



Harper College

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President's Letter - September 2009

September is a busy month! Classes are settling down and programs, activities and athletic events are gearing up. It's impossible to move across the campus without sensing the energy in the air. It is always a wonderful time of year on the College campus.

Our enrollment continues to build. Fall FTE enrollment to date shows an increase over last fall of 4.47%. Headcount is up by a similar percentage. We are still enrolling students for remaining 12-week and 8-week sessions. When all is said and done, we anticipate fall enrollment to exceed a 4.5% increase. Coupled with an enrollment increase of 9.5% for our summer sessions, we continue to project a 6% overall increase in our fiscal year enrollment. We will continue to monitor this situation carefully, as so much of our budget is connected to this forecasted enrollment increase.

The enrollment increase is also evidenced through our financial aid office. Currently the Office of Financial Aid has disbursed over \$5.25 million to our students. At this point last year, about \$1 million was disbursed. We are processing financial aid much more quickly this year due to the new Banner system.

Along with more students on campus, there has been a substantial increase in the availability and sales of used books. Compared to last fall, students saved \$81,500 more this year because of the purchase of used books. Used book sales accounted for 37.9% of total textbook sales this year, compared to 22.8% last year. Early adoption of textbooks by our faculty helps our Bookstore access the largest quantity of used books. Thanks to the faculty and our Bookstore staff for making these savings possible. We will learn more about this topic in our Board presentation this month.

Our food sales also have soared this month. September 1st witnessed the largest sales record ever at the College. We have more students taking more classes, which means they are both busy and hungry! It's gratifying to note that, despite heavy usage of the cafeteria, our food service areas have received nearly perfect health scores. Coupled with the sales volume and the quality of cleanliness, the staffs in our food services have had a great run since the beginning of the fall semester. We want to thank them for their outstanding service and also thank student Trustee Kelly Redmond for helping us form a student focus group to assist with developing a food service questionnaire to gather additional student input.

There have been a number of accomplishments by faculty and students that are noteworthy:

- Kurt Hemmer had a publication of “The Natives Are Getting Uppity: Tangier and Naked Lunch” in *Naked Lunch @50: Anniversary Essays*, (Southern Illinois University Press 2009);
- Richard Middleton-Kaplan’s essay “Play It Again, Herman: Melville at the Movies” will appear in the October 2009 issue of *Leviathan: A Journal of Melville Studies*;
- Kevin Long of the Speech and Theater Department is directing “Sunday in the Park with George,” a musical by Stephen Sondheim, for the Village Players in Oak Park.
- Special thanks to Maintenance Technology Coordinator Kurt Billsten and Carpentry Instructor Phil Rybarczyk, whose summer classes built a working kitchen in the Forensics Lab in D Building. The kitchen will be used by Law Enforcement and Forensics Science students as a crime scene room in order to learn investigative techniques. Kurt and Phil also secured the donation of the materials used to build the kitchen.

Earlier this month, Richard Steele of Chicago Public Radio’s program “Eight Forty Eight” was on campus. Mr. Steele interviewed Harper Instructors Kurt Billsten and Pamela Olin and two women welders about the increased interest in Harper’s class, *Welding for Women*, and how the class ties into the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) program to place women and minorities into fast-growing career fields like welding. The broadcast will be heard on WBEZ 91.5FM in the near future.

Our student athletic program has been very active this month with Football, Men’s and Women’s Soccer and Cross Country all underway. The men’s and women’s soccer teams are currently undefeated, and the Cross County team saw Harper student Jesus Escareno win first place in the Sixth Annual Harper College Cross Country Invitational. Congratulations to Jesus! The Football team lost a tough home opener to the College of DuPage, but bounced back this week to defeat Rock Valley. Congratulations to all our student athletes and coaches.

Our students and faculty will acknowledge “Constitution Day” on September 17 with a program on Constitutional Issues for the 21st Century with Walter J. Kendall, a Constitutional Law Scholar from John Marshall Law School. The program is organized by Associate Professor Michael Harkins, Assistant Professor Bobby Summers and adjunct faculty Richard Krupa, and assisted by the Office of Student Activities.

This month’s Board meeting marks the third month of my presidency. Much has been accomplished during the first quarter, as we kick off the implementation of the President/Board goals for the year. This month there are a number of Board items related to moving forward on our goals. Among them:

1. Related to our goal of transparency and Board involvement is the first reading for the proposed Board Committees. These committees, focused on student success, finances and operations, and Board effectiveness and planning, are described in Board Exhibit X-A.7.

2. Related to our goal of master planning, there is a detailed RFQ soliciting the services of a master planner in Exhibit X-A.4. We will work on a very aggressive schedule for the acquisition of professional services for master planning, and have built a target for the November Board meeting for a recommendation.
3. We have two items related to the goal of organizational design. First, in Exhibit X-A.6, Personnel Action Sheets, the Board will see that Ms. Tammy Rust is being recommended to serve as the Interim Vice President for Administrative Services, replacing Judy Thorsen, who is retiring. Also, Ms. Mia Igyarto is being recommended to serve as Interim Vice President for Human Resources/Diversity and Organizational Development, replacing Ms. Cheryl Kisunzu, who has resigned from the College. The second item related to our organizational design is found in the New Business section of the Board Book. Exhibit XI-C, Administrative Service Providers, recommends the acquisition of two firms: Elm Advisors and Robert Half Management Resources. These firms will provide the College with facilities, information technology and finance expertise. Through the services provided by these groups, we will acquire temporary leadership for Informational Technology, the comptrollers function and capital development as well as facilities management.

Two other goals, student success and strategic planning, are also building momentum. With respect to student success, we have activated a number of groups of faculty and staff to assist the assessment of our student success goals and implement programs directed at improving success. During the Board meeting, Sean Noonan will update the Board on these activities. Personally, I was very encouraged and excited to hear from over 150 of our College faculty and staff who have volunteered to become involved.

With respect to strategic planning, our “Week of Engagement” will launch the College’s environmental scanning activities. During the week of November 9 and the weeks and months that follow, we will be seeking the advice of experts in academic and career pathways, workforce development and economic development to assist us with determining the directions we should pursue.

We are delighted that Deputy Secretary of Labor Jane Oates and University of Illinois Professor Dr. Debra Bragg have accepted our invitation to keynote our symposiums during the Engagement Week. Mr. Rick Mayer, a national expert on regional economic development and workforce development, will facilitate these sessions. We will follow this week of engagement with the development of white papers that will describe the options we may wish to consider for strategic directions. The community will be invited to help us consider the options in a series of meetings with community stakeholders.

During mid-to-late winter, the College seeks to host a residential conference with internal College stakeholders, as well as our external opinion leaders, to consider more fully the options from which we may choose. In the late spring, we will be seeking Board authorization for the implementation of a new strategic plan that will guide our resource allocation over the next several years.

Lastly, with respect to our goals, we are making progress in determining a new organizational design for the College. Each of the Vice Presidents has submitted (at the President's request) their recommendations for the organizational design. The Vice Presidents and the President will meet in a daylong retreat in early October to consider those recommendations. Following that meeting and during the month of October and early November, the President will be consulting with campus leaders and others with respect to design considerations. We will be in a position to describe the design in the late fall. Implementation of the design is scheduled for the winter and spring of 2010.

We have a busy six to eight weeks ahead of us in the President's Office. We were delighted that ACCT invited the Harper Board to present at its national conference regarding the facilitation of a president's transition into the College. Chairperson Stone and the President will be making that presentation on behalf of the Board. I will be traveling to New York City to present a program to the National College Board meeting regarding remediation and high school/college partnerships. While there, I will participate in the annual meeting of the National Presidents Advisory Committee to the College Board, as a member. I have also accepted an invitation from TIAA-CREF to attend an invitation-only meeting of university and college presidents to consider national educational policy initiatives. This meeting will also be in New York City. Last, I will make a quick trip to New Jersey to serve as a President panelist for Wilmington Universities Pathways Leadership Conference. Modeled after a similar program we created at Cumberland, Wilmington President Dr. Jack Varsalona has requested that I attend his inaugural event and assist with the launch of his institute. This activity, along with moving our agenda, representing us at Steven C. Ender's Investiture in Grand Rapids, traveling to the "Twin Bowl" and attending an Illinois President's Council Retreat, will keep any grass from growing under my feet! Before we know it, it will be Thanksgiving.

We are off to a good start. We have a good first-year plan. Much will be done this year to build infrastructure to support our ambitious agenda. I am convinced that William Rainey Harper College can help set a secure course for the future of our district, state and nation. We will "make no little plans" and will look forward to spectacular results.

Finally, on a sad note, on Tuesday, September 1, we learned of the passing of Dr. Bridget Fitzgerald, Associate Professor of Sociology. It seems fitting to share a few thoughts.

Bridget joined the Harper Faculty in August of 2003 and was tenured in Fall, 2006. She earned her B.A. from Ohio State University, her M.A. from Ohio University (Athens), and completed her Ph.D. in sociology from SUNY Albany in 2003. Bridget was a valued member of the Harper Community.

Bridget taught courses in introductory sociology, social problems, and sociology of the family. In all of these courses, she seamlessly wove media and current events with sociological theory. Her teaching ability and expertise inspired many students to enroll semester after semester in her various course offerings. It was a common occurrence to pass by her office and see it overflowing with students. A student who felt close with Bridget reflected that Bridget was not only a teacher, but was one of the heroines of her life. Although she met Bridget in a large section SOC 101 class, she describes "feeling as though Dr. Fitzgerald was speaking directly to me, as an individual who mattered, and who could make a difference in the world and in the lives of others."

Our prayers and thoughts go out to Bridget's family, her colleagues and many friends and students.