

Board of Trustee Candidate Interview - Christine Fenne

Cheryl Baunbach-Caplan

So obviously, you've been a Board member for a while, you have some experience that this, but can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

Christine Fenne

Yes. My name is Christine Fenne, for those of you who haven't met me, and I am running for reelection for College of DuPage Board of Trustees. I have had a real passion for the college since the beginning of my tenure on the board, even before I started in public service on the Wheaton Public Library Board where I currently still serve. It's an appointed committee, not an elected board. Anyway, I was reading about the news of how they were having trouble just even running open meetings at the College. And that really bothered me because I didn't think that it was that difficult. So that started my interest in running for the board then. Also, my husband is a College of DuPage graduate. And so is my nephew. And I had many friends who went to the college and I grew up right down the street -- my parents still live off of Lambert road. COD was my library growing up.

Let's see, what else can I tell you about me? Yes, so I'm married to Craig Fenne and we have two wonderful children. My son Carson is now 18, and on his own college journey, and he's completed his application to college to COD and has considered other colleges as well. So we're still on that journey to see where he's going to end up. But we can constantly advocate for College of DuPage among our friends who have students who will be graduating high school as well. My daughter is 16. And so everything that comes with her learning to drive is also filling our schedule. And they're very active. And so we love that about them.

Cheryl Baunbach-Caplan

Thank you. And why is it you want to run again? I mean, you kind of touched upon it. But what specifically makes you want to run again for the Board of Trustees?

Christine Fenne

Yes, so this isn't a stepping stone. For me, I don't have any aspirations towards any other higher offices, and I just really fell in love with College of Dupage and the board, the administration, the faculty is amazing. There are so many people who work at the College that share the same passion that I do. And I really think that there's a lot of great work that has yet to be done. We know the administration faculty, and the board worked very hard to get the accreditation back in line with the HLC. And so now that we have that great work behind us, we can now focus on even greater work with improving our educational system. We have some not so great results from surveys, as well as our completion and persistent rates could be improved. And so I look forward to working with the administration and the faculty to make those improvements in the college.

Cheryl Baunbach-Caplan

Thank you. So that leads into another question nicely, how do you define student success?

Christine Fenne

You know, students success can be defined in many ways. To some it's getting their associate's degree to, to others it might be, you know, completing a certificate or getting another accreditation for their employment and improving that. So student success can mean a lot of things and the true meaning lies within that student. And so that is how I would measure success. Is the student reaching their goals, stretching for more, working to become a better person?

Cheryl Baunbach-Caplan

Thank you. How would you help maintain fiscal responsibility at the college?

Christine Fenne

Yes, that is also another great challenge that we have at the college. Our budget hasn't been balanced without help from our general fund. And so we've seen how there's a gap between revenues and expenses, and we need to work collaboratively to determine how we can come up with a solution for that. We understand that revenues come from property taxes, it comes from tuition, it comes from Pell Grants, some date funding. But it seems that there's a challenge these days with determining exactly where we can have the revenues exceed the expenses. So I think that working with the enrollment, improving persistence, and getting students to complete their associates, if that is their goal, would go a long way towards improving the budget.

Cheryl Baunbach-Caplan

So can you share some ideas you have to position College of DuPage as a leader in education over the next five to ten years?

Christine Fenne

Wow, that is a big question. I think that we are on track to be the leader in the state of Illinois for community colleges, we already have, you know, our sister colleges look to us to see what is College of DuPage doing? And I've read many articles that have been posted regarding the future of community colleges. I think that we've learned a lot from what students would like for online learning versus in person learning. And I think that we need to consider some of those lessons that have been learned. And I think that we need to talk about this more together to determine what would be best for the College of DuPage community and it students moving forward. You know, should they consider paying one fee for all of college, as opposed to credit by credit? There could be other ideas in terms of how they attend or how the courses are given. Do we continue with semesters and quarters? Or do we move to something that's more on demand? And how does that work? And what does that look like? And what does that mean, for faculty, and staff? Those are all different interesting concepts that are being discussed in the

higher education environment. And so I look forward to continuing those conversations, working out what the challenges might be, and finding the best solution for the College of DuPage Community.

Cheryl Baunbach-Caplan

I'm not sure if you're aware, but one of the things that some of us have thought about is offering intercession courses. You know, it obviously doesn't lend itself well to all subjects, because it would only be four or five weeks, you know, a relatively short period of time. But there are a lot of colleges that do that. And actually, some of our students take those online courses at another college to try to make up credits after maybe having to drop a class. In particular, I know the athletes tend to do it sometimes to make sure they maintain eligibility. I'm wondering if that would be a good way to expand our course offerings.

Christine Fenne

So would you say that would be something like a j term? That's, you know, between ending in December and before they come back in January,

Cheryl Baunbach-Caplan

Right, that would probably be the most appropriate time to do it. I don't know how much demand there is for these courses, but as a counselor I have at least a few students each semester asking if we offer any courses between terms.

Christine Fenne

Yeah, that certainly would be interesting to see how you could start it with maybe one or two classes and see what the demand is.

Cheryl Baunbach-Caplan

Can you talk a little bit about what role you think adjuncts have at COD going forward?

Christine Fenne

Oh, wow. Adjuncts are so important to the college community. They teach, you know, the majority of courses, so I would think that they would be a large part of the college going forward. Certainly in determining you know, the future classes and how the students engage with their courses. So I think that the adjunct voice should be an important one and definitely at the table for any discussions regarding the future of the college and higher education.

Cheryl Baunbach-Caplan

Thank you. What are your thoughts on dual credit? You know, that's a big thing right now increasing dual credit with the high schools and I'm wondering what your thoughts on that are?

Christine Fenne

You know, I do have thoughts about that. I think that dual credit is important. I think that as I've seen my children take advanced placement courses through their high school I've wondered, well, what's next? If they start with some of these courses in a sophomore or junior year, what are they going to be able to take as a senior before they go off to college? Wouldn't a dual credit class be great? The other thing I see is that College Board seems to have quite a monopoly on, you know, the college level type courses. And, you know, I think that dual credit would be a great competitor to that program. And I think that dual credit going forward is only going to grow more. Do any of the adjunct faculty have concerns regarding dual credit?

Cheryl Baunbach-Caplan

Yes, there are some concerns. One is, to be blunt, if dual credit is expanded a lot and a lot of students are taking typical entry level courses, such as Speech 1100 and English 1101 that most adjuncts teach then there'll be fewer opportunities for adjuncts. Another concern is that no money comes in to COD from dual credit courses. So I do see a lot of benefits for students, as long as it is made very clear to them that the credit becomes part of their permanent academic record, but is there a way it can be balanced to not take jobs away from our adjuncts. I know there's a theory that if students take dual credit classes then they may be more likely to enroll at COD. I would like to see studies on how much validity there is to this theory.

Christine Fenne

I can check that.

Cheryl Baunbach-Caplan

It would be helpful to see how much does it increase enrollment at COD because if it does then it is a benefit for the student and a benefit for the college. Another concern I have as a counselor, though, is finding a way to better partner with high school counselors to make it abundantly clear to students their parents abundantly that dual credit is part of their permanent college transcript and follows them everywhere. I personally see students who took say dual credit courses in high school that they didn't take seriously and they then start of their academic career at COD or another College with low grades.

Christine Fenne

Yeah. I agree with those points that you made. I don't know how the adjunct faculty could be considered for the teaching assignments and how that would work. But some of the high school teachers don't have the right credentials for teaching a dual credit class, they might have a master's of education, but not in the subject matter that they're teaching. Whereas the adjuncts might be more qualified. But you know, I don't know how that would work in terms of who's paying what and how the school might be compensating the college for paying that teacher and that type of thing.

And I think in terms of expanding dual credit there's opportunities with high schools that we aren't currently connected with, -- you know, the ones that are geographically closer to us, we seem to have, better connections with -- so maybe we might expand to communities with more students at higher risk, Maybe that would be a great opportunity to introduce college courses to at risk students there.

Cheryl Baunbach-Caplan

What do you think are one or two of the greatest issues facing College of DuPage, now or in the near future?

Christine Fenne

I think that student persistence from semester to semester and completing their certificate or degree is really important. We can do a lot of great work to get those numbers up and to help the students reach the goal that they have for themselves. So I think that's one of our greatest challenges, and finding out what supports do they need. Why are they not completing what they set out to do? How can we help them remove those barriers, as well as dealing with our budget, and determining how we can have the revenues be greater than the expenses, without cutting programs and keeping the things that are good about College of DuPage. And that's what I see as being the challenges that the Board would be concerned with.

Cheryl Baunbach-Caplan

Right. It seems everyone around the college, I think in some way or another, is involved in increasing retention and completion or at least thinking and talking about ideas. Do you have any ideas about what types of support to achieve these goals? Do you think of it holistically?

Christine Fenne

So I think about the individual students and what challenges they might be dealing with. Is it because they have challenges with childcare or transportation, they just can't get here? Are they choosing work over going to school because they think they can't afford it? I wonder about our students and what personal challenges they might be having. And so I think that a lot of the solutions to removing those barriers, start with talking with the students and the faculty that support those students to find out what is it that we can do? You know, it was the students that came up with a fuel pantry. And that's been a hugely successful program. So I wonder what other solutions exist within our student body already and they just need, you know, the support of the board or the administration in order to resolve that and remove that barrier. How can we work with the Pace bus system to improve the routes or make the transportation easier? Those are some things that I've been thinking about, what are the barriers? And how can we work together to remove them?

Cheryl Baunbach-Caplan

Thank you. We're almost at the end of our questions. But we did have one more that is obviously very important to adjuncts. And that is, how would you support adjuncts at College of DuPage.

Christine Fenne

Well, I think sitting down and talking with the adjuncts to find out what their concerns and challenges are. The board doesn't really get to participate in any contract negotiations, and certainly don't want to, talk about negotiations, specifically, but I'm just saying that the process is awkward. We just hear from the administration regarding how things are going. And then we might hear public comment from faculty, whether it's adjuncts or full time about how they think it's going. So I'm not necessarily suggesting that it be more participatory by the board. I'm just pointing out that it's a slightly awkward, But anyway, I think that we can take time to meet and work together.

As a board, we'd like to listen to what you have to say and hear the challenges that you're having. Because otherwise, we think everything's just fine. So if there's a solution to be found, and so that we can continue to advocate for you, we would need to hear more from you. So that's what I would suggest. We're interested in listening. We're in a role to provide oversight. But in order to do that, we need to hear from you.

Cheryl Baunbach-Caplan

All right, thank you for that offer. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Christine Fenne 23:08

I just would like to thank all of the adjunct faculty for their support every day of our students and their success. You do such wonderful things in helping them learn and it must be so amazing to see a light bulb go on for a student when they've been struggling with something. And you know, your constant care for them is truly appreciated. And so I just wanted to let you know how much I appreciate what you do. And that I understand that you have a lot of challenges in getting that learning to happen in the classroom. And we look forward to removing any of those challenges so that you can be the faculty that you want to be. Thank you.

Cheryl Baunbach-Caplan 24:00

Thank you very much for meeting with me.