

# Leaders bring conference insights – and speaker – back to BC3

Nov. 30, 2018

(Butler, PA) Dr. Cia Verschelden's presentation during a Strategic Horizon Network colloquium in San Diego titled "Equity, Diversity and Inclusion" was "by far the most powerful," according to a Butler County Community College vice president, was "very relevant and applicable to what our students encounter," a BC3 assistant dean said, and "resonated the most," a dean added.

The topics at the June 3-5 academic conference were among many that will ultimately benefit BC3, its employees and students, administrators said, as were those discussed at the American Association of Community Colleges' National Legislative Summit, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education's annual conference, and a second Strategic Horizon Network colloquium in Boston.

So important was her message – "Bandwidth Recovery: Helping Students Reclaim Cognitive Resources Lost to Poverty, Racism and other 'Differentisms'" – that Verschelden, executive director of institutional assessment at the University of Central Oklahoma, was invited to speak at BC3's Professional Day on Oct. 9.

"Through her deft presentation of findings from multiple researchers, she demonstrated how the persistent stress caused by poverty, racism and other forms of social marginalization can restrict the cognitive resources, the bandwidth, that students have available to learn," said Dr. Case Willoughby, BC3's vice president for student affairs and enrollment management, who called Verschelden's discussion the most powerful among those in San Diego.

"It's important to remember, this is not about intelligence. It's about the bandwidth or attentional resources that we have available to take in and process information."

## "Practical strategies" can benefit students

Verschelden's talk was relevant and applicable to what BC3 students encounter daily, said Dr. Nichol Zaginaylo, BC3's associate dean of humanities and social sciences.

"Cia gave very practical strategies that faculty and administrators can use in their classrooms and in communications with students so that students feel valued in the classroom," Zaginaylo said. "As a result, students are more engaged and have a higher degree of success. Her analogy in which she compared life's challenges and students' fears to losing cognitive bandwidth was brilliant."

Martin Miller, BC3's dean of library services, said the "variety of differentisms" addressed by Verschelden "was striking" and resonated most with him.

"Poverty and bad home situations" can affect a student's ability to learn, Miller said. "I sometimes will see a student walking around campus with no coat on in 15-degree weather and wonder why he's not wearing his coat. Now I wonder if it's because he doesn't have one. How does being cold affect that student's concentration in class?"

Added Willoughby: "We've all been in a class or meeting in which we are distracted by some external issue, a parent who is ill, car trouble on the way to work or a bad night's sleep. Everyone is vulnerable to that. However, if you are financially or socially marginalized, these stressors can create a significant disadvantage. More importantly, (Verschelden) provided some powerful and very do-able strategies for faculty and staff to help students recover this cognitive bandwidth."

## Topics "provided me with valuable information"

BC3 is among seven institutions that comprise Strategic Horizon Network, whose philosophy, according to its website, involves "an active learning community focusing on pushing the envelope, exploring the new trends and building capacity. Collaboration and leveraging the synergy of the network to learn, build strength and support institutional transformation are its cornerstones."

In addition to Willoughby, Zaginaylo and Miller, Dr. Nick Neupauer, BC3 president; Dr. Belinda Richardson, BC3 vice president for academic affairs; Ruth Purcell, executive director of the BC3 Education Foundation; and Scott Richardson, director of campus police and security, attended the Strategic Horizon Network colloquium in San Diego.

Willoughby and Purcell joined Dr. Ed Book, Les Graves, Tracy Hack, Kelly Flis and Matt Kovac at a Nov. 4-6 Strategic Horizon Network colloquium in Boston titled "Equity in the Age of Artificial Intelligence."

Book and Graves are assistant professors of business; Hack is coordinator of community leadership initiatives; Flis, associate director of academic and career planning; and Kovac, dean of BC3's STEM Division.

Among the presentations in Boston were "AI: Bringing Equity Front & Center," by Dr. Peter Smith, professor of innovative practices in higher education, University of Maryland University College; "Learning and Work: How AI Will Bring Them Together," by Beth Porter, CEO and co-founder of RIFF Learning; and "The Future of Work," by Joseph Fuller, Harvard Business School professor of practice and co-leader for its Future of Work initiative.

Those "were all very good and resonated equally well with me," Kovac said. "Smith's and Fuller's presentations discussed the predicted disruptive aspects of AI technology as well as opportunities it will present."

Porter addressed computational social science and how artificial intelligence was being used to study human signals, such as body language and tone of voice, in both in-person and online collaborative communication situations, Kovac said.

“The combination of all three provided me with valuable information regarding how AI will potentially influence higher education and the workplace,” Kovac said, adding that he may be able to apply what he learned at Strategic Horizon Network to work with faculty to “ensure that the STEM Division programs maximize opportunities to demonstrate to students the relevancy of what they are being asked to learn.

“While I believe that the STEM Division faculty currently do a very good job of this, the evolution of AI might soon allow for the understanding, on an individual student basis, of what examples, demonstrations, etc., are most relevant to each student.”

## Ideas may be implemented at BC3

Neupauer and Purcell attended the American Association of Community Colleges’ National Legislative Summit from Feb. 11-14; and Neupauer, Dr. Belinda Richardson and Sharla Anke, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education’s annual conference from Nov. 28-30. The summit and conference were held in Washington, D.C.

A presentation by Heather Kelly, director of institutional research at the University of Delaware and titled “Aligning Post-Graduation Outcomes: The Trifecta Approach” was among those that appealed most to Anke, BC3’s assistant dean of institutional research.

“(It) showed a new approach that one institution took to demonstrate outcomes for their graduates,” Anke said. “Prospective students, parents, legislatures and the federal government are all asking ‘Where do an institution’s graduates get jobs? How much money do they make? Where do they go to graduate school?’ So this institution implemented strategies to gather data through multiple sources to increase the number of graduates from whom information was available when determining post-graduation outcomes.

“This was helpful in generating ideas that we may be able to implement at BC3 to increase our knowledge of student success after leaving BC3.”

A “Self-Study in Action – Communication Strategies for Multi-Campus Institutions” workshop reviewed the approach one college used in preparing for and engaging in its self-study process using the seven Standards for Accreditation and was, Richardson said, “outstanding.”

Marianne Vakalis, dean of strategic initiatives, and accreditation liaison officer, Berkeley College; and Angela Harrington, vice president of communications and external relations, Berkeley College, discussed strategies that colleges and universities with numerous locations can use to minimize the complexities of their geographic distances and maximize stakeholder input and awareness of the self-study process.

“The presenters provided practical steps, examples and take-away resources for participants to use immediately,” Richardson said. “The workshop provided great ideas for the storage and sharing of information and a replicable model. It has significant relevance to BC3 as we prepare for our next self-study.”