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PHASE 1 – FOCUS GROUPS

The following process is how information for this report was gathered and analyzed.

OVERVIEW

- Data was gathered during the visit to Foothill College on September 17 & 18, 2007.
- A total of eight focus groups were conducted with staff, administration, and students.

Focus groups invited input on the intake process from the students’ perspectives and staff perspectives of students going through the process. Other topics of discussion included potential staffing and customer service issues, communication on campus, recruitment of different student populations, and opinions about the soon-to-be new Student Services building, acting as a “one stop shop.” The focus groups were recorded, and comments were transcribed and coded to note the area or issue.

General Findings

Overall, the eight focus groups from which these results were drawn revealed similar perspectives on core issues each group felt was important. However, Administration’s perspectives regarding processes varied from the other groups.

- Programs and services were seen as strong positives for the college.
- Administration seemed to feel that solid processes were in place, but all other groups indicated that there was a lack of clarity when students attempted to identify the specific steps involved in getting through the system (while steps are outlined on the website, the user encountered numerous pages with increasing numbers of steps for each process they are expected to complete).
- While processes may be in place, they are not simple enough for the person coming in who has had no experience with the college, and are lacking clear direction for the most basic of needs (e.g. parking permits and how to get one).
- Processes also need to be simplified for the various types of students (high school, professional, etc.).
- Across all groups, the counseling services seemed to fall short in terms of providing assistance and accurate information to students.
- While a slight concern around Financial Aid was present, high housing costs and location of the college (long drive) were mentioned as barriers for potential students coming into Foothill College.
• Perceptions of faculty were generally only average or worse due to lack of personal attention/focus provided for individual student needs.
• Customer service was an issue across the board, inconsistencies in amount of attention given to students.
• Communication was an issue as well, as information provided between counselors and divisions has been inconsistent, resulting in a disconnect that students see and experience.
• Facilities were often mentioned as an issue, but all groups had favorable expectations regarding the new student services building as a “one stop shop.”
• Need communication processes and protocols for phone response, email response and face-to-face assistance. Phone system seems cumbersome, long hold times, no back-up to answer phones when staff is away for meetings or offsite for days at a time. Inquiries by email have similar problems.
• Website lacks simple format to provide step-by-step guidance and easy access to information needs.
• Need to simplify registering for classes for re-enrolling after missing a quarter. Remove the many roadblocks that create ongoing hurdles (especially for limited English speakers).
• There were numerous mentions regarding class cancellations due to low enrollment and how to better manage this process.

Researcher Observations During Foothill College Visit:

• Public bus system being redone - not going to be coming to the Foothill College campus any longer.
• No counselors on Fridays, yet Friday deadlines exist for students and staff.
• No cafeteria or nearby place to get food; quite an isolated location.
• It needs to be clearly outlined for students that if they don’t attend subsequent quarters, they need to reapply.
Summary of Focus Group Attitudes:

In reviewing and analyzing all the data, the researchers noted several patterns worth noting.

1) The college website is seen as not user-friendly, language/text dense, and difficult to use as a source of information.

2) Numerous staffing issues were mentioned including understaffed, overworked offices.

3) General lack of communication/communication methods between departments/offices (especially with policies/procedures).

4) College faculty and staff feel a great amount of pressure from workload and shifting resources; this plays itself out in morale and leadership-questioning issues.

5) Critical lack in phone system and phone tree. With the phone tree, students lose personal contact because three years ago they lost the operator. This is a major barrier.

6) There seems to be no voice mail option available for Admissions and Records (A&R); students get caught in a hold loop with no voice mail option. This is a major barrier.

7) There is a great need for college-wide training and cross-training with all departments/offices involved. Student workers in student services offices need better training.

8) Geography seems to be an issue between application, registration, testing, and acquiring counseling; the potential of losing students across campus seems to be large.

9) There is a concern about accessibility; all parking lots but one (Parking Lot 5) have stairs. This may be limiting to older and disabled students.

10) Local housing is difficult to locate, and getting to campus is difficult if you don’t have your own car.
PHASE 2 – STUDENT/STAFF GAP SURVEY

OVERVIEW

The findings from the Phase 1 focus groups were sufficiently volatile in strength of attitudes, opinions and latitude of those opinions that Phase Two. The Student Gap Survey was modified to include a survey of faculty and staff. It was believed that this survey would help identify the gaps between student opinions and needs with faculty/staff’s perceptions of student opinions and needs.

- The Student Gap Survey was conducted via the web from November 19, 2007 to December 3, 2007.
- A total of 656 respondents were students, with 24% of those being first quarter students with relatively little experience with Foothill College and another 39% having had five or more quarters, being highly experienced with Foothill College. Staff, faculty and administration amounted to 128 of the respondents.

General Findings

The research measured three elements: First is how important students view a variety of experiences and services offered by the college. Second is how satisfied students are with that experience at your college. Third is how staff, faculty and administration view as well as perceive student satisfaction.

When experience is rated more highly than the importance level, we have a positive gap where the college has exceeded student expectations. When experience is less highly rated than the importance level, we have a negative gap where the college fails to meet student expectations.

Not all gaps are significant. There are many small gaps that the college should see as fundamentally meeting student expectations. It is where those gaps are large, or in areas where the college takes particular pride and places particular importance, that the gaps are significant.
Summary of Student/Staff Gap Survey

• Overall, the largest gap was between how faculty and staff viewed the importance of each service and process, and how important students regarded it. In most cases, faculty/staff saw each element as “very” important and only “slightly” satisfied. This created large gaps.

• Another pattern noted was that faculty and staff were overestimating the importance of services (from the student’s perspective), and underestimating their satisfaction. **Take away message:** Internal Audiences are more critical and harder to please than the students the college is serving.

• The application processes received fairly positive ratings; the one area that could be improved is phone assistance.

• Phone assistance consistently received lower scores than other modes of service (face-to-face, online) across all areas at Foothill College (application process, testing services, cashier’s office, registration, advising and counseling). We recommend reviewing the experiences of students who have accessed these important services.

• Overall, few areas of service were not satisfactory. The lowest rated area overall was the Financial Aid process. This is commonly a target in the gap survey (as they are the college department that must say “No” to many students). However, the satisfaction levels on scholarships in particular were slightly lower that would be expected (typically scholarships are rated more highly than that of college services), and this is an area that needs attention.

• Generally, students were satisfied with the information they received in both print and online, as it related to the schedule and catalog. Online information was rated very high in importance while print was rated lower, comparatively.

• None of the ratings for Registrar Services were unsatisfactory. However, there was a moderate gap between expectations and satisfaction. We recommend reviewing the issue of phone assistance by which students access this service.

• None of the ratings for day, time, and location were unsatisfactory, but students were least satisfied with the class availability and cancellations. If current students are only slightly satisfied with the availability of courses, it is reasonable to believe that individuals who choose not to attend Foothill College may be significantly less satisfied. This is an issue that should be examined.

• While none of the Advising Services received highly negative ratings, the most concerning were the assistance available online and over the phone. These are two services that should be examined immediately.
PHASE 3 - LEADERSHIP MEETINGS

OVERVIEW

• Facts, attitudes and managers’ perspectives were gathered during a campus visit to Foothill College on February 10, 2008.

• Dr. Pamela Cox-Otto and Kari Gabriel of Interact Communications met with senior leadership, student services and academic services.

Meetings were held with staff to discuss the findings of the Student/Staff Gap Survey, and to discuss the critical elements that need to be addressed in any customer service plan.

The purpose of these meetings was to “triangulate issues that offered across multiple groups (new students, staff, administration for example) or across multiple venues at different times.”

Three types of issues were identified:

• Critical: Recognized by three groups and/or at three times as an issue (unaided recall). These are issues where the process, communication and effectiveness of the methodology of offering these services must be examined because of the number of people and frequency with which this issue is raised.

• Communication: Recognized by two groups and/or at two times as issue. These are issues where it is important to look for ways to improve the process, but the core issue here is clarity of communication so that expectations of all college groups (students/staff/leadership/etc.) are managed and all groups understand the process being used.

• Efficacy: Raised as a service issue by students (alone). This is an issue that students have raised through focus groups, interviews or the student gap survey, and by the very nature of their concern, it means that this process should be examined for efficacy.
Summary of Findings

**Critical Issues**

- Academic Counseling including availability, online and face-to-face
- Admissions Advice/Process including info face-to-face, web and process
- Scheduling of classes including times and days (not a Student Services issue)

**Communication Issues**

- Payment Process (Options)
- College Web (Level of Information: Admissions, Testing, Financial Aid)
- Funding (Financial Aid and Scholarship)
- Communication (Phone Tree, Voice Mail, Communication to Departments, etc.)
- Geography? (Locations to which students travel to complete the process)

**Efficacy Issues**

- Online Catalog
- Test Assistance
- Advising
- All Online Information
- Touchnet

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Critical</th>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>Efficacy</th>
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<tr>
<td>Academic Counseling</td>
<td>Payment Process Options</td>
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Observations

- The problems are *highly volatile* among staff and faculty.
- Student Services is ready to look at its broad intake issues.
- There is a need to go deeper (department level) and look at the internal functioning of individual departments.
- There is also a need to look at the ways students are recruited (Enrollment Funnel) and the ways the college loses them (Retention Sieve) (Foothill Data Mining).

Recommendations

- Work directly with staff to streamline the student experience.
- Set aside two days to work with Student Services staff to identify “what is” and “what should be.”
- Identify the “handoff issues.”
- Assume the solutions are staffing neutral (no new staff).
PHASE 4 - PLANNING MEETINGS

OVERRIDE

- All Student Services staff held a review and planning day on Friday, May 2, 2008 to examine in detail the findings of the gap survey.
- On Monday, May 5, 2008 unique Student Services departments met individually with Drs Pamela Cox-Otto and Carol Green to identify the current student flow into the organization and create streamlined processes that better serve students.
- Student Services staff were encouraged to find ways to simplify the process, make it clearer from the student perspective and reduce the number of steps in the process from inquiry to the classroom.

A SIMPLE MODEL OF INTAKE

Interact believes that the student experience is a process that answers five key questions: Can I get it? Can I afford it? Can I graduate? Can I get a job? Can I transfer when I want?

Given limited resources, it is important that the college finds ways to focus its work on students, and to do that it must find ways to move inquiries to applications, and applications to registrations in the most effective way possible. This means that colleges must streamline their intake systems so that the processes are simple and NOT staff intensive. Critical staff time should be spent with actual students, giving them the kind of one-on-one attention that improves retention and student persistence. A simple process for all prospective students and excellent personal attention for actual students can raise the quality of the experience for everyone, even those who choose to not attend.

This does not mean that colleges should not spend considerable time, effort and money to pull students into the application/registration process; but it does mean that the most successful colleges will be ones that manage this “cost per contact” and make it as inexpensive as possible. Here is Interact’s model of core and support services that answer the key questions for students.
Key Issues

• The system has been set up so that each group is attempting to serve students who appear before them. This desire to serve is good, but it means that there are loops of services where students are “handled” by offices multiple times. This results in confusion among students and less effective student contacts by staff.

• Under this flow, 90% of the work with students is done BEFORE they ever commit to attend the school. This means that college resources are always spread thin serving students who may never show up. It also means that once the student is actually registered, there is less time and focus spent on retaining them.

• The process requires professional assistance at each phase because there are few “simple” choices.

• Students require substantial support in order to successfully navigate the system.
INITIAL FLOW OF THE SYSTEM WITH DIFFERENT STUDENTS

Flow Chart B

Low Needs
- Continuing Students
  - Apply
  - Assess
  - Register
  - Pay
  - Attend Class

Medium Needs
- Transfer in
  - Apply
  - Assess
  - Counsel
  - Registration
  - Pay
  - Attend Class

High Needs
- High School
  - Apply
  - Assess
  - Counsel
  - Registration
  - Pay
  - Attend Class
- New to College (AD)
  - Apply
  - Assess
  - Counsel
  - Registration
  - Pay
  - Attend Class
- Concurrent HS Enrollment
  - Apply
  - Assess
  - Counsel
  - High School Permission
  - Registration
  - Pay
  - Attend Class
- College Skills ESL
  - Apply
  - Assess
  - Counsel
  - Registration
  - Pay
  - Attend Class
- AB SAC
  - Apply
  - Assess
  - Counsel
  - Registration
  - Pay
  - Attend Class

Note: Steps 1 - 3 are staff intensive with all potential students where only 1 out of 4 will actually register & pay.
Key Issues

• In order to better serve students, the process must be streamlined.

• While the college wishes to offer access to all students, the goal is to simplify the intake process so that students may navigate from Application to Class in a simple and effective way.

• What these processes show is that a great deal of college effort (admissions, testing and counseling) is done with large number of students who never make it to the classroom.

• It is also clear that the college sees most students as high need and has set up a system to “catch” these students and help them succeed.

• However, the key question is this: Are they high need because of their actual needs, or high need because the system is so complex that everyone needs assistance in making it through?

• Student Services staff were extremely open to simplifying the process for students.
Flow Chart C: Counseling

New Efforts

1. Where there are still MULTIPLE CHOICES in the system: Define more clearly when no plan/assessment is needed so students can self-select (one class only for example).

2. Goal is to get students registered BEFORE spending all the counseling time to create individual academic plans.

3. Distribute counseling by using alternate ways to communicate and by getting students registered first into basic courses and THEN developing the plan.

4. Have preset Q1 course/program recommendations ready to go for all students at assessment so they can commit and register (make available in print and downloadable in PDF form on the web).

5. Promote ongoing counseling once registered (Campaign: Save Your Time & Money).

6. Develop ways to group counsel and create options to deliver counseling assistance asynchronously (downloadable video explanations, etc.).

7. Create Ongoing “Internal” Market Campaign to talk to a counselor.
   NOTE: In the longer term, Foothill College must look at outcomes for Counseling 50. What is being accomplished? Compare retention, credits earned, GPA between those who attended/not.
**CRITICAL QUESTION:** What is the churn rate from Application to Registration, from Fall to Winter, Winter to Spring, Spring to Fall (in other words, where is the Pipeline leaking the most)?

**Other Issues**

- There should be ongoing training between Counseling and Student Success Center.
- Counseling should not be doing intake - Point them to the Student Success Center.
- A counselor should be available on the first floor for drop-ins and to save students’ time in the process.
- Invite college counselors to the HS Counselor Breakfast.
- Evaluate the orientation process to see if it can be streamlined or made more effective.
- Centralize and de-counselor (if possible) the orientation process.
- Standardize the resolution of Registration Hold/Excess Units/Transcript Evaluation/Placement/Financial Aid Hold/Other.

- The Counseling 50 “requirement” needs to be resolved quickly since requiring students to take Counseling 50 and placing “holds” for this failure is not. ***It seems this thought isn’t finished.***

- In order to provide more coverage to students, there would be extra counseling coverage on the first floor of the Student Success Center during these key times:
  - Fall Quarter: 2 Weeks (1 ahead of start and 1 after start)
  - Winter: 1 Week (3/3)
  - Spring: 3 Days (2/1)

**Question: (to be resolved over time)**

Why are counselors doing admits for specialty programs? This is usually an issue handled in the department that is the source of the rules regarding admits.
NEW EFFORTS
1. Ongoing training for faculty/staff on how to refer potential EOPS students.

2. Consider portable computers for use by EOPS staff for processing applications in the field.

3. Promote EOPS inside the college with current students using the Free Books “hook.”

4. Develop a “Mini” Recruitment Campaign for recruiting within the college
   - Checklist of factors
   - List of questions/FAQ
   - Create culture of recruiting

5. Checklist can be used at Student Success Center as training piece for faculty/counseling and as self-assessment piece.

6. Consider portable computers to allow EOPS recruiters to help community people apply and register while still in the field.

NOTE: EOPS staff will still work with “Walk-Ins” but the process will be focused on sending them to Student Success for “Pre-Qualifying.”
Issues

1. Financial Aid is both a marketing tool and a service to students, and as such, it does massive amounts (majority) of work for students who never show up. This internal flow and integration with student needs must be examined for simplicity, effectiveness and clarity.

2. Financial Aid Outreach: Needs to be coordinated with all outreach.

3. Financial Aid as the default location for the phone tree should be examined and rerouted to a more general location (FA has 8 lines and is the default for calls when no one else is found).

4. A Financial Aid staff person will be available on first floor as part of the registration “Triage.”

Recommendations

- Use the cubicles behind the counter in the SS Center for Financial Aid, EOPS and Counseling.
- Create a simplified Re-activation form instead of an entire new application for stop-outs.
- Earlier application open dates and registration to help students commit to the college earlier.
- A deeper process review of financial aid should be done in order to find ways to better serve students more quickly while managing the workload of the office.
Issues

1. This is a self-contained intake system as students are recruited at their high schools and the college brings the services and process to them.

2. This concept should be examined for how effective it is and the cost of the staff time per recruited student.

3. It may in fact be a model for other types of recruitment, but without this kind of efficacy research, this is not known.
**Issues**

1. Student Services will test by offering the smart card at the Student Success Center during the upcoming year and implement it as soon as equipment and staffing make it possible.

2. They would like to take their portion of Counseling 50 out of the class and bring new students to their part of campus to show them around.

3. During registration, Student Activities will bring “fun” activities to the Student Success area to make the area more welcoming.
Recommendations

1. The campus is beautiful but difficult to navigate for new students (all the buildings look similar).

2. Conduct a sign audit to identify the critical locations and paths for first-time students.

3. Create simple signage that can be placed during registration and the first week of classes to direct students to important locations.
   a. Example: Small colorful flags saying “Student Success Center” that can lead from the parking lots to the center.
   b. Look for larger site-specific campus maps that can be placed during registration/week one that point to nearby buildings with “you are here” information.
   c. Examples of non-permanent signage:

4. Look at updating the language and explanations in the “Beyond the Classroom” booklet.

5. Create a signature-welcoming event that makes campus fun while assisting students to get where they need to go.
   Example: A Tailgate Party in the Registration parking lot of campus during registration.
ISSUES TO BE RESOLVED

These are questions for which the answers are either not apparent, or they represent some deep issues which must be resolved before they can be answered.

- Students have indicated they want the new student information sessions to be accessible online rather than coming to campus. It is important that Counseling and Student Success do not duplicate others’ efforts.

- The Welcome Desk needs to be staffed during the entire time the campus is open; otherwise, it may create a negative impression.

- Printed materials are NOT consistent depending on the originating department. Directions on how to proceed are different depending upon the source. These must be standardized.

- CNSL is definitely someone’s “favorite child” but is not necessarily the students’ favorite class.

- If the student’s first point of contact is whomever they speak with first, then everyone needs to know how to help them! Campus-wide training on these systems is critical.

- Signage needs to be improved while maintaining the integrity of the location and the campus design.

- There is some confusion about pre-admission advising and what it really is. This should be clarified and communicated.

- Students need a better way of getting their schedule printed the first day of school rather than needing a personal contact.

- Counselors should not be evaluating students for entry into professional technical/career programs. This is better to do at the faculty level.

- Counselors believe they are understaffed and have issues with teaching and coordinating programs. This is an important workload issue for them.

- The system needs to review the application process and registration dates; both need to be moved up.

- Financial Aid doing phantom packaging is a lot of extra work. Is there any data on how many they process and don’t matriculate?
These are questions for which the answers are either not apparent, or they represent some deep issues which must be resolved before they can be answered.

Flow Chart G: Recommended Intake

Recommendations

1. Create the first floor of the Student Success Center as a “Triage” area where students can be served quickly and pulled into the registration payment process as soon as possible.

2. Add Financial Aid and Counselor Services to this first floor area, but leave the staffing of the triage post to those departments to manage.

3. Develop an optimum “flow” for first floor of the Student Success Center (where do you really want people to go first or does it matter?).

4. Clearly and SIMPLY define the options for the steps with more than two choices.

5. Work on creating bifurcated choices in all intake processes (A or B, not A or B or C or D or E or F).

6. Counseling is NOT an intake point (expensive people doing expensive work for potential students who have not shown any commitment).

7. Financial Aid is both a service and a recruitment tool, and as such, needs to be examined more closely to clarify how best it can serve students. The recommended fallback position is “apply for financial aid anytime in this process.”
LONG TERM ISSUES/NEXT STEPS

Financial Aid Internal Process Alignment

Financial Aid is problematic. By packaging “potential” students, a great deal of work is being created for this area with no commitment (or even an application) by students. The cost of applying to the college for a student is very inexpensive while the cost of the Financial Aid staff time to create a package for a student who has not even applied can be thousands of dollars. There needs to be some way to “pre-qualify” applicants as “real” potential students. Otherwise, this workload can be a fundamental limit to student access.

We believe that a deeper examination of Financial Aid is needed so that serving students, streamlining processes and supporting intake is better served. The Financial Aid staff is ready to participate in this process and it should take place as soon as possible.

Time: 2 days on site
Cost: $10,500 plus T&E

Asynchronous Video Counseling

Much of the time-sink for counselors (and all intake, Financial Aid, EOPS staff) is in explaining the same information repeatedly to different students. The college should create videos that explain “chunks” of the intake process and make the content of Counseling 50 available online. These snippets would be one to three minutes in length and are meant to both promote the critical services of these areas as well as educate the students in their options. These videos would be used on the campus-wide monitors, on the website, as YouTube downloads and as VOD-casts.

Time: 6 weeks
Cost: $25,000 - $35,000 (Ten 1 - 3 minute intake videos)
**Signage Audit**

Signage is an issue for new students and creates a barrier to registration. The college should do a signage audit to examine way-finding from the main road to parking and from parking to key locations on the campus. The audit should be done with the idea that a signage plan would be created that can be implemented during registration, the first weeks of classes and other times of high traffic.

Time: 2 days on site  
Cost: $6,500 plus T&E