

Research Briefs

KEY FINDINGS

- Students were satisfied with various college facilities including: technology, equipment, building layout, parking and the multi-campus system
- Improvements need to be made in different areas including: upgrades for ADA, use of signs, safety, campus aesthetics, campus amenities, and childcare availability

IMPLICATIONS

For Practice:

- Enhance current ADA compliance with additional conveniences, i.e., door upgrades including push button/automatic door access
- Enhance safety equipment & presence of more security

For Policy:

- Continued access to free parking
- Continued expansion of multi-campus system

For Research:

- Continued inquiry for enhanced understanding and opportunities for addressing student concerns
- Triangulation of data with other findings from quantitative survey data



Student Satisfaction: Facilities

A 2007 SWOT Study

In the 2006-2007 academic year, South Texas College (STC) conducted a SWOT Analysis as part of its strategic planning to evaluate our institution's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. During the course of focus groups conducted as part of this study students expressed their opinions in regards to STC facilities. Through the information gathered it is apparent that while students recognize and applaud STC for its wonderful facilities, they also provide excellent suggestions for continued improvement.

Background

As an academic institution that strives to provide a better quality of life for communities throughout the Rio Grande Valley by meeting the diverse educational and workforce needs of the people of Hidalgo and Starr counties, STC is dedicated to continually improving how it functions as an institution of higher learning. In order to continue moving in this direction STC believes it is important to examine student attitudes towards various aspects of college life. This particular brief focuses on student opinions in regards to STC facilities.

Purpose of Study

(Please see Research Brief: South Texas College Study of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Vol. 2, Issue 1)

Methodology

Data collection involved 14 student focus groups which took place in November and

December 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.

Research Questions

Although students were asked a variety of questions in relation to the SWOT analysis, issues regarding campus facilities can be attributed to questions asked in regards to strengths in marketing and technology and weaknesses in systems and resources. Students were also asked to comment on what they found "vulnerable" about STC. General questions were also asked about how the college could improve and how student needs can better be met.

Although students were not specifically asked about facilities, this study can answer questions about how STC can improve its facilities to better serve the student population.

Key Findings

Students articulated satisfaction with a number of STC facilities

ranging from technology and equipment to building layout and campus locations.

Technology

A number of students were pleased with the way in which STC utilizes technological equipment. They also were appreciative of the access they had to different technological resources such as computer labs and programs such as WebCT and Jagnet. Students found these services to be easily accessible and helpful.

Multi-campus System & Cleanliness

The SWOT indicated that students found STC's multi-campus system convenient, allowing them easy access to academic resources from different locations throughout the Rio Grande Valley. At least one student indicated that easy access to the various campuses affords them the opportunity to take on full-time academic schedule. In addition, students also expressed satisfaction with the layout and cleanliness of the campus facilities.

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Parking

Several students commented on their appreciation of access to free parking; increase in parking facilities, easy access to public transit, and short walking distance to campus from parking lots was also noted.

ADA

A number of students expressed concern in regards to proper access to facilities for disabled students. They have pointed out how in a number of buildings automatic doors are not available or push buttons are broken. In some cases doors with ADA access were locked.

Signage

Additionally, students have indicated that the buildings on campus are not labeled in a clear manner. They have suggested better use of signs to facilitate easier navigation of the STC campuses.

Safety

Students expressed some concerns about the level of security and safety on campus. A number of students indicated that lighting in parking areas and other areas of campus is insufficient. They also suggested that there needs to be a stronger security presence during

evening hours. Some students suggested the addition of emergency call buttons or phones as a means of addressing safety concerns.

Campus Aesthetics

Dissatisfaction was also expressed in regards to various aesthetic aspects of the STC campuses. Students indicated that the environment on campus would

equipment and that more childcare facilities are necessary to better cater to students with children.

Although there was some indication of satisfaction with the layout and architecture of the buildings on campus, displeasure with the use of portable buildings and the absence of covered walkways for protection from bad weather was also expressed.

Despite the fact that some improvements could be made to facilities to improve service, it is apparent that STC is meeting many of the students' needs and wants in terms of available facilities by meeting its guiding principle of fostering an environment for the students and community so that they may achieve a better quality of life.



be more inviting if the college were to improve its landscaping and décor. Suggestions for improvement in this area include the incorporation of more displays, the addition of benches and reading areas, and allowing art students to display their work throughout campus.

Layout & Childcare Services

While students lauded the layout of the campuses, they also indicated that they would be better served if campus amenities such as the Health and Wellness Center and childcare facilities were located in areas that were more accessible. They also feel that the Health and Wellness Center is in need of better

Implications for Further Research

While the data collected from students as part of the SWOT study in terms of facilities at STC offers us a preview of what students appreciate about the college as well as to what needs to be improved, a more widespread study that concentrates specifically on this subject could provide additional and more thorough insight on the subject.

A mixed methods study that involves both quantitative and qualitative research methods would be useful in seeing areas in which the college needs to concentrate to improve the way students feel about STC facilities.