

Big Bend Community College

Community Focus Group Ritzville February 2009

The Big Bend Community College (BBCC) Board of Trustees has asked for community focus groups to determine how BBCC is perceived in its district communities. The emphasis of the focus groups has been the Board Ends Statements on Access, Student Achievement, and the BBCC Mission. In February, BBCC participated in a community meeting and held focus groups with community members following the meeting. A total of 21 individuals from the Ritzville, Washtucna, Lind, and Sprague areas participated in four focus groups.

SUMMARY

This focus group emphasized improved outreach to outlying service district communities. While BBCC was commended for its resources and services, the college was asked to help provide outreach tools to assist with the gap in communication between BBCC and outlying communities.

Overall, BBCC has an important influence on the community and should continue to work on meeting the needs of a diverse, growing population.

There were some common barriers the group believed students in the area attempting to attend colleges and universities faced. Students in these rural areas must overcome issues such as: distance, finances, inaccurate advising, and finishing a degree in the time allotted when they attend any college.

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Has BBCC fulfilled the components of the mission statement?

Focus Group participants agreed that BBCC is fulfilling the components of the Mission statement. It was noted, however, that continuing to fulfill the mission requires that BBCC is dedicated to continually monitor community educational needs.

Community members expressed concerns in regards to: distance, wireless access, and a lack of computer literacy. They thought that BBCC should consider these issues when decisions are made that pertain to services for their area.

What do you know about BBCC? How did you learn about BBCC?

Often members of the community learn about BBCC through the newspapers and mailed catalogs.

What are more effective ways to communicate?

A communication gap seems to exist between schools and parents. BBCC should strive to work closely with the schools to get college information to the parents to help students make the decision to continue their education.

Focus group members believed a closer relationship needs to exist between BBCC and other community service agencies such as: Work Source, DSHS and other social service agencies in the region.

There was also mention of making financial aid workshops available in high schools for students and parents to make BBCC attendance a more attainable goal.

It was noted that BBCC should print more information in other local newspapers such as the Ritzville Journal and Harvester (the school newspaper) to better communicate with their community. Early in spring quarter, send a newsletter aimed at high school juniors that outlines the steps a student needs to take in their senior year to help them prepare for college.

Describe the types of experiences you have had with the college. And how does BBCC compare to other colleges?

BBCC has several ideal community assets which include its location for local students, smaller class size, lower tuition rates, library resources, job skills training, community activities, and a supportive staff.

Are there areas that you see we need to improve?

The financial burdens of education can be a barrier for many students who want to attend college. Students could potentially face thousands of dollars in hidden costs. Improving communication to students about all costs involved with college and helping students make financial plans will make it easier for them to succeed.

BBCC could improve contact with the Hispanic community through the Migrant Councils or the Horizon Project. WSU's "Imagine You at WSU Day" was suggested as a great model for BBCC to use and adapt as a recruitment tool in the schools.

BBCC should continue to improve community outreach and communication to alumni.

Parents also suggested making transfer credit information a top priority.

Another concern was that counselors may not be easily available to students. Advising students and making it easier for students to get the advising they need should be a top priority.