

Student Focus Group Result 2012 – First Glance

In spring 2012 semester, the College's Office for Institutional Effectiveness conducted focus groups with students to strengthen their voice in the college assessment process. The student focus group also served to complement the quantitative assessment provided by Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), at the recommendation of the CCSSE national program. The College felt that it was important to dig deeper into student perceptions of the quality of their experience at the College. In February and March 2012, using professional qualitative approaches, eight student focus groups were designed and seven were conducted: Two with students from the Hospitality, Business, Legal, and Technology cluster; two from the Health Academic Program; two from the Arts and Sciences cluster; and one with students from the Development Education program.

The focus group study was designed with four goals in mind:

- (1) To better understand students' academic experience;
- (2) To better understand the challenges and obstacles that students are facing;
- (3) To better understand students' perception of the college facility, environment, and technology support; and
- (4) To get students' advice on how to improve the college.

A total of 34 students participated in the focus group sessions. Health science students (n = 20), students of non-traditional age (i.e., 25 and above) (n = 22), and full-time students (n = 30) were over-represented in the sample. The preliminary analysis yielded the following findings:

Most students perceived the overall quality of classroom instruction as excellent or very good. In their view most courses:

- had well-prepared teachers with expert knowledge
- made students feel comfortable asking questions
- provided an environment in which students can learn from each other
- had enriched content connecting to real world experience, and
- had challenging course content.

Two Developmental Education students praised the self-paced approaches to math learning and found them particularly helpful. All the students thought that most of the instructors at the college were of great quality. In their view, most instructors are:

- knowledgeable
- easy to understand
- personable and approachable
- ready to help, supportive, and "go the extra miles" to help students
- open to questions
- good at answering questions and explaining concepts
- setting clear expectations for the students
- responsive to emails and phone calls
- passionate
- allowing student trial and error
- connecting what they teach to real world applications and experiences.

Common critical responses focused on courses in which teachers were lacking in teaching skills, came to class very late, were not challenging enough or lacked adequate learning facilities.

Most students who took the online courses enjoyed them but a few students felt that the quality of the courses varied. Positive online class experiences were those that encouraged interaction among students through online forums. Less satisfying experiences shared were that the course was a “computer program” rather than a class. Instructors’ unfamiliarity with online teaching media (e.g., Lulima) and their unresponsiveness to students’ questions contributed most to student dissatisfaction.

The most frequently used service was academic advising, which was highly appreciated by the students. Other services used were tutoring, faculty office hours, the Honda International Center, the STEM center, TRIO, Kahikoluamea, Malama, Ulu Pono Program, Smart Thinking in English classes, student orientation offered by the program, SOS workshops, and the note-taker service for disabled students.

However, many students in the focus groups were not aware of the existing available services. Students called for decompartmentalization and for student services staff to be more aware of all the services, so that they could direct students to proper services when needed. The following student service areas were identified as in need of improvement:

- Financial aid: needs to have more personalized and friendly staff, and to reduce errors
- Admissions office: needs to have knowledgeable and friendly staff, as well as consistent hours of operation
- Library: needs to have longer hours in the evening, and possibly be open on Saturdays
- Testing Center: needs to have longer hours; allows for appointment; and to remain open certain hours during the break time (e.g., Winter break)
- More tutors and tutors for specific major subjects are needed

The critique of the slow transcript review process was overwhelming among students from the Health Science Academic program. They called for the college to increase staffing in this process.

Regarding campus environment, facilities, and technology support, the majority of the students agreed that the campus provided a beautiful, clean, constructive, and relaxing environment. However, the responses to the actual facilities for the college were more average. Run-down buildings and ill-maintained classrooms were mentioned in two focus groups. In general, students thought the technology support was good. The biggest complaint for technology support was the slow and spotty Wi-Fi connection on campus.

In general, students were happy with their educational experience at the college because of the caring teaching faculty, counselors, and staff, small class size, and affordable tuition.

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