

**John B. Cook, Ph.D., President of STCC on Diversity and Inclusion continued from page 3****STCC work with the workplaces in this area?**

We have a federal grant as a Hispanic Service Institution to work with middle school and high school families to get them to understand that these are great jobs and how do we start earlier with those families. So on that side we have work to do to partner up with the public schools. On the other side, I think our employers are very open-eared, dare I say, to this notion that they need diversity within their work force. They are asking us to help them figure out how to do that.

**MFR - Let me follow up on the topic of a Hispanic Service Institution.****One of the biggest complaints of this type of program is that Hispanics usually supply students while they are notably absent from the staff and faculty that runs these programs.. What is the situation at STCC?**

I am right here willing and able and keen to hear people's ideas. Keen to hear the suggestions for systematic approaches to really try to address this. We are in our student body almost 60% women. Granted, they are not as represented across all the programs as we would like. That is mirrored in our faculty. But that is not the case for us with our students of color. We do not see the same diversity in our faculty. And I am keen to hear people's ideas on how we change that.

**NM - Following up on that, it's not just Latinos. You have everybody here. This is a United Nations. It's the faculty, the staff, the program heads. There's no diversity there. Obviously something is missing. What is the active plan that Human Resources has at STCC to say we really have to change this?**

That's an important question. My predecessor who was here for 12 years made this a signature effort and its tough to budge something that is so stubborn. Whether we put the call out, whether we show just how welcoming we are for students. We do all the things that you would hope for in terms of student experience. How do we do this for faculty? I am still not quite sure how to entice faculty from tenure track seeking opportunities within a larger university to come and do what I think is very rewarding work which is focusing on the teaching and learning. We have tenure here. But this idea of tenure track in the traditional sense of scholarship and teaching obligations, we don't carry research obligation. For us is service, and heavy on the teaching.

**MFR – How many Hispanic faculty at STCC have tenure track?**

It's very modest. Those who identify to us as Latino and Latina I have to imagine it is under 5 percent.

**NM – What is MGM's influence on community colleges, specifically STCC? How does such a giant company impact the community colleges?**

It's a guess for all of us right now. We partner with Holyoke Community College. We with HCC are doing that gaming school, helping people prepare specifically to work as dealers. And there could be some nice wages. So we are pleased as a community college to do that. That for us speaks to our mission – career development, working with an employer. Yet it's not every day that an employer will come to a city and say we are going to bring thousands of jobs with us. What I hope is that it will bring good careers.

**NM–STCC had a Latina, Arlene Rodríguez, in a very high position, who had been recently promoted. She's gone. Is there another position at that level that is now occupied by someone of color, by someone that is not Caucasian?**

It's certainly been a point of conversation. We have an Acting Vice President of Academic Affairs, Gerardo Zayas Jr. He's a gentleman that I worked with as a colleague in New Hampshire. He brings a tremendous skill set, including a lot of experience in health care and in workforce development. But he is Acting. We have a search ongoing for that position. I'm thrilled that we had over 80 applicants and a very diverse pool of applicants. So I'm optimistic by this summer well have a permanent Vice President of Academic Affairs. People have asked a lot of questions about that. What I have shared with them is because it's a personnel matter, I am not at liberty to talk about that.

**NM – How do we solve this problem of lack of diversity at the highest levels of community college, specifically this one?**

I wish I had a great answer. What I know is we need that diversity of perspective and experience absolutely throughout the college. It makes us stronger.

**NM – Then why isn't it there? Why is it lacking? Where is the leadership from communities of color? Why do we not see that? What are the obstacles?**

I would almost rather not speculate. For us right now in some ways it does a disservice to try to guess at that instead of trying to keep after it and try to help ensure that we have diversity, that we have facilitators, people who can move all aspects, all corners of our college with these kinds of conversations. Even with a student body that is as diverse as it is we have equity gaps within how they participate and succeed. We need that. If I knew why, I would be after it.

**MFR – As you know, we are witnessing a new wave of Puerto Ricans coming to the Springfield-Holyoke metropolitan area. Among the newcomers many are looking for transfers and/or accreditation of licenses. What is STCC doing about this?**

We were thrilled when the Board of Higher Education with support from our Commissioner, ensured in-state tuition for evacuees from Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands. We've also ensured that when they land here, if there are issues with paper work, we will be flexible and try to figure that out. As we start to better understand what is the need, what role can we literally play without over-promising, let's make sure we are welcoming. We can at least help them with advocacy, help connect them because we have community engagement where we know the leaders in these other areas. At least we can start to build those connections.

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