

The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) presents
Rethinking higher ed: Beyond {the buzzwords}
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Sheraton Centre Toronto

Day One
November 7, 2013

Session 1A | Barrier busters: Forging pathways

Institutional supports and partnerships that remove obstacles to and through PSE

Facilitator: Helen Tewolde, Council of Educators of Toronto

Robin Taffler, Work Colleges Consortium

Jim Vanderveken, Mohawk College

H.J. (Tom) Thompson, Olds College

Robin Taffler from the Work Colleges Consortium narrated the genesis of their program, where students work 20 hours a week as part of the diploma. Her institution, Berea College, has a lot of low-income students and little money to employ staff, so students help run all core institutional functions, including research, accounting and business. All students must work and none can buy their way out of service. There are seven colleges in the consortium, including one of the most liberal and one of the most conservative in the United States. Working together develops an expectation of respect, student leadership and authentic community, and fosters a deep appreciation of service. As a result, three of the work colleges have ranked in the top 10 nationally for graduating students with the lowest debt, and those students report that their college better prepared them for their current job.

Jim Vanderveken then talked about the Mohawk Access Strategy, which is focused on major disparities in educational attainment, health and employment in Hamilton Ontario's priority neighbourhoods. He said it is difficult to persuade young people from these communities to take what they see as the risk of a college education. In response, Mohawk reached out to 14 neighbourhoods, using a mobile team of advisors who helped youth identify career goals and educational pathways, a process funded by the college rather than government or industry. Students can get up to \$1,000 off their first year's tuition through this access program, and Mohawk is pioneering a "FutureReady" loyalty card, where future students can earn points toward their education by attending college events.

Tom Thompson addressed the Co-Investment Partnerships at Olds College, talking about programs centred on disruptive innovation in college education. The Learning Campus, a collaboration with Chinook's Edge School Division, aims to tackle the barrier of low participation rates and increasing dropout rates in the high-school-to-college education sectors. By working with partners in private industry and government, Olds has built a health and wellness centre, a learning centre and a multi-media centre, with the specific aim of giving people in rural areas the same centralized facilities that people in urban communities enjoy. Olds has also built a hotel and conference centre with the Pomeroy Group, with the college owning 40% of the hotel. The goal, he said, is to give students work experience and offset the decline in government funding.