

**Virginia Western Community College
2007 Community Survey**

RESULTS

Surveys mailed = 234 (to non-attendees of focus group meetings)

Surveys returned = 28

Question 1

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

- Shrinking Roanoke City population/tax base
- Explosion in commercial and residential real estate development around perimeter of MSA with no urban growth boundary planned or in place
- Perceived shift away from manufacturing sector; changing from manufacturing to more service-based needs; crash of furniture/textile industry (speed of decline)
- Carilion and HCA have grown along with the demand in medical treatments; focus on biomedical; Roanoke has become a medical center for SW Virginia & Southern West Virginia, and will grow more so
- Increase in commercial, public and private construction
- Retail growth – development of more upscale retail/shopping (Fresh Market, Ukrops, Panera, etc.); infusion of new retail businesses and having successful track record
- Major loss (NAFTA) of wood, textile and other plants to overseas (less costly) production
- Tobacco farming and farming in general is disappearing
- Several large companies moving to the area
- Diversification of economy through location of new tech-orientated manufacturers and new commercial development
- Increased usage of Greenfield ETC for both education/job training as a community resource
- Expanded emphasis on tourism and sports marketing
- Retraining in jobs such as medial and technical areas
- NewVa venture capital fund and investments from Third Security
- Continued development of Smith Mountain Lake; major growth at SML, both retirees and telecommuting
- Lack of qualified entry level management personnel – skills of existing don't match need, “strong backs” are not enough
- Reorganization of Roanoke Regional Ed Partnership
- Transportation challenges (highway funding primarily)
- Adverse political reputation of Roanoke City; change in Roanoke City leadership
- New industry relocating to Botetourt and Roanoke counties as they are given generous tax incentives
- Young, educated professionals staying in the area and working for local companies; emphasis on attracting younger workers
- More emphasis on existing businesses; involvement by the business community; thinking and planning strategically; new growth of businesses – enlarging market is creating an effective workforce for the future
- Investment in downtown area; continued revitalization of downtown Roanoke City
- Influx of higher-tech entrepreneurial start-ups
- Declining performance of Roanoke City Public Schools; K-12 (RCPS) focus; improvements in school system
- Involvement of VA Tech and Carilion in driving economic development
- Movement away from large box industry to smaller entrepreneurial business

- Increased emphasis on quality of life; focus on strengths of Valley – mountains, outdoor, quality of life
- Move from industrial to information technology jobs (closure of manufacturing plants)
- Loss of Johnson & Johnson
- Rise in level of poverty
- Steel Dynamics merger/acquisition with Roanoke Electric Steel
- Reduction in “hands on” jobs – and often no planning at secondary school level for adequate training
- Too much emphasis on 4-year degree jobs and not a real plan of action to utilize VWCCs training – more in coordination with high school
- RVCVB Study – focus on quality of life
- Status quo growth
- Successful hi-tech and IT companies growth in Roanoke
- Land value
- Increased demand for goods and services associated with population and traffic growth
- Cultural Center plans – expand/build new Art Museum
- Expand offering of restaurants/night life for young adults
- Unemployment levels seem to be fluctuating in and around the Roanoke area, causing unemployment rates to rise and fall inconsistently – due to layoffs, etc.

Question 2

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

- Influx of immigrant population with resulting cultural/language challenges; increase of non-English speakers
- Encouragement of more collaboration/cooperation between city and county leadership and administration; improved regional cooperation with greater influence from VA Tech
- Increased need for highly-trained medical professionals, especially physicians; necessity of an increase in medical treatments; Carilion Clinic
- Influx of retirees; aging workforce adapting to “retirement jobs”; baby boomers heading into retirement causing an open shortage of employees to job ratio
- The booming of construction, both private and commercial
- Attempted “sophistication” in changes in our market that are not called for, or ready
- Technological driven business
- A loss of “non-technical” employees, i.e., the trades
- Real estate – commercial and residential development; local market will continue to progress in and more so out and around Roanoke such as Botetourt, Salem, etc.
- Marketing – market the region to potential visitors and transplants
- Global networking
- Retirement of many community leaders and need for new leaders to emerge
- Growth pressures will conflict with preservation/conservation initiatives; failure to protect the environment and natural beauty just to collect taxes from shopping and office buildings
- Training with a more global focus, such as teaching Spanish, Chinese and Russian
- Infrastructure in County
- Amenities to attract/retain young professionals; shift to the technical aspects of big business ensuring continued growth for young professionals
- Local sources of investment funds for growing companies
- Continued development of Smith Mountain Lake area
- Determine role in world commerce – what is Franklin County’s niche?

- Development of I-73 corridor
- Further movement of business services and retail out of Roanoke City
- Development in Franklin County (Westlake) and Botetourt County
- Redevelopment in Downtown Roanoke
- Continued growth in the local job market
- Upgraded education facilities to better prepare the next generation workforce
- Continued emphasis on strategic planning for future
- Linking area communities for combined growth
- Infrastructure investment
- Growth in new technology applications
- Improved education in Roanoke City
- Greater difficulty recruiting professionals, especially young minorities; focus on retention of young adults in employment rather than leaving the area for employment
- Service industry
- More people working from home/telecommuting
- Expansion/explosion in computer/IT technology
- Serious air pollution – resulting in higher rates of pulmonary diseases and heart disease
- Momentum for higher growth rate
- Potentially soft U.S. economy
- Hard decisions on the future of some of our arts and cultural organizations; Art Museum will bring more flow of traffic and tourism, which will affect the area as a whole, economically speaking
- Water and sewer availability
- Much more residential growth in North County
- Move towards 4-lane Route 122
- Improving education level and retention of graduates
- Success in recruiting new businesses and supporting growth of existing business
- Need for businesses of all nature to grow and service growing population
- Need for good employees to make these businesses successful
- I-81 congestion

Question 3

If you were to hire a VWCC grad what kind of traits would you look for?

- Hardworking/industrious; well-rounded and well-read (not insular or ignorant of the outside world); mature; independent thinkers who are team-oriented
- Scholastic achievement, ambition and ability
- Desire to succeed, well-grounded in “family”
- Honesty, integrity, motivation, basic job skills, dependability, hardworking, professionalism, positive attitude and ability to work well with others
- Task oriented with knowledge and creativity
- Attentive to detail, dedicated, excellent communication skills
- Ability to analyze data
- Problem solving/thinking skills and resourcefulness
- Ability to apply instruction and guidance to a matter and see the matter through to completion with only general supervision
- Candidate who has shown successful measures in taking initiative to start and complete projects, someone who has the ability to learn a wide array of subject material and be successful with multitasking; talented individual to excel in a team atmosphere

- Technical skills/education in computer, facility management, landscaping
- Training for an ever-changing workforce demand
- Appropriate interview attire, good English and ability to write legibly and coherently
- Values/ethics, energy, attitude, and aptitude
- Communication, collaboration and ability to manage people
- Data network engineering
- Work ethics – willingness to work hard, extra hours, take ownership of company's success; looking for veterinary tech grads specifically
- Strong communication skills, solid language, math and critical thinking fundamentals, strong work ethic, customer service
- Skills and knowledge/certifications, etc.
- Field internships/experience, competitive resume writing skills, course selection and areas of training/knowledge, effectiveness and references from the past

Question 4

Have you/ would you hire a VWCC Grad (or a community college graduate in general)? Why or why not?

- Yes – the radiological technologist and registered nurses from VWCC are well-prepared and highly professional
- Yes – very pleased with VWCC grads, they are mature and have direction
- Yes – many positions are well suited for community college grads; general experience with VWCC has been positive
- Yes, in specific skill sets
- Would like a set of technical skills around chemistry
- Yes, if they have demonstrated not only intelligence and skill, but also maturity, strong work ethics and initiative
- Expectation of good education, willing to learn and develop more skills
- Would hire if qualified for opening
- Absolutely, one of our best employees is a VWCC graduate
- Yes, often mature and goal oriented and VWCC does a good job educating its students
- Yes, it is time we stop telling our children that they must go to 4-year college
- Yes, hire based on the persons attitude and will train for the skills
- Yes, a key source of associate level healthcare professional and technicians
- Yes, in entry level position (clinical), some healthcare positions special fields, technical maintenance positions; most positions require 4-year degree
- Yes, most qualified applicant

Question 5

Thinking back over the economic development changes you identified in the past five years and those projected for the next five years, what role can Virginia Western play in our region's future?

- Continue to produce enlightened, well-rounded graduates
- Continue to promote access to other institutions' Baccalaureate and Graduate programs
- Encourage alternative transportation to the VWCC campus to relieve the traffic and parking crunch; add bikeways and places to park and lock bikes; promote carpooling; work with Valley Metro to improve mass transit access to campus

- Make the campus more pedestrian-friendly; Colonial Avenue should have sidewalks running along both sides
- Keep up with the developing technologies as they evolve and continue offering a strong base in the Humanities
- Continue as you are, but work to maintain a solid balance between high-tech and trades and the arts – we need ALL; continue to evolve course offerings to match new expectations – expect some courses to drop-off as new ones to develop; provide trades training such as IT, drafting, construction, etc.
- VWCC MUST continually reach out to business/industry to ascertain their needs and attempt to meet them
- VWCC must partner with others (DSLCC, Botetourt Public Schools, regional 4-year colleges) to offer innovative, lifelong learning
- To be ready to help train people in relation to the needs of the community
- To be ready to train people for a more global economy
- Leadership in courses that strengthen “business management” degree
- Proactively seek to understand the region’s workforce development needs and provide programs tailored to those needs – in terms of content, accessibility and convenience; help develop workforce; prepare our students to assume roles in growing companies
- Offer classes for HR positions, seeing as how there will be much of a need for this role in the near future; prepare students for the reality of the workforce before graduation
- Great deal of individuals with/without degrees that don’t have the peoples skills or organizational sills to be successful in the workforce
- Language assistance
- Support service training
- Teacher training
- Technical skill training
- Core development of problem solving skills including data collection and analysis and computer modeling
- VWCC is well known in the greater Roanoke area; imperative that VWCC continues to have a presence in area high schools in order to assist young adults with the career path; use of higher education and adult education centers are very beneficial as knowledge is power and people strive for success at all ages
- Making a conscious effort to make entrepreneurship a part of every class so that students will be immersed in this idea
- Serve as job training ground for new/growing employers by providing facilities and instructors to companies through economic incentives
- Training! Training! Training! – not just in technical job skills, but work behavior skills like timeliness, working on a team, written and oral communication
- A huge one – including offering job related classes in Spanish (medical, office, law, technical and professional levels- -- vocabulary and pronunciation and comprehension.) This could be life saving skills in many cases. We need to eradicate prejudice, ignorance and fear of foreigners in this region – its centuries old and just under the surface of many groups!
- Teach values/ethics, energy, attitude and aptitude
- Renewed job skills for displaced workers
- Training for specific job skills: data and IP network engineering; sales skills
- Medical support personnel will be needed for new growth
- Construction trades skills are needed
- Promoting retention of high school students and increasing the likelihood of their graduation, especially within Roanoke City
- Collaborating with employers to meet hiring needs

- Continue to encourage people to take advantage of the community college system to prepare themselves for the growing job opportunities in the Valley
- Offer skills based on certificate programs
- Night classes expanded for those currently working full-time positions
- Offer more online classes
- Attract additional state 4-year college programs on campus or at Higher Ed Center