Harper College

Dialogue Session

Whitepaper

The Changing Landscape of Work	**October 8, 2019**

How have expectations in the workplace changed? According to the World Economic Forum, 65% of children entering primary school will ultimately work in a job that doesn't exist today. The half-life concept states that professional skills last five years. Thus, by 2024 the skills we need, regardless of industry, will have changed. How do these dramatic changes impact how we educate students for the future? A distinguished panel of experts will discuss these trends to help us prepare for the future.

Summary of the Background of the Discussion

- As technological changes continue to escalate, how can we best support instructors who need additional instruction themselves in order to keep abreast of the changes?
- How can we provide students with the essential, human, or soft skills knowledge today's employers require?
- Should travel abroad, language, world culture, and diversity programs become required as part of preparing students for employment in a global economy?
- The available workforce is shrinking. How can community colleges help by removing barriers so women and minorities can move into non-traditional occupations?
- Workplace and educational alignment is critical. How can we integrate credit and non-credit credentials into the existing systems?
- How can Harper challenge its past accomplishments to prepare students for a future in which they will need to continually update their existing skills, adjust to new technological advances, and understand cultural diversity?

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Panel Discussion of the Topic

Below is a summary of the statements made by the panelists in response to the questions asked:

What were your first jobs and how did they impact you throughout your career?

The panelists shared a variety of first work experiences and their personal and professional impact. Experiences included grocery retail, detassling corn, bank teller, community organizer, florist apprentice, and car hop. Panelists shared the skills developed through these experiences including the essential skills of being on time and working collaboratively. Personal reflections on these experiences included racial discrimination, the importance of drive, determination and hard work, as well as creativity and optimism.

Moderator Note: Creativity, punctuality, boldness, connection to others, determination, tenacity, optimism, work ethic – these are intrinsic skills.

How can we teach the types of skills employers want to see and teach students to be flexible and adapt to the changing landscape of work?

The one constant in the workplace is change, so we need to teach students how to manage it, especially in high stress situations and still perform their jobs at a top level. Getting things done on time while maintaining high quality is equally important.

Employers need to understand the world is changing. The available talent pool is evaluating employers to find an employment match. We are transitioning into more digital environments that will drive the service and industrial sectors going forward. How will moving into that environment change traditional thought and patterns of work? In today's world, it is not necessary to be in the office to work and accomplish many things. Some of the prerequisites previously deemed important just are not anymore.

Employers say soft or human skills are important, the most important of all being communication. But what does that mean? Being able to text on a phone? Employers need to figure that out and balance skills, technology, and the things only humans can do.

The future of work – automation, artificial intelligence, and quickly changing technologies create a tension between technical skills and general skills. How can students learn both of these? In the past, workforce development focused largely on the technical aspect of work, but with rapidly changing technology, students also have to learn general skills. Work-based learning such as formal apprenticeships, internships, and service learning is where this can happen.

In the ever changing technological environment, educational institutions need to address an instructor skills gap. Instructors are saying that at certain points they know they have reached the end of their knowledge base – they do not understand the newest technology and find themselves needing to learn more. We can't close the skills gap since technology never stops, but we need to keep the instructional skills gap as narrow as possible.

With regard to workplace and educational alignment, what policies or changes need to be made in education to create greater alignment?

One issue to consider is performance-based funding where student outcomes determine the amount of state funding. Has performance based funding considered workforce development and the push towards certificates and credentials? Instead of a federal workforce development system, the United States has loosely connected community colleges and other local organizations. How does performance-based funding complicate this move toward certificates and credentials?

The way of credentialing is going to change from the current federal system based on traditional credentials and pathways to those credentials. How can policies be synced with the skills and competencies a person needs to enter a work-based learning situation and eventually a job? Policies need to address employer-driven programs and credentials and the opportunity to integrate these with existing educational systems. It is a great deal of work and sometimes stalls when trying to integrate a certificate or badge with a credit program, so everything needs to be redefined. As a part of a lifelong learning trajectory, how do credentials align and what are the policies that support those credentials?

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Diversity is changing the landscape of our workforce and our country. There is a graduation requirement for students at Harper to help them prepare for competing in a global workforce. What value is a graduation requirement like this and what are implications for institutions that don't have this as a requirement?

In touring Harper, the sophistication of the various departments is impressive. Additionally, the ability for students to travel abroad, learn about other cultures, and hear different languages is vital. Study abroad prepares students before they enter the workforce in a variety of ways including understanding the importance of communication and the ability to get along with coworkers and management.

In a company with a large Latino workforce, the way to lead this team is to understand their culture, know what is important to them. Personally acknowledging not just Latinos, but all employees, especially on special occasions such as their birthdays is important.

In nursing, for instance, more critical than teaching a nurse to put an IV into a patient is teaching them about giving compassionate care to patients. Human skills are the key to success. Since people will change jobs more and more often, they need to identify what skills they have acquired that they will bring to their next job. Harper's World Culture and Diversity course is a graduation requirement; it adds curiosity, a needed skill. A desire to learn and the enjoyment of education are critical. Northwest Community Healthcare started a bilingual healthcare scholarship at Harper in response to the importance of providing translation services for our patients.

According to the Illinois Department of Public Health, by 2025 the total available workforce is going to shrink. The only population that is growing is the over 65 age group. This puts pressure on both workforce and wages. Will this be a plus for minority groups or further emphasize barriers that currently exist? An effort will need to be made to keep older workers in the workforce. Currently, there are 1.6 million job openings in the U.S. with no one to fill them. This situation will continue to escalate without a remedy on the horizon. Barriers need to be removed so that women and minorities may enter non-traditional occupations.

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How will automation and artificial intelligence impact the workforce of tomorrow?

In working with large companies such as Google, Facebook, and Amazon, much has been learned about what can and will be automated in terms of learning delivery and jobs. Among other things, we need to embrace different ways of learning, learn how to chunk learning, and accept that online learning enhances rather than threatens. Moving forward, community colleges will have to challenge everything they have done in the past because people will have to do things faster, pivot often, learn quickly, and have the human skills as previously discussed.

Audience Discussion of the Topic

Below is a summary of statements made by the panelists in response to audience comments and questions:

Audience question: At Harper we have basic communication and computation skills and a World Culture and Diversity course graduation requirement. You mentioned technical skills as necessary for employment. Do you feel there should be a minimum technical skills level required for graduation? And, if so, how do we balance required employment skills with general education outcomes and the curiosity aspect this panel mentioned?

Answers: From a health care perspective, there needs to be a balance. Nurses must have the required technical skills. Being in the hospital is not a happy occasion, so patients also want a connection with their caregivers. The human skills are often harder to replace than the technical skills, so a person will have to be even better at the human skills.

Basic technical skills should be an expectation, but the emphasis on that in education should start earlier than it currently does. We should build a system that thinks about how to get a person from preschool through college and into lifelong learning. The shrinking size of the workforce gives us an opportunity to look at occupational clusters and find the common denominators that need to be taught over a variety of industries. Understanding computer sciences at an earlier age helps students understand there are multiple pathways available to them.

Audience question: Baby boomers and Gen-Xers are currently in control of the workplace, but that is going to change. As new generations come into leadership roles and have new ideas regarding work life balance, and the relationship between employers and employees, how will that change the workplace?

Answers: A job path will no longer be a linear but a winding road; however, the new generation is used to rapid technological change. Also, people change jobs often. The average time a person stays in one job is about two years.

There are two things to consider. If we rethink the general education requirement, reading, writing, and analytical skills – what is the most effective way to give people a foundation or platform on which to pivot? Higher education needs to address this. Second, the dignity of work and pride in one's work will drive our economy and sense of personal worth. We need to start addressing this in the classroom, continuing to the workplace. If people recognize their own value, concepts like being paid not to work go away.

Millennials are very smart and do things faster than we do; however, they are not loyal to their employers. They are constantly looking at what's next. To address this, we decided to build employee loyalty by creating dignity at work and connecting with our employees through helping them do things like buy homes, take care of their credit, etc.

Audience question: As a business person or business owner, how can you help under-represented people in the workplace who may experience racism or micro-aggression?

Answers: We mentor employees so they can move forward and advance. We also try to increase our employees' knowledge. We created a workshop on how to best treat LGBTQ patients. Employees felt safe asking questions they would not ordinarily feel comfortable asking.

Technology can help both employers and employees with educating around this issue. We are bringing together employer groups that identify the community social responsibility side connected with the talent side. Companies see a need to address diversity not just in their own companies but across multiple sectors.

The only way to address this is by creating an environment that does not tolerate intolerance and educates employees so they can shift their perspectives. Also, people need to feel safe reporting racism or micro-aggression and understand the importance of reporting any incident immediately.

Students need to be taught self-advocacy so it translates into the workplace. In the workplace they may want to advocate for a particular job, salary, work environment, treatment, or advancement.

Audience question: How important is it to make Human Resources a strategic focus and a lever to make the organization successful?

Answers: In my growing organization, I realize I need not just an Human Resources Director but a Director of Organizational Development. The person in this role would understands all aspects of the organization and could help develop people as individuals.

The scope of work will change from a manual type of labor, to understanding machinery and making adjustments. In 2021, there will be many people leaving the workforce. We need to plan to replace them seamlessly; therefore, apprenticeships are viable and necessary.

Human Resources can create a culture in organizations; in ours, safety is number one. Someone coming to our hospital with a questionable immigration status wants to feel safe. Our Human Resources office is helping with cultural competency and how to best serve our Hispanic community.

Audience question: Many rural community colleges don't have the diverse population that Harper has. How can rural colleges incorporate more diversity and help their students embrace and celebrate diversity?

Answers: In very rural areas here in Illinois there is a growing Hispanic population, but there is not the diversity of Harper or Triton or city colleges.

Could we do a student or faculty exchange in which students and faculty from these types of colleges come to a community college like Harper to get that experience?

The credit side of the community college usually provides advising and non-academic support for students. We should consider what advising would look like for the workplace development space, whether that means providing counseling, a food pantry, or childcare. Why not integrate the credit and non-credit sides since many students from both sides have similar needs? Community colleges should serve all students across the college.

Community colleges should work together on common issues about how to best serve a non-traditional student and a non-traditional community.

Audience question: How do we better educate employers on the need for students to complete their degrees or certificate programs after they are hired, and how can employers help them do so?

A bachelor's degree is still the primary ticket to upward mobility in the workplace. It's an equity question because if colleges are pushing short term certificates and credentials to only certain groups of students, they may actually be removing the possibility of these students getting a two- or four- year degree.

Unfortunately, there are employers that still value these degrees even when there is no direct correlation to their impact on that employee's actual ability to do the work. Until we get into a competency-based framework that levels the playing field, we need to find ways to work within the current constraints.

Additional questions (turned in at the dialogue session but not asked):

Because our student of color often do not see themselves reflected in classrooms and other spaces on campus what can the college do to prepare students to have the necessary self-advocacy once they reach the workforce? Many don't have enough for self-advocacy on this campus.