

Dolphin UPDATE

FALL 2004

Adult Learning: A niche served by community colleges



*Shoreline CC President
Holly Moore, a Board
member of CAEL*

At the 40th Annual Commencement of Shoreline Community College, graduate **Elizabeth Bowen** was verbally acknowledged by **Senator Patty Murray** for her academic achievements in earning her professional-technical AAAS degree plus certifications in several specialties of health information technology. Not only was she cited as an outstanding student whose hard work and dedication allowed her to succeed in achieving her goals, but her success was even more remarkable because she is an adult learner, a homemaker, and a mother of 14.

The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) is a national, non-profit organization whose mission is to expand learning

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opportunities for adults. CAEL works to remove policy and organizational barriers to learning opportunities and to identify the best practices associated with adult education.

Shoreline Community College
President Holly Moore was person-

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Dr. Holly Moore

ally introduced to CAEL in 2003, when she was invited to participate in the American Academy, a conference that called for representatives from around the country to discuss the issues of adult learning and the public policy implications associated with adult learning. The conference resulted in an academic white paper and an invitation to Dr. Moore to join the 23-member Board of Directors.

"I strongly believe that community colleges are the great equalizer in our higher education system," says Dr. Moore. "By recognizing this niche, community colleges can take all learners to a place that improves their earnings potential and their lifestyle, I want SCC to be at the frontline in discussing the issues of adult learning and to be a part of driving the national public policy debate."

CAEL is unique in its knowledge of adult/employee learning practices and in its ability to work as an active

intermediary between colleges & universities, corporations, labor unions, and government, community and philanthropic entities.

Since its founding in 1974, under the auspices of the Educational Testing Service (ETS) in Princeton, New Jersey, CAEL has provided colleges and universities, companies, labor organizations and state and local governments with the tools and strategies they need for creating lifelong learning solutions.

As the only educational services organization of its kind,

CAEL leverages the strengths and capabilities of each of these constituencies.

In early 2003, over half (55%) of the students at Shoreline Community College were adult learners or over the age of 23. This has been a trend that has been growing for more than a decade. From the time that the College was first founded in 1964, adult learners were recognized to be an important part of the student mix. In the early days, before the campus was constructed, classes were held at night in order to serve the needs of working adults.

With a strong emphasis on university transfer students, Shoreline Community College has continued to build a long tradition of serving adult learners. While industry clamors for more skilled labor, colleges and universities strive to become more effective and to determine "what works."

Most colleges and universities still prefer to cater to the traditional student aged 18-22 because of the homogeneous nature of this student group. However, community colleges across the country are realizing their niche in serving adult learners and are getting plenty of support from students, the government, and more importantly industry and business.

At Shoreline Community College, Dr. Moore has sent several faculty and administrators to workshops to learn more about the issues of adult learning. A committee has been tasked with examining the issues of Prior Learning Assessment and how the current models can be incorporated into SCC's educational practices. Prior learning refers to granting college credit to students for the years of experience they have in their professions, thereby giving them credit towards their associates, bachelors, or masters degrees.

CAEL is actively developing innovative funding mechanisms for adult learners so that they afford to take classes to upgrade their skills. In the future, policies may encourage businesses and individuals to set up special Lifelong Learning Accounts (LiLAs). LiLAs, similar to 401.K savings accounts, are set up to allow employees to contribute to the account and for employers to match this amount. These LiLAs are being tested around the country to determine their effectiveness.

Shoreline Community College will continue its work to determine the best practices in adult learning and will remain on the forefront of this issue in the future. ■