College of DuPage

Executive Summary

During the 2014-2015 academic year, the College of DuPage (COD) completed the Adult Learning Focused Institution (ALFI) Toolkit. The Toolkit consists of two surveys: the Institutional Self-Assessment Survey (ISAS), which reflects the perceptions of the faculty, staff, and administrators on the campus, and the Adult Learning Inventory (ALI), which reflects the perceptions of the adult students.

The surveys are based on the nine Essential Principles for Serving Adult Learners that the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) has identified. These Principles, defined in Attachment A, are:

1. Outreach
2. Life and Career Planning
3. Financing
4. Assessment
5. The Teaching/Learning Process
6. Support Services
7. Technology
8. Transitions
9. Strategic Partnerships (ISAS only)

A small team of faculty, staff, and administrators at COD completed the ISAS. Adult students at the institution completed the ALI. Following administration of the ALFI surveys, COD received summaries of the data and a Basic Report. This addendum further analyzes the data and recommends some next steps for strategic planning. Because it is impossible to address all of the Principles at once, CAEL suggests a sequence of specific activities that are related to the most significant strengths and challenges identified by the surveys:

- Market the institution’s strength in Technology. Answers on both the ISAS and the ALI indicate that ALFI participants perceive the institution’s performance on this Principle at the top of their rankings.
- Market the institution’s strength in Transitions. Answers on both the ISAS and the ALI indicate that ALFI participants perceive the institution’s performance on this Principle at the top of their rankings.
- Market the institution’s strength in the Finance. Answers on both the ISAS and the ALI indicate that ALFI participants perceive the institution’s performance on this Principle at the top of their rankings.
- Take specific steps to improve performance in Strategic Partnerships.
- Take specific steps to improve performance in the Teaching/Learning Process.
- Take specific steps to improve performance in Student Support Services.
- Take specific steps to improve performance in Life and Career Planning.

Internal Comparisons
The Basic Report, received earlier by COD, includes summaries that compare the ISAS and ALI perceptions with more than 80 institutions that have also completed the ALFI surveys. The comparisons show the rankings of faculty, staff and administrators and of adult students at COD on each Principle when measured against the other institutions. These data provides valuable information about how perceptions compare and are consistent with the underlying concept of the ALFI Toolkit: perceptions = reality. It is important to remember, however, that no campus is “the best performer” on every Principle and that, in most of the Basic Report summaries, ISAS data are compared to ISAS data, while ALI data are compared to ALI data.

This addendum focuses on the data from a different perspective. Here we view internal comparisons. How do the perceptions of faculty, staff, and administrators at COD compare to the perceptions of adult students at the institution? By comparing these perceptions, CAEL believes that the institution can identify points of agreement and divergence, and can identify and implement specific strategies to capitalize on strengths and to address challenges.

The following table compares the rankings of COD faculty, staff, and administrators with those of students:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank order</th>
<th>ISAS</th>
<th>ALI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Financing</td>
<td>Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Transitions</td>
<td>Financing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Outreach</td>
<td>Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>Outreach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Support Services</td>
<td>Teaching/Learning Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>Support Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Life/Career Planning</td>
<td>Life/Career Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Teaching/Learning Process</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Strategic Partnerships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Strengths

- **Transitions** is an area that COD can market to distinguish itself. Transitions rank in the upper half of both rankings. Internal perceptions of the institution’s performance on this Principle indicate that COD “supports guided pathways that lead into and from the institution’s programs and services in order to ensure that students’ learning will apply usefully to achieving their educational and career goals.” Helping adult learners integrate what they have learned before entering the institution and planning for what they will do afterward is an important component of serving adults well. Indeed, rankings on the ISAS and on the ALI indicate that COD is succeeding in its goals of enabling students to use their college experience to explore the future with curiosity and confidence; and to achieve their maximum potential on their journey North of Ordinary.

- It is clear from this table that faculty, staff, and administrators as well as students agree that Financing is an institutional strength. The ranking for both groups is #1 and #2, respectively. Faculty, staff, administrators and students agree that COD “promotes choice
using an array of payment options for adult learners in order to expand equity and financial flexibility.” At a time when so many adult learners are concerned about the affordability of their education, especially potential debt burdens, the high ranking of Financing is a characteristic of COD that can be very appealing to prospective learners. CAEL recommends identifying and publicizing some of the specific activities that have helped the institution achieve the high rankings on the ALFI Toolkit. To do this, COD can compare its scores related to Financing on the Benchmark Contribution Report with the best possible scores on the Maximum Benchmark Contribution Report.

- CAEL notes that perceptions of performance on the Technology Principle fall in the upper half of rankings for both groups. This means that both groups feel that the campus “uses technology to provide relevant and timely information and to enhance the learning experience.” CAEL recommends that COD leverage agreement on this Principle to market the College’s strengths in Technology and to set COD apart from peer institutions.

Challenges

College of DuPage is not alone; typically Life and Career Planning is the Principle that ranks toward the bottom for students at many two- and four-year institutions. Yet the ways in which each institution can profitably address this challenge vary, depending on the results of the institutional ALFI surveys. CAEL recommends that the institution carefully review and compare the scores obtained on the Maximum Benchmark Contribution Report and the HCC Benchmark Contribution Report. Administrators can:

1. Review the spreadsheet, Maximum Potential Contribution to Each Benchmark, to determine the maximum scores for questions relating to the column Life/Career.
2. Review the spreadsheet, Benchmark Contribution Summary for Heartland Community College to determine the ISAS scores relating to the column Life/Career.
3. Compare these benchmark scores to identify activities on which the institution’s scores differ from the maximum scores.

For example Question 34 on the ISAS asks: Are mechanisms in place for students at your institution to obtain credit toward a degree for previous work-related credentials or prior non-credit work (check all that apply)?

- Some Occupational Programs
- All Occupational Programs
- Some Academic Transfer Programs
- All Academic Transfer Programs

The Maximum Contribution Summary spreadsheet shows that the maximum score on this item is 10. However the score obtained by COD is 2. By noting the various areas in which this question applies (i.e., Some Occupational Programs, All Occupational Programs, Some Academic Transfer Programs, and All Academic Transfer Programs), COD can begin to identify ways in which to strengthen performance. By specifying this and other activities associated on the spreadsheet with Life and Career Planning, COD will be able to plan a strategic response to its challenges.
Another area of challenge is the ISAS ranking for the Principle of **Strategic Partnerships**. Faculty, staff, and administration rank performance on this Principle last. Such partnerships revolve around engaging in “strategic relationships, partnerships, and collaborations with employers and other organizations in order to develop and improve educational opportunities for adult learners. The low ranking that faculty, staff, and administrators give to this Principle is particularly troubling in light of the institution’s philosophy that “the needs of our students and community are central to all we do.” Further, in COD’s strategic plan priority #4 is to ensure “our curricular offerings maintain high quality and align with changing community needs.” The results of the ISAS survey indicate that faculty, staff and administrators at COD do not believe that this priority is being successfully met. CAEL recommends that a strategic priority should be the development of more effective strategic partnerships, using the activities listed in the Maximum Contribution Summary as a starting point.

**Further Exploration**

CAEL recommends that COD convene focus groups to consider the perceptions of the institution’s performance on the **Teaching/Learning Process and Student Support Services**. Both internal stakeholders and students rate the teaching/learning process principle 8th and 5th respectively. **Student Support Services** is ranked 5th and 6th or next to last from the student perspective. Perceptions in both of these Principle areas can be weighted by many factors and COD will be well-served to engage the participants in considering the responses on both the ISAS and ALI surveys. In these focus groups, a review of the crosswalks between ISAS responses and those on the ALI will be especially useful. The goal of this exercise will be to identify problem areas that the faculty, staff, administrators support to focus on. The focus group facilitators can support this process, synching the ALI questions that correspond to those areas. These are the items that can be agenda items for discussion and action planning. **Student Support Services**, although rated slightly higher by internal constituents, is rated toward the bottom by both stakeholder groups.

**Conclusion**

The ALFI toolkit yields important information for COD and its services to adult learners. CAEL is pleased to note the strengths that ALFI identified and hopes that articulating the challenges will help COD implement specific steps to address them. CAEL believes that it is a positive that both internal and student stakeholders are very much in agreement about COD’s strengths and challenges. We are confident that attention to the Principles cited will lead to an improved performance when COD once again administers the ALFI in the recommended three-year cycle.