

Virginia Western Community College

Alumni Focus Group Meeting

VWCC Natural Science Center

Tuesday, April 3, 2007

7:30 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.

Participants:

Bobbie P. Irvin
Barbara L. Maberry
Jack A. Powell
Deborah A. Saunders
Judy Lienhardt
Mike Womack
Thelma Simpson
Karen Rayl
Tara Nepper

Other Attendees:

Moderator – Erik W. Williams
Recorder – Katherine F. Strickland

Question 1

From your perspective, tell us what have been the most significant economic development changes in our community in the last five years?

Response

- More PR for alumni
- Expansion of hospital
- Expansion of VWCC
- Building of bio-medical center
- Smart Bus to Tech
- Trying to attract technology businesses – get away from railroad town
- New art museum
- Not enough skilled workers
- Lack of new industry
- Moving of manufacturing off-shore
- Roanoke moving toward tourism
- Retirement center
- People leaving for gainful employment
- Splintered efforts for workforce development
- Lack of engineering/technology jobs in Roanoke
- Huge gap in workforce, but availability and affordability to move from 2-year to 4-year higher education without having to leave Roanoke is improving things
- Business is dying for trained employees, but general public doesn't seem to know about it
- Alumni Assoc. could put together an information sheet about job opportunities and where to go to find jobs HERE in our area
- Businesses need to know about our graduating students as well
- Links on VWCC website to places that a graduating student can go for work

- More links to networking organizations
- Job fairs a waste of time, because hosts are not well informed or enthusiastic
- Fail to educate public/students about job characteristics

Question 2

Please rank these changes by the impact each has had on the community. Has the change been positive or negative?

Response

1. Workforce has not been collaborative – negative
2. Governments not working together – lack of communication - negative
3. Smart Bus a positive to connect us with Virginia Tech

- Bio-medical center – positive
We need to start training employees for this center; need to tell future employees about impact they can have
- Need to encourage young people to stay by communicating increased job opportunities
- The different networking groups like NCTC important
- Positive that we are providing employment for older people

Question 3

Over the next five years, what do you think will be the key areas of change in our community?

Response

- Creating internships at businesses for students important
- Retirement of baby boomers
- Need our own people to be trained for new jobs offered (like bio-med)
- Roanoke a mecca for outlying regions and North
- PR needs to be done to keep our youth here
- Need more soft-skill training for youth
- As we move more to automated manufacturing, we need to look at employee needs and training
- More sophisticated technology will create need for more sophisticated training
- Market to the Lake
- Franklin County is really growing
- Need to figure out how to use Greenfield; marketing satellite campuses; gasoline prices have impact; offer variety of faculty-lead classes there as well as distance learning
- Hire more faculty for college; more funding there
- Keeping up with technology at VWCC and learning technology
- Challenge of informing public about what VWCC does

Question 4

A. What do you feel Virginia Western is best known for in our community?

Response

- Cheaper/affordable education

- Great faculty – therefore students
- Avenue to a better job
- Nursing program great reputation
- Transfer agreements great
- Law enforcement great
- Business courses great
- VWCC allows students to build more focus
- Market better programs
- Do a better job with legislative
- Beautiful expanding campus
- One day have 4-year and even law school

B. What is your perception about the way Virginia Western currently provides access to higher education and job training?

Response

- Let current students know what opportunities for future are available
- Strength is articulation agreements
- Need to communicate to employers and students about custom training, certification, etc.
- Inform parents about opportunities starting early (before dual enrollment) & value of 2 yr. education
- Make sure we are addressing financial needs of students
- Expand on donors to scholarships
- Increase knowledge of students of financial aid opportunities

Question 5

A. Thinking back over what we discussed earlier about economic development changes in the past five years and those projected for the next five years, what role can Virginia Western play in our region's future?

Response

- Training and workforce
- More aggressive marketing
- Expand nursing program
- Develop leadership opportunities and training – entrepreneurship programs
- Constantly educate students even while here, pushing transfer options as well as Roanoke is best place to stay
- Offer short-term seminars and workshops about specific skills and job opportunities
- Exit program – resume preparing class (with credit) and social skills and dress; networking seminar to meet potential employers—this should be in curriculum and for credit
- More accessibility by road
- Not handicap friendly (for example, Duncan needs a buzzer door)
- Aggressively work with school system so students are already on track for higher education – start letting students know early in high school
- Use hierarchy to promote college
- Increasing our visibility – show our success; saturate the public; re-educate the community and ourselves
- New facilities should be promoted

- Re-educate our own employees about our significance and our opportunities; hold ourselves to higher standard
- Get businesses involved and backing programs (and don't forget to thank them)
- Encourage our current students to be more vocal about their positive experience here
- More press coverage on commencement
- Now is the right time because so much is going on
- Bring people on campus – community involvement
- More giving for our theater productions
- More money from alumni and employers and legislation
- Hierarchy of alumni membership; if alumni feel they are making a difference they will give; PR about alumni (in neighborhood newspapers, high school newspapers); set up in high school lobbies for PTA meetings and games; “parent” fair (fundraiser in Fairfax County to sell mulch, raised \$15,000); students advertising to students, peer to peer

B. What activities would Alumni like to see?

Response

- Personalized contacts – simple, summarized and to the point
- Continue newsletters, increasing graduate piece
- Alumni weekends
- Market alumni sweatshirts, etc.
- Newsletters should tell what other alums are doing (facts)/creating personal contacts
- Alumni directory
- Alumni Assoc. do more marketing on distinguished alumni award