

Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute

Future Search IV Executive Summary

METHODOLOGY

External

In November 2013, Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute invited community members to convene and discuss changes, challenges, and ideas for the future. They were asked what changes would occur in their respective fields as well as in other fields. Then they were asked what challenges we would have to face and what could be done to meet those challenges. Finally, they were asked to select three priorities for the college to focus on when writing the 2015-2020 Strategic Plan. All written responses were collected, transcribed, and coded.

Internal

During the fall semester of 2012, the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Research (IER) surveyed faculty, staff, and students to determine what topics they thought would be the most important at the college between now and 2020. The questions focused on six areas: teaching and learning, community, technology, administration and facilities, economy and finances, and other areas. The Office of IER used data collected from this survey to develop questions for focus groups. Faculty, staff, and students were invited to participate in these focus groups during the spring semester of 2013. They were asked to discuss how students would be different in 2020, what obstacles students would encounter, what would motivate students, how the classroom would change by 2020, what programs need to be added, how the economy will change by 2020, what local businesses we should partner with, how student services need to change, what improvements should be made to facilities, and what the institution should focus on as priorities in the coming years. Focus group discussions were recorded, transcribed, and coded.

Student

Due to low attendance by students at the spring focus groups, during the 2014 spring semester we asked English instructors to have students write an essay answering the following prompt: In your opinion, what is the single most important area CCC&TI should focus on improving between now and the year 2020? Students who completed the essay received extra credit in the class. All essays were transcribed and coded.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Research compiled responses from all three groups and coded them with both a topic and subtopic. Full text answers were recorded and then paraphrased for use as examples in the final report. External reports have weighted point totals due to priority ranking (each person chose three priorities—the highest being assigned three points and the lowest

being assigned one point), but the internal and student results reflect the frequency of the topic and subtopic because a point system was not utilized. There were 563 participants at the external conference, 280 participants for the internal focus groups, and 51 student essays submitted. Due to the number of participants, the prioritization methods, and the nature of the questions posed to each group, certain topics and subtopics may be more or less prevalent in each. For that reason, this report will examine the results separately for each group and then as an aggregate of all groups.

RESULTS

External

When asked what priorities Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute should focus on in the coming years, the top suggestions were community and educational collaboration, skill enhancement, educational training in select areas, and offering a broad curriculum.

Community members suggested that the college collaborate with primary and secondary education institutions in the area to encourage more dual enrollment and to market programs. They suggested we collaborate with other universities and colleges to ensure courses will transfer correctly, encourage students to transfer, and to make students aware of online courses available from other colleges. As for collaboration with the community, it was suggested that the college become more involved, continue to reach out to businesses and industries in the area, invest in projects with businesses, work with the county to recruit new business, and to maintain communication in order to build better relationships.

Some of the skills that community members thought the college should focus on in the future are soft and/or basic skills, communication, critical thinking, customer service, writing, and other personal and professional skills. They feel it is important that students leave the institution with a skill set that will help them succeed in the workplace and in life. In order to be good employees, students must first know how to interview well, be leaders, prepare a resume, and communicate well with supervisors and other employees.

Most participants agreed that the college should cultivate a culture where learning is a life-long process. They said the college should offer specialized job-training that meets the needs of industries in the area, and gave examples such as paramedic, call center, logistics, distribution, agri-business, agri-tourism, and pharmaceutical training. Another suggestion was to require on-the-job training (such as a co-op or internship) for every program at the college. This would not only help industries find well-qualified employees, but will give students a “realistic” preview of the job they are interested in pursuing.

Community members emphasized the importance of offering a curriculum that would challenge students, help them earn success, and most importantly, remain flexible. Being “flexible” means that a variety of classes should be offered at different times and programs should be able to change and respond to the business community. Some program areas that they suggested we offer were: banking

and finance, sales and marketing, and customer service. It was also suggested that the college offer more specialty certification programs.

Some other topics mentioned, but not as highly prioritized, were technology, marketing, services, health care, funding, planning, the job market/workforce, data, recruitment, and work ethic. Suggestions that stood out from these areas were to offer more online courses and emphasize technology training, to redesign the school website and market the college more effectively, to provide career placement and mentoring services, to focus on training in the health care field, and to improve recruiting efforts—especially for continuing education courses.

Internal

Faculty and staff concentrated on topics such as curriculum offerings and administration, soft and/or basic skills and critical thinking, infrastructure and safety, training, collaboration, and technology in their focus groups.

When asked for suggestions regarding specific class offerings, faculty and staff recommended more clinical sites for health science programs, a larger variety of foreign language options, classes on the use of drones, outdoor recreation classes, and more hybrid classes. As for new programs, they listed: green construction technology, sustainable agriculture, construction, hospitality and tourism, advanced manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, and a program that would train students for animal-centered jobs. Faculty and staff also suggested that student completion be analyzed, that more time be set aside for one-on-one advising, that ACA classes should be required during a student's first semester, that more tutors be available, and that curriculum courses be "stackable" across different programs. Changes suggested on the administrative side of curriculum include flipped classrooms, a longer distance learning orientation, an improved distance learning readiness assignment, the use of podcast lectures, and a general movement towards more online and/or hybrid classes instead of traditional seated courses.

Like community members, faculty and staff feel the college should encourage life-long learning and they ranked skills as a priority; however, they focused on both academic and job-specific skills. They believe students need to be taught study skills, computer skills (as well as other technology skills for the workplace), organizational and time management skills, critical thinking and problem solving, how to work effectively in a group, and how to take responsibility for themselves. They thought short attention spans and a lack of motivation will be the biggest obstacles to overcome in this pursuit.

Faculty and staff utilize the college facilities on a daily basis and brought attention to several areas that may need improvement by 2020. Those listed include: parking, directional signage, elevators, office space, outdoor lighting, and technology in classrooms. Making sure all areas are ADA compliant was also mentioned several times. Other suggestions include leveling the breezeway, offering child care on campus, offering a shuttle bus system for student transportation, providing more food services to the Watauga campus, and having a wider bandwidth on campus. In order to improve campus security, it was suggested that emergency phone boxes be installed in various areas, panic buttons be installed in offices, and more security officers be hired.

Training for faculty, staff, and students was another area of focus. This encompasses educational training such as apprenticeships for students and professional development for employees, technology training for faculty (they must know how to use the latest technology so they can teach students to use it), specialized training in areas as diverse as distance learning and self-defense, and finally employment training for students—specifically on how to find and get a job.

Collaboration was an important area for both external and internal groups. Internally, participants focused on collaboration between schools (especially 4-year colleges), programs (nursing and phlebotomy for example), and the divisions of the school—curriculum, continuing education, and basic skills. They feel better communication between departments is a must. Faculty and staff also mentioned collaboration with industry and the community. They suggested bringing employers and alumni to the school as guest speakers, requiring students to complete community service projects for certain programs, asking community members to volunteer at the school (specifically to help with basic skills and GED instruction), and finding more businesses willing to offer internships for students.

Faculty and staff went beyond their requests for more technology training and better technology in classrooms to address issues about access to technology. Options such as e-textbooks and rental textbooks, video classes offered around the country, and virtual material were suggested as possible areas of exploration. Possible obstacles for these include limited access (because students may not have technology outside of school), limited finances (because new technology can be expensive), and limited knowledge.

Other areas that were not mentioned as frequently include improving customer service on campus, employing a grant writer for the college, charging an application fee, converting to a non-smoking campus, changing social media restrictions for communicating with students, and increasing cultural diversity.

Student

Student responses tended to fall under the categories of curriculum, technology, training, and environment. Other topics mentioned less frequently included funding, infrastructure, collaboration, community, and student services.

Students requested the college consider adding different classes and courses. The classes listed were: video game programming, a greater variety of language classes, a wildlife officer class, a small business start-up course, and engineering courses. The programs they were most interested in include: more study abroad programs, a special education program, and radiation therapy. In general they suggested increasing the variety of classes already offered (especially art, history, and humanities), varying the times those classes are offered, and offering more classes online. They requested more one-on-one time for students to meet with instructors and advisors, more access to e-textbooks, more technology in classrooms, and for instructors to alert students of their grades more frequently.

When it comes to technology, students want to be able to access WebAdvisor and Moodle from their mobile devices. They also appear to prefer hybrid classes to fully online classes. When it came to

the campus facilities, they suggested added parking, new machines in the weight room (at Caldwell), and expanding the library (both physical space and available books). Several students also said smoking should be banned or limited on campus.

Aggregate

Overall the topics most discussed were skills (specifically: basic, soft, leadership, communication, and critical thinking skills), curriculum, technology, training, collaboration, infrastructure, and the local population and community. The external and internal groups tended to agree on the importance of collaboration between the community and institution and also the need for students to have soft skills before graduating from the college. Faculty, staff, and students overlapped in their desire to see programs added and improved, for technology and facilities to be updated, and to have more opportunities for training (whether it be professional development, internships, or activities on campus).

Conclusion

Some suggestions from the Future Search IV groups have already led to changes at the institution.

- Three new curriculum programs have been added: Hospitality Management, Computer Technology Integration, and Medical Assisting.
- Two new diplomas have been added: Nuclear Medicine for Radiography majors and Mechanical Engineering with a concentration in welding.
- Exploration has begun on the feasibility of a diploma/certificate in Outdoor Leadership being offered on the Watauga campus.
- Exploration has begun on the feasibility of expanding the culinary program to the Watauga campus.
- The ACA-122 course has been made a requirement for students earning an AA or AS degree.
- Health Science programs are now offering extensive information sessions prior to enrollment.
- Plans are underway to offer more training for faculty teaching online and hybrid classes.
- A new graduate employer satisfaction survey was sent out in the spring, and information collected by the survey will be used to make contacts for additional student internships.
- The bookstore is discussing the possibility of expanding textbook rentals in order to help student save money.
- The website is being revamped to make it more user-friendly.
- New buildings are being built for both campuses, new furniture has been ordered for common areas, and new signage will soon be installed.
- Health snack options have been added to the vending machines at Watauga.
- All classroom technology has been assessed and upgraded where appropriate.

Other suggestions collected from the Future Search IV groups will be reviewed and considered for future improvements. In addition, the larger priorities mentioned and reinforced from both internal and external groups will help the institution create its goals and objectives for the 2015-2020 Strategic Plan.