

FOGLIA FOUNDATION  
AND RECREATION  
WELCOME



# OPTIMIZING CAMPUS CENTERS FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGES

How CENTERS Elevates  
Student Engagement and  
Institutional Success



CENTERS



# Why Campus Centers Matter in Community Colleges



In the ever-evolving landscape of higher education, colleges must not merely manage their facilities; they must optimize them to create a dynamic experience that supports student life and financial objectives. A campus center operator is the lynchpin for institutions seeking not only facility management services but also a partner that employs innovative and entrepreneurial discipline to deliver returns on investment.

**CHOOSING A PARTNER LIKE CENTERS IS NOT JUST A CHOICE FOR EFFICIENT MANAGEMENT; IT'S A STRATEGIC MOVE TO MAXIMIZE THE UTILITY OF YOUR CAMPUS CENTERS.**



## Bridging the Gap to Opportunity

An educated populace has identifiable roadways to achievement. Community colleges pave these roads across the country. These institutions confront distinct challenges and opportunities not shared by most four-year higher education institutions. Community colleges are indispensable assets for more than nine million individuals across the United States, providing accessible education to learners of all backgrounds. They offer opportunities for those facing financial constraints, requiring flexible scheduling, or seeking technical degrees. Regardless of their educational attainment or status, all are welcome.



## A Proven Pathway to Success

A recent [comprehensive study](#) by the National Science Foundation’s National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics revealed that from 2008 to 2017, 52.3% of those receiving first-time bachelor’s degrees had previously attended community colleges—an uptick from previous years .

This path has been particularly beneficial for historically underrepresented communities, who until recent decades have faced dramatically steeper climbs to achieving scholastic parity. For example, among those receiving first-time bachelor’s degrees from 2008 to 2017, 56.3% of females and 57.9% of African Americans first attended community colleges. Among those with disabilities, the percentage was 64.3.

Community colleges play a vital role in workforce development and higher education, yet they often operate with fewer financial resources than four-year institutions. Simply put, fewer resources mean less room for error, exploration, and ambitious enterprises. This means they must innovate strategically to provide high-quality student experiences while managing budget constraints.



**52.3%**

*of first-time bachelor’s degree recipients previously attended a community college.<sup>1</sup>*



**56.3%**

*of female and 57.9% of African American graduates took this route.<sup>1</sup>*



**64.3%**

*of students with disabilities are first enrolled at a community college.<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> [National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, National Survey of College Graduates, 2019](#)



# The Role of Campus Facilities in Student Engagement & Retention

**CAMPUS CENTERS AREN'T JUST BUILDINGS—THEY'RE A CATALYST FOR STUDENT SUCCESS, RETENTION, AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT.**

The student experience is shaped by facilities, campus engagement, and a sense of belonging. The belonging students form with their institution and their peers contribute to their retention and success. According to a [2022 study by Inside Higher Ed](#), 67% of students say that “campus facilities influenced their college choice.” Meanwhile, 43% of prospective students “rejected an institution because an important facility was inadequate or poorly maintained.”

It's not just about the facilities themselves; it's also about how they

impact students. For example, [Recreation Sports Journal](#) identified a 99% retention rate linked to participation in campus recreation. Schools increasingly recognize the value of offering the right mix of buildings and programs. Just as notably, [Recreation Sports Journal](#) also published an academic paper revealing that frequent users of campus recreation facilities are three times more likely than infrequent users to have a GPA of 3.8 or higher.



*Part-time Employee Appreciation Banquet at Moraine Valley Community College*



As a specialized professional services firm, CENTERS provides management, programming, and operational expertise for:

- Sports venues & arenas
- Student centers
- Recreation and wellness facilities
- Performing arts centers
- Conference & events services



## How CENTERS Supports Student Success

As a professional services firm specializing in campus center management for colleges and universities, CENTERS helps power sports venues, recreation and wellness facilities, student centers, performing arts venues, conference facilities, and other high-impact buildings.

At a time when more community colleges are bolstering their “outside-the-classroom” offerings—implementing programs and building facilities that respond to the needs of 21st-century non-traditional students—CENTERS helps them progress from Point A to Point Z, delivering value at each step.

CENTERS provides unique value in this industry because our management expertise and technical knowledge across a broad range of issues produce targeted outcomes that deliver operational efficiencies, cost savings, and revenue-producing programs and services while contributing to vibrant communities.

Community colleges hire CENTERS to help solve current and future challenges of building a robust out-of-classroom experience. Our clients crave expertise in marketing, membership recruitment, risk management, human resources, and building cross-functional partnerships. They want to understand today’s best practices, such as how to implement a popular fitness training program, or which FF&E will optimize utility and value.



*Group Fitness Class at Moraine Valley Community College*

It's not that these schools can't figure it out themselves. It's the resource drain that comes with the process of figuring it out, improving upon it, and sustaining that improvement. It's a process that requires financial and personnel resources most community colleges can't spare.

CENTERS offers a nationwide network of industry experts leveraged at each institution, but that doesn't mean each site is a copy of the others. Our partnership with the institution starts with the college's core mission, vision, and strategic plan, incorporates our site leadership and student employees, and is oriented always to the institution's brand. Institutions can afford to invest in CENTERS, because our people integrate fully into their mission, their students, their targeted new reality, and ultimately their success.



“CENTERS provides innovative opportunities for student employees to get hands-on experiences interacting with their peers, college employees and community members, extending their learning beyond the classroom.”

*Dr. Normah Salleh-Barone,  
Vice President of Student Development  
Moraine Valley Community College*



# Case Study: Moraine Valley and Harper College

## Two Community Colleges, Two Unique Approaches

Moraine Valley Community College (“MVCC”) and Harper College (“Harper”) are two stories in the same book, bound by a shared commitment for preparing students for post-graduate achievement, but with very different approaches.

MVCC is building a community beyond its physical campus footprint. This community at large is embedded in the school’s mission statement, which speaks to “our responsibilities to one another, to our community, and to the world we share.” It is a bold pronouncement, and it’s not merely aspirational. Through its commitment to “innovation and continuous improvement,” MVCC endeavors to become a national hub for excellence.

## MVCC’s Journey with CENTERS:

- In 2014, MVCC opened the \$34 million Health, Fitness & Recreation Center (FitRec) to support athletics, physical education, and community engagement.
- CENTERS was hired to manage the facility and launch a Department of Campus Recreation.
- FitRec has since become a cornerstone of student life and community engagement.



*FitRec at Moraine Valley Community College*



*ESPN High School Basketball Game hosted by FitRec at Moraine Valley Community College*

Meanwhile, the school formerly known as Harper Community College removed “community” from its name to accentuate how they’re a new type of community college—4-year degree program through the University Center, the Canning Student Center currently under construction, and nationally competitive extracurricular teams.

At the dawn of these transformations, both schools realized they needed outside expertise, specifically with facilities they hoped would become campus cornerstones — hubs for wellness, enhancing community, and personal and professional growth. Neither school had the resources to hire a full-time team of experts to navigate the myriad of challenges confronting them.

So when MVCC opened the \$34 million Health, Fitness & Recreation Center (“FitRec”) in 2014 to support its athletic program, physical education department, and graduation ceremonies, it hired CENTERS to manage the entire facility year-round and to develop a new Department of Campus Recreation.



# Harper’s Transformation with CENTERS:

- In 2016, Harper hired CENTERS to oversee the pre-opening and management of the Health and Recreation Center.
- Harper partnered with Palatine Park District for shared use of the natatorium, increasing community engagement.
- Student employment, and formal and informal recreational opportunities became key priorities within the recreation program.

Soon thereafter, while touring MVCC, Harper administrators were drawn to CENTERS’ sophisticated recreation model and determined they wanted the same cutting-edge assistance on their campus. So Harper hired CENTERS in 2016 to oversee the pre-opening phase and management of the Health and Recreation Center (“RecCenter”).



“What we have created together is something we never could have done by ourselves. We’re showing our community what the future of public institutions looks like, not only in this district and state, but across the country.”

*Dr. Kenneth Ender, Former President, Harper College*



*Foglia Foundation Health and Recreation Center at Harper College*

# Delivering Real Impact: Measurable Results

## How CENTERS Drives Success at MVCC

CENTERS excels at strategic thinking and seamless execution to achieve bottom-line success.

### Expanding Student Employment & Engagement

For example, MVCC set a goal for 10% of its recreation center's 130 employees to be Moraine Valley students. Through our collaboration, the College not only met but exceeded this target, with student employment reaching as high as 30% and consistently maintaining a strong presence at 15-20%. Additionally, 75% of students surveyed indicated that FitRec is important or very important when it comes to their overall sense of belonging at the school.

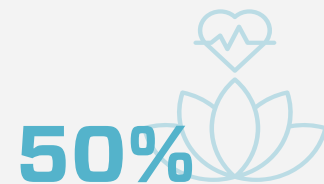
### Faculty & Staff Wellness Initiatives

CENTERS also partnered with MVCC Human Resources to implement a Faculty/Staff Wellness Initiative, through which employees received reduced fees to the facility when they reached a targeted number of visits. The result was a 50% increase in usage and correlated improved outcomes via annual health screening metrics.

## Success at MVCC



*student employment at FitRec -  
More on-campus job opportunities*



*increase in wellness participation -  
Healthier workplace culture*



*expanded youth program space  
- Increased community integration  
AND financial stability*



*growth in MVCC's 5K event -  
Scholarship funding for students*



## Revenue Growth Through Community Partnerships

CENTERS executed a 9,000 SF capital enhancement to operate a comprehensive youth program, resulting in a dramatic increase in family membership revenue and retention. In fact, membership sales have effectively mitigated MVCC’s financial risk, improved community relations, and enhanced the College’s brand. The school also has witnessed exponential growth in its annual 5k event ever since CENTERS took it on, resulting in more than \$68K dollars in student scholarship funds.



“The CENTERS team maintains a beautiful, state-of-the-art facility that has helped make Moraine Valley a hub of our communities. In addition to the building, the programs and services offered truly enhance the health and wellness of our campus.”

*Dr. Pamela J. Haney, President  
Moraine Valley Community College*



*Lifeguard at Harper College*

## Actionable Insights from Innovations at Harper

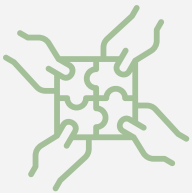
There are many more stories to tell, including at Harper, which first hired CENTERS to serve as the owner’s representative throughout construction of the Health and Recreation Center (RecCenter).



## Harper College & CENTERS: Student Impact at a Glance



*Hundreds of students gain career-readiness skills through recreation operations.*



*Seamless multi-use partnerships balance college, athletics, and community access.*



*Harper Fit Program bridges academics and fitness industry careers.*



*Gaming Lounge & eSports provide innovative student engagement opportunities.*

## Supporting Student Career Readiness

After the facility opened, CENTERS brought its unique focus on student development to the student staff at the RecCenter. CENTERS fosters an active learning environment through experiential educational opportunities at every managed location. The goal is to ensure student and part-time employees acquire career readiness skills such as leadership, teamwork, conflict resolution, and management that make them marketable academically and professionally. Through its partnership at Harper, CENTERS has helped hundreds (and counting) of students prepare for the next step on their journey.

## Maximizing Shared-Use Facilities

Community colleges often share facilities with multiple stakeholders, from Athletics and student events to external partners like YMCAs and municipal Parks and Recreation departments. These partnerships help fund school's operations but can create priority-use challenges that complicate scheduling.

CENTERS ensured smooth, equitable facility management at Harper by implementing efficient scheduling and universal access policies—eliminating overcrowding while maximizing usage for all stakeholders.



## Strategic Partnership with Palatine Park District

Harper partnered with Palatine Park District for the RecCenter natatorium, granting the district exclusive access to the pool while sharing other facility space. CENTERS leads the day-to-day operations for the entire facility, which includes supporting the programmatic needs of both entities and managing the shared expense reporting between the two government agencies.

## Hands-On Learning with the Harper Fit Program

CENTERS works closely Harper's Kinesiology Program to offer practical student experience through the Harper Fit Program (HFP). HFP is part of a personal training certificate program that assigns faculty/staff to a student enrolled in the personal training practicum. Under the guidance of the professor, students offer one-on-one personal training sessions on the fitness floor. Additionally, faculty/staff, students, and members are eligible to participate in fitness assessments and consultations with the same trainers and CENTERS staff.

The HFP program is another example of CENTERS' student development philosophy at work. It gives Harper students real-world industry experience, preparing them for careers in fitness, health sciences, and wellness.

## Expanding Student Engagement with eSports & Gaming

In its second year of operations, CENTERS collaborated with the College to create a gaming lounge and e-sports space, transforming an underutilized meeting room into a vibrant student hub, complete with 70" televisions, consoles, lounge seating, table tennis, foosball, and board games.

The space is open to students and members for drop-in gaming along with reservations for clubs, organizations, and employee groups. The success of the Gaming Lounge is a direct result



*New Gaming Lounge at Harper College*



of collaborations with marketing and student engagement centers. By working with these stakeholders, CENTERS @ Harper has amplified the lounge's visibility, ensuring broad student participation and enriching the overall college experience.

Building on this momentum, CENTERS recently collaborated with Harper Athletics to launch its first e-sports team, which competes in the National Junior College Athletic Associations Esports (NJCAA) —expanding Harper's extracurricular offerings and engaging a new student demographic.



New Gaming Lounge at Harper College



“We’ve achieved a safe, clean, professionally run health and recreation facility. We’ve grown our group exercise program and eGaming. The results include a well-staffed, well-run facility, great connections for our students, and numerous student engagement opportunities through hiring CENTERS.”

*Mary Kay Harton, Dean of Students,  
Harper College*



# The Future of Community College Campus Centers

## Why More Institutions Are Partnering with CENTERS

There is no such thing as a one-size-fits-all approach to managing campus centers. Community colleges, more than most institutions, must get creative with their partnerships to maximize value, balancing student needs, financial constraints, and external partnerships. CENTERS thrives in this space. We bring deep expertise in campus operations, but we're also nimble enough to innovate when innovation is what drives institutions forward.

**OUTSOURCING CAMPUS CENTER OPERATIONS TO EXPERTS LIKE CENTERS ALLOWS COLLEGES TO FOCUS ON WHAT THEY DO BEST—EDUCATING STUDENTS.**



*Membership Services at Moraine Valley Community College*



As community colleges grapple with budgetary pressures and staffing shortages, many are rethinking how they operate their campus centers. The decision isn't just about reducing costs—it's about unlocking new sources of value that advance their institutional mission.

Institutions like MVCC and Harper turned to CENTERS not only to optimize operations but to enhance student experiences, expand revenue opportunities, and strengthen their role as cultural and community hubs. These facilities don't just serve the college; they serve the broader community, creating dynamic spaces where education, wellness, and engagement intersect. CENTERS helps institutions own that space, ensuring that their campus centers reflect their vision and purpose.

Managing a modern campus center requires far more than day-to-day operations. It demands a team with specialized expertise in programming, construction, accounting, marketing, student engagement, community relations, and revenue generation. That's what CENTERS provides: a dedicated network of former campus administrators and industry experts, working behind the scenes to help our clients understand value comprehensively—through financial sustainability, student development, and long-term institutional impact.

We are passionate about this work because we've seen the impact firsthand—on student retention, institutional growth, and community partnerships. Let's start the conversation.

## The CENTERS Advantage in Student-Centered Campus Management

Community colleges are increasingly seeking external partners to enhance student experiences while maintaining financial sustainability.

- **Strategic operations management** reduces costs & maximizes efficiency.
- **Innovative programming** improves student retention & success.
- **Revenue-generating partnerships** lower financial risks.
- **Collaborative models** strengthen community and institutional impact.
- **Student development is our DNA**—expanding leadership, career readiness, and engagement opportunities.



# Elevate Your Campus with CENTERS

## Let's Start the Conversation

MVCC and Harper faced complex facility management challenges—but with the right partner, they transformed their campus centers into thriving student hubs.

## Is your institution next?

Let's start the conversation. [Contact CENTERS](#) today to explore how we can optimize your campus facilities and student engagement.



Have a question or interested in working with CENTERS?  
Contact Kim Martin, CENTERS' Vice President of Business Development.  
Email: [kmartin@centersusa.com](mailto:kmartin@centersusa.com) | Direct: [513.348.6303](tel:513.348.6303)

### ABOUT CENTERS

Established in 1998 by Brailsford & Dunlavey, CENTERS is the nation's leading campus recreation and student life facility management firm, delivering high-impact experiences across recreation centers, arenas, student unions, performing arts venues, and conference services. Through expert operations and innovative programming, CENTERS enhances engagement, maximizes value, and creates dynamic environments that build community and enrich campus life.