

## **Symposium Summary**

### **Achieving Student Outcomes: Linking Academic Success, Workforce Preparation and Civic Participation**

**William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy  
Higher Education Strategic Information and Governance Project (HESIG)  
Stockton University  
June 15, 2016**

#### **Purpose and Acknowledgements**

Approximately 200 higher education professionals and individuals from industry, state and local government and non-profit organizations attended the symposium. The purpose of the event was two-fold: First, to bring together a diverse set of individuals to share information about how to help students gain the needed skills and abilities to succeed in college, the workplace, and to become active citizens. Additionally, its purpose was to explore what policy and practices need to be changed to achieve these objectives.

The symposium serves to create a foundation for an extended discussion during 2016-17 of “best practices” and needed policy change within, and among colleges and universities to improve service to students, and to innovate campus and state-level policy supporting students’ success. The overarching goal of this approach is to take actions that support the broad purposes of higher education in New Jersey, in serving the goals of equality of opportunity, workforce competitiveness, civic participation and the long-term economic prosperity of the state. In this respect, the symposium will also help to build partnerships with employers, state and local policy makers and others to assist higher education in fulfilling its mission to New Jersey. HESIG is a partner with the Student Success Collaborative, of the Office of the New Jersey Secretary of Higher Education.

The Hughes Center is especially appreciative of the committee that helped to plan the symposium, and expert panelists, Kathleen Brady (Georgian Court University), Hasani Carter (Office of the Secretary), Yesenia Madas (Council of County Colleges), David Payne (Educational Testing Service), and Tyler Seville (New Jersey Business and Industry Association), who stimulated discussion, and the many organizations that provided special assistance to make the symposium a success. President Harvey Kesselman and Executive Vice President Susan Davenport at Stockton University, and Secretary of Higher Education Rochelle Hendricks deserve recognition for their sterling leadership. Finally, thanks to all of the dedicated individuals who took time to engage these important issues with colleagues.

The program and additional information shared during the symposium can be found at:  
[www.stockton.edu/hughescenter/hesig](http://www.stockton.edu/hughescenter/hesig) .

## Session 1- Defining and Designing Success on Student Outcomes

In the opening leadership discussion, facilitated by Darryl G. Greer, Stockton Senior Fellow for Higher Education Strategic Information and Governance (HESIG), three higher education leaders were asked to consider several questions, including:

- A college education is still highly valued in New Jersey, but there seems to be lack of clarity among educators, employers, policy makers and citizens about achieving expected outcomes. Taking a global perspective, what are the skills and abilities needed to succeed in learning and working for a lifetime; how do we measure them, for what purposes?
- Is it possible to achieve the complex, inter-related purposes of an academic and practical college education for all students?
- The NJ Secretary of Higher Education has boldly initiated a Student Success Collaborative with broad objectives beyond academic success. Can you briefly share these with us?
- Stockton and national survey research show that civic learning lags behind top expected college outcomes. What can be done to improve this situation?
- What policies and practices do we have to change to achieve a student success agenda; what can we learn from others; who leads the charge; how long will it take?

President Kesselman, outlining the broad purpose of the symposium, emphasized that “students come first, and we need to find better ways to prepare our graduates to become productive employees and good citizens.” “Giving our students the skills and abilities needed to learn for a lifetime and to start successful careers is at the heart of the missions of our colleges and universities,” Kesselman continued, “This is the means by which we build a more prosperous and civil New Jersey. Only truly educated citizens can protect our special American sense of opportunity, liberty and equality.”

Kesselman was joined on the leadership panel by David Payne, Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of Educational Testing Service Global Education Division, and Hasani C. Carter, who currently serves as the State Director of the New Jersey Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) within the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education.

Payne discussed skills and abilities needed for lifelong learning and workplace success, and means of measuring student outcomes from a global perspective, stressing ongoing efforts to measure outcomes in an “intentional, meaningful way” for students, educators and employers. He also explored the growing interest in evidence-based assessment of civic learning.

Carter outlined the Student Success Collaborative, an initiative of Secretary of Higher Education Rochelle Hendricks which involves pre-tertiary, higher education and community-based organizations. The

initiative also researches the broad set of skills needed to succeed beyond college and the workplace, such as tolerance for others and global awareness.

## **Session 2- Perception v. Reality on Student Outcomes: Views of Students, College Administrators and Employers**

Darryl Greer presented 2014-16 Stockton Polling Institute survey research on students' attitudes toward college value and on counseling and advising services. Research commissioned by the Office of the Secretary provides one of the most comprehensive surveys of current undergraduates nationally regarding advising and counseling, which included about 5000 undergraduates at 31 New Jersey colleges and universities.

The HESIG research reveals recent college graduates believe the most important college outcome is "to get a better job," with 30 percent naming that as their top priority. One in three students says colleges are doing "extremely well" in preparing them for a job and career.

Daniel J. Douglas, Director of the Hughes Center, pointed to the research where students did not think civic participation was important to employers. However, a 2015 survey conducted by Hart Research Associates for the American Association for Colleges and Universities (AA&CU), reported that 86% of employers surveyed said that, regardless of major, college and university students should "take courses that build the civic knowledge, skills, and judgment essential for contributing to a democratic society."

## **Session 3- Working Session**

At the heart of the event was an hour-long work session, facilitated by Walter Tarver, III, Director, Career Center at Stockton, involving all 200 all participants in small group discussions. Participants were asked to tackle questions regarding the current status of advising and counseling services; identification of best practices, what needs to change; and, what resources are needed to enhance helping students succeed. The responses were recorded for discussion in an hour- long plenary session (Session 5).

## **Session 4- Mapping Paths to Success**

Maralyn Mason, Director of Stockton's EOF (Equal Opportunity Fund) program, facilitated an expert panel of practitioners.

Yesenia Madas, Executive Director of the Center for Student Success for the New Jersey Council of County Colleges, outlined work of the Guided Pathways Consortium, which is housed within Council. Guided Pathways is a national movement that engages colleges and universities to design and implement integrated, coherent program pathways with embedded support services so that students are provided clearer roadmaps and enhanced supports from college entry to completion. 13 of New Jersey's 19 community colleges are working with other colleges and universities, here, and nationally in this effort.

Kathleen Brady, Executive Director of Career Services, Corporate Engagement & Continuing Education at Georgian Court University, contributed to the panel by emphasizing the distinction between coaching

and counseling. Coaching, Brady explained, serves as a more dynamic approach than traditional guidance, by providing students with real-world examples of possible paths and outcomes, building successful decision-making through mentorship, and as a way for students to gain greater confidence in taking responsibility for making effective choices.

Tyler Seville, Director of Technology and Workforce Development for the New Jersey Business and Industry Association, which represents 20,000 businesses, provided the panel with an employer perspective, stressing the skill gaps that employers see when hiring graduates. He noted the gap is especially common in basic workplace skills, such as punctuality and communication. Seville stressed that businesses want to be a strong partner in working with colleges to develop curricula and practical experiences to gain essential skills, and to provide internships to help students learn about and prepare for prospective career opportunities and workplace requirements.

### **Session 5- Envisioning the Future: Synthesis of Working Groups and Next Steps**

Peter Hagen, Associate Dean of General Studies and Director, Center for Academic Advising at Stockton, facilitated a plenary session summarizing suggestions from the small group work sessions and inviting comments from participants.

In very brief summary, symposium participants recorded recommendations in small-group sessions on three issue areas: perception of use, coherence and value of counseling and advising services; best practices and priorities for change; and resources needed to achieve change.

#### Perception of Advising and Counseling Services

Participants perceived advising and counseling services as being of high value to students, but lacking coherence in relationship to one another, and academic and student affairs policy. Confirming prior Stockton Polling Institute/HESIG research, the majority of groups indicated that advising and counseling services are underutilized by students. In rating use and coherence of these services, overall, on a scale of excellent-good-fair-poor, a majority of discussion groups viewed these services as good to fair. Most indicated that there is much room for improvement.

Plenary discussion focused on several broad issues, including making counseling and advising a requirement of graduation; whether or not to make internships a requirement for all students; how to strengthen the availability of internships (for example by engaging employers and alumni more in academic and advising/counseling activities); reaching out more assertively to students regarding career opportunities, as early as first-year orientation; the role of faculty in mentoring and classroom advising regarding career opportunities in fields and disciplines; and innovating and streamlining some services to fit better the needs of students using social media and other information technologies.

In work session reports, participants stressed especially the lack of intra-institutional coherence for advising and counseling services, citing that too often these offices are “siloes” within the university, receive too little policy attention, and too few resources for innovation. Many reported that these services have a relative low priority, and need greater attention from presidents and provosts in order

to be more effective. Many cited policy or procedure as inconsistent, or unsupportive of student success, such as not emphasizing career choices early in the college experience, and weakness in information systems to follow up with students.

Several stressed, too, that more inter-institutional cooperation is needed among two-year and four-year colleges to facilitate student transfer, evaluation, guidance and achievement. Furthermore, many reported that advising and counseling should be better integrated into academic and student affairs planning and evaluation of outcomes. Many reported that the faculty collaboration in service innovation and delivery should be enhanced.

Many work sessions reported that counseling and advising centers need stronger reward systems, in order to increase perceived value and effectiveness. Also, a common suggestion is that these offices need more training, professional development and more technical support, tied into institutional research and management systems to be more effective. It follows that staff need, too, greater freedom to break from traditional routines to be able to innovate, and to reach out to faculty and other external constituencies to build the bridges needed to design practical experiences leading to student success.

#### Best Practices and Priorities for Change

Some specific ideas flowing from working groups:

- Include more information about practical experience tied to academic choices.
- Assist faculty in bringing practical experience into the classroom.
- Strengthen outreach to the larger community, especially alumni and potential employers to build internships.
- Create a system of benchmarks for students and advisors/counselors to measure performance
- Create more integrated experiences for transfer students.
- Tie career services into first-year orientation, and redesign of the freshman experience.
- Require regular meetings of faculty, advisors/counselors and academic and student affairs directors, deans and provosts.
- Assign a career counselor, mentor to each entering student.
- Require practical experiences for all students by major or discipline.
- Realign resources to provide for more aggressive outreach and follow up to students, and better use of new media.
- Provide cross-training for advising/counseling staff.

- Make advising and counseling a requirement of graduation, integrated throughout the college experience.
- Tie civic learning to all fields of study.
- Use more mentorship to provide students with career guidance.
- Integrate some services such as tutoring more closely with advising and counseling.
- Meet more often and coordinate more with two-year colleagues.

During the discussion several individuals stressed that students need to be “served where they are,” meaning to take into account the diversity in background and preparation of students, that many students are already working, and the need to tie academic experiences directly to current work activity.

Finally, many participants seemed to concur that internships should not be required of every student, every year. However, there was strong consensus that every student should have some integrated practical experience, and that civic education should be tied directly to fields of study and particular interests of students, as contrasted to a general course requirement.

#### Resources Needed for Change

Some of the resources suggested for accomplishing these objectives, include:

- More focused direction from the president and provost on counseling and advising as a policy priority tied to mission.
- Increased funding for staff training and development, and involvement with faculty.
- Restructuring offices (perhaps integrating them) to place them more at the center of academic and student affairs planning.
- Invest more resources in tracking degree progress, and ability to communicate with students.
- Fund more apprenticeships, including on campus experience.
- Invest more in faculty development for advising/counseling, including adjunct faculty.
- Bring in more external facilitators/mentors to work with advising and counseling staff.
- Fund cross- training of staff, and provide more release time to work with K-12, Upward Bound, Gear Up, and community colleges.
- Invest more resources in state-level coordination of student opportunity and financial aid programs.
- Provide more resources for evaluation of procedures and outcomes.

- Fund experimentation with non-traditional advising/counseling models.
- Provide academic credit for internships and co-op experiences.

### **Next Steps and Concluding Remarks**

Darryl Greer thanked participants, presenters, individuals and organizations that helped to provide for the symposium, reviewed its purposes and outlined next steps, in partnership with the Student Success Collaborative and many others. He indicated that these include:

- Distributing widely a meeting summary, “best practice” recommendations, and ideas for innovation in policy and practice.
- Conducting a follow up statewide survey, possibly of advising and counseling professionals, presidents and others, on implementing change to support student success.
- Holding follow up meetings among campus professional groups and business groups
- Conducting meetings with college presidents, provosts, deans through higher education sector associations.
- Strengthening partnership with other organizations, such as Office of the Secretary, NJBIA, ETS and others.
- Making concrete recommendations for campus and state-level policy innovation.

Respectfully,

Daniel J. Douglas, Director  
Darryl G. Greer, Senior Fellow  
June 28, 2016