



2009 TYCA "Fame and Shame" Award Winners

The Two-Year College English Association (TYCA) has announced the winners of the Public Image of the Two-Year College "Fame and Shame" Awards.

FAME AWARD

The 2009 TYCA Fame Award went to Second Lady, Dr. Jill Biden, for commitment to the mission of community colleges. The fact that she has chosen to continue to teach at a community college after becoming "Second Lady" speaks volumes about her dedication to two-year college ideals.

- Biden said in a statement. "I have always believed in the power of community colleges to endow students with critical life skills, and I am pleased that I can make a difference by doing what I love to do, teaching people who are excited to learn."
- Though she does not have to work, let alone teach at a two-year or four-year college/university, Biden is thought to be the first second lady to hold a paying job while her husband is in office.
- She could have chosen to teach at George Washington University, or Georgetown University, or the University of Maryland, yet instead, she picked a community college because she feels passionately about them.
- A 28-year veteran educator and community college instructor for nearly a quarter of a century, Dr. Jill Biden, Vice President Biden's wife, currently teaches two classes at Northern Virginia Community College (at the Alexandria campus): an English as a second language course and a developmental English course.
- In addition to Biden's two master's degrees, she also earned a doctorate in education from the University of Delaware in 2007. Her dissertation was on "retaining students in community colleges"
- Biden intends to assume a role as a public advocate for community colleges as second lady, and she also "may advise the Obama administration on related education policies."

NOTE: Several newspapers and magazines, including *The Boston Globe*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Huffington Post*, *Time*, and many others all ran similar stories detailing aspects of Dr. Jill Biden's commitment to community colleges during the past year. However, the Public Image of Two-Year Colleges committee felt the person rather than a single article (often reprinted in many different publications) deserved to be honored with the TYCA 2009 Fame Award.

HONORABLE MENTION

"Brush with Destitution Fuels a Desire to Succeed," an article written by Peter Schworm and printed in *The Boston Globe*, January 21, 2009. The story discussed how an opportunity

for a higher education provided by Bunker Hill Community College enabled a homeless individual, Maximilien Yelbi, to comprehend his talent and build a sense of self-worth—an experience that enabled him to ultimately state, “I felt free.”

SHAME AWARD

The 2009 Shame Award went to *U.S. News and World Report* for Kim Clark’s January 9, 2009 article, “Community Colleges: Cheaper but Not Necessarily Better.” Therein, the author warns those who might opt for “low cost community colleges” rather than pay the rising tuition costs at four-year colleges. “Counselors across the country warn, however, that sometimes students get what they pay for,” suggesting that people who often attend community colleges end up with a second rate education.

- Clark goes on to explain that, “Choosing a two-year college could actually harm students' long-term prospects” because “Research has shown that community colleges, overall, do a poor job of getting students into four-year schools.”
- Clark’s article appeared in “College Knowledge,” a section of *U.S. News and World Report* by the U.S. News Education Team. However, it does not praise the quality of education available at two-year colleges in general. At best, it offers sweeping assertions and limited evidence to justify claims that cheaper is not necessarily equal—or better. Even though, occasionally, a community college education can be as effective as lower division education at a four-year college or university, Clark implies that such occasions are the exception rather than the rule.
- Clark cites a 2008 paper by Harvard Professor Bridget Terry Long, who she identifies as an alleged authority on community colleges, stating that Long “found that, among similar students, those who chose two-year colleges were less likely to get a bachelor's degree than those who went straight to a four-year college.”
- The “College Knowledge” Education Team and Clark further quote Professor Long who notes that “Since employers tend to pay those who actually earn a degree more than those who’ve had only a few years of college, saving a few thousand dollars on tuition when you are 18 might end up costing you hundreds of thousands of dollars over your lifetime.”
- This is particularly true, according to Long, if students “get discouraged in community college and don't persevere to a bachelor's.”

Although Clark’s article concludes with a reference to a video by Santa Monica Community College that contains some tips that could help a “community college student succeed” in higher education, overall, the article was derogatory in tone and content. Success as defined by the article means transfer to and the reception of a four-year college/university degree.

- Again, most of the tips have nothing to do with quality education that one may receive at a community college. Rather, they focus on transfer because then and only then “students can take advantage of the low-cost classes at community colleges and still make it through to a *prestigious degree*.”
- The author never mentions and in essence dismisses the value of a two-year AA/AS degree or certificate.
- Tips include such advice as, drive “a few extra miles to attend a school [community college] that has a better *transfer* track record.”
- And take honors classes at community colleges to prepare students for rigorous courses and upper-class assignments at universities [the implication being that community college courses in general lack academic rigor and that transfer should be the ultimate goal of a community college student].

