

Good evening. My name is Daniel Morrow. I am a Visual and Performance Arts Major (with a Theater focus) at Naugatuck Valley Community College and the president of the Stage Society, which is the theater club at the college. I also work in the Arts and Humanities department as an assistant to the campus Technical Coordinator. I graduated high school in 2009, making this my 12th semester at NVCC. That might strike a few of you as a long time to be in community college, but for a lot of students, that kind of schedule is a reality. Several times in my life, I have had to make a decision; choosing between work and school. It's only very recently that I've been able to focus on advancing my own academic life.

That's the beauty of community college; the ability to mold to each individual student's needs. Naugatuck Valley Community College created an environment where I could attend classes at my own pace. It was far from the most efficient way to get through college. Due to financial issues, I had to take semesters with small course loads, and even take a few semesters off. If I had been pursuing a bachelor degree, I would not have felt comfortable coming back because the community college system creates an environment that accommodates people from all walks of life. Even when scheduling was difficult, I was always able to come back and pick up where I left off.

When I finally returned to the campus, what I found was a school full of opportunity that I never even saw before. I jumped right into an acting class and found myself surrounded by colleagues. Through the class, I found Stage Society, the club that really opened doors for me. After a few short weeks, I was asked to step in and run for president. The club had been through a fairly rough time, and the theater department had been in decline (as it turns out, multiple staffing changes make it difficult to get things done.) I had a small amount of leadership experience from my time as a musician in high school, but never anything close to the level this school allows. I was put under a lot of pressure in a short amount of time and it changed me. On a personal level, I became much more vocal and confident. I found myself able to make decisions and to be the leader that the group needed me to be. For the first time in my life, I had a set career path and goals for my life.

In addition, through my leadership, the theater has developed drastically. We've been able to establish connections with professionals and get insight on work straight from the theater industry. I have personally been an instrumental part in unifying the visual and performing arts at the college in a way that hasn't been accomplished in years. Because of the work we as a club have done, the theater has once again become a profitable entity, and a conduit for students into the professional world.

I tell you all of this, because I am the textbook example of a student who would be affected by budget cuts. Without funding, my assistant position (which allows me to afford to attend school) is likely to be cut. Another obvious consequence is the increased tuition costs. I personally teetered on the financial barrier of tuition for my first few years, and I was finally able to afford the cost while working several jobs. With higher tuition, people with situations like mine would not be able to afford to attend the school.

There's of course the matter of staffing. Many classes are unavailable because of limited professors and large class sizes. Especially in our arts departments, students have had to put off graduation because of issues like limited class sizes in required classes. It's fairly common for some of our art students to have to come back for an extra semester for just one or two courses. With more budget cuts, this problem only gets worse, and if the eventual goal of the college is to get students in, educated and transitioned onto the next step of education in a timely manner, then crippling the already thin roster of staff is not an option.

The bottom line is that these cuts will very obviously hurt our schools. My story is one fantastic example of what a person can accomplish through community college. But without the resources it needs, the school can't produce success stories like my own. At the end of the day, it's the students that are hurt the most, and what is the college for if not the students?