

Lehman College Holds Student Success Summit

By Don Sutherland

October 15th was a mid-autumn day that was filled with bright, warm sunshine. The “kiss” of passing summer was evident as the mercury rose into the upper 70s. It was a perfect day to be outdoors. But at Lehman College, it was even better to be indoors. The College held a Student Success Summit. The summit was co-moderated by Associate Provost of Academic Programs and Educational Effectiveness, Dr. Victor Brown, and Director of Online Education, Dr. Olena Zhadko.

The Summit highlighted the substantive, and in cases, transformative work faculty, staff, and administrators are pursuing to improve the transfer student experience. Those present learned about course redesign experiences built from the College’s Student Success Course Redesign Initiative (SSCRI) and from faculty who completed a comprehensive NASH-ACUE professional development experience. The College gained wider exposure to the innovative CUNY TRAIN advising model. It learned about faculty who are widening the literary horizons of its students by enriching students’ reading with literature from female, African and African-American, LatinX, and Indigenous authors in the spirit of General Education’s quest to create “well-rounded” students in a cosmopolitan world. It gained insights into the College’s work with HyFlex teaching, teaching that enables students to attend classes in-person or remotely simultaneously.

The keynote speaker, Dr. John N. Gardner, of the John N. Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education share valuable experiences and insights with the audience that numbered nearly 150 at its peak (in-person and virtual). Invoking the “separate but equal” rationalization in the discredited and overturned 1896 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, Dr. Gardner challenged attendees to think about the transfer student experience. He invited the campus to take a close look at the policies in place for transfer vs. non-transfer students. Are they consistent? Are all eligible for internships? Are all eligible for academic awards? Are academic advising policies optional or mandatory for one group or both groups of students? In short, is the transfer student experience truly the same as that for all other students or has it evolved into something that more closely resembles “separate but equal.”

At the event, it became clear from the innovative practices highlighted and the commitments expressed that Lehman’s transfer student experience is moving ever closer to being the same as that for all of its students. Dr. Gardner acknowledged the impressive work being done in his closing remarks and final suggestions.

Edwin Hubble once explained:

With increasing distance, our knowledge fades, and fades rapidly. Eventually, we reach the dim boundary—the utmost limits of our telescopes. There, we measure shadows, and we search among ghostly errors of measurement for landmarks that are scarcely more substantial. The search will continue.

At Lehman College, if there is one broad lesson from Student Success Summit, it is that Lehman College is moving closer to creating and sustaining an exceptional transfer student experience.

It's knowledge of what works is growing. It is beginning to measure early outcomes demonstrating the success of its efforts. Substantial promise for even bigger gains lies ahead. And, in common with Hubble's observation, the "search" for continuing progress—the efforts being made and the experimentation with new ideas and practices—"will continue."