

# Research Briefs

## KEY FINDINGS

- Strengths: Affordability, Class Size, Instructional Technology, Quality of Faculty, Open Admissions & Commitment to College Readiness for All,
- Weaknesses: Competitiveness of Salaries/Benefits, Student Academic Preparedness, Parking, "Community college is easy" Stereotype, Daycare
- Opportunities: Collaboration, Local Economy, Marketing, Community Awareness of Educational Need, Online Programs
- Threats: Funding, Low College Readiness, Cost of Living, Transportation costs, Socio-cultural Barriers to Education

## IMPLICATIONS

### For Practice:

- Utilize prioritized data to prepare strategic plans

### For Policy:

- Review policies that may need to be changed with new information

### For Research:

- Prepare separate reports based on topic areas for administrators
- Prepare presentations of findings for planning groups to use to generate courageous dialogue around the data

## A South Texas College Study of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT)

In the 2006-2007 academic year, South Texas College (STC) conducted a SWOT Analysis as part of its preliminary stages to strategic planning. This environmental scan is critical to the success of any strategic planning effort and provides an opportunity to evaluate the College's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT). Faculty, staff, students, administrators and board members provided their perceptions of internal strengths and weaknesses and external opportunities and threats. The data were used to develop an online faculty/staff survey for prioritization into top 10 lists to be incorporated into strategic dialogue and planning.

### Background

As an academic institution that strives to provide a better quality of life for the South Texas region and specifically for Hidalgo and Starr Counties, STC is dedicated to excellence as an institution of higher learning. In order to provide leadership and direction for strategic planning the President frequently requests research designed to listen to the voices and opinions of College stakeholders.

### Purpose of Study

The main purpose of this study was to gauge the college's current condition both internally and within its external environment, and to provide a description of shared perceptions to define a "preferred" future. The collection and analysis of this data would in turn provide critical information for the development of strategic direction and planning for the College over the next 5 to 10 years.

### Methodology

Qualitative research methods

were utilized in a total of 51 focus groups to gather information regarding student, faculty, staff, administrator, and board member perceptions of STC's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. All interviews were conducted in Fall 2006 by facilitators trained in SWOT data collection methods.

In September 2006, 33 focus groups consisting of no more than thirty individuals were conducted with faculty and staff on Professional Development Day. An additional 2 focus groups, also consisting of no more than thirty individuals, were conducted with adjunct faculty.

In October 2006, 2 focus groups were conducted with administrators as part of an Administrative Staff Retreat and one final focus group was conducted with STC's Board of Trustees as part of a Board of Trustees Retreat.

The final phase of qualitative data collection involved a total of 13 student focus groups which took place in November and Decem-

ber 2006 on the Pecan, Starr, and Mid-Valley campuses. The recruitment for these focus groups involved a small financial incentive (\$50) for participating student organizations.

All focus groups were asked the same questions regarding their opinions of the College's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in the context of the College's mission, vision, core values, and guiding principles.

The collected data were immediately coded into themes which were developed into a quantitative online survey to determine the level of priority to faculty and staff for addressing in strategic planning for the immediate future. Over 400 completed surveys (and 237 partials) were collected and analyzed to identify the Top 10 strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The information was formally presented at the Spring 2007 Professional Development day.

