

External Focus Group Report – Rationale, Questions, and Data

Office of Planning and Institutional Effectiveness
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RATIONALE AND FRAMEWORK FOR THE FOCUS GROUPS

While strategic planning cannot and must never be used as fortune telling (Mintzberg, 1994), it is, at its core, about providing a method for aligning the operations and budgeting with changing external conditions (Cope, 1989) and has been a central planning process within colleges and universities since the early 1980s (Keller, 1983). As such, there are two foundational elements that must be included – the use of multiple data points and the involvement of individuals throughout the college. Effective strategic planning requires that qualitative data, intuition, opinion, and interpretation maintain a central place given that hard data is best synthesized when filtered through the understandings, expectations, and intuition of the stakeholders (Mintzberg, 1994; Rowley et. al, 1997, Cope, 1989). Brainstorming efforts, involvement of multiple groups, and integrated direction-setting activities are critical both in the data gathering and interpretation stages. The Strategic Planning Council (SPC) is the inclusive, integrated body that will ensure that the opinions, understandings, and intuitions of the college community are included throughout the process, but the entire effort will be strengthened significantly by ensuring that one of the initial data-collection activities is also inclusive and based upon intuition. This is where the focus group effort fits into the strategic planning process. Clearly, the members of the SCCC community, both internal and external, are our primary "storehouses of knowledge" (Cope, 1989, p.55) and as such, we need to ensure that their voices are heard.

THE FOCUS GROUP

Focus groups offer a powerful opportunity for introducing intuition, opinion, and emergent thinking during the information gathering portion of the strategic planning process (Mintzberg, 1994) and by providing a voice to those most knowledgeable about the college, the institution will be provided with an avenue for access to tacit knowledge - a resource which often goes under leveraged (Alfred, Shults, Jacquette, and Strickland, 2009). By increasing the dialogue and allowing for the formalization of conversations that address changing environments, college stakeholders will become partners in the change process and invaluable contributors to institutional direction-setting. Another benefit is that it provides a formal opportunity to examine the cultural expectations and aspirations of stakeholders (Rowley et. al., 1997). When considering that intuition and opinion are important in ensuring alignment between college operations and the changing external environment, gaining an understanding of cultural expectations will help us to appropriately frame the process. To gather information that is useful and provides a structure for analysis, we must consider the conceptual/theoretical framework that will be used to develop the questions and probes included in the interview protocol (list of questions) and to analyze the collected data.

FOCUS GROUP FRAMEWORK

The focus group approach is strengthened by developing an appropriate theoretical framework that drives the development of questions, interpretation of the data, and presentation of the analysis. The process is strengthened because the framework becomes the basis for both trustworthiness (validity) and dependability (reliability), allows for greater interpretation of emerging themes, and increases the rigor of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1997; Yin, 1984). To

develop an appropriate framework, we have examined six publications (the first five of which are seminal works) that deal with planning, strategy, institutional effectiveness, and the future trajectories of community colleges. These include the following:

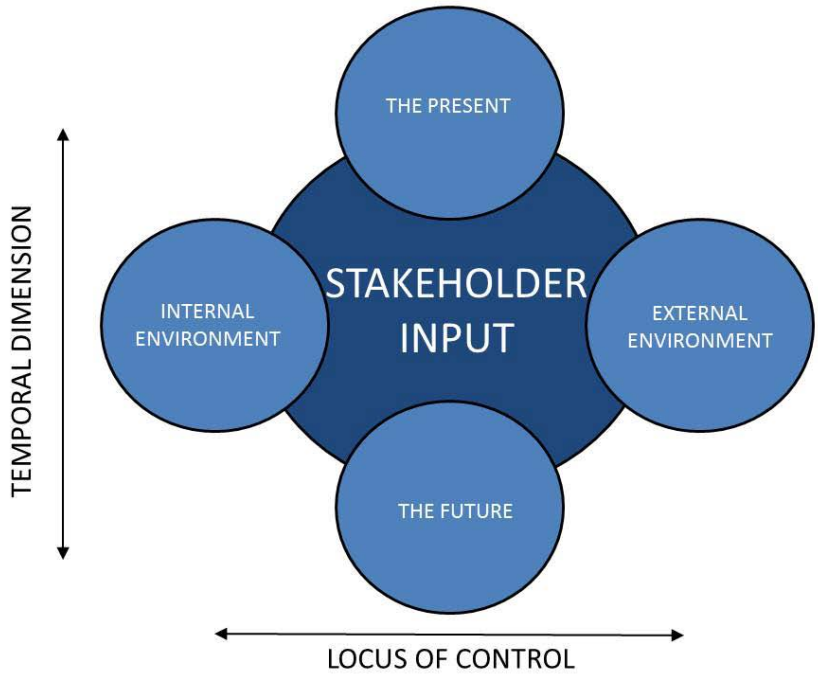
- Cope's *High Involvement Strategic Planning: When People and their Ideas Really Matter*
- Rowley, Lujan, and Dolence's *Strategic Change in Colleges and Universities: Planning to Survive and Prosper*
- Mintzberg's *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning* (a publication that supports and helped to reframe how strategic planning is conducted – not eliminate it as the title may suggest)
- Alfred, Shults, and Seybert's *Core Indicators of Effectiveness for Community Colleges*
- Alfred, Shults, Ramirez, Sullivan, Chambers, and Knabjian-Molina's *Managing the Big Picture in Colleges and Universities: From Tactics to Strategy*
- Alfred, Shults, Jacquette, and Strickland's *Community Colleges on the Horizon: Challenge, Choice, or Abundance*

Based upon a thorough analysis of these publications, the following information emerged as foundational for SCCC's strategic planning focus group framework:

- Stakeholders must discuss where the college is now, the direction it is going, and ideally where it will be in the future
- Change is constant and, as such, the impacts of change on college members must be assessed
- Strategic planning must seek to find where opportunities are being met as well as where they are not
- Strategic planning must seek to find out what people want from the college
- Stakeholders must discuss the uniqueness of the college
- Stakeholders must discuss the impact of the external environment on the college
- Stakeholders must consider how the college will need to align itself to take advantage of future opportunities, both internal and external.

As a result of this information, it is clear that the questions will need to garner input from stakeholder groups regarding their views on the direction of the college, assessment of strengths and weaknesses, assessment of opportunities and threats (external), and the impact of change on the college. All of these issues must also be addressed across the categories of time (the present and the future) and control (internal environment vs. the external environment). Based on this information, the following framework has been developed to guide the development of questions and probes within the interview protocol.

Figure 1: Graphical Representation of the SCCC Strategic Planning Focus Group Framework



Based upon this information, the following questions and probes have been developed[1]

Question 1: Based upon your experiences with Suffolk County Community College, what would you say our institution should be most proud of?

Probe 1: What do you feel the strengths of the college are?

P2: What aspect(s) of the college do you feel we are most known for?

P3: If there was one thing you felt that our county needed to know about our college, what would it be?

Q2: All institutions of higher education have areas where they can improve and Suffolk County Community College is no different. Therefore, could you share your opinions about areas where you want to see our college improve?

P1: What do you feel the weaknesses of the college are?

P2: What are some areas that you feel could be strengths with some modifications and what modifications do you feel are needed?

[1] It must be noted that this is an interview protocol and there is a small chance that all probes will be asked. Qualitative focus groups are typically semi-structured and, as such, the facilitator will strive to engage respondents in a conversation that elicits strong and relevant opinions. As such, there is no guarantee that all questions will be asked since a highly productive session may require the facilitator to allow lengthy discussion.

P3: What, do you believe, is keeping us from reaching our full potential?

Q3: As the college moves forward with its strategic planning efforts, what areas, initiatives, or activities would you like to see our institution focus on in the future?

P1: What do you want Suffolk County Community College to be known for?

P2: What is the college not currently doing that you would like to see us do in the future?

Q4: In your opinion, what are some of the most dramatic impacts that the external environment (i.e. politically, economically, socially, or technologically) is currently having on Suffolk County Community College?

P1: How is the external environment negatively impacting the college?

P2: How is the external environment positively impacting the college?

P3: How effectively is SCCC responding to current external influences?

Q5: Looking forward into the next 5-10 years, what do you feel the biggest impacts of the external environment will be on SCCC (i.e. politically, economically, socially, or technologically)? How should the college move forward in addressing them?

P1: Moving forward, what are some trends that will significantly impact SCCC in a negative manner?

P2: What are some potential opportunities that SCCC must take advantage of?

INFORMATION FROM THE EXTERNAL FOCUS GROUPS

A total of eight external focus groups were convened and facilitated by OPIE between January 31st and March 16th. Of the eight, seven consisted of focus groups with three local K-12 districts, one close to each of the campuses. The three districts involved as well as a breakdown of which groups participated can be seen in table 1. In addition to facilitating sessions with local K-12 districts, OPIE

Table 1: Focus Group Breakdown by District and Group

	Students	Parents	Administrators
Central Islip	X	X	
Three Village	X	X	X
William Floyd	X		X

reached out to local business and industry leaders, with the assistance of John Lombardo, Associate Vice President for Economic Development, and was able to gather representation from healthcare,

aerospace, manufacturing, and the automotive sectors. Moving forward, the college will be reaching out to more districts and business and industry groups to ensure that our many external constituents are involved with strengthening our strategic and other planning efforts.

In regards to the data collected from the external sessions, the college utilized the same process for data collection, analysis, and reporting that was used for internally collected data. This is a first step and as we move forward, many more voices will be heard, but it is important to note that more than 50 of our community members will be responsible for impacting our burgeoning strategic plan. Through the use of recordings, the conversations were fully transcribed so that a rigorous qualitative approach known as "stage-coding" could be utilized. Put simply, this is a qualitative data analysis procedure that pulls statements (known as codes), line by line, from each of the transcripts and then utilizes two different categorization stages (known as axial and selective coding) to elicit a final set of themes that provide the overarching perspectives of participants. Using the framework to both craft the questions and to guide the first categorization process increased the rigor of the process and added to its trustworthiness and dependability (usefulness and "believability"). The initial line by line analysis resulted in approximately 400 unique statements (open codes) and was categorized into 29 supporting themes (axial codes) through the use of the framework identified earlier in this report. The final step in the analysis phase was to categorize the 29 codes into a set of 5 final themes (selective codes) listed below.

- The college must address and work to correct the misconceptions and negative perceptions that exist within the community
- SCCC is largely viewed as an outstanding college and asset to Suffolk County
- The college needs to control its story through enhanced marketing and interaction with external constituencies
- The college would benefit from enhanced efforts to connect with, listen to, and address the concerns of high school students throughout Suffolk County
- The college must enhance its understanding of changing conditions and work to proactively address evolving demands

Moving forward, this information will be used not only by the Strategic Planning Council (SPC), but also within the appropriate divisions and units who are charged with communicating with the college's external stakeholders. There are two appendices within this report that provide not only the breakdown of the grouping themes that come under each of the final codes listed above, but also the initial statements that come under each of the grouping themes. Finally, we want thank all of the students, parents, administrators, and business and industry leaders who gave of their time to participate in the focus groups and provides such a rich amount of data to work with. We also want to provide a special note of thanks to our external partners who scheduled the focus groups, contacted participants, and in the case of the high school students, who also facilitated the

distribution and collection of parental consent forms. The contributions of the following individuals were simply invaluable to the process:

Central Islip Public Schools:

Dr. Craig Carr, District Superintendent
Dunia Mars, President of the Reed Middle School PTA

Three Village Central School District:

Cheryl Pedisch, District Assistant Superintendent
Alan J. Baum, Principal of Ward Melville High School

William Floyd School District:

Dr. Gordon Brosdal, District Assistant Superintendent for Secondary Instruction and Administration
Dawn Azar, Secretary to the Distant Assistant Superintendent for Secondary Instruction and Administration

This report marks the completion of one extensive data gathering effort, yet at the same time marks the beginning of our enhanced efforts to gather input from all of our stakeholders. This information is critical as we, as a community, collaboratively plot our future trajectory, a trajectory in which we all have a stake and a responsibility to see through to fruition. As an institution, we look forward to continue serving our community in partnership with the many external groups and individuals to whom we are so committed.

Appendix 1: Final Themes (Selective Codes) and Supporting Themes (Axial Codes)

The college must address and work to correct the misconceptions and negative perceptions that exist within the community
There are perceptions that community college academics are not the equivalent of academics at four-year colleges and universities
There is a great deal of misinformation regarding SCCC
Some graduates of SCCC don't represent the college well
The college's open access mission is viewed by some as a negative
With knowledge, attending SCCC becomes an appealing higher education choice for students

SCCC is largely viewed as an outstanding college and asset to Suffolk County
The college's open access mission is viewed as a positive
The college provides great service to Suffolk County
Suffolk is respected by the community for its strong academic programs
Suffolk offers a wide variety of programs/courses
The college would benefit from enhanced collaboration with other colleges

The college needs to control its story through enhanced marketing and interaction with external constituencies
The college needs to enhance its connection and communication with the community
The community wants the college to promote local success stories
College sports are important to the community
Suffolk needs to strengthen and enhance connections between college and the world of work
The high schools need to have more direct communication and interaction with SCCC
The college needs to enhance efforts to highlight successful alumni
Suffolk County Community College would benefit from a unique brand
The college needs to continue and enhance its marketing efforts

The college would benefit from enhanced efforts to connect with, listen to, and address the concerns of high school students throughout Suffolk County
High school students want to feel as if they are going away to college
Incoming freshman desire a traditional college experience
There are concerns that Suffolk can't live up to high school student expectations
Transportation is an issue for some who will be coming to Suffolk
High school students want more direct communication from SCCC
Being close is sometimes viewed as a negative

The college must enhance its understanding of changing conditions and work to proactively address evolving demands
High school students are less prepared for college
Environmental trends are impacting the college
The economy is impacting where students go to college
The competition for incoming freshman will be increasing
Suffolk will be serving a more diverse population of students

Appendix 2: Supporting Themes (Axial Codes) and Initial Statements (Open Codes)[2]

There are perceptions that community college academics are not the equivalent of academics at four-year colleges and universities

"I would assume they [classes] wouldn't be equivalent to a private university or a state school or something like that"
Courses at Suffolk are perceived to be easier
From a participant's personal experience, the "math courses at SCCC are equivalent to Stony Brook"
High school students don't see SCCC as a "high quality" academic institution
High school students are unaware of the quality of teaching
High school students "tease other students" for going to Suffolk
There is a reputation that "students with no aspirations" go to Suffolk
There is a stigma that going to Suffolk means you didn't try hard in high school
The public assumes the core curriculum is "watered down" compared to four year colleges
The reputation is that you go to Suffolk when you don't have the grades
There is a feeling that 2 year colleges are inferior to 4 year colleges
The students think field trips to Suffolk would erase the negative image
Suffolk is not viewed as a college for "smart people"
Students see the value and benefit of Suffolk, but are impacted by the stigma

The college's open access mission is viewed as a positive

"It's a great opportunity"
Parents appreciate the access to developmental education
Parents with students lacking direction send them to Suffolk
The college is good for those who "don't yet have direction"
The college is good for those who need to mature
Some students need a fresh start to be successful
Some students would benefit from opportunities to gain technical skills
SCCC should market to the students as a second chance at higher education
Students see Suffolk as a second chance
Students now see college as an option thanks to Suffolk
Students see Suffolk as the only hope for some students
Students with no chance to go to four-year colleges get a chance by starting at Suffolk
Suffolk has helped students who were not ready to go away to college
Suffolk is great for the underprepared student
The college is a good choice for the working adult
The college is a great safety net for students unsuccessful at the four-year colleges
The college is a great second chance
The college is an integral part of an educational pipeline
The college is well suited for the non-traditional student
The college needs to keep serving veterans
The college should market that all students are welcome
There is a need to ensure that adult learners are served

The college's open access mission is viewed by some as a negative

Suffolk is promoted more as a "fall back" than a "step forward"

[2] Statements in quotations were taken verbatim from the transcripts while the other statements reflect paraphrasing of the comments

“There is no prestige in going to Suffolk”
There is a perception that “if anyone can get in, there is no rigor”
“The range of students attending Suffolk hurts its image”
Some individuals look at Suffolk as nothing more than “a safety school”
There is broad range of student preparedness at the college
Students know too many unprepared students who go to Suffolk
Getting into Suffolk “doesn't feel like an accomplishment”
Open access can be seen as a negative

Suffolk County Community College would benefit from a unique brand
"The brand consciousness here in this community is very, very real"
As a college in the student's "backyard" it has to stand out
We need to have a tagline associated with the college
We need a slogan attached to the sports teams

The college needs to continue and enhance its marketing efforts
The community feels that data on the success of students needs to be a major part of the college’s marketing
Parents would like to help the SCCC marketing department
Parents want to “see numbers” in the advertisements
Parents want to see success indicators in advertisements
People want to see some “numbers regarding transfer, not just sweatshirts”
Personal experiences in the community show that SCCC grads transfer to top universities
SCCC needs to provide data on its success
Our marketing makes students see us differently
The community feels we need to show the cost of a Suffolk education vs. other colleges
We need more commercials
We have to market to multiple markets
We have to more effectively market the college to “remain competitive”
The sweatshirt commercial "pumps up" the students
The sweatshirt commercial is "enlightening"
The sweatshirt commercial is opening eyes to the transfer function
The sweatshirt commercial provides good public relations
The honors program “could be a key marketing tool”
The community doesn't know about the forensics or other academic teams
The college should reach out to parents of successful students to market the college
The college needs to effectively market all educational avenues
The college needs to continue promoting the transfer function
Students would like to see billboards
Students want to see the college advertised like a four year college
Students want to see “real students” in the advertisements
Students want more ads in the newspaper
There is a suggestion that the college establish funds to allow for donations to marketing efforts
Some business and industry leaders believe we market well, but “not nearly enough”
Some business leaders want to see the college market its success better
Student life opportunities should to be marketed broadly to the county
Students want to be "convinced" to attend SCCC
Students want to be shown that the college is a good choice for them
The college needs to market the honors program
The college could “team up with the districts” to promote Suffolk CC

The college needs to promote the certificate route
The college needs to find more money for advertising

Suffolk offers a wide variety of programs/courses
"A benefit to Suffolk is that you can explore many options"
Community colleges must shine as the "career change" institutions
Community members look at the curricular circulars for enrichment classes
Ensuring that courses are available gives us an advantage over four year colleges
Expanding the online offerings would help to sell the college
"The range of certifications is impressive"
SCCC has shown "great flexibility" in its offerings
The flexibility of programs "allows individuals to change their lives"
The flexibility of programs is a strength
The flexibility of the college offerings is good for students who need to work

With knowledge, attending SCCC becomes an appealing higher education choice for students
After understanding college entrance requirements, Suffolk is more appealing to high school students
Attending a community college is becoming more acceptable to students
Changing expectations on going to college are helping Suffolk get more students
"Younger students are the most negative towards Suffolk"
Greater student and high school partnerships with BOCES helped change the negative opinion (community members feel the same can happen with SCCC)
When students "get past the stigma," they are happy with their education at Suffolk
High school students who come see that we are "a true college"
High school students feel the reputation is improving among their peers
High school students are receiving information on Excelsior
People are happy once they get into the college
The perception on the weakness of the college comes mainly from high school students
Seniors and juniors appreciate Suffolk more than sophomores and freshmen
Students believe that if college representatives speak with juniors and underclassmen, the college will gain "a new cohort of applicants" to Suffolk
Students are pleasantly surprised by the community events on campus
Students are beginning to see that" two years of college is two years"
Students see the value of taking their first two years of college at Suffolk
Students see that if you can transfer, "the final degree is what really matters"
Students feel that getting them on the campus will change impressions
Students were surprised by the number of Suffolk students and faculty at events
Students who have attended Suffolk have positive things to say
Students who visit reject the 13th grade moniker
Visiting the college changes some student misconceptions
Students viewing the college application process value Suffolk
Bringing 5th graders on campus is early recruiting

Suffolk will be serving a more diverse population of students
As immigration increases, so will the demand for education from new residents
"College counselors need knowledge about immigration issues"
Increasing diversity means a greater need for flexibility
"Not all students want or need academic programs"

College sports are important to the community
"Athletes leave Suffolk to attend Nassau"
Parents want to see more about the sports program
Students believe the community would support the sports teams if they knew about them
Students feel more students would come if they knew about the college sports
The community is proud of the soccer team
The community sees the school spirit at sporting events
The community likes the athletic venues

Being close is sometimes viewed as a negative
Colleges and universities in "their backyard" are looked down upon by the students
Community college is a "dirty word" because it's close
There is a perception that staying local means "don't ever try to achieve your best"
Students want to meet new people
Students want to get away from their communities
Students want to experience something "besides the same community"
Students want to feel like they are going away for college
Some students need to get away from their environments
There are influences that the students want to get away from

Suffolk is respected by the community for its strong academic programs
Business and industry leaders are impressed with the faculty
Business leaders are "starting to respect [SCCC's] distance education degrees"
Local employers are happy with AS graduates
Local employers feel "all of your students make effective employees"
Local healthcare providers have been happy with the Nursing program
Local industries believe SCCC "stepped up at a time when there was a need and did something aggressive"
Local industries see Suffolk as the starting point for advanced education
Local industries see the importance of strong articulation agreements
The honors program has an outstanding reputation with the local high schools
The honors program is a strong point at the college
The honors program is well respected in the community
"The AS programs are very strong"
"The auto tech program is cutting edge"
The "auto tech specialists" that come from Suffolk are "highly qualified"
People who know our programs respect them
Suffolk's graduates are desired by prestigious four-year colleges and universities
Students are starting to see that hard work can help them transfer to a four-year college
Some individuals feel that "Suffolk could deliver bachelors or masters as effectively as four-year institutions"
Community members respect our reputation as "a solid learning environment"
There is a suggestion that developmental education be "re-evaluated"
Some community members would like to see the college focus on offering more, rigorous online programs
The breadth of programs offered by the college is "critically important" to the community
The "transitional program for students with disabilities is outstanding"

Suffolk needs to strengthen and enhance connections between college and the world of work
Businesses would like to see more collaboration in connecting education and work
Education needs to ensure greater alignment with changing economic realities
Connecting with local high schools has created better employees
"Decreasing educational preparation means a higher unemployment rate"
Emerging fields require a highly skilled workforce
"Employers are hiring students with technical training"
"Education needs to adjust to meet changing industry standards"
Some business and industry leaders feel that the "general population doesn't see the connection between STEM and jobs"
"We need more welders, programmers, and machinists"
Many individuals are retiring from the aerospace industry
Turning around the economy rests on the ability for business and education to collaborate
"There will be jobs opening up in Aerospace"
There is a suggestion that Suffolk establish a "transitions program" to better prepare students for success in the workplace
There is a "general lack of knowledge" regarding how to get into high tech jobs
There are industries across the island in desperate need of employees
The local community depends upon our variety of certification programs
The mechatronics training has benefited the county
The decreasing occupational opportunities may impact college going
The connections between the college and the world of work need to be shared publicly
The college could partner with BOCES to create "a vocational/technical track" from high school to SCCC
"The college needs to increase its outreach to companies"
Business and industry leaders would like to see the college put even more energy into connecting directly with business and industry partners
The college must continue to ensure that programs are aligned with changing standards
The college needs to address employment gaps with the programming field
The ability of the college to bring in adjuncts current in their fields gives great perspective to the students
Suffolk must expand its connections with industry
Suffolk needs to "cozy up" to business and industry to find out what skills will be in demand for the next 2-4 years
Suffolk effectively meets individual company needs
Suffolk has "listened to local industries"
Suffolk has to address the educational gaps between high school and the world of work
Suffolk is in a position to provide the needed workforce
Suffolk has a great reputation with the business community
"Suffolk degrees are strengthened by the relationship with business and industry"
Suffolk contributes to the engineering workforce on Long Island
SCCC has helped spur regional growth in Aerospace despite company departures
SCCC provides "on-time solutions" to the county
SCCC has worked with the STEM industries to increase the number of students in the fields
There needs to be a greater emphasis on the connection between the education and world of work
There are too many students coming from all colleges "without strong writing skills"
Students are making the choice to come to college instead of going straight to work
STEM education needs to keep changing to keep up with industry shifts
Stronger skill sets will help students move to higher level positions
There is a niche for high quality technical training
The health care industry sees an increasing need for LPNs

The decreasing educational standards are “impacting the readiness of the workforce”
Suffolk must enhance its ability to ensure graduate preparation for the "real world"
The college must help solve the skills gap
Enhancing the written and communication skills of diverse populations is critical to the Island
Local businesses are being forced to provide their own communication enhancement opportunities to college graduates

The college provides great service to Suffolk County
SCCC provides a pathway to four year education
SCCC is an “intellectual asset” to the county
SCCC has helped educate the county’s population
Offering courses for the community is a great benefit
Suffolk meets the general needs of the community
Suffolk provides an opportunity for students to attend college
Suffolk provides “hope for a better future”
Suffolk makes education accessible
The theatrical productions are enjoyed by the community
The community wants weekend hours
The GED program is a great resource for the community
The community likes using the libraries
The community wants longer library hours
The community wants more GED slots for residents
Suffolk "improves" the life situations of residents
Suffolk enables people to come to college
Suffolk has helped solve the problem of some companies leaving the Island
Suffolk helps four year colleges identify "diamonds in the rough"
The college provides outstanding service to the county
The college should be "proud of the manufacturing program"
The college should expand the dual enrollment opportunities
The community depends upon the college for retraining
Community members enjoy being adjuncts at the college

High school students want more direct communication from SCCC
Freshmen need to hear from SCCC administrators
Freshmen need to hear from SCCC faculty
Freshmen need to hear from SCCC alumni
“Faculty who have been in K-12 will know how to reach recent high school seniors”
Students want Suffolk to come in and connect with underclassmen
There is a suggestion to have discipline specific mentoring with high school students
Several high school counselors and faculty didn’t know the name of SCCC’s president
Several high school students didn’t know the name of SCCC’s president
High school students see many colleges at their high school, “but not too much Suffolk”
Students believe Suffolk should be in the high schools with information on how college works
Students don't see Suffolk in the high schools regularly
Students want Suffolk represented at high school assemblies
High school bus tours don't come to Suffolk

High school students want to feel as if they are going away to college
“Dorms help students feel like adults”
Dorms will get students out of their "whirlpool" (difficult home environments)

Dorms will help students feel like they are “stepping into their new lives”
Dorms would help eliminate the 13th grade moniker
Dorms would help erase some of the stigma of staying at home
Dorms would help students “feel independent”
Going to college means going away to college for many
Going to college means living on your own
High school students want to get away from their high school peers
“Not having the dorms makes it still feel like high school”
“The college can't feel like a continuation of high school”
Students feel that going away to college is like starting a new life

High school students are less prepared for college
First generation students “don't prepare for college early”
High school students think a diploma means they are "college ready"
Underclassmen need to think about college earlier
Students are coming out of high school “unable to write”
Suffolk should more directly connect with the local high schools
The entrance exam for math is not aligned with the high school courses
Students who were successful in math in high school are placed in remediation because they can't use calculators
“Teaching to the test is not preparing students for college”
The merger of school districts will “decrease college readiness”

The high schools need to have more direct communication and interaction with SCCC
High school counselors need help communicating the college's programs
High school students need to be “acculturated to view Suffolk positively”
High school students have difficulties taking courses over the summer
Partnerships between SCCC and the districts need to be strengthened
Parents are concerned that not all their children's credits will transfer
Parents are more involved and will help their children make the right decisions
Parents are talking to their children about going to Suffolk
Parents don’t see Suffolk at enough college fairs
Parents need information to promote SCCC to their children
Parents need to see that students can transfer to other SUNY colleges
Parents want more information from Suffolk
Parents are becoming more involved with the college process
Parents want to help the college address community questions and needs
Parents would be grateful if the college could get more information out to them
Parents would like more weekday programs for high school students
Parents would like the STEP program at Grant
Parents would like to see more college assemblies in the high schools
Parents are confused by the regulations under FERPA
High school teachers need to be “introduced to new teaching approaches” (pedagogies)
Representatives from other colleges come and sit down with the students
Some high achieving high school students would “benefit from more dual enrollment”
Students are experiencing difficulty when trying to get the courses accepted back in high school
Suffolk provides assistance to the high school dropout
The college could partner with high schools to “decrease the remediation rates”
The college could partner with the high schools to “decrease the number of dropouts”
The community would like to see the professors in the high schools

The high schools need for the college to come to them
The parents would like to see more college transition programs in the high schools
The website is a great resource for high school counselors to advise students
The guidance counselors need to have a stronger relationship with Suffolk
The districts are not effectively promoting college as an option
Students are being "wrongly placed" into developmental math
Students don't see all the programs they want offered at Suffolk
Students "don't take the testing seriously"
Students need to be exposed to what the college has to offer to them
Students need to have opportunities to retake developmental tests
Students want to see SCCC reach out and invite them to see the campuses
The students want to "get to know Suffolk"
The counselors feel that the catalog is "weak" and "not very clear"
The college should promote and elevate alternative teaching pedagogies
The counselors would like to see the SSN requirement on the application listed as optional
Counselors don't see a clear distinction on what courses will count towards an associate's degree

The college needs to enhance efforts to highlight successful alumni
The community would like to see us highlight our successful alums
Community members would like to see the college bring successful alums back to talk to the community
Our students, current and former, will be the best recruiters for high school students
Parents suggest that the college have alumni days at the college
Students want successful graduates to come and speak to them
Students want to get to know successful alumni "personally"
Students want successful alums from their high school to talk to them
Successful alumni will be our best recruiting tool for high school students

The competition for incoming freshman will be increasing
Distance education provides greater competition than in the past
The merging of high school districts will increase competition for college

Some graduates of SCCC don't represent the college well
Some SCCC graduates have "complained about the lack of campus life"
Some alumni have not presented the college in a positive light

Transportation is an issue for some who will be coming to Suffolk
The lack of college transportation prevents some students from attending Suffolk
Parents appreciate that high school students are transported to different campuses
Transportation is a major issue for some students
Students want a college transit system

There are concerns that Suffolk can't live up to high school student expectations
High school grads are technologically advanced
The most prepared high school students will have the "highest expectations"

The college needs to enhance its connection and communication with the community
"Other colleges have larger signs welcoming them to campus"
Other community colleges have extensive summer programs for local children
"QCC has a summer outreach program"

There was a suggestion to open the campuses up to the community more
Suffolk "needs to evolve without loosing touch with the community"
Suffolk needs to keep working to raise its profile in the community
Suffolk needs to understand and serve the "two distinct Hispanic populations"
Some students don't feel the college does a good job of communicating to the community
Suffolk needs to show the community that individuals who want to be in college go to Suffolk
The college must recognize "the distinct desires of its multiple constituencies"
The community would like more seats in the high demand programs like nursing
Community members feel there is not enough promotion of community events held on campus
Students would like to see a stronger research emphasis at the college
Students would like to see newer and bigger buildings
"Credit transfer is not talked up" in the community
Credit transfer is not well understood in the community
Students are unaware that there is an honors program
People are not familiar with the Excelsior program

There is a great deal of misinformation regarding SCCC
There is a perception by some that Suffolk has "one full college and two satellite centers"
Some parents believe that they won't be able to get their children into Suffolk
Students are unaware of the application process
Students are unaware of the variety of educational opportunities
Students are shocked that SCCC courses are the same as the four-year courses
Students have a lot of misinformation about college
Students have many misconceptions about Suffolk
Students think there are no openings at the college
"Suffolk has a perception problem that keeps some highly qualified students away"
Some community members feel that the college is disconnected from the community
The community is unaware of the study abroad program
There is a reputation that "students never get out of Suffolk"
There is a lack of knowledge about Suffolk
There is a perception that "developmental education means you are not college material"
There is a perception that faculty are "not up to date on teaching methodologies" and are just "content experts"
There are misconceptions that all SCCC programs have waiting lists
There are concerns that some programs don't have enough spots for all the interested students
There is a feeling that some of our students need to be "weeded out" of high demand programs
There is a belief in the community that "Suffolk does not attract the highest quality student"
"When they [public] see a success story for Suffolk, everyone goes wow"
High school students are unaware of the caliber of the student who attends the college
Lack of information leads to wildly inaccurate perceptions
Community members believe that negative perceptions exist because there is "too little information" to combat them
"Community colleges have a negative reputation in general"
Some students are unaware that they can get an accredited degree
Some students did not know we had academic programs

The economy is impacting where students go to college
Some districts have more than 60% of their students on free or reduced lunch
There is a concern that students won't be able to pay back their loans
Suffolk provides hope for low SES students

Suffolk should "brace for more students since parents can't afford to send them away"
"The bad economy is a good selling point for the college"
The college is known for its affordability
Suffolk is becoming an option to some parents due to the economy
Suffolk is meeting the need for an affordable education
Students feel that going to college will put their parents into debt
Students are not getting full scholarships at four years and can't afford to go
Students are unsure about the value or number of scholarships
Students are unsure about their eligibility for scholarships
Students don't want a lot of college debt
The parents can be persuaded to send their children to Suffolk based on "the financial argument"
The parents would like more scholarships
Students like that their parents can save money by sending them to Suffolk

The college would benefit from enhanced collaboration with other colleges
"SCCC needs more joint admissions programs"
Other colleges are setting up "stratified communication programs" for different populations
Personal experiences show that transfer is "sometimes difficult"

Incoming freshman desire a traditional college experience
Parents would like to see a greater emphasis on extra curricular activities
Students feel like they are "giving up the college experience" by coming to Suffolk
Students don't think they will have a true collegiate experience at Suffolk
Students want to have a full college experience
Students want to have the "dorm and roommate" experience
The full college experience will be "a great selling point"
Traditionally aged students expect "more from college than just classes"
There is a feeling that the campuses don't look collegiate
Students feel there would be "social difficulties" in transferring into a four-year college
Students would like to learn about the life of a college student

The community wants the college to promote local success stories
Parents would like the college to conduct an entering student study
Parents would like for SCCC to track successful students from high school throughout their collegiate experience
Suffolk could connect with students prior to the time they leave to get information on where they are going
"Suffolk should highlight local high school successes"
SCCC could publish its success stories in Newsday
Suffolk should have a "series of local success story commercials"
Using alumni who came from our large feeder high school is good for local relationships

Environmental trends are impacting the college
Students know they need a college education
The college needs to find ways to "effectively serve students with autism"
The college needs to increase its assistance to the undocumented
The college needs to "target the ESL students" given demographic shifts
The community is concerned about the trend to hire only BSNs
The community wants to see the nursing program adjust to changing requirements
Community members feel that the college will need more counselors who know how to "work with

at-risk students"
The community wants to see us make veterans a focal point
The increasing county budget deficits will "negatively impact the college's budget"
The community is starting to embrace the importance of going to college
Teachers understand that students have complex lives
The college needs to "plan for the future because economics will change"

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