

Community Voices

A Survey of Residents of MECC's Service Region

Fall, 2004

Institutional Research Office

Mountain Empire Community College

This survey was conducted as part of the Achieving the Dream initiative. Often, when input is received from the community, those voices more often represent community leaders. This survey focused on listening to voices of the people. Here are some of the respondents' occupations or work locations: nurse, electrician, coal miner, waitress, cook, mechanic, truck driver, tippie operator, teacher, hair stylist, sales clerk, pharmacy technician, dispatcher, social worker, prison guard, bank teller, car dealership, computer networking, home health care, grocery, construction, secretary, supervisor.

MECC is fortunate to have students who are Americorps members. They had already gone through an extensive selection process, so we knew we had a committed group. They were trained and employed to conduct face-to-face surveys in their communities. A great deal of gratitude is extended to Dr. Sue Graham, Americorps Program Director, for her enthusiastic involvement in this project. She provided much support and direction to the Americorps members as they conducted the surveys. Our goal was to provide these students with an educational experience, as well as employment. Our thanks go to:

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Summary

Methodology: Forty student members of MECC’s Americorps program conducted face-to-face interviews with members of households in their communities. A target was set to obtain 200 interviews; 209 were completed. Survey questions focused on identifying barriers to enrolling and succeeding in college.

Approximately one in every fifteen residents in MECC’s service region enroll in a credit or non-credit class each year. Therefore, it was anticipated that interviewing former or current students would be a very real possibility. Survey questions were constructed to address these different levels of experiences residents would have had with MECC.

Respondents: Of the 209 respondents –

- Forty-two percent had never attended MECC as students; however, 45% of this “never attended” group said they had thought of taking classes. Further, 58% of this group reported they had family members who had attended MECC.
- Forty-one percent had previously been students at MECC.
- Sixteen percent were current students.

Barriers to College Success: The primary issues identified by all three respondent groups were:

- Costs associated with going to college
- Finding time for both college and their work or family responsibilities
- Lack of child care
- Lack of or unreliable transportation
- Lack of family support

Supports for College Success: Overwhelmingly, financial assistance was the primary support provided to help students.

- The “never attended” group felt financial assistance, family support and self-motivation were the primary supports for their family members who were or had been students at MECC.
- The “previous” students (79%) felt the primary support was financial assistance, followed by supportive teachers and friends or fellow students at the college. These were followed by advisors, tutoring and work study.
- The “current” students (88%) also name financial assistance as the primary support, followed by friends and fellow students at the college, and supportive teachers.

Characteristics of 209 Respondents to a Community Survey

	<u>Never Attended MECC</u>	<u>Previous Student</u>	<u>Current Student</u>
Age			
Average Age	36 years	38 years	30 years
Age Range	18 – 73 years	19 – 68 years	18 – 56 years
Gender			
Male	40%	33%	23%
Female	60%	67%	77%
Head of Household			
Respondent	49%	55%	27%
Spouse	29%	36%	36%
Parent	16%	6%	36%
Other	6%	4%	0%
Currently Employed			
Full-Time	83%	92%	45%
Part-Time	17%	8%	55%

Geographical Distribution

Given the constraints of time and resources, a stratified, random sampling of MECC's service region residents could not be obtained. An effort was made to obtain a representative sample. The Americorps members' residences were located throughout the service region, so they were instructed to interview members of their local communities.

	<u>MECC Service Region Population</u>	<u>Survey Respondents</u>
Wise County	39%	37%
Lee County	22%	22%
Scott County	21%	19%
Dickenson County	15%	13%
Norton City	4%	9%
Total Population	108,570	209

Overall, how well do you think MECC is doing to provide opportunities for people to go to college?

	<u>Never Attended MECC</u>	<u>Previous Student</u>	<u>Current Student</u>
Very Good	25% (22)	30% (26)	41% (14)
Good	40% (36)	57% (49)	50% (17)
Fair	21% (19)	10% (9)	6% (2)
Poor	2% (2)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Very Poor	0% (0)	0% (0)	3% (1)
No Opinion	11% (10)	2% (2)	0% (0)

How have you heard about MECC?

	<u>Never Attended MECC</u>	<u>Previous Student</u>	<u>Current Student</u>
Newspapers	47% (42)	16% (14)	18% (6)
Class Schedule (MECC Today) in the mail	30% (27)	49% (42)	82% (28)
Radio	20% (18)	4% (3)	0% (0)
TV	33% (29)	9% (8)	9% (3)
Billboards	57% (51)	27% (23)	38% (13)
Electronic Sign in front of campus	43% (38)	22% (19)	50% (17)
MECC's Website	7% (6)	19% (16)	65% (22)
Word of Mouth	88% (78)	59% (51)	62% (21)

Community Members Who Had Never Taken Classes at MECC - 89 Respondents

1. Have you ever been to Mountain Empire for any purpose or event?

	Number	Percent
Home Craft Days	37	42%
Pro-Art Event	10	11%
Graduation	6	8%
Haunted Forest	3	3%

Others:

- Governor's School
- Career Fair
- Bridges Learning
- Check on classes
- College Tour
- Went with mother to her classes
- Drop off or pick up daughter
- Awards ceremony and PTK induction
- A Christmas party for Headstart
- To talk about psychology

2. Have you ever thought of taking classes at MECC?

	Number	Percent
Yes	40	45%

3. What kinds of classes are you interested in, or is there a particular program you would like to get training in?

Number

6	Computer related
5	Nursing
5	Welding
4	Criminal Justice/Police Science/Corrections/Law Enforcement
4	Education classes
2	Photography
2	Air Conditioning

1 response each:

Art	Electrical	Contractor's license
GED	Mining	Psychology
Biology Class	Accounting	Physical therapy
Medical Field	Child care	General Studies
Archeology	Forestry	Business Management

Doesn't have time to pursue a degree, maybe some "just-for-fun" classes.

4. Are there things that would make it difficult for you to take classes?

	Number	Percent
High cost	32	36%
Conflict with work schedule	21	24%
Unreliable transportation	14	16%
Lack of child care	13	15%
Lack of family support	5	6%

5. Have any members of you family ever attended MECC?

	Number	Percent
Yes	52	58%

6. Do you know of things either in their personal life or at the college that helped them to go to college?

32 said financial support (3 specifically mentioned scholarships, 1 said tobacco fund scholarship, 1 said Trade Act, 1 said loans, 1 identified the company Norris Trim paying)

Family support and to better themselves were other major factors.

7. Do you know of things either in their personal life or at the college that made it difficult for them to go to college?

Transportation, child care, and work conflicts were predominately identified.

See the specific comments on pages 11 - 12.

8. Do you have any suggestions for things that MECC could do to help more people to go to college?

Providing various forms of financial assistance (including reducing the cost of tuition), providing transportation and childcare, and accommodating working schedules were once again the most frequent comments on ways to help more people go to college. A few suggestions about the curricula and outreach were also offered, as well as a couple suggesting the college have dorms and sports.

See specific comments on pages 12 - 14.

9. Are there any other comments you would like to make about Mountain Empire?

The largest number of comments were positive statements about MECC and the opportunities it offers to the community. However, a number of statements suggested MECC needed to be more involved in the community and provide more information. A few others reiterated the issue of cost, academic issues, transportation and child care. One individual spoke of a concern with being in school with younger people. And, one person said MECC needed a red light at the intersection! (Editor's note: We agree.)

See specific comments on pages 14 - 15.

Community Members Who Were Previously Students at MECC - 86 Respondents

1. Did you graduate with a certificate or degree?

	Number	Percent
Yes	32	38%
No	53	62%

2. If a graduate, were there any difficulties that made it a challenge for you to stay in school?

	Number	Percent
None	13	35%
Conflict with work schedule	12	32%
High cost	10	27%
Lack of child care	7	19%
Unreliable transportation	3	8%
Lack of family support	3	8%
Other	9	24%

Other:

Not enough time to spend with family.

When I got pregnant, I had to get a job to support my child.

I never enjoyed school.

Conflict with MECC staff.

Availability of classes (classes offered during the day, etc.).

I had just gotten married and was trying to work and save money for a new house.

There cannot be enough said about the need for child care at MECC. This is a very big challenge for many students and causes many to miss class or drop out.

Had to work everyday to raise two kids. Is divorced.

Affording food.

4. If a graduate, was there support from Mountain Empire that helped you to stay in school?

	Number	Percent
Financial Aid	34	79%
Supportive Teachers	16	37%
Friend/fellow students at the college	16	37%
Your Advisor	9	21%
Tutoring	5	12%
Work Study	4	9%
Other	10	23%

Other:

I didn't get that much financial aid, and since I have a job and they go by your income, I wasn't qualified for that much, so in result, I couldn't afford the tuition and books.

Family and God

No. No one tried to talk me into staying.

Dr. Patricia Brown

GI Bill

EFI

Dr. Van Rose and Dr. Thompson

Ability to learn

Tobacco money benefit

None

5. If you did not graduate, were there any particular reasons why you did not complete the program?

	Number	Percent
Got a job	16	30%
Conflict with work schedule	15	28%
High cost	12	23%
Lack of child care	11	21%
Unreliable transportation	10	19%
Just wanted a few classes	8	15%
Lack of family support	6	11%
Transferred to another college	5	9%
Other (please specify)	13	25%

Other:

Hard switching from high school to college.

Husband got sick (I plan on going back).

Daughter's illness

Health - became paralyzed.

I got pregnant.

Got married.

Marriage.

Decided she did not want to be a nurse's aid, she got a job while supporting two kids and found it difficult to go to school as well.

It was my choice to stop attending to rear my children.

The program was cut and was no longer available.

Didn't like the classes.

Dual enrollment

I just dropped out.

6. Did you encounter any problems at the college that made it difficult for you to stay in school?

Response	Number	Percent
Yes	9	15%
No	50	85%

7. Could you tell me more about that?

Money problems. I had to have money for family and bills instead of school.

I was unable to attend school for a year because I could not receive financial aid.

I was not living with my parents or receiving any help from them, but was told by the dean that they had to count my parents' income. Therefore, I could not attend school that year.

Didn't have enough pell grant.

Tuition too expensive.

I think my counselor (advisor) messed me up by making me take classes I didn't need.

My daughter got the a virus, and I missed about two weeks of classes. One of my teachers made me drop, and wouldn't let me make up tests.

They would not let her drop classes that she could not handle [without reduction in aid - ed.]. She felt these courses were too difficult and they would not help.

A lot of the classes I needed interfered with my work schedule.

Liked going, but couldn't continue while working and raising her two kids.

Help wasn't available at MECC the years I went to college.

8. Is there one thing that the college could have done that would have helped you to stay in school?

There was not one issue, but rather an array of situations causing students to leave the college before completing their programs of study. Many of the respondents stated that their dropping out was due to personal reasons. Some were affected by cost/finances, child care, and transportation. A few mentioned feeling they did not get the support they needed at the college, and a few stated the need for more accessible classes.

See specific comments on pages 15 - 16.

Community Members Who Are Currently Students at MECC - 34 Respondents

1. Are you enrolled in a program or just taking some classes?

	Number	Percent
Just taking some classes	11	32%
In a program	23	68%

2. Do you plan to complete the program?

	Number	Percent
Yes	22	96%
No	1	4%

3. Are there any difficulties that are making it a challenge for you to stay in school?

	Number	Percent
High cost	9	32%
Conflict with work schedule	9	32%
Lack of child care	4	14%
Lack of family support	4	14%
Unreliable transportation	3	11%
None	8	29%
Other	4	14%

Other:

Gas.

Though I do get help (financial aid), it still costs a lot and some people who are not eligible for financial aid cannot go unless they work and then that makes it hard to find time for school. I get financial aid, but my parents still end up paying about \$500 if not more each semester.

I work, go to class and have kids. My husband thinks I should give school up and concentrate on a real job.

Making the time.

4. Are you receiving any support from MECC that helps you to stay in school?

	Number	Percent
Financial Aid	30	88%
Friend at the college (fellow students)	16	47%
Supportive Teachers	10	29%
Work Study	2	6%
Tutoring	2	6%
Your Advisor	2	6%
Other	4	12%

Other comments

The class is paid for through a grant.

College is not a choice really. I have to go because my parents would kill me otherwise.

Yes, my fiance has played a big role in me attending college and wanting to graduate.

I want to change my major to Physical Therapy.

Academic Scholarships

5. Do you have any suggestions for things that MECC could do to help more people go to college?

Seven had no suggestions. Providing accessible classes – e.g., online, video, night, and off campus – were the suggestions most offered, which seems to fall into the theme of accommodating students' personal/work schedules; followed by suggestions to reduce cost or provide more financial services; and providing transportation and child care. One additional element was to provide more recruitment and information about the college.

See specific comments on page 17.

In Their Own Voices

Community member who had never attended MECC, identified the following issues in family members' personal lives or at college that made it difficult for them to go to college:

Transportation

Weather made traveling difficult.

No, not really, just the drive to the college.

Transportation, the bus schedule did not work with their schedule.

Distance and traveling. Had a hard time finding advisor.

Transportation and financial matters for both.

The distance, especially since gas is so high.

Transportation.

Their car broke down and could not find a way to get to MECC.

High gas prices. An old car, very old.

Just driving there everyday, gets costly.

Transportation to and from the college made it difficult for her.

Forms of textbooks, transportation problems.

No transportation, work schedule--the workplace wouldn't work with the person.

Childcare

Finding a babysitter.

Had two children.

Daycare for their kids.

Child care.

Other times when child care was not available.

She had to drop out because she lost her babysitter and couldn't find one soon enough to finish.

Raising three children as a single parent.

Lack of child support to further continue her education.

Lack of child support, lack of child care.

Lack of child care, high cost.

Work Schedule

Trying to fit classes around work schedule.

Work conflict.

Schedule conflicts.

Work schedule.

Trying to find time in between working and taking care of a family.

Finding the time to go and work.

Work.

Other difficulties

Financial Problems.

Income.

My daughter didn't want to go, but we made her. Now, she's glad.

He didn't really want to be there.

Her lack of confidence, but clubs and activities helped her.

Family disagreed with choice.

Personal life .

Courses weren't completed.

For those who had never attended MECC, here are their suggestions for things that MECC could do to help more people go to college.

Cost

Possibly set up some sort of aid that gives the student money every so often for gas and car repair. That would help a lot.

Lower tuition

Lower the cost or guidelines to get financial aid.

Cost is too high.

Reduce tuition and offer more curricula over the net.

More scholarships. Let more students go to college to get an education without a high school diploma.

Lower the cost of tuition and fees.

MECC shouldn't base pell grant on parents' income because they should help students if students are willing to learn and prepare for the future.

More available scholarships, workshops at high school to make students more aware of things the college does.

More funding

Need to re-evaluate income for families with moderate income.

Provide more night classes. Provide more financial aid for working people - the middle class falls through the cracks by not affording to pay themselves but make too much to be eligible for financial aid.

Offer more scholarships to help aid students in going to college.

Scholarships.

Try to lower the cost.

The cost because some people are not able to get financial aid or scholarship money.

Financial aid helps.

Transportation

Some transportation from Wise County to Big Stone Gap.

Lower the cost. Provide some type of public or school funding transportation.

Provide transportation for each county such as a bus, van, etc.

Make transportation more available.

Provide some type of transportation for the ones that can not afford it.

Better transportation.

Provide transportation

Provide transportation

Provide transportation

Buses to the college would help.

They need a bus to come from Gate City to MECC.

Buses. Some I think use some form of bus system there now through MEOC but there needs to be a better bus system.

Childcare

Consider helping the ones with financial problems, and have maybe a childcare free for students.

I guess they should have some type of daycare center up there if they want older people to go to school. I don't have kids, but a lot of people do and would probably go if they could get a babysitter.

Offer child care, transportation, more courses at off-campus sites, and more funding to pay for classes and books.

A daycare center for people who have children.

A child care program could help single parents.

Day care for young children.

Help provide child care.

More daycare, maybe even some activities for children while parents are in class.

Accessibility and Accommodation

Maybe offer classes at many different times. It's hard to go to school and work at the same time. Some employers will help people, but my work will not.

To accommodate work schedules more.

Mountain Empire has a good selection of classes, however some are not available at night such as geometry, etc. math. This makes it difficult to finish a degree.

Make more distance classes.

They could have more classes to work around people's work schedule.

More off campus classes in local schools.

Curricular

Physical therapy program

Try to make classes fun for the students.

Different classes.

Limit the curriculum so that older students would not be overwhelmed.

Create smaller classes, more parking spaces.

Offer larger enrollment numbers for video classes.

Maybe offer some senior citizen classes, slower paced things and transportation.

Outreach

Do more surveys like this one.

Need to let the public know more about what is being offered

Advertise more.

Get more involved in high schools and allow students to visit or give tours.

Encourage the older generation who are wanting to receive higher education.

Be more like a 4-year school!

They need a gym, a basketball team, a softball team (athletic sports).

Have a football team.

Maybe if they could get dorms on campus.

Dormitory, more 4 year programs

When asked for any other comments they wished to make about MECC, here were the responses:

Supportive

Mountain Empire seems to be doing a fine job in training many people!

I'm glad we've got something there if we want it.

Yes. If I lost my job in the coal industry, it would be great to have the opportunity to get some other training, so a person my age could find other employment. Thank you.

It is very good that the college is helping all people at a reasonable price.

I think it gives good opportunities for students to learn.

It's great that they provide so many opportunities to people who would not have them otherwise.

It provides a lot of opportunities for people to achieve goals.

It's a nice place to attend.

I think for people who don't want or need a bachelor's degree, it is a great option or a good starting point.

I know it was real good for my nephews.

Nice to have the college in the community.

I think it would be a good college.

Outreach

Get out there more and involved in young kids' lives.

Need to have more community-based activities on campus.

Need to get more information to high schools and more open to the public.

MECC should send more detailed information through the mail because it is somewhat intimidating for older people to go to the campus for the first time.

Maybe they could have a few nights a year for campus orientation for older people so they won't feel out of place.

They should send more detailed information that is in layman's terms so people won't feel so inadequate when looking at that list of classes.

Cost

They need to offer more funding for low-income students.

If the tuition and fees were lowered, a lot more people would probably be able to attend college.

The federal government needs to lower guidelines for aid.

Curricular

Make more classes transferable.

When will there be a bigger selection of Bachelor programs?

They should provide mechanic classes.

Others

I wish transportation to MECC could be better. A lot of people can't drive, don't have cars, or can't afford gas. Buses to MECC would allow more students to attend.

It's just hard to be out of school for so long and then go back with all those young kids.

Plus, they should help people find a job around here (if they don't already do that) because it's a bad market here if you've got any skills you want to use.

It would be easier if I had "good" child care. I'm picky with whom I leave my children with.

Need a red light on to intersection at highway

Community members who at one time had been students at MECC, but did not graduate, gave the following suggestions on things MECC could have done to help them stay in school, if anything:

Personal

Not that I can think of.

No, only wanted to take the specific class.

No, they helped me out.

At the time, I never really thought about it.

No. I was just in high school taking courses there for college credit.

No, I had a good job opportunity.

I was employed at the time, and I just wanted to upgrade my skills.

Not really. My job and family are priority, so I couldn't take on other things that would jeopardize them.

At the time, no!

No, personal situation

Not at the time.

Cost

Lower the costs of just being able to attend college.

Offer more financial aid or possibly, have different payment options. For example, monthly payments for tuition instead of a lump sum.

Give me financial aid.

Lowered class and book prices.

Let her drop to a smaller load and let her keep the financial aid.

Helping with more financial matters.

Child Care and Transportation

Child care

Allowed for more of a loan and have a child care center.

Provide a child care center, possibly transportation.

I had trouble getting there when my car tore up. If they had a bus or something, I may have finished.

Make sure a bus is reliable and continually running.

Adjustment

The college was okay. I had car trouble during my second semester, and couldn't get a ride. Also, I was kind of mad that I was wasting my time in classes I didn't want.

I think that if they want the older crowd there, they should be more willing to work with them.

Have special classes to help students get used to college life. I became so stressed, I couldn't handle it anymore, and had to quit.

Professors could have worked with me more.

They could have offered more assistance, tutoring, help with financial aid, and caring environment.

The teacher left for several classes, and the sub went too fast for me to learn the notes, finger placement and expected me to be farther along than I was. I just couldn't keep up with him.

No one really helped me work around a tight work schedule.

Curricular

More variety of classes.

More class options

They could have kept the program I was enrolled in.

The online classes are a good idea. Those were not offered when I was there.

Continue to provide a schedule that is convenient for working adults.

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Other

Come to fire department more often.

Suggestions from current students on ways MECC could help more people go to college:

Curricular

Offer classes at other places, more range of classes at high schools.

Offer more online and video classes.

More flexible hours and a wider curriculum.

Offering more distance classes at other locations in the Scott County area.

Offer more night classes.

Classes being offered every semester, rather than some that are only offered in the spring session.

Cost

More financial services.

Low tuition and cost.

Find out a way to lower the price to go to school.

Maybe they could lower the cost of some things like tuition.

Transportation and Child Care

Provide better transportation.

More buses and flexible hours.

Yes, maybe get more buses and run more flexible hours and go farther than they do.

Offer more online or mail-in courses. Have free transportation available

More scholarships, help with childcare (day care at MECC) for days.

Have a day care center, like a headstart on campus, and not count attendance as long as your work is done.

Outreach

Do some more broadcasting.

Various people on Billboards, to show various people they would fit in, and have friends like them at college.

Go more to local schools for recruitment Advertise more! - billboards - letters in mail - more workshops at local businesses and schools