

# College study begins in Top Floor

## Class starts with English 101

By Douglas Farmer  
Staff Writer

PALMER — It seemed to take a few seconds for the question from Ken White, dean of community services at Holyoke Community College (HCC), to sink in among the attendees of an English class at Top Floor Learning recently:

"You're all in college now. What does it feel like?" he asked.

For although the group of eight students from Palmer and surrounding communities, ranging in age from teen to senior citizen, were physically on the third floor of the Palmer Public Library, in a very real sense, they were in college. For starting last fall, Margaret Boyko, chief executive officer and the staff of the grant-funded Top Floor Learning programs, entered into a pilot agreement with HCC called "Bridge to College," where students, many of whom had recently passed their general equivalency degrees (GEDs), are offered study and life skills to make the transition into higher education.

And though the faces changed somewhat as the formal coursework began a few weeks ago, all seemed eager to begin the first class, English 101.90 — Language and Literature I, as taught by Laurretta St. George-Sorel, an adjunct English professor.

"I work with the Ware Historical Society and I love to write," said Cindi LaBombard. "And I want to add to my knowledge base."

As for Tammy LaValley, she said she had always had a dream of going to college, though she was nervous as she began the journey. "My daughter beat me to it (going to college) but I want to be an accountant," she said.

But before the instruction actually began on Feb. 3, the group got a sense of some of the glitches that can occur in the college setting: Some of the students had the seventh edition of their book, "Reading Critically, Writing Well" by Rise Axelrod and Charles Cooper, while others had the eighth. The matter turned out to be a misunderstanding revolving around the HCC bookstore.

"The books are a little different but I want to go with the one that we have the most of here," said St. George-Sorel.

She said that while the class would include selected readings of classic literature and review of the basics of grammar and parts of speech, she would depend on critical discussions, writing and research to make the class successful.

"I'm excited and nervous too," said St. George-Sorel. "But each person has ideas that he or she can share with the group so we can make this a valuable experience."

And offering a similar message, White gave them tips on how the diverse group could conduct their educational career to get the most out of it. Specifically, he mentioned proper note taking, rewriting notes, time management and the formation of study groups with other students.

"In high school, you had people watching you



Turley Publications staff photo by Douglas Farmer

### Ken White, a dean at HCC, addresses students at Top Floor Learning.

closely, but in college nobody monitors you," he said. "When I was in high school I was oblivious to the success skills for college."

When he asked the students seated before him at Top Floor Learning what they thought the reasons were for failure in college, he got answers ranging from "too much partying" to "inadequate time management." He said they were all good answers, but the top reason for failure, he said, was lack of attendance.

"You really need to ask questions and participate and be an active learner," he said.

And St. George-Sorel had at least a first impression that her students had every intention of doing so, and for that she was grateful. She added that this was her second course taught in a community away from HCC, another being at the Early Childhood Centers of Greater Springfield.

"For many people it does make a difference because they have a transportation problem to get to the school," she said. And last fall, Boyko and Marsha Gaudette, director of adult literacy programs at Top Floor, said HCC faculty knew there was a dearth of college preparation resources in the Palmer area, making their site an ideal location for the program.

Anyone with questions about "Bridge to College" or other Top Floor Learning programs should call 283-2329.

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