

## Strategic Planning Dialogue Sessions - Fall 2014

In preparation for the development of the College's new 2016-2020 strategic plan, internal constituents engaged in a series of dialogue sessions on strategic issues facing Harper College. These issues were identified based on feedback and recommendations from strategic planning teams, as well as emerging issues specific to our district, community colleges and higher education.

In order to ensure a broad based understanding and thorough vetting of these issues, four dialogue sessions were held:

- Session One: Harper's Changing District – Friday, September 12, 2014
- Session Two: Harper's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats – Friday, October 10, 2014
- Session Three: Approaches to the Adult Market – Friday, October 31, 2014
- Session Four: Student Engagement – Friday, December 5, 2014

The dialogue sessions included presentations from subject matter and industry experts, as well as expert panelists of Harper faculty and staff who responded to the presentations and provided unique perspectives on addressing the issues at the College. Employee feedback was a critical component of these dialogue sessions. Feedback was gathered through discussions, input groups and survey opportunities. Engagement in the dialogue sessions provided Harper College employees with the opportunity to learn about and respond to critical institutional issues facing the College ensuring broad based input in the development of the next strategic plan.

### Session Three: Approaches to the Adult Market

On Friday, October 31, 2014 Harper held the third dialogue session, *Approaches to the Adult Market*. The session was attended by 122 Harper College employees, including 32 administrators, 28 faculty, and 62 staff. In the *Approaches to the Adult Market* session, members of the College community discussed adult student enrollment trends in both the local and the national context, as well as how Harper might address its decreasing adult enrollment. Prior Learning Assessment and Competency-Based Education were also discussed.

The session began with a review of adult enrollment trends at Harper College.

- During the economic recovery, enrollment rates decreased across the state, among our peer colleges, and at Harper.
- Adult student enrollment at Harper has been decreasing since 2011-12.
- Retention rates for the Adult population are lower than rates for the non-Adult population.

Following the trends presentation, Dr. Lewis Sanborne, Associate Vice President at Noel-Levitz, presented on "Adult Students and the Two-Year Sector."

- Although enrollment rates have substantially grown in all sectors of higher education since the 1960s, enrollments have dropped recently. The 4-year public and 2-year public sectors have shown the most substantial decreases.

- Nationally, the 25+ age group will reach 10 million students by 2021 (43% of all enrollments).
- Workers with a Bachelor's degree or higher gained jobs during the recession and gained 2 million additional jobs during the recovery. Workers with a high school diploma or less lost more than 5 million jobs during the recession and did not regain those jobs during the recovery.
- Dr. Sanborne also shared the results of the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory that was administered at Harper in fall 2014:
  - Harper's strengths include a safe and secure campus, convenient access to services, and faculty communication.
  - Harper's challenges include course scheduling, quality of instruction, and knowledge of academic advisors.

After Dr. Sanborne's presentation, Dr. Pamela Tate, President of the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) shared her thoughts about "Degree Completion through Prior Learning Assessment and Competency-Based Education."

- Nationally, 62% of Americans ages 25-64 have not earned an Associate's degree or higher. In Illinois, 58% of those ages 25-64 have not earned an Associate's degree or higher.
- If Illinois continues the current rate of degree attainment, the state will fall 10.4% (713,771 degrees) below the 2025 Lumina foundation degree attainment goal of 60%.
- CAEL is a strong supporter of Prior Learning Assessment (PLA), which is a process for evaluating knowledge and skills in order to award college credit for learning from job training, military service, community service, and independent study.
  - PLA is evaluated through student portfolios, standardized tests, non-college training, and industry-recognized certificates. Credit is for learning, not for experience.
  - Studies show that baccalaureate students are 2 ½ times more likely to persist to graduation if they have also earned PLA credit.
- Competency-based programs are based on what students know and can do. Competency-based initiatives include Jumpstart from CAEL and Lumina, The Incubator from Educause and the Gates Foundation, and programs at individual institutions such as Purdue University and Texas A&M University-Commerce.
- Adult students need improved career and educational advising, expanded online options, flexible scheduling, and options for PLA and competency-based education.

Finally, a panel of Harper employees shared a variety of perspectives on the adult market based on their review of the presentations and their own experiences at Harper. Panelists included Mike Barzacchini, Director of Marketing Services; Maggi Franks, Manager of Fast Track; Patricia Hamlen, Associate Professor of Anthropology; and Jose Vital, Instructor of Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Technology. Panelists also responded to questions from the audience. The perspectives shared included the following:

- The "Adult Market" is very diverse in terms of age, race/ethnicity, and job and educational experience. This diversity means the College will need a variety of outreach and engagement efforts in order to appropriately respond to the market and to the individuality of adult students.
- The College must redefine its focus on adult students to improve enrollment. An examination of data trends may help the institution accomplish drive the services provided.

- Establishing relationships with students is essential for ensuring they feel welcome and are able to access resources when needed. The College should ensure adult students have easy access to the resources they need to enroll, persist, and complete.
- Adult students can be helped by providing additional packaged career programs and clear paths to completion as well as high-touch advising and counseling. The College should focus on strong relationships with industry to ensure it is attentive to the needs of the business community as well as its students.

Harper employees were also given the opportunity to view the presentation and panel discussion and respond to a brief survey. Themes shared by survey respondents included:

- The adult market is diverse, and adult students need more personalized services to attend to the differences among them. Additionally, the services that adult students need are often not the same services that traditional students need.
- The College needs to increase flexibility in course scheduling and provide additional defined paths to completion.
- There should be more attention to the role of Continuing Education in providing education and services to the adult market.
- Prior Learning Assessment and other flexible learning options may be important paths to ensuring the College serves adult students well.

Overall feedback to the session was positive. Participants found the presentations to be informative and relevant to the Harper context. The dialogue provided attendees with information about the adult market in relation to both the local and the national context, and attendees were interested in discussing the possibilities for changing the way Harper addresses its adult student populations.