Danielle McCusker, only minutes removed from her acceptance speech at the CCA Foundation awards ceremony in April, was sitting in the Denver Marriott Tech Center lobby to discuss her lead role in trying to raise $50,000 -- one coin at a time -- for a new school amphitheater.

She suddenly paused mid-sentence. “Speaking of which, I left a cup of change on the table that I’d collected …” she said, asking a nearby college staffer if she could retrieve the item.

That catchphrase will be a central theme in what will be a longstanding project on campus over the next five years as part of the overarching “Transforming Lowry, Transforming Lives” campaign. The Foundation is attempting to raise $5 million in overall contributions through 2016 for the continued revitalization of that campus.

McCusker’s ancillary role emanated first as student leader in CCA’s giving community and continues now as the alumni representative after her May graduation with an associate degree with a Business distinction. The passion project took root as an award-winning Phi Beta Lambda integrated marketing presentation -- and took off from there.
tially brought Witherspoon to CCA in the fall of 2006. He didn’t want to wallow alone in spare time, so he re-entered school a mere 54 years after he stepped off the University of Missouri campus and into battle in January 1942.

Witherspoon’s since taken 13 courses at CCA, focusing on painting, drawing and creative writing, while also dabbling in astronomy. He’s enrolled this summer in Painting IV for a fifth time, since he considers instructor Randal Painter one his biggest creative supporters and “one of the greatest artists I’ve ever met.”

“I’m obviously a different kind of student than the other students in the class,” Witherspoon said. “No. 1, I’m older.”

But he’s as motivated as anyone half his age, or more.

His artwork is sprinkled throughout his writings and poetry, and strewn about his house and those of his children.

A pencil drawing of his wife graces the cover of the book he wrote, “The Taking Disease,” which discusses his wife’s “better days” followed by her rough descent into an Alzheimer’s facility.

His works aren’t all plaintive. There are drawings of a wolf, leopard and a pirate, too.

Still, he admitted, “I have an inclination to do things that I’ve done, like climbing mountains.”

Much of his artwork quietly tell stories of the places he’s been, physically and emotionally. They speak in a manner unlike his normal communications vehicle – his gift of gab.

“Sailors can tell sea stories,” he said matter-of-factly. “And love to tell them.”

Witherspoon has a million tales in his memory bank that he freely shares: about storms and typhoons; navigating by the stars, long before GPS systems took over; the time he helped rescue a Japanese survivor deserted on an island for a year after his ship sank; the assault on Minami, Iwo Jima; pulling parachuting B-29 pilots “out of the drink;” setting smoke-screens with his ships fan tail while bombs dropped; how a uncle from many generations prior signed the Declaration of Independence; even getting his ship’s port director to re-route to San Francisco so he could meet a sorority girl he knew at Missouri that he’d written letters to while at sea -- only to find out she was engaged by the time the boat dropped anchor.

He’s quick to laugh at his prodigious storytelling, too.

That zeal for life is one reason he’s assimilated into the classroom atmosphere so effortlessly, even with his 92nd birthday on tap in October and the generation gap among fellow students clearly visible.

“I fit in, just like I do with anything I do,” Witherspoon explained.

Research shows that there have been four students within the last five years that have taken classes at Colorado Community College System schools while at least 91 years of age.

One 93-year-old student was registered as late as Fall 2010. A more recent Morgan Community College student turned 91 this month but was born five months before Witherspoon, who seemingly gets a kick out of his unique status as oldest of the lot.

“I don’t feel old, really. I go to the bagel shop every morning for breakfast and there’s people there 20 years younger than me and I’m in better shape than they are. Age is relative. And in my case, it’s in the genes. I inherited good longevity genes.”

Witherspoon’s return to college began simply, with a stroll into the admissions office to register.

It was so easy he didn’t even have to eat bananas to gain entrance this time around.

He suggested he’ll continue to take courses at CCA “probably until I’m 100.”

“It’s a sense of accomplishment, creating things,” Witherspoon noted. “And I guess all my life I’ve been the kind of person who’s liked to create things. This is just continuing on what I’ve done. … And they’ve accepted me as one of theirs.”

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**Snake’s alive!**

Security guard Will Hicks shows off the six-foot bullsnake he caught outside of the Administration Building on the CentreTech campus on May 15. The snake was sunning itself on a railing when Hicks, who had yet to check in for his shift, was called upon to wrangle it. Hicks said he’s experienced in catching snakes and demonstrated a steep knowledge of the slithery creatures, adding that bull snakes mimic rattlesnakes by shaking their tails and hissing. Bullsnakes are common in the central portion of the United States, including Colorado.
New students get to-do’s, don’t-dos
Mandatory orientation begun as get-started guide

The idea of a mandatory student orientation has germinated at Community College of Aurora for a while. Now that it’s in full bloom, organizers and implementers of the revamped program are just beginning to see the fruits of their labor.

The three-hour program began April 26 and runs through July 19. This new accommodation merges together an academic and financial overview followed by small-group presentations that includes a technology portion, presentation on student life and academic support services, advising, and registration.

The main difference from the old set-up, outside of the new mandatory component, is that the registration and advising areas have been added and a student-success portion removed. Also, up to 1,500 first-time, full-time and part-time college students can experience the revamped orientation within a nearly three-month window.

“It’s going really smoothly and I think it’s been well-received,” said Betsy Oudenhoven, the school’s vice president of student services. “Institutions are often fearful of pushback from students about having to do it, and we really haven’t had any.”

The impetus for a mandatory orientation started before Oudenhoven’s tenure began at CCA last August but quickly gained traction. She examined orientation as part of a critical look at all of the school’s programs and it quickly became apparent that large pockets of the incoming student population “didn’t have any context for really understanding their advising conversation.”

Basic questions about college life, in particular, were an inefficient use of advising time. So the wheels were set in motion for a new way of doing things that put the knowledge in the students’ hands before reaching that step in the process.

“We know from research in higher education that mandatory orientation is a best practice,” Oudenhoven noted. “It does impact retention and completion.”

Four-year institutions have used the mandatory model for years but two-year colleges have generally shied away from it because of smaller staff sizes and a more fluid influx of students.

But two of Oudenhoven’s previous career stops, at Joliet (Ill.) Junior College and College of Lake County (Ill.), each used mandatory orientations successfully. She was convinced that with a full buy-in from CCA the tactic could be equally useful.

Feelers were put out on campus and both Student Affairs and Instruction were receptive to the change. A 20-person committee from those two groups was formed and met every two weeks last fall and this spring. Student surveys told the orientation group what would have benefitted them upon entrance to CCA, including fundamental items such as types of degrees offered, the difference between full- and part-time attendance, financial aid, tutoring and the school’s computer portal.

“Those things drove the structure we put in place,” Oudenhoven explained.

The idea was presented to Cabinet following the fall semester and received the necessary support.

Once the new process went through the troubleshooting phase, practice sessions and then was implemented, the increased knowledge the students gained before sitting down for the finer details with individual counselors was seen as a welcome change.

“The selling point is it was going to make our lives easier” said Rene Simard, director of advising. “It’s going to make our students more prepared and more responsible for their goals. It’s great. It’ll probably take a semester to see and feel the benefits of that. But it wasn’t a hard sell at all.”

The mandatory student orientation will continue to go through adjustments to ensure that it’s as beneficial as possible to all involved.

The biggest missing piece is the evaluation process through surveys. The school also will be aggressive in its follow-up procedures throughout June and July.

A refresher opportunity will be offered to students in the fall. Those incoming individuals who missed the window prior to fall semester for mandatory orientation will have an opportunity beginning in early August for an express version.

“What’s wonderful about this is it’s truly a college-wide initiative,” Oudenhoven said. “This is CCA saying as an institution we this is important, so we’re all going to be a part of making it happen.”

CCA receives about $374K as part of challenge

Community College of Aurora received $373,731 in grant funding May 17 for four proposals submitted to the first phase of the Colorado Community College System’s “Immersive and Game-Based Learning Challenge Program.”

Projects were submitted to faculty representatives across the system based on their “potential to improve and scale sustainable, collaborative solutions that improve student success,” system president Dr. Nancy McCallin wrote in announcing the winning proposals.

All four CCA projects were selected. Overall, $3 million is being offered as part of this special CCCS initiative.

The CCA proposals:

Apprentice Project ($99,704): The school is designing an immersive learning competition that mirrors the popular TV show “The Apprentice.” Teams of approximately 10 students from four departments will be involved in launching a new product and have specific tasks tied to that goal. Film will handle the media component; Art and Design, the commercial/media portion; Business, the marketing plan; and Computer Science/IT, the technology component.

Colorado Virtual Studio System ($99,833): The nuts and bolts of working in the film industry will be replicated via the use of electronic simulation. Students will receive a more realistic portrayal of the movie-making process from script to production to the financial side of the business through the incorporation of a plug-and-play module.

CSI: Aurora ($74,541): A spring 2012 project that taught the reality of forensic work through a mock crime scene and trial will be expanded into five possible scenarios for upcoming semesters involving more students and added departments.

Going Beyond the Book: A Planning Project to Promote Immersive and Game-based Learning ($99,633): This is a planning grant to guide faculty in the use of immersive and game-based learning in hopes of creating more projects of that type at CCA. It will also, by extension, serve to prepare faculty in the submission of future proposals for the second round of grant requests in October.

CCA faculty Daniel Sandoval leads a group of incoming students through the orientation sessions implemented on a mandatory basis beginning April 29 and ending July 19.
The Arapahoe County Fairgrounds turned into Celebration Central on May 5 at CCA’s 2011-2012 commencement ceremonies. Student Jamie Corchado, faculty of the year recipient Will Hicks, school interim president Dr Geri J. Anderson and president emeritus Dr. Linda S. Bowman were featured speakers on a balmy Saturday around midday. Emotional moments were commonplace, from parents, siblings, spouses, children, graduates and instructors. About 190 students received their associate degrees and began new paths in their lives. As Corchado noted in his remarks, commencement was the beginning, not the end for the cap-and-gown crowd.
New degrees creating a ‘major’ impact

CCA is building a degree of certainty. It's not another category to go along with the alphabet soup of AA's, AS's, AGS's and AAS's, applied degrees and certificates, but a philosophical shift, initiated by statewide conference committee and put into action throughout the Colorado Community College System since last year.

Four new statewide transfer degrees are in place at CCA -- Anthropology, French, Political Science and Sociology, beginning with the new academic year that begins with the summer session May 29.

The inclusion of those new choices brings the total to 11 of degrees with designation under the statewide transfer articulation agreements, with Business, Economics, History, Mathematics, Political Science, Psychology (BA and BS), and Spanish already in place since last April.

The impact has been, in essence, that a two-year ‘major’ has infiltrated CCA's two campuses, at least semantically. These 11 statewide transfer degrees will be taken in totality by any in-state public college or university and are a pathway to a particular baccalaureate.

“It works like a major, but we call it a statewide transfer degree,” said Ted Snow, CCA’s dean of liberal arts. “It’s kind of obvious it’s a major because it says, ‘AA-Anthropology, AA-Philosophy.’ So it works just like that.”

The offshoot for CCA is that a measure of structure has been added to the academic process, turning a possible mishmash of courses for students into a potential course of study.

“We’ve gone from this, ‘Everybody can do anything they want. Come be very broad,’ to being very specific,” said Janet Brandau, the school’s associate vice president of instruction. “There's more intentional learning early on in not giving students a lot of choice, but really focusing them in on an area.”

The curriculum that has been deemed acceptable for statewide transfer degrees is seen as a boon to Colorado universities, whose incoming community college students now have a pre-designated base that theoretically prepares them better for integration into their major fields of study.

On the other hand, “It really helps the two-year schools,” Brandau added, “because it’s going to keep uncertainty was overwhelming,” she explained. “I’d recently lost my job, my car, and I could have lost my house. So you’ve got to supplement that income somehow, and I could always go find another customer-service job, but it (stunk). I didn’t want to do that forever.”

McCusker related a story prior to re-entering CCA in which she did a presentation for her company about raising productivity. The power-brokers of the business listened intently, but near the end of McCusker’s speech, asked her about her college education. She related that she didn’t have one.

“They immediately dismissed my presentation, and it really clicked in me, like, ‘If you want to win the game, then you’ve got to play the game.’”

Getting that education also was her chance to show her son the possibilities. One day, he may even sit with his mother, watching a show at an amphitheater she played a large role in getting erected. Now, that’s tangible proof.

“When I first came to CCA, I came from kind of a rough, bad past, or a past I wanted to leave behind,” she said candidly. “So now, whenever I want to step into a project or any type of organization I ask myself, ‘What footprint would I like to leave, or what legacy?’”

Phi Beta Lambda became that laser focus. She co-founded the campus wing of the national organization and through her vice president’s role, the “Transforming Lowry, Transforming Lives” effort became a natural offshoot.

“The faculty, the staff, the school all helped me develop as an individual, so I need to give back,” she said.

“Plus,” McCusker added with a laugh, “if this campaign’s huge it’s going to be great on my resume.”

Campaign fundraising is banking on change

Continued from page 1

The vision for the would-be amphitheater at Lowry is that it would serve many different functions and multiple departments as: informal outdoor gathering space; screening area for the Colorado Film School; audition space for the theater department; an area for concerts, recitals and open-mic sessions; gathering place for student-life organizations; and rental facility for the community.

The fundraising plans are equally varied. There are likely to be lock boxes near vending stations, the CCA bookstore and cafeteria; a walk-a-thon; e-mail and social media campaigns; and likely “Cents Make a Difference” and “Change It Up” T-shirt sales.

McCusker’s big-picture vision also includes fostering of competition between departments and majors to raise money for the facility.

“The change it up part comes from rounding up the difference,” McCusker explained. “What I'd eventually like to do is get into grocery stores and, you know how they have the dollar or five dollar donations to the hospital? I simply want people to donate the difference in their bill, so if there's 27 cents, just round it up, and the change goes to CCA.”

McCusker knows something or two about change. She's lived it.

She initially came to the college in 2003 but admittedly hung with the wrong crowd, lacked the necessary dedication to succeed and didn’t stick around. But after some personal travails, and a dead-end career she hated, she returned intent on not only excelling but leaving a mark. She’ll do so with her fundraising efforts from afar after deciding to continue her academic career at University of Colorado-Denver.

“I came into CCA uncertain. The power of...
Student art show puts talent on display

The Spring 2012 Student Art Show demonstrated the varied talents of CCA students of all abilities. Among some of the works on display throughout May, counterclockwise from left, were: “Life of a Pot,” a multimedia piece by film student Luke Askelson who “sacrificed one art for another.” His video presentation merged from the clay beginnings of his pot to a color representation of the finished product. The pot was then smashed into pieces as a part of his “sacrifice;” the Ceramics I project “Beehive,” by Jesus Barraza; “Okami Reflects in the Koi Pond,” by Ceramics I student Corinne Desmond, merging together clay, glass, micah and acrylic; “Lifewinder;” by Ceramics I student Samantha Wilson; “Blue Melee Minion;” a ceramic and acrylic paint project by Ceramics II student Blake Sanford; “Cut Pots,” by Askelson in Ceramics III; “Zodiac 2012,” glazed ceramic on wood by Tom Lizzak; and “Out of the Box,” an independent study ceramics/glaze piece by Margie Herrera.
Plaudits and accomplishments at CCA

Rebecca Bernstein
Began her new role as Manager of Lowry Student Services on May 29. Bernstein, formerly in academic advising at CentreTech, will continue in that role at Lowry but also be charged with coordinating that campus’ student-services office operations. The latter role includes staffing, budget, coordinating with deans and faculty on programs and staff training.

Pony Anderson
Cited as an “outstanding faculty member” for the prestigious Pinnacle 2012 conference in July in Colorado Springs. The event brings together leaders from all types of EMS systems and explores innovative operational and business practices and allows networking opportunities with experts in the field.

Kyla Doddridge
The native of tiny Kirk in the eastern part of the state returned to Colorado as CCA’s new Coordinator of Student Life. Doddridge had spent the last nine years at Texas Tech University, where she most recently served for two years as the lead advisor of its Pegasus Program.

Information bank

The Colorado Film School held its Spring 2012 Student Show on May 3, an event that is the culminating instructional lab for the semester. Faculty members assessed student work and evaluated it through a custom online judging criteria, then placed the highest-scoring entries through a custom online judging criteria, assessed student work and evaluated it to the lead advisor of its Pegasus Program.

Judging categories included technical merit, storytelling and originality.

The titles and directors of the productions comprising the student show were:


That provides support services for first-generation college students. She worked in Residence Life the seven previous years at Tech. Doddridge was seeking a new challenge at a different-sized institution and gets that at CCA. Tech has 33,000 students.

Victor Vialpando, Ted Snow and Elena Sandoval-Lucero
The trio was selected to participate in leadership development program the CCCS Deans’ Academy, which began in May. The year-long program is designed to enhance current deans’ skills in preparation for future CCCS leadership roles. The five-day summer academy includes self-assessment, in-depth leadership development, skill development in key dean responsibilities and administrative competency development. The professional development will continue throughout the academic year with a shadowing experience, participation in a regional or national conference and professional readings. Vialpando also was invited to June’s National Community College Hispanic Council Leadership Fellows Program. The NCCHC initiative provides leadership development experience for Hispanics, with an opportunity to continue their professional growth and take over positions of increased responsibility as upper-level administrators.

Geoff Hunt
Appeared on National Geographic’s show, “The Dec-rypters” on May 10. Hunt was interviewed at Riverside Cemetery last summer for a British film project on American cold cases. The social sciences department chair spoke about why one might find Civil War veterans in Denver’s Cheesman Park.

James Fountain
Awarded one of 20 scholarships from a national competition to study abroad. Fountain began his Accredited Study Tour in Spain for Trio Students on May 31 and will continue the “Spanish Language and Culture in Salamanca” course work as part of the Keith Sherin Global Leaders Program through June 30.

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