

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

Facilitator: Kent Farnsworth

Note Taker: Sharon Fisher

Student Participants

<u>Gender</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Curriculum</u>	<u># of Credits</u> Previous/Current	<u>First Enrollment</u>
Female	39	AST	50/15	Fall 2000
Female	20	Software	67/12	Fall 2000
Female	44	Respiratory Therapy	78/11	Fall 2001
Female	20	Respiratory Therapy	71/13	Fall 2001
Male	19	Business Administration	13/13	Fall 2003

Did you enroll in college within the same year as graduating from high school?

Age 18-21 3 said yes

Age 25-44 2 said no

Are you employed?

4 yes (3 are on workstudy)

1 no

Hours worked each week?

3 11 – 20 hours

1 21 – 30 hours

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Questions	Student Responses
What made you choose MECC?	<p>Job security. Without education there is no chance to step up.</p> <p>Close to home. Help with financial aid, tobacco funds. It helps a lot.</p> <p>Close to home. Atmosphere is friendly. Helpful moneywise, not as expensive.</p> <p>Wanted to go into Respiratory Therapy (RT) and the closest program was here.</p> <p>Parents are on fixed income; it helped.</p>
Has your goal changed since you began attending MECC?	<p>Changed from Networking to Software. It was nothing to do with the teachers; it was just not for me.</p> <p>Started in HIT. My sister coaxed me to go for the associate degree. I understand; there are more opportunities.</p> <p>Started in Nursing – didn't like it, too widespread. RT is interesting.</p> <p>Looked at different things, being a teacher, etc. Business Administration will help me later in life; but, I plan to go into the ministry.</p>
Why do students change their goals?	<p>A lot don't know what to expect.</p>
Complete this sentence. This college is like a ...	<p>Second home.</p> <p>Yeah, second home.</p> <p>A place of work.</p> <p>Like a high school. (editor's note: I think this was positive.)</p> <p>Good environment. Majority of teachers are eager to help.</p>

<p>What responsibilities do you have outside of school?</p>	<p>I work 30-35 hours a week.</p> <p>I work and am a single mother of two.</p> <p>I'm a mother, and I take care of my mother two days a week. And church.</p> <p>I work 16 hours a week here – at the college. Majority of time I am involved with my church.</p>
<p>How do these responsibilities influence your ability to stay in school?</p>	<p>I have to provide for my kids. Its been difficult, studying every moment. Child care is no problem; I have family.</p> <p>My husband helps with the kids.</p> <p>It's hard to find time to study.</p> <p>Work affects getting studying done.</p> <p>Our lifestyles make it difficult.</p>
<p>What services does the college provide to help you?</p>	<p>I work on campus – workstudy - and I do tutoring.</p> <p>Workstudy in Business Technology; I get office experience.</p> <p>(ed. note: 3 of the 5 students were on workstudy.)</p>
<p>Do you know of other services?</p>	<p>Library – GAIN – Americorps - Math Lab – Web classes – you teach yourself, but still ask the teachers questions when you are on campus.</p>
<p>What types of financial aid are you receiving?</p>	<p>PELL, COMA, VGAP, Tobacco, workstudy, federal trade act, dislocated workers funds</p>
<p>Is financial aid adequate? (give percentage)</p>	<p>100%</p> <p>100%</p> <p>Doesn't cover all; I pay for books and other things.</p>
<p>A correlation has been shown between financial need and the likelihood to stay in school.</p>	<p>It puts you in a tight situation.</p> <p>Working, driving time; it's lots of gas.</p> <p>I have a 45 minute drive.</p>

<p>Are there other financial problems?</p>	<p>In Respiratory Therapy you have insurance and other costs.</p> <p>My father is elderly. If he gets sick, there are a lot of bills to pay.</p>
<p>Is there other financial assistance from the college?</p>	<p>Financial aid pays my tuition and books and then I get \$1,300 more.</p> <p>They (MECC) work well with students.</p>
<p>How do you learn about financial services?</p>	<p>I work here and know people.</p> <p>Word of mouth.</p> <p>My high school guidance counselor. But I had to fight with them in the (name given) office. Mom had to go through (name given) for help.</p> <p>My senior year I came up here and got information.</p>
<p>What has been your financial aid experience?</p>	<p>Very positive.</p> <p>(Name given) called my mom and told her to tell me about a job on campus.</p> <p>The only problem I had was that my financial aid was dropped. They were very eager to help and it got fixed.</p> <p>Support is available.</p> <p>I know people who dropped out; but if they had found out they could have been helped.</p>
<p>How would you describe your academic experience?</p>	<p>Really good times with teachers. I love them.</p> <p>They will help.</p> <p>Smooth as possible.</p> <p>Only had one problem in (class named) – he wasn't fair with grades. Other teachers helped me get tutoring.</p> <p>Very good. Except for a few exceptions in (class named). Very inappropriate. I walked out of class.</p>
<p>Did you feel repercussions?</p>	<p>I was told to do some research on an inappropriate topic. I got a "B." Everyone is respectful of my lifestyle. MECC should learn</p>

<p>What services help you?</p>	<p>more about practical living – provide more life centering things – more religion classes.</p> <p>GAIN</p> <p>Math Lab – helped a lot.</p>
<p>How do you learn of services?</p>	<p>Word of mouth.</p> <p>Instructors.</p>
<p>Let’s talk about advising.</p>	<p>I have an advisor who explains classes you need to take before others.</p>
<p>How do you know your advisor?</p>	<p>(Discussion among students.) Your advisor’s name is on the VCCS profile.</p> <p>The course catalog has credits to take and you can go to that if you can’t get to your advisor.</p>
<p>Do you know your advisor?</p>	<p>(All responded “yes.”)</p> <p>It was hard to see my advisor. There was confusion over who it was. After the 3<sup>rd</sup> time, I saw my advisor on the 4<sup>th</sup> try.</p> <p>I’ve seen my advisor once. I changed my major so went to catalog. It’s hard to fit my hours with my advisor’s.</p> <p>Great. My first advisor was real friendly. My second advisor is real friendly, very helpful.</p> <p>My advisor is also my instructor – it works well.</p>
<p>Let’s talk about the registration process.</p>	<p>I registered in high school</p> <p>Most is done now online – it is just simpler.</p> <p>Before online, everything was taken care of in one day.</p> <p>I like online.</p> <p>Before, there were two people in Godwin and a long line. It is so much easier now.</p>
<p>Can you get the classes you want?</p>	<p>If you get in early.</p>

<p>Describe your interactions with your teachers.</p>	<p>They like what they do – makes it easier if they like what they do.</p> <p>They teach well; it’s interesting in most cases – pleasurable.</p> <p>Respiratory Therapy is tough and intense, but they give opportunities to get extra credit.</p>
<p>What about interactions outside of class?</p>	<p>Email. Discussion boards on Blackboard.</p> <p>Free food – Spring Fling – picnics</p> <p>Workstudy – I work with them.</p> <p>I help faculty set up for workshops.</p> <p>I haven’t been involved. I live an hour away.</p> <p>More don’t than do.</p> <p>I leave and go straight to work.</p> <p>I can fix food at home rather than come back here.</p> <p>If students are taking web courses, they can’t come up here.</p>
<p>How active are you in your own learning process?</p>	<p>We do presentations.</p> <p>In RT we have to be involved – it’s like a big family.</p> <p>We do group projects in AST and Software.</p> <p>Group work in Accounting.</p> <p>Depends on the class.</p>
<p>How easy is it to not participate?</p>	<p>Easy.</p> <p>But counts against grade.</p> <p>Some come to class and lose focus; not motivated.</p>
<p>Why come?</p>	<p>To look big.</p> <p>Parents make them.</p> <p>It’s never favorable when you take a test!</p>

<p>Describe a time or experience that was not favorable.</p>	<p>One time I got the “Oh God, look.” They (named office) did not want to see me coming.</p> <p>Just (named a class mentioned earlier).</p> <p>(ed. note: Two said they had no bad experiences.)</p> <p>Just (named a class mentioned earlier). We went in as a group to ask the instructor to show us how we got our grades. He didn’t feel he needed to. We went to (named office), but no one could help us.</p>
<p>Is there a formal process you can use?</p>	<p>You can go to the dean or president.</p>
<p>What could have helped?</p>	<p>If someone had helped – just showed how he graded.</p> <p>With mine, maybe they were having a bad day. They could have been more respectful.</p> <p>In my class, she could have been more realistic. I was the only one that cared. She could have been more respectful of my lifestyle.</p>
<p>Why do students leave?</p>	<p>Burn out! Coming right out of high school. A male friend didn’t want to go to class. A female friend got kicked out for not coming to class.</p> <p>Younger students don’t have focus.</p> <p>Finances.</p> <p>Unsure of what they want to do.</p>
<p>Are there innovative things the college could do to help students succeed?</p>	<p>More parking.</p> <p>Definitely an issue.</p> <p>Offer practical living classes dealing with faith.</p> <p>Some classes (programs) are not offered. Have to go to Marion.</p>
<p>What about your advisors. Do they help you select classes or what you want to do with your life?</p>	<p>Yes, both of those.</p> <p>My advisor just said, “Put down your classes and I will sign.”</p>

<p>What does this college do right that helps you stay in college?</p>	<p>In RT, both advisors are very helpful.</p> <p>Yes, and it doesn't stop after graduation.</p> <p>With Jessica Genco and the job site. Helps you get a job.</p> <p>Friendly atmosphere. Just spent over \$1 million on Holton Hall – game room, restaurant, new bookstore.</p> <p>Yes, it gives a sense of camaraderie.</p> <p>If they had a day care program they could let students in Child Development work in classes.</p> <p>I was in a bad wreck and missed 2 ½ weeks. My teachers were very eager to help me keep up my grades. One faxed me things and one even brought materials to my house.</p>
<p>What is the single most important factor that keeps you coming back to college?</p>	<p>I've worked at factories – one shut down, another went overseas. It's scary. It's time I do something with my life.</p> <p>I'm like a sponge. I want to keep going.</p> <p>I've got to finish my education. I look up to role models with education. It's my obligation.</p> <p>The teachers. I love people here, especially up in PT.</p> <p>I work in a mall and have worked at a restaurant. I don't want to work there forever. I want a better future.</p>