

# Woodland Community College Educational Master Plan

## Student Focus Groups

### Summary and Key Findings

#### Focus Groups

- Associated Students of Woodland Community College – February 8, 2022 [8 participants]
- EOPS/CARE/CalWorks (Lake County Campus) - February 16, 2022 [10 participants]
- Middle College High School Students (Lake County Campus) - February 17, 2022 [8 participants]
- Lower Lake High School Students - February 17, 2022 [8 participants]

#### Purpose

The purpose of WCC Student Focus Group sessions was to incorporate qualitative information about the student experience at WCC and what students need to enroll, persist, succeed in courses, and complete programs of study. The questions posed during these sessions were framed with the intention of garnering information to help the College answer *Five EMP Guiding Questions*; namely:

1. Who are the students we serve now and who will our future students be?
2. What are the needs of our current students and what will students' needs be in the future?
3. Do our current delivery systems serve student needs? Will they serve students' future needs?
4. How can we best serve the educational needs of the population in our service area?
5. What resources (e.g., technology, facilities) and practices will best ensure equitable access and outcomes for our students?

The selection of Focus Groups provided an opportunity for input from a variety of experiences and perspectives:

- Current WCC student leaders who, in general, are academically successful students, engaged, and aware of the College's programs and services.
- Current WCC students who are first generation, socio-economically disadvantaged, educationally disadvantaged, and single or custodial heads of households.
- Current WCC special admit students who are transitioning from high school to college.
- Future WCC students.

## Process Summary

*Recruitment:* WCC program leads recruited students for each focus group with an open invitation to register to participate. High School students were required to submit a Parent Release Form in order to attend. All participants received \$20 gift cards as a token to thank them for their time and the valuable information they provided.

*Protocol:* At each sessions were apprised of a basic protocol, including:

- an explanation of the purpose and function of the Educational Master Plan as the guiding document for the College's future;
- an explanation of WCC's commitment to ensuring that the student voice and student experience be central to the EMP's goals and objectives, the overall purpose and function of the Focus Groups in the planning process, and the critical importance of their honest, forthright input in the sessions;
- a description of the session as one guided by some specific questions but with the understanding that a range of observations and feedback on other topics was welcomed; and,
- an assurance that the session was not recorded and only summary notes would be provided to the College.

*Questions:*

*For Current Woodland Community College Students:*

1. Why did you choose to attend Woodland Community College?
2. What does the College do particularly well?
3. What have been your biggest challenges (roadblocks, barriers) at WCC?
4. What do students need to be successful at WCC?
5. What advice would you give the college's leaders regarding how to help students be more successful or improve the student experience?

*For Middle College High School Students:*

We realize you're in high school taking courses at WCC, so these questions are geared around where you at currently in your educational journey.

1. Why did you choose to take college classes at WCC's LCC? What motivated you?
2. Have you thought about whether or not you want to attend college after you graduate from HS? If so, is WCC one that you would consider or other colleges? Why?
3. Have you thought about what you might want to study or major in? Or a career you are interested in?

4. If you were to consider WCC (LCC or another campus) what kinds of help or support would you need getting ready to enter college? What could WCC do to make the transition to college easier or seamless?
5. If you want to attend WCC, what factors might prevent you from attending?
6. What advice would you give the college's leaders regarding how to help students be more successful or improve your experience as a student?

*For Lower Lake High School Students:*

We realize you're currently attending high school, so these questions are geared around where you are currently in your educational journey. (Note that some in the group had taken classes at WCC.)

1. Have you thought about whether or not you want to attend college after you graduate from high school? If so, is WCC one that you would consider or other colleges? Why?
2. For those of you who have taken classes at WCC, what do you think the College does particularly well?
3. For those of you who are considering attending WCC in the future, what do you think you would need to be successful in terms of entering college (getting enrolled, etc...) and being successful in your courses and completing your degrees or certificates?
4. If you want to attend WCC, what factors might prevent you from attending? What might some obstacles or barriers be?
5. What advice would you give the college's leaders regarding how to help students be successful (both on terms of entering the college or succeeding in courses), make WCC an attractive option for you, or improve your experiences as a student?

## Common Themes

### *Main Reasons for Choosing To Attend WCC*

- Close proximity to "home" and easy commute.
- Affordability – financial aid is important but not accumulating student loan debt is also important to their long-term financial well-being.
- Parents are very influential in decision making for first time students just out of high school.
- WCC's reputation for its genuine concern for students and the personal attention they receive from faculty, staff, and administration.

## Factors in Student Success

- **Demonstrated** Commitment to Student Success:
  - Faculty, Staff, and Administrators who demonstrate that they care about students as individuals and will “go the extra mile” to help students succeed. (Mentioned in all focus groups that this is a major strength for WCC.)
  - High-Tech and High-Touch approach – especially in the delivery of instruction, but also in the way other College information is conveyed. (Many comments in all four groups about online courses being convenient but very impersonal (“detached”) and with little opportunity to connect with or form relationships with faculty and other students – very isolating experience which made mental health issues even worse during the pandemic.)
  - Schedule of courses that is set-up around students’ needs.
    - Students understand that the College cannot let classes run with 4-5 students enrolled. So, “offer courses when students can take them” to reduce class cancellations.
    - Schedule courses in non-traditional ways. Examples offered included multi-semester and multi-year schedules (which helps students with their program planning), short-term semesters, combinations of hybrid courses, weekend offerings (combined with online instruction).
  - Make pathways more accessible.
    - Students want more information about “steppingstones.” Examples offered included short-term job skills courses or certifications (e.g., credit and non-credit), information about required preparation to enter living wage occupations and the pathway to enter an occupation with opportunities for advancement and professional development.
    - Students know that non-credit enrollment is not eligible for financial aid, but some students reported that it was how they ended up in credit courses and now on track to complete degrees, certificates, or transfer. Students said that non-credit courses provided an important pathway for members of their families and communities to eventually attend college, or just gain some skills they need.
    - Students want information about what they can do with specific degrees or certificates and what they will earn in the occupations for which those programs prepare them.
- Accessible and Consistent Information:
  - Easily accessible information about the College, programs, services, and courses, which is important to all students, but critical to new students entering the college and navigating the complexities of higher education.
    - As noted below, students are comfortable with technology for accessing information but they also need personal, easily accessed, “human” support and guidance.
    - Students would welcome information that they can access in a “centralized” way – one portal or place where they can find all announcements, updates, deadlines, opportunities, events. They report having to look for information in

- many places on the web and missing important information (e.g., deadlines) because they weren't looking in the right spot or didn't know what webpage they were supposed to be monitoring or even where to find the information they needed.
- The needs community members who speak Spanish as a primary language need to be addressed.
    - Students report knowing, observing Spanish speakers who “gave up” trying to enroll in ESL and other courses because of the complexity of the systems, which are not mitigated by having bilingual assistance. The language barrier combined with the technology barrier represents a significant equity issue.
  - Consistent, accurate, reliable information about courses and instructional program requirements, including especially degree/certificate requirements, total costs for courses (fees, books, materials).
    - Accurate, timely information about degree requirements, graduation requirements, transfer requirements are critical and WCC needs to address inconsistencies in information or lack of timeliness in the delivery of information.
    - Details about financial information about course costs are very important to students' financial planning.
  - Information about what degrees and/or certificates will position students to earn a living wage.
  - Students repeatedly mentioned the publishing of year-long (aka multi-year) schedules so that they can plan out most/all of the courses they need and in the course sequences they need to complete programs and transition to four-year colleges or living wage jobs.
  - Consistency in the Delivery of Instruction:
    - Particularly in regard to online courses, students need consistency in the way that courses are set up, syllabi, course requirements, instructor expectations.
      - Students expect online courses to have current dates and deadlines (not assignment dates from the previous semester or out-of-date information posted).
      - Students need some level of consistency in the way online courses are taught (e.g., high levels of interaction with faculty and peers vs. others with no interaction with anyone; courses with well-organized units of instruction and clear directions for assignments vs. other courses with no clear guidelines, disorganized information, “absent” faculty who do not appear to students to be actively engaged or participating courses).
  - High-Tech and High-Touch:
    - Students are comfortable with technology; but technology (computer and reliable broadband) are not available to all students or not always reliable (especially broadband depending upon location).
    - Students confirm the existence of a digital divide – those who can access computing and internet technology and those that cannot - often due to financial factors but sometimes due to lack of familiarity/knowledge about technology.

- Students appreciate the efficiency that technology provides; however, they attribute their persistence, motivation, belonging, and success to personal interactions.
  - Repeated recommendations from students regarding hybrid courses or “hyflex” (i.e., online and in-person) courses and the use of technology to make courses more personal and interactive.
- Program and Occupational Interests
  - STEM
  - Computer Engineering
  - Environmental Sciences
  - Sustainable “Green” occupations
  - Software and Cyber Security certifications (especially short-term courses/programs)
  - Skilled trades (specifically mentioned – welding, construction trades)
  - Medical assisting

### *Summary Take-aways*

- Students – regardless of background, ethnicity, gender, age, or location - are resilient, capable, and, ambitious.
- Students are practical and pragmatic. They want and need:
  - accurate, timely, and consistently delivered information to guide them through the institution from first connection to program completion and transition; and,
  - information about how programs of study will ultimately prepare them for career opportunities and living wages.
  - Note – these points came up in every focus group.
- To meet WCC’s mission, the needs of Spanish speakers - a significant demographic in the service area - must be addressed.
- While online instruction and support services were the only viable alternatives during the pandemic, students want and need in-person, human interactions, establish relationships of trust and support, and have a sense of belonging, purpose, and community.