

Dialogue Session

Whitepaper

The Changing Landscape of the Community	October 22, 2019
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How does the College respond to the changing community? The community is critical to Harper's success as an educational institution. How is the community changing? How is Harper perceived in the community? How can the College work collaboratively with other groups to help students succeed? Exploring these topics will allow the College to identify and address the needs of a changing community. A panel of experts will address these questions and provide additional insights.

Summary of the Background of the Discussion
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The Harper district is changing in numerous ways. Between the 2005-06 and 2015-16 school years, there was a significant increase in the number of public school students who were eligible for free or reduced lunch. This is representative of the changing financial situations of residents in the Harper community. Racial demographics of district residents are also changing. As a result, the number of Hispanic/Latino students enrolled at Harper College has increased in recent years. As the district's community college, Harper must keep these and other changes in mind as it strives to meet the educational needs of the community.

Unemployment rates in the district and surrounding communities have improved since the recession of 2008. Unemployment remains higher however, if one does not have an education. The unemployment rate is ten percent for those with a high school diploma and seven percent for those who have some college. Higher education truly makes a difference in people's lives.

Harper, as an institution, has opportunities to increase both communication efforts to the community and partnerships within the community. There is a need to better communicate the benefits of higher education and what Harper offers the community with regard to both credit and non-credit continuing education. Harper should also consider how this information can be delivered to the people who need to receive it. Additionally, partnering with local employers to offer more internships and apprenticeships in a variety of fields will be even more important in

meeting the future needs of community residents who need to earn a living wage. Harper should consider how to further engage employers to partner in this effort.

Panel Discussion of the Topic

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

What do you believe are the two to three most important characteristics that define our community today? And, how is this different than five to 10 years ago?

The needs of our community are changing significantly. Not all community members can provide for their families and for the community's well-being. In turn, this puts responsibility on institutions such as Harper to effect change that will help prepare our community members for the future. Young people may find it difficult to know what they need to do in order to prepare themselves for the future. Change, especially economic change, can cause instability in a community. Today, uncertainty and unrest create a greater anxiety for our children and our community than we have seen in the past.

Anxiety exists for both high school students and their parents. Many feel concerned about safety, finding stable employment, and being able to buy a home in this community. Five or six years ago, people felt they could stay in this community and achieve the American dream. Today more are concerned about affording school and health care. Adults are looking at Harper for answers including certificate programs that will allow them to find jobs that pay a living wage and find child care so more mothers can move into the workforce. Families want to stay in this community, but in order for that to happen, needs must be met. These needs include affording an education, finding jobs, earning a living wage, and affording housing.

Today, high school programming is aligned to help put students on career pathways. Our students are keyed to look for what is next. With the Harper Promise Program we see first timers entering college. We need to ask why we can't define a timeline for completion of a degree. It is helpful to have graduation as a target.

How should Harper continue to work with the high school population to address socio-economic and uncertainty issues?

The mentality of some is that they will only attend Harper if they have to. Students can benefit from and are thirsty for outreach and information. The high schools can do better with bringing students to Harper so they can experience what it has to offer. It would also be helpful for Harper representatives to come to the high schools and connect with the high school students on a personal level. Actively reaching out to students, especially those who are first timers is important, but we need to recognize that these students need continued support even after they enter Harper.

How should we work with the community to meet the educational needs of all in our community, including adult students who are returning to Harper or attending Harper for the first time?

We need to develop stackable programs with completion time lines. Some students may have to take time off to find financial resources or find more time in their lives to complete their education.

More apprenticeships and internships would help, especially apprenticeships where students work full-time with full benefits from their employers and attend college part-time. Harper currently offers apprenticeships in a variety of areas including health care, manufacturing, supply chain, HVAC, and graphic design among others. But more are needed, especially in the health care field. Harper should work closely with district employers to determine needs and the skills required to better prepare students and help them to have the education they need to land jobs after graduation. Also, on-demand and online education opportunities would help students obtain education when and where they can access it. Harper should consider this in partnership with district employers and high schools to fully support our students.

Partners for Our Communities (POC), works to reduce barriers including language, transportation, health, etc. It's important to market what Harper has to offer and reduce the transportation barriers. There are many potential students who are not aware of what Harper has to offer but need Harper's resources such as ESL, citizenship, GED. It is important to get more Harper representatives out into the community – at the apartment complexes, at POC, and more to increase awareness.

Northwest Community Hospital has leveraged its resources with Harper as evidenced through our new health care center. What's next and how should we help?

NCH has been working with Harper to establish career paths so students in high school learn they can take an apprenticeship program to get them into an employed situation, and that they can continue their education if they are not sure at first exactly where they want to go with their careers. Health care offers a broad array of opportunities. From the hospital perspective, we deal with people who are in difficult situations and are responsible to assist patients and their families through these difficult situations in the best way possible. NCH wants employees who are engaged, who have a path, and who want to learn and grow. NCH can expand to offer more programs through Harper to help educate these employees. Health and education are intertwined and can help our community grow and remain healthy.

Given the need for Harper to do more, as we develop our next strategic plan could you name one issue you think is most important to be addressed?

If incoming students and families know of the completion and successful transfer rates, these become both the target and the advertisement. Excellent improvements have been made with connections to Northern Illinois University and the University of Illinois. Runways have been set in motion for progress with Degree in Three, and it is the best commercial for students who can access opportunities locally at any level for what will be their ultimate destination. At the same time, transitions that are not successful become everyone's shared work. Harper needs to build upon the success of students who then become models for other students regarding what is possible.

One critical element deals with communication and partnership between Harper and area employers. Students need to understand what opportunities are available and employers should work with Harper to help students understand. High school students are limited in their knowledge of what is available and about how quickly they have to make decisions. They feel pressure having to do that. It's important the students find out what working is all about and what they want to do and where they want to do it.

Exposing children to Harper earlier than high school helps. We should start with first or second grade. Kids who succeed often say it's due to their parents, so Harper needs to give the parents

the information and educate them about what the College can do for their children as early as when their children are in preschool. Parents need to know that Harper is available to their children and is important to their children's future.

The challenge for the future is to continue to develop the partnerships Harper has and find new partnerships. Harper recognizes it is part of the community. The refurbishment of M Building was a result of partnerships, and it has become a community resource not just for students but for everyone. Working with the school districts and employers to bring together the Promise Program is a wonderful achievement that will change lives. Harper worked with businesses to establish the internships and apprenticeships we have now. We have 20 years of working with the community to recognize and solve problems together, and it is Harper's greatest strength, but it needs to be built upon for the future.

If you had to give Harper a grade today, what would that grade be based on overall quality. What is Harper's greatest strength and its greatest challenge?

I give Harper a B. I know we need to do some things better, but we also have many successes. We hear stories of students who have received our scholarships and what it means to them. They may be high school students coming to college for the first time or coming from the workforce where they were in dead-end jobs or needed more education to support their families. Our challenge is to increase the number of scholarships Harper gives. Last year we provided 563 students with over one million dollars in donor-sponsored scholarships. More than 421 students started Harper as Promise scholars. But, in 2018 more than 2,400 students applied for the scholarships Harper gave out, so many students' needs were not met.

I give Harper a B-. The greatest strength of Harper is an increase in the number of students and parents who know Harper is the right place to start a college career. They understand it is the best choice financially and offers a quality education. Now 60% of our high school students begin at Harper. Our challenge is continuing to get the word out.

I'd give Harper a B+ because Harper continually self reflects in an effort to grow and challenge itself to be better. The fact that Harper is holding today's session supports this. The biggest challenge is the access to education, making sure people have the means and ability to obtain a college education.

My grade is Commendable. Harper is always there to help people who are facing challenges. People want quality at a reasonable cost and high efficiency; Harper does that. We all need to work together for the goal of students finishing their education.

Audience Discussion of the Topic

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

Audience question: Harper is primarily dedicated to transfer students who will go on to obtain a baccalaureate degree before entering the workforce. Career students leave Harper with associate or applied science degrees and go right into the workplace. Where do you see us going on that balance between transfer and career students? Regarding career students, where do we draw the line between a credentialed career opportunity and what we do in continuing education?

Answers: It's not necessary to draw a hard line between the two. If we do it right, we should provide that runway where career students could, after entering the workforce, decide to obtain further education in their field or in a different field. Sometimes students just want to decide what to do next, not necessarily what they want to do for the rest of their lives. If we can offer flexibility it would be helpful.

There are programs, especially in health care, where students can complete a one-year program that leads to a two-year program and finally a degree if they choose to continue on. We need more stackable programs, and we need to work on more one- or two-year certificate programs for those who want to enter the workforce immediately after obtaining specific skills. Harper should think of expanding these certificate programs in areas such as robotics, aviation, cybersecurity, technology, health care, etc.

Harper has developed partnerships with local companies. These allow students to work for a company while attending Harper. It's important for Harper to find more partner companies so more students can receive help with tuition and be allowed time to attend school while working.

I know a woman who entered the nursing program but found she could not afford to continue; therefore, she decided to obtain certification to become a phlebotomist. She is now earning a living wage job and so is able to afford nursing school. I appreciate the certificate programs that can offer people affordable and attainable education that leads to a career.

Audience question: Many high school students leave school because they need to work to help support their families. How do you think Harper's stackable career certificates should be marketed to high school and incoming Harper students through programs such as Promise?

Answers: The people who have gone through these degree certification programs should become the spokespeople for those degrees and those careers. The high school districts all have career advisors to help kids learn about careers and the certification programs that allow them to see a completion or finish line.

Harper should be at junior high open houses and elementary school teacher conferences. Harper should market to parents so they are prepared early for what is available to their children. It's important that Harper market itself by being welcoming and helpful so parents feel at ease.

Audience question: Describe the role Adult Education has in helping adult students and their families make the transition to higher education.

Answer: The role of Adult Education is to help each adult understand that he or she has the potential to learn and be successful and that learning is ongoing and has no barriers. The adult educators show the students that it may take some time, but they will learn English and how to navigate the health and educational systems. We let them know we are there by their side to help them through this very stressful and sometimes very scary experience.

Audience question: Does pushing students to career pathways take away from the exploration of learning? To what extent are you encouraging students to take a Liberal Arts education?

Answer: We don't feel we are limiting students. The courses within our curriculum allow students to identify skills needed to pursue a chosen career. Every student has an individualized readiness plan. Students take career interest surveys that help them find areas that are of interest to them. Our students continue to take Social Studies and English courses in the core area.

Audience question: Our community is evolving more in its diversity than is reflected in the Harper faculty and staff. How can Harper better recruit, retain, and grow opportunities for people of color and other minorities?

Answer: How can we keep our diverse students here in this community? We first must look at our high schools to encourage our students to obtain careers so they can come back and give back to their community.

Audience question: How do you encourage students to go into the careers that have a great need? For example, CNA, Manufacturing, CNC, HVAC, etc.

Answer: In our high school summer school programs we offer career exploration or survey classes where students who aren't certain about a career path can get a taste of and learn about various careers such as IT, arts and graphics, etc.

Follow-up question: What about the adults?

I chose the career I did because I came from a family of teachers and nurses. If people have not been exposed to a certain career, they don't know what it is about. The most powerful thing we can do is bring it to them in the classroom with real people who are in that profession.

Harper has career expos for 4th-8th graders as well as adult students. Perhaps we need to expand these expos to give people looking for a new career or a change in careers a place to learn about the different opportunities available to them.

Audience Question: What would you describe as barriers or challenges that keep our first-timer students and families from feeling comfortable coming to and approaching us as an institution? Non-native English speakers can be intimidated by Harper.

Answers: There is more that we can do as an organization, but we need help from the community and employers to assist in this. If there is an employment opportunity that goes along with the learning opportunity, it can be an incentive to people who see Harper as a pathway to their earning a living wage.

We developed a parent communications group. We ask them what we can do better with our communications, and we have learned much from this parent group. Harper can learn much by asking first timers and non-native English speakers what it was like for them to have a first encounter with Harper and then ask what Harper could do to make them feel more comfortable.

Audience Question: Higher educational institutions sell themselves in terms of time: two to three years for an associate's degree; four years for a bachelor's degree; and more years for a master's degree. Wouldn't it be beneficial to sell higher education as part of a lifelong learning process? How do we sell that?

Answers: The educational institution alone can't bring a desire for lifelong learning. Employers can help drive that ambition. Employers haven't emphasized the importance of ongoing education enough. People need to see a benefit since they often correlate education with a degree, but it is more about learning about life and how we can be better and more complete human beings.

We need to help people look at a high school education as a milestone rather than a capstone. This is a mindset that can be changed and has been changing over the years.

Immigrants come here as professionals with top degrees from their native countries. Their background and credentials are not recognized here, so they end up as teacher assistants rather than teachers, for instance. Could Harper find a way to recognize past training and degrees?

Audience questions not asked due to lack of time

Current data shows that an English major five years out makes more money and has a more stable job (Daily Herald article)

How can Harper address the increasing diversity of the community?

Will Harper College and the partner 9-12 institutions commit to apply for federal TRIO programs (e.g. Upward Bound, Talent Search) supported by the Department of Education to support first-generation low income students?

How do we ensure as educators that we steer students away from degrees that will or can be replaced by technology?