

# Virginia Western Community College

## Focus Group Meeting

### Loudon Avenue Christian Church

Tuesday, April 24, 2007

12 Noon – 1:30 p.m.

#### **Participants:**

Mr. Calvin Curry, Housing and Redevelopment Authority  
Reverend Ray Douglas  
Ms. Mary Hackley  
Mr. Wayne Harris  
Ms. Mae Huff  
Ms. Eva Hughes, Loudon Avenue Christian Church  
Ms. Marlene Hughes  
Reverend Melton Johnson, First Baptist Church  
Reverend William L. Lee, Loudon Avenue Christian Church  
Mr. Peter A. Lewis, Apple Ridge Farm  
Dr. Gloria Lindsay, Virginia Western Community College  
Reverend Lee Pusha', First Baptist Church  
Mr. Charles Richardson  
Reverend Johnny Stone, Hill Street Baptist Church  
Ms. Susan Willis, Principal, Wm. Fleming High School

#### **Other Attendees:**

Moderator – Katherine F. Strickland, VWCC Educational Foundation  
Recorder – Erik W. Williams, VWCC Educational Foundation

#### **Question 1**

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

#### **Response**

- Internet/technology
- Northwest area left out/not heard in economic development
- Companies coming in and leaving area
- Trouble keeping young professionals in area
- Advantage of Higher Ed Center -- #1 economic impact for some but others question its actual impact?
- Loss of major business/non-local ownership
- Carilion filling some of this void, also Advanced Auto
- Healthcare industry more prominent
- Movement of business to outside Roanoke, no public transportation to these jobs
- Increase in immigrants in area, Hispanic and others – filling low paying jobs in area
- Trouble for low-educated people finding jobs now because filled by immigrants
- 850 ESL students this year at William Fleming, up from 200; also teaching these students to write because they were not taught to write in their own language
- ESL students teaching their immigrant parents how to function in society
- Wal-Mart – New Horizons are positive for the region
- Less degree jobs needed
- Finding employment for those after release from prison difficult
- Roanoke City is Mecca for those coming for social services, schools – those with special needs
- Social services opportunities are limited in areas outside of Roanoke City
- High dropout and low graduation rate in City

- Businesses need viable employees; dropout and graduation rates can affect this
- Low number of high school graduates in City, but region-wide is not an issue
- Roanoke City is repository for low income housing and location for social services in region
- Biomedical Center a positive for the City
- No one solution will fix the problem
- Preparedness for workforce has greatest impact on employment and many need training in preparedness
- Students need more focus on what are jobs available here in Roanoke and skills needed
- Employers want employees with good work ethics
- Encouragement to attend school and go to work

The respondents felt that “Preparedness for workforce” has had the greatest impact on economic development in the past 5 years.

### **Question 2**

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

#### **Response**

- More offenders being released
- Aging population, what are they going to do? – work past retirement?
- Workforce readiness a real issue
- Need a technological based workforce, must be trained
- Young professionals leaving our area - how will this affect the region
- Increased tolerance in region in terms of different cultures/backgrounds
- Becoming more global/needs to be more education on global issues
- Concerned if population wants to look 5 years from now; people are afraid of change
- Controversy around changing is a problem
- Roanoke afraid to change; rest of the region not as afraid, responds quicker to needs
- Population of ESL students must be educated to serve society
- Rethink definition of education; must be broader concept and think more of technical/vocational needs
- Must begin moving technical/vocational courses into dual enrollment
- City schools offering some classes with no future
- Stigma attached to certain technical/vocational education
- Have students all learn a skill
- College preparatory gets the most emphasis in high school; many of our students do not have the propensity for college and need to be guided towards technical/vocational careers
- Needs more emphasis on being prepared to enter workforce with vocational/technical education; needs to start before they enter middle school, give them information on earnings potential to encourage direction
- Non-skilled parents often are the ones who need the information to pass along to their children

### **Question 3**

What, in your opinion, are community colleges best known for?

#### **Response**

- Quick education
- Stepping stone education

- Cheaper/affordable
- Transfer agreements
- Guaranteed admission/open-door admissions
- View of community college as extension of high school, as 13<sup>th</sup> grade
- View of K-16 education (not seen as “college” education)
- Stigma of community college being “not real college” and then student goes and finds it is too rigorous
- Ability to respond to community needs
- Needs to teach customer service
- Teach old fashioned courtesy/respect
- Attach monetary value to all VWCC degree and training

#### **Question 4**

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**

- Emphasis on customer service skills
- PH alums who attended VWCC could come back to speak to students
- Low percentage of minority students at VWCC about 9.0% African-American
- Gather alums between 20-27 to speak to high school students; partner more with guidance departments
- Start in 9<sup>th</sup> grade to speak to them in their English classes about advantages of VWCC
- Use armed forces model to recruit students
- Many students won’t come because they think they cannot afford it
- Show affordability up front
- Get information to parents as well
- How does VWCC reach dropout students with same vision?
- Also how do we reach out to those released from prison?
- Utilize churches to reach out to community
- Form group to reach out to community, everyone working together, but must have a plan
- Used to have Partners for Success Program; framework still exists
- Bring together employers and job seekers
- Messages students get give them false sense of hope
- Find poster child for VWCC
- Just soft skills can get you so far
- Looking to retired community as well as potential mentors
- Partner with TAP
- Networking with right people is important; use Hall Associates Center
- Advertise Hall Center to entire community, especially African-American community (churches, Tribune, flyers in schools, etc.)
- Nighttime classes
- Use students to reach out to community
- Must show students can succeed at VWCC