Internal Focus Group Themes

Faculty and Staff

1. How can we (the leadership, faculty and staff at Virginia Western) create a thriving organization that generates student success and economic development?
2. What do you feel Virginia Western is best known for in our community? How can we best market our strengths?
3. How well does the academic environment (such as variety and quality of programs, and overall academic rigor) meet the needs of our students?
4. How well do the services and facilities at Virginia Western support the changing needs of our students?
5. How can we help our students and prospective students be prepared to succeed at Virginia Western?
6. Is there anything else you would like to share with the College that might help us in completing our strategic plan?

Strengths

- External image
- Quality faculty, programs and facilities
- Affordable, accessible options for students
- Understand that we serve a diverse population
- Small class sizes
- Transfer students prepared and well-received

“We touch the lives of the community.”

“We truly have something for everyone.”

“Our students have the ability to achieve lifelong educational goals.”

Areas for Improvement

- Communication/Collaboration (internal and external)
- Recognizing that support services are crucial to student success
- Increase quiet study spaces for students
- Address program structure (shorten time-to-completion, strategic course offerings – modality/times, part-time completion track)
- Marketing focus on students in academic settings
- Program-specific marketing
- Connections with K-12/college preparedness
- Ensure resources are sustainable and decisions are data-informed
- Reduce the number of adjunct
- Ensure programs meet student and employer needs in the region

“Support services are critical to our students success...”

“Market to our strengths by advertising our successes.”
Internal Focus Group Themes

Students

1. Why are you at college? Why did you choose Virginia Western?
2. What challenges do you face in achieving your goals?
3. How well does the quality of education you are receiving at Virginia Western meet your expectations?
4. How well do the services at Virginia Western support your academic needs? What do you consider our strengths and in what areas could we improve?
5. How well do the facilities at Virginia Western support your academic needs?
6. What do you feel Virginia Western is best known for in our community? Based on your experiences here, is there anything else it should be known for?

Strengths

- Strong Transfer Agreements
- Affordability
- Facilities
- Caring Faculty and Staff
- Encouraged to attend by family and friends
- Transfer students feel prepared
- Small Class Sizes

Areas for Improvement

- Communication – where to find information, knowledge of supports services, etc.
- Tutoring funding cut and impact on student success
- Need for additional quiet study spaces
- Cancellation of classes due to low enrollment (how does this affect students?)
- Communication of transfer best practices (Which classes should I take?)
- SDV content and structure
- Campus climate – students want to feel more united and valued
- Required instructional materials that are not used in class
- Availability of computers (labs are always full/reduced lab hours)

“My instructors are involved in the student learning process.”

“The fitness center is super great.”

“Others should know about the small class sizes. It helps.”

“Tutoring is vital. I was very upset when it was cut.”

“I would like to see more school-wide activities.”

“Sometimes I feel like just a name.”
1. Based on your experience, how well prepared are students transferring from Virginia Western for coursework at your institution?

2. What recommendations would you make to strengthen the academic preparation of transfer students from Virginia Western?

3. What other issues (such as social and financial) are faced by transfer students at your institution? How could Virginia Western help prepare transfer students to address these issues?

4. How could Virginia Western more effectively connect potential transfer students with your institution? To specific programs at your institution?

5. Virginia students now have the ability to obtain an associate degree while in high school. How can Virginia Western help prepare its dual enrollment students to succeed at your institution?

**Strengths**

- Graduates are well prepared
- Students understand what classes they need to take to complete their program of study
- Students appear to have had strong advising

“Students are knowledgeable in what classes to take.”

“Overall VWCC students are well prepared.”

**Areas for Improvement**

- Students seem unprepared for the large amount of homework
- Lack of understanding of transfer institution’s prerequisites
- Need a better working knowledge of the financial aid process
- Students report they could be better prepared in writing and presentation skills
- Many schools want more direct time with prospective students
- Encourage students to visit four-year campuses where they might transfer
- Clearly communicate the permanence of grades earned in dual enrollment
- Clearly communicate that each four-year institution will “treat” associate degrees earned in high school differently.

“Often times, transfer students seem hesitant to talk with our financial aid office.”

“VWCC students do not have enough exposure to out-of-classroom academic assignments.”