



Community & Technical College

HIGHER EDUCATION BEGINS HERE

Student Services Focus Group Study

**Study conducted during the
2006-2007 Academic Year**

**Report Written by the
Office of Institutional Research**

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Purpose

A qualitative research project was conducted during the 2006-2007 academic year by the Office of Institutional Research Office and the Division of Student Development and Enrollment Services. The purposes of the study were to identify why students choose to attend Bluegrass Community and Technical College (BCTC); gain insight into various aspects of their experience as matriculating students; and glean recommendations for improving services to students.

Methods

Pilot Study

A pilot test of the project was conducted during the summer of 2006. Research questions were based on discussions between Institutional Research and Student Development and Enrollment Services staff. A rough draft of questions was created from the discussions and shared with Student Development staff, who further honed the primary and secondary follow-up questions to better serve the purposes of the study.

A random sample of students enrolled in at least one course at the Cooper Drive location for the summer term was selected for participation. These students were enrolled at BCTC for at least one term prior to summer 2006 and were listed as “degree-seeking” within PeopleSoft (this omitted workforce, high school, and visiting students).

An introductory email was sent to students identified as part of the sample inviting their participation in the focus groups. Email communication alone generated little response; to increase participation, all students who received an email were contacted via telephone inviting their participation in the focus groups (see Appendix A). Students were given the selected time, date, and location for each focus group. In return for participation, students received a \$30 gift card from Barnes & Noble.

Prior to beginning each focus group, a member of the research team introduced the purposes of the research project and its importance to future planning for the College. Each participant received a consent form, explaining the confidentiality of their responses and ensuring that all comments would be reported in the aggregate (see Appendix B). Students were notified that each focus group would be audio-taped and were asked to sign a consent form for participation in the study and agreeing to be audio-taped.

Two focus group sessions were conducted at the Cooper campus, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Ten students were invited to each focus group, with a total of seven actually participating. As a result of the pilot test, no major changes were made to the six primary focus group questions. Updates and additions were made to the secondary follow-up questions to add clarity and better identify specific examples from students.

Primary Study

During the fall of 2006, a random sample of enrolled students was identified for each campus. The random sample included “degree-seeking” students, both new and returning to the College. A total of seven focus groups were planned: two each at the Cooper and Leestown locations, and one each at the Lawrenceburg, Winchester, and Danville campuses.

Student participants in the study were contacted via telephone inviting their participation in the focus groups. Students were given the selected time, date, and location for each focus group. In return for participation, students received a \$30 gift card from Barnes & Noble.

Prior to beginning each focus group, a member of the research team introduced the purposes of the research project and its importance to future planning for the College. Each participant received a consent form, explaining the confidentiality of their responses and ensuring that all comments would be reported in the aggregate. Students were notified that each focus group would be audio-taped and were asked to sign a consent form for participation in the study and agreeing to be audio-taped.

A facilitator for each session posed the research questions, modified from the pilot study, as well as any follow-up requests for additional detail. A note taker also observed any non-verbal communication or changes in intonation during the conversations. All sessions were audio-taped for subsequent analysis. Five focus groups were conducted during the fall 2006 and two in spring 2007; a total of 38 students participated in the focus groups.

Four members of the Institutional Research and Effectiveness staff comprised the research team. Each team member listened to the focus group tapes individually and then met as a group to discuss the content. Through the analysis, a comprehensive list of all content areas was generated, along with themes that emerged from the seven focus group discussions with students.

Analysis of Themes

Student responses to questions asked during the focus groups revolved around several themes. For many topic areas, student responses were similar regardless of campus location (e.g., comments about quality of instructors tended to be comparable at all locations). Other topic areas showed differences, depending on the campus at which the focus group was conducted (e.g., comments from students at extended campuses differed from comments from students at the Cooper Drive campus regarding access to offices, services, and events).

The main themes emerging from the focus groups tended to fall into eight major categories. An additional ninth category was created to include topics identified by students as important that did not naturally fall into one of the other major themes. The nine areas identified were:

Communication – This included communication from faculty/staff to students and student-to-student. Topics included the effectiveness of email, bulletin boards, word-of-mouth, etc.

Extended Campuses – Students from extended campuses (including Leestown and Regency) tended to have similar opinions about BCTC services. This category addressed topics such as availability of services at extended campuses, access to these services/events/clubs, and other concerns specific to extended campuses.

Extended Services – These included comments relating to extending services beyond the traditional school day, such as having weekend library and computer lab hours and evening office hours (e.g., financial aid, advising, and business office).

High-quality faculty – Students at all BCTC locations commented on the excellent faculty, related not only to teaching, but also to “soft skills” such as personal interest in students.

Meeting community college needs – Comments from students reinforced the fact that BCTC is attractive as a community college in terms of cost, convenience of location, and the small size.

Non-traditional students – Many BCTC students have families, mortgages, jobs, etc. and comments supported the fact that BCTC is flexible in serving these students.

Processes – A number of comments were related to specific functions that did not fulfill student needs as well as they could; these included financial aid, the bookstore, and student records.

Web services – This included BCTC’s overall website as well as specific applications such as Blackboard, online registration, etc.

Miscellaneous – Some comments did not fit clearly into the above categories and were included here.

Each of these categories will now be discussed in further detail.

Communication

This section centers on communication from faculty/staff to students or student-to-student. Comments addressed various means of communication such as email, bulletin boards, word-of-mouth, and announcements on the website. Remarks were also made concerning the effectiveness of communication processes in general.

Concerns. A number of students commented on communication problems between BCTC offices. In certain areas it did not seem that information was transferred between offices efficiently, requiring students to go from office to office to resolve their situation. Another common theme was the problem of identifying the correct person, office, or

website to visit in order to resolve a problem. Students mentioned that certain information was not communicated accurately on the BCTC website (e.g., course numbers, course prerequisites, and class start dates), possibly due to a lack of scheduled updates on a regular basis.

Different offices or staff were said to have supplied inaccurate or conflicting information. Bulletin boards in hallways were not always up-to-date. The sheer bulk of emails received by students tended to be overwhelming at times (in their words, “useless emails”). Sometimes when program requirements changed, students were not notified in a timely fashion or at all. Finally, some students mentioned that telephone messages and email notes were not always returned.

Positives. Students mentioned their frequency and satisfaction of one-on-one communication with their instructors. Several students mentioned instructors were conscientious about answering email.

Recommendations. These included:

- Update the website on a regular basis
- Update bulletin boards on a regular basis
- Clearly communicate when a class is cancelled through multiple means
- List course prerequisites prominently (e.g., “background check will be required”) in all materials
- List which books are needed for each class prior to the course begin date

Extended Campuses

For the purpose of this report, extended campuses are defined as all locations except the Cooper Drive campus. This is due to the fact that comments tended to be similar for students attending these campuses. Topics addressed in this area included the availability of services at extended campuses, access to these services (including special events and student organizations), and problems specific to extended campuses.

Concerns. The common theme running through comments in this area was that extended campuses do not receive the same level of service as the Cooper Drive campus. Students expressed feelings of being “left out” and that they were not “part of the main campus.” This included everything from academic programs not being offered at extended campuses to the lack of variety in the vending machines at the Danville campus. Most events, clubs, and extracurricular activities were seen as being held in Lexington or more specifically, at the Cooper Drive campus. In many cases, services that students felt should have been available at their location (e.g., financial aid, registration, student records) could not be completed successfully without driving to Lexington/Cooper Drive. The removal of bookstore services at the extended campuses was an additional concern raised by students who now had to drive to Lexington to purchase books.

Other services that students indicated were lacking at extended campuses included: tutoring (in one case, advertised as available but then no writing or math tutors showed up); disability services (required driving to Lexington to finalize support services for the student); work-study office (no office exists at Leestown). The Student Orientation program was felt to be more complete at the Cooper Drive campus than at extended campuses. And although staff from Lexington make it a point to have office hours at the extended campuses, it was remarked that these are not always the same people each week – resulting in conflicting advice.

Academically, students from extended campuses expressed concern over the limited number of course offerings, which in some cases required them to complete their credential requirements at the Cooper Drive campus. Although a number of students stated that the program offerings at their nearby BCTC campus were a major reason they enrolled at the college, most felt the variety of courses was too limited.

Positives. Students at extended campuses commented on the different atmosphere at these locations. Labels such as “relaxed,” “homey”, and “laid back” were common. This was particularly noticeable to students who had to go to the Cooper Drive campus to complete paperwork or other business. Instructors at extended campuses – particularly campuses outside of Lexington – were seen by students as taking a more personal interest in their (the students’) lives. Some examples included: an instructor visited a student at home to convince her to continue her studies; another attended the funeral of a student’s family member; still another rescheduled an exam for a student because she had an ill child.

Students at the extended campuses also seemed to identify more with their home campus and less with Bluegrass Community and Technical College (BCTC) as a whole. They viewed the Cooper Drive campus as being very different than their home campus, accentuating the positive differences at their own campus throughout the conversations.

Recommendations. Students had several suggestions for how to improve services at extended campuses: These included:

- Have a staff member from Student Support Services visit extended campuses more often, at least during the first few weeks of classes
- Provide a wider variety of options in the vending machines at Danville
- Reevaluate and broaden technical program offerings at the extended campuses
- Improve/enhance student orientation at extended campuses

Extended Services

Comments regarding this theme focused primarily on extending services beyond the traditional school day of 5:00 PM. Examples included having weekend library and computer lab hours and possible evening office hours for student service areas.

Concerns. Students mentioned a number of issues relating to BCTC’s provision of extended services. For the most part, focus group participants indicated an interest in

more evening and weekend classes. This resonates with the fact that a large portion of BCTC students maintain full-time employment in addition to attending classes. Students felt the hours the libraries were open were inadequate, particularly for students who must use the library after traditional business hours. Not having computer labs open on weekends was reported to be quite inconvenient for students who needed to use a computer outside their home. An evening student mentioned that currently, offices such as Admissions, Records, and Financial Aid were closed during evening hours, requiring a special trip during the day.

Positives. Based on comments from participants, no positives were specifically mentioned. Perhaps students were taking for granted such conveniences as distance learning, current evening and weekend classes that are being offered, and free Internet access from BCTC computers.

Recommendations. Several explicit concerns were identified by students as listed above and should be explored. These included:

- Extend evening & weekend classroom hours
- Extend library & computer lab hours
- Ensure minimal coverage of administrative offices during one or two evenings a week

High-quality faculty

One of the more prevalent themes, repeated over and over by focus group participants at all BCTC locations, concerned the excellent faculty. As one student indicated, “BCTC has top-of-the-line instructors – challenging and engaging.” This related not only to the instructors’ academic content knowledge and their teaching skills (faculty want students to learn) but also to so-called “soft” skills such as taking a personal interest in students’ lives. Many students provided a specific example of something an instructor did that made a positive difference in their lives.

Concerns. There were few complaints with regards to the faculty at BCTC. The only real negative was mentioned by one student who indicated that “some teachers had poor attitudes - all they want to do is pass you to get the class finished, or fail you no matter what you do.” This example was definitely the exception rather than the norm.

Positives. Students were enthusiastic in praising BCTC faculty. Several students mentioned choosing to attend BCTC based on the positive comments they had heard from other students regarding the faculty. The faculty instilled learning in the students, not just rote memorization; they provided hands-on opportunities for learning in the classroom. Many faculty were considered flexible and understanding with respect to students’ personal lives. They understood the special circumstances and life situations of non-traditional students. Students indicated that instructors treated them with respect and as “adults”.

Focus group respondents often mentioned the availability of faculty to meet with students, outside of class and apart from their posted office hours. Students described one-on-one interactions with their faculty as making a difference in their success as a student. Most faculty were responsive in returning phone messages and answering student emails.

Several students mentioned the helpfulness of having instructors who were experienced in the “real world.” It was also pointed out that instructors seemed to “care about the subject they teach.” Little things meant a lot to students, such as the items mentioned under the Extended Campuses section concerning instructors taking an interest in students’ lives.

Recommendations. Students mentioned little in the way of suggestions for improvement with respect to faculty. It should be noted though, that many of the positive experiences related above took place at extended campuses. Since these behaviors made a big difference to students, the factors that could be publicized to all faculty members in an effort to “build on our strengths” (in this case, an exceptional faculty).

Meeting community college needs

Community and technical colleges typically have several characteristics in common: small size (compared to large 4-year institutions); geographically located to be accessible to students in communities too small to support 4-year institutions; lower tuition rates than 4-year institutions; and higher quality interaction between instructors and students (i.e., more one-on-one time). Comments from students from all focus groups indicated that BCTC was clearly achieving these characteristics.

Concerns. Few concerns were mentioned about whether or not BCTC was fulfilling its role as a community and technical college. On the contrary, students appreciated that BCTC existed in their communities and many pointed out how they would not have attended a postsecondary institution if it had not been for BCTC.

In some cases, the merger of the former Lexington Community College with the former Central Kentucky Technical College was confusing; however, there were markedly fewer comments to this effect than there were indicated in the pilot focus groups that took place only one semester earlier.

Positives. In addition to positive comments about BCTC’s small size (“instructors care about you personally”), geographic locations (“BCTC is convenient and close to home”), and low cost (“a good value for your education”), students reported several other advantages to attending Bluegrass Community and Technical College. One student who was fulfilling basic pre-baccalaureate requirements said BCTC was a “place to figure out what you want to do.” Others said it was “just as good as a private institution” and it “provided more guidance than a four-year institution.” Students in general appreciated not only the small classes which allowed more interaction with instructors, but also the short distances they needed to travel from home to school or class to class.

Focus group respondents mentioned that BCTC was “not as rushed” as a larger institution. As discussed previously, students remarked positively regarding their instructors’ real-world experience as well as the hands-on aspects of classroom learning. Faculty flexibility toward non-traditional student needs was another positive, as was the ability to transfer class credits into and out of BCTC.

Recommendations. No major recommendations were identified by students in this area. As BCTC expands into new locations such as the Horse Park, Georgetown, Lancaster, and the new Cooper Drive and Winchester buildings, it needs to remember the characteristics that make it a successful community and technical college: small size, low cost, and geographical locations. This includes looking at student demographics to determine such things as how many parking places are needed, how many students have children needing daycare, and how many students must attend to their schoolwork after regular business hours.

Non-traditional students

Non-traditional students attended BCTC for a number of reasons – to obtain additional training for a job, to explore new career paths, or to learn a new skill. Comments from students supported the fact that BCTC is meeting the needs of these students.

Concerns. Few concerns specific to non-traditional students were mentioned. One student remarked that because of family and job responsibilities, they “didn’t have time to stand in long lines” for things like purchasing textbooks. Something not specifically mentioned by the students, but implied in comments concerning BCTC’s web services, was that some non-traditional students may not be as comfortable with technology (and online services) as their younger classmates. In general, the experiences related by focus group participants suggested that faculty members were more responsive than staff to the needs of non-traditional students.

Positives. The overriding theme running through comments on this topic was the flexibility and understanding instructors showed toward their non-traditional students. In the words of one respondent, “my instructors understand that I have a personal life too – I am treated with respect, as an adult.”

Recommendations. No major recommendations were identified by students. As one student so aptly reminded us, simply “recognize the limits of non-traditional students, especially concerning work and family. We don’t have time to stand in long lines.”

Processes

When students were asked what processes or systems could function more effectively at BCTC, they did not hesitate to make a wide variety of suggestions. Many of their comments fit better into other areas of this report (e.g., “difficult to access Blackboard for online courses” more appropriately fit with other electronic and web-related issues). However, students from all campuses tended to mention similar processes that needed to be addressed. These are discussed in further detail below.

Financial Aid

Concerns. Overall, students mentioned their needs were not being met by procedures and systems currently in place. One student indicated that visiting the financial aid office was as stressful as visiting the Department of Motor Vehicles. Specific cases of concerns with this office included forms that were misplaced; staff who didn't always have the answer, or who gave information that was incorrect; the current process requiring students to go from office to office to obtain signatures or forms; requiring the same form to be completed multiple times; and different financial aid representatives rotating through the same extended campus and at times providing inconsistent information. Problems receiving the correct financial aid sometimes prevented students from obtaining books & supplies and required a trip to Lexington in order to finalize paperwork for payment.

Recommendations. Student respondents provided several recommendations regarding the financial aid processes. Reevaluate the process of book vouchers provided through financial aid to ensure that students can receive books in a timely fashion. Ensure all staff members follow the same procedures and provide the same information regarding the financial aid process when working with students. Streamline the process for obtaining signatures to complete financial aid paperwork internal to the college.

Admission & Registration

Concerns. Concerns with the admissions and registration processes dealt mainly with their online systems, and are discussed elsewhere in this document.

Recommendations. Students had several suggestions which could apply to traditional as well as online admissions and registration processes. They included the following:

- Clearly list prerequisites needed for courses, as well as other requirements such as criminal background checks
- List textbooks needed for courses. For example, instructors could send an email message to students enrolled in their course(s) listing the books needed
- Keep program requirements updated. Instances were mentioned where the requirements were different from those listed in the catalog
- Make it easier to find course identification numbers, abbreviations, etc. Several students indicated these were unclear and difficult to find either online or in the printed catalog.
- Clarify start dates for classes this was mentioned numerous times.
- Decrease the number of "course dates TBA" or "instructor TBA" occurrences in the course schedule. Although sometimes this is unavoidable, students felt "TBA" added to the complexity of scheduling their classes.

Bookstore

Concerns. Because Barnes & Noble recently gained the contract for books at BCTC, the extent to which that change impacts bookstore services is unclear. However, a big concern for students – particularly at extended campuses – was that bookstore services were no longer available at their campuses. Other concerns mentioned by the students

included late-arriving or missing textbooks and not knowing in advance which books were required for a course.

Recommendations. It was suggested to hire more students at the start of each semester to help with the larger than normal crowds.

Miscellaneous

Concerns. Student comments that did not fit into a particular category, but are worth mentioning, included:

- Requiring students to do too much shuffling back and forth between offices to complete paperwork
- Difficulties in finding the right person/office to talk to about a specific issue – this was mentioned for online, telephone, and in-person visits to BCTC
- The apparent disconnect between student responsibilities for completing a process (e.g., financial aid or registration) and staff's explanation of these processes
- The “silo” mentality – students mentioned that some staff didn't seem able or willing to help them in another area – students described this as an attitude of “it's not my job”

Recommendations. Students identified several specific methods for improving the processes and services afforded to students: have student services staff members visit the extended campuses more often on a regular basis; schedule the same staff members to visit the extended campuses so that students can establish a relationship with someone who is familiar with their individual situations; and encourage cross-training between various offices so that staff may troubleshoot with a student instead of shuffling from office to office.

Web services

This section discusses the two primary aspects of Web services: the overall BCTC website (<http://www.bluegrass.kctcs.edu>); and other online services (e.g., online courses, registration).

Although many remarks from respondents applied to both areas, enough differences were mentioned that each will be discussed separately. (NOTE: Some students' apprehensions concerning Web/online services may be related to their overall comfort level with computers – a large number of BCTC students did not grow up with computers in the same way as the so-called “younger generation” of traditional college-age students. This should be taken into account when reviewing student comments.)

Overall BCTC Website

Concerns. Some students stated navigating the website was “easy” while others indicated it was difficult (“I just stay off it”). Several cited the need for an improved “search” function – currently, it can take up to five or six mouse clicks to reach the desired page. One student declared that in order to find certain information, he first had to visit the individual campus page. Others referred to areas of the BCTC webpage

where information was out of date, classes on the webpage did not match the printed catalog, performing a degree audit was difficult, and grades from previous courses could not be retrieved. Most students indicated that informal communication was often more accurate than relying on webpage postings.

Positives. Other than some students saying the website was easy to navigate, few specific positive comments about the website were included in the discussions. However, from the many comments about the website and web services, it can be concluded that the interest level and use of the web was high.

Recommendations. Students referred to several specific recommendations for improvement to Web services. They included improving the search function to allow searching by functional area or office name from the BCTC homepage; adding clear links to departments and positions from home page; and listing course prerequisites clearly on the website in an easy to find location.

Other online services

Concerns. Students revealed a number of concerns regarding specific online services. One student mentioned she could not access the Kentucky Virtual Library using the link provided on the BCTC website, and had to use the link on the Lexington Public Library page. Overall though, most comments focused primarily around the use of Blackboard and online registration.

Regarding online registration, a student said, "I couldn't find where I should be" in order to complete the process. Another mentioned that registration closed prematurely, before the registration process finished. In addition, two students remarked that it was "confusing" (especially for freshmen), and that they had to "change their password too often."

Regarding Blackboard (BCTC's platform for delivering online courses), one student described difficulty in saving answers to quizzes and homework. Completed work was not transmitted to the instructor and the student received a grade of zero. Sometimes students would make several fruitless attempts to use Blackboard correctly, only to find that the system was down. Another mentioned that it was not possible to access Blackboard using the Firefox web browser, and that Blackboard only accepted Internet Explorer. In addition, technical support was identified as an issue. One student provided the example that when she called the technical support number given, the support was actually not available.

Positives. Most of the positive comments mentioned by respondents were in reference to the online admissions process. Those students who had completed the admissions application online spoke positively regarding the ease and clarity of the process.

Recommendations. Student participants provided recommendations for how to improve the Web services provided to students. These included adding a link to Blackboard from

the BCTC home page; and broadcasting an email to all online students when Blackboard is down.

Miscellaneous

Some comments did not fit readily into the above eight categories, but were mentioned by students and identified by the focus group team as appropriate for being included in this report.

Very little information was obtained about Greg Page Apartments from focus group participants other than some students at extended campus didn't know Greg Page Apartments existed.

Concerns. A wide variety of miscellaneous concerns were identified by students throughout the focus groups. For instance, parking at the Cooper Drive campus was seen as difficult, requiring students to leave the building occasionally to "plug the meter." Confusion still lingers regarding the name change from the former LCC to BCTC. One student commented, "You just end up saying LCC." Concerns were raised regarding why University of Kentucky charges a "processing fee" for online payment, when there is no other way to pay these fees. Finally, silos still exist in departments and offices throughout the college despite the fact that many processes overlap between multiple offices.

Positives. The One-Stop Center was seen as a big improvement in providing services to students. One student mentioned the advantage of having "generalists" in one place to answer basic questions. Students had fewer complaints about services received through the One-Stop Center, and remarked that the Center decreased the amount of time they had to spend visiting the Cooper Drive campus. Academic advisors were also mentioned as a strength for the College.

Recommendations. Students provided a never-ending list of constructive recommendations to improving services offered to them. For instance, clearly define policies in writing so that students can be held accountable for their role in policies and procedures. Improve and grow the Cooperative Education program – a student commented that there seemed to be far more co-op opportunities in past years.

Put Microsoft Office (especially Excel & Word) on library computers. One student had brought a diskette containing a project that needed to be printed out, only to find the library computer didn't have MS Word installed. For printers & copiers, ensure there is extra toner and paper immediately available. Provide more campus maps of classrooms to allow students to easily find their course location. Finally, provide broader class offerings, both general education and technical, especially at extended campuses.

Limitations of Focus Group Study

Qualitative research inherently involves limitations and personal biases of the research team. While each member of the research team listened to the focus group tapes and identified themes individually, the team as a whole completed a lengthy analysis and

discussion in a group setting. The group discussion, along with consensus gathering, hopefully minimized the personal biases of the individual research team members.

Since the participants of the focus groups were all Bluegrass students, the findings of this study are specific to these campuses and should not be extrapolated to other community colleges within the state.

While a random sample of students who met the selection criteria was generated for each focus group location, concerns arose during the study regarding the consistency between sample selection among the various focus groups. Participants for one focus group were identified using a snowballing approach while participants were called from the random sample list for the remainder of the groups. The data gathered using the inconsistent sampling method was thrown out and an additional focus group was conducted in its place to ensure a more consistent sampling method throughout the entire project.

Conclusions

The purpose of the study was to identify why students choose to attend Bluegrass Community and Technical College (BCTC), gain insight into various aspects of their experience as matriculating students, and glean recommendations for improving services to students. As a result of the focus groups, a list of recommendations has been identified from the student participants for improving the services provided to them. While addressing all recommendations may not be possible, further investigation is needed to identify which recommendations could be successfully implemented by the College to provide a stronger, more supportive learning environment for students.

Questions regarding this report should be directed to:

Office of Institutional Research
Bluegrass Community and Technical College
2647 Regency Road, Suite 101
Lexington, KY 40503
(859)-246-6566

Appendix A. E-mail and Telephone Text for Focus Group Participation

Dear Bluegrass Student,

You have been selected to participate in an exciting event that will impact the student experience at Bluegrass Community and Technical College.

The Division of Student Development and Enrollment Services, in conjunction with the Office of Institutional Research is conducting focus groups this fall with students at each campus location to better understand why students choose BCTC for their education and to find out about their experiences, both in and out of the classroom.

We need **YOUR** feedback in order to confirm areas where the college is meeting the needs of students as well as identify areas for improvement.

The focus groups will last approximately 1 ½ hours, including the explanation of directions and ground rules for discussion, along with the actual question and answer session.

For your participation, we are offering each student a **\$30 gift certificate from Barnes & Noble**. Lunch will also be provided.

The focus group for the _____ campus is scheduled for _____ at _____ in room _____.

If you would be interested in participating in this exciting opportunity, please reply to this email by _____.

Thank you,

Erin Tipton
Division of Student Services
Erin.tipton@kctcs.edu
246-6763

Rena Murphy
Office of Institutional Research
Rena.murphy@kctcs.edu
246-6566

Students' Perceptions Regarding the BCTC Experience

Consent Form For Participation in a Focus Group for Bluegrass Community and Technical College

I agree to participate in a focus group where I will be asked to reflect for approximately 60 minutes upon my experiences as a student at Bluegrass Community and Technical College. I understand that this information will be used to inform future changes in the way services are provided to students. I also understand that this discussion will be audio-tape recorded and used to verify the accuracy of my comments. I further understand that these audio-tapes will be kept in a secure (locked) file cabinet in the Institutional Research Office. The audiotapes will be available only to the research team and will be destroyed upon completion of the study. All information collected will remain confidential except as may be required by federal, state or local law. The information I provide may be made public in the form of a published report or presentation. Information used in a report or presentation will be reported in the aggregate; no individual will be identified.

By signing below, I agree to participate in this focus group. I understand that my participation is voluntary and if at any time I do not want to answer a question, I am free to abstain. I am also free to end my participation in this group at any time during the process.

Signature

Date

I understand that this focus group will be recorded on audio-tape to verify the accuracy of my comments and I agree to be recorded.

Signature

Please print your name

Questions regarding participation in the focus groups should be directed to:

Rena Murphy, Ph.D.
Director of Institutional Research
2647 Regency Road, Suite 101
Lexington, KY 40503
Phone: (859) 246-6566
Email: rena.murphy@kctcs.edu

Students' Perceptions Regarding the BCTC Experience

Introduction (10 minutes)

1. Introduce members of research team
2. Introduce the project:
 - a. The Office of Institutional Research, in collaboration with the Division of Student Development and Enrollment Services, is conducting focus groups with students at each campus location to better understand why students choose BCTC for their education and what aspects of the student experience make them stay enrolled.
 - b. We need your feedback in order to confirm areas where the college is meeting the needs of students as well as identify areas for improvement.
 - c. For the next 60 minutes, we will be asking you to discuss six questions about your experiences as a Bluegrass Community and Technical College student.
3. Read the conditions of consent (printed on the consent form):
 - a. Everyone present should understand that they are here voluntarily and can terminate their participation at any point during the process.
 - b. Although we can't make any promises that changes will be made, the information collected today may be used to inform future decisions regarding programs and services provided to students.
 - c. The information gathered today may be made public in the form of a published report or presentation.
 - d. This discussion will be audio recorded. In addition to note-takers, we are audio tape recording the discussion in order to verify the accuracy of your comments today. This audiotape will be kept in a secure (locked) cabinet in the Institutional Research Office and available only to the research team. The audiotape will be destroyed upon completion of the project.
 - e. All the information collected today will be reported in the aggregate. No individual will be identified.
4. Pass out the consent form and ask participants to read the conditions (printed on the form) and sign, date and print their names.
5. In the event that any students choose to terminate their participation prematurely, this is a copy of our contact information. If you find that you have more thoughts about our discussion and would like to share them with us, please feel free to call or email.
6. Collect the signed consent forms.
7. Start audio tape recorders.
8. Begin the focus group.

Questions: Why Students Choose BCTC and Why They Stay (60 minutes)

For the next 60 minutes we will discuss six questions related to your experiences as a student at Bluegrass Community and Technical College. We'll spend about 10-15 minutes on each one. To get us started I'm going to read you the first question and ask for your comments.

Question 1: Think back to when you were selecting a college or university to attend. Why did you choose to apply and become a student at BCTC?

Possible prompt questions:

- Do you find it convenient to be a student at BCTC?
 - Possibly close to home or work
- Is the cost of a BCTC education worth the price?
 - Did the student receive a good financial aid package?
- Does BCTC offer an academic program or programs that are of interest to you? If so, which one(s)?
- Did you select BCTC because your credit hours would transfer to 4-year institution?

Question 2: Now that you have been a student at BCTC for at least one semester, tell me about your experiences as a student. What is it about your BCTC experience that makes you want to continue to be enrolled as a student?

Possible prompt questions:

- Tell me about your classroom experience.
 - What do you like about the interactions with faculty? Are you satisfied with the quality of your academic program?
 - What do you enjoy about the classroom environment?
- Have you participated in a student organization? If so, tell me about that experience.
- Have you attended an educational or cultural event sponsored by the college? If so, tell me about that experience.
- Do you or have you lived in Greg Page housing? If so, tell me about your experience.

Question 3: Through its website, BCTC attempts to provide useful information and resources to assist students in their college experience. Tell me about your experience accessing and using the BCTC website.

Possible prompt questions:

- Did you apply for admission to the college on line? Tell me about that experience.
- Do you use the website to register for courses? Tell me about that experience.
- For what other information have you accessed the BCTC website? Were you able to navigate the site and find the needed information? Please explain.

Question 4: All systems and organizations have areas that can be improved upon. Do you have suggestions for where (BCTC) can provide better services to students?

Possible prompt questions:

- Did you receive adequate communication about the programs and services provided by the college?
- If you have needed assistance from a campus office, were you questions answered when you approached college personnel?

Question 5: You may or may not know that Lexington Community College and Central Kentucky Technical College merged last year to form BCTC. Did this merger have any effect on your decision to attend BCTC or remain a continuing student?

Possible prompt questions:

- Did you find the name change to Bluegrass Community and Technical College confusing?
- Were you concerned that your courses may not have transferred to a four-year institution?
- Were the procedures for 1) applying for admission to the college; 2) applying for financial aid; or 3) registering for courses different than you had expected?

Question 6: If you had the opportunity to select a college or university again, would you choose BCTC and why? Would you recommend BCTC to a friend and why?

Possible prompt questions:

- What aspects of your BCTC experience have been successful or positive in moving you toward meeting your educational goals?
- What aspects of your BCTC experience have slowed down your progress toward meeting your educational goals?

After each question we will wait for student feedback. We will facilitate the discussion to the extent that everyone who wishes has an opportunity to speak and encourage them to respond to each other's comments.

Wrap-up (5 minutes):

Our time is almost up. For the next five minutes please share any final reflections to the questions posed to you today or final thoughts about your experiences at BCTC.

Thank you very much for taking the time to participate in today's focus group. Although we cannot make any promises that changes will be made, your comments will be compiled and reported to Student Services.

The last thing we will do today is to make sure that everyone has a copy of our contact information (distribute business cards). If you find that you have more thoughts about our discussion today and would like to share them with us, please feel free to call or email. Good luck with the remainder of the term.

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