

**Achieving the Dream  
Faculty Focus Group  
October 11, 2004**

| <b>Questions</b>   | <b>Faculty Responses</b>   |
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| <p>This college is like a ...</p>  | <p>community. (editor note: nods of agreement)</p> <p>home away from home. (laughter)</p> <p>“leading edge.”</p> <p>refuge for students. (nods of agreement)</p> <p>a beginning.</p> <p>a second chance – or – last chance!</p>  |
| <p>What do you believe to be the most significant factors that discourage students from staying in school?</p> | <p>Lack of day care.</p> <p>They get jobs. They may be choosing between feeding their families or staying in school.</p> <p>Not ready. Immaturity, especially for those right out of high school. It is a different approach than high school and they are not ready.</p> <p>Being first generation. They have nothing to compare to; no support system.</p> <p>Transportation.</p> <p>Domestic violence. It goes up as they get closer to finishing. Husbands feel threatened.</p> <p>Biggest percentage are females; they have children.</p> |
| <p>Which of these are most critical?</p>   | <p>They get jobs - part of our mission is retraining.</p> <p>Immaturity, especially the younger ones in Arts and Sciences.</p> <p>Child care.</p> <p>General biology numbers are down this semester. (ed. note: referring to withdrawals/non-attendance)</p> <p>I’m seeing a drop off in math classes. (ed. note: agrees with previous statement)</p> <p>They have no study habits.</p>  |

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| <p>Is advising effective?</p>                     | <p>It's falling down due to self-advising.</p> <p>I contact all of mine.</p> <p>I don't see them until they walk into class.</p> <p>They don't take time to read information online or in the catalog. They talk to their buddies and friends. Don't make a distinction between appropriate classes.</p> <p>Advising is same from one program to another, whether transfer or O/T.</p> <p>All of my classes are on the web. I have a student from Florida. I use email.</p> <p>Some courses are sequential and they need to know this.</p>  |
| <p>Is there a lost of personal contact?</p>       | <p>Yes. (nods of agreement)</p>   |
| <p>What is positive about the current system?</p> | <p>They can register any time, at home. Accessibility.</p> <p>From student's perspective? Some don't like it. Depends upon their independence, comfort with computers.</p>  |
| <p>How could it be made better?</p>               | <p>They have a help area in Godwin. Could have that in the other buildings.</p> <p>They should have to meet with advisors before registering.</p> <p>I'm on a Strategy Team and working on a flow chart of the registration process. Right now, advising is the second step. It should be the first step.</p> <p>Special orientation before classes begin. This is easier for residential campuses. Many faculty are not here in the summer; they go to counselors.</p> <p>Have one week to meet all advisors in August.</p> <p>That could be overwhelming.</p> <p>Have an advisor code for all students you advise. They (students) would have to get the code before registering.</p> <p>But we have too many advisees.</p> |

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| <p>How effective is developmental education?</p>    | <p>Wish I could everyone to Rhoda. What she does with those students is amazing.</p> <p>We've had data that shows those who complete one or more developmental classes are more likely to stay in school.</p>   |
| <p>What are its strongest features?</p>             | <p>Getting students ready.</p> <p>One-on-one faculty-student contact. Our faculty are committed to this.</p> <p>We offer the Math Lab, but some do not take advantage of it.</p>  |
| <p>How can we get them to take advantage of it?</p> | <p>They don't have time; they work, have kids. Students are dedicated to their family; they get sick and they (students) are gone.</p> <p>Some ladies could not afford day care. When kids get in school, they come back.</p> <p>Don't have gasoline for their cars.</p>  |
| <p>Is financial aid available?</p>                  | <p>We had the WINS program before – that was gas money. Coal and tobacco are gone. They have to get a job to help their family.</p> <p>Financial aid covers tuition and books. I don't know if financial aid has kept up with increasing tuition and increasing cost of books.</p> <p>Gasoline cost is increasing.</p> <p>Nursing students have to work to pay for their insurance.</p> |
| <p>Is health insurance available for students?</p>  | <p>Used to be. Don't know if they are aware of it, or are using it.</p>   |
| <p>What can we do about finances?</p>               | <p>Don't know.</p> <p>There is an emergency fund.</p> <p>We tried that with Student Services – the money is not there.</p> <p>It's a small amount.</p> <p>It is not being pushed.</p>   |

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| <p>How do students learn about financial aid?</p>   | <p>Word of mouth.</p> <p>Willie Harris.</p> <p>If we don't know their need, we can't help them. But, you don't want to get into their lives too much.</p>   |
| <p>What activities are available for students outside the classroom?</p>  | <p>Clubs. We know that students who are active members do return the next semester.</p>   |
| <p>What percentage is involved in clubs?</p>  | <p>Many have jobs and kids. It is a small group.</p> <p>Those that are active, they're really active.</p> <p>For Pro-Art, we have to bribe them with extra credit.</p>  |
| <p>Are faculty involved in Pro-Art?</p>   | <p>The events are at 12:15, activity period. Clubs meet then.</p> <p>It (faculty) is a small group that participates.</p>   |
| <p>How could we get more students involved in activities?</p>   | <p>It's TIME.</p> <p>Many students have M-W-F classes from 9:00 until 1:00 and then leave campus.</p>   |
| <p>Are there ways we could increase the number who are involved?</p>  | <p>One thing is to get students in professional organizations. It costs \$20 for students' national dues. Financial aid won't pay this.</p>   |
| <p>What about the academic structure? Is there anything that is contributing to students leaving the college?</p> | <p>If they can get the skills to get a job, with half they will leave.</p> <p>Half of the freshmen coming in need reading, but they won't take the class.</p>   |
| <p>Isn't that required?</p>   | <p>(A small discussion takes place about what is required and what is not, whether there are several reading classes.)</p> <p>It's a gray area.</p> <p>If it is not required, they won't take it.</p> <p>The VCCS limits the number of courses they can take.</p> |

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| <p>What about gatekeeper courses?</p>                                  | <p>Sciences.</p> <p>Math, at least at certain levels. If they use the Math Lab - but that takes time. We can put them in different math sequences, but that goes back to advising.</p>  |
| <p>What could be revised at MECC to make students more successful?</p> | <p>Back in the 70's we had Lab 99. It was a credit hour. It involved small groups, tutoring.</p> <p>Before, you could take more than 12 credits with no extra cost. Now you pay per credit hour. It is more money out of pocket or financial aid.</p> <p>Before, we've increased hours for developmental courses – up to 5 credit hours to increase time on task on the campus. We saw increased success.</p> <p>We volunteer time in the Math Lab.</p> |
| <p>What other strategies would you suggest?</p>                        | <p>Make a study skills course mandatory.</p> <p>They don't know how to take notes, do outlines.</p> <p>The system cut hours needed in a program. Courses like that, the students won't take them.</p> <p>They have to take the initiative. They don't do it.</p> <p>Mandatory orientation. I don't know what is done in that course. They do some of that.</p>  |
| <p>Others?</p>   | <p>We are allowing student to register late.</p> <p>It is setting them up for failure.</p> <p>I had four do that. They are now gone.</p> <p>Web students are doing that.</p> <p>They have to get their financial aid, then books. Sometimes it is three weeks late.</p> <p>We need to shorten the add period to no more than one week.</p> <p>They register late because they can.</p> <p>Yes.</p>  |

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| <p>Any other policy issues?</p> | <p>They would find a way to get registered if they had to.</p> <p>Perhaps we could make some exceptions with instructor's permission, rather than a fixed rule.</p> <p>I heard one faculty member say they needed the second week to get more students in the class or it would be canceled for everyone.</p> <p>Backout. It's ridiculous. (Lots of agreement.)</p> <p>If they can register until the second week, then let them pay until then.</p> <p>At least don't drop them daily. At least give them until the end of the week.</p> <p>They are dropped from classes even if the class is not full.</p> <p>It's a disaster.</p> <p>They know that if they pay for the class and it gets canceled, then it is weeks before they get their money back.</p> <p>New testing in English does not require a writing sample. We had a better system before. Students are not near the quality coming into regular English classes.</p> <p>The nursing program needs revision in selection of students. It is rigorous to get in. Large numbers accepted, then some decline. Others are then brought in two weeks late. We should have been looking for them in April, not August.</p> |
| <p>Anything else?</p>           | <p>We need division counselors.</p> <p>(nods of agreement)</p> <p>Child care. It is limited out in the area. It's availability as well as affordability.</p> <p>Some don't want to send their kids to day care.</p> <p>If they have issues with teachers, they don't talk to their advisors, they just withdraw.</p> <p>They don't know who to talk to.</p>  |
| <p>They can self-withdraw?</p>  | <p>Yes. (nods of agreement)</p>  |

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| <p>Was there a persistence issue with 4-day schedule?</p> | <p>Before they needed the advisor's signature. Sometimes you could work out something for them.</p> <p>They break the routine of coming to class – due to snow. Some won't sign up second semester.</p> <p>We do a lot of good things – why we (faculty) have been here so long.</p> <p>We used to have 4-day class schedules. Students could their internships on Friday.</p> <p>It was changed due to classroom utilization – mandated.</p> <p>We had our meetings on Friday.</p> <p>We had our largest enrollments after we went to five days.</p> <p>We changed classes to begin at 8:00 am, use to be later to better for students with kids in school. But the come.</p> <p>They need a burning need to come!</p> |
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**Faculty Focus Group – Evaluation  
October 11, 2004**

**Based upon your participation in this focus group, please respond to the following:**

*I felt that I could freely express my opinions.*

|                |       |          |                   |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 7              | 3     |          |                   |

*I felt that the facilitator was listening objectively to my comments.*

|                |       |          |                   |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 9              | 1     |          |                   |

*I felt comfortable with having a note taker to record the focus group comments.*

|                |       |          |                   |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 9              | 1     |          |                   |

*I felt that this focus group was a good use of my time.*

|                |       |          |                   |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 7              | 3     |          |                   |

*I would recommend to my faculty colleagues that they participate in a focus group.*

|                |       |          |                   |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 8              | 2     |          |                   |

**Below, please provide any suggestions to improve the focus group process, or make any comments. Thank you.**

Provide lunch!

(Note: We later gave each of them a \$5.00 coupon for the Red Fox Grill.)