

**Big Bend Community College
Latino Focus Group Summary
March 2016**

In winter 2016, Big Bend Community College held Latina and Latino focus groups to learn about our students' college experiences. The purpose of the focus groups was to learn ways to help Latino students reach their educational goals in a three-year time span. BBCC has a degree completion gap between Latino and white students (*Graduation rates - All students 36%, Latino students 27%, white students 44%). Twenty-seven current BBCC students participated in the focus groups. Students were recruited from two College Survival Skills classes, an Intro to Healthcare Studies class, TRiO Student Support Services, and Title V staff.

Students' Initial Big Bend Community College Experience

Students said they were encouraged to apply and helped by a variety of people including BBCC staff, high school staff, or community members. Once admitted, students commented on the difficulty of understanding college lingo, words like "Canvas" had no meaning and also the difficulty of understanding the financial aid process. For example, one student had to come up with tuition in just a couple of days.

New Student Orientation and the College Success Skills (CSS) classes were the primary college sources that helped these students navigate college processes and resources. Students said that a CSS class should be mandatory for all new students. Making a personal connection to BBCC staff/faculty seemed to be the turning point when students felt like they had someone that would help them through college.

Students who identified as first-generation and indicated that their parents did not speak English said their parents did not understand the benefits of a college credential or that financial help is available. Students suggested that outreach programs should start as early as middle school to help parents and students understand what being a college student entails and the long-term benefits of college.

Situational Barriers

All students stated that financial barriers made it difficult to attend college. Not only did they have school expenses, they also worked and financially contributed to their families. Many students had limited time on campus because they had to care for younger siblings or their own children and also worked.

A significant number of younger Latinas' families discouraged them from attending college. The students indicated that, if they attended college, it meant their time and financial support to their families was limited. When Latinas had children, their children were their primary priority over college.

Latinos also showed a great level of responsibility to contribute to their parents and siblings financially. They often attended school and worked full-time. Both Latinos and Latinas said that a family crisis (health, financial, etc.) took priority over their education and could cause them to drop out.

Campus Barriers

Some Latino students said they did not know what they should do when they started college and one student said he was intimidated by the people in the offices and did not ask questions.

Other constraints included limited English vocabulary. Some students said they listen in English but think in Spanish. At times, this makes it difficult for them to process and demonstrate their knowledge. Science classes were especially difficult, but many of the instructors helped students after classes.

*2015 IPEDS data – full-time, first-time, degree- seeking students within three years of enrollment, 2012 Fall Cohort

Campus Resources that Help

The personal connections students made in Student Support Services TRiO, positively impacted students' educational progression. Students said BBCC staff always made them feel welcomed and answered their questions. The students appreciated the one-on-one they got with faculty and staff.

The STEM Center, tutors, Supplemental Instruction (SI), and the English Lab helped students succeed in their classes. For some, the English Lab was intimidating initially, but all said English Lab tutors explained their writing problems and made them better writers. Students recommended that BBCC advertise resources so students recognize resources when they need them.

Financial resources were essential to help students get through college, including federal and state financial aid, Washington Application for State Financial Aid for DREAMers (WAFSA), and scholarships. One Latina student said the Intervention Scholarship kept her from dropping out.

Identified Student Needs

Students mentioned needing extra help with Canvas, APA formatting, understanding instructors' tracking comments on returned coursework, and tools to avoid plagiarism. Some students suggested more programs that "teach you what is expected of you". Students' limited time on campus made it difficult for them to access services like tutoring, advising, or help in the English Lab if the service or advisor was not available during the limited time they were on campus. One student said, "I have 45 minutes to get help from the English Lab. If a tutor isn't available at that time, I just don't get help."

Identified Needs in the Classroom

Some students stated that instructors make assumptions about the skills that students who are in their classes (i.e.: knowledge of how to use a computer program) have. Some students stated the information taught in classes was presented too quickly and too much information is presented at one time leaving little time for questions. One student stated "We don't know how to show the teachers we have the knowledge" and "teachers need to tell us where the problem is".

The one piece of advice students would give other entering students:

- Get an educational plan the first quarter you enroll, otherwise you will take courses that are not necessary for your major.
- Take a CSS class in your first quarter, it helps you understand resources and get a plan.
- Use college resources such as tutoring, STEM Center, SI, Disabled Student Services, financial aid, scholarships, etc.
- Time management is essential to success; map out time for classes and studying.
- Be prepared to work hard, and get through the "bumps" – be tenacious.
- Get involved with clubs and attend ASB activities.

Summary

The primary points students made about staying in college and being successful were to go to New Student Orientation, take a CSS class, and make a connection with a staff member who can advise students on careers, degrees, classes to take, and transfer options. Utilize college resources. Even though students learn about resources in New Student Orientation and CSS classes, it would help if resources were advertised to remind students what is available when needed.