

Focus Group Summary for Participants November 2002

- There was a wide variety of opinions as to the definition of a community college and whom it should serve. Yet, participants expressed an expectation that the community college serve the needs of the community with excellence. The most surprising finding was that community colleges have a fuzzy image in the public eye. They are simply considered to be gap-filling and what universities are not. At the same time, people respect the notion of a community college. Participants felt that community colleges contributed more to the average person in Oregon and to the total community. However, an average person might not see where the community college fits in. They also mentioned that if there were no community college in Lane County, it would be chaotic.
- There was no general consensus about cost-saving or budget-cutting strategies. However, most said that we should eliminate expensive programs with low enrollments, but only after looking at the acute need for the programs and seeing whether business or other stakeholders could support the programs. Cutting departmental budgets proportionally rather than eliminating underperforming programs was considered a poor idea. Having fewer offerings was preferable to keeping underperforming programs.
- There was general consensus that it was necessary to raise tuition to offset increasing expenses on a regular basis, but that this should be coupled with offering more financial assistance (financial aid & scholarships), if possible, in order to maintain a certain level of accessibility. It was felt that raising tuition and fees helps to maintain integrity and quality.
- Most were not in favor of reducing school operating hours. In fact, they thought we should do just the opposite and use it more to capacity. However, some were in favor of limiting administrative or service hours.
- There was general consensus that property owners should not be the main citizens funding education. They also felt that it was no longer typical for Oregonians to think that funding was more than adequate for schools to operate effectively. Most were in favor of a sales tax to fund education, but they did not think the typical citizen would agree.
- We learned that financial aid package bargaining is quite common among students. “Students look for the best bang for their buck, so there is economic competition. They attend the first two years at LCC because of the value received.”
- There was general agreement that the core of our mission should remain the same in good times and in bad. We were reminded that a recession is limited in time and that we shouldn’t be flip-flopping on our mission.
- Discussions clearly demonstrate that though LCC has been around for a number of years and people generally hold Lane in high regard, they do not fully understand what Lane really is or does. It is important that we clearly define our image, that we better communicate that image to the public, and that we become more visible.
- There was a strong trust level in the management of the college given that the groups support the actions of the college even though it’s not clear to them what we do.
- There was an overwhelming feeling of gratitude for Lane and what it has done for the community. Nearly all of the participants had had positive experiences with Lane either by having taken courses themselves or through a family member or friend who had attended the college.

1. The Most Important Factors College Applicants Use in Selecting a College:

- Accommodations of special needs & learning disabilities
- Admission requirements
- Campus climate & social atmosphere
 - Familiarity with campus
 - Comfort level
 - Multi-cultural sensitivity
 - Philosophy & world view
 - Personal attention (from teachers & staff)
- Community
 - Amenities
 - Attractiveness
- Cost & perceived value
 - Financial aid
 - Scholarship opportunities (athletic or academic)
- Programs & Activities
 - Flexibility of curriculum
 - Courses offered
 - Programs offered (academic & vocational)
 - Activities (availability of sports)
 - Degrees available
 - Engaging classes
 - Appropriate level of challenge for student desires & success
 - Personal ambition (i.e. Future goals)
- Flexibility
 - scheduling & curriculum
 - Catering to working adults
 - Accessibility to classes
- Honest advertising
- Housing
 - appropriateness
 - proximity to campus
- Infrastructure
- Location
 - Convenience of getting to and around campus
 - Proximity to home
- Pressure from High School Counselors
- Pressure from parents (where parents want you to go and/or where they went)
- Pressure from peers (where friends go)
- Prestige (reputation, rating/value of programs entering, selectivity, recommendation of others)
- Size
 - Classes
 - Institution
 - Community
- Student services (availability of tutors and counseling)
- Transferability of credits/ assessment of credits/ accreditation

Top Factors by Group

Group 1: Selected Members of Advisory Committees

In Normal Economic Times

1. Cost
2. Admission requirements
3. Location/Convenience
4. Programs
5. Campus climate
6. Prestige/Reputation

In Uncertain Economic Times

1. Cost
2. Admission requirements
3. Location/Convenience
4. Programs
5. Campus climate
6. Prestige/Reputation

Group 2: High School Principals

In Normal Economic Times

1. Cost
2. Location/Convenience
3. Admission requirements
4. Programs
5. Campus climate
6. Prestige/Reputation

In Uncertain Economic Times

1. Cost
2. Location/Convenience
3. Admission requirements
4. Programs
5. Campus climate
6. Prestige/Reputation

Group 3: Representatives of Local Colleges

For the traditional student:

In Normal Economic Times

1. Programs
2. Prestige/Reputation
3. Cost
4. Location/Convenience
5. Admission requirements
6. Transferability

In Uncertain Economic Times

1. Programs
2. Cost
3. Location
4. Prestige/Reputation
5. Admission requirements
6. Transferability

For the non-traditional student

In Normal Economic Times

1. Cost
2. Programs
3. Prestige/Reputation
4. Location/Convenience
5. Admission requirements
6. Transferability

In Uncertain Economic Times

1. Programs
2. Cost
3. Location/Convenience
4. Prestige/Reputation
5. Admission requirements
6. Transferability

Group 4: Donors

In Normal Economic Times

1. Cost
2. Programs
3. Location/Convenience
4. Prestige/Reputation

In Uncertain Economic Times

1. Cost
2. Location/Convenience
3. Programs
4. Prestige/Reputation

- Four factors were named among the top by every group: Cost, Programs, Location/Convenience, & Prestige/Reputation
- Cost includes perceived value, availability of financial aid and scholarships. It is not based on the price of tuition alone.
- Representatives of local colleges were the only ones to hold “transferability” as one of the top factors, although it was mentioned by all of the groups.
- Campus climate was among the top factors for selected members of advisory committees and high school principals.
- Representatives of local colleges rated “prestige/reputation” more highly than the other groups.