

## **COMMUNITY NEEDS SURVEY – AUGUST 2010**

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

#### **Background and Objectives**

Approximately every three years Harper College conducts a “community needs” study designed to monitor district residents’ opinions of and attitudes toward Harper. These studies are utilized in determining changes in area needs that should be addressed to meet college goals and mission, in verifying that the various Harper communities have consistent and accurate views of the school, and in measuring the effectiveness of advertising campaigns. This year (the 2009-2010 school year), as Harper is redirecting its strategic direction for the coming several years, Harper additionally has an objective to examine various strategic partnerships and directions.

#### **Methodology**

A quantitative study was conducted at the end of the Spring Semester 2010 among 534 respondents:

- 250 district residents;
- 50 parents of high school juniors living within the Harper district;
- 50 high school juniors living in the district;
- 100 current students; and
- 75 recent alumni (50 transfer and 25 career).

The current students were surveyed via self-administered questionnaires delivered in several college classes. All other respondents were selected randomly and then surveyed via a 14-minute telephone survey.

#### **Findings**

This Executive Summary presents key findings in the three areas of awareness, attribute ratings, and strategic partnerships and programs.

Note that “key” findings for attributes, programs, and strategies were determined based on respondent assessments utilizing a seven-point rating scale, with those rating an attribute a “6” or “7” out of seven (top two box) considered important or very important, and together termed “key.”

## I. Findings – Awareness

*“When you think of colleges and universities in your area, which come to mind? Any others?”*

Overall, Harper was the most frequently recalled area college or university, as 41% mentioned Harper first when asked about local area colleges and an additional 20% mentioned Harper later in their list of schools with which they were aware (for a total awareness of 61%).

This is slightly below what was seen in the 2007 Harper Community Survey (74%), but similar to what was seen in 2003. The 2010 responses to the most frequently recalled college is significantly above level seen in the 2000 Harper Community Survey (44%). In 2007 Harper was engaged in several high profile efforts that most likely contributed to the higher recognition:

- A capital campaign by the Harper Foundation
- Celebration of the College’s 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary
- A bond referendum campaign with accompanying public relations efforts
- Soliciting public feedback regarding the College’s performance as part of its reaccreditation self-study for the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Schools and Colleges

U of I – Chicago was the second most frequently mentioned school, as 43% were aware of it.

In 2007 U of I – Chicago was also the second most frequently mentioned school.

*“Which Community College serves your area?”*

90% knew that Harper was their local community college, similar to what had been seen in prior surveys. In 2010, only 44% of those living in the district for fewer than five years knew Harper was their community college.

*“In your opinion, what is Harper College best known for?”*

When respondents were asked what Harper was best known for, the top attributes listed were for its academic reputation (26%), a specific major (28%), and having a good transfer program (24%). In other words, three out of four responses related directly to academic excellence. Only 10% of respondents initially could not think of a response.

In 2000, Harper was not associated with any attributes, as the majority of respondents could not think of a response; receiving some mentions were value, safety, and a wide variety of programs. In 2003 Harper was best known for being a “well-known community college” (10%) and location (10%), but again “nothing” received the highest number of responses.

In 2007 the order of this question was changed, and rather than being asked in the beginning of the study it was asked near the end after many attributes had been discussed in order to give respondents a vocabulary with possible responses and to measure reaction to a specific advertising message. That year the top mentions were a specific academic program (32%) and an overall academic reputation (22%), meaning slightly over half of responses were academically based.

In 2010 the question was moved back to the beginning of the study. Since it was now asked without the vocabulary of possible responses, *a priori* we anticipated results below 2007 levels and closer to what had been seen in 2000 and 2003. Therefore, the fact that 2010 results were very similar to or even above those seen in 2007 – even without giving respondents a

“vocabulary” to use – is an extremely positive result. Whether due an increased attention to Harper due to the economy, a successful advertising/promotional/public relations push, or other reasons, respondents do recognize a perceived high degree of status for Harper academics.

## II. Findings – Attributes

*“In general, a Community College can play a large number of roles for the people in its district. Using a 7 point scale, where 7 means extremely important, and 1 not at all important, or you can choose any number in between, please tell me how important it is for Harper College, your Community College, to offer the following:”*

Attributes were measured based on responses to a seven-point rating scale, with those rating the attribute a “6” or “7” out of seven (top two box) measured and compared.

The attributes seen as most important by respondents are:

- Provide a safe environment for students & community members (93% top two box)
- Offer courses and Associate Degrees which transfer directly to 4-year schools (93%)
- Maintain tuition at competitive levels (89%)
- Have a faculty that interacts directly with students (86%)
- Utilize faculty with real-world experience (85%)
- Offer career technical programs designed to meet current and future community needs (82%)
- Examine and designs courses for future needs in the rapidly changing economy (80%)

Note that while some attributes tested changed each time a the Community Survey study was conducted (primarily due to a changing environment – academic, economic, and/or educational – along with evolving priorities for the school), there are commonalities which can be monitored.

In 2000, the three highest rated attributes were

- Up to date technology available;
- Providing a safe environment; and
- Value for the money.

In 2003, financial aid availability began to climb in terms of top two box ratings, as did the ratings for teachers with real world experience. While campus safety was still important, the rating dropped somewhat.

In 2007, the top eight attributes were:

- Quality of teaching (95% top two box)
- Academic reputation (89%)
- Value for the money (86%)
- Classes available on my schedule (86%) (significantly higher than the weekend and Friday courses asked about in 2010)
- Safety (80%) (about the same level as in 2003, but significantly below that seen in 2010)
- Offering a wide variety of courses (79%)
- Teachers with real world experience (73%) (higher than seen in 2003, significantly higher than seen in 2000, but still significantly below the 85% seen in 2010)
- Personal attention (70%) (while not identical, still similar and below the level seen in 2010 for faculty that interact directly with students)

#### IV. Findings – Strategic Partnerships and Programs

*“The college currently has some partnerships and is considering others with a wide range of groups and organizations within the Harper District. Using the same 7 point scale we used earlier, where 7 is very important, 1 is not at all important, or you can use any number in between, how important is it for Harper College to offer a partnership with . . . ”*

*“Harper College currently has a number of programs and is developing others designed to help all students succeed. Again, using the same 7 point scale where 7 is extremely important, 1 is not important, or you can use any number in between, how important is it for Harper to . . . ”*

While a wide variety of partnerships and programs were examined for importance,

- Those deemed most important by respondents tend to relate to more traditional community college goals and values, such as
  - Assuring transfers;
  - Fostering long-term life-long relationships from K-12 through four-year schools and beyond; and
  - Providing tutoring for all in need.
- Those deemed least important tended to deal more with “special interest” groups, such as
  - Faculty and staff (providing incentives to improve student learning);
  - At-risk students (provide more remedial courses); and
  - Businesses (train employees of large businesses).

There are no comparisons regarding strategic partnerships and programs from previous Harper Community Surveys as this is the first time that Harper surveyed its constituencies on these matters.