

League of Women Voters Oak Park River Forest Community College Study 2013-2014 Report June 2014

Committee members:

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Triton College, our local Community College, was the subject of our study. Our preliminary goals for this study were:

1. To educate the League of Women Voters of Oak Park and River Forest and, more broadly, our community about the effectiveness of our local Community College in comparison to other Illinois Community Colleges.
2. To educate our members and community about the adequacy of funding from the State as well as local property tax support.
3. To educate our members and the community regarding Triton Board policies, procedures, and election cycles while building interest in Triton College and student support.

How did we attempt to achieve these goals?

We observed and reported on 18 Triton College Board Meetings, Finance/Maintenance and Operations Committee, and Special Meetings over a one year period. We met eleven times to discuss our reports and the material listed under Selected Resources while formulating questions for our guest speakers. We organized two events open to the community. The first was a presentation by Dr. Patricia Granados, President of Triton College, in November 2013, and the second was a “Second Tuesday” meeting in March 2014 with Mark R. Stephens, Chairman, Triton College Board of Trustees.

A preliminary report on this study was given at the LWVOPRF Annual Meeting on May 22, 2014.

Effectiveness compared:

The most common way, though not the most accurate way, to compare community colleges is by their completion rate. The rate is determined by the number of students who register first-time, full-time and the number who complete the program in 150% of the time expected or in three years for an associate (2 year) degree. From the *Illinois Community College Board 2010 Report* we learn that just 19.4 % of all Illinois Community College enrollees “complete” in the expected time. Triton is below the state average with 15%. Thirty-five out of 48 other community colleges in the state rank above Triton in completion rates.

However, “Triton is among five Illinois Community Colleges working with Achieving the Dream, a national nonprofit organization whose focus is to reduce academic achievement gaps among minority and low-income students.... Triton is implementing a college readiness initiative, requiring students to take placement tests to determine enrollment in developmental or credit math, reading and English courses... Officials predict that within four to eight years a substantially higher percentage of students, especially low-income students of color, will experience success, with no reduction in enrollment for these populations.” From *Focus on the Finish* (2012) by Sheila Simon, Lt. Governor of Illinois at <https://www2.illinois.gov/ltgov/Documents/CC%20Report%20for%20web.pdf>

In order to get a sense of excellence in programming in the state of Illinois we looked at outstanding innovations in Illinois Community Colleges as determined by the Illinois Council of Community College Administrators (ICCCA) and found:

1. College of DuPage received the 2012 ICCCA Innovation Award for its 3+1 baccalaureate completion program which allows students to complete their bachelor's degree at College of DuPage at significantly reduced tuition rate.
2. On September 30, 2013 Harper College announced it had won a \$1.4 million grant for a partnership program with Northwestern University to create a supply chain management program at Harper College with eight layers of credentials.
3. Oakton Community College won the ICCCA Award in 2003 and 2005 for its science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) center.
4. Sauk Valley Community College won the 2012 ICCCA Innovation Award for its involvement with the co-development of the Northern Illinois Online Initiative for Nursing (NIOIN) program.
5. John Wood Community College received the 2001 Innovation Award from ICCCA for its mobile fire science lab. A 48 foot semitrailer was renovated to create a mock two level home.

We attempted to find a peer community college to compare on several bits of data and Moraine Valley came the closest in socioeconomic demographics, but we felt that Harper and College of DuPage were geographically near enough to be competition for the Triton student population.

FAQ Completions FY 13.pdf Source of Data: Annual Enrollment and Completion (A1) Data www.iccb.org Summary of Comparison of Annual Duplicated Completions by College Fiscal Year 2009-2013

		Completions	% change 2009-13	% change 2012-2013
502	College of DuPage	4,388	50.4	37.8
512	Harper	3,900	68.7	-12.3
524	Moraine Valley	2,577	49.6	1.2
504	Triton	1,363	11.9	-10.6

Annual Student Tuition and Fee Rates (In-District, Based on 30 Semester Hours/Year) at Illinois Public Community College Districts Fiscal Years 2010-2014 www.iccb.org Source of Data: Survey of Colleges

	3-Year average FY 12-Fy14	1-Year Change Fy13-Fy14	5-yr Change FY 10-Fy14	Percent of change in 5 Years
502 DuPage	\$4,080	\$120	\$720	20.7
512 Harper	\$3,655	\$60	\$615	19.7
524 Moraine	\$3,550	\$150	\$1,020	37.0
504 Triton	\$3,100	(\$90)	\$930	43.1
State Average	\$3,244	\$143	\$713	26.8

Adequacy of funding from state and local tax dollars:

Historically, Triton received about 33% of its funding from the state, 33% from local taxes, and 33% from student tuition and fees. At this time about 15% comes from the state, 47% from the local tax, and 52% from the students, as noted in Dr. Granados' November 12, 2013 presentation.

The Triton Board budget calls for an increase in tuition and fees over the next 5 years. At the November 19, 2013 Triton Board meeting the 2013 tax levy was approved for \$25,066,404 with no increase over the 2012 levy. Last year's levy was abated by \$2,434,506, providing a benefit of approximately \$25 per household. Quoting Mark R. Stephens, Chairman, Triton College Board of Trustees from *Page One*, (vol. 8, issue 5, Jan/Feb 2014, pg. 2) "...on June 30, 2013, Triton College still had net reserve funds in excess of \$20 million." The cost of going to Triton if living in district in the Fall of 2014 is \$108/credit hour or slightly above \$3,000 per year for a full time student. This is about the median for tuition at a community college in Illinois.

Comparing the data on the 17% decline in student enrollment at Triton from Fall 2012 to fall 2013 after successive tuition and fee increases with the dramatically improved completion rates from Indianapolis and New York City after implementing programs which include tuition decreases, or even sometimes elimination, seems to indicate an inverse correlation between increased tuition and enrollment/completion at community colleges. Sources: *WSJ*, 11/04/2013, "College Makes Studying Pay," Caroline Porter and *The New York Times*, 1/09/2014, "How to Help College Students Graduate," David L. Kirp. We believe that investing in human potential will prove to be the most effective use of our tax dollars.

From *The Illinois Public Agenda for College and Career Success*, Dec. 2010 "Fact: Colleges and universities are starving for state dollars....Budgets for community colleges and public universities in fiscal 2011 are at the same level of state resources as they received in FY99.... Illinois community colleges rank 46th in the nation in spending on education and related services per student. They rank 31st in the nation in the subsidy provided by state and local taxes."

www.ibhe.org/SJR88/Materials/FinalReport.pdf

With shrinking state dollars and declining enrollment it was a surprise to hear at the March 25, 2014 board meeting that the board approved a raise for Triton President Patricia Granados of 27.4% of her salary, bringing it to \$312,000 per year. It makes her the highest paid community college president in the state of Illinois. The average community college president in Illinois earned \$192,895 in fiscal year 2013. The average salary of a full-time Triton faculty member is \$66,205 according to the Illinois Community College Board. Other administrators received raises from the board ranging from 12% to 25.6%. (At this meeting, Dr. Granados announced her resignation at the end of 2014.)

In the *Forest Park Review*, April 8, 2014, Jean Lotus, editor, wrote "Triton board hands out hefty raises. Pay hikes to key administrators between 12 and 27 percent". "Granados' salary spike will trigger the penalty imposed by state legislators in 2005 called the '6-percent penalty.' The fines were instituted to discourage universities and school districts from doling out last-minute pay bumps to retiring teachers and administrators. Typically, a pension raise cap of 20 percent should mean Granados won't be collecting a pension on any final-year pay hike of over 20 percent. But the Triton School board on March 25 voted to give Granados and other administrators two separate pay raises, one on April 1 and another on July 1...." "'Triton will be billed for this pay raise,' said State University Retirement System (SURS) Legislative Liaison Jeff Houch."

What is the tax burden in terms of tax rate as a percent of the Estimated Actual Property Value in each of the four community college districts we compared?

College of DuPage	2.495	Property value per person in community college district	118,747.73
Harper	3.332		38,806.78
Moraine Valley	2.80		96,342.99
Triton	2.688		75,660.43

Review of Triton College Board policies, procedures, and election cycles:

What qualifies an individual to become a candidate for the Triton Board of Trustees? The person must be age 18 or over and have been a resident of the Triton District for one year. The term for each of the seven board members is 6 years. One student representative is selected by the student body for a one year term.

Current Composition of Triton College Board of Trustees (June 2014)

Members	Village	Date Elected	Term expires	Years served
Mark Stephens*	Rosemont	1991	2015	23
Donna Peluso	Melrose Park	1992	2017	22
Diane Viverito	Elmwood Park	1995	2019	19
Glenn Stam	River Grove	1997	2015	17
Elizabeth Potter	Brookfield	2011	2017	3
Vanessa Moritz	Forest Park	2013	2019	1
Glover Johnson	Oak Park	2013 Appointed	2015	

*Stephens has held the position of Chairman of the Board for 22 years.

For many years the League has been concerned about what appears to be a lack of transparency on the part of the Triton Board. There is very little, if any, public discussion about anything. Most votes are unanimous and, if not, there is no discussion just a “No” vote. We have become accustomed to vigorous comments from the community and board members at the various boards we observe in Oak Park and River Forest. However, after observing the “Retreat” for the Triton Board on March 3, 2014 conducted by Michael Monaghan, Executive Director of the Illinois Community College Trustee Association, it appears the Triton board is doing exactly what the Executive Director thinks is appropriate. Quoting Monaghan “...there is too much detail to discuss issues in a public meeting, and as long as the board felt informed, it was good to discuss in private and vote in public.”

At the March 11, 2014 “Second Tuesday” meeting with Mark Stephens the question was posed “Would you find it disruptive or unproductive to have some questions and answers or discussion at the Triton Board meetings?” Mr. Stephens responded, “ We come prepared so there do not have to be questions at the board meeting. The staff do not ask questions because they have had a chance to ask questions in the time of setting up the agenda. If anyone from the public wants to ask a question he/she signs up and can have 3 minutes to talk at the board meeting....Regarding the perception that all our decisions are made in some smoky back room – not true – we have board members on committees, and they work hard and come back to us with reports.” Response by Leaguer: “We do not know about these reports, so it appears to us that decisions are made without any discussion.” After several back and forth responses from the Leaguer to this topic, Mr. Stephens agreed that the committee work would be acknowledged at the board meeting so that it would be clear that decisions were reached after considerable input from several staff and board members.

What can we do to safeguard this valuable community resource and improve its reputation, effectiveness, and support? How do we meet the challenges of promoting openness, transparency, and accountability?

The following is a list of steps we can take to keep our community college board aware that their constituents are listening. We also must help ensure that the citizens in our community are aware of the decisions that impact their lives and those of their children.

1. **Observe and report on progress.** The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association, which did its survey in October 2013, has given Triton a ten year accreditation but requires by October 2014 changes to achieve core values in Criterion Two, Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct. The factors contributing to this lack of achievement related to Board influence on travel policy. The Board decided, in essence, who could travel and how much could be spent. It also related to the Board interviewing candidates at the Dean level or administrative level, which is not under the purview of the Board. The Board has one employee and that is the president of the college. The Board sets policy and the president and her staff carry it out. (The previous two statements are from Michael Monaghan at the March retreat.) Immediately after the Board was notified of this problem, the travel policy and interview process were changed.
2. **Attend and participate in.** Hearings for the bond issue \$30-\$40 million which will start this summer (2014) with some dates to be scheduled in Oak Park. This is an alternative bond issue which does not require a vote by Triton's constituent communities, but only that the Board inform the community about how the bond will be retired.
3. **Monitor the search for a new president.** The current president, Dr. Patricia Granados, has resigned effective December 31, 2014.
4. **Hold candidate fairs, forums, and possibly debates.** February 24, 2015 is election time for three Triton Board members. Who will run?
5. **Provide seminars** for candidates who are new to the campaign rules and regulations.