

## Dialogue Session

### Whitepaper

**Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

**September 30, 2019**

How should the College respond to changes in education and the learners we serve? How is education evolving in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? How do we teach a community of learners who are tech savvy and have the world at their fingertips while others are English language learners or are facing challenges? What does it mean to be a well-educated person in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? A panel of experts offered their views on these and other questions.

#### **Summary of the Background of the Discussion**

The world is changing at ever increasing speed, and educational institutions must keep up with this pace to prepare students to be productive citizens and prepare the future workforce. The following are several key considerations offered during the panel discussion:

- Today's students and their parents often need to weigh costs versus benefits when considering higher education. Can we do more to help students who need assistance?
- It is becoming more difficult for students to actually complete their education and secure a degree. What more can Harper do to support them on their pathway to a degree?
- Educators must consider that not all students have equal access to the necessary technology. How can Harper provide a more level playing field for its students?
- How do we introduce a climate of safety and civility in the classroom and on campus?
- How can we rethink equity gaps from a growth mindset that acknowledges student resiliency and their ability to succeed?
- How can we address the basic needs of some students that impact the mental bandwidth they have available for learning?
- Diversity in the classroom has dramatically increased. How does this impact how we teach?

<b>Panel Discussion of the Topic</b>
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Below is a summary of the statements made by the panelists in response to the questions asked:

**What challenges and opportunities do you foresee in teaching and learning over the next five years?**

Our biggest challenge is also our biggest opportunity. We need to think about growing with regard to equity and social justice. We have been responding to an increasingly diverse student population through an assimilation model where we look at what diverse students are lacking and how we can change the student to get them to fit the institutional model. This is connected to completion and retention for both students and faculty and staff. If we learn from the diversity of our students, recognize their strengths, and alter our policies and procedures in response to these strengths, we can better prepare our students for their futures.

**How can community colleges such as Harper move from assimilation to understanding the value added from diversity?**

We should rethink our assessments and pedagogical strategies to better incorporate linguistic diversity in the classroom rather than assuming standard English is superior.

We cannot continue to assume all those entering our classrooms have the same mental bandwidth. Racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, and mental illness are examples of issues that limit a student's available bandwidth. We can increase student bandwidth by increasing their sense of belongingness.

The definition of the word disabled from the New Zealand Ministry of Health is, "The process which happens when one group of people create barriers by designing a world only for their way of living, taking no account of the impairments other people have." We have created a society that disadvantages people of color, the poor, and those who speak a language other than English.

The rising cost of education and climbing equity gaps are a challenge. We need to help our faculty understand what it means to create an equitable learning environment. Instructors need to

examine classroom and assessment strategies. Some assessments favor a certain set of learners. Bridge programs help students who are struggling to get ready for college. Unfortunately, some students finish these programs but don't have enough support after the program to ensure their success. Part of this may be because the faculty did not have training or expertise in how to change the learning environment.

**What would students like to see in the classroom that would add value/help them learn more?**

We should focus on empowerment for students and instructors, both inside the classroom and out. Today's students are capable of many things, including changing the world of tomorrow. Harper's Admissions Outreach Office focuses on students' strengths – what they can do rather than what they cannot do. It helps them with things like improving study habits. Students on campus who take a leadership role can also encourage and help more introverted students.

One of the biggest challenges for the immediate future is that personalizing instruction for students could backfire as it has in the past. We don't want to personalize students into greater inequities. We did this in the past when we assumed putting some students into vocational programs would benefit them.

We are an institution and must change from within. This is a lengthy process and often by the time changes take place, the public has moved on. The speed of change continues to increase.

**What does it mean to be well educated in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?**

Today our public schools have very diverse student bodies. This is a major change from the past. Our goal should be to get every student to be academically skilled, ethically minded, and employable. Their education should help them be successful in knowing what they want to achieve and how they would like to influence society, but also give them the power to achieve their goals.

In order to be well educated in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we need students who are critical thinkers, those willing to question things and understand the difference between real news and fake news.

Students should be willing to seek answers and not just accept evidence that's given. They should be advised against accepting what comes first in their Google search. It's important to raise ethical questions as well. A well educated person is a critical thinker.

We need, as instructors, to model critical thinking for our students. A component of this is humility, being able to accept there is always something we don't know, but could come to know. One important result of humility is curiosity about what we could come to know in the future.

**Businesses are telling us that they need employees who know the technical aspects of a job, but also to have soft skills. Do you agree?**

These days soft skills are called essential skills or survival skills. The ability to critically think is dependent upon bandwidth and is the privilege of people who aren't operating on survival mode and with trauma every day. In city colleges we operate from one crisis to the next. Some students are housing or food insecure. We need to take care of these foundational issues first, so the students can then be creative, critical thinkers with essential job skills. As such they have the ability to change things in their world.

It's important to make assignments for students that are more relevant to their world with activities that are in line with what they may actually do upon graduation.

Employment skills are extremely important, but many millennials recognize their power to ignore what the employer wants. Employers need to start reaching out to people and make a connection, describing what their business is about rather than telling applicants they just don't have the necessary skills.

**We hear about privilege, achievement gaps, and lack of completion at community colleges. Where is the intersection of achievement gaps, privilege, and completion?**

Some students don't come with the capital of being second, or third generation college students, but they may have other capital such as resilience. The language of deficit or gap puts the problem on the student rather than the system. We need to empower students by finding their

strengths and addressing their capital with regard to things such as resilience, even if they don't have the bandwidth other students come to class with.

### **How can faculty empower students?**

Empowerment comes from support and leadership. Harper has great programs such as the LEAD Program where the student is paired with a faculty mentor. First generation and DACA students, for instance, are helped to understand how they can apply for college, obtain financial assistance, and how to get ahead.

Coming from a deficit model is not a productive way to think about students as learners. We can use inclusive excellence frameworks and create an environment where students can achieve by not always being compared to other students.

An instructor must believe that a student can be successful. As Rick Siggins has said, "A child can hit a target as long as it is clear and it does not move." This is true at every level of education. Some students just need more time and should be allowed that time.

We need to challenge the notion that a good class is a hard class. If you are trying to be a good teacher rather than a hard teacher, you can construct a compassionate classroom to meet the needs of all students.

### **Audience Discussion of the Topic**

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

**Audience question:** Traditionally, students at Harper have been using technology, iPads and similar, since about 4<sup>th</sup> grade. How do we bridge the gap between these students and those who don't have technology experience?

**Answers:** I use an app in the classroom where students participate through their devices. My dean has made iPads available for students with the app already loaded.

I coach a college for Achieving the Dream that has installed vending machines with laptops available for students to borrow at no charge, and a student's ID is used to obtain these.

Question your assumptions. Some students may have no experience with a smartphone. We shouldn't use technology unless we are sure the technology is accessible for students and they are able to use it.

**Audience question:** What is the future of Liberal Arts in higher education?

**Answers:** We as educators shouldn't just be pumping out employees. Exposing oneself to the arts and the full human experience is important. We shouldn't just live for our employment, our jobs.

Increasingly, Liberal Arts is under assault. Smaller colleges that focus on Liberal Arts aren't as attractive to students who want or need to find a job right out of school. To survive, these schools need to tie Liberal Arts in the classroom to real-world experience.

What we associate with Liberal Arts we can embed in a chemistry class, for example. We can think of education broadly in terms of critical thinking and social justice.

**Audience question:** Relative to equity and the rising cost of education, the community college movement has been very successful in the United States. Today, we see many students looking to study abroad after Harper to continue their education. What do we need to do to rethink education in the U.S.?

**Answers:** Equity and access with regard to getting into college, while in college, and obtaining a job after college plays a role. What may be leading students to study outside of our county could have to do with students graduating with debt into a workforce with declining wages.

Those who have some kind of post-secondary education rather than just a high school diploma secure the best jobs and wages. A four-year degree is not essential. Harper is a phenomenal option, especially with the Promise Program, provided the student has a plan for the future.

It's a watershed moment for community colleges. We need to think about the obligation we have to make sure students graduate and are successful.

**Audience question:** How can campuses create inclusive environments for students if the faculty and staff don't feel that the campus is safe and inclusive for the employees?

**Answers:** They can't. Schools need to look at their policies and procedures to be sure the faculty and staff are able to be their whole selves. Employees need to feel they can make mistakes and be different.

Sometimes faculty feel they can't be their authentic selves because they feel students may not be accepting of that authentic self. Institutions need to find out how to create an environment where faculty and staff feel welcome, feel they belong, and feel free from reprisal from students.

**Audience question:** How can institutions get through to students who have no energy left after the demands of work and school? How can we let students know there are activities outside of the classroom that are vital to their education and the kind of person they could become?

**Answers:** Most of the time, students will ask other students who seem to be going through the same thing they are. That's why we need students to lead other students. There are clubs available such as one for DACA students where students can share with other students and get information they may need. They can also ask faculty for assistance.

We can do things in the classroom to support students such as gratitude practices at the beginning or end of a class. Or we can do something lighthearted to rejuvenate the students.

Some students just don't know how to ask for help even if we invite them to do so. We need to build in classroom time for students to ask questions.

Faculty can go around the room and ask students briefly what is going well and what challenges they are having. Also, it's important to have student clubs and groups. Even if many students are unable to attend, it's important for them to know they exist and are available.

There is a college in Texas where they actually remove impediments students may have such as not being able to buy groceries or obtain child care.

We as instructors need to be the best we can be, so barriers to learning can be suspended for the short time a student is in the classroom. We shouldn't lower our expectations because the student has barriers.

**Audience question:** What are three things secondary education can do right away to serve students who do not test college ready upon admission?

**Answers:** We can only do our best and do everything in our power to get students to be successful regardless of how they came to us.

**Audience question:** As an instructor, I often feel ignored in the classroom. I try to reach out to the students and create an environment for learning. I feel students are not focused. I think of technology as a hindrance to focus. How can we help them focus?

**Answers:** The only time I truly feel focused is when I'm teaching. I often wonder why the student is not that focused, but we need to think about ourselves at other times and remember that we are not always focused.

Think about breaking down larger tasks into smaller chunks. It's easier to maintain focus with shorter lectures and discussions.

I look at what I'm doing as an instructor. We cannot just get up and talk and show PowerPoint slides. Students need to be engaged, and we need to connect to what they know. We need to ask students rather than assume why they are not focusing. A check in at the beginning of class can help, especially for those students who have issues. It helps them to not focus on those issues during the class.

Harper has a new program, Small Group Instructional Feedback. It is offered through the Academy for Teaching Excellence. A representative comes in your classroom to obtain feedback from students about what they like about your class and what they think could be improved. The feedback is then shared with you.

**What does it take for a student to pay attention in class and come back?**

It depends on the method of teaching. Instructors need to understand students have different learning styles and appeal to all of them.

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

What opportunities and challenges does the global context offer for 21st century U.S. institutions?

How does education in the 21st century different from the education in the 20th century?

Did I hear anything new?

How could Harper College train employees to understand how to address the needs of immigrant students and offer more open-doors to higher education?

Basic issues such as transportation, housing, and family concerns are commonly brought up amongst immigrants. Much information needs to be shared. Patience with students that don't understand the U.S. education system or don't understand all the vocabulary when they go to One Stop for admissions are important to consider.

What can community colleges do to refocus emphasis on the value of language courses in the age of Google?

Is there a difference between equality and equity?

Do you think higher education needs to consider the difference between the two inside and outside of the classroom?

Dr. Edwards, how do we close the gap between students who are informed of our aim to help them succeed and the students who feel school is designed for smart students only?

Give two examples how educators can create a learning environment that allows students to gain bandwidth and create critical thinkers without personalizing education that creates more inequities?

With the increasing low-cost availability of mobile devices, which can connect to the internet, how do you see community colleges keeping relevant and competitive in the ubiquitous global market?

What does education in the 21st century really look like?

Describe the effective, productive, meaningful 21st century classroom?

Do you worry that our increased emphasis on the instructional value of education – in terms of focusing on skills for the workforce, at the high school level, career clusters, has inadvertently contributed to students undervaluing the essential skills you've talk about?

Do you worry that online teaching presents unique challenges to the goal of creating a sense of belonging in an educational space?



Several of the panelists focused on diversity/marginalized student populations, and equity. While Harper has recently turned its attention to issues such as food and housing insecurity, the institution is still primarily focused on high school graduates and transfer to four-year institutions. There is a vast, untapped population of adult learners who are under-employed, second-language learners, and/or students of color pursuing high school equivalency. These adult learners must be welcomed/invited/on-ramped to Harper with the same intensity and focus that we provide recent high school graduates. Harper must break down its silos and coordinate the intake process (marketing, community events, admissions, advising, financial aid, areas of interest) to embrace and include these adult learners in its mission.