

Executive Summary of Stakeholder Planning Input

Steve Wilke, VP Planning and New Programs

June - 2014

Introduction:

Southwestern College works with two different yet compatible structures regarding planning and improvement. One structure is found in our strategic planning which segments the plan into seven goals. The other structure is found in our Higher Learning Commission Accreditation, Academic Quality Improvement Project (AQIP) which segments our portfolio into nine categories.

To assist with these efforts, this summary is provided in the seven goal areas of the strategic plan with notation made as to the corresponding AQIP categories. This summary comes from: mission partners, college employees, main campus students, professional studies learners, and main campus parents. All stakeholders were asked to give input into the colleges planning process. The input was received in the spring of 2014.

Report:

1) Relational Goal (planning) and AQIP Distinctive Objectives And Collaborative Relationships

There is general support for the college's commitment to church relatedness, service learning/leadership, and community enrichment efforts. Service learning teams and the main campus activity programs are supported. In general, folks are pleased with what the college offers and would like to strengthen them. The primary concerns here relate to desiring a larger pool of stakeholders. Any shrinkage in students, donors, or supporters is seen as a threat to the college's future.

2) Educational Goal (planning) and AQIP Helping Students Learn

There is strong support and appreciation for the relational quality of the learning experience, both on the main campus and in professional studies. This relational learning is viewed as a combination of the small classes, the teacher/student ratio, and the desire to connect with the learning process found in both the students/learners who attend and the faculty/affiliate faculty who teach. More efforts to support career exploration and assistance with graduate school selection/acceptance, job acquisition and advancement are desired. Many see an opportunity to improve our students'/learners' educational experience by assisting them in their academic focus, career selection and next steps following graduation. Additional undergraduate, master's, and doctoral degrees are encouraged. The major threat for the educational life of the college is seen in lower enrollments. Any internal or external reason for the college being unable to recruit and/or retain quality faculty is also an ongoing risk.

3) Enrollment Goal (planning) and AQIP Students and Stakeholders

Diversity of background in the student body and the range of opportunities for students are greatly appreciated on the main campus. The online programs are a primary draw for professional studies learners. While the size of classes and programs are valued, growth by adding new programs, courses, and degrees is encouraged. Many desire increased scholarship funds to compete for quality students. Also, a number of programs are viewed as under-supported with staff, facilities and/or budget. The basic values and ethos of the college are appreciated and form a desire for the college to grow with a student body that resonates and desires to perpetuate the vision and mission of the college. Improving retention is a priority. There is a good understanding of the competition in higher education, especially the less expensive options in our region. The competition to recruit students who are a good fit and can succeed academically will continue to be one of the key challenges facing the college in the years ahead.

4) Financial Goal (planning) and AQIP Supportive Operations

Not having the funds to remodel and maintain the college's facilities is a concern. As many facilities have improved, there is a strong desire for everything the college has to be top notch. Also, the inability to more adequately support existing programs and to take advantage of opportunities reflects the college's financial limitations. Opportunities are seen to grow a larger endowment and lower budget costs with more sustainable energy efforts. Probably the most repeated and unifying concern focuses on finances. Rising tuition costs, financial aid not being competitive, and employee compensation all loom on the minds of most our stakeholders.

5) Faculty/Staff Goal (planning) and AQIP Valuing People

The individual attention given students/learners is clearly a main strength of the college. Many persons report and appreciate the quality interactions they experience within the life of the college. Collaboration and cooperation between departments is seen as an opportunity to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the college. The primary concern for the college regarding personnel would be an inability to recruit and retain quality persons who believe in the vision and mission of the college and can help it succeed.

6) Facility/Technology Goal (planning) and AQIP Supporting Operations

On the main campus the primary facility concerns focus on Darbeth/Messenger and student housing. Other campus facilities that generate concerns include: White PE, the student union, and parking. Along with remodeling and upgrades comes the desire to provide additional student housing, and expand the indoor recreation/weight room/ gym/track facilities. On both the main campus and in professional studies, not staying current with facilities and/or technology is a major concern.

7) Administrative Goal (planning) and AQIP Leading And Communication, Measuring Effectiveness, And Planning Continuous Improvement

For most, an atmosphere of cooperation and collaboration exists between students, faculty, and administration on the main campus. The general concerns most reported involved: any loss of focus by the college leadership, leadership transitions, and environmental issues beyond the college's control--both financial and physical.

Conclusion:

Southwestern College is seen by its stakeholders as valuable and viable. Many identify with the progressive "can do" spirit that has been a part of the college for some time now. Examples of growth and improvement abound. A culture of rising expectation is firmly rooted in the culture. This is both good and challenging.

Many fears are found in the uncertainty of our financial well-being and the economic environment of which the college is a part. Efforts to strengthen our existing programs, while capitalizing on a few new opportunities, will be important in the days ahead. Strengthening the educational vision and mission of the college with the personnel and finances that support it will be key to the forward progress of Southwestern College.