

## **Achieving the Dream Focus Groups Summary Winter 2007**

The start-up of the Achieving the Dream grant focused on improving student success at BBCC. The first step in this process was to examine disaggregated student data on persistence (quarter to quarter enrollment) and success in gatekeeper courses. This was done to determine specific areas where student success was low and if specific groups of students achieved at a lower rate than others. Student success in a course was identified as completion of a course with a 2.0 or higher GPA or “p” (pass) status.

The data review indicated that students were not successful in developmental math, specifically in Pre-Algebra and Elementary Algebra. It also showed that Hispanic male and female students were not reenrolling for a second quarter at the same rate as white students. This provided a focus on all students in developmental math classes and Hispanic students.

Nine focus groups were held, seven student groups and two faculty groups. Student focus groups were comprised of students from specific developmental math classes (Pre-Algebra, Elementary Algebra, and Intermediate Algebra), groups of part-time students, full-time students, female Hispanic students, and male Hispanic students. English faculty and math faculty comprised the two faculty groups.

Students were asked to identify barriers they faced to staying in school or completing developmental math courses and what they thought BBCC could do to alleviate or improve their success, based on those barriers. Faculty members were asked to identify barriers or challenges they faced in teaching their courses and how they thought those barriers or challenges could be alleviated or reduced.

Common themes among the focus groups were categorized according to the respective areas the changes pertained to.

### **Student Focus Groups**

#### **Student Services**

**Student Resource Center:** Students’ primary suggestion for change in this area was to create a central location and/or contact person that provides information on all available student resources. Students said they do not know where to go or who to ask about a range of services, including financial aid requirements, degree requirements, tutoring availability, etc. Students felt that a clearly defined student resource center would solve this issue.

**Financial Aid:** Students wanted more Financial Aid Workshops throughout the year. They also wanted to have access to friendly financial aid counselors who could advise them on the availability of grants, loans, work-study positions, and scholarships. Students seemed to lack an understanding of how financial aid works. They were very concerned about not completing a course, possibly causing them to be put on probation or suspension from financial aid, therefore eliminating their access to education.

**Orientation:** Students thought that New Student Orientation should include more extensive components of what it takes to be successful in college and how to access various student resources. They also felt that orientation should include new students’ family, so family members will appreciate the amount of time and effort it takes to succeed in college.

**Tutoring:** Students clearly wanted more tutoring for everyone, not just select students served by specific grants. They felt that, as soon as an instructor finds a student having problems, the instructor should refer them to tutoring services. Focus group students felt that the math lab was “unavailable” to them.

**Advising:** Students said that advising should be mandatory. Focus group participants thought that counselors were better at advising for transferring into specific majors.

**Childcare:** Students indicated that childcare is an added barrier to being able to complete classes and persist in college. Students found it difficult to find childcare at night and, when students lost childcare in the middle of a quarter, they were forced to withdraw from school. They felt that a drop-in day care would help solve short-term childcare issues.

**Support and Mentoring Groups:** Hispanic students thought support groups on-campus would help students stay in school and make them feel welcomed. They suggested assigning Hispanic staff mentors to Hispanic students. Another approach would be to assign second-year students to first-year students. They could hold ice breakers during New Student Orientation to help students feel more comfortable.

**Diversity Issues:** The Hispanic student focus group participants wanted to raise awareness of cultural events held on and off-campus.

### **Instruction**

**Math Placement Testing:** Students felt that BBCC’s math placement test is a barrier to many students’ success in math courses (correct?). Transfer students who started at other schools had to take the placement test all over again and start at their math placement level, regardless of previous math classes they may have taken. Many BBCC students have not taken math classes recently. In regard to this, students said that classes offered before placement testing designed to help them “brush-up” on math skills would help them place higher in math classes.

**Slower-paced Math Classes:** Students liked having Elementary and Intermediate Algebra spread across three quarters (as is in MPC 091, 092, 093). They thought it was better for them, especially if they had a hard time keeping up. Students didn’t think that there were enough of these types of classes offered, which forced them to take Elementary and Intermediate Algebra as two separate courses.

**Accommodating Students with Families:** Students with families wanted additional online and other non-traditional course delivery modes made available. They felt that instructors need to be more flexible with coursework when students have kids that get sick, run into daycare problems, encounter transportation problems, or have their work schedules changed.

**Flexible Instructors’ Office Hours:** Students said that instructors need to have more flexible office hours. Students’ childcare and work schedules do not always allow them to be able to meet with instructors during specified office hours. When part-time instructors teach classes that require their permission to take the class, students are not always able to locate them to obtain the necessary permission and, therefore, cannot take the class.

## **Faculty Focus Groups**

**Advising:** Math faculty felt that student advising, with regular progress checks, should be mandatory for students enrolled in developmental math courses. English faculty thought that more insightful advising would help students whose first language is not English.

**Placement Issues:** Faculty said that students with different skills or knowledge levels in a class create barriers for other students to learn and succeed. To help alleviate this problem, they want increased (?) administrative support for strict enforcement of placement testing.

**High School and Community Outreach:** Faculty thought that potential students and faculty from service district high schools should be made aware of college course expectations. This will encourage students to take high school courses that will better prepare them for taking college courses.

**New Student Orientation:** Faculty would like a session added to New Student Orientation that would educate students about college expectations, financial aid, and how to get individual attention when they need it.

**“Intro to College” Course:** Faculty said that an “Intro to College” course would help students succeed by understanding the preparation and study time needed to be successful in college.

**Tutoring and Mentoring:** Math faculty thought that trained tutors and mentors would help students overcome their “self-defeating attitudes about math”.