

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 One: Harper's Changing District

On Friday, September 12, 2014 the first dialogue session, *Harper's Changing District*, was held. The session was attended by 128 Harper College employees, including 34 administrators, 36 faculty, and 58 staff. *Harper's Changing District* detailed the importance of responding to and serving our changing community. The session began with a presentation from Darlene Schlenbecker, Director of Institutional Effectiveness, which highlighted the findings of the College's recent *Environmental Scan* and provided an overview of the economic, workforce and population trends impacting the Harper district. Trends discussed included:

- Economic Conditions:
 - Underfunded pension system
 - Declining financial aid
 - Decreasing household income
- Workforce/Employment:
 - Unemployment
 - Discouraged or "missing" workers
 - Employment "shrinkage"
- Population Changes:
 - Decrease in birthrate/increase in resident age

- Education levels
- Race/ethnicity shifts

Following the trends presentation a Harper panel engaged in a discussion on the changing state of our district, providing perspectives on potential impacts and the importance of responding to these changes. Panelists included Gary Anderson, Business Administration; Malathy Chandrasekar, Economics; Dr. Monica Edwards, Sociology; Andrea Fiebig, Adult Educational Development; Jeannine Lombardi, Education; and Valerie Walker, Human Services. Panelists responded to the data presentation with comments related to the impact of these district changes and approaches to meeting the needs of our district. The perspectives shared included the following:

- The diversity of students is powerful, this is not the world it was 10 years ago. We need to train faculty/staff to work with diverse students and increase the diversity of our own employees.
- Who are we serving? If we are not serving our students we need to change. We must address student needs in scheduling, access, financial support, and in the transition to college. All students do not come to us with the same experiences and we need to identify with this. Providing students with the services they need is essential.
- Although the marketability of students with associate degrees is on the rise, there is a lack of qualified workers and a mismatch between the training students are receiving and the jobs available. Additionally, while the economy seems to be making a recovery and unemployment is down the number of discouraged workers is alarming.
- Students are juggling multiple responsibilities – work, school, and family – often with limited resources and income. Students come to us with preexisting conditions and we cannot exclude them. Harper needs to provide services to all so that students do not fall through the cracks. Building relationships between faculty and students, and staff and students will help support students and increase enrollment and completion for all.

After the panel discussion session attendees discussed two questions in small groups. Groups were instructed to document responses to these questions on a provided form and turn in the forms before departing. Compiled results of these feedback forms results in the following themes:

Question 1: Based on what you have heard, what one thing should Harper focus on and what institutional changes should be considered to address it?

- Affordability
 - Provide financial aid resources and additional funding options/opportunities to help student meet the cost of attendance - tuition, fees and books.
- Accessibility
 - Offer adaptive/flexible scheduling options, provide services for evening and weekend students, increase transportation options, and provide technology training/resources.
- Resources
 - Provide services for evening/weekend students, including child care, academic support and non-academic support services.

Question 2: Based on what you have heard, what has the biggest potential to influence what you do at Harper, and what changes would you need to consider?

- Developing a sense of community within the classroom, the college and the district
 - Build relationship within and outside of the classroom; encourage faculty/student relationships; strengthen internal and external partnerships; provide community services; and strengthen communication between college and community.
- Prioritization of initiatives
 - Need to limit, organize and clearly communicate priorities; balance student needs with institutional needs; capitalize on things we do well; and focus on a few common goals to really make progress.

Harper employees who were unable to attend the session were also given the opportunity to view the presentation and panel discussion and respond to the feedback questions. Respondents of the online survey indicated the following areas of focus to address the changing district demographics.

- Child care
- Mass transportation
- Flexible class times
- Financial assistance
- Advising

Overall feedback to the session was positive. Participants engaged with the data presented and interacted through the panel discussion, audience questions, and group work. The dialogue session not only provided attendees with information on the district changes but also elicited a discussion and sharing of perspectives on responding to and meeting the needs of this changing community.