

Humphreys College

NEWSLETTER SUPPLEMENT

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OUR INTERVIEW WITH ASSOCIATE DEAN CYNTHIA S. BECERRA **STEPS AHEAD: FOCUSING ON STUDENT RETENTION**

One of the main goals of every college is not only to enroll students, but to manage efficiently the entire enrollment process - from the student's first day through to graduation. In the center of this process is student retention. Last year, Humphreys College introduced its second graduate program; in addition to the law school's Juris Doctorate, it now offers a Master in Arts in Education. The school has added a new Criminal Justice Program to the well-established undergraduate offerings in Business Administration, Accounting, Community Studies, Liberal Studies, Paralegal Studies, Court Reporting, and Early Childhood Education. Moreover, Humphreys College experiences a significant enrollment increase in both its Stockton and Modesto Campuses. In June 2009, in order to expand the student retention measures, the College established the Retention Committee headed by Associate Dean Cynthia S. Becerra.



What is the main goal of your Retention Committee?

“The purpose of the Humphreys College Retention Committee is to provide the rationale and strategies to increase the retention of undergraduate students by implementing practical measures, from a multi-disciplinary approach, gleaned from college data as well as other sources, including interviews, focus groups, literature reviews, and demographic trend analyses. Moreover, this is a continuation of the retention efforts set forth in the Retention Plan of 2007, which was led by Dean Jess Bonds.”

Characterize the sources that inform the committee recommendations.

“The Committee has benefited not only from the 2007 report, but also from a review of the Strategic Plan (2009-2014); extensive literature on retention, including WASC’s 2010 *Report on Student Success*; input from members who have attended national conferences on retention, including Retention 101 that was conducted by the Educational Policy Institute, and *Bottom Line on Student Retention: A Data Proven Approaches that Work* that was presented at the NACUBO Conference in 2009; Cengage seminar on Generation One, and a seminar on enrollment management by the Noel-Levitz Company sponsored by Capella University. In addition, many of the recommendations contained within this report are driven by data gathered from Disaggregated Undergraduate First-Year Retention Reports, student surveys conducted by the Office of Institutional Research & Effectiveness, and student-focus groups. Another significant contribution was made by graduate candidates in the Master’s in Education Program who did extensive research as part of their group projects, culminating in five reports that were presented to our committee. In addition, because retention involves all of the stakeholders in any institution of higher learning, many administrative representatives have been consulted to ensure that their vital input is included.”

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To which extent does the committee cooperate with Dr. Jess Bonds, Dean of Institutional Research and Development?

“Dr. Bonds is the go-to man for anything that relates to college data, both internally and externally. He provided the committee with data regarding annual retention rates for the College, including our specific programs. We also work together to create meaningful surveys, such as the graduate survey and probation survey that will supply us with vital information about our students and programs. It is tantamount that the collection and analysis of data be included in the decision-making process, so the role of Dean of Institutional Research is essential to advancing the goals of the committee.”

How do you measure students’ feedback concerning the retention measures of the college?

“Students’ input is accessed in several ways and used to inform program development and improvement. For example, recently the committee conducted four student-focus sessions. The first two groups consisted of Stockton campus students from diverse backgrounds and majors who were nominated by their department chairs. They addressed questions and participated in discussions about their college expectations in general and their experiences at Humphreys as they related to academic and social integration. Another student focus group was conducted on our Modesto Campus and addressed the same topics of discussion. Finally, graduate students from our Master’s Program in Education engaged in an important discussion on what makes some students persist to earning their bachelor’s degrees while others do not. They essentially are called ‘persisters’ in retention terminology because they ‘persist’ to graduation.”

All Humphreys’ programs are accredited by the senior commission of the Western Association of School of Colleges. What do the WASC standards say about retention-related policies and measure?

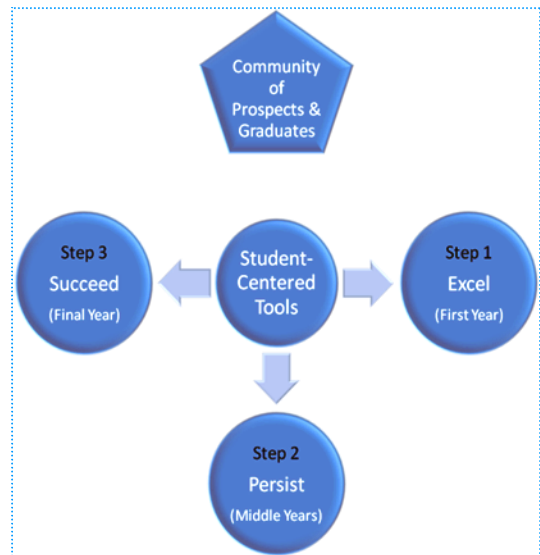
“WASC is generally concerned that the College has put forth an effort to improve retention of its students. In addition, it wants to see that there is a plan in place that includes benchmarks for improvement.”

Towards the end of the first year of its existence, your committee developed a retention-planning model known under the acronym STEPS...

“Illustrated in the following model--Student-Centered Tools to Excel, Persist, and Succeed (STEPS)--provides a framework for the retention efforts at the College. Ultimately, student-focused programs and essential tools will be developed and applied to improve not only retention but also student performance. Each of them will be linked to the model and focus on preparing students to excel in college, persist in their programs, and then succeed in completing their educational objectives.

This is a new model, so it may change as retention efforts expand in the upcoming years, creating an enrollment management team.”

~ Stanislav Perkner

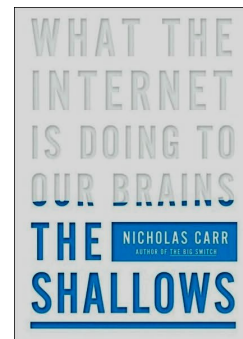


ON THE ISSUES OF THE NEW MEDIA

Nicholas Carr. The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains. Norton, 2010

The bestselling author and journalist Nicholas Carr is well known for his previous books: *The Big Switch*, and *Does IT Matter?* He has written for *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *The Atlantic*, *The Guardian*, *Wired*, and other periodicals. In his latest book—*The Shallows*—he attempts to address an obvious question: As consumers of the new media, are we sacrificing our ability to read and think deeply? What are the intellectual and cultural consequences of the Internet?

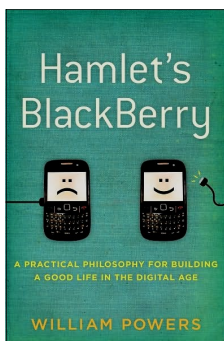
He analyzes these alarming issues on an historical background by reminding today's reader that similar questions were raised throughout the centuries, whenever the humankind developed a new "tool of the mind": alphabet, maps, the printing press, the clock, radio and television, and the computer.



Another line of Carr's narration stems from neuroscientific research. Human experiences change our brains. The neural pathways are influenced by new means of communication. The author presents a very compelling case by comparing traditional book culture with the cultural impulses of the Internet. More than five centuries ago, the Gutenberg Revolution launched both the Scientific and Industrial revolutions. The printing of the books, journals, and magazines revolutionized education. While the printed publication "served to focus our attention, promoting deep and creative thought," the new media encourage "the rapid, distracted sampling of small bits of information from various sources." Is the Internet remaking us to its own image? Are we losing our "capacity for concentration, contemplation, and reflection"?

The book raises many questions that are relevant to both college instructors and students. Carr's arguments will be tested by time. Humphreys' courses in Communications, Mass Media, Psychology, and even Education are productive places to think about them.

William Powers. Hamlet's BlackBerry: A Practical Philosophy for Building a Good Life in the Digital Age. Harper, 2010



The author is a former staff writer for *The Washington Post*, where he covered the media and technology. *Hamlet's BlackBerry* is his first book. It grew from a project he completed as a fellow at Harvard University's Center on the Press, Politics, and Public Policy.

The key concept of Powers' work is "the conundrum of connectedness." He points out that electronic devices are extremely helpful; however, they also "impose an enormous burden, making it harder for us to focus, do our best work, build strong relationships, and find the depth and fulfillment we crave."

Similarly as Nicholas Carr, in an effort to cultivate "an everyday philosophy for life with screens," Powers learns from the past. The pages of his book are enlightened by the "communications ideas" as perceived by Plato, Seneca, Johannes Gutenberg, William Shakespeare, Benjamin Franklin, Henry Thoreau, and Marshall McLuhan.

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We are “wired;” however, we may be “losing something of great value, a way of thinking and moving through time that may be summed up in a single word: depth.... Since depth is what makes life fulfilling and meaningful, it’s astounding that we’re allowing this to happen.”

In the closing part of his book, Powers offers guidelines for applying the lessons of the past. using real-world examples. To be happy and productive in a connected world, “we need to master the art of disconnecting.”

The News and Its Future. Edited by Paul McCaffrey (The Reference Shelf). Wilson, 2010

This book contains a selection of essays and articles dealing with the current state of the new media and the factors that are shaping their future. One of the core questions they seek to answer is how the new journalistic models compare with the old, and whether they are capable of living up to the high calling espoused by the principles of journalism issued several years ago by the Committee of Concerned Journalists: 1. Journalism's first obligation is to the truth. 2. Its first loyalty is to citizens. 3. Its essence is a discipline of verification. 4. Its practitioners must maintain an independence from those they cover. 5. It must serve as an independent monitor of power. 6. It must provide a forum for public criticism and compromise. 7. It must strive to make the significant interesting and relevant. 8. It must keep the news comprehensive and proportional. 9. Its practitioners must be allowed to exercise their personal conscience.



The opening section of the book is devoted to the democratization of the news in light of the Internet and the rise of citizen journalism. The second part is focused on the newspaper crisis (“Print Media in the Cross-hairs”). The closing two parts cover the issues of media bias and the 24-hour news cycle as provided by cable news media. The sources of the reprinted materials include professional journals (*American Journalism Review*, *Broadcasting & Cable*, *Online*, *Information Today*, and *Variety*), newsmagazines (*Time*, *Mother Jones*, *Newsweek*, and *Atlantic Monthly*), the daily press (*The Boston Globe*, *Christian Science Monitor*, and *The Washington Post*), and online publications (*Slate Magazine*).



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