

## 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 Four: Student Engagement

On Friday, December 5, 2014 the fourth and final dialogue session, *Student Engagement*, was held. The session was attended by 110 Harper College employees, including 35 administrators, 38 faculty, and 37 staff. *Student Engagement* detailed the importance of student engagement with Harper College and the Harper community. The session was opened by the Provost, Judy Marwick. Dr. Kay McClenney, Senior Associate at the Center for Community College Student Engagement, provided the keynote presentation. The presentation highlighted several key elements uniquely tied to understanding student engagement at a community college:

1. Understand each student's goals: complete a degree, transfer to a four-year institution, or build skills in a new area.
2. Build channels for assessment and feedback like the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE).
3. Creating personal connections and create opportunities to support students throughout their academic tenure.
4. Plan pathways for success through curriculum, advising, and engaged learning opportunities.

Following the presentation by Dr. McClenney, a Harper panel took the stage to provide information related to student engagement in their departments and classrooms. The panel included John Garcia, Philosophy; Travaris Harris, Student Development; Paul Peterson, Academic Enrichment & Engagement; and

Kimberley Polly, Mathematics. The panelists responded to several important questions from the moderator, Dr. Marwick, including the meaning of student engagement, and effective approaches balanced with the challenges. The perspectives shared included the following:

- Students must feel connected to the institution through faculty, staff, and other students. Harper must become a community for students to feel supported and committed to their educational goals.
- Building trust, and creating a welcoming environment takes work from the entire staff. We must strive to build a positive environment in and out of the classroom.
- The classroom must support active and engaged learning through discussions and assignments that are tailored.
- Effective learning is supported when faculty are engaged in the experience as well. Simple steps like learning students' names can have a profound impact on relationship building.
- Assessment is a continuous loop, and students must feel involved in the process. They must also see that their feedback is valued and find the right channels for continuous improvement across the institution.
- Intrusive learning may be a good option; students need a new bar for success and higher accountability.
- Major challenges to student engagement include time management, life responsibilities, faculty attitudes, external influences, preparedness, and attendance.

The panel fielded questions from the audience, and Dr. McClenney joined the panel in this discussion. Highlights included discussions on early-alert systems, intrusive advising, student responsibilities, co-curricular activities, innovation in the classroom, and one-size-fits-all models.

When the panel concluded, audience members were asked to respond to the following:

*In the context of your role at Harper, what could you do to improve student engagement at the College?*

Thirty-three audience members provided feedback to this question. The perspectives shared include the following:

- Certain staff members do not have a lot of contact with students, but seek to better understand ways they can better support those who do interact with students.
- Develop more opportunities for students to provide feedback about specific service and support areas – and then provide the results and action steps back to students.
- Creating synergies across service and support departments would create clearer paths for students to navigate the system.
- Do more follow-up about issues that arise in one area, but are transferred to another area.
- Create new opportunities for engaged learning in the classroom, as well as developing relationships with students in and out of the classroom.
- Be a cheerleader for all students at every opportunity.

Harper employees who were unable to attend the session were also given the opportunity to view the presentation and panel discussion and respond to two feedback questions.

*What is your overall reaction to the information provided in the presentations?*

*Based on what was shared, what approaches should Harper consider to improve student engagement in the classroom and at the College?*

Four employees responded to the survey. They shared the following:

- Several good take-aways were highlighted both in and out of the classroom.
- Academic plans are important; career pathways need to be expanded.
- Sharing best practices across our departments and divisions will yield great improvements.

Overall, feedback to the session was very positive, both at the dialogue session and via the online survey.