

Building on the momentum and interest in postsecondary education, innovative strategies are being explored to attract more adult students. The Ready Adult Concierge is one such model.

This model serves as a single point of contact for returning students at the institution. They assist adult students with application, enrollment and the registration process. Other models focus on two areas identified as “trouble spots” for adult students; completion time and remediation. In an effort to address these issues, some intuitions are successfully implementing accelerated degree programs. This includes quickly addressing academic needs and moving at a rapid pace rather than lingering in remediation, which often becomes a pitfall for students.

Partnership

Not unlike inspiration, this strategic direction focuses on the formation of partnerships as well. However, in this area partnerships are developed in both existing and emerging career areas in order to support student success in a global economy.

Postsecondary credentials continue to serve as a pathway for sustainable living. However, with the current economic changes the fastest-growing jobs are disproportionately lower skill and lower wages. This trend is expected to shift in the coming years; as such institutions of higher learning that choose to educate for the current market rather than the future may do so at the risk of disserving their students.

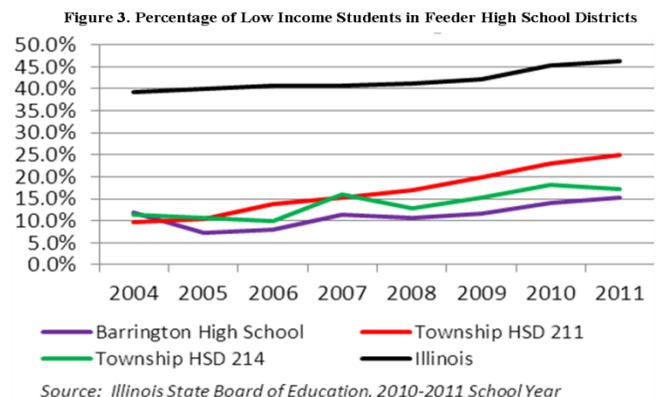
Accountability

In an effort to better serve both the internal and external communities, Harper College has included in its strategic directions an accountability focus. The findings of the environmental Scan highlight the following areas of focus:

- Availability of funding. Harper College’s ability to innovate and support a robust accountability system will be challenged by constrained tuition resources at the family, state and federal levels. This is significant in considering that 36% of graduates from high schools in-district attend Harper College; this increases to over 50% when tracked out after 18 months of graduation.
- New accountability measures. Harper College established its own “Challenge of 10,604” in response to President Obama’s college completion goal. Currently Harper College is on track to meeting this goal.

Completion

In keeping with the challenge of reaching 10,604 graduates, Harper is dedicated to increasing completion and achievement of all students with a particular emphasis on underperforming students. In 2008, Community Colleges accounted for 44% of all U.S. undergraduate fall enrollment, according the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC). This total



includes a large number of low income, ethnically diverse and first generation students; each group presenting with various barriers to completion.

As shown in Figure 3, each of the High School districts has a growing number of low income students. Since more than one-half of high school graduates in the Harper district enroll in Harper College within 18 months of graduation, the trends relating to percentages of low-income students are important.

Conclusion

A large part of the success of Community Colleges are predicated on its ability to assess and adapt to a rapidly changing external environment; while still serving as trailblazers. Consequently, traditional long-range planning models that focus on the internal community are no longer useful. Institutions such as Harper must continue to account for the numerous social, technological, economic and political variables that alter the external community; thus impacting the organization. It is this inclusive view that makes the Environmental Scan a much needed component for analysis and a useful tool for institutional planning.

Morrison, J. L. (1992). Environmental scanning. *A primer for new institutional researchers*. Tallahassee, Florida: The Association for Institutional Research.

NIU Outreach, July 27, 2011. Harper College Environmental Scan.

Articles to come: PACE Employment Climate and Student Satisfaction Surveys