

## Candidate Bios

### Mr. Clint Cowden



Clint Cowden serves as Assistant Superintendent and Vice President of Instruction and Student Services at Palo Verde College, where he oversees approximately 80% of institutional operations, including instruction, student services, workforce education, and accreditation. He manages more than \$42 million in general fund and grant resources and leads strategic initiatives focused on student success, workforce alignment, and institutional growth. He also serves as the college's Accreditation Liaison Officer.

Clint brings 22 years of experience in higher education across instruction, workforce development, and executive leadership. He spent 10 years as a full-time faculty member teaching agriculture and applied workforce programs before moving into academic and executive leadership roles at rural community colleges. His leadership experience includes serving as Director of the Farm of the Future at West Hills College and later in dean and campus executive leadership roles at Hartnell College, where he helped launch the \$13.7 million Castroville Education Center and oversaw multiple workforce and transfer programs aligned with regional industry needs.

Before entering higher education, Clint worked in agriculture and irrigation systems management, supporting large-scale agricultural operations and water infrastructure projects. That industry experience continues to shape his commitment to applied learning, workforce partnerships, and polytechnic education.

Since joining Palo Verde College, Clint has helped lead institutional growth from approximately 2,000 to more than 3,000 full-time equivalent students through strategic enrollment management, dual enrollment expansion, and workforce pathway development. He works closely with faculty, staff, and community partners to strengthen institutional effectiveness, student completion, and regional workforce impact.

Clint earned a Master of Education in Agricultural Education and a Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Systems Management with a minor in Agricultural Business and concentration in Water and Irrigation, both from California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. The Cal Poly "learn by doing" philosophy continues to shape his leadership approach to student success and workforce preparation.

Raised in Cody, Wyoming, and in rural communities across the western United States, Clint grew up in a family that ranched and rodeoed. That upbringing shaped his lifelong connection to rural education, workforce opportunity, and the role community colleges play in expanding access and economic mobility.

He and his wife, Joy, have twin daughters. Cory is a senior in Software Engineering at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, and Colby is a junior in the Bachelor of Nursing program at Fresno State. Both daughters attended Hartnell College, where they competed as collegiate swimmers, contributed to the highest-scoring relay team in Hartnell College women's history, and graduated with associate degrees as valedictorians.

### **Dr. Gaby Hawat**



Dr. Gaby Hawat is a seasoned executive leader with over 35 years of experience spanning higher education, engineering and technology, public-private partnerships, corporate and community engagement, grants and funds acquisition, public relations, government affairs, and economic development with experience in the United States and Middle East. Currently he serves as Principal at [Catalyst Partners](#), a Washington D.C. based government relations and public affairs firm specializing in homeland security, business development, education, and cyber security. He also Chaired the National Visiting Committee Board for the [National CyberWatch Center \(NCC\)](#), a National Science Foundation-funded cybersecurity consortium representing nearly 500 member institutions globally, with a mission to advance cyber awareness, education, and workforce development. In addition he is the President and CEO of Hawat Enterprises, a higher education, financial assesment, and business development consulting firm.

Dr. Hawat most recently served as Senior Vice President for Higher Education at [Kaufman Hall](#), where he advised colleges and universities on institutional strategy and financial sustainability. Previously, he was the Strategy and Growth Lead for Higher Education, South Market Unit at [Accenture](#), the largest consulting firm in the world, and Executive Vice President, Chief Operating Officer, and Chief Financial Officer at the [University of Providence](#) where he was featured at the front cover of the [Signature Montana magazine](#). He also held key advisory position Special Advisor to the Rector at [Princess Nourah Bint Abdulrahman University](#) in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, the largest all-women's university in the

world, where he lead the development of academic college and help expand international engagement.

Earlier, as Senior Vice President for Operations and Global Initiatives at [Florida Institute of Technology](#), Dr. Hawat focused on institutional efficiency, partnership, and global expansions. He also dedicated nearly three decades to [Valencia College](#) in Orlando, Florida, in progressively senior roles including Special Assistant to the President and Senior Executive for Strategic Initiatives and Economic Development, Dean of Architecture, Engineering and Technology, and Chair of Business, Computer Technology, Engineering and Public Services.

Dr. Hawat holds a Doctorate degree in Higher Education Leadership from Nova Southeastern University, Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Electrical Engineering from Florida Institute of Technology and is a graduate of Harvard University's Management Development program. His honors include the National Collegiate Engineering Award, National Collegiate Leadership Award, National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development Excellence (NISOD) Award, Scholastic All-American Award, Florida Institute of Technology Alumni of the year, and formal recognition from the Partnership with the Department of Homeland Security for his collaborative contribution.

An experienced board member and grant administrator, Dr. Hawat has worked extensively with high tech industries, chambers of commerce, economic development agencies, elected officials, state and federal agencies, and global academic institutions. He is a trilingual citizen of the United States, France, and Lebanon, fluent in English, French, and Arabic, and currently serves as a member of the American Task Force on Lebanon (ATFL).

### **Dr. Brian Kalk**



Dr. Brian P. Kalk is an executive leader, educator, and public servant whose career spans higher education, applied energy research, military service, and statewide elected office. Born in Bottineau, North Dakota, he was raised with the values that define the state, hard work, integrity, service to community. He began his academic journey at Dakota College at Bottineau, an experience that grounded him in the people, culture, and priorities of North Dakota. He went on to complete a B.S. degree in Political Science from Campbell University, a M.S. degree in Environmental Engineering, and a Ph.D. in Natural Resources Management both from North Dakota State University (NDSU).

Brian currently serves as Chief Research Officer at the University of North Dakota's Energy and Environmental Research Center, one of the world's leading applied energy research institutions. He leads a team of scientists, engineers, and professional staff. His leadership strengthens federal, state, and commercial partnerships while expanding research in oil and gas, renewable energy, and environmental technologies. His work directly supports the development of a highly skilled technical workforce and advances strategic initiatives that benefit the region's economy.

Dr. Kalk's past contributions to NDSU form a significant chapter of his career. As Executive Director of the NDSU Research and Technology Park, he championed innovation, entrepreneurship, and hands-on learning. Earlier in his career, at the Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute, he led curriculum development, student recruitment, and program administration for an interdisciplinary logistics program, deepening his understanding of transportation systems, supply chains, and workforce needs.

Brian's statewide impact is reflected as a North Dakota Public Service Commissioner, including service as Chair. He oversaw regulatory decisions affecting energy production, transmission, and pipeline safety. He worked closely with numerous stakeholders, providing input, analysis, and perspective on complex issues while building strong relationships with leaders across our state. His ability to communicate technical matters helped shape policy affecting energy, infrastructure, and consumer protection.

A dedicated educator, Dr. Kalk taught extensively at NDSU, the University of Mary, and Park University. His teaching portfolio includes logistics, environmental policy, energy management, and organizational leadership. He has worked with traditional and non-traditional, military, and international learners, demonstrating a strong commitment to student achievement and academic quality.

During his 20 years in the U.S. Marine Corps, Brian held roles in operations, logistics, and served in command. His career spanned the globe, through Europe, Asia, Australia, Africa, and the Middle East. These experiences gave him a deep understanding of diverse cultures, global perspectives, and the importance of building trust across different communities. This global awareness continues to shape his leadership style and his ability to connect with people from all backgrounds.

Deeply engaged in education, community service, veterans' organizations, and youth development, Brian has dedicated his career to strengthening educational pathways, advancing innovation, and supporting the workforce needs of a rapidly changing economy. His broad leadership experience, collaborative approach, global perspective, and lifelong commitment to North Dakota values position him well to guide any institution into its next era of growth, innovation, and student opportunity.

## Dr. Rai Kathuria



Dr. Rai Kathuria is a higher education leader with more than two decades of experience advancing student success, workforce alignment, and institutional vitality across public colleges and university systems. He brings a clear commitment to career-focused education as a catalyst for expanding opportunity, strengthening communities, and connecting talent with high-demand fields.

He most recently served as Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs at Empire State University, where he led a comprehensive academic restructuring that unified eight schools into five colleges to elevate academic identity, strengthen student outcomes, and align programs with workforce needs. Prior to that, he served as Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs for the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities system, providing strategic leadership across 17 institutions, serving 85,000 students, with an emphasis on workforce-aligned programming, affordable access, and cross-sector partnerships. Earlier in his career, he held system-level academic leadership at Indiana University, where he contributed to building one of the nation's most successful online education platforms and a revenue model generating \$180 million annually.

Throughout his career, Dr. Kathuria has championed the integration of rigorous academic preparation with applied, experiential learning. He has cultivated Business and Industry partnerships that keep curriculum responsive to employer needs, developed stackable credentials and flexible program pathways to meet students where they are, and built K-12 pipelines that expand access and accelerate students into college and career simultaneously. His approach reflects a core conviction that polytechnic education prepares students for both a living and a life.

Dr. Kathuria holds a Ph.D. in Molecular Biology and Biochemistry and completed executive leadership training at the Harvard University Graduate School of Education. Having served as a peer reviewer for Quality Matters and Higher Learning Commission, he grounds institutional innovation in evidence, academic integrity, and measurable student outcomes.

He has overseen more than \$80 million in externally funded grants and initiatives, including federal workforce development awards and large-scale initiatives expanding access in healthcare, advanced manufacturing, and technology fields. He has built partnerships with

high schools, healthcare organizations, and industry leaders advancing institutional mission and regional economic development.

Grounded in respect for students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community partners, Dr. Kathuria believes that colleges thrive when academic distinction and public purpose advance together. He leads with listening, collaboration, and decisive action, guided by the conviction that higher education remains one of the most powerful forces for expanding opportunity and transforming lives.

### **Dr. Phillip King**



Phillip King currently serves as Executive Vice President and Provost at Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC), a comprehensive community and technical college serving approximately 31,000 students annually. In this role, he provides executive leadership for instruction and instructional support, workforce education, dual enrollment, enrollment and student services, athletics, and four regional campuses and centers. His portfolio reflects deep experience leading complex, multi-campus institutions with a strong commitment to access, student success, and workforce alignment.

With more than 30 years of service in community colleges, Dr. King brings a career-long commitment to public higher education grounded in student opportunity, applied learning, and institutional stewardship. His professional journey spans classified staff, faculty, and senior administrative roles, including vice president positions overseeing academic affairs and student services, dean-level leadership, and director roles in enrollment management and student success. He has served colleges in California, Oregon, Washington, and Wisconsin, as well as in university settings in Florida and Washington, D.C., giving him a broad, systems-level perspective on higher education leadership.

Dr. King is recognized for leading major institutional initiatives that strengthen student pathways and workforce outcomes. His experience includes strategic enrollment management, guided pathways redesign, accreditation leadership, developmental education reform, governance and organizational redesign, and large-scale strategic planning and communication. Central to his leadership philosophy is collaborative problem-solving—bringing faculty, staff, and students together to co-create solutions that advance institutional mission while responding to regional and workforce needs.

As an educator, Dr. King has taught across multiple disciplines, including physical education and health, college success, communication studies, and higher education leadership and research. His academic preparation includes a bachelor's degree in psychology, a master's degree in

communication studies, and a doctorate in community college leadership. His teaching and scholarship reinforce his belief that effective presidents must remain closely connected to the teaching and learning enterprise and to the lived experiences of students.

Dr. King's leadership is guided by a strong belief in the role of community and polytechnic colleges as engines of economic vitality, social mobility, and regional prosperity. He is committed to transparent communication, data-informed decision-making, and building partnerships with industry, government, and community stakeholders. As a presidential finalist, he brings a steady, student-centered, and future-focused approach aligned with Bismarck State College's mission to deliver hands-on, workforce-driven education that prepares learners for both careers and lives of purpose.

### **Dr. Daniel Leingang**



Dr. Daniel Leingang is deeply committed to developing environments that foster strong student success and engagement. With just under 30 years of experience in higher education, he currently serves as interim president at Bismarck State College (BSC) in Bismarck, North Dakota.

A first-generation college graduate from Mandan, Dr. Leingang earned a Bachelor of Arts in mathematics from Concordia College (Moorhead, MN), followed by a Master of Science in mathematics, and a Doctor of Philosophy in educational leadership with a higher education focus from the University of North Dakota (Grand Forks, ND). As an advocate for student success, Dr. Leingang has received national recognition for his classroom teaching from the Association of Community College Trustees and his chapter advising from Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society.

In his administrative roles at BSC, Dr. Leingang's leadership has contributed to strategic advancements of the polytechnic mission, stackable degrees/pathways, and baccalaureate degree expansion. Previously, he served as the college's academic vice president, academic dean, department chair, and tenured faculty member. These roles continue to shape him as he strives to build collaborative teams that elevate teaching and learning in support of a student-centered college. Additionally, he focuses on strengthening industry and community partnerships to enhance the college's regional impact.