

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 Two: Harper's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT)

On Friday, October 10, 2014 the second dialogue session, *Harper's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT)*, was held. The session was attended by 105 Harper College employees, including 30 administrators, 26 faculty, and 49 staff. *Harper's SWOT* detailed institutional level items within the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats categories. The session began with a presentation by Colleen Burns and Mark Mrozinski, Chair and Vice-Chair of the Strategic Planning and Accountability (SPA) committee, on the Draft SWOT Analysis developed by the SPA committee. Across the four categories, 22 items were identified and reviewed.

Strengths

1. Increasing Levels of Student Degree Completion/Credentials Earned
2. National Model for Addressing Manufacturing Workforce Gaps
3. Partnerships with Sender High Schools
4. Support for Professional Development
5. Physical Environment
6. Community Awareness/Participation

Weaknesses

1. Stagnant Student Persistence Rates
2. Insufficient Employee Diversity
3. Inadequate Levels of Student Engagement

4. Student Achievement Gaps
5. Employee Climate Concerns Regarding Communication and Advancement
6. Physical Plant and Infrastructure

Opportunities

1. Credit for Prior Learning/Experience and Competency-Based Learning
2. Workforce Partnerships with Business and Industry
3. Underserved District Populations
4. Responding to the Region's Skills Gap

Threats

1. Response to District Demographic Changes
2. Changing Pedagogy/Technology
3. Decreasing Funding/Increasing Cost
4. Pension Liability
5. Increasing Call for Accountability
6. Lack of Employment Data

Following the SWOT overview, attendees participated in a series of small group dialog sessions during which each participant had the opportunity to provide feedback about the presented SWOT items and to suggest revisions, clarifications and/or additional SWOT items for consideration. Harper employees who were unable to attend the session were also given the opportunity to view the presentation and provide feedback in the employee portal via an online survey about new or existing SWOT items.

Overall, participants supported the presented SWOT items. The majority of the recommendations were largely for the addition of clarifying language. However, there were two items for which the feedback suggested that perceived contradictory items should not appear in the analysis. These items were:

- Strength 5 – Physical Environment
- Weakness 6 – Physical Plant and Infrastructure

Upon further reflection from the SPA committee, the contradictory nature of the items were recognized and even though data supported both, from a college strategy standpoint, the item with least institutional impact needed to be removed from the analysis. So while significant efforts are being taken by the college to improve our facilities, the fact that the campus is over 45 years old and that 50% of our buildings are in need of renovation are the issues with the most institutional impact. The Strength was removed and the Weakness was updated and retained.

Solicitation for additional items yielded a number of suggestions. None of these suggestions were supported across the groups and while the vast majority were focused on real experiences of the participants, the issues raised had low institutional impact. There was one suggestion made across the vast majority of breakout sessions, which was the opportunity to provide input concerning how the college moves forward in addressing the SWOT items.

Overall feedback to the session was positive. Participants engaged with the information presented and interacted through the small group input sessions. The input sessions not only provided attendees with information critical to the strategic planning process, but also engaged them in open discussion about the potential Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats that need to be considered as part of this process.

In response to the call by participants to have input into possible responses the college could take to address the SWOT items, this opportunity was provided. The final stage in SWOT analysis was to provide an online forum to solicit ideas about how to maximize our Strengths and Opportunities, as well as mitigate our Weaknesses and Threats. The forum was opened at the beginning of the spring 2015 semester and remained open through the end of January.