



MHEC 7th Annual Policy Summit
Ready or Not Here They Come
Ensuring the College Success of All Students

Summary of Reflection and Discussion by Local Institutional Leaders

November 14-15, 2011, Iowa City, Iowa

Summer King, Southern Illinois University
Blanca Rincon, University of Illinois – Urbana Champaign

The panel of institutional leaders included a diverse collection of higher education stakeholders. Linda Baer of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation moderated this diverse panel of institutional leaders. Joining Baer, David Drake, senior associate to the president at the University of Iowa; Wanda Everage, vice provost for Academic Excellence and Student Success at Drake University; Janet Handler, vice provost at Mount Mercy University; and Mick Starcevich, president of Kirkwood Community College all contributed to a discussion on college readiness and success. Although each panelist addressed a different piece of the retention puzzle, as a collective the panel emphasized higher education's profound responsibility to meet the diverse needs of the 21st century student population in ways that ensure success.

Describing the 7th annual MHEC Policy Summit as a “good combination of the right people at the right time,” Linda Baer began the discussion by challenging participants to develop campus and community environments dedicated to creative, innovative strategies for improving college readiness, access, and success for every interested individual. By framing higher education as a social entitlement and not a privilege, Baer enjoined her listeners to engage in the discourse of inclusion and to conceptualize frameworks in which K-12 schools, colleges and universities, and community organizations can collaborate to address and eliminate achievement gaps.

David Drake emphasized the need for creating personal connections between students and the campus. To develop these connections, the University of Iowa hosts, as part of their On Iowa! Program (<http://oniowa.uiowa.edu/>), extended first-year student orientations that seek to “shrink” the campus and socialize incoming students. The university also offers residential students “living learning communities” where like-majored individuals can live, socialize, and, by extension, build the social support networks crucial to student retention and success.

Wanda Everage addressed the need to extend these kinds of first-year retention initiatives to include second-year undergraduates. Informed in part by the work of Pascarella and Terenzini, Drake University's Peer Mentor Academic Consultant Program develops connections between upper-class student mentors and first-year mentees. Not only does this holistic, high-touch, collaborative program emphasize the social and cognitive development of both mentor and mentee, but it also embodies the mission of Drake University.

Janet Handler, too, emphasized the need for peer-to-peer support networks, living learning communities, and longer, more meaningful orientation processes. At Mount Mercy University, those orientations, communities, and networks, in conjunction with cohort-building portal courses and close faculty-student connections, are designed to create a variety of access points so that students' difficulties are easier to identify and remedy, and so students are aware they can seek support through a variety of channels.

Mick Starcevich echoed the other panelists' concerns and shared Kirkwood Community College's own high-touch, seven-part initiative, the Learner Success Agenda, which focuses on instructional innovation, program effectiveness, educational delivery, regional leadership, market intelligence, operational excellence, and information excellence. Details of this plan can be found at <http://www.kirkwood.edu/learnersuccessagenda>.

When asked what successful partnerships look like, panelists emphasized the need for transparency, visibility, value, and communication when establishing collaborative systems of opportunity. Panelists agreed that intentional, intersectional, success-oriented engagements by all stakeholders, as well as focused considerations of the specific needs of each individual stakeholder are both crucial elements of successful partnerships.