area chambers of commerce, school boards, service clubs, and key business leaders to spread the word of the new college. These discussions covered programs and services, and also started dialog with multiple constituencies that would prove vital to the development of future DMACC education offerings and services, while cementing the College's tie with its communities.

Lowery's dedication to the College was demonstrated through a year of 16-hour work days spent recruiting staff, orienting a new board, providing leadership to program and curriculum development, establishing relationships with the Iowa Department of Public Instruction and legislative leaders and more. In large part due to the work of Lowery and his

early staff, the College grew rapidly in the 1960s. By 1969 DMACC had nearly 1,800 students and began to grow outside the Des Moines metro area.

<https://go.dmacc.edu/about/Pages/history1960.aspx>

Growing Beyond Des Moines

The Boone Campus was originally Boone Junior College, founded in 1927 on the third floor of the Boone High School with faculty who served both the junior college and the high school. When legislation was approved to create the Iowa community college network, Marvin Sturtz, County Superintendent of Boone County, served on the committee that created the boundaries for Merged Area XI and helped ensure the agreement included language to designate Boone Junior College as an attendance center. [Unpublished history of Boone. DMACC](#)

Pioneers.

The Boone community responded by passing a \$925,000 referendum with 96 percent of the vote in favor to build a new facility to address the limited space issue. In February 1969, the Iowa Legislature passed enabling law that allowed DMACC to enter into a long-term lease/purchase agreement with the Boone Community School District for the newly constructed facility, and the way was cleared to develop Boone as DMACC's second campus.

[Lowery, Paul J., "A history of the first fifteen years of community colleges in Iowa 1965-1980 " \(1982\). *Retrospective Theses and Dissertations*. Paper 7511. page 126](#)

Iowa State University Today, Boone Campus includes on-campus housing and is home to all DMACC Bears intercollegiate athletic programs. This campus provides a traditional, two-year liberal arts residential college environment, while also offering a full slate of vocational-technical offerings.

Carroll Takes a Circuitous Path to Joining DMACC

DMACC's farthest-west campus in Carroll joined the district in a unique way. Leaders in Carroll and neighboring Audubon counties originally hoped Carroll would be the site of a stand-alone Western Iowa community college. When community colleges were centered in Sioux City, Council Bluffs and Fort Dodge, surrounding Western Iowa counties joined those merged areas. Carroll and Audubon counties found themselves on an island, unattached to any merged area.

In 1970, a committee from Carroll and Audubon counties began to look for a home, meeting with the boards of Merged Areas XI (DMACC in Ankeny), XII (Western Iowa Technical Community College in Sioux City) and XIII (Iowa Western Community College in Council Bluffs). The difficulty in finding a fit came down to distance; Carroll is 90 miles from the central campus of each merged area. The college boards were also concerned that Carroll and Audubon Counties' assessed valuations would not support building a Carroll Campus in the near future.

Ultimately, DMACC invited Carroll and Audubon counties to join its merged area, after agreement on the type of services and the timetable for establishing a campus. Indeed it was several years before Carroll Campus received a permanent home, with classes meeting in various temporary locations until 1986 when the first dedicated campus building was constructed. The facilities expanded in 1992 and in 2003.

1970s: Ankeny and Urban Campuses Headline an Era of Physical Growth

With Boone onboard, and Carroll and Audubon counties completing the merged area, DMACC began construction on its Ankeny Campus in 1970 on 240 acres purchased from Iowa State University. **DMACC Board minutes, April 10, 1967.** The first structures hosted Industrial Manufacturing and Health Services, two programs that have remained popular throughout the College's history. The DMACC Board had the vision to purchase 80 additional acres adjacent to

the Ankeny Campus, bringing the total to nearly 320 acres. As more buildings were constructed in the 1970s, DMACC continued to consolidate offerings from temporary quarters elsewhere onto the Ankeny Campus.

Source: <https://go.dmacc.edu/pioneers/history/Documents/StoryofDMACC.pdf>

With the Ankeny Campus under construction, the College again responded to the needs of the community and looked toward urban Des Moines. The DMACC Urban Center was the precursor of the Urban Campus, taking up temporary residence in the former Dowling High School building, and then moving to the former Sabin Elementary School building in central Des Moines. The location for the current Urban Campus was purchased in 1978 and opened with a newly constructed facility in 1980.

Today Urban Campus is DMACC's second-largest location, offering an array of academic programs as well as the largest high school equivalence (HiSET) and English as a Second Language (ESL) programs in Iowa. [DMACC 2014 Annual Data Summary Report](#) Urban Campus students come from Des Moines, Central Iowa and more than 75 countries around the world. The Urban Campus also continues its founding tradition of offering access to education and services to those who face extraordinary barriers.

Breaking Down Financial Barriers

When DMACC leaders found that the relatively low cost was still out of reach for some students, they created the DMACC Foundation to widen access to education through the solicitation of donations and awarding of scholarships. The Foundation started with a total budget of \$43,000 for scholarships in its inaugural year of 1975. By 2014 the Foundation was granting more than 1,500 scholarships across all DMACC campuses funded by \$725,000 in donor contributions annually. [Des Moines Area Community College Foundation, Ankeny Iowa, Financial Report, June 30, 2014, page 5.](#)

By 2016, the Foundation expects to provide \$1 million in scholarships to more than 2,000 students. **FY 2012-2016 Des Moines Area Community College Foundation Strategic Plan written by Foundation Executive Director Tara Connolly in 2011**

The Foundation also uses charitable gifts to support professional development and capital improvements for the students, faculty and staff of the College and the broader communities it serves. Among the Foundation's goals are supporting student success, high academic achievement, completion of degree programs, and involvement in civic life through volunteerism.

1980s: Cementing Business Relationships, Moving into Liberal Arts

By the dawn of the 1980s, community colleges were on the cusp of turning 20 years old and no longer a novelty. DMACC had four campuses — Ankeny, Boone, Carroll and Urban — each serving a unique set of community needs, while simultaneously working together to support DMACC's mission of widening access to education for students and helping to power growth for businesses. In 1981, Dr. Joseph Borgen became DMACC's second president and put into words DMACC's future focus: "I'm going to spend my time and I want all of you to spend your energy in living from here on into the future, because we have a lot of things to do and a lot of services to provide to the people of this area," (Borgen, 1981, p??).

Pulled out of the first video HERE:

<https://go.dmacc.edu/prospectivestudents/Pages/videotimelines.aspx>

Since its founding, one of DMACC's main functions has been to offer training to employed workers, helping them advance within their companies. An evolution in that effort came in the mid-1980s when the College's effort became more proactive. The Economic Development Group (EDG) was created in 1984 and provided training to more than 11,000

individuals in its first-year. <https://go.dmacc.edu/about/Pages/history1980.aspx> The 1990s also featured deepening cooperation between DMACC and area chambers of commerce and employers as DMACC's customizable training and continuing educational offerings were increasingly seen as valuable workforce improvement tools. By 2014, the successor of the EDG, DMACC Business Resources (DBR) had brought invaluable training to thousands of employees and hundreds of millions of dollars of state economic development benefits to dozens of companies across DMACC's service area.

<https://go.dmacc.edu/annualreport/documents/DMACCAnnualReport.pdf> p 23

DMACC's tradition of celebrating other cultures - originally started by the College's Culinary Arts program's ethnic dinners in the 1975 - expanded in the 1980s with "Japan Week," the first of many formal weeks of study of different countries. Later, the College would dedicate the entire school year to programming focused on a specific country. The College would go on to have faculty exchanges with Japan and the Soviet Union and increasingly globalize its view of business and education.

In the late 1980s DMACC experienced increasing demand for residential college liberal arts education from Iowa's largest community college. The college responded by ramping up on-campus amenities, including new on-campus housing at Ankeny, which attracted 200 students.

1990s: A New Era of College Cooperation

By 1990, DMACC was in the midst of a sea change. While technical, skill-focused education opportunities remained an important part of the College's offering, DMACC again responded to the community by expanding liberal arts course offerings in a variety of settings and delivery formats. In the 1990s, tuition and other costs at Iowa's public four-year universities were becoming increasingly cost-prohibitive for many Iowans. This resulted in a growing

number of parents and students looking to community colleges to make four-year degrees more affordable. Many four-year colleges and universities increased the level of cooperation with community colleges in the 1990s through the expansion of formalized transfer agreements. In 1994, the University of Northern Iowa was among the first four-year schools to create a “2+2” agreement with DMACC, designed to allow students to spend their first-two years at DMACC and then seamlessly transfer to UNI to finish their Bachelor’s degree.

<https://www.dmacc.edu/about/Pages/history1990.aspx> Today DMACC has 87 such agreements with four-year colleges and universities in Iowa and in several other states.

Newton Campus Rises from Maytag Partnership

Even as the liberal arts courses grew through DMACC, the college vocational and technical offerings remained a mainstay. In fact, DMACC’s fifth campus was championed by a coalition of the city’s dominant employer, Maytag Corporation, the City of Newton, Newton Community Schools and Iowa State University, and later the University of Iowa, which located an MBA program at the campus. <https://www.dmacc.edu/pioneers/history/Pages/newton.aspx>

The genesis of the Newton Campus dates to November 1992 when the Maytag Corporation CEO, Leonard Hadley, contacted DMACC President Joseph Borgen to explore expansion of DMACC programs and services to Newton if a facility, land and funding were donated. In 1993 Newton DMACC Polytechnic Campus was opened. The term polytechnic was chosen to reflecting the intended focus on education, training, and cooperation with industry and the community. <https://www.dmacc.edu/pioneers/history/Pages/newton.aspx>

A Center for Policy Discussion

Located in Iowa’s capital city, DMACC has been a center for political and policy discussion, hosting a list of high-profile policymakers including First Lady Hillary Clinton and

Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala for a nationally televised healthcare conference in 1993. Secretary of Commerce Ron Brown (April 1994) and U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Joyce Elders (April 1996) also visited DMACC in the 1990s. Since then DMACC has continued to host a long list of state and national policymakers.

<https://www.dmacc.edu/about/Pages/history1990.aspx>

2000s: Evolution of the Two-Year College Concept

At the turn of the century, DMACC was nearly 40 years old and had grown in every area envisioned by the 1966 state legislation that established community colleges. The vocational and technical training and “programs for in-service training and retaining of workers” sections of the founding legislation were an early focus. However, by the year 2000, DMACC was showing impressive growth in other purposes outlined in that founding legislation, including offering the first two years of a four-year degree and courses offered to high school students, often at their local high school. [Iowa Code 281 Chapter 24](#)

[http://search.legis.state.ia.us/nxt/gateway.dll/ar/iac/281_education%20department%20_5b281_5d/0240_chapter%2024%20community%20college%20accreditation/_c_281_0240.xml?f=templates\\$fn=document-frame.htm\\$3.0](http://search.legis.state.ia.us/nxt/gateway.dll/ar/iac/281_education%20department%20_5b281_5d/0240_chapter%2024%20community%20college%20accreditation/_c_281_0240.xml?f=templates$fn=document-frame.htm$3.0)

In an era of high college graduate student debt, the trend of the 1990s accelerated in the 2000s as more and more students responded to DMACC’s combination of quality liberal arts studies and affordable tuition. By 2014, 65 percent of DMACC’s 26,365 credit students identified themselves as students studying liberal arts in preparation for transfer to four-year schools. [DMACC 2014 Annual Data Summary Report](#) The growth in liberal arts and sciences students created demand on DMACC campuses for more of the experiences and amenities normally found at four-year colleges; DMACC responded with ambitious plans for student

housing. DMACC formed a partnership with private developers to build and operate apartment-style houses on and near the Ankeny Campus. In Boone, the College purchased and remodeled on-campus student housing and built more units to meet student demand.

While housing and activities were important, DMACC also focused resources on development of its University-College Transfer Program, an initiative that aligned curriculum, program, policy, technological and personnel changes designed to deliver even greater levels of support for liberal arts students in creating and executing a plan for graduation and seamless transfer to a four-year institution.

Adding West Des Moines

In foresight, DMACC purchased land in West Des Moines during the 1990s for what would become the College's sixth and final campus. In 2001, DMACC responded to the growing need for skilled Information Technology (IT), digital networks, and telecommunication workers by founding its newest campus in a facility specifically designed to aid in the training of skilled workers in those areas. West Campus has become known for its "Celebrate Innovation" week, which features a series of state and national speakers on innovative thinking and its critical role in personal, organizational, community and national success.

Career Advantage and Learning Centers

The first decade of the 21st Century brought dramatic growth in the number and variety of DMACC credit courses offered to students who were still in high school. The College's effort, DMACC Career Advantage, expanded from serving 480 students completing 3,571 credit hours in 1999 to serving 11,496 students with 92,885 credit hours in 2012. In 2013, 13,308 students enrolled in Career Advantage, an all-time record.

Rob Densen, President's Day Fall 2013 (10/18/13) PowerPoint presentation, Slide 28.

Some concurrent enrollment classes take place within the individual high schools, while others are held at stand-alone regional attendance centers known as Career Academies. During the first 15 years of the program, DMACC added three stand-alone Career Academies: the Hunziker Center in Ames (2006), the Perry VanKirk Career Academy in Perry (2010), and the Center for Career & Professional Development at Southridge in Des Moines (2013).

Driving the growth of DMACC's Career Academies are both the opportunity for high school students to get a jump on their careers, and millions in cost savings for both students and school districts. "Technical programs have changed so much over the years, from what used to be a shop class is now a completely different experience. With new technology and sophisticated equipment, most school districts cannot afford vocational programs today" (Teigland, 2013, p #). <https://www.dmacc.edu/news/pages/20121115.aspx> DMACC's Career Academies are learning centers serving as outposts, offering both credit and noncredit classes to students as a part of DMACC's continuing role to bring education to its communities.

DMACC expanded education and training opportunities for high-demand jobs by constructing a \$14 million Health Sciences Building on the Ankeny Campus, the first College building jointly funded by a private-public partnership. DMACC has led the effort to connect unemployed and under-employed Central Iowans with available jobs through its comprehensive Workforce Training Academy, located adjacent to the Urban Campus. Thanks to a close partnership with other service agencies, the Workforce Training Academy not only offers training, but also assists individuals in overcoming various barriers that prevent them from accessing the training.

A Strong Vote of Confidence

Perhaps the strongest endorsement of DMACC's value to the community has come at the ballot box. Iowa law requires voters to reapprove property tax levies that fund the community colleges every 10 years. In the most recent referendum (2013), 75 percent of voters in 22 Central Iowa counties approved continuing DMACC's two equipment and facilities levies totaling 26.25 cents per \$1,000 valuation payment through at least 2025.

http://www.newtonindependent.com/newton_independent/2013/09/dmacc-levies-approved-by-voters.html Thanks to this strong community support, all of DMACC's buildings have been funded by levy proceeds without the use of bonds.

DMACC's plans for investing the renewed levy revenue will benefit all six DMACC campuses. Five campuses will receive expansions or completely new structures, and all six campuses will see major renovations to create and equip more classroom and lab space. The College also continues to explore public/private partnerships that benefit both the College and the community.

2010 and Beyond

DMACC has responded to challenges of the 21st century by launching innovative and comprehensive student retention programs and signing more articulation agreements, including one with Grinnell College. DMACC has also ramped up courses in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) fields to meet growing demand while further developing pre-professional programs.

DMACC campuses continue to use their discretion to meet the needs of the region, or to fill an unmet need statewide. Examples of this include the addition of a unique-in-Iowa two-year Court Reporting degree, and the expansion of DMACC's acclaimed Culinary Arts program on the Newton Campus.

DMACC has stayed true to its heritage of helping all students who wish to succeed by expanding programs to serve more Iowans in the areas of high school equivalency and English as a Second Language, at-risk youth, the unemployed and the underemployed, while also building on its innovative Honors Program. “To meet the needs of our vibrant community, DMACC is growing too,” as indicated by Rob Denson (person communication, MONTH DAY, YEAR) Rob said this during an interview with him October 2014 DMACC President since 2003. “College administrators are working on a 10-year strategic planning initiative to build new facilities, purchase new technology, remodel its campuses and work with businesses to offer new career choices,” (R. Denson, personal communication, MONTH DAY, YEAR). Rob said this during an interview with him October 2014

Assuming the continuing twists and turns of the national economy, the future is difficult to predict. Given current trends, DMACC leaders expect the coming decade to bring an expanding role for online courses and even more accelerated rate of change in entry-level job skill requirements, with an increasing percentage of the workforce requiring frequent updating of their work skills including skills that will qualify them for other occupations. The pace of technological change is also expected to require investment in data systems and software, as well as construction of new facilities and remodeling. Rob said this during an interview with him October 2014

As the current president of DMACC, Denson stands confidently on his mantra that “DMACC graduates build our homes, fix our cars, care for us and protect us,” (personal communication, MONTH DAY, YEAR). “Nearly all Central Iowa companies rely on DMACC for a part of their skilled workforce. In fact, more than 95 percent of DMACC graduates live and work in Central Iowa. As those companies grow, we will need more skilled workers. DMACC

will deliver” (R. Denson, personal communication, MONTH DAY, YEAR). Rob said this during an interview with him October 2014

Sidebars

DMACC Presidents (maybe with little mug shots)

Paul Lowery — 1966 to 1981

Joseph A. Borgen — 1981 to 2001

David England — 2001 to 2003

Robert Denson — 2003 to present

Alumni quotes

“I am very proud to say I’m a DMACC graduate. I have built a lot of personal relationships with students that I went through the program with, as well as instructors. It’s not just about going to class and being a number, you get to go to class and interact with people who truly care about what you are going to do in the future.”

- Amy Weiford, DMACC Ankeny Campus Respiratory Care Program graduate

“I met a lot of veterans coming out of the service who went to DMACC just like myself, and the type of environment that they have at DMACC is very encouraging to veterans.”

- Clint Peterson, DMACC Ankeny Campus 1975 graduate, military veteran, retired Ames Fire Dept. Chief and former DMACC Fire Science Advisory Board member

“I’ve employed several folks who have degrees from DMACC. I have a heightened awareness when I see that, it says something to me.”

- Jim Langin, DMACC West Campus alum and Senior Vice President, Mutual of Omaha Bank, Des Moines

“DMACC provided me with a hands-on learning experience for the real world that boosted my self-confidence and will continue to pay back for my entire career. “

- Jerry Nystrom, 1984 DMACC Boone Campus graduate and Director of Marketing,
Farner-Bocken Company

References