

North Hennepin Community College
Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) Plan for Sustaining Growth and Improving
Student Success

North Hennepin Community College Internal Needs Assessment

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	Pg. 3
Methodology & Limitations	Pg. 5
Findings	Pg. 13
Recommendations	Pg. 23
References	Pg. 25
Appendix A: Informed Consent Form	Pg. 26
Appendix B: Survey Monkey	Survey Insert
Appendix C: Focus Group Protocols	Pg. 29
Appendix D: Demographics of Survey Respondents	Pg. 31
Appendix E: Analysis of Open-Ended Remarks on Survey	Pg. 32
Appendix F: Summary of Focus Group Questions (Current Students)	Pg. 38
Appendix G: Summary of Focus Group Questions (Graduates)	Pg. 40
Appendix H: Summary of Focus Group Questions (Stop-Outs)	Pg. 48

INTRODUCTION

In 1966 North Hennepin Junior College was established with 414 students. In 2012, North Hennepin Community College served over 4900 students, and is the community college of choice in the rapidly growing northwest suburbs of the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area. In the past 10 years, North Hennepin Community College (NHCC) has grown 40% in their full-time equivalent enrollment. NHCC offers general education coursework and pre-professional programs for transfer to baccalaureate programs. This includes Associate in Arts, Associate in Applied Science, and Associate in Science degrees along with certificates in specific business areas.

In recent years, Community Colleges nationwide have experienced drastic increases in enrollment. Since fall 2007, enrollment has increased 21.8% in community colleges across the U.S. (Mullin & Phillippe, 2011). Much of the enrollment boom is likely attributed to the economic downturn, following historical trends of enrollment spikes during poor economies (Mullin & Phillippe, 2011). As the economy turns around, enrollment is expected to decline. Colleges need to be strategic in how they manage their enrollment numbers, particularly in a time of declining state subsidies and tuition increases. Two-year institutions have always been touted as open-door institutions, providing access to college for all community members. In the past decade, attention has been shifted to not only focus on access, but also to persistence and completion (Bailey & Alfonso 2005). As community colleges are held more accountable for these outcomes, and enrollment growth may contract as the economy improves, community colleges must be more intentional about how they serve students throughout the enrollment process, from recruitment through graduation. Because of the fluctuating economy, the rising cost of tuition, and the enrollment challenges within higher education, community and technical colleges around the nation are looking for more stability and strategic direction that a Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) plan can offer.

Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) is “a concept and process that enables the fulfillment of institutional mission and students’ educational goals (p. 3)” (Bontrager and Clemetsen). The concept has been utilized at the four-year colleges and universities for many years. Only recently has this concept made its way into the two-year college environment. Challenges within the community college such as diverse student bodies, specialized student challenges, and students with multiple goals has made many reflect and reform the traditional SEM model (Bontrager and Clemetsen, 2009).

In 2011, under the leadership of Chief Student Affairs Office, Dr. Landon Pirus, North Hennepin Community College embarked on a journey to develop a three year Strategic Enrollment Management Plan, primarily for sustaining growth and improving student success. A committee has been created to involve key individuals on campus that

will contribute to and benefit from the development of a SEM plan. The book, *Applying SEM at the Community College* (Bontrager and Clemetsen, 2009), is a guideline for the SEM team and has been distributed and read by leadership within NHCC.

One of the first steps in developing a SEM plan is data collection. This report focuses on the Internal Needs Assessment, conducted by a team of leaders from various Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, who are participating in the year-long MnSCU Luoma Leadership Academy. This group was tasked with conducting an internal needs assessment, with the following goals in mind:

- To better understand the program and service needs of our current students
- To better understand the student behaviors and how they impact the student success and/or persistence
- To better understand the factors that led to past students successfully completing their goals (transfer, graduation, course completion)
- To better understand any barriers that might exist to the success of our students

METHODOLOGY

The following outlines the mixed-method approach that was used to answer the research question: Which practices in academic and student services have been most helpful to the success and transition of North Hennepin Community College (NHCC) students? This section begins with a discussion of mixed-method design, followed by a description of the participants of the study, as well as a discussion of the sampling methods that were used and the rationale for such methods. Finally, data collection procedures and instrumentation are described, concluding with an explanation of the data analysis procedures that were used to answer the research question.

In short, this mixed-methods study entailed two stages of data collection. First, an online survey was implemented to gather student perceptions of the following: decision-making factors for attending NHCC, orientation experience, advising experience, curricular/course scheduling experience availability, Student Services experience, faculty-student “connectivity,” and diversity experience. The survey was followed by focus group interviews conducted with selected participants to further examine the preceding perceptions.

Mixed-Method Design

The following section outlines a brief history of mixed-method design, including its origins and defining characteristics. The section concludes with a discussion on the rationale for selecting a mixed-method design for this research proposal.

History. The beginning of mixed-methods research design is traced to what is often referred to as the “paradigm wars” within the social and behavioral sciences. A phrase initially coined by Gage (1989), the “paradigm wars” references the research debate regarding the superiority of two research methodologies: quantitative and qualitative. Hammersley (1992) traces the paradigm dispute to the mid-1800’s, with subsequent debate between qualitative and quantitative research methods intensifying in the 1950’s and 1960’s within the fields of psychology and sociology. Attempts at bridging the theoretical divides between the positivist (quantitative methods) and constructivist paradigms (qualitative methods) were unsuccessful until researchers began demonstrating how research studies (many dating back to the very time period in which the debate was most intense) incorporated and benefited from the utilization of both methodologies.

Defining characteristics. A guiding principle within mixed-methods research is that combining quantitative or qualitative strategies provide a better understanding of the research problem than either used alone. The collection of both numeric and narrative data requires a mixed-method approach to the research design and data analysis. Creswell (2009) defines mixed-methods research as follows:

An approach to inquiry that combines or associates both qualitative and quantitative forms. It involves philosophical assumptions, the use of qualitative and quantitative

approaches, and the mixing of both approaches in a study. It is more than simply collecting and analyzing both kinds of data; it also involves the use of both approaches in tandem so that the overall strength of a study is greater than either qualitative or quantitative research (p.4).

Today, mixed-methods research is widely used to triangulate quantitative and qualitative data sources, to deepen understanding of qualitative and quantitative research, and to better explain and build upon the results from each other's research (Creswell, 2009). Creswell cites three primary challenges faced by the researcher when conducting a mixed-methods study. First, mixed-methods research requires extensive and varied data collection. Data collection procedures for this study which practices in academic and student services have been most helpful to the success and transition of North Hennepin Community College (NHCC) students are specifically outlined later in this chapter. Second, Creswell points to the time-intensive data analysis processes involved in mixed-methods research. Data analysis processes for this study are previewed later in this chapter and are fully articulated in Section 4. Finally, the researcher needs to have a solid understanding of both quantitative and qualitative research methodology and how elements of both are incorporated into the mixed-methods study.

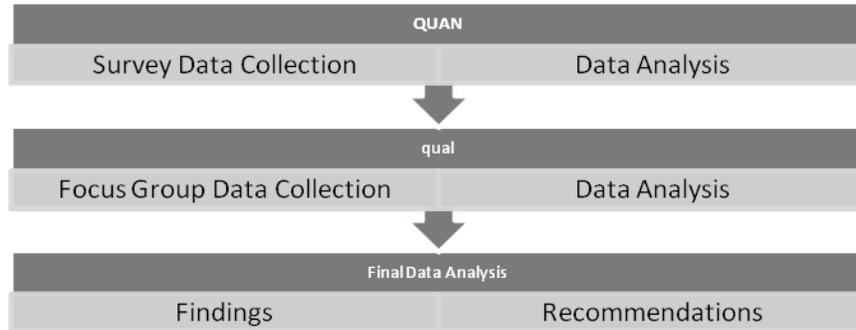
In designing a mixed-methods study, Creswell (2009) points to four influencing factors that must be addressed by the researcher; timing, weighting, mixing and theorizing. For this study, the collection of quantitative and qualitative data was done sequentially, starting with the quantitative data collection. This timing supports the primary intent of the study and its emphasis on collecting NHCC student perception data. Quantitative survey results was used to guide focus group questions and topics conducted once the survey was administered. In mixed-methods design, weight is typically given to the methodology utilized first and is dependent upon whether results from the first data collection and analysis will inform or influence the second data collection. For this research study, the questions and themes for the second data collection (focus groups) were drawn specifically from the initial quantitative survey. In this regard, weight was given to the quantitative data.

Rationale. The rationale for selecting mixed-methods research design for this study is best demonstrated by examining the characteristics of mixed-methods and their relationship to the research question. The characteristics discussed earlier, along with how they will be addressed within this research study, point to a specific mixed-methods research design. Creswell identifies six design strategies utilized within mixed-methods research: Sequential Explanatory Design, Sequential Exploratory Design, Sequential Transformative Design, Concurrent Triangulation Design, Concurrent Embedded Design and Concurrent Transformative Design.

For this study, a sequential explanatory design model was utilized. Sequential explanatory design involves collecting and analyzing quantitative data first, followed by qualitative data collection and analysis. The purpose of the qualitative element of the study is to build on the results of the initial quantitative results. Data mixing within this strategy occurs when the initial data analysis informs the secondary data collection. While data is collected

separately, it is connected by its use within both phases. By using a sequential explanatory design, the quantitative results will be further interpreted and explained through the collection and analyzing of qualitative data. Figure 1 provides a visual model of how the sequential explanatory design model was applied to the study.

Figure 1. Sequential Design Model of the Study



Participants

The samples for both stages of this research included NHCC graduates, NHCC transfer students or “stop-out” students, and currently enrolled NHCC students. Participants in the qualitative component of the study were derived from the survey participants. Drawing upon resources from NHCC enrollment databases, nearly all NHCC students (current or graduated within the past four academic semesters) were invited to participate in at least one element of the study. All necessary confidentiality agreements were in place prior to the dissemination or use of any information obtained from NHCC.

Incentives for participation were established as follows:

- “Graduates” Sample: Two \$25.00 Visa gift cards were provided to winners selected in a random drawing from participants who completed the survey within the specified sample group.
- “Current Students” Sample: Four \$25.00 bookstore vouchers were provided to winners selected in a random drawing from participants who completed the survey within the specified sample group.
- “Transfer or ‘Stop-out’” Sample: Four \$25.00 Visa gift cards were provided to winners selected in a random drawing from participants who completed the survey within the specified sample group.

Quantitative Data Collection

Procedures. The sampling procedure for the quantitative data collection was single stage. All NHCC graduates within the past four academic semesters, NHCC transfer students or “stop-out” students, and currently enrolled NHCC students were invited to participate in the electronic survey. Participants were provided consent information prior to taking the electronic survey. The consent information (Appendix A) indicates that participation in the study was

voluntary, and that submission of the completed survey would be interpreted as informed consent to participate. In January 2012, over 14,000 surveys were disseminated to members of the sample. Permission to access the NHCC enrollment databases and electronically deploy the survey was granted by Dr. Landon Pirius of NHCC, and executed by professional staff of NHCC.

All NHCC students within the sample received an e-mail which included a description of the study, an invitation to participate in the study, the requested date of completion, all required language related to confidentiality, potential risks of participating in the study and a link to the survey. Respondents were made aware that clicking on the survey would indicate their consent to participate in the study. Because the survey was administered electronically, respondents submitted their responses directly to an on-line collection point.

Completed surveys were coded only to track respondents. A list of coded participants was kept in a secured, locked location, and was accessible only to the primary and secondary researchers. In an effort to maximize response rates, a follow-up request was made five days after the survey was initially disseminated.

Instrumentation. An original electronic survey (Appendix B) asked respondents to complete Likert scale ratings, yes/no response, “select any/all” response, and open-ended comment regarding practices in academic and student services that have been most helpful to their success and transition from North Hennepin Community College. The intent of the survey was to gather and analyze data to provide an accurate view of student perception.

SurveyMonkey was used as the on-line survey administrator. The rationale for choosing SurveyMonkey included its wide-spread use, its familiarity within the education community, and its ability to serve as a warehouse for responses prior to data analysis. This commercial survey tool is also capable of generating results and reporting descriptive statistics back to the researcher.

Because the survey was designed specifically for this research, attention was given to assure its validity. Creswell (2009) identifies three traditional forms of validity to consider when examining a survey instrument: content validity, concurrent validity and construct validity. Content validity addresses the degree to which the survey questions measure the content they were intended to measure. Concurrent validity, sometimes referred to as predictive validity, considers whether survey results correlate with other survey results that attempt to measure the same thing. Construct validity refers to a survey’s ability to measure hypothetical constructs. Creswell indicates that the definition of construct validity has expanded to include whether the results of the survey “serve a useful purpose and have positive consequences when they are used in practice” (p.149). Because the survey had not been used previously, concurrent validity was not as applicable to this study as content and construct validity.

Content and construct validity of the survey was established by inviting a small sub-group of the NHCC Strategic Enrollment Management Team to review a draft survey for the purpose of providing feedback related to the survey’s applicability and readability. This group

also assisted in verifying that the survey accurately depicted the targeted student perception areas.

Qualitative Data Collection

Procedures. Focus groups were held to collect qualitative data. Kruger and Casey (2009) define a focus group study as “a carefully planned series of discussions to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment” (p.2). Led by a group facilitator, focus groups typically include 5 to 10 people. The goal of the focus group sessions included in this study was to gather contextual information from respondents, provide opportunities for open-ended responses, and to assist in the explanation and interpretation of the preceding quantitative data collected. The purpose of the focus group interviews was to provide participants the opportunity to share additional perspective on practices in academic and student services that have been most helpful to their success and transition from NHCC, and for the researcher to further investigate themes from the quantitative survey.

Limitations of focus group interviews include setting (focus groups are typically not conducted in the participants’ natural setting; however, in this study, students did participate at the actual site of their educational experience), bias (the researcher’s presence may limit participant responses or candidness) and the fact that not all focus group members may be as engaged and participatory as others (Creswell, 2009).

Four focus groups were conducted. Students who completed the electronic survey were invited to attend a 60-90 minute focus group meeting, and were sub-divided by participant group: NHCC graduates (1 focus group), NHCC transfer students or “stop-out” students (1 focus group), and currently enrolled NHCC students (2 focus groups).

The following six essential questions offered by Miles and Huberman (1994) were used in considering the qualitative sampling plan for this study:

- Is the sampling relevant to the research question and framework?
- Will the phenomena in which you are interested in appear?
- Does your plan enhance generalizability of your findings?
- Can believable descriptions and explanations be produced?
- Is the sampling plan feasible?
- Is the sampling plan ethical, in terms of such issues of informed consent, potential benefits and risks, and the relationship with informants?

Sample relevancy was addressed by inviting NHCC students to participate in the focus group sessions. Focus group sessions were semi-structured, in that there were specific questions asked based on the initial quantitative findings. These structured elements of the sessions allowed for data collection directly related to the research question. Focus group setting consisted of a meeting room within an academic/student services building on the North

Hennepin Community College campus. Sample selection was also based on students' willingness to participate in the focus group and proximity to the researchers. Proximity helped facilitate the data collection process. Consent forms for the focus group sessions were distributed to attendees prior to the start of each meeting. The focus group consent form (Appendix A) included the voluntary nature of participant involvement, and student anonymity when research results are released.

Instrumentation. Focus group interview questions focused on emergent themes from the quantitative survey. Participants were asked to provide information related high and low frequency survey responses, and were also invited to share personal examples that illustrate the relevance of specific student experiences.

Interviews were audio taped and transcribed. An interview protocol (Appendix C) was utilized that incorporated interview details (time, date, participants), instructions to ensure standard procedures were used with each focus group and the questions asked at each focus group session. Notes were taken during the focus group sessions for the purpose of documenting specific participant responses and citing general themes, questions and ideas that emerge from the group as a whole.

Qualitative reliability refers to the intentionality of wording, format and content (Creswell, 2009). Two reliability procedures, transcription checks and code definition review, were used to increase the reliability of the research study. In order to avoid reporting errors, focus group transcriptions were reviewed for accuracy and revised accordingly. Assistance in this effort was sought from individuals with transcription experience. To assure consistency in code definitions, Gibbs (2007) recommends that researchers purposefully review code definition throughout the data collection process in order to assure code meaning and word definitions remain consistent. This review was conducted after each focus group session

Creswell (2009) states that qualitative validity is "determining whether findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of an account" (p. 190). The trustworthiness, authenticity and credibility of focus group data was sought by incorporating a number of validity strategies. First, multiple focus groups were held, allowing for the triangulation of various data sources. By collecting data from multiple sources at different times, themes that emerge during the analysis phase increase in credibility. Second, bias was identified and reflected upon within the study.

Data Analysis Procedures

Quantitative analysis. First, data was organized in relation to the relevance rating of each competency. The analysis will focus on the frequency of specific responses. Data collected from SurveyMonkey was analyzed, and results were reported descriptively according to the student experience perceptions. High and low frequency responses from the quantitative survey informed the development of focus group questions.

Qualitative analysis. The qualitative aspects of the study were coded based on student perceptions of the following: decision-making factors for attending NHCC, orientation experience, advising experience, curricular/course scheduling experience availability, Student Services experience, faculty-student “connectivity,” and diversity experience. Each experience was organized as a primary node, and data analysis rested on the degree and depth provided by focus group participants.

Coding was completed in three waves. First, open coding was conducted to assist the researcher in the initial labeling and categorizing of focus group data. This coding process relied on the 7 student experience perception areas. Code saturation was met as all 7 student experiences were distinguished as its own code. Once open coding was complete, axial coding occurred. Axial coding “helps identify relationships between categories and the links that create a web of meaning for the people under study” (Straker, 2008, p. 4). This procedure assisted the researcher in identifying connections and relationships amongst the student experience perceptions. Axial coding also led to the identification of emerging themes within the data. Finally, selective coding was completed. “Selective coding involves the process of selecting and identifying the categories and systematically relating them to other categories” (Straker, 2008, p. 4). Categories that emerged as a result of this process are shared in section four.

Quantitative and Qualitative Data Mixing

The process of mixing quantitative and qualitative data includes determining when the mixing of quantitative and qualitative will occur, and whether the data will actually be merged, kept separate, or combined in some way. Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) identify three types of mixing processes: connected, integrated and embedded. Connected mixing occurs when “the quantitative and qualitative research are connected between a data analysis of the first phase of research and the data collection of the second phase of research” (Creswell, 2009, p. 208). As demonstrated earlier in Figure 1, connected mixing was utilized for this study as results from the quantitative survey was completed and served as the basis for focus group interviews. Although both elements collected separate data, they were connected in that one informed the other.

Delimitations

1. The study is confined only to North Hennepin Community College. The uniqueness of the study within a specific context makes it difficult to replicate exactly in another context (Creswell, 2003).
2. Participants’ responses are reflections of and confined to their personal experiences at North Hennepin Community College.
3. The study provides only one perspective on which practices in academic and student services have been most helpful to the success and transition of North Hennepin Community College (NHCC) students, that of the students themselves, excluding other constituents internal and external to the program.
4. Due to time parameters of locating current and former students, who have stopped-out or exited from NHCC programs, the researchers may not have located all students who

are currently enrolled, or have stopped-out or exited. This may skew the results of the statistical analysis in the first, quantitative phase of the study.

Limitations

1. Because the convenience sampling was used in the qualitative phase of the study, the researchers cannot say with confidence the sample was representative of the population (Creswell, 2002).
2. Due to the nature of qualitative research, the data obtained in the second phase of the study may be subject to different interpretations by different readers.
3. Because of the interpretative nature of the qualitative research, the investigators may have introduced bias into the analysis of the findings.
4. Newly generated thematic variables were sample specific
5. The quality of probing during the focus group sessions within the second phase of the study may have influenced narrative production and depth.
6. Our survey was completed by 17% of current students, 12% of graduates, and 6% of stop-outs. This low response rate cannot ensure accurate representation of the sampling.

	# Emailed	Total Responses	Completed Entire Survey	% Completed Survey	% of people who started survey and completed survey
Current Students	6262	1091	1046	17%	96%
Graduates	1545	186	180	12%	97%
No Longer Attending	7253	515	470	6%	91%
	15060	1792	1696	11%	95%

7. The graduate focus group was comprised of only three participants and cannot accurately represent the sampling. The stop-outs focus group was comprised of only four participants.
8. The demographics of survey respondents do not proportionally represent the demographics of NHCC. Please see Appendix D.
9. There was an error within the survey that didn't allow students to provide "other remarks" as a standalone answer. Upon review of the "other remarks", it appeared to have minimal impact on the validity of survey responses.

Summary

The preceding section provided an overview of mixed-methods research, including the rationale for its use in this research study. Specific information was shared regarding the participants of the study and the methods that were used to gain access to them. The quantitative and qualitative elements of the study were discussed, outlining both the data collection and data analysis strategies that were deployed throughout the study.

FINDINGS

Data analysis was conducted by our group as the next step following the Strategic Enrollment Management plan. This data analysis guided our recommendations for the SEM team. You will find our groups' summary of findings within each of these categories:

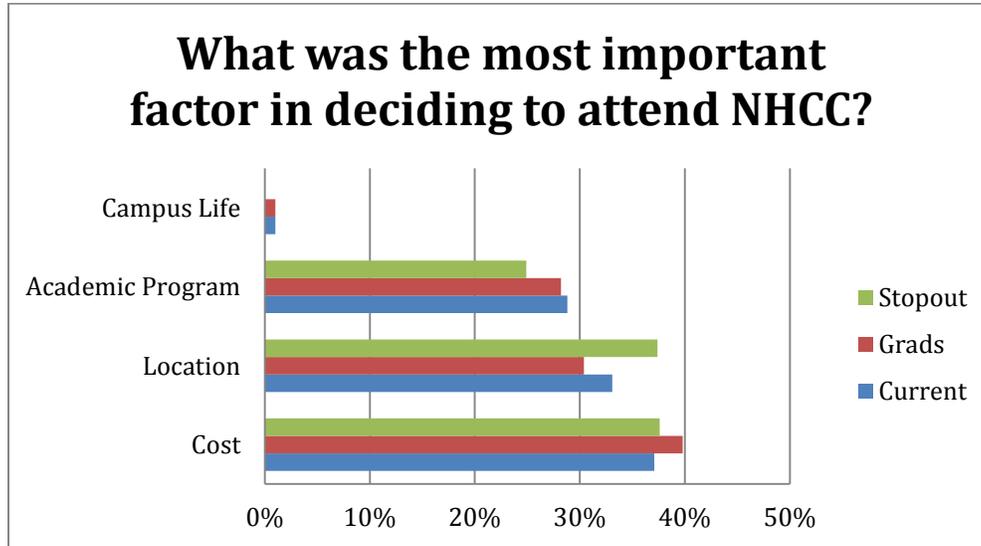
1. Why do students choose to attend NHCC?
2. Student Orientation
3. Advising
4. Course Availability
5. Student Services
6. Connections to NHCC
7. Diversity

Common themes surfaced among all three groups of students (Current, Stop-Outs, and Graduates), along with unique findings which will be discussed following themes. Qualitative and quantitative data from our survey (phase one) and focus groups (phase two) can be found in our additional handout and Appendices B, D, and E.

Why Students Chose to Attend North Hennepin Community College

The most important factor among all students in deciding to attend NHCC was cost (37.6%) followed by location (34.0%), and academic programs (27.6%). Campus life was identified as less than 1%. Of the students who provided an “other” response, 40% of them listed Flexible Course Offerings (online, evening, weekend courses) as a primary factor for attending NHCC.

Table 1

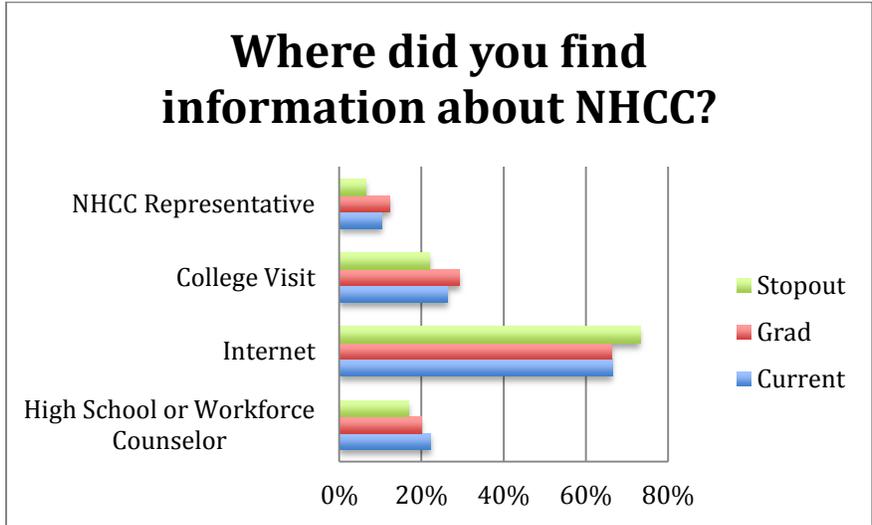


When students were asked to select any/all from an array of prompts for why they chose to stay at NHCC to complete their degree, responses supported the above question and were as follows:

Prompt	% of Respondents
Enjoyed my major	37%
Found the campus to be inviting	26%
Made a connection w. a faculty/staff member	18%
Class times/offerings fit my schedule	65%
Campus location	59%
Advising	5%
Quality of classroom	16%
Affordability	71%
Accessibility	28%

Students reported finding their information about NHCC through the Internet (68.3%), with college visit coming reported at (25.3%). Of the 293 students who provided an “other” response, 58% of them found their information about NHCC from family and friends.

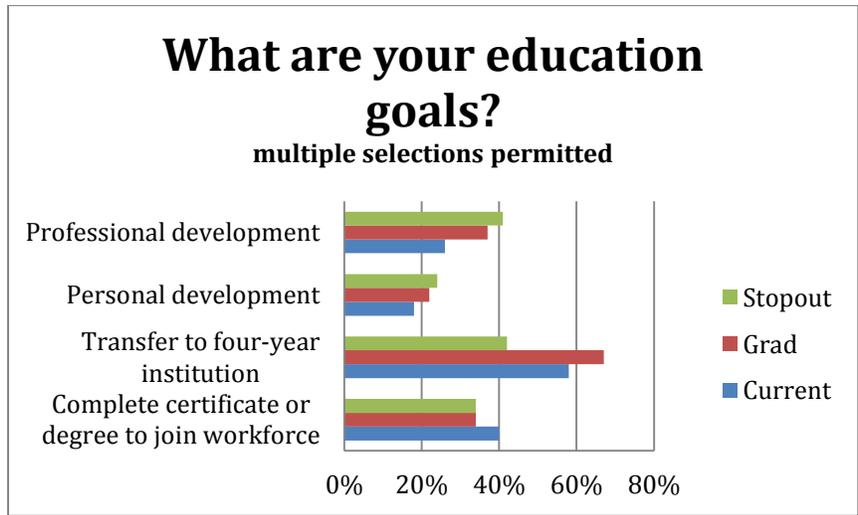
Table 1.1



Students across all groups responded their common goal for attending NHCC was to transfer to a four-year institution (54.8%).

Unique findings within each group were found for the second most popular educational goal. For current students, completing a certificate or degree to join the workforce came in second (40.0%), while stop-out students had professional development as their second reason (41.1%).

Table 1.2



In hopes of discovering information as to why students stop attending NHCC, we surveyed the Stop-out students and asked the major reasons they did not return to NHCC (multiple selections). Of the 200 students who responded, the top 5 responses were as follows:

<i>Prompt</i>	<i>Stop-outs</i>
Completed Academic Goal	33.5%
Personal Reasons	23.0%
Financial Issues – Personal	13.0%
Did not receive adequate academic advising	11.0%
Financial Issues – Financial Aid	9.0%

We evaluate this data as being promising, and believe the stop-out student group tends to be more students that have actually satisfied a goal at NHCC rather than those who have attempted a goal and left the college unsatisfied.

Orientation

The majority of students completed the on-campus orientation (54.0%) compared to the online orientation (22.7%). The majority of students were “very satisfied” with all aspects of orientation from available student interactions to academic and student information. Stop-out students had the highest percentage (27.4%) of having not completed any orientation.

When students were asked if they completed NHCC orientation, responses were as follows:

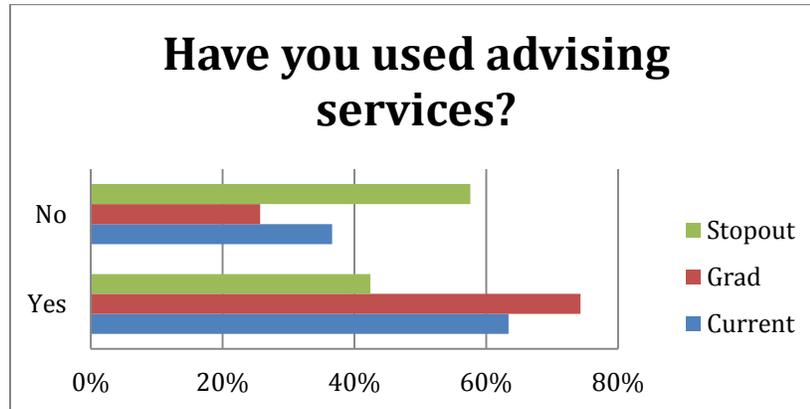
<i>Prompt</i>	<i>Current</i>	<i>Graduated</i>	<i>Stop-outs</i>
Yes, I completed the online orientation	21.6%	21.0%	25.8%
Yes, I completed the on-campus orientation	63.6%	45.9%	36.3%
No, I didn't complete any orientation	10.0%	19.3%	27.4%
I don't know if I completed orientation	4.9%	13.8%	10.5%

The current student focus groups seemed to be very supportive of a comprehensive orientation. Overall students seem to appreciate the value and experience as an introduction to be successful at NHCC. A suggestion made by current students was to have DARS play a larger role within the orientation.

Advising

In regards to Advising, there were some differences in the responses from the 3 student groups when asked about utilization of the advising services. As seen below, a majority of graduated (74.3%) and current (63.4%) students have used advising services, while 57.6% of stop-out students have not used advising services.

Table 2.0



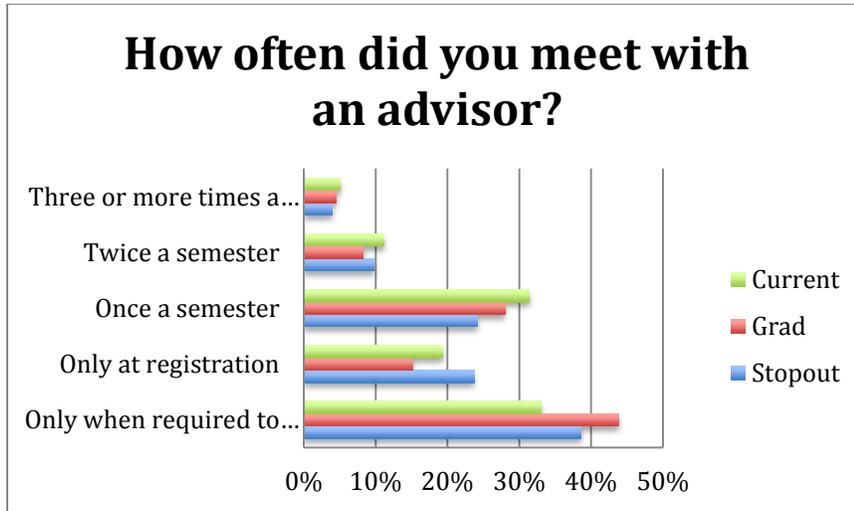
To follow-up to this question, we assessed the awareness of the advising services. So even though a larger percentage of stop-out students did not use advising services, they were still aware that it existed. We believe students are making a conscious choice as to whether or not use such services.

When asked if the students knew that the Advising Services existed, the responses were as follows:

Prompt	Current	Graduated	Stop-outs
Yes	72.3%	66.7%	67.7%
No	27.7%	33.3%	32.3%

Advising does not appear to be frequent as the majority (35.6%) of survey respondents only use advising when required, followed by once a semester.

Table 2.1



Students have typically found the scheduling of advisors easy with few barriers (66.9%). Over 71.8% of survey respondents were “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with the advising they received. Those who have had trouble accessing advising would like to see more flexible time offerings available (60.0%).

The vast majority of students (81.2%) use their DARS report to verify they are registered for the correct classes for their major. This not only shows an incredible number of students who are knowledgeable about their DARS report, but also a possible reason as to why more students do not seek out advising if they feel they can do it themselves.

Course Availability

NHCC matches national trends of a growing desire for a mixture of on-campus and online courses within their schedule. On-campus courses appear to be vital with NHCC’s non-traditional and diverse student population. Less than 10% of current students prefer a complete online academic program. The majority of students (50.9%) prefer evening classes between 5-9 pm or late morning offerings (45.9%). Students preferred mid-week offerings to weekends.

Table 3.0

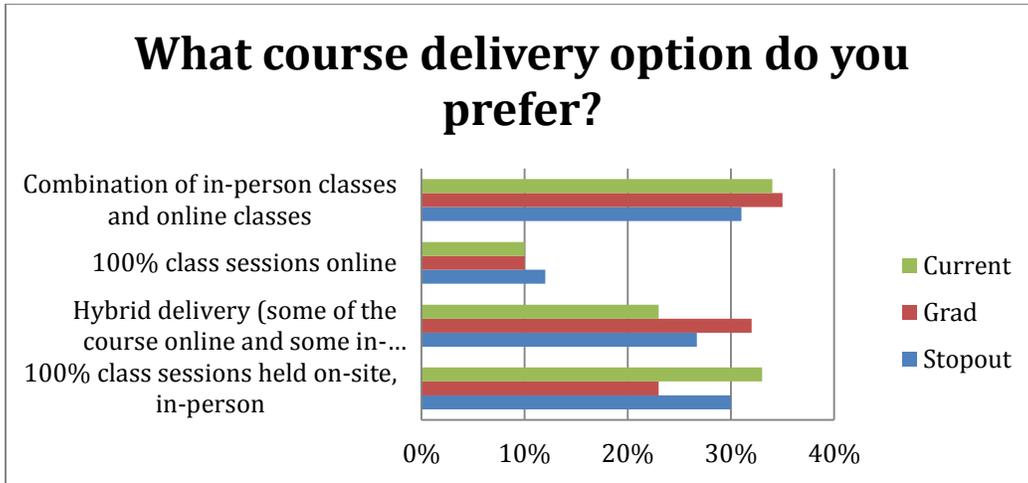
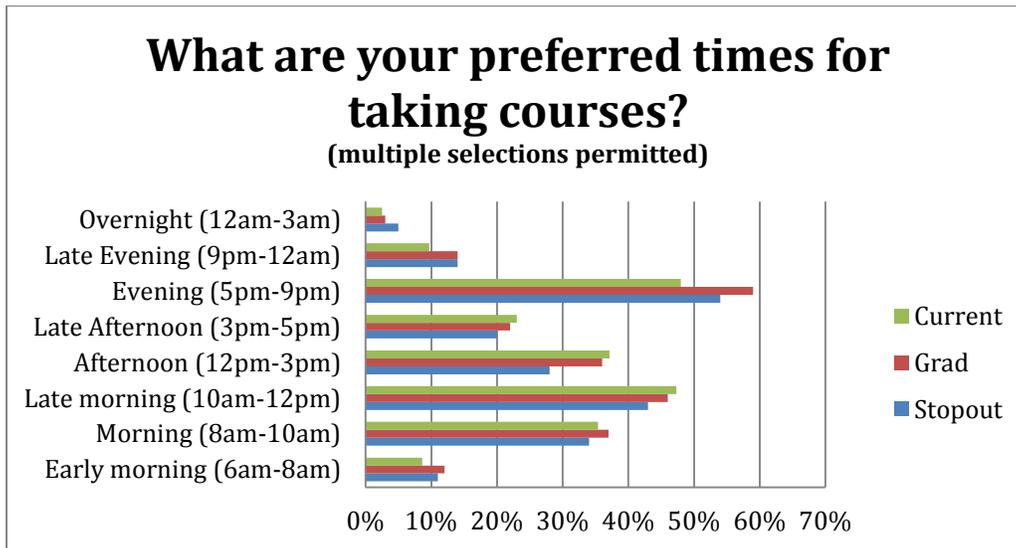


Table 3.1



When students were asked which factors influenced their decision on the number of credits they enrolled in each semester, responses were as follows: (multiple selections)

Prompt	Current	Graduates	Stop-Outs
Financial Aid eligibility	37.5%	28.4%	28.8%
Work schedule	68.7%	72.7%	66.1%
Class availability	53.9%	59.1%	54.4%
Family obligations	33.6%	35.8%	24.4%
Personal finances	31.4%	30.7%	34.3%
Transportation	12.1%	6.3%	7.4%
Housing instability	3.0%	0.0%	1.7%

Student Services

Student Services is typically satisfying for students that choose to use them. Financial Aid and the Library had the highest proportion of “very satisfied” students. Parking had the highest percentage of “dissatisfied” and “very dissatisfied” students (20.4%).

Table 4.0

	Rating Average: 1=Very Satisfied 3=Neutral 5=Very Dissatisfied			Percent rated N/A		
	Current	Grad	Stopout	Current	Grad	Stopout
Career Planning Services	2.2	2.32	2.45	46%	49%	56%
Counseling Services	2.16	2.24	2.47	35%	35%	47%
Disability Access Services	2.29	2.24	2.51	69%	78%	72%
Bookstore	2.13	2.32	2.27	3%	1%	10%
Financial Aid	1.99	1.96	2.29	20%	22%	39%
Veteran Services	2.45	2.1	2.53	73%	77%	77%
Library	1.91	1.89	2.07	20%	11%	26%
Student Support Services/TRIO	2.26	1.96	2.36	60%	68%	65%
Tutoring Services	2.2	2.07	2.33	49%	53%	57%
Accounting and Fees	2.11	2.07	2.31	17%	7%	22%
Testing Services	2.12	1.97	2.26	21%	24%	36%
Parking	2.68	2.37	2.32	6%	3%	11%

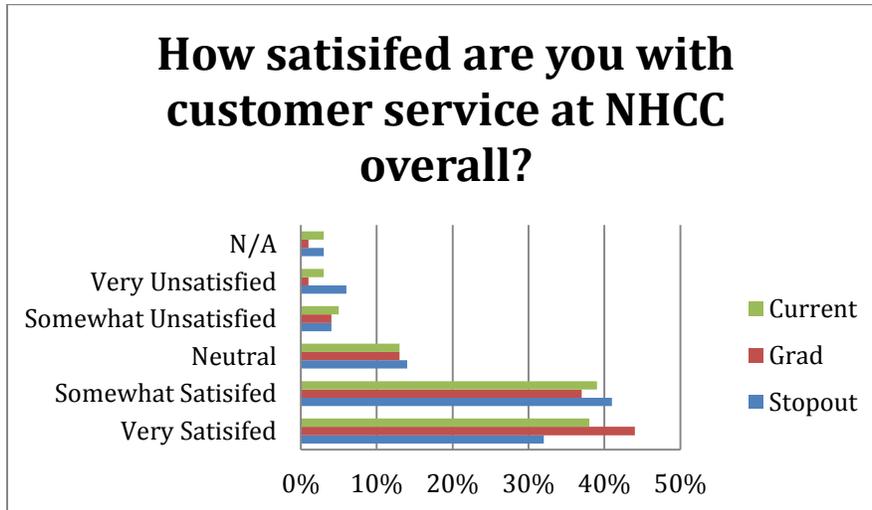
A reoccurring issue seemed to be the way in which NHCC communicates/markets the student services available to students. During the focus groups many students identified not knowing of services available to them. Again there were a variety of comments to both extremes. The bookstore was identified frequently for being inflexibility and unhelpful. It appeared that the bookstore was getting some unjustified blame versus instructors about the books they were required to purchase compared to cheaper versions available.

Connection to NHCC

Generally, students from all three groups were satisfied with the customer service they received at NHCC as seen below. This shadows and supports much of the data that students are satisfied with their overall experiences at NHCC and would recommend the

college to a friend or family member (76.0%). This speaks very highly of much of the great work NHCC is already doing.

Table 5.0



When students were asked whether they have made a connection with any NHCC student(s), faculty, or staff members, with whom they felt comfortable asking for assistance or discussing coursework, responses were as follows:

Prompt	Current	Graduated	Stop-Outs
Yes	75.9%	81.3%	64.2%
No	24.1%	18.8%	35.8%

These results can raise a red flag in regards to Stop-out students feeling less connected to campus than current and graduated students. Although this doesn't directly link to their cause of ending their time at NHCC, it can be studied further as to how to improve all students' opportunities for connections on campus and within the classroom.

Diversity

Overall NHCC appears to have a great reputation with engaging and embracing diversity. Over 81.9% of students feel comfortable engaging in diversity conversation with their instructors. Only 7.9% of students feel their culture is not valued at NHCC. A common theme emerging amongst white male survey respondents dealt with reverse discrimination. These students feel as if they are the growing minority and their values do not matter compared to their various ethnic and female counterparts.

The focus groups really highlighted the reputation NHCC has for accepting diversity. Numerous positive examples were brought up. There seems to be a population that would like to see more diversity among faculty and then a counterpart population that is more concerned with quality of instruction. Students seemed interesting in exploring the diverse cultures at NHCC and expressed interest in receiving an invitation and method to do so.

When students were asked whether they felt comfortable engaging in conversations that relate to diversity issues with instructors, responses were as follows:

<i>Prompt</i>	<i>Current</i>	<i>Graduates</i>	<i>Stop-outs</i>
Yes	83.1%	84.1%	78.3%
No	16.9%	15.9%	21.7%

When students were asked whether they felt the climate at NHCC values their own cultural background, responses were as follows:

<i>Prompt</i>	<i>Current</i>	<i>Graduates</i>	<i>Stop-Outs</i>
Yes	67.3%	72.7%	61.9%
No	5.8%	5.7%	8.9%
N/A	26.8%	21.6%	29.1%

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Integrate Key Marketing Messaging:** Integrate key messages about affordability, flexible scheduling, and campus location into all promotional activities.
2. **Research Audience-based Website Layout:** The primary source of gathering information about NHCC is the institutional website. Many higher education websites have developed an audience-based layout identifying prospective students, current students, alumni, and employees. Conduct a study investigating the effectiveness of the current website layout and information specifically for prospective versus current students. There may be an opportunity to more effectively communicate by identifying the specific audience.
3. **NHCC Mobile Website:** Smart phone and tablet technology continues to grow amongst higher education students. Develop a plan to implement an NHCC mobile website.
4. **Focus on Completion Rates:** Focus the majority of messaging on student success through completion. Currently those with the goal of “transferring to a four-year institution” have the highest completion rates amongst our findings. If current trends in higher education towards completion continue it would be recommended to focus on those career goals that yield the highest completion rates for the institution.
5. **Orientation Completion Rate Comparison:** Monitor persistence and completion rates of students that complete the online versus on-site orientation.
6. **Advising Program Incentives:** The use of advising services is vital towards student success and completion. Stop-outs were the most likely group not to have used the advising services. Consider developing an incentive or mandatory advising program. Also research options to make advising more accessible such as evening hours or online advising options.
7. **Explore Book Buying Options:** Lead a discussion amongst the bookstore, student government, and faculty to review book-buying opportunities in higher education including e-books and book rental programs.
8. **Improve Student’s Connection to NHCC:** A student connection with NHCC appeared to play a large role in the completion of their educational goals. Conduct a study to further explore the accuracy of this statement and ways to improve student connection and involvement with NHCC.

9. **Focus on Diversity:** NHCC has a great reputation of accepting diversity to the external community. Develop an internal marketing campaign highlighting and celebrating diversity in all forms including those considered traditionally the majority. The focus should be on celebrating diversity not minorities to avoid feelings of reverse discrimination.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR USE OF INTERNAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT IN THE FUTURE

1. Segment the 'Stop-Out' student group differently to get a true analysis of the students that are leaving from school. Many within our group seemed to have met their goals and/or were transfer students, so we didn't get an accurate read on students who 'stopped-out' of NHCC in an unhappy or unsatisfied state.
2. Within Survey Monkey, create a check box that recognized "other" as a standalone response. This was not done this year which lead to some confusion in data analysis.
3. Get larger response rates for the focus groups so that data holds credibility.
4. Identify the more popular "other" responses from this year's responses and turn them into multiple choice options for better analysis. For example, a large % of people responded that they were referred to NHCC from either friends or family. Friends or family should be listed as one of the choices for that question.
5. Continue to offer a 'compensation prize' for those who complete the survey. Student completion of the survey was high so length of survey is attainable.

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Appendix A

NORTH HENNEPIN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

IRB#

Title of Project: Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) Plan for Sustaining Growth and Improving Student Success: Student Needs Assessment

Purpose of the Research:

The purpose of this study is to identify practices in academic and student services that have been most helpful to the success and transition of our students. You have been identified as a student who (is currently enrolled at /transferred from /graduated from) North Hennepin Community College.

Procedures:

Participation in this study will require 10 minutes of your time for the electronic survey component of the study. For participants who complete the survey, and elect to participate in the focus group session, 60 minutes of time will be required. You will be asked to participate in a focus group with 6-8 graduates or transferred students from NHCC. You will meet with two of the study's secondary investigators who will audiotape with your permission. You may ask that the recording be turned off at any time during the interview.

Risks and/or Discomforts:

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

Benefits:

This study is designed to help North Hennepin Community College (NHCC) Community identify practices in academic and student services that have been most helpful to the success and transition of its students. Results of the study will be shared with members of the College's Strategic Enrollment Management team, College administration and staff, and Luoma Leadership Team (secondary investigators).

Confidentiality:

Any information obtained during this study which could identify you will be kept strictly confidential. SurveyMonkey has physical and environmental controls in place to protect data. In addition, SurveyMonkey will not use the information collected from the surveys in any way, shape or form.

Any information obtained during this study which could identify you will be kept strictly confidential. The focus group data will be stored in a locked cabinet in the principal investigator's office at NHCC. The data will only be seen by the principal and secondary

investigators during the study. The information obtained in this study may be published in professional journals and/or presented at professional meetings, however the data will be reported as aggregated data. The audiotapes will be erased after transcription verification is deemed accurate.

Compensation:

Each participant who completes the survey receives a chance to win gift cards/vouchers (<insert specific incentive text for the corresponding sample group>).

- “Graduates” Sample: Two \$25.00 Visa gift cards will be provided to winners selected in a random drawing from participants who complete the survey within the specified sample group.
- “Current Students” Sample: Four \$25.00 bookstore vouchers will be provided to winners selected in a random drawing from participants who complete the survey within the specified sample group.
- “Transfer or ‘Stop-out’” Sample: Four \$25.00 Visa gift cards will be provided to winners selected in a random drawing from participants who complete the survey within the specified sample group.

Opportunity to Ask Questions:

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study. You may contact any of the principal and secondary investigators whose names and phone numbers are listed in this informed consent. If you have questions concerning your rights as a research subject that have not been answered by the investigator or to report any concerns about the study, you may contact North Hennepin Community College Institutional Review Board, IRB Coordinator Sheryl A. Olson, or telephone (763) 424-0882.

Freedom to Withdraw:

You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the investigators or North Hennepin Community College.

Consent, Right to Receive a Copy:

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature/electronic signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Signature of Participant:

Signature of Research Participant

Date

Name and Phone number of investigator(s):

Primary Investigator:	Landon Pirius	North Hennepin Community College
Secondary Investigators:	Jackie Briggs	Southeast Minnesota Technical College
	Sarah Carrico	St. Paul Community College
	Nadine Haley	Metropolitan State University
	Nasreen Mohamed	Minneapolis Community & Technical College
	Shawn Reynolds	Pine Technical College
	Jason Trainer	Northland College
	Ginger Zierdt	Minnesota State University, Mankato

Appendix C

Focus Group Protocols

North Hennepin Community College Graduates

Date:

Location:

1. What elements/components of NHCC's of orientation session did you find most/least helpful/impact fully onward graduation?
2. What elements in your advising sessions did you find most/least helpful in your path toward graduation.
3. What did your advising sessions look like/sound like...who was present/ what topics were discussed?
4. Where did you learn how to navigate/read Your DARS report?
5. Cost and location are understood to be significant variables for student who chose NHCC, what was the key for you in ultimately choosing NHCC?
6. The NHCC website appears to be a significant means of gathering info at NHCC, what web pages did you utilize most?
7. Describe how your degree from NHCC has added value to your life?
8. If you transferred following graduation, how did your NHCC experience prepare you to be successful at the institution you currently attend?
9. How did NHCC assist you in preparing for your actual transfer process between schools ?(what was their role)
10. How did NHCC help prepare you to work or study in a diverse work/school environment?
11. How did student life at NHCC impact your success in employment or continued education?

North Hennepin Community College Transfer or "Stop-outs":

Date:

Location:

1. Tell us about your experience at North Hennepin.
2. Why did you stop attending NHCC?
3. Could North Hennepin have done anything to retain you?
4. Were you satisfied with the Course Availability at North Hennepin? How could course availability have improved? (days, times, delivery)
5. If your intent was to only take a few courses, why did you declare a major?
6. Tell us about your experiences with student service offices? Which services were you satisfied with and which services were you dissatisfied with?

Counseling and Advising, Bookstore, financial aid, accounting and fees, parking, disability services, library, student life, tutoring, veteran services).

7. Cost and location are understood to be significant variables for student who chose NHCC, what was the key for you in ultimately choosing NHCC?

North Hennepin Community College Current Students:

Date:

Location:

1. Tell us about your experience at NHCC?
2. Cost and location are understood to be significant variables for student who chose NHCC, what was the key for you in ultimately choosing NHCC?
3. The NHCC website appears to be a significant means of gathering info at NHCC, what web pages did you utilize most?
4. What elements/components of NHCC's of orientation session did you find most/least helpful?
5. How have your experiences w/ Advising compared to your expectations of Advising Services?
6. Where did you learn how to navigate/read Your DARS report?
7. Are you satisfied with the Course Availability at North Hennepin? How could course availability have improved? (days, times, delivery)
8. Tell us about your experiences with student service offices? Which services were you satisfied with and which services were you dissatisfied with? Counseling and Advising, Bookstore, financial aid, accounting and fees, parking, disability services, library, student life, tutoring, veteran services).
9. Upon review of the survey responses, it is apparent that Diversity plays a very strong role at NHCC. Please discuss your view and experiences of diversity at NHCC?

Appendix D

Demographics of Survey Respondents

Respondents			
Average Age		31.69	
Gender	Male	56	30.1%
	Female	130	69.9%
	Undeclared	0	0.0%
		186	
Ethnicity	Amer Indian	1	0.5%
	Asian	21	11.3%
	Black	11	5.9%
	Hawaii	0	0.0%
	Hispanic	3	1.6%
	Undeclared	5	2.7%
	White	145	78.0%
		186	

All Students			
Average Age		29.82	
Gender	Male	704	39.2%
	Female	1093	60.8%
	Undeclared	1	0.1%
		1798	
Ethnicity	Amer Indian	17	0.9%
	Asian	177	9.8%
	Black	180	10.0%
	Hawaii	0	0.0%
	Hispanic	31	1.7%
	Undeclared	26	1.4%
	White	1367	76.0%
		1798	

Appendix E

Analysis of Open-Ended Remarks on SEM Survey

Why did you choose to stay at NHCC to complete your degree?

By the time I was ready to transfer it was better to finish up degree

Family recommendation

Great online classes

I got a Bachelor's degree from another institution and went to NHCC in the summers to supplement. Then I returned to NHCC to get a certificate.

I was very pleased and impressed with the whole experience of caring, concerned, and pleasant staff to include instructors, counselors, and even the custodial engineers.

Left HTC for NHCC, NHCC was far more interested in my success

Like the small class sizes

NHCC was one of only two colleges that had the program I wanted

Night/Weekend Nursing Program

The Business ASAP Program

The degree in what I wanted to do.

Was ABA approved for my major

Was accepted into RN program

After graduating from NHCC, what was your primary objective? - Other (please specify)

Accumulate money for fall semester at another college and find another 4 year college to attend too I wanted to go to a four-year institution, but I got a job instead.

I still plan on attend a four-year University.

This was a challenging choice being transferring to another college and personal development were also key factors.

What college did you transfer to? (top 15 listed) Count of Open-Ended Responses

University of MN Twin Cities	58
Metro State University	51
St Cloud State University	25
Bethel University	16
Anoka Ramsey Community College	15
Minnesota State University Mankato	12
University of St Thomas	12
Hennepin Technical College	8
Northwestern College	8
Winona State University	7
Hamline University	6
Minneapolis Community and Technical College	6

Augsburg	5
University of MN Duluth	5
Bemidji State University	4

If you stopped attending NHCC, what were the major reasons you did not return? **Count of Open-Ended Responses**

Degree seeking elsewhere	33
Did not like / conflict with instructor	6
Personal Conflicts	6
Met Professional Development goals	3
Taking a break	3
Moved out of area	2
NHCC Did not meet students' needs	2
Unknown	2
Completed Generals / Program	2
Frustrated with computer system and email	1
Military Service	1
Not comfortable with technology	1
Nursing program bar to high	1

What was the most important factor in deciding to attend NHCC? **Count of Open-Ended Responses**

<i>Course Availability (evening, online ,weekend, summer)</i>	66
Combination of Options (i.e. cost and location or program and location)	46
Misc (expanding / explaining original answer)	24
Transfer Credits	7
Customer Service	6
Great place to start	6
Atmosphere	3
Expanding on selection	3
Buffalo High School Location	2
Diversity	1
Financial Aid	1
Later application deadlines	1
Veteran Friendly	1

Where did you find out information about NHCC? Count of Open-Ended Responses

Family / Friends	169
Proximity (live or work near NHCC)	35
Misc (expanding / explaining original answer)	32
Previously Attended	20
Mailing / Marketing	11
MNSCU	8
Employee of NHCC	4
Employer Recommended	4
Bethel University	3
American Bar Association	2
Called for Info	2
Television	2
Open House	1

What are your educational goals? Count of Open-Ended Responses

Pre-Reqs / Coursework for Graduate program	52
Misc (expanding / explaining answer)	34
Coursework to fill requirements at another school	24
Career Change	4
Undecided	2
All of the above	1

How did you connect with an advisor? Count of Open-Ended Responses

SSS / Trio	10
Emailed Advisor	6
Scheduled an appt	5
Walked in	5
Called Advisor	4
Class Assignment	2
Disconnect between experience and expectations / Wasn't pleased with service	2
Found it difficult to meet with an advisor	2
Unknown	2
ARCC Counselor	1
Enjoyed Experience	1
Sign for ESOL students	1
Student Success Day	1
VA Office	1

	Count of Open-Ended Responses
I have found meeting with an advisor to be:	
Limited availability / Difficult to meet with Advisor / Appts run late	27
Disappointed with service (wasn't helpful / received incorrect information)	16
Positive experience	8
Don't know who advisor is	6
Easy, quick email responses	4
Only met once or twice	4
Orientation was only meeting with Advisor	4
Would like to see evening appointments	3
Student too busy to meet with advisor	2
Varies depending on the advisor you see	2
Would like to see more walk-in appts	2
Did not feel connected but felt that advisors did their best	1
Happy that she is able to meet with advisors at 6pm	1
Met once	1
Would like the same advisor through NHCC	1

	Count of Open-Ended Responses
What would help you use Advising Services more? (Top 15 responses listed)	
Nothing	163
Better informed advisors (in regard to specific programs / not providing incorrect info)	30
Online / Email / Phone advising option	19
Evening Hours	18
A more friendly atmosphere / Being comfortable with advising services	9
Knowing more about Advising Services (what can they do for me)	8
Pleased with advising	7
Advisors reach out to students	4
Allow for walk-ins	4
More time with advisors / Less emphasis on quick service (felt rushed)	4
Trio/SSS	4
Who is my advisor?	4
Require that students meet with advisors	3
Advisors should reach out to students	2
Assist with registration	2

Which factors influenced your decision on the number of credits you enrolled in each semester? (Top 15 responses listed)

Count of Open-Ended Responses

Credits needed	24
Academic Success / Get Good Grades / Course Difficulty	21
Program Plan	10
Desire to finish school early	6
Course Availability	5
Finances	4
Family and work full time	3
International Student Status	3
VA Benefits	3
Medical	2
Advised	1
All factors	1
ASAP offerings	1
Career Goals	1

Please provide any comments you would like to share in regards to NHCC customer service. (Top 15 responses listed)

Count of Open-Ended Responses

Nothing / No Comment	60
Very Satisfied with Customer Service	59
Satisfied with Customer Service	46
Not pleased, with customer service	39
Financial Aid (process / customer service/responding to emails, phone)	16
Bookstore Customer Service Concerns / Procedures	12
Mixed views on NHCC customer service	11
Phones (placed on hold / don't always receive call back)	9
Student employees (customer service / internet use)	8
Front Desk customer service concerns	7
Accounting and Fees (customer service concerns / long lines)	5
Registration customer service concerns	4
Advising Customer Service / Informed	3
Website could be improved	2
Staff need training	2

What could NHCC do to help you meet and connect with more of your classmates?	Count of Open-Ended Responses
Nothing / Not sure / NHCC already does enough	165
Not Applicable / Not Interested	85
Group work / Classroom Interaction	59
Campus events / Activities / Social Clubs	40
Social Network for NHCC / Discussion forum	19
Adult Student Groups	9
Study Groups	9
Advertise Events / Groups / Clubs	7
Peer Groups / Mentor	7
Expand use of D2L	6
Online Student	6
Advising (meet w/ advisor, increased availability)	4
Flexible times / days for events	4
Smaller Class Size	4
Area for meetings	3

Appendix F

Summary of Focus Group (Current Students) Responses:

*Current Student focus groups consisted of 2 focus groups, with a total of 18 participants

Question: Why did you choose NHCC?

1. Location: Several live near NHCC campus or near the Buffalo site
2. *Cost (several students doing pre-reqs for both undergrad private and grad programs)*
3. *Transferring to other schools (held in high regard by other schools admissions/cost of pre-reqs)*
4. Reputation (academically challenging, treatment of senior citizens, community)
5. Friends and family referrals (word of mouth)
6. Flexibility of course offerings (hybrid, on-campus, online)
7. First Impressions (greeted professionally and didn't have to wait or come back for a tour)

Question: What elements/components of NHCC's orientation did you find most/least helpful?

1. Online Orientation (worked well for working adults)
2. Some students didn't remember orientation
3. Wishes they would put a greater focus on getting involved at Orientation
4. Overwhelming for some students
5. Need to emphasize the use of DARS at orientation
6. Some found it very helpful and it reduced the anxiety / intimidation
7. Students requested a checklist, felt like she was searching online of what do next and calling each independent office.

Question: How have your experiences w/ Advising compared to your expectations of Advising Services?

1. Students were very pleased with College Prep program and felt that without it they wouldn't still be at NHCC.
2. Several didn't know who their advisor was.
3. Several were very impressed with Shawn Davis
4. Several students mentioned that they were misadvised and placed in classes that it turns out they didn't need.

Question: Where did you learn to read your DARS?

1. Several taught themselves
2. Several didn't know what DARS was?
3. Several stressed that DARS is a great tool, but still should meet with advisors

Question: Are you satisfied with the Course Availability at North Hennepin? How could course availability have improved? (days, times, delivery)

1. **Course sequencing** (several courses only offered in the spring... Sciences mentioned)
2. **Time offering:** some courses offered only in evenings... while other only offered during the day. Also some concerns about if a class is offered in the evening and it is part of a sequence that the next class will also be offered in the evening. ASL 1 and ASL2. Also

- some programs days / time offerings don't match the needs of the students in the program (i.e. Graphics). However, Liberal Arts are offered in the evenings... when several of those are also offered online.
3. Wanted more offerings at Buffalo site. Great place to start, but not enough to remain there.
 4. Disappointed with Music Department... don't have AFA. Keep promising AFA, but will it ever come.

Question: Tell us about your experiences with student service offices? Which services are you satisfied with and which services are you dissatisfied with? (Counseling and Advising, Bookstore, financial aid, accounting and fees, parking, disability services, library, student life, tutoring, veteran services).

1. **Parking.**
2. Expressed disappointment w/ Veterans Services and didn't know who to go for Federal Tuition Assistance. Promised call back, but was never called back.
3. Students grateful for college prep program.
4. **Bookstore**
 - a. Return policy (should be exceptions for students who were misadvised)
 - b. Book buy back isn't a good deal and won't accept books with even a little writing
 - c. Not offering e-books
 - d. Cost / Disconnect between what faculty thinks the book will cost and actual cost.
 - e. Some faculty using unbound books... can they find more options to keep costs down
5. **Tutoring** very positive, but need to get the word out
6. **Disability services** were found to be unhelpful and deaf students were frustrated with them.
7. **Financial Aid** was found to be scary and unapproachable by some. One student won't go alone and will only go with parents.

Question:

1. Administration is very responsive to any complaints (derogatory poster was removed immediately)
2. Lack of diversity within Faculty / Staff. However it was noted, because diverse staff / faculty need to choose to work at NHCC.
3. NHCC has a great reputation for diversity and it is heard and felt all over campus.
4. People don't mix, difficult task to bring cultures together, because all cultures value diversity differently.

Question: General

1. Student really connected with instructors, a lot of positive comments about faculty.
2. They wish that NHCC offered bachelors programs, but then other students brought up the bachelors programs that are offered on campus. Perhaps better promotion of Bachelors program is needed.

Appendix G

Summary of Focus Group (Graduates) Responses:

*Graduate Student Focus Groups consisted of 1 focus group with 4 participants

*Direct Quotes below

Why Graduates Chose to Attend North Hennepin Community College

Qualitative Results

When I came from Africa in 2005, my intention when I was in Africa was to come here and go to school, but the plan was to go to – I think the East – was it North Carolina area to go to school. So when the plan changed, we came over in 2005, I was thinking about, I'm wanting to go to school. How would I go to school? So then I met this American friend. You know, he started asking me questions as to what I was doing back home. I told him I was a teacher. He said, well, do you have plans to still go to school? I said yes, but I do not have the money to go school. He said, oh, I can take you to the college right here. There's a college right here. We can go there and you can register.

I never knew the system. But I just came, I was about – I think I was three to six months in the country, so I have not even learned about the system. So he drove me and we came here, went straight to the financial aid office. There's a lady who was doing the office called I think Caroline. And he say, well, this guy is from Liberia. He wants to go to school. She say, oh, really? Yeah. She walked me out there on the computer. Within a couple of minutes, fill out the financial aid application, and she said, it's approved. So just wait in the mail, your PIN is going to come.

And then within less than a week my PIN came, and that was how I came to school. I think in August of 2006 I started.

But to answer your question, I mean, I was just living about five minutes from here, not too far. So I think the proximity was another thing that played a very key role, the closeness of the school to me...especially for most of the immigrants that are living here.

And then the convenience of – and possibly offering the classes right here at this location, so you don't have to drive there anyway. That's excellent. How smart.

Location. And I guess the other factor for me was that I'm – my mother had come here and got a nursing degree, so it was already – kind of like – that had been my plan from the get-go. It was just like, okay, well, I can go to North Hennepin for two years and save some money.

So that was a huge factor for me, was that – just the cost. I would save like \$5,000.00 at least or even more.

Well, that's what a lot of people are doing. They're getting their two years done at these – the community colleges because of the cost of the colleges. They're just getting incredibly high. They end up paying a house payment-like on school, and they don't get anywhere. They're in debt till they die.

And another thing is, you see, North Hennepin has a sort of agreement with most of the universities, like Metro State, for example, and then even Hamline University. I never knew, until

I went to Hamline, the criminal justice program at Hamline, and the one year at North Hennepin, when I went to Hamline, all of my credits were accepted. You see, I got 64 credits from here, and all my credits were accepted.

Orientation

Qualitative Results

They presented their information well and their communications and the distributions, paper. That was very well-organized. It was very user-friendly.

When I registered in 2006, time for orientation, it was in the same room, so we had a – an organization called Student Support Services, I think Trio, Student Support Services. They conducted the entire orientation in the same room, and they welcome us, and they introduce to us the organization called Trio, explained to us exactly what Trio meant, so then most of us sign up to be a member of Trio.

So after that, during the orientation, they were the one that organized the entire orientation program for us. And then I think the orientation was held in the Fine Arts – there's an auditorium in the Fine Arts building. That was where it was held. We went there. There was a forum where you have the president of the school, you have other dignitaries within the school.

And they make us to ask questions, a kind of forum, whereby students were free to ask whatever questions they want to ask. The students asked questions. You know, we have people answering us, and that was great. That was great. Yeah.

I never had that kind of orientation, so I was working full-time, and so I was only a part-time student, and I got my communications mailed to me, and this stuff – see, I didn't go in – you must have had the option then to come to one like that, or you could go into the way I did it. I did my appointments with my counselors for advising, but I never had an official orientation. It's because they – I guess they might have had two kinds of ways you could do it, because I got mine all communication through mail, which were very well – good, instructive, and then I made my appointments with counselors as needed. And then when I came to register, it was – they explained in their paperwork the way – the procedure to do it.

Hmm. Well, I think it's – I want to say there was an online orientation. Was there not? Okay. Yeah. And I'd been to the college before, because my mom went here several years ago, so I was pretty familiar with the campus and how the layout was. So I think I remember doing an online orientation, where I felt pretty comfortable with the campus already, living – because we had lived in Maple Grove, so it was really close. So I was pretty familiar with the campus.

I didn't have to drive. That was nice. It was nice to have an online orientation, I guess, to have an option of just going through and looking at some of the pictures and some of the services and stuff like that. I guess when you start going here, I mean, you come here and regardless of your orientation, it's like if you still have questions, like, well, where do I get information, you know? You just start asking questions when you get here, right, and people are pretty friendly.

Advising

Qualitative Results

I liked the scheduling. They were able to fit your schedule to go meet with a counselor. They're very accommodating. And they had more than one person for each – well, in my experience, more than one was available for the same thing, so you weren't waiting in line for one person. And the counselors themselves were very informative, and they knew their – they knew their information, knew exactly where to look for information, and who to direct you to if they didn't know an answer.

Yeah. I think the classes that I took, they were all relevant in my area. Had I not had ___ a counselor, it would have been very difficult. I would have done classes randomly, which would have maybe taken me up to four years, something like that. But as she rightly pointed out, my counselor was well-informed. She knew the program, the catalogue. So I was taking courses that were relevant in my area, so that made me exactly to spend the required time. You know, I think I was – Trio. Yeah, Trio counselor. And I mean, they were great.

I guess I have a different take. I guess initially it was good to talk to counselors, but at – as my coursework went on, I found it more and more that I didn't – I found it more that I – the planning that I did was on my own, that I didn't really get any more information out of the counselors than what I could just look for myself in the catalogue, and go, oh, I mean, this is where the required courses are, and this is what I need to take to get there. These are the steps that I need. So it was kind of frustrating at the end, actually. There was – I ended up having to take a class outside of North Hennepin because it wasn't offered here, and it was my last semester, and I needed to fill out a form, and it – that whole process of just filling out the form so that it could get – I mean, you could do that. They allow you to do that here. You can take a class that's part of your degree that's not offered here on campus, if it's not offered.

It was one of those, and then I needed to get it approved as well, that I could take the class. So I needed to have it signed off by the technology department, and then also a dean. And that whole thing like took a month to do that. And it was just a lot of run-around, and it seemed like that shouldn't have taken that long. It should have been like what could be done in a week took about a month. And it – the dean was like – he had no clue. He got the form and he sent me back like all these things, like what is this? I don't know what this is. What's going on here?

So it was a long, drawn-out process that – talking with the counselors, and then talking with the dean, and emailing back and forth and back and forth. It got done, but it just took a long time.

Well, yeah. Like to find a class that would – if one class is full, what class would be good to fill in for the area until the next time was open, or rearranging your schedule to fit the class in you needed, and also – that was very helpful, because we would have – sometimes when you're just going there, you don't – you're just overwhelmed, like I don't know how to figure this out.

And they'd help you think out the process, so it wasn't – you can't see – you're involved in it, so you can't see the big picture, and they're outside the picture looking in. And you're just like – you're the one in it, and you're like, I don't see what I can see – what I should see. And then they'll step you out with them, and say, this is what the picture looks like. And you're – they'd give you different options and scenarios on how to set your schedule up. You know, I never thought of that. Yeah. That would work, you know. That was very good.

Course Availability

Qualitative Results

The D to L site was – that was pretty good.

The online classes were good.

I took one class that was completely online. There was always some – at the end of the class, it's like, whoa – discussions. And like, well, let's meet. I want to meet these people.

Student Services (Including Transfer-Counseling)

Qualitative Results

I can't really think of a specific time that I really like relied on the counselors to really pull me through or give me some really good advice. I guess I didn't really utilize that that much.

The counseling office. Until I really needed it, like at the end when I was getting kind of done, and it's like, well, I need these classes, and this one's not offered, and that whole process of finding this class outside – and they were willing to work with me on that, which was good. It just – it took a long time.

I guess I learned about that [degree audit report-DARS] through a counselor, actually. The first few times I went and talked to the counselor, they were like, and this is your DARS report. And I'm like, oh, okay. And they're like, and – but you can access this yourself any time. And I was like, I can? Really? Oh.

The parking – the parking like that is in North Hennepin I think is great.

I think they should maintain the free parking system here in North Hennepin. Yeah. They should maintain that. That's good.

Plus have a good bus system. It's right on 6th – 10 – I mean, the location of the school is perfect for all these – the infrastructure is perfect, and you've got so much stuff around it. I mean, everything's around here.

The Student Support Services, they are great. You know, I think the school – the colleges support them to do their work. They help a lot of students achieve their goals. Yeah. So they are great. They are good. They help a lot of students here.

So you see, (my) parents did not have the chance to go to school. I'm the only person that went to high school, had a chance to at least have an associate degree, now on the way to getting a bachelor's degree. So I mean, TRIO is meant for those kind of people. And they also help you academically. There's an office just not too far from here. They help you academically. They have – they help you with your academic work. They help you with all the things like scholarships. So many things they help you with. And they helped me a great deal. I think TRIO is found in almost every college in the US, I guess.

[The] TRIO counselor[s]. And I mean, they were great. They were great. Student Support Services, I can recommend that to anyone. They are great. Yeah. Very, very great. Yeah.

A lot of my [credits] transferred, except there was a couple that didn't. One was – I had to retake – it was a 1901, which is like a beginning computer science course, because that's just the U's policy, because they teach it differently down there. Actually, it was either 1901 or 1902, which is intro to computer science. It's like the basic – yeah. It's the kind of like pre-reqs for computer science. It's like 1901 and 1902. And I had to retake one class. So – but overall, everything else transferred. It was really nice. I was really happy with the amount of credits that did transfer. A lot of them – I think – yeah, just the one class that I had to retake that was – that I wish I would have known about, because they said it would, but, I mean, oh, well.

All transferred to Hamline – all sixty-four. Yeah.

The one thing North Hennepin does is sometimes they send – they sent – I mean, you have representatives from these various universities come here to speak to students. Sometimes they have that table, we have transfer fair, you know, and that is a good thing. But at least where students feel lost, they should be able to help the students, see them through the transfer process. I think that would be a very good idea, too. Just inviting the schools to come and have table, to discuss transfer options with students, is a good idea, but at least there should be a sort of follow-up.

Connection

Qualitative Results

As for me, like as a speaker of a second language, I mean, English is my second language, of course, so most of us when we came, we were required to do additional English classes, and they're referred to as ESL. So these ESL classes actually to prepare us for college level English, and then they teach you reading, because irrespective of my educational background from back home, the educational system here in America to that of Africa, they are two different things.

So for me, I saw it as an – I mean, as an opportunity for me to learn the American way of educating someone. So for me, again, as I've said, it was an advantage for me, so I make it – I took advantage of that situation to learn all the study skills, time management skills, and that actually prepared me especially to where I am now. It helped me a great deal. Otherwise, it would have been very difficult, because the way we learn back home is totally different from how people learn here. Time is very important, and back in Africa, we don't value time.

What I feel very strongly is that these courses should not be counted as part of our – as part of our program, because I remember at a certain point in time, they send me a letter and say I have maxed out my – my credit, you know what I'm saying? It means that I have reached a maximum number of my credits required to graduate. And they were taking into account the ESL classes, which they should not do, because they were not even counting towards my degree.

And the program here in North Hennepin is called Service Learning. You get to really have that sense of community, that you're out there helping people that really need it, you know,

and they're getting huge turkeys and stuff that they can – the whole meal, Thanksgiving meal, that you're giving out to people. And that was – that was a big deal. Yeah. I would highly recommend that for students that are going here, to get involved in the community.

For me, I think it has given me a sense of the community, again, because when I was here, especially in most of my social science classes, we used to do some community service work, go to Salvation Army, you know, read to the kids, as he was explaining. So a sense of community.

There's no question. I mean, any time that you spend learning and studying for two years or in our case three years, I mean, it shows that you can – you persisted in something, and follow through and get things done. And I guess the sense of community was a big thing for me, too. It's carried on through my experience now at the U, because I see a lot of the same faces that are down there that I know from here, which is really cool, you know, that sense of a larger community that I'm actually a part of, the community around me, and I know people. And it's like, that's kind of – that is really cool. Yeah. Definitely.

The ultimate goals of education is at least to contribute to your society. If you see, most of the schools – in fact, not most. All of the schools you see, they are within the community, and it is within the community you have people. So if your education is not relevant to the community in which you belong, then your education has no meaning.

It adds character to yourself, and it's a value to the community, and you feel more part of the world around you. There's no question.

When people see it, then they get inspired by you. And it's attracting – it's attractive. It's actually attractive to people, when they see someone giving it, and it – you carry it on wherever you go. Your family, and you just – because you're in that giving, you're going to receive more, and you just want to give more, because you get back more. And everybody's responding to that, because then they see you giving, then they start giving. It's just the whole community gets involved then.

[Upward Bound] - It's an after school program for kids, high school kids, and they go to the high schools and they work with – they go into the schools most of the time and they work with high school students, just tutoring them and mentoring them, usually on subjects that you know, like English or math or science or something, whatever you're good at.

And then, too, part of that was that we helped them kind of fill out and look at different colleges that they would be interested in, and help them submit forms, and kind of help them in that regard, and just kind of be a role model for them, and kind of talk about what's going on in their lives and stuff like that. So that was really kind of eye-opening for me. We went to Park Center and we went to Cooper, and both those schools were – I mean, it was kind of cool to go see a whole – like a different – because I was far removed from high school at that point, so it was – it was good to go and work with kids and in turn be a role model. And we did some like events, like we went to the Science Museum, and you kind of chaperone some events and stuff like that. So that was kind of eye-opening for me.

I got to do a program called Cornerstones. It was like a tutor/mentor program, the last year I was here. And I guess that was really good for me.

Diversity.

Qualitative Results

Oh, I think diversity was represented well here, and it – and it was acceptable. People, they weren't – I never saw any prejudices here. I just never saw it. They're – everybody's pretty well all one, and friendly, and they just don't – they're all – they don't see anyone differently. I have – I didn't see any of that here.

If you look at North Hennepin program, they have minority relations. You have intercultural communications. You have interpersonal communication. Discourse is very crucial as far as, one, appreciating diversity is concerned. And most of the courses actually helped me, you know, already, I mean, to be able to work with other people, accept other people differently. Yeah. The courses are great. The courses are great. Intercultural communication especially is an eye-opener. You know, it tells you about different races. They tell you about people's culture, you know, how – you understand how culture is – I mean, the relativism of culture. Yeah. So with that in mind, you can appreciate other people's culture, that cultures are different.

I noticed here at North Hennepin that they have different culture groups, they'd have their own – like have like an organization – where'd they put on a lunch or something. They'd welcome the whole school to come just – you could experience their culture.

They'd serve the meal of their culture. And they would welcome everybody in the school to come just to experience it. So they represented different diversity groups. You didn't lose your diversity group. You got to be part – still have it, but then everyone's still integrated.

So diversity is actually celebrated.

I would agree with – I experienced the same thing. There was a lot of multicultural events that were held here on campus to celebrate culture, you know, and diversity, and learning different stuff. So that was really cool, and just going to those events. I remember in particular there was even an Indian – like a big pow-wow that was here.

And the teachers – the teachers here, they are actually working towards, you know, promoting diversity. And they – they don't welcome any student in class to make comments that will be offensive to other people. I remember there was a class, my last class in this place, I think it was – I think biology or something, environmental science class, in which the bulk of the students were, you know, people from different backgrounds, especially minorities.

And while we're in our class, there was a student who made a comment and said, why is it that America is allowing, you know, people from all over the world to come to this country? And then go to school, get free – get free education, get free food? So – yeah. I mean, everybody was on edge, you know.

He made a comment. So after that – and he continued talking. He lashed out, it's not good that people are coming here to go to school, get a free education, get free food, and the government is supporting these people. So the professor asked him, I mean, where does he get his facts from?

So he said, well, it's true. So the professor did not want to create some sort of environment that would be tense, so he continued with the lecture, and then the class ended.

The following day we had class, we enter, so we enter the classroom, the student stood up, the same student stood up and said he has something to say to the class. He said, I have something to say to the class. So we're surprised, what he have to say.

So he said, yesterday I made a comment that was inappropriate. I realize it. I think I said it out of – or out of ignorance and immaturity. So I'm asking my fellow students to forgive me for the comment that I made. So, I mean, we all felt touched. You know what I'm saying? When he apologized. So quickly I thought to myself, the professor might have called him. You know what I'm saying?

And said, what you said was not good. You know what I'm saying? Yeah. What you said was not good. But the fact that he came back and realized his mistake, you know, I mean, we all – we all appreciate it. So what I'm saying in essence is that teachers as educators, they should be the ones to, you know, discourage some of these comments. You know what I'm saying?

So North Hennepin is a great place, quite frankly. Yeah. That's just some isolated incident, you know. It's an isolated incident.

And not that it's a diverse – this is another kind of area I'd like to touch upon, is the age differences, too. The young and the old. I love that part, too, because everybody can learn from everybody. The old can learn from the young and the young can learn from the old, and it just works out great, because the old farts – the old people, they get up to – they get updated on what's current, because you're not still in the stone ages. And it's like, okay, now I'm kind of hip now. And then the younger ones, they look up to you for your wisdom, and it saves them time, going through your mistakes. So I love that age difference involvement. People, they – the younger learn how to respect their elders, and the elders respect their – the younger ones. It goes two ways.

It's almost like a village, where everybody knows everyone, you know.

Appendix H

Summary of Focus Group Responses for “Stop-outs”

*Stop-out Focus Groups consisted of 1 focus group with 4 participants

1. Tell us about your experience at North Hennepin.

Complaints specific to the computer science and paralegal programs. In general experiences were very positive. Concern expressed about content flow in the science curriculum. General consensus that North Hennepin is friendly to adult learners. Classes are very mixed and very diverse, which is seen as a positive.

2. Tell us about your experiences with student service offices? Which services were you satisfied with and which services were you dissatisfied with?

Some frustration with transfer credit evaluation process. Student had to do a lot of the legwork to get course information from another MnSCU institution. Repeated mention of crabby people in the Records Office and bookstore and book related issues. In general students were pleased with student services.

3. Were you satisfied with the Course Availability at North Hennepin? How could course availability have improved? (days, times, delivery)

Quality of online instruction can really vary. Course offerings are getting better, could always use more variety in day versus evening options. A number of students referenced the early availability of the Anoka Ramsey course schedule, this is appreciated for planning purposes.

4. Why did you stop attending NHCC?

All attendees either completed their program, transferred, or continue to take courses on and off so none of them truly meet the definition of a “stop-out.” One participant had a terrible experience with the Computer Science program and transferred to a different program at Anoka Ramsey.

5. Cost and location are understood to be significant variables for student who chose NHCC, what was the key for you in ultimately choosing NHCC?

Participants agreed that cost and location are key. They would generally recommend North Hennepin to other people.