

QEP Student Focus Groups Fall, 2005

Two student Focus Groups were held in the fall 2005 semester. Kerstin Brooks, Director of Student Life, conducted them with a list of preprepared questions regarding improvement of student learning at CTC. The students were given a brief orientation on the procedures for a focus group, and the sessions were tape recorded and transcribed. What follows is a listing of key points (from both groups) students made in response to the prepared questions. The key points were taken from a verbatim transcript of the focus group sessions. However, there was a limited amount of paraphrasing where appropriate for meaning.

Question 1: How can CTC improve student learning?

Positive comments:

- The availability of computers is ample.

Areas for Improvement:

- CTC should provide students with more up to date textbooks.
- There should be more feedback from professors before and after exams.
- The interlibrary loan takes too long for students.
- Instructors should try to be more on a one to one level with the students.
- CTC should offer more programs that would interest students.
- Students need more help in scheduling their classes.
- CTC needs to improve accessibility for students who are disabled.

Specific suggestions:

- on-campus shuttle for all students
- library needs more resources

Question 2: How can CTC improve support services for students?

Positive Comments:

Areas for Improvement:

- The Financial Aid department needs to find a better way to inform students of eligibility.
- Students need to be better informed about campus services. (2)
- Expanded tutoring for students.

Specific Suggestions:

- The library needs longer or weekend hours.
- The Financial Aid department should send letters to students before they come to campus.
- CTC should offer lower rates for international students.

- Financial aid should employ students to advise students in the process of FA.
- CTC Departments need to send letters to students with more information on how to begin the semester.
- Letters to high school students who plan to enroll at CTC.
- Hold meetings at each of the high schools to inform students about going to college at CTC.
- Expand tutoring services to the open library hours on the weekends.

Question 3: In what ways can you acquire information about your progress in a course?

Positive Comments:

- Some professors give progress reports to students during the semester.
- Some professors ask students in private if they understand the material.
- Professors provide email addresses—students should use email to communicate questions.
- SOAR will inform you of your end of semester grades.

Areas for Improvement:

- Professors should be able to recognize the difference between poor study habits, misunderstandings and possible learning disabilities.
- More professors need to use progress reports or other forms of feedback

Specific Suggestions:

- Students should always take the responsibility to speak with your professor.
- More comments on written reports are needed in areas other than English.

Question 4: What does feedback mean to you?

Students answered "receiving feedback from your professor at different times during the semester, especially after tests and other assignments; any reply or action taken regarding instructors' concerns about student learning; communication about your strengths and weaknesses so that students can make efforts to improve."

Positive Comments:

- Professors will give feedback to students if asked.
- I can get feedback by attending focus groups like these.

Areas for Improvement:

- Students should make more of an effort to get the feedback they need from their professors.
- Professors should provide feedback to students before the end of the semester.

Specific Suggestions:

- Professors should not allow students to fail without an effort to communicate to them.
- Some students are embarrassed to ask about their progress—there should be other ways to help these students to get the feedback they need

Question 5: In what ways does teaching faculty provide you with feedback about your learning in different courses?

Positive Comments:

- English professors write comments on the papers returned to me.
- My math professor travels around the class while we are working a problem.
- My instructors talk to me and help me correct my mistakes.
- My professors have always provided time in class for questions or help.
- Some professors attach a progress report to a test.

Areas for Improvement:

Specific Suggestions:

- More professors should provide progress reports.

Summary of Focus Group Responses:

Responses to all five questions were considered within three important functions of effective learning environments for community colleges: access, communication, and engagement.

Access

One session began with a discussion about access for students with disabilities and concluded with the agreement that any improvement in services should be for all students. Access also pertains to access to information that students need. Students declared a need for more information in the areas of financial aid, library resources, services on campus, textbooks, tutoring, and general "How to go to College" skills.

Communication

Student responses regarding their experiences at CTC, need for improvements, or specific suggestions involved many aspects of communication. Students need to communicate with one another, with faculty and with departmental clerks to complete the requirements of community college life. The college campus can provide better, more inclusive communication to students regarding support services, course related progress, campus orientation, and how to be better students. Students also benefit when campus departmental units communicate with each other regarding collaborative efforts to meet student needs and improve student learning and experiences.

Engagement

Access and communication do not take place without engagement of all campus constituencies. Engagement includes interaction, inclusiveness, and responding to identified needs. CTC's students would benefit by actively engaging in classroom and campus activities and by taking responsibility for their own progress. Quality Enhancement Planning is a vehicle for the continuation of campus wide efforts to improve campus life, student services, and collegiate learning for our students.