

Introducing Dr. Avis Proctor

MEET HARPER COLLEGE'S NEW PRESIDENT



Start Ready

DR. AVIS PROCTOR LEADS HARPER COLLEGE AS ITS 6TH PRESIDENT

Harper College is a higher education gem in our backyard. One quarter of Barrington High School's graduating class agrees by attending within one year after high school. Barrington and other communities benefit from dual credit courses, the Promise Scholarship Program, proximity, highly qualified staff, and affordability among several other key assets. In Illinois, nearly 61% of bachelor's degree earners previously attended a community college sometime in the last 10 years.

Dr. Avis Proctor has joined the Harper College leadership team as its 6th president. She was aware of Harper College through the American Association of Community Colleges, where best practices are shared among peers at conferences. "I was aware of the college's readiness program designed to assess students' math readiness, and the strategy of finding ways to invest in math skills before college, so that students start ready, rather than addressing the gap with remediation." Mathematics is at the center of Proctor's education and her career commitment to higher education.

Proctor's family moved from St. Croix to Florida before she started college. She attended Florida A & M University in Tallahassee, earning her bachelor's degree in mathematics education, followed by Florida Atlantic University for her master's degree in teaching mathematics. Her doctorate degree from Florida International University is in higher education.

"Early in my career I was teaching math at Pine Crest, an elite college preparatory school," Proctor said. "But I felt that my contributions would go further at a community college," she said. At Broward College, she accepted a role there teaching math, and within three years was asked to run the math department. "I loved it, bringing people together around common issues, and problem solving on the high failure rates in math at our school. I worked with faculty across the college in designing an instructional strategy—a math redesign—that used structured activities involving artificial intelligence to assess math strengths and weaknesses. Then we were not just teaching math but equipping the instructors with the data we had, so they could fine-tune their instruction

with students," Proctor said. Her approach using powerful, collaborative learning and managing change brought results with increased success rates in math, and decreased attrition at Broward. "Math is critical to our competitiveness. My lifelong commitment to education started in high school while tutoring my peers in math," she said.

STANDARDS OF EDUCATION

Harper College has the same accreditation standards as other colleges and universities as defined by the Higher Learning Commission. Faculty need to have specific credentials such as advanced degrees and concentrations in a field in order to teach that subject to students. "Our mission is different though, than a university, as we are authorized to offer certificates and two-year associate degrees," Proctor said. "But our faculty credentials are the same for what we offer, as with other colleges. Our goal is to respond to the community's needs. We offer associate degrees for transfers to other colleges and universities, corporate job training, and lifelong learning. For example, The Garlands of Barrington takes advantage of our Lifelong Learning Institute."

Proctor is married with one child. She has a love of the arts and plays piano and has played the clarinet and violin. Getting up and exercising is a personal goal for her mornings. In September, students and faculty can join her on the dance floor for "Zumba with the President".

When asked about her favorite book, she mentioned Carol Dweck's "Mindset". She also recommends "Bandwidth Recovery" which discusses the cognitive obstacles students may have from a variety of personal life burdens, and the ways in which we can help students recover their cognitive bandwidth.

Harper College is in good hands with Dr. Avis Proctor. She has a keen understanding of the college's goals and she possesses the innovative, collaborative leadership style to get the right things done. "I've not come here to rubber stamp what I've done in the past," she says. "I will learn the environment and context here at Harper, and then see the emerging needs, and rally people around me to address those things head on." U



Pat Stack, Harper College Board Chair

THE SEARCH PROCESS

A Barrington resident since 2014, Pat Stack first served on the Harper College Board of Trustees as a vice chair for two years. Today, she is Chairwoman of the Board, tasked with the oversight and governance of the college. "Our goal is to meet the needs of the community," Stack said. "For students, that means we must offer an excellent education that is accessible, and affordable. We are moving forward with the college's strategic goals, and fiduciary responsibilities, which we take seriously."

The search process for a new president began more than a year before Dr. Kenneth Ender's contract would expire on June 30, 2019. "Dr. Ender brought to Harper a nationally known reputation of excellence. He lifted the whole community building important relationships between the college and nearby School Districts 214, 220, and 211. His sphere of influence and ability to lift the whole community is something he called "communiveristy", Stack said.

A search consultant was hired in June 2018, three finalists were invited to campus the following January, and the Board of Trustees approved Proctor's contract in February 2019. "Dr. Proctor stood out to us because she made a visit to the college prior to her interview with our search team—one that was in the worst weather days of last winter. She learned about the campus, made insightful observations, asked students and faculty questions, and came to the interview fully prepared. Dr. Proctor stood above all our finalists. We were impressed with how comprehensively and thoughtfully she answered all of our questions," Stack said.