

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats Survey Results

Wharton County Junior College

Fall 2015

Prepared by Voorhees Group LLC

Introduction

To supplement WCJC's refresh of its strategic plan, an online Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) survey was made available to faculty, staff, and administrators in November and December 2015. Responses to this survey were categorized into themes and are reported below.

Strengths are the strong parts of the organization that can be directly controlled. Weaknesses, on the other hand, are those elements of the organization that are not necessarily positive but which the College can control. Weaknesses represent areas that Wharton County Junior College can improve. Opportunities and threats operate outside the organization and while they are usually beyond control, the College may be able to influence their impact. The most productive use of energy, however, is on those elements that an organization can control, i.e., strengths and weaknesses.

Wharton County Junior College also has created an environmental scan to refresh its strategic plan. This scan may be found on the College's strategic planning webpage and can be used in conjunction with this SWOT analysis to create a fuller picture of the external challenges facing WCJC as well as to help identify the range of internal responses to be tested and implemented in the College's current strategic planning processes.

Respondent Demographics

The survey was made available to WCJC's internal stakeholders. One hundred thirty-eight individuals completed the survey out of approximately 400 total employees resulting in an overall response rate of roughly 35%. The demographics and length of service of these respondents are captured below in Figures 1 and 2. Full-time faculty represent the majority of respondents while nearly half of the respondents have been employed at WCJC for ten years or more.

Figure 1. Which best describes your role at the College?

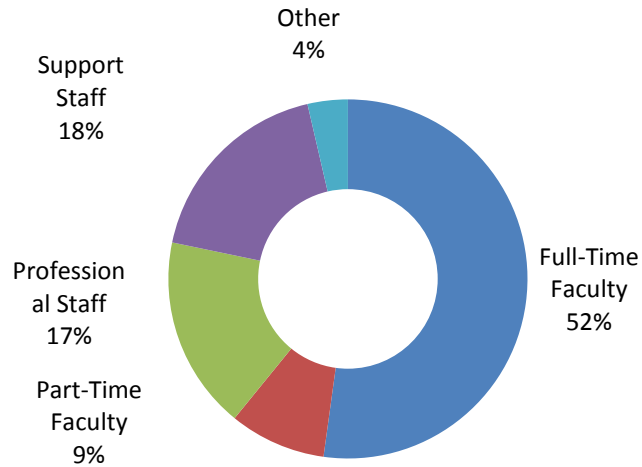
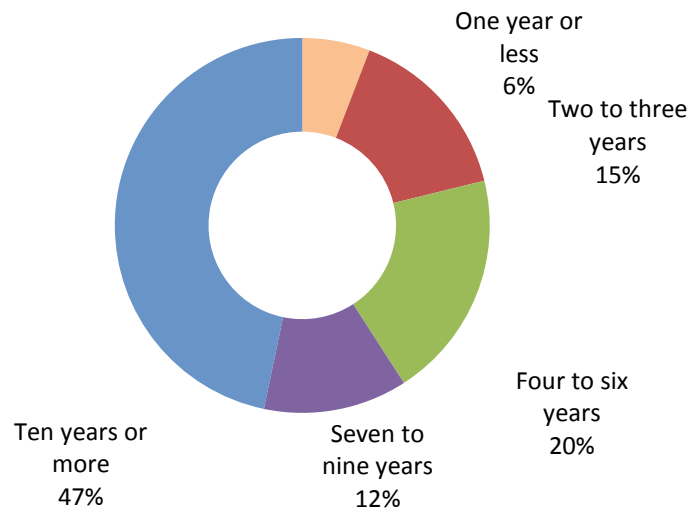


Figure 2. How long have you been affiliated with WCJC?



Strengths

Quality and program variety. The most common strengths mentioned by all employee groups was the quality and variety of programs offered. There were numerous comments made about the high quality of the various vocational/career technical education certificate granting programs (e.g., nursing, dental hygiene, welding, automotive and cosmetology), and how these programs respond to the job market demands. Moreover, these programs are reported to be highly regarded in the community, and the students who graduate from these programs are perceived to be the top in their fields.

Student-centered. The next most common themes, also found across all employee groups under Strengths, was student centeredness including personal and individual attention that the students receive from faculty, staff and administrators. The perception exists that the college does all it can to support students through services and in meeting their academic and career goals, and the small class sizes lend themselves to connecting with the students. There also appears to be genuine interest by all employees in the success of their students.

Quality of Instruction. Both faculty and professional staff believed that one of the college's strengths is the quality of instruction. The faculty at WCJC are perceived as talented, dedicated, and highly competent. They perceive themselves as caring about students and student success.

Positive learning and work environment. There was also mention of the positive learning and work environment as an area of strength at the college. This was particularly prevalent among the professional staff and faculty. Faculty also believe that there are strong department heads, and that the college supports them and their programs, and there is a spirit of cooperation. Respondents also believe there has been financial stability and a sense of pride at the College. The professional staff believes that employees are genuinely positive, and care about each other, and are connected to students.

Weaknesses

Environment and morale. A frequent theme across all employee groups is morale and the campus environment. Many felt there is a general sense of dissatisfaction, and low morale among employees. Some stated that there is distrust, uncooperative attitudes, and disrespect among groups, and across departments. There were claims of infighting, and lack of cohesiveness within departments, as well as a general disconnect between the administration and the faculty. Faculty in particular stated that they felt undervalued, and most pointed to the comparatively low salaries, as well as the lack of increases in salaries as a factor that has been contributing to the low morale.

Technology and IT support. Many commented on the need to update the technology at the campuses; upgrade computers, add smart boards to the classrooms, improve the email system, and upgrade the infrastructure to support greater bandwidth capacity for things like student portals, and additional online classes. The belief is that the college is falling behind other Texas colleges and losing its competitiveness (and students) as a result. In addition to this, the IT department perceives that it is not adequately staffed to accommodate all of the needs of the college, and lacks the necessary responsiveness to support faculty in particular.

Facilities. Although not as prevalent, there was mention of the need to improve some of the facilities. This included the buildings (e.g., increase classroom and lab space), as well as replace old furnishings, improve the lighting (at the Richmond campus), and add more signage.

Marketing. Another predominant theme is the perceived need for more marketing. In particular, faculty believe that there is a lack of marketing of their instructional programs that would lead to increase enrollments. Additional comments and suggestions were made to publicize the small campus/country feel of the college, and the reputation for quality education. Some suggested advertising more broadly (e.g., television ads, and billboards), and creating some campaigns that build excitement about attending the college.

Communication. An additional theme expressed across all employee groups was the need for improved communication in its various forms. It is not unusual in the Voorhees Group's experience for college constituents to be concerned with communications as a universal theme. Some at WCJC believe that the communication from the leadership is not transparent, nor frequent enough, and often too formal, and top-down. Comments were also made about the poor quality of the WCJC website; unclear information, outdated forms, and links that don't work. Other comments were made about the numerous committee meetings that seem to be unproductive because of the lack of information shared at the meetings.

Leadership and planning. One weaknesses mentioned primarily by professional staff and support staff was leadership and planning. This included the need for training and mentoring of leaders at the college especially in communication. Lack of, or unclear communication by the leadership was the area mentioned most frequently. It was also noted that there needs to be better alignment between the administrations' decisions and the needs of the departments, as well as a call for improving collaboration between the two. Also noted was the lack of a clear vision for growth and expansion of the various campuses, as well as the general need for better strategic planning.

Student services and activities. One of the more common themes among faculty and support staff was improving student services and adding more student activities. Suggestions for improving customer service and processes in the student services departments (e.g.,

financial aid, counseling, registration) included; responding to telephone calls more readily, adding more advisors and counselors, and extending the office hours to accommodate evening students. Few concrete suggestions were made for increasing the student activities on campus, although adding more intramural sports, as well as better planned and organized social activities for the students were mentioned by several respondents.

Opportunities

Population growth and expansion. The most common theme under opportunities was population growth within the college's service area, as well as the perceived need to expand college programs and facilities in order to accommodate this growth. Many comments across all employee groups referenced the large population growth within the Fort Bend county, and Sugar Land and Richmond areas, which opens up a variety of possibilities for facilities expansion and enhancements at the campuses (e.g., the tech center in Richmond). Along with the growth of the population in the area, it was noted that there will be a need for additional and qualified workforce for which WCJC can provide training. Programs such as the Associate Degree in Nursing, petrochemical, healthcare, and other vocational programs (e.g., welding, cosmetology and LVN) are perceived as growth areas as well continuing education classes, ESL and transition skills classes.

Reputation. The second most common area for opportunities that were suggested by all employee groups across the college is related to the college's reputation. There were numerous comments about the college's positive reputation in the community and the dedication of college employees to student success. The college has a reputation also of offering a small campus environment, yet located conveniently within a short distance to a large city. The financial benefits were also mentioned in terms of the affordability of a quality education students receive at the college.

Economic shifts and marketing. The other area of opportunity that was mentioned particularly by faculty and professional staff was the downturn of the oil-based economy in the state and the opportunity to re-train the workforce. Even if reduced oil demand is only a short-term phenomenon, jobs in the oil industry are now being reduced and people are looking to shift careers and require training to do so. Many see this as an opportunity to market the vocational and short-term programs more heavily. Marketing the technical programs in particular would serve the college and the community well. Equally important are new programs that need to be developed to respond to the demands of the new economy. Additional marketing to underserved populations that need training in the new economy was also mentioned.

Industry, community, and university partnerships. Another common theme under opportunities was partnerships. In particular, partnerships with industry to help determine the changing workforce needs is a perceived need to provide professional growth and development opportunities for the students. Partnerships with the four year universities (e.g., University of Houston) were also noted as an important opportunity that has not yet been fully tapped. Community partnerships in general were also mentioned as a way to utilize external resources available in the community.

Grants and scholarships. Federal grant funding opportunities, and scholarships were noted by faculty as opportunities. Grants were mentioned as a way to support program growth in the STEM areas in particular, and scholarships were mentioned as a general benefit to WCJC students.

Threats

Competition. The most common threat reported across all employee groups was competition. The most frequently mentioned competitor is the Texas State Technical College (TSTC) campus scheduled to open in the Fort Bend/Richmond area in Fall 2016. TSTC has the potential to attract students away from the Wharton County Community College Richmond campus's career and technical programs. There also are other technical and non-technical providers that serve the eastern portions of Fort Bend County and the surrounding area with the same or similar programs as Wharton. These are perceived as direct competition for students, and thereby a threat to WCJC's enrollment. Additionally, there is the perception that the University of Houston's growing need from classroom space at their Sugar Land campus may eventually lead to a termination of WCJC's facilities agreement with the possibility of losing future students. To counteract this possibility several respondents suggested that partnerships between the U of H and Wharton be strengthened.

Safety and security. The second most prevalent threat, mentioned frequently by faculty, was safety and security on the campuses, especially new legislation that allows students and others to carry guns on campus. There is also concern that the security at the campuses is not adequate (e.g., no cameras, unlocked side entrance doors, free access to instructors' offices, and poor emergency communication systems). The need for emergency response training for faculty and security personnel was frequently mentioned.

Funding. The third most common threat mentioned across all employee groups was state appropriations. It was noted that there is a lack of funding currently and that funding lost during the recession was unlikely to return to previous levels. Adequate funding to develop

and enhance programs, or upgrade facilities and technology, is a perceived need to trigger the college's ability to compete for students.