

President's Report
August 20, 2009

The campus activity is building daily as we approach the beginning of the new fall term. Faculty and staff are busy this week with orientation, professional development and departmental activities. The College pace is quickening and there are big smiles as the energy of new fall term builds. The beginning of the fall term is always a special and exciting time on a college campus.

Students will enroll throughout this week, the week prior to the opening of classes. Currently our enrollment is up 2.45%. We anticipate a 4.0% increase as we continually enroll for the fall semester. With 8-week and 12-week classes starting later this fall, we are on track to meet that goal; however we have noticed that some of our processing of financial aid students may not align well with other business practices, vis-à-vis accounts receivable. We will be examining those processes as we align our access and equity agenda.

Our financial aid staff has processed an increase of 40% in applications. This is unprecedented, however not surprising given the current economic conditions throughout the country. Congratulations to Earl Dowling and his staff for processing those applications so expeditiously. Our new Banner student services software support their efforts in a significant way. Banner is proving to be an excellent investment. We are not immune from the economic downturn and the proof is literally in those numbers. Last month we hosted a day-long job fair that over 1800 persons attended. Just this week we hosted a half day orientation for unemployed persons, sponsored through the Workforce Investment Act fund and had over 200 people attend. We have been hosting these weekly since February with attendance averaging around 130. There are a lot of people who need re-training to become employed in this new economy.

Board members may have noticed some very nice media coverage regarding the College's Summer Bridge Program that assists first generation under prepared students as they transition to the College. This was a two-week summer program that ended, supported by our Reading and Math departmental colleagues as well as staff from our Center for Multicultural Learning. The students brushed up their skills in math, reading, writing and computer usage, and were exposed to a series of strategies to assist them with their transition to the rigor of college classes. Across the board the students improved in their placement tests in reading, writing and math. Kudos to all the staff involved.

Many new students (and their parents) are attending the summer orientation programs run by Vicki Atkinson and her staff. The orientation program was recently highlighted in *Inside Higher Education*, an online news publication for professionals in higher Ed. It was great to see Vicki and her staff being acknowledged for their good work.

Another great example of assisting the success of our higher risk students is the establishment of a fully digital language lab that will go online in the fall. Created by the English as a Second Language faculty and our Information Technology staff, the lab provides 32 computerized work stations for the students and teaching support for the faculty member.

Students will be able to use this new lab to view and record video, as well as use the traditional aspects of a Language Lab. The students can collaborate through the software using their headsets while the faculty member can monitor all student activity through the console software and communicate to the students individually through the headsets. Students can work at their own pace with constant individualized support from the faculty member without interrupting the entire class. This is a great example of the synergies our various staff can bring to the teaching/learning experience.

We have recently “closed the books” on the Small Business Development Center over at the Higgins Road complex. The center had a productive year. Clients of the Center received over \$2 million of financing to support emerging businesses. The Center assisted with creating 31 new businesses and 148 new jobs. The Center was also credited with retaining 75 jobs. This is great work and we are examining with an eye to expanding these opportunities for entrepreneurs.

Legislatively we have closed out the fiscal year with the Governor signing the budget bill for Fiscal Year 2010. The good news is that the Governor did fund enough of the Career and Technical Education and Adult Education to match the Federal Perkins Funds. The bad news is that there is grave concern for next year as stimulus funds go away and with the State’s budget in a dire condition.

The Governor also signed into law Senate Bill 1624, the Illinois Higher Education Veterans Service Act. The bill requires all state colleges and universities to appoint a Coordinator of Veterans and Military Personnel Student Services position and distribute a comprehensive guide of those services for veterans. We had anticipated this and we’ve included a veteran’s specialist/coordinator position as part of our FY 2010 budget.

We will be looking at the funding opportunities available in President Obama’s Community College Initiative. There is \$9 billion for “challenge grants” to spur innovation. Many of the grants will require partners including our local businesses or Workforce Investment Boards.

With the close of the summer session, we also closed down the “guest chef” program in the plaza off of the student cafeteria. We have had a number of guest chefs this summer including the President. A fun (and delicious BBQ) was enjoyed by all prepared by yours truly (with lots of professional support).

Thanks to all of our cafeteria personnel for making the entire guest chef program so successful this summer.

Finally, as we begin this new fall term let me once again thank the Board for providing me this opportunity to serve. The welcoming reception earlier this week was tremendous, the community theme was perfect! The faculty/staff opening day was a celebration and new beginning for this new era at William Rainey Harper College. This President is honored and proud to be here.