



The report from the
Kansas City Kansas Community College
Community Listening Project

Presented by
Kansas City Consensus
to the
Kansas City Kansas Community College Board of Trustees
May 18, 2010

Consensus

"We put the *public* in public policy"

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Dear Trustees of the Kansas City Kansas Community College:

When you asked the Consensus team to talk with your stakeholders, we had no idea what kind of reception to expect. After all, we were asking people to give up 90 minutes and to share their thoughts about your college. Would people be hostile? Would they even be willing to show up? As it turns out, not only were they willing to participate, it was very rare for someone we called to turn us down. And far from being hostile, what people said in meeting after meeting was that KCKCC was a valued asset, a hidden gem, and that they wanted to see the college trumpet its successes more loudly.

Projects like this represent an act of faith on the part of stakeholders. They gave their time and thoughts in the belief that it might provide value to an institution they respect. They praised the college for what it does right and they were honest about what the college could do to improve. They don't expect the college to do everything that they suggested, but they will be watching to see whether the college implements the most critical actions from the *Community Listening Project*.

To a college staff that is working at capacity, the thought of doing even more must be overwhelming. We would encourage the college to reach out to the community for assistance in bringing the recommendations to life. At session after session, people expressed their willingness to help.

We consider this the beginning, not the end, of the *Community Listening Project*. We applaud the trustees and staff for taking the important, potentially transformational, step of doing something that seems so simple: listening. Based on what we heard from your community, we encourage the college to keep bringing together its stakeholders and listening to what they have to say.

Our heartfelt thanks to the Community Listening Project Planning Team, chaired by Cathy Breidenthal and including Dr. Ray Daniels, Wendell Maddox, and Leota Marks. Your leadership skillfully shaped the project, and your collegiality made it a pleasure to work on it with you.

Best regards,

Jennifer Wilding
Director, Consensus

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In addition, Consensus has provided the college with a PDF archive that includes separate reports for each focus group, the two-page fact sheet about the college, and the survey, along with a spreadsheet showing individuals who participated in each focus group. Together, these documents reflect a complete record of the Community Listening Project.

“You can achieve greatness from here”

Executive summary of the Kansas City Kansas Community College
Community Listening Project report
Presented by Kansas City Consensus May 18, 2010

On the road, blind spots cause accidents because we can't see what's coming at us. In life, the same is true for individuals and institutions. Blind spots, those things that others know about us that we don't know about ourselves, can keep us from taking the actions we need to take. We don't know what we don't know, and sometimes what we don't know *can* hurt us.

In December 2009 the trustees of the Kansas City Kansas Community College [KCKCC] took action to reduce their blind spots and build a future strongly connected to the needs of their community. They launched the *Community Listening Project*, a series of focus groups and interviews intended to accomplish three goals:

1. To distinguish the conversation among stakeholders about the community college, its effectiveness and role in the community;
2. To identify issues that the board of trustees should address; and
3. To get a sense of the KCKCC that stakeholders want to see in the future.

The project was led by a planning team chaired by Trustee Cathy Breidenthal, which included Dr. Ray Daniels and Wendell Maddox, trustees, and Leota Marks, dean of human resources and affirmative action at the college.

The team identified 16 stakeholder groups, each one the subject of a focus group. The 16 fit into four major categories:

- External stakeholders. Civic groups, neighborhoods/seniors, large employers, small employers, chambers of commerce/workforce development, nonprofits/clergy, and Leavenworth;
- KCKCC students. Current full-time and part-time students, and former students who completed an associate's degree or who transferred to a four-year school; and
- High schools. Board members, school counselors, and students from two USD 500 high schools.

In addition, the team requested interviews with several political and civic leaders.

Consistently, the people Consensus contacted were eager to assist KCKCC. Only rarely did someone decline to participate, typically because of a scheduling conflict. The people of Wyandotte and Leavenworth counties appreciated being asked their opinion and provided thoughtful, constructive feedback.

The 14 things focus group participants want KCKCC to know (in no particular order)

These comments were themes among several focus group sessions:

1. KCKCC is viewed as a confidence builder for students, helping first-generation college students or technical students who had never seen themselves as college material realize that they can be academically successful. The college is considered a good fit for the community, offering education that is affordable, practical and accessible. Wyandotte County residents felt a strong emotional connection to the college because it helps “their” students, many of whom did not begin life with a lot of material advantages.
2. KCKCC serves six distinct groups of students:
 - High school students who want to earn college credits;
 - Students who aren’t ready psychologically or academically for a big, sink-or-swim college;
 - Students who can’t afford the tuition for all four years at a four-year college;
 - Students who want an associate’s degree or certificate that leads to a job;
 - Students who want to learn a technical trade; and
 - Adults who want to take a class or two for personal or career purposes.

Students who are academically ambitious or who can pay for or get scholarships to four-year schools are not interested in KCKCC.
3. The college is accessible to people from many socioeconomic and racial/ethnic backgrounds, and it reflects the diversity of Wyandotte County.
4. The college has areas of excellence within an academic environment that is not viewed as terribly challenging overall. People recognize a tradeoff between challenging coursework and serving a student population that may need additional support.
5. Students felt strongly that KCKCC faculty members were supportive and encouraging, and that they gave their all to help students succeed. Students appreciated the small class sizes and the extra attention they received. Students had different perspectives about how challenging the classes were.
6. School counselors said high school students benefit from taking classes taught by KCKCC instructors. They said students were surprised by the amount of preparation and difficulty associated with a KCKCC class.
7. While school counselors say that high school students are so oriented towards KCKCC that active recruitment isn’t a big issue, students strongly disagreed. Students wanted the college to make the case for attending KCKCC.
8. While being the “local” college offers benefits like lower cost, higher comfort level, and proximity to family, students said proximity can be a distraction and can make KCKCC feel like “13th grade.”

9. Large employers view the college as a partner in providing training for employees and potential workers, and one that is flexible enough to respond quickly to their needs. They were very positive about the experience of working with KCKCC.
10. People felt strongly that the purchase of the Laird Noller and Walmart buildings for use by the Technical Education Center was a sign of forward momentum and a benefit for students and community redevelopment.
11. Dr. Thomas Burke, college president, was recognized and appreciated for his involvement in the community, at the same time panelists said that other staff and faculty should be more involved in civic life.
12. The buildings on the main campus are considered unattractive, drab, gloomy and difficult to navigate. People thought both the main and Leavenworth campuses needed sprucing up.
13. To people who are outside looking in, the college is seen as bland and not particularly engaging or friendly. They said it needs a “face” and a personality. To insiders, however, the college is viewed as friendly, active and knowledgeable.
14. A survey of all panelists showed that the three facts that had by far the greatest positive impact on their perception of the college were:
 - Tuition per credit hour at KCKCC is \$49, while each credit hour costs about \$245 at KU and UMKC;
 - Credit hours from KCKCC can transfer to KU and UMKC, among other universities; and
 - Of 146 full-time instructional faculty members, 17% have Ph.D./doctorate degrees and 65% have master’s degrees.

The 16 actions people most want KCKCC to take (in no particular order)

Each focus group suggested a range of actions for the college to take, and it is worth spending time with the full report to identify actions that would be valuable for specific groups like chambers, unions, high school students, etc. The following actions represent agreement among more than one group.

1. **Communicate!** People consider the college a hidden gem and want it to tell its story. Panelists were extremely frustrated with the minimal information they received from KCKCC and wanted a steady stream of emails that they could forward to others. They also gave low marks to the college’s website and said the course catalog was an ineffective communications tool. Clergy and union representatives also wanted flyers that they could distribute at union halls and churches.
2. **Polish the brand.** Almost everyone disliked the television ads, and that went double for high school students. Panelists also disliked the tag line, “Making life better,” which they said was weak and meaningless. The college, they said, should market specifically to the types of students who attend KCKCC by

sending a “you can do this” message and by showing examples of people who attended KCKCC and went on to lead successful lives.

3. **Spruce up the buildings.** Both the main and Leavenworth campuses were considered prime candidates for a makeover. People considered the buildings threadbare, shabby and drab. Wayfinding was tough at the main campus; better signage is needed.
4. **Educate the public about levy increases**, including why they’re needed, what the funds are for, and how the college benefits the community.
5. **Actively sell the college to high school students.** High school students want evidence that you can prosper if you start your career at KCKCC. Share stories of successful graduates, offer campus tours, and build the picture of KCKCC as much better than the college of last resort, which is how it is sometimes seen.
6. **Pitch the certificate programs and TEC training directly to high school students.** Currently, outreach focuses more on degree programs.
7. **Work with school counselors to improve the system.** Engage counselors in addressing concerns such as rules about online enrollment, billing, improvements to the website, and use of ACT scores for presidential scholarships.
8. **Improve the academic counseling to transfer students.** Students found that many KCKCC credits didn’t transfer or didn’t count towards their degree at four-year schools. They said counselors seemed more focused on selling the associate’s degree than helping students who wanted to take some classes then transfer to a four-year school.
9. **Integrate TEC more fully into the college.** KCKCC students were concerned that the two had different phone numbers and that TEC and KCKCC were not advertised together. They wanted the two to feel more connected.
10. **Hold classes off-site**, at Fort Leavenworth, in neighborhoods around Wyandotte and Leavenworth counties, and on work sites of large employers.
11. **Provide workplace training** to students to ensure that they are employable after leaving KCKCC. Both large and small employers craved anything the college could do to encourage students to speak and write Standard English, dress and behave appropriately, interact professionally with the public, and have good work habits.
12. **Provide management training.** Large companies wanted classes for employees promoted into management positions, and school board members wanted the college to help residents climb past entry-level jobs and into management.
13. **Provide Leavenworth-specific information** on the website and in the catalog, so people can tell easily what classes are offered there and so leaders can more easily use the college as an economic development tool.
14. People have a hard time connecting with the right person inside the college. **Provide an ombudsman** to connect outsiders with the person who can help them. Large employers and school counselors requested a liaison to work specifically with each group.
15. **Stay in touch with alumni.** People who have attended KCKCC were positive about the experience and were interested in being helpful.

16. **Take a stronger role in community and civic affairs.** Lead progress, bring together leaders of key institutions in Kansas City, Kansas, and Leavenworth, and convene meetings of other educational institutions. Encourage staff and faculty, especially department heads, to be more active in the community. Let the community know where KCKCC personnel are already active.

Overall, the feeling from the focus groups was that KCKCC is a valued asset that is too often invisible. The college is surrounded by a community that is on record as wanting to help the college be even more successful in the future.

About Consensus

Consensus is a nonprofit firm with 25 years of experience bringing people together to deal with difficult issues. Consensus works on behalf of the local community, providing research, processes, and a neutral space in which residents can have a voice in public policy. It also works on behalf of clients in metro Kansas City and around the U.S., conducting studies and engaging constituents in finding positive solutions to even high-conflict challenges. For more information, see www.consensuskc.org or contact Jennifer Wilding, director, at jenwilding@consensuskc.org.

The Consensus consulting team includes Dan Blom, Mary Jo Draper and Jennifer Wilding. Consensus is led by a 15-person board of directors chaired by Charles Renner, partner, Husch Blackwell Sanders.

Introduction

After a series of positive changes and a few challenges, the Kansas City Kansas Community College (KCKCC) felt it was time to hear from the people who had a stake in its success. The board of trustees and staff initiated the *Community Listening Project* to find out what key stakeholders were thinking about the college and the way in which it served the community.

The project was led by a planning team chaired by Trustee Cathy Breidenthal, which included Dr. Ray Daniels and Wendell Maddox, trustees, and Leota Marks, dean of human resources and affirmative action with the college.

The team created three major objectives for the project:

1. To distinguish the conversation among stakeholders about the community college, its effectiveness and role in the community;
2. To identify issues that the board of trustees should address; and
3. To get a sense of the Kansas City Kansas Community College that stakeholders want to see in the future.

The team identified 16 stakeholder groups, each one the subject of a focus group, which fit into three major categories:

- **External stakeholders.** These included civic groups, neighborhoods/seniors, large employers, small employers, chambers of commerce/workforce development, unions, nonprofits/clergy, and Leavenworth stakeholders.
- **KCKCC students.** Focus groups were held with current full-time and part-time students, with students who had completed an associate's degree and who had moved on to four-year institutions.
- **High schools.** Focus groups were conducted with board members of local school districts, school counselors, and with students from Sumner Academy and Washington High School.

In addition, the team requested seven phone interviews with people considered to be key political and civic leaders in the community.

KCKCC hired Consensus to implement the study. Consensus is a nonprofit firm with 25 years of experience in engaging the public. It works on behalf of the local community, providing research, processes and a neutral space in which residents can have a voice in public policy decisions. It also works on behalf of clients in metro Kansas City and around the United States. For more information, see www.consensuskc.org or contact Director Jennifer Wilding at jenwilding@consensuskc.org.

About qualitative research

Focus groups have a small sample size and, in this case, the participants were not randomly selected. Because of that, the focus groups cannot be assumed to accurately portray the entire group being studied. Qualitative methods like focus groups are valuable when the intent is to explore and the questions are broad and general rather than highly detailed. The value of qualitative research is that it can uncover the hidden feelings, beliefs and attitudes that can then be tested using quantitative methods.

Quantitative methods include, for example, Gallup polls mailed to randomly selected Americans that are said to be accurate within plus-or-minus a certain percentage. We make no such broad claim to accuracy for focus groups. What we can claim is that the focus groups were the right method to use to allow the project to meet its goals, of uncovering the conversation and identifying possible actions and the role for the college in the future.

About the participants

The planning team identified specific individuals that they wanted to attend most of the focus groups. For a few others, they asked Consensus to identify people who would fit well within a category. Consensus was responsible for recruiting participants for the external focus groups, Leavenworth, and the focus groups of school counselors and board members. The college recruited current and former KCKCC students, and USD 500 staff recruited two focus groups of high school students.

Most participants were not compensated for their service. The only individuals who received stipends were current and former KCKCC students; a small amount of money was expected to have a big impact on their willingness to participate.

Consistently, the people we asked to donate 90 minutes to KCKCC were enthusiastic about doing so. Only very rarely did someone decline to participate, and that was because they had another commitment. Panelists said they were glad to be asked and they appreciated the fact that the college wanted to hear from them. While the feedback was honest and included some criticisms, it also reflected an appreciation for the college and its role in the community as well as a desire to help the college be even more of an asset in the future. The overriding feeling from focus group participants was, "Help us help you."

External stakeholders

“External stakeholders” includes seven focus groups, mostly populated by people who live or work in Wyandotte County. The focus groups were divided into people from civic groups, neighborhoods/seniors, large employers, small employers, chambers of commerce/workforce development, unions, and nonprofits/clergy. In addition, comments from the Leavenworth and school board focus groups were included in this section when they were pertinent.

External stakeholders were asked four main questions:

- What is your impression of the college?
- What are the benefits that it offers to the community?
- What current programs are needed and which new programs should be added?
- What actions should the college take that it isn't currently taking?

All focus groups of external stakeholders were held in the conference room of the United Way of Wyandotte County. The only exception was the Leavenworth focus group, which was held at the KCKCC building there.

What is your overall impression of the KCK Community College?

The first question was intended to distinguish the top-of-mind thoughts about the community college.

Overview of people's responses about the institution

- The college is respected and considered a valued asset for both Wyandotte and Leavenworth counties.
- Consistently, panelists said that the college is a hidden gem and should toot its own horn more loudly and more often.
- The college gets extremely low marks for communication, which is considered a serious weakness with ramifications for community support.
- KCKCC is viewed as a confidence builder for students, helping first-generation college students or technical students who had never seen themselves as college material realize that they can be academically successful.

- The college is considered accessible to people of a wide variety of socioeconomic and racial/ethnic backgrounds, and is viewed as reflecting the diversity of Wyandotte County.
- The college has some important areas of excellence within an academic environment that is not viewed as terribly challenging overall. People recognized a tradeoff between challenging coursework and serving a student population that may need additional academic support.
- The college is viewed as a good partner with businesses, providing training for employees and potential workers.
- The recent purchase of the Laird Noller and Walmart buildings was considered very positive by every focus group. People see it as a sign of forward momentum and a benefit for students and for community redevelopment.
- Dr. Thomas Burke, college president, was recognized and appreciated for his involvement in the community, at the same time many focus group members said that other staff and faculty members should be more involved in community organizations.
- The college needs a “face” and a personality. To people who are outside looking in, the college is seen as bland and not particularly engaging or friendly.
- The buildings on the main campus are considered unattractive, drab and gloomy, and difficult to navigate.

Educational quality

Panelists saw the college as very oriented towards work and its role that of preparing people for employment and “not just an esoteric degree.” The college can create training that meets an immediate need that is outside of the standard curriculum. If you have workers who “need to learn to make widgets, they set up a class in how to make widgets.” People point to this with pride.

Large employers see the college as a valued partner in providing training that meets their needs. “They’re inquisitive, they want to know what they can do for us,” one panelist said. Another said her company had worked with the college even before the business opened to get workers trained. The college gets high marks for responsiveness.

Panelists viewed KCKCC as smoothing the transition between high school and college. Several panelists mentioned the fact that not every student was ready to leap into a large institution like KU or K-State, and that KCKCC eased students into the pursuit of higher education. People viewed that role as extremely important.

The college is perceived to offer some high-quality programs that can compete well with other colleges and universities. Specific examples of areas of excellence included: nursing, audio engineering, mortuary science, music, athletics, and debate.

With the exception of the areas of excellence, KCKCC is not perceived as challenging by people who are academically ambitious. "I hear from young adults in the community who are interested in the college-prep track that they choose a different institution to get training that is more challenging," one panelist said.

When people compared the quality of KCKCC with other educational institutions, they typically compared it with the Johnson County Community College. While they felt JCCC offered higher quality education, they also recognized that it had more money and a student population with more advantages. As one person said, "We don't have a quality community. We have the highest dropout rate in the area. Our programs (at KCKCC) meet our students at eye level. They don't have the GPAs to get them into another college."

Over and over, people talked about KCKCC as being a good fit with the people and needs in Wyandotte County. The size, the course offerings, the friendliness and personal assistance available from professors were all seen as positive.

The board of trustees

The board was mentioned very rarely. One participant said the college had been in "mid-life crisis." He explained that "for a lengthy period of time the college was dysfunctional because the board was dysfunctional," and that now it appeared the board was moving out of that dysfunctional period.

Communications and advertising

The people who participated in the focus groups were, by and large, people who cared about the college and its role in the community. Those who knew the college best were the most frustrated by the lack of communication between the college and the community. They felt that the college had an important and positive story to tell, but it wasn't telling the story.

Poor communications were seen as affecting how people perceived academic quality at KCKCC. Even some people who said they believed KCKCC's academics were strong were reluctant to recommend the college because of its poor or missing profile in the community. While people generally take pride in living in Wyandotte County, one panelist said, "You don't hear people talking about being proud of KCKCC." Another agreed and said, "There are some great staff and great people, but if someone asked me if they should go there, KCKCC would not be my first pick. And that's sad." When asked what would make people proud, one focus group suggested more community interaction. "Bring people in and show them positive things so they have positive things to say. Let people know what KCKCC is doing right."

Another example of the impact of the dangerously low profile was related by a business owner who needed trained health-care workers. Nursing is considered a strength of KCKCC, but nobody he asked in downtown KCK mentioned the college. “Donnelly or JCCC were what everyone said. For a while we thought Donnelly and KCKCC were the same. We finally learned about it from one of our employees who had gone there.”

What little advertising the college does is considered of poor quality, and many panelists said the website was not user-friendly.

Alumni

We made no attempt to recruit focus group participants who had attended KCKCC, but a surprising number of those on our list happened to have taken classes or received their AA degrees there. People who had attended KCKCC a little or a lot all had positive things to say about the experience. They consistently said that they would be interested in getting involved in the college if they were invited.

Image

We asked panelists to describe the community college as if it were a person. Here are some of the descriptions they gave us:

- Threadbare. “Imagine someone working hard, but in a coat that is threadbare, not getting any glory, but just working hard.”
- Wallflower. “Like being a student who nobody knows.”
- Introverted, shy, a loner from the outside, “but when you get to know the people there it really blooms and blossoms.”
- KCKCC is “the old guy who lives down the road in the country. You tell your kids not to play in his yard, but when you get to know him, it turns out he’s full of knowledge.”
- A sleeping giant.
- “You’re like a submarine and you’re running silent because you don’t want anyone to know you’re there.”
- Stuck in the 1970s or 1980s.
- “Someone you instantly like but forget about the next day.”
- Approachable, especially for someone who is undecided. “You can say, ‘What do you have to offer?’ and not be intimidated.”
- Supportive and encouraging. Easy to get along with, but not a pushover
- Talented. Athletic, academic, artistic.

- Fun, safe and relaxed.
- Friendly. “It reminded me of high school in a way. It was less formal, not as intimidating for someone not ready for a four-year program.”
- Steadfast. “It’s like a big oak tree out there. If you need shade, you know it will be there. It will survive without a whole lot of tending.”
- Multicultural. “You don’t walk in and see one set of people. It’s Wyandotte County, very diverse.”

Many of the descriptions reflected the pervasive feeling that the college was hidden from view, unappreciated and a bit scruffy around the edges. Most people felt the image didn’t do the school justice, and that the college was better than the image it presented to the outside world.

The tension between low cost and a nicer facility

By the time we conducted the focus group with people in Leavenworth, we had heard complaints from several groups about the shabbiness of the KCKCC campus, complaints that were echoed in Leavenworth about the KCKCC building there. Groups said that they both valued the low tuition cost and wanted the space to receive a facelift. When we probed the Leavenworth group about the need to balance affordability and cost for improvements, they jumped into an interesting conversation.

One participant said the desire to keep costs low for students doesn’t always pay off. “If you go to Johnson County (Community College) and ask for TQM or SPC training, they would charge what the most expensive consultants would charge, but then pour that back into the staff and college.” He said the adjuncts at Johnson County are equal to the best experts. “I think there is too much emphasis on price, especially for customized training.”

Another panelist agreed that price is not always the main consideration: “I never was concerned with cost for customized training. I sent (my) high school students here to get college courses and never worried about cost. When I sent employees here, I was much more interested in whether they could get what they needed than price.”

On the other hand, another panelist warned that the college could raise tuition to a point where some students would not attend school. “I would hate to see a lot of money spent to chase a dollar that we are not going to get anyway.” This man asked, “What target market are you after and what are you going to spend to get them?”

A panelist said that for some people, such as those in the military or stay-at-home moms, it doesn’t matter if the college looks like the Johnson County college campus. They’re trying to squeeze in classes and convenience is most important.

After the discussion, the group tempered their earlier criticism of the physical space, saying that a nicer campus would not improve enrollment and agreeing that they

don't expect the KCKCC building to rival the Johnson County campus. Here are some comments:

- "If I wanted to live in Johnson County, I would live there."
- "We need to take care of our own."
- "We'll go broke if we have to chase them (Johnson County)."
- "If you provide good equipment and good instruction, that's what counts; not the building."

What benefits does KCKCC offer to the community?

Major benefits people said KCKCC offers included:

- Affordable education.
- Education of good or excellent quality.
- Education that's accessible to first-generation college students.
- Practical, workforce-related education.
- Training designed specifically for businesses.
- An example of diversity in action.

Overall, the role of KCKCC was seen as that of a "portal to higher learning." People talked about it as a first step, a way to ease students into college. They talked eloquently about the benefit of a college that really meets the needs of students in Wyandotte County, many of whom don't view themselves as college material and who may have no family members who have attended college.

KCKCC is seen as an educational "home," where people want you to succeed, as opposed to large, impersonal universities like University of Kansas or Kansas State University. Panelists related stories of people who went to larger institutions, were underprepared or overwhelmed and quit, then enrolled in KCKCC, where they got a second chance. Some returned to the larger institutions and finished out their degrees.

Several people said that connecting the Technical Education Center to the community college was likely to encourage TEC students to work towards a degree. The one TEC student we talked with said that was exactly what had happened with him, that he didn't see himself taking college classes until he got on the KCKCC campus.

Panelists see this as a major benefit to students and the community.

The college is seen as serving six distinct groups of students:

1. High-school students who want to gather college credits while getting their high-school diploma and who want a taste of what college is all about.

2. Students who are not ready psychologically or academically to go to a big, sink-or-swim college like KU and who need a little more hand-holding before they're ready to transfer to a four-year school.
3. Students who are ready academically or psychologically, but can't afford the tuition at a four-year school. These students may get their basic requirements out of the way or may receive an associate's degree from KCKCC before getting a bachelor's degree.
4. Students who want an associate's degree or certificate in employment-focused programs like mortuary science, law enforcement, audio engineering, nursing, etc.
5. Students who want to learn a technical trade, such as welding. Some of these students may be motivated to earn a degree, as well.
6. Adults who want to take one or two classes whether for academic, career or recreational reasons.

Here are some examples of what people told us about the KCKCC role as a portal to higher education:

- "KCKCC makes our kids feel like they are not the misfits of society any more. My family didn't have much money; college was not open. With the technical college opening up, I have hope for my younger siblings and kids I know. It's not out of reach anymore."
- "I live in a neighborhood where not everyone even talks about going to college and many who do talk about going to the community college talk about it excitedly and proudly. It's an opportunity for these kids."
- "For someone who went to elementary, middle and high school, I thought I was ready to go off to college. It was a good transition to get the feel of college, having the ability even in your senior year to take classes there."
- "There's not a big culture shock. You see the people you went to high school with."
- "One of my (church) members went there and then went on to the police academy and is now a sheriff's deputy," one pastor said. He added that this was a typical experience in his church, where several members had gone to KCKCC and found they could move on to a four-year college. "I can refer my folks to all kinds of people who have had that experience to get the confidence and keep going."

In terms of diversity, several panelists talked about the benefit of being an educational institution that is open and accessible to students of any ethnic or racial group. The college was seen as reflecting the diverse Wyandotte County community in

terms of its students and faculty. (A couple of panelists, though, said the college could better serve the growing Hispanic population, particularly those who speak English as a second language.)

KCKCC students are perceived to be focused on the benefit of job training, according to one panelist. “A lot of people I know who have gone to JCCC are using it as a stepping stone to get to a four-year college. They seem quite motivated. People I’ve met from KCKCC have goals that are a lot more short-term. None of them are looking to move to a four-year college. They want to get a piece of paper that will help them get a job more quickly.”

Panelists did not expect KCKCC to serve students who are ready academically and psychologically for a four-year school and who have scholarships or who can afford the higher tuition. That group was not considered the KCKCC market. “I drove by KCKCC on the way here, and I was talking to a kid from Wyandotte County on the phone who was at K-State. I asked him why he didn’t come here. He just laughed. That’s their reaction.”

When asked how KCKCC should balance the needs of students against the desire for academic rigor, members of local school boards said accessibility was most important. The group agreed with one member who said, “You have to serve the population that you have. If you get students who need remediation, it’s hard to maintain rigor and do the remediation.”

Along with serving individual students, KCKCC was seen as providing benefits to employers. Large employers see KCKCC as a partner in providing training for their workers, and for people who might become their workers. They see training as an ongoing need due to new technology and other changes. “It’s always better to keep your current workforce and train them,” one panelist said. The types of training that businesses need are very diverse, from basic life skills training so that employees can interact with customers, etc., to highly technical training. They said that KCKCC needed to react to the needs of businesses in the area, and believed it was flexible enough to do that well. “It is harder to tell KU or MU to change something in their business offerings,” one panelist said.

Which educational programs are most needed? Which should be added?

Panelists consistently said they appreciated the fact that many of KCKCC’s programs are designed to move Wyandotte Countians into good jobs. The educational and technical programs most often listed as standouts were:

- Teacher preparation program with Emporia State
- Early childhood education
- Health training, especially nursing and including physical and respiratory therapy

- Fire science
- Law enforcement
- Mortuary science
- Construction-related programs

With some groups, when we asked a group which new educational programs should be added, the group talked about the process that should be used to identify the new programs rather than naming programs themselves. Talk to employers, talk to the business community, find out what jobs will be important in the future, and then train for those jobs, they said.

Other focus groups, like employers and chambers and unions, had specific ideas about what should be offered. Here is what they suggested:

Early childhood education

- More advanced degrees in early childhood education.

Health-related

- Health care – including wellness and serving the elderly population
- Nutrition, coupled with the professional cooking program, to combat obesity
- Animal health

Law enforcement

- Law enforcement training. Officers have to travel to Chicago for training that could be offered locally, a panelist said.

Liberal arts

- Science
- Journalism
- Spanish classes for adults

Life skills

- Basic life skills. Both large employers and small employers said that they needed workers who could speak and write Standard English, dress and behave appropriately at work, interact professionally with the public, and get to work on time. They were very interested in anything the community college could do to train people to exhibit these behaviors.

Management – nonprofit and for-profit

- Management “soft skills.” Large employers were interested in training for people who are promoted into management for things like decision-making, conflict resolution and managing people, change management and problem-solving, quality control, and Six Sigma.
- A comprehensive package of training for nonprofits in things like budgeting, accounting and human resources. Nonprofits are bombarded with single-session training offerings, they said, when a comprehensive curriculum from a single source would cost less and provide better training.

Manufacturing

- Manufacturing or operations two-year degree program
- Manufacturing engineering
- Supply chain management

Skilled trades

- Refrigeration. There are 2,500 jobs in Wyandotte County related to food processing and people are being sent to Garden City to train in refrigeration, according to one panelist.
- HVAC
- Lineman program for BPU
- Commercial drivers license training. Getting trained to drive a semi is expensive and difficult, and some schools are fly-by-night.

Service industry training

- Hospitality industry training. This was often mentioned, due to the growth of hospitality-based businesses in Wyandotte County. The business administration aspect of hospitality should be part of the program, along with training for service jobs.
- Recreation-related jobs

Technical

- Information technology (strongly encouraged by large employers)
- Information management (informatics)
- Textiles
- Biotechnology
- Green energy (“Other schools that teach those things are packed.”)

- Mechanical and design engineering
- Green engineering (“There’s an increasing emphasis on certification and licensing in the field. The more we can train locally the more we can employ locally.”)
- Safety / OSHA training. Even standard first aid and CPR would be helpful, one panelist said.

In addition, the chamber focus group suggested the college try to increase the number of women and minorities prepared to participate in government contracts of various types.

What actions could the college take?

Academics

Focus group participants talked more about workforce training and degree programs and certificates designed to get people into jobs than they did the liberal arts elements of KCKCC. One panelist said the college should strengthen the faculty in the areas of math, the sciences and liberal arts, but our overall impression was that people thought the faculty in those areas was doing what was needed to serve the student population.

One panelist suggested sending students, especially education majors, into high schools and middle schools to serve as mentors. Another encouraged providing interpreters and classes offered in Spanish to serve the growing Hispanic population.

Alumni

The college should maintain contact with alumni, including anyone who has taken a class or training at the college as well as those who graduated with an associate’s degree. Alumni, if involved, can serve as promoters, recruiters and funders. One participant pointed to a minister who said he had attended KCKCC for two years and said, “If (he) was my alumni, I would plaster his picture all over my material.” Another participant said he had taken a class at KCKCC and never heard from the college again, while colleges he never attended sent him regular email updates.

Business services and research

Large employers want the college to conduct research and provide information to them on the trends and skills needed in the future, rather than waiting for large employers to approach the college. The group felt the college should be the leader, supporting the business community with research and advice. The group sees a potential partner in the economic development branches of government. In turn, government can use the

college as a recruiting tool by being able to show that it can support the businesses' training needs.

Large employers also wanted the college to employ a business liaison who would serve as one point of contact for employers.

Communications

Lack of communication was mentioned as a serious problem by every focus group. Only occasionally did a participant say he or she received information about the college beyond the course catalog that is inserted into a local newspaper. It was rare for a participant to say he or she received information by mail, and no participant said information arrived via email.

Panelists were interested in targeted communication, bite-sized pieces of news that they could use, like information about programs or awards won by students or faculty. They wanted information delivered regularly, as well.

Almost everyone wanted communication via email. The chamber focus group said it wanted to be emailed a "steady stream of information." Large employers wanted email blasts about new programs that they could easily pass along by forward.

In a few cases, people were interested in materials on paper. Pastors and union reps were interested in flyers that they could pass out in church or at the union hall. One focus group was interested in receiving a postcard with a URL they can go to for more information.

Panelists understand the need for a large course catalog, but found it to be ineffective as a communication tool for anyone other than people who had already decided to attend KCKCC. They didn't want to read it, and when they tried to find information they were looking for, it either wasn't there or was too difficult to find. One group suggested other materials were needed to get people excited about the college, and then the catalog could help them register.

The nonprofit and clergy focus group said the college needs to build its communications program around relationships. The eight-person group almost never heard from the college, despite having attended the occasional class or event there. The pastors were universal and energetic in their desire for more outreach, and saw themselves as potentially a conduit from the college to their congregants. "They are losing out on a great deal of word of mouth in this community, because if I get a young person I can talk to them about what's available at Penn Valley or Johnson County," one pastor said. "You're going to tell them about what you know and I know more about those programs at other junior colleges than our own right here."

The large employers were interested in online information and requested websites that would be specific to individual large employers, where they can find everything that is pertinent to them. They want to find the information they need parsed out on the web.

People acknowledged that the lack of a hometown newspaper hurt the ability to communicate. While the *Kansan* is available online, it doesn't have the reach that it had when it was printed.

Community outreach

Members of most groups appreciated that Dr. Burke had played a key role in civic life, and also said that the college should assume an even higher-profile role in Wyandotte and Leavenworth counties. People consistently felt that faculty and staff members, especially department heads, should be active in civic and other organizations.

"A more active faculty would bring new viewpoints to the community and they (the faculty) would be exposed to other views," a panelist said. "In a past life I was an academician and you can really get isolated in academic life." One focus group agreed that community involvement was more important in Wyandotte County than elsewhere because it's a more parochial community that cares about where people live and how they are involved.

While more involvement would be welcome, it also seems clear that the college is more active and connected than most people know. For example, the CEO of a nonprofit group said he had no idea of the breadth of KCKCC's involvement in the community until he asked his staff members about it. That's when he found that almost all of his staff members had some interaction with the college. It's important to let people know where the college is already involved, he said.

Other ideas for additional community outreach included:

- Raise the college's profile by participating in community events. Participate in off-campus health fairs, the Kiwanis Bike Rodeo, and other opportunities to hand out information about the college.
- Provide an ombudsman to serve as a one-stop representative to help outside groups connect with the right person within the college. The perception is that unless you already know someone inside the college, Dr. Burke in particular, you won't be able to connect.
- Send speakers to meetings of civic groups.
- Look for faculty members who can play a visible role in the community. Several panelists mentioned faculty members Paul Jewell and Marge Blank as being people who served as excellent ambassadors.
- Reach out to the 50+ age group and look for opportunities to fulfill their desire for life-long learning. "We're looking at 37-40,000 people in Wyandotte County. Nationally, community colleges are taking this (age group) very seriously," a panelist said.

Credits

The college should take steps to assure that its credits transfer to four-year colleges. The strong perception exists in the Leavenworth community that the credits often don't transfer. In the minds of that focus group, it means that the student wasted money and time, negating the advantage of low tuition.

Funding & taxes

Most people mentioned the benefit of low tuition costs for KCKCC. A few mentioned the college mil levy. When they did, the tone was, "Yes, the tuition is low, but the community also pays quite a bit through the mil levy."

One panelist said the mil levy is high, adding, "Mayor Reardon talks about property taxes going down, but my taxes keep going up. The community college is the major reason for that." During a conversation about the need for a facelift at KCKCC, one participant said, "We're between a rock and a hard place; a poor community that is taxed to death already." He said the college hadn't distinguished itself by tightening its belt much and said there needed to be a revolution in the way community colleges are financed. "We can't just keep draining the tax base of the community year after year."

Multiple panels suggested educating the public about the reasons for the levy increases, what the funds were being used for, and the value the college provides to the community.

Image: Branding

The image of the college was not well-served by the physical items that comprised its brand, according to most focus group participants.

Participants in several focus groups said that the current television advertising campaign is subpar. Some participants thought the college should market to students who they saw as being the likely target market for the community college, rather than the more generic advertising campaign currently being broadcast.

The college should market KCKCC to students who think they are not college material by emphasizing the college's affordability and small class sizes. The message should be, "This is not KU. You can do this." Another panelist said that the message to KCKCC students and potential students was, "You can achieve great things from here."

Several panelists also spoke against the tag line, "Making life better," which was seen as weak.

One focus group said the college should rewrite the mission statement. One participant said the mission statement should use active voice and say what the college was going to do. "It's the dullest I think I've ever read," he said, to agreement from the rest of the group.

A few panelists suggested the college change its name, an idea that was met with general agreement in those focus groups. The merger with the technical school and its presence in Leavenworth County were two reasons for the suggested change.

In addition, the union focus group said the college should consider including the word “college” when branding the Technical Education Center. When Washburn University took over the tech school, changing the name to Washburn University Technical College gave it credibility, a panelist said.

Image: Buildings

Every group mentioned that the buildings on the main campus were unattractive and several said this would keep the college from attracting students. Civic organization members hoped that KCKCC would call on the community to support education, and that part of the result will be a physical facelift at the college campus. They noted that the Wyandotte County community had invested in the area around the racetrack and said that some investment should also land in education.

The union group, most of which were from the building trades, focused on the architecture and appearance of the campus. “The architecture, black and silver, is not really inviting. It’s almost communistic. It reminds me of being in the Czech Republic,” a panelist said. The nonprofit/clergy group noted that some local high schools were more attractive than KCKCC.

The grounds of the main campus, on the other hand, were considered quite attractive.

Off-site classes

Multiple focus groups suggested holding classes off both the main and Leavenworth campuses. Here is what they told us:

- Consider setting up satellite campuses, perhaps at area high schools. This would help ameliorate the effects of poor public transportation in Wyandotte County.
- Hold classes in neighborhoods at community centers, to connect with students who might want to further their educations.
- Off-site classes offered in partnership with community-based organizations could give the college access to new markets with different people than those who come to the main campus.
- The new Children’s Campus could offer space for classes, especially for people in the early childhood education program.

Partnerships and leadership

Several focus groups wanted to see KCKCC be a leader in the community’s civic and educational affairs.

One group said the college should be a more forceful leader to unite the community and lead progress in Kansas City, Kansas. Another suggested that the college sit down with the governing bodies of the Unified Government, Board of Public Utilities, and area school districts to talk about common interests, strategies for the community, and tax issues. A third group wanted KCKCC to sit down with other community

colleges and colleges in the region to discuss sharing research and identifying areas of specialization.

Other ideas for partnerships were specific to high schools, community organizations and skilled trades.

High schools

Partner with high schools to give high school students tours of the campus. Participants in one focus group said that high school seniors and students with 3.0 GPAs and better are taken to visit the college. They suggested that visits include juniors and students with lower GPAs, as well. Also, consider holding Wyandotte Day, Schlagel Day, etc., at the college.

Community organizations serving the Spanish-speaking population

Partner with community organizations like El Centro to encourage Spanish-speaking students to attend KCKCC and to fill a need for bilingual students for the social worker program.

Skilled trades

Partner with skilled trades to develop articulating agreements, so that skilled workers who have gotten training can get college credits and perhaps even graduate. Longview College, for example, currently offers 50 hours of credit for an apprenticeship.

Also, partner with the skilled trades to help students find jobs when they finish their certificate programs. Consider projects like turning Fairfax into a green area, or working with the trades to be on the forefront of retraining workers for new energy delivery technologies.

- The union focus group urged the college to pick up the phone and call them to discuss partnerships and programs. “Our organizations are communities. Establish a relationship. We’re all parents. We have kids to send to college.” They said the college could give them flyers to distribute at meetings or at places where union members pay dues.

Placement in jobs and internships

A panelist who had taken on student interns encouraged more contact between faculty members and the businesses who are giving students a practicum in their field of study. More involvement from faculty will give the employer a better recommendation and understanding of the student. “Businesses should not be left to babysit (students),” the panelist said. He also suggested the opportunity to meet a group of students for an interview rather than being contacted one by one.

Another focus group said the college should stress job placement for graduates and certificate holders. “(The college) should not be just a place for them to accumulate debt; they need to make sure...it serves the purpose.” In several groups, there was a lot

of energy around Cerner's new presence in Wyandotte County and the desire for local residents to have the technical skills that would allow them to compete for good jobs with the company. One focus group saw Cerner as a test of sorts for KCKCC and Wyandotte County, potentially opening up partnerships with companies like Sprint and H&R Block.

Wayfinding

Many panelists said that it was difficult to find one's way around the KCK campus, and that it was easy to get lost. One panelist suggested offering a campus tour for new students.

Large employers, who were almost totally positive in their comments, reserved their only ire for the physical setting. "You can hike the place three times before you find where you're going. Figure out how to make yourself human and navigable," one panelist said. Another said, "I hate Jewell Hall; I can't find a damn room."

Workforce training

Both large and small employers were hungry for training that would help employees navigate the world of work. They said the college should add a life-skills curriculum to make sure that students can hold down a job after leaving KCKCC. Employers said they had difficulty finding employees who were literate, who could read a map and follow instructions, who knew how to interact with the public, dress and behave in a professional manner, and show up on time and every day.

One had difficulty specifically with students from one high-profile program at KCKCC. "I get a lot of requests from KCKCC students to come for practicum training, and I only accept about one percent. They don't have basic command of the English language. And there's textbook learning, but that's no way to teach working with people. They need to show up on time, be prepared to work. Students who come to me are missing some basic knowledge."

In addition, two focus groups suggested that the college step outside of semester schedules to operate as a training center that is flexible and responsive to business needs. They suggested offering more intensive three-, six- or nine-week courses, focusing on just-in-time training, and being prepared to rapidly scale classes up and down to meet the demand.

The large employer group said that businesses would increasingly want training to be provided online and said the college should talk with businesses about their needs in that area.

What is specific to each stakeholder group?

Chamber and workforce development groups. These panelists were not the only ones to suggest the college provide training targeted to workforce needs. The group expanded that role to include research. The group firmly believes that the college should invest in both communications and research and that a research department should keep the community apprised of trends in business and employment.

Civic groups – Rotary, Kiwanis, etc. While the college is well-regarded overall, the participants universally thought it needs a major overhaul of its communications, message and community interaction. They were very interested in giving the college the chance to connect to the community by speaking to their members or participating in their community activities.

Large employers. The large employers have a clear focus on training that delivers benefit to the business community. They are extremely eager to be full partners with the college to deliver training, and are looking for innovative ways to advance that partnership. They are also interested in services that are delivered on-site and that are specific to their businesses. They see the need for new programs that keep the workforce on the cutting edge of technology and management. In some areas, they want the college to tell them what the trends will be and help them to apply the appropriate training.

Neighborhood leaders and seniors. These panelists spoke eloquently about the value of an accessible, affordable education available from KCKCC. They were excited about the addition of TEC and about KCKCC's ability to improve the lives of the young people who might not otherwise go to college. This group also wanted the college to get out in the community more and mentioned the need for instructors who could serve as ambassadors for the school.

Nonprofit and clergy. Of all the groups, this one was most focused on how it could connect with and serve as a resource to the college. Everyone at the table worked with populations that could be well-suited to attend school at KCKCC, and some had hired graduates or attended the college themselves. They were hungry for the kind of regular communication from the college that would help them connect KCKCC with their clients and parishioners.

Small employers. What the small employers said they needed most were employees who have the life skills as well as the technical skills needed to be a benefit to the business. They discussed how difficult it was to find employees who are literate, reliable, able to interact with the public, and who have the values and habits needed to keep a

job. The college could help students prepare for work by adding a life skills curriculum. The business owners offered to talk to classes about what they look for in employees.

Unions. The participants in the union focus group expressed their interest in working in partnership with the college on a variety of initiatives. Participants urged the college to avoid sabotaging its relationship with the unions by bringing in out-of-town contractors to work on campus. They encouraged people who do hiring to visit the local unions' training centers and to look at quality and training as well as price.

Leavenworth, Kansas

The college operates a satellite campus in downtown Leavenworth, Kansas, that serves the community as well as soldiers stationed at Fort Leavenworth. While the Leavenworth campus is smaller than the main campus and offers fewer classes, it is definitely viewed as a community asset by participants in a focus group held specifically to get the voice of Leavenworth.

When Leavenworth respondents had comments that were about the college in general, those comments have been added to the report for external groups. This report covers information that is specific to the Leavenworth campus of KCKCC.

What is your overall impression of the KCK Community College?

Panelists had the following impressions:

- The college has lost its leadership role in the community over the last ten years.
- The building is dated and perhaps not adequate to meet the needs.
- The curriculum is strong and students enjoy the instructors.
- Nursing, firefighting and child care programs are highly regarded.
- Training for the workforce is customized and flexible.
- Educational programs that lead to jobs are highly valued.
- KCKCC is a springboard to four-year schools.
- There is the strong perception that KCKCC credits don't transfer to four-year colleges.

They described the college as a person, saying the KCKCC Leavenworth campus was:

- Affable and helpful
- Friendly
- In need of some sprucing up - not shabby, but not polished, either. (The group wanted it noted that the people who represent the college on staff are not in need of makeovers. "If they looked like the building, we would be in trouble," one said.)

KCKCC has lost its leadership role in Leavenworth

KCKCC once had a leadership role in Leavenworth, but that is no longer the case.

Panelists said they don't view the college as being a part of the community like it once was, and see St. Mary's College assuming the leadership role that once belonged to KCKCC. "St. Mary's has moved in and taken that role. You had it 10 years ago and

lost that.” The group, though, believed that KCKCC could become a more significant community partner and encouraged it to do so.

Leavenworth civic leaders would value more communication from KCKCC

“The ship is dead in the water, but you could get it going,” one panelist said about the college’s interaction with the community. “We can’t promote something if we don’t know anything about it,” said another, specifying classes, strategy and instructors as topics of communication. Another said that the local economic development corporation, Chamber and other groups have been “pushed” to communicate better, citing changes those groups made in their website, newsletters, online updates and direct updates to elected officials, saying, “I’m not sure I have seen...that the community college is doing anything (differently).”

The focus group wants communication improved so they can promote the college, help the college connect with businesses, and leverage the college as a community asset. They want to see the college succeed and to contribute to that success. One said, “If Leavenworth is a drag on the college, we should know that so we can improve it. We don’t have a clue if we are meeting expectations or not. If not, we would be at the table helping it become more successful. It is a very vital part of the community, but it is underutilized.”

The group was also very enthusiastic about the college working more closely with Fort Leavenworth. They see the Fort as an asset that should be supported by all of the institutions in the community. In turn, the Fort offers tremendous growth potential to the college by partnering on on-site training and by promoting the college’s total offerings with Fort personnel and families.

What benefits does it offer to the community?

The focus group said that KCKCC academic offerings are well-regarded. It was especially positive about programs that connect people to jobs and that provide training for existing workers. In Leavenworth, they said, there is an emphasis on education that stays in the community, an emphasis that creates an affinity for the services the college provides and which highlights the perceived gap between the college’s community leadership and involvement. The seeming exception to this is Fort Leavenworth. In this case, the Fort is seen as the permanent institution and services for Post personnel has the same impact as staying the community.

Which educational programs are most needed? Which should be added?

Like their counterparts in Wyandotte County, this group was interested in the addition of classes in basic life skills and work skills. They said students aren’t ready for work

because they cannot interact with customers appropriately. They also mentioned the need for applied math and learning that connects to the “real world,” not just textbooks.

What actions could the college take?

Focus on serving soldiers at Fort Leavenworth

A panelist noted that the population of Fort Leavenworth would grow in the next few years. He said, “There are going to be a lot more soldiers coming here and we are not going to drive a long way (for classes). We have tuition assistance and the GI Bill, so for the military community money is not an issue unless it is a spouse (taking the classes).”

It was important that the college have a table at PAIR Day (Post Activities Information Registration), when organizations show what they have to offer to Post families. The college was not represented recently, and a panelist said, “You’re really missing it if you’re not going to show up there.”

In addition, a panelist suggested offering classes on Fort Leavenworth. Many soldiers take lunchtime classes at the Fort education center, a military participant said. He believes military personnel might start taking lunchtime classes and then continue at the Leavenworth KCKCC building.

Take the lead in pulling together the education community in Leavenworth

Connected with the group’s desire for KCKCC to play a leadership role in Leavenworth, the group would also like the college to take the lead in pulling together all the local educational institutions. The group wanted KCKCC to be the “go to” institution representing education in Leavenworth. “I think education is the single most important thing that we have in the community and it’s like the educational system is standoffish. The Chamber and others are trying to get in, but they don’t reciprocate,” one panelist said. “The advantage to the college of being part of the leadership is that the other leading institutions will become advocates and promoters for the college if they understand the curriculum and the work that the college is doing.”

Provide Leavenworth-specific information on the website and in the catalog

This focus group was very frustrated by the lack of information specific to the Leavenworth campus. The way the paper catalog was organized made it difficult to find just the Leavenworth classes, a problem that was also true of the website. A participant involved in economic development said he wants to show prospective businesses what’s available in Leavenworth, and can’t easily identify what is taught there. This issue was seen as connected to a lack of identity for the Leavenworth campus.

Conduct outreach in other towns in Leavenworth County

The group suggested that KCKCC increase its outreach to other towns in the county, perhaps through partnerships with the libraries. They specifically mentioned towns in southern Leavenworth County as places where KCKCC has no presence.

Form partnerships with economic development entities

Connect with the business community and to economic development entities to find out how to design classes and training that businesses need. The economic development groups can help make connections and use the college as a recruiting tool if there is a tighter bond between them.

Spruce up the KCKCC building in Leavenworth

As with the main campus, the Leavenworth building is viewed as dated and the college's offerings as limited by the physical configuration of the buildings. The group's discussion on the need to balance low cost with a better physical environment led it to suggest raising costs for customized training, not trying to compete with the Johnson County campus, and matching the physical space with the target market.

Add a technology fee to replace lost funding

Some group members were concerned about the loss of \$6 per credit hour that KCKCC used to receive from Leavenworth County. They suggested adding a technology fee to the per-credit-hour cost as a way to replace computer and other equipment that can't be replaced with existing funding.

KCKCC students

The college convened focus groups of current and former students. Current students included one focus group with full-time and one with part-time students. Former students included one focus group with people who had received their associate's degrees and one with people who went on to a four-year college or university.

Students were provided a boxed dinner and a small stipend for participating. All student focus groups were held at the college.

What is your overall impression of the KCK Community College?

Students mentioned attributes like:

- Affordability
- Smaller class sizes
- Teachers who want you to succeed and go out of their way to help you
- Pathway to a four-year degree for some, the academic destination for others
- Local (which can be both a support and a distraction)
- Sometimes too easy
- Has teachers of different levels of quality
- Has a student body with different needs and attitudes

Tradeoffs of being the hometown choice

When people talked about the benefits of KCKCC, they talked about attributes that helped make the school more accessible and less intimidating than other colleges. One of those was the fact that it's local – most of the student body comes from high schools in the area. Living at home saves money and provides additional support.

The local aspect has its downside, as well. One group of students said that KCKCC was “the thirteenth grade.” Others said it was like still being in high school.

This can be valuable to some students, we heard. “I feel like I matured from high school here. I grew and then was ready for college.” Another panelist came to KCKCC right after high school and then came back as an adult to get an associate's degree: “When I came here it was everyone I went to high school with and they all just wanted to play. It made me want to do better so I could go somewhere else. In the years since I've been out and come back to school at night, where people are more focused, my attention span is different, and other people's attention spans are different.”

The purchase of the Walmart and the auto dealership buildings

Students, like external stakeholders, applauded the purchase of the former Laird Noller and Walmart buildings. One student said the college had been slow to update to serve 21st Century learners, but that it showed that it intended to be more responsive by expanding into the two buildings. A TEC student told us, “Now I think the college is really interested in students because they bought the Walmart and the old auto dealership. That shows they really care about the students.”

Image

Asked to describe KCKCC as a person, responses included:

- “That person cannot be my boyfriend. It would be a friendly person and really helpful, but he’s not maybe so handsome.”
- “It would be a person I would not have a long-term relationship with as a friend because he doesn’t offer what I really need. I need to be challenged, taken to the next level. In the long term I don’t think he would be the person who would be able to do that for me. I would probably be bored with him.”
- Comfortable (sometimes considered a benefit and sometimes a disadvantage. “Wyandotte County can suck you into a comfortable level, in terms of financial issues, family and education.”)
- Bubbly
- Friendly
- Loud
- Outdated
- Overlooked

Why would you tell someone to come here?

It’s affordable

One full-time student was accepted at an out-of-state four-year university but felt KCKCC was a better fit financially. “I chose to stay local because I would rather be at home without any money than in another state without any money,” she said.

Affordability also included scholarships, which full-time students said were a deal-maker for them. “I’m basically going here for free, and I would rather just save my money so I can go somewhere else to continue my education after I graduate here,” a student said. Another added, “When I was in high school, I thought I would go to KU. KCKCC gave me a full ride and a book voucher. That sealed the deal for me. I’m getting my associate’s and saving two years of money I could have wasted.”

For technical students, KCKCC is also considered affordable, especially compared to similar programs like the one at Pittsburgh State.

It has smaller class sizes and more caring teachers than the big schools

Students felt that smaller class sizes provided major advantages, including less intimidation and more personalized attention from faculty. Hearing students talk, you get the impression that the KCKCC faculty is a cheering section for their students, doing whatever they can to help students succeed.

Students talked about how friendly and personable faculty members are, and they connect that with the smaller class sizes. At a bigger school, like KU, their experience was that they felt like numbers. By contrast, several said they appreciated teachers taking an interest in them, even after they had completed that teacher's class. One student said, "The teachers here know me by name. They ask me how my day was." Another student had to miss classes because of a death and teachers got in touch. "At (my previous university) they would just drop me and not worry about it. Here I feel like they want you to succeed." A student who went on to a four-year school said, "If the professors knew you were trying they'd meet you halfway."

This makes the college experience less intimidating, they said. "I was afraid of a place like KU where you were one of 500 students in a class," a student said. "Teachers here go out of their way to help you." Another said, "The faculty here makes you feel like we need you here, we want you here." At a different school, a student said, she felt like the college just wanted her money and didn't care about her as a student.

Students who went on to a four-year school said they think KCKCC deserves to be known as outstanding, in part because of the attitudes of professors who go out of their way to help students succeed. "I had one teacher who was willing to tutor me and help me on Saturdays," one former student said.

It's local – you can live at home and go to school

While this was sometimes considered a disadvantage – having friends and family around could be distracting and make it feel less like college – for some students it was seen as positive. Living at home was convenient, financially helpful, and low-stress for students who might find moving away from home difficult. For some, a student said, "If your parents aren't there to wake you up and say go to class, it won't work." Another student said, "First I went to Emporia State. I was not ready. I had two years of fun on my mama and daddy's dime. Then I came here, close to home, and got a scholarship."

You can start earning college credit in high school

Several students took the opportunity to take KCKCC classes while still in high school. As one said, "I'm from Bonner Springs and I took a lot of college classes in high school, then I came here for two years to finish up. Then I went on to KU."

It provides a pathway to a degree for TEC students

In discussions with external stakeholders, several people said they thought that having the Technical Education Center within KCKCC would encourage TEC students to take college classes. The one TEC student in focus groups said that he had never considered getting a degree until he started tech school. "When I came here, I heard from people talking about getting a degree. For the first time, I got interested in it," he said.

It provides a pathway to a four-year degree

Full-time students talked about the advantages of getting a two-year degree at KCKCC before going to a four-year institution. They said that the college had good connections with other schools, and that KCKCC graduates were often recruited. Students said that instructors constantly emphasize the need to go on to get a bachelor's degree, and that they were being well-prepared academically for that transition. Some students really appreciated the support. Then again, according to one student, "I usually say, get all the classes you don't really care about, then go to a university and get your major."

It works for older students returning to school

Students who have responsibilities like work and family say they appreciate the flexibility of KCKCC. They are less appreciative of the attitudes of younger students, who they say don't take college seriously enough. "At 18, I felt overwhelmed," a student said. "When I came back as an older student, I don't think the classes were as challenging but I was more interested. When I came back I was focused." Other students appreciate the fact that it's a comfortable place for students with children and other nontraditional students.

Some academic programs are known for excellence

One student was enrolled in the music program, which is considered a high-quality program. The student found that she had to work hard. "My music teacher knew me really well and didn't let me be lazy. I appreciate that. I would have just sat back and she didn't let me do that. Teachers expect a lot from their students and push us to be the best."

It offers extracurricular activities.

Students and former students said that different people want different things out of college life. For those who want them, they said, the college offers lots of activities. "I think I got a good experience of college life, getting involved in activities here" a student said. "There was always something going on."

What should the college do to improve?

The major frustrations that students had with the college were administrative rather than instructional. Two were considered quite serious by current and former students: problems with the enrollment process and problems with transferring credits to four-year schools. The first is simply crazy-making, but the second can have an impact on how much the community and students trust the college.

Make enrollment and registration more efficient.

One student said if she had known that the enrollment process was going to be so difficult, she would have chosen another college. Students talked about administrative departments that seemed to not communicate well and a registration process that sends students all over campus to wait in line after line without providing the help they needed.

“It took me seven hours to enroll,” a student said. “When I was enrolling, they sent me to the business office, then to counseling, then back to the business office.” Another student described enrollment as a game of ping pong, bouncing students from one office to another, a problem that, on a scale of one to ten, she said was an eight.

The process was slowed by what students saw as a lack of empowerment of staff members, who weren’t authorized to solve student problems. As a full-time student said, “It seems like whenever you want to get something done you have to find a dean, and the dean is always busy. Maybe if the people who enroll you have the power, you wouldn’t have to wait for the deans.”

The students who went on to four-year schools, on the other hand, felt the enrollment process was simple. We have no idea why there was this difference, other than that the problems may have developed after they left the school.

Provide better academic counseling to students going on to a four-year school

While some credits earned at KCKCC will transfer to some four-year schools, not all of them do. If they will transfer, they may not apply to a degree. Students who transferred to four-year schools found this to be an expensive and time-consuming problem that they believed could be solved with better academic counseling.

Students said they attended KCKCC in order to take basic courses at a lower cost, but many of the electives they took did not transfer to other schools like UMKC or Park University, as they expected them to do. That meant they paid for credits and completed classes that would not count towards their degree.

“I cried for hours because I wasted 40 hours of classes,” one student said. Another student said she currently faces the same issue. Other students said that, while their elective credits did transfer, they did not count toward their degree as they thought they would.

Students saw the problem as stemming from a focus within the counseling department on the associate’s degree. “You need a counselor to sit down with you one-

on-one and tell you what will transfer to UMKC,” a student said. “Some of us are first-generation college students and we don’t understand the whole college thing.” Several said they didn’t think the KCKCC counselors did a good job of helping them understand transfer issues. “Maybe the counselors are pushing us to get an associate’s degree, rather than helping us get the credits we need and move on,” a student said.

While students didn’t come out and say it, the impression was that students felt they were being sold classes for the benefit of the college rather than for the benefit of the student.

Provide a better online experience.

The online technology got extremely low marks from students. One student called it “really messed up.” Another suggested, “they should work through the glitches before putting things into place, because it frustrates us.” The student cited the switchover to DataTel, which knocked systems down for two weeks, and other times when online classes are down and students have to call out of state.

Integrate TEC more fully into the college.

Students pointed out that TEC and KCKCC were not advertised together and that the two had different phone numbers. The full-time focus group agreed with the statement, “It seems like the tech center just got added on to us and isn’t really a part of us.”

Use alumni as a resource.

Former students were interested in being of assistance to the college. All of the participants in the focus group who had received an associate’s degree said they would be interested in an active alumni association. The group said that they didn’t have much money to contribute but would be willing to contribute time. They suggested volunteer activities such as: driving students to events; paying for things students need; or manning a phone bank to encourage alumni participation.

Offer more publicity for what the college has to offer.

People inside the college mentioned this issue much less than the external stakeholders. Like one student said, “I’m here and I know a lot of things that are going on but my next-door neighbor doesn’t. They need to know in the community what’s going on. We need to let the public know we have a great facility here.”

Use social networking like Facebook.

Students suggested a great way to keep in touch was by setting up a KCKCC Facebook group. “When I see someone in my network has joined a group, I want to join, too.”

Consider opening a dormitory for out-of-town students.

Former students said the apartments near campus were “drug infested” and suggested the college buy them and turn them into a dorm for out-of-town students enrolled in the athletic programs. “They get kids from New York and put them over on 8th and Leavenworth Road and make them come here on public transportation,” a student said. “When you’re recruiting students, the first thing a parent will say is, where is my baby going to stay? It needs to be in walking distance.”

Other ideas included:

- Keep asking for feedback from students. Build in asking students what they need as a regular part of the classroom experience.
- Start a partnership program for incoming students, so experienced students can show them around campus.
- Encourage faculty members to get involved in clubs and campus groups.
- Do a better job of informing faculty and staff about the KCKCC programs and operations, and/or encourage everyone to help students find the answers they need.
- Provide professional development for professors, to help them stay up on the latest technology.

Which educational programs are most needed? Which should be added?

Students said that the following existing offerings stand out as really valuable:

- Two-Plus-Two with Emporia State University
- Nursing, pre-med and other health programs
- Honors
- Music
- Business classes
- EMT program
- Anything technology-driven

Students suggested the addition of other offerings:

- Web designing and other technology classes

- Journalism
- Band and a football team

Some students suggested that the professors put more emphasis on outside-classroom activities, which they said were an important part of the college experience.

Students said it was frustrating when a class that is required for graduation is not offered because of low registration.

How challenging are the classes?

No student suggested that classes were too difficult and some said that classes were occasionally too easy. While some students didn't expect or feel they received the same quality of instruction that they would get at a big university, others felt they got better instruction at KCKCC.

Some students said classes *should be* less challenging than at a four-year school because KCKCC students come from different circumstances. Many are raising children, working, or dealing with family problems. Students talked about the need to balance the need for serious academics with the importance of helping students succeed.

Some students thought the focus on teaching at KCKCC made for better classes compared to a big four-year university. As one said, "I think the teachers here are better because they know how to teach rather than just lecturing you. Since they're talking to a smaller class size, they have to figure out how to get people to understand." A student also said that when classes get difficult, it's easy to ask the instructor for extra help.

Students who transferred from KCKCC to four-year schools were generally complimentary of the teaching staff. They said it was a misperception that the teaching staff is less qualified at KCKCC. "I had teachers who taught at Harvard and Yale," one student said. Another said that KCKCC teachers and staff "put more into it" when it came to teaching. Overall, while they initially had the impression that KCKCC would be academically inferior, after attending classes there they no longer felt this was true.

Still, some current students said some classes were too easy, like the instructors didn't think the students were up to challenging classes. "I've had classes I breezed through my first semester here," one said. Another said an instructor "was dumbing it down, like he didn't think we were smart enough to get it."

One student knew of a case where a teacher gave a classmate a low grade, then was ordered by the dean to change the grade. "I've felt that they've lowered the standards so students here don't feel bad. That will affect students because when they leave here, they will be incompetent. I would rather have high standards than have someone make it easy for you," the student said.

Students also said they perceived KCKCC to be easier than JCCC. A couple students cited examples of friends who had received low grades in a course at JCCC

then got an 'A' when they took the class at KCKCC. "They are giving out 'As' like they are nothing. That's my worry when it comes to the education, that the quality gets diminished," a student said.

Students said that there were inconsistent levels of academic challenge across the school. The nursing program is perceived as very challenging, so students may move to another major that is less "stressful." They suggested standardizing the level of difficulty, so students don't opt out to take the easier classes.

As would be true at any school, students found that some instructors were better than others. Several students mentioned adjunct instructors, some of whom were considered less capable. Students also said it was difficult to contact adjunct faculty because they had no on-campus office. "Most of them will tell you when they are here, they are tired," a student said. Another student, though, said he appreciated having a practicing doctor teaching anatomy because the instructor brought real-life experience.

The student body itself has varying levels of commitment to education, students acknowledged. Evening classes are full of older students who are more mature and more committed to their class work, they said, while daytime classes are mainly composed of younger students who "don't take it as seriously."

High school boards, counselors & students

This series of four focus groups was intended to discern how much people at area high schools know about KCKCC and to determine the college's reputation among people who are its potential students and people who influence potential students.

The school counselor focus group included counselors from the Piper and Turner districts. Counselors from USD 500 had agreed to attend but were unable to make the session.

The results of focus groups with Sumner Academy and Washington High School students are reported separately at the end of this section.

What is your overall impression of the KCK Community College?

- Accessible – has a site in Leavenworth
- Affordable – can get a quality education at the fraction of the cost of KU
- Challenging in terms of expectations
- Comfortable – not as scary as big campuses
- Local – close to home
- A bargain for quality instruction
- An extension of high school – because they see so many peers there or maybe because they view it as less rigorous as a four-year school
- Work-oriented – technical education leads to a job right away
- Old and run-down
- A starting place for their kids
- Not terribly challenging academically (although board members said they had no idea if that reputation was accurate)

School counselors and getting started early

School counselors said they encourage students to take classes from KCKCC while they are still in high school. Students can take the classes on the KCKCC campus, or they can enroll in classes taught by KCKCC instructors that are held at the high school.

Counselors encourage students to take KCKCC classes because it gets the college basics out of the way and it's a good post-graduate fit for some.

Taking classes offered by KCKCC instructors at the high school also opens the students' eyes to the differences between high school and college instruction. They

describe how surprised students are by the amount of preparation and difficulty associated with a KCKCC class when they first take one.

One gifted student who took public speaking from KCKCC told a counselor that it helped him realize how much effort it would take to succeed in college. Counselors hear that students have to adjust to the attendance policies, deadlines and the preparation.

Counselors agreed that it was better to have students taught by a KCKCC instructor and receive KCKCC credit for the class than to have students taught by high school teachers and receive KCKCC credit.

School counselors and communication

Counselors receive their information from the KCKCC partnership coordinator, who they said covers a lot of ground for one person. They say that the college holds counselor lunches, which are valuable, and that someone comes at least once each semester to talk to the students. They especially appreciate the breakout sessions at the counselor partnership lunch because they can choose to learn more about issues that affect them. There is also a financial aid session at least one time per year.

The counselors do not get material in the mail or by email from the college. They strongly prefer contact by email, especially when dealing with someone they already know. They would appreciate having one person assigned to handle their issues because it can be confusing to figure out who to call at the college.

School boards and communication

For school board members the issue of communication was huge. They said they receive no information at all from KCKCC, and speculated that any communication is sent to school administrators. "It's not complicated," a board member said.

"Communicate with us. We do influence superintendents and building administrators."

Board members saw themselves as being able to inform parents and students in their districts about what the college has to offer, and were impatient and frustrated that lack of information from the college kept them from doing so.

One board member held up the one-page background sheet on KCKCC provided at the focus group and said, "send it out like this." She contends the catalog won't get read and that simple and shorter material is better. "Educate the public on what they offer," she said. "We see the slogan (making life better), but what does that mean?"

Board members want communication in electronic form. They requested summarized, basic listings of courses and activities that are available, as well as communication about activities (sports, cultural, entertainment) happening at the college.

The target market for KCKCC

The Piper counselor said that "better students see it as beneath them to go to community college," a perspective that has changed as the economy has hit a rough patch. At one school, most of the students had gone to KU or K-State in the past. Now

it's closer to a 50-50 split between the four-year schools and KCKCC, although there is still more peer pressure for the four-year option.

The Turner counselor said many students are the first generation to go to college and they choose community college because it is "familiar and safe. They are overwhelmed," the counselor said. "More than 50 percent say they are going to college, but only 25 percent really go." At Piper, nearly 90 percent of students go on to college.

Recruitment for KCKCC in local high schools

Counselors say that their students are so oriented toward KCKCC that active recruitment isn't a huge issue. Community colleges visit high school campuses in the spring rather than spring and fall because there is no fall deadline for enrollment at a community college. The counselors said that, while they get overwhelmed with private and technical schools who want to come and present to their students, "if it was someone local like KCKCC, that would be valuable." And, while students love the free gifts that other colleges give away, most of the students can't afford the colleges.

Which educational programs are most needed? Which should be added?

- Technology training. Board members had a strong focus on job preparation for local residents. They are especially interested in technology-related jobs, such as those at Cerner, Owens-Corning and Ford.
- Business management education. Board members don't want local residents stuck in entry-level or "dead-end" jobs that don't allow income growth or advancement. They want local residents climbing into management positions.
- Crime scene investigation. Board members said the presence of the Kansas Bureau of Investigation lab on campus would allow courses to be tied to that asset.
- Automotive engineering, perhaps in partnership with Pittsburg State.
- Robotics
- Automotive engineering

Where are there opportunities for partnerships?

Formal or informal internships

School board members wanted students to have the chance to work and learn inside an operating business. "There is a difference between doing a brake job in class and doing it in a dealership. The time and profit pressure doesn't exist in the auto shop class," a board member said, adding that working in a business would make a student better prepared to function in a commercial atmosphere.

Golf course management

The nearby golf course could be a partner in course management classes such as those offered by the Golf Superintendents' Organization.

Faith-based community

Pastors in churches influence young people. Forming partnerships with pastors can connect KCKCC with young people in the community.

What actions could the college take?

The school counselors noted that, while they have some complaints about KCKCC rules and procedures, they also feel much more connected to KCKCC than to any other college. As a result, they would like to be involved in solving the problems that affect them and their students. Counselors noted that KCKCC has “a new dean in that department and she seems to be really on top of it,” and said the new dean had been involved in meetings they had had with KCKCC staff.

Revise the enrollment process

School counselors view the enrollment process as broken and strongly believe it needs to be corrected. The deadlines for enrolling for college credit from a high school teacher have been advanced because of the increasing number of requests the college receives. The advanced deadlines don't fit into the flow of scheduling at the high schools and make it difficult for the counselors to meet with students on the new deadline. “For this year,” a counselor said, “we had to have paperwork to them by August 29 and we didn't start school until August 25.” The counselors also contend that the college's intention to relieve them of collecting and billing obligations also failed. “They need to figure out a better plan for how all of this is going to happen.”

Provide more information about the certificate programs

School counselors asked that the college provide more information about TEC programs and certificate programs like nursing, mortuary science, respiratory therapy and similar programs. The college tends to focus on spreading the word about degree programs, while other offerings would be valuable to other students. Counselors learn about certificate programs at counselor lunches, but say the students need to learn about those programs directly. Counselors see the certificate programs as a good fit for bright students who could complete the program and come out with a job.

Tours

School board members suggested that the college invite school boards and senior classes to tour the facility to see what it has to offer.

PSA programming for high schools

School board members said that there are televisions in high school lunchrooms that run PSAs during the day. They suggested that KCKCC produce programming about the college that could include information classes, programs, and such.

Reach parents through PTA meetings

When asked how KCKCC should communicate with parents, board members suggested speaking directly to them at PTA meetings and college fairs. They said that it was important to also reach parents who weren't involved in their children's educations, but that doing so was difficult.

Fix the website

The KCKCC website was called "one of the worst college websites I have ever seen," by a counselor. The college changed the log-on but didn't tell counselors, and kids complain about having trouble logging on to the website to enroll. Counselors have been meeting with the college and acknowledge that the college is trying to fix the problem.

Rethink the rules on online enrollment for high school students

Reconsider the rules and process for online enrollment by high school students. Counselors question why the college does not want high school students to enroll online as well as the reasoning behind the approval process for high school students taking college credit classes.

Use ACT scores for the presidential scholarships

When KCKCC determines which students will receive presidential scholarships, they use ACCUPLACER results instead of ACT scores. "That is the most ridiculous thing that I have ever heard of," one panelist said. "Harvard...and everyone else takes them (ACT scores)." The ACT is considered a more valid test and should be used for the presidential scholarships.

Sumner Academy Focus Group

Students at the Sumner Academy are required to maintain a high GPA and take rigorous college-prep courses in order to stay at the school. They expect to be able to get into high-quality four-year colleges and universities and to receive college scholarships. Sumner students perceive KCKCC as having limited value to them while at the same time saying they appreciate what the college offers to their community.

Students believe KCKCC serves an important function by providing education for students who are not ready for a four-year college, don't know what they want to do yet, or who have tried a larger school and failed or did not fit in. Several students say they

have family or friends who attend KCKCC and who need the flexibility and convenience the school offered through things like on-campus child care.

A few Sumner students are completing basic classes at KCKCC to reduce cost and lower their college workload. Overall, Sumner students believed, “If you went to KCKCC you would be wasting your money” and that it would be “a last resort for us if we couldn’t afford anything else.” Students pointed out that it’s not just KCKCC; many four-year colleges would not challenge them after their experience at Sumner.

If they had to attend a community college, students see JCCC as the more attractive alternative because it has a better academic reputation. Sumner students believe that KCKCC classes are comparable to high school classes and less challenging than Sumner classes.

When asked who they would tell to enroll at KCKCC, students summed it up by saying that KCKCC is for “everyone else in USD 500.” They would advise students who aren’t prepared for college, who struggle academically or financially, or who have special life situations to enroll at KCKCC. Young mothers and students who work during the day would benefit, as well as students with learning disabilities and language issues.

Students did not feel that the KCKCC reputation for academic excellence, outside of certain select programs like nursing, is sufficient to merit the respect of prospective employers. “When you go out for a job, they’re not going to hire you if you went there because it was easy,” a student said.

Asked what KCKCC should do differently, Sumner students had several suggestions:

- Advertise more and better. “The ads are so sunny and happy,” a student said. “That’s not the reality here and you know it if you live here. They need ads that actually work.”
- Promote programs like the Saturday Academy more intensively to students. “Get to know the people who you are actually asking to come to you,” a student said.
- Revise the application to explain what KCKCC offers, invite students to tour, and hold special days for high school students.
- Consider northern Johnson County part of the KCKCC target area.

Washington High School Focus Group

Although Washington High School is located near the main campus of KCKCC, few of the nine students had visited there. Some didn’t even know the location. (“What, that’s the college? I thought it was a park.”) Those students tended to have a less favorable view of the college than two students who were enrolled there.

This focus group saw the community college as a good stepping stone for students who are not quite ready for a four-year college after high school. They perceive KCKCC as having college-level classes with a social atmosphere similar to that of high

school. Some saw the social atmosphere as a distraction and others said it would help them make the transition to college easier. Several students said their friends were more interested in attending a bigger four-year college like KU. Others said the major reasons most students want the four-year school is, “parties, sports, and to get the college experience.” For some, going away is about getting out of KCK. “Some think if they go to the community college they’ll be stuck here forever,” a student said.

Students who already attend classes at KCKCC have a high opinion of the community college. They generally give the professors very high ratings. “They will help you until you understand it. My professors want everybody to pass. They don’t lower their standards but if you come after class they will help you.”

One student is studying at KCKCC to be a medical responder. He initially perceived KCKCC as a “Podunk” school, but after taking classes he now thinks of it as very advanced. He said that once he got his first college grade, he realized that the college had higher standards than high school and that he would need to work harder to succeed.

Another student, who will start taking classes at KCKCC this summer, said, “It means a lot to me because I’ll be the first person in my family to go to college.”

The students were concerned about what attending KCKCC would mean to a potential employer. A graduate with a two-year degree was considered less likely to be hired than a graduate of a four-year school. There were two exceptions. First, some two-year KCKCC programs, like nursing, have strong reputations and would be appealing to an employer. Secondly, if the student begins at KCKCC and then moves on to a four-year school, there is no stigma. One student said two of her sisters began at KCKCC and then went on to four-year colleges, which she said was a good experience for both of them.

Students put a lot of stock into college recommendations from their peers. “Colleges are like restaurants. You ask your friends and they tell you what’s good,” a student said. They agreed that if their peers started to talk up KCKCC, they would give more thought to attending there.

Despite being so nearby, however, KCKCC was not perceived as having the same presence at their school as KU and K-State, whose representatives visit Washington High School yearly and talk about what they can do for students. And, while the high school has taken them on trips to K-State and KU, they have not visited KCKCC. All of the students said they would be interested in a visit. “I know a bunch of people who would like to see what it’s like. I know people who want to go there but they might be afraid they wouldn’t succeed. If they visited, they might be braver about trying to go there,” a student said.

Students were very interested in evidence that attending KCKCC could lead to success. “KCKCC should come and talk about all the people who started there and went to bigger colleges and prospered,” a student said to agreement from the group.

The current commercials don't provide that evidence, and the students consider them ineffective. "They're just standing there," a student said. "They don't show the classes, people doing work. Even National American University ads show people doing work."

For these students, a commercial that showed people who had attended KCKCC and succeed, even if those people were not famous, would be more effective. "The commercial should show students in the classroom and should show people working afterwards. It could be a local business owner, like someone who owns a bakery. The message would be, 'They did it, we can do it,'" a student suggested.

These students strongly suggested that contacting them via Facebook would not work and would be invasive. They said a better approach would be to have a booth at Legends or Oak Park Mall with marketing materials, academic counselors and interactive, fun things to do.

Surveys

A paper survey provided the opportunity to check the results of the focus groups and find out more about perceptions people had about the college and its work. We have grouped the responses from external focus groups and KCKCC students so the differences and similarities are easy to see.

External focus group responses: Including all focus groups except current and former KCKCC students.

The following statements are sometimes made about community colleges in general. Please check the box that matches how well you think the statement describes the Kansas City Kansas Community College.					
N=57					
Responses are in descending order by the percent who strongly agree that a statement describes the college.					
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Good value for the money.	50.9% (29)	43.9% (25)	5.3% (3)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)
Good place to get an associates degree and technical training.	47.4% (27)	45.6% (26)	7.0% (4)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)
Good place to complete basic credits and general education classes.	39.3% (22)	51.8% (29)	7.1% (4)	1.8% (1)	0.0% (0)
Good place to start before moving on to a four-year school.	36.8% (21)	52.6% (30)	7.0% (4)	3.5% (2)	0.0% (0)
Offers smaller class sizes and more individualized education.	31.6% (18)	36.8% (21)	31.6% (18)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)
Not as good as a four-year education.	12.3% (7)	36.8% (21)	28.1% (16)	17.5% (10)	5.3% (3)
Credits may not transfer.	1.8% (1)	30.4% (17)	42.9% (24)	21.4% (12)	3.6% (2)

KCKCC students, current and former

The following statements are sometimes made about community colleges in general. Please check the box that matches how well you think the statement describes the Kansas City Kansas Community College.

N=27

Responses are in descending order by the percent who strongly agree that a statement describes the college.

Offers smaller class sizes and more individualized education.	66.7% (18)	33.3% (9)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)
Good place to complete basic credits and general education classes.	59.3% (16)	33.3% (9)	7.4% (2)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)
Good value for the money.	59.3% (16)	29.6% (8)	7.4% (2)	3.7% (1)	0.0% (0)
Good place to get an associate's degree and technical training.	37.0% (10)	40.7% (11)	22.2% (6)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)
Not as good as a four-year education.	14.8% (4)	29.6% (8)	29.6% (8)	14.8% (4)	11.1% (3)
Credits may not transfer.	3.8% (1)	34.6% (9)	34.6% (9)	23.1% (6)	3.8% (1)

External focus group responses: Including all focus groups except current and former KCKCC students.

<p>The following are some facts about the Kansas City Kansas Community College. Please rank from one to five the five facts that had the greatest positive impact on your perception of the college.</p> <p>N=47 (We could not count surveys where participants didn't follow instructions.)</p> <p>Responses are ranked in descending order of impact. The score for each one was derived by assigning a value to rankings 1-5 and multiplying by the number of votes.</p>					
	1	2	3	4	5
<p>Tuition per credit hour at the community college is \$49, while each credit hours costs about \$245 at KU and UMKC.</p> <p>Score = 184</p>	62.8% (27)	16.3% (7)	11.6% (5)	4.2% (2)	4.7% (2)
<p>Credit hours from the community college can transfer to KU and UMKC, among other universities.</p> <p>Score = 162</p>	28.6% (12)	42.9% (18)	16.7% (7)	9.5% (4)	2.4 (1)
<p>Of the 146 full-time instructional faculty members, 17% have a Ph.D/Doctorate and 65% have a master's degree.</p> <p>Score = 135</p>	6.1% (2)	24.4 (8)	30.3% (10)	30.3% (10)	9.1% (3)
<p>Minority students account for 43% of the enrolled students whose ethnicity is known.</p> <p>Score = 45</p>	5.6% (1)	5.6% (4)	44.4% (8)	22.2% (4)	22.2% (4)
<p>The college debate team has won the national championship six years in a row.</p> <p>Score = 44</p>	11.8% (2)	11.8% (2)	17.6% (3)	41.2% (7)	17.6% (3)
<p>The college provides language services for businesses, including translation, interpreting, editing and language cross-cultural training.</p> <p>Score = 41</p>	0.0% (0)	42.9% (6)	21.4% (3)	21.4% (3)	14.3% (2)
<p>Credit hours for the main campus increased 4% from fall 2008 to 2009.</p> <p>Score = 40</p>	6.7% (1)	26.7% (4)	20.0% (3)	20.0% (3)	26.7% (4)
<p>Of the 7,137 students enrolled, 66% are part-time students.</p> <p>Score = 33</p>	5.6% (1)	5.6% (1)	11.1% (2)	22.2% (4)	55.6% (10)
<p>The college serves students with physical and mental special needs.</p> <p>Score = 26</p>	7.1% (1)	0.0% (0)	21.4% (3)	14.3% (2)	57.1% (8)

The Wellness Center is available to the public and has an indoor track, weight room, aerobic studio and more. Score = 21	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	15.4% (2)	30.8% (4)	53.8% (7)
The college has a highly successful music program with award-winning ensembles. Score = 13	0.0% (0)	16.7% (1)	16.7% (1)	33.3% (2)	33.3% (2)

KCKCC students, current and former.

The following are some facts about the Kansas City Kansas Community College. Please rank from one to five the five facts that had the greatest positive impact on your perception of the college.					
N=22 (We could not count surveys where participants didn't follow instructions.)					
Responses are ranked in descending order of impact. The score for each one was derived by assigning a value to rankings 1-5 and multiplying by the number of votes.					
	1	2	3	4	5
Tuition per credit hour at the community college is \$49, while each credit hour costs about \$245 at KU and UMKC. Score = 71	62.5% (10)	18.8% (3)	18.8% (3)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)
Credit hours from the community college can transfer to KU and UMKC, among other universities. Score = 69	29.4% (5)	47.1% (8)	23.5% (4)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)
Of the 146 full-time instructional faculty, 17% have Ph.D./Doctorate and 65% have a master's degree. Score = 58	33.3% (5)	20.0% (3)	46.7% (7)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)
The college provides language services for businesses, including translation, interpreting, editing and language cross-cultural training. Score = 19	0.0% (0)	80.0% (4)	20.0% (1)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)
Of the 7,137 students enrolled, 66% are part-time students. Score = 11	0.0% (0)	66.7% (2)	33.3% (1)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)
The college has a highly successful music program with award-winning ensembles. Score = 10	0.0% (0)	33.3% (1)	66.7% (2)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)

The college debate team has won the national championship six years in a row. Score = 10	0.0% (0)	33.3% (1)	66.7% (2)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)
Minority students account for 43% of the enrolled students whose ethnicity is known. Score = 7	0.0% (0)	50.0% (1)	50.0% (1)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)
Credit hours for the main campus increased 4% from fall 2008 to 2009. Score = 5	100.0% (1)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)
The college serves students with physical and mental special needs. Score = 0	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)
The Wellness Center is available to the public and has an indoor track, weight room, aerobic studio, and more. Score=0	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)

External focus group responses: Including all focus groups except current and former KCKCC students.

<p>The community college sometimes sponsors activities designed to engage the community. Please check the box that best matches how you feel about each activity.</p> <p>N=57</p> <p>Responses are ranked in descending order based on the percent who said they loved the idea.</p>					
	Love it	Like it	It's okay	Not so great	Bad idea
Summer programs for young people	52.7%	36.4%	9.1%	1.8%	0.0%
The Saturday Academy, a math and science program for young people	49.1%	45.5%	3.6%	1.8%	0.0%
Concerts	39.3%	26.8%	30.4%	3.6%	0.0%
Activities for senior adults	38.9%	44.4%	14.8%	1.9%	0.0%
Ethnic festivals and programs	33.9%	35.7%	26.8%	3.6%	0.0%
Political forums	31.6%	45.6%	19.3%	3.5%	0.0%
Wellness activities like health fairs	27.3%	45.5%	23.6%	3.6%	0.0%
Plays	25.5%	47.3%	25.5%	1.8%	0.0%

The survey invited panelists to suggest other activities they would like to see KCKCC present. Those ideas included:

- 1-2 day weekend/evening classes on specific topics
- Host athletic nights for local high school teams to come and watch KCKCC athletes
- Job fairs
- Offer programs in partnership with the community. “The college has so much support they do not utilize or are not aware of.”
- Health education in the community
- Free technical education on Saturdays similar to the Saturday Academy, but for common software packages used in information businesses
- Acoustic music concerts with known artists – local, regional or national
- Cancer walks
- Local talent showcases – singing, dancing, poetry reading, etc.
- Community-wide planning events
- Events operated by the school but not on campus
- Jazz and blues events
- Satellite locations for credit and/or noncredit classes east of I-635
- Leadership development track starting in the 12th grade at a local high school
- Political forums / Community conversations
- Speakers and public fairs that welcome the community and educate it at the same time

Key leader interviews

Along with the focus groups, the trustees requested interviews with seven key leaders. The telephone interviews took from 15-30 minutes and included individuals who would likely not have been able to spare the 90 minutes to attend a focus group and, if they had, would likely have been deferred to by other participants to an extent that it would have been disruptive.

The interview questions were similar to the questions of focus group participants. Because the conversations were one-on-one, what was lost was the ability for participants to engage with one another.

What is your overall impression of the KCK Community College?

- Underrated community asset. “The community knows it’s there but it has the potential to be so much more. I think it’s a tremendous time of opportunity. With this presidential administration and the way they’ve talked about resources available to community colleges and job stimulation, I think this is one of those forks in the road that, depending on which road you take, you could make a huge contribution or not. I would like to see them take the road that makes a tremendous contribution.”
- Excellent facility for people in our county. “I know many young people who go there who can’t afford a four-year college. Many high school kids take classes there and can finish their college career in three years. It’s a big benefit.”
- “The college provides essential training and education to our community.”
- Getting better. “My perception has been that because of the direction of the board of trustees, the college for some time now seemed to be more interested in cultural diversity than education...But I’m continually amazed at what they have to offer. They are a great community resource and are missing some opportunities in telling people what they’re all about.”

What is the community college doing now that’s good for the community?

- It’s giving the opportunity for young adults and adults who may be first-generation college students the opportunity to get their foot in the door and to develop their own career. This is critical to the community. When you look at the unemployment rate in this county, its one of the highest in the state. I shudder to think what it would be if you didn’t have the community college contributing what it does.”
- The whole academic program is good for the community. “I feel very strongly – I think it’s a tremendous asset for us and for all of Wyandotte and Leavenworth counties.”

- “It’s serving more in our community than ever before, from data I’ve seen recently. In this economic time it is providing the advanced training we need to compete. It helps young people to transition to new opportunities. I feel very strongly about these benefits.” Also, the college is serving as a community gathering place and bringing technical training into a college setting.
- “It’s a place that anyone of any means can begin to get an education. A young person, getting the first couple of years of college or an older person who has been downsized and goes back to school either to get new training or to start a whole new educational career. I think there is direction in this; there are so many pathways to growing industries in our community.”

What would you like to see the college doing that it isn’t doing right now?

- Work with high schools to prepare young people for the knowledge economy. “Young people coming out of high schools are not ready to go to the next level...I don’t think they have a realistic understanding of what’s going to be expected of them, which was fine when we had manufacturing jobs where people can go right in after high school and have a long career....It’s important to work with the school district to help people graduating and adults retooling to match up, and the community college plays a critical role in that.”
- They’re working with Wyandotte Economic Development to make sure there are the right jobs courses. That’s something to continue.
- There are two challenges. The first the economy and the second is responding to a work world where fewer jobs are blue-collar. “College will become more critical to future generations...They need to be able to provide the curriculum and move people into jobs. I see that as being very positive. We’re seeing that evidence most directly in Cerner coming to KCK. Jobs are being created and now we have to see the curriculum that will help the student graduating from high school be able to move into that opportunity.”
- Better marketing. “I’m afraid that some people believe this is the school you go to if you can’t go anywhere else. I think that’s beginning to change, but some of the advertising on cable TV or in print media and the ‘making it better’ slogan...Making what better and for whom?”
- A marketing campaign specifically for the TEC program. “I love that they bought the off-site buildings. That was brilliant, and it gives them a marketing opportunity for TEC.”
- Strategy. “The college needs to identify what it has now, what are the needs of the community, and they want to build on their strengths. As our legislature and taxpayers are looking at what we can afford to sustain, each community college will have to make the best of its assets and, let’s face it, we have a formidable set of community colleges around us.” The interview subject suggested thinking

about K7 as the next bioscience corridor and what could be the role of KCKCC in making that happen.

Do you know of any educational programs that the college should offer that it doesn't currently?

- Conduct an assessment of the job opportunities to determine whether the jobs they're preparing young people for really match up with the future economy. "They need to take another look at what they offer and what are the growing industries in the region."
- No. "The college has done a very good job of being responsive to part of the economy that are changing...There is a willingness at the college to engage in emerging areas like health care, technology, green jobs. I hold a lot of hope out as they integrate technical education into the college. I see advantages there."
- Follow what industries are coming into Leavenworth County, and offer technical training and certificates that can be a starting point for workers.

Where are there opportunities for partnerships between the college and other entities?

- Training for a career path. "Hospitality industry training is okay, but I would like to see them working more with clients on a long-term basis on a career path, at a minimal level mapping out the opportunities so the young person could see what they need to do to progress, so growth is automatically built in, so you're not just looking for an entry-level job. Think long-term and build the type of programming that would allow them to get into a job, but don't lose contact with them. Always be talking about the next step. Create clients for life."
- "There are always opportunities. One thing I've appreciated about KCKCC is they really are looking for ways they can help."
- Unified Government. The Unified Government needs to be more involved in making sure our young people are employed beyond high school. "The Healthy Community Task Force will focus on learning and enrichment and its impact on the community viability. We're excited about their willingness to explore a health care technology curriculum."
- Make a list of what makes KCKCC different and unique and sustainable, and use that list as the springboard to consider partners. "Partners can come from the strangest sources...Start with the usual suspects, and then come back and keep asking the question, who else needs to be at this table?"

What information do you receive, and what would you like to receive and how would you like to receive it?

- Would like to see pieces that say what the college can do for you and that highlight the students' stories more in-depth than the TV ads.

- Some activities that they have in terms of plays and sports schedules are good for the community and need to be publicized.
- Would like to know more about how the college is doing overall, like a report card or quarterly report on enrollment, etc. As a citizen, want to see what the offerings are because (my) kids participate in some of the things they do out there. Want something beyond the course book.
- “The website (stinks). It’s lifeless. It’s difficult to navigate and they need a better search engine. Someone needs to be in charge of it. I get nothing electronic. There isn’t any e-blast that I’m aware of, no use of technology.”

Miscellaneous comments

- “Their president, Dr. Burke, does a fine job representing the college. He’s very willing to do what he can to help. He’s a great asset.”
- “I’m excited about where they are right now and where they could be headed. I’m bullish on the college.”

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