Report 3 for the New Vision Council

Response Analysis: Focus Group Questions for the South Lake student body

Introduction: Eleven students attended the South Lake campus focus group. They were selected for their “stakeholder” roles as leaders in student government and student activities on the campus, and reflected the general campus population by age, race, and gender. Please note that there will be a variation in the number of responses for several questions. One respondent arrived late but backfilled her responses to the first 2 questions, and one respondent took ill in the meeting, excused herself, and left the room.

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A. As a student, if LSCC offers a four year degree that interested you, what would be the most important reason for you to choose the LSCC degree, assuming you could get the same education elsewhere?

1. Cost would be less.
2. I am already familiar with LSCC faculty, staff, and facilities, and that would make my studies easier to accomplish.
3. I would not need to relocate
4. I would gain the same or greater of personal satisfaction in achieving the degree as elsewhere.

Responses:
#1 - 5
#2 - 4
#3 - 1
#4 – 1

Discussion Summary: The students’ overwhelming preferences for #1 and #2 are clear evidence of the two most important characteristics of LSCC as a community college, and they are assumed by the students to continue if 4-year degrees were offered. First is that a cc education costs less than at a university. Second, that comfort in a learning environment is an important issue -- smaller classes and supportive faculty and staff as opposed to being “just a number” in a larger university is the sentiment being expressed here.

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B. As a student interested in a four-year degree what would be your primary concern about LSCC offering one or more four-year-degrees?

1. Does the degree have as much value as others?
2. Will the degree help me find a better job?
3. Will the degree limit any future educational plans? For example, if I want to go to graduate school?
4. Will the degree mean larger classes and less personal touch?

**Responses**
1 - 5
2 - 2
3 - 3
4 - 1

**Discussion Summary:** Left undefined in #1, but specific in #2 and #3, value is of the utmost concern, be it professional, vocational, or future planning. Those who chose #2 as their expression of value are students pursuing now terminal AS degrees, and those who chose #3 are seeking BA or BS degrees and eventual university placement. Clearly, the value of the degree is the issue, despite the individual goals.

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C. Suppose you were a student not intending to pursue a four year degree, what might you see as the primary advantage of LSCC offering four-year degrees?

1. If I want to change my mind about a four-degree, I can.
2. It would make LSCC seem more a “real” college.
3. It would also enhance the prestige and quality of my LSCC two-year education.
4. Any student would prefer going to a state college rather than a community college.
5. It might make it possible to upgrade my career.

**Responses**
1- 6
2- 3
3 -1
4- 0
5- 1

**Discussion Summary:** That the majority of students chose #1 is no surprise. They understood their futures are unknown, if not uncertain, and that plans can change. The interest in #2 may be more a surprise. Several other students agreed with those who chose #2 that a “real” college is an important consideration. It was obvious to these students that, at a minimum, a name change lends weight to the image of LSCC as a “real” college.

D. Suppose you were a student not intending to pursue a four-year degree. What might you see as the primary disadvantage of LSCC offering four-year degrees?

1. I do not want my own two-year or certificate program weakened.
2. I do not want to be forced into more schooling for my career opportunities to expand.
3. In this case, the skill training is more important to me than a four-year degree.
4. In this case, because it does not affect me, I do not care what decision is made.
Responses
1-4
2-0
3-4
4-3

Discussion Summary: All the respondents agreed this was a “bad” question. They were conflicted, believing that all choices except #2 were equally valid. #1 and #3 reflect a respondent’s emphasis on their education; #4 reflects an attitude. Several said that choosing #4 was somehow a “selfish choice.” I accepted responsibility for the question, and did comment that #4 as I conceived it was meant to be a more “personal” attitudinal choice while the others were less so.

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E. If the college administration recommends a degree program for what they consider are good sound educational reasons, but the students oppose it what they think are good sound educational reasons, which best describes your position?

1. As a student, I would oppose it.
2. As a student, I would support it anyway.
3. I would support any recommendation made by the Administration.
4. I would encourage the Administration to not bring this to the board of trustees if student leaders oppose it.

Responses
1 - 2
2 - 2
3 - 1
4 - 6

Discussion Summary: The majority choosing #2, #3, and #4 is a reflection of the non-confrontational student approach. The rationale in choosing #4 is expressed in the comment that “if students don’t like it, then the administration should not do it.” The choice of #1 is reflected by the comment: “It’s my education, not the Administration’s.” Respondent to #3 admitted having a relative who worked at the college, and that swayed their thinking.

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F. If UCF takes a different position on four-year degrees than the college administration, which best describes your position?

1. The presence of UCF is critically important for many LSCC students, and I would not want to jeopardize their future. I would oppose it if UCF opposed, and if they were in support of it, so would I be in support.
2. I would support the college recommendation nonetheless.
3. I would prefer UCF to offer more degrees.
4. I would encourage the administration to not bring this to the board in that circumstance.
Responses
1 - 3
2 - 6
3 - 1
4 - 0

Discussion Summary: Respondents, attending the South Lake campus, clearly understand the importance of UCF to many students’ educational plans. That is reflected in #1. The majority, in choosing #2, agreed with the comment: “UCF is a Big Brother to LSCC, not a Big Father.” I believe only a student could articulate that so directly, and I also believe it requires no further comment from me.

LSCC is a community-oriented institution by practice, tradition, and mission. As a Lake or Sumter County resident, if the college opposes a four-year degree program, but your community generally favors it, what would be your position?

1. I would support it because my community leaders do.
2. I would oppose it because the college administration knows better than the community what the right thing to do is.
3. It makes no difference to me.
4. I would encourage the administration to not bring this to the College Board in this circumstance.

Responses
1 - 6
2 - 1
3 - 0
4 - 3

Discussion Summary: The respondents in the large majority clearly understand the word “community” in the community college in choosing either #1 or #4. The difference is the degree of confrontation respondents asserted; #1 is more confrontation; #4 is less. I personally was surprised that no one chose #3, a reflection of respondent sensitivity to the importance of community leadership instead of apathy. Most interesting was overall agreement however, with the comment: “The College needs support for what they do.”

G. There are now a number of new state colleges with creation of the Florida College System. Knowing that, which best describes your thinking about four-year degrees being offered at LSCC?

1. If the great majority of schools become state colleges, it must be alright here.
2. LSCC would have to join in offering four year degrees to remain an effective and competitive institution.
3. LSCC should make the best decision here without worrying what other colleges are doing.
4. Four year degrees may be ok, but not here.

**Responses**
1 - 0
2 - 5
3 - 5
4 - 0

**Discussion Summary:** The 50-50 split between #2 and #3 reflects the same quandary surrounding the issue to students as it does to the administration, the board, and the faculty, and the NVC. It is a serious concern, despite their lack of in-depth knowledge of all factors involved. Those who chose #2 believe the College has no choice and those who chose #3 believe the College does. All expressed their faith in the College to make the right decision.

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H. Given that the State of Florida provides 60% of the College’s funding, which best describes how state funding for these degrees would affect your thinking?

1. If the state funding increases for these degrees, then I support offering four year degrees.
2. If there is no change in state funding, then I oppose offering the degrees. There is not enough instructional money for my education now.
3. If there is no change in funding, LSCC should do this anyway.
4. It would depend on the size of the state funding increase.
5. I would oppose or support without regard to state funding. The only thing I can judge is the educational value to me.

**Responses**
1 - 0
2 - 1
3 - 2
4 - 1
5 - 6

**Discussion Summary:** Those who chose #3 expressed optimism about the future of state funding; believing things will get better in the future. In choosing #5, the majority of respondents admitted their limited understanding of the complexity of funding, preferring to express their own self-orientation instead. However, one respondent comment did attract agreement from the others, even those who did not select #5: “It will only get pricier in the future, do it now.”