

Returning Student Focus Group Summary Spring 2021

Purpose of Returning Students Focus Group

The purpose of the Returning Students Focus Group was to learn about what influenced students' decision to attend Big Bend, what their online experiences have been, factors impacting student success, and if their initial expectations of BBCC met their experiences. Multiple focus groups were held with 28 students participating, 15 academic students and 13 workforce students. Most students had been enrolled at BBCC prior to the COVID-19 restrictions as well as during remote learning with COVID-19.

Enrollment

Choosing Big Bend Community College

Many selected Big Bend because they were familiar with it and it was close to home. Running Start students said it was a great opportunity to get ahead before transferring to another college. Workforce students chose BBCC for specific programs, some were displaced workers, and see their education as a way to further or change their careers.

Experience Returning each Quarter

Students credited having an educational plan with making it easy to return each quarter. Having an advisor or instructor there for them and up to date canvas sites took the stress out of the process. Students were concerned about required classes being canceled, not allowing them to graduate before their funding runs out.

Student Success

Online Environment Experience

Online classroom

Although some students liked the flexibility of online classes, many students found the online learning environment difficult and were easily distracted. Students said instructors' preparation and ability to manage the online environment greatly impacted the quality of instruction and their success. Having an up to date canvas sites helped students manage their time. Not having "hands on" lab time made it harder to learn and the time for responses to questions was frustrating.

Self-paced courses allowed students to cover material at their own pace but sometimes that led to them falling behind.

Student services (student services department)

Students said "services are here for us if you know where to look" although some students hesitate to reach out to services. Financial Aid, Registration, WES, and TRIO have been helpful although students wanted to be able to reach these areas by phone.

ASB events gave students a sense of normalcy.

What Evening Students Need to be Successful

Evening classes have to be engaging to keep students focused. Access to resources such as childcare, tutoring, and the STEM Center in the evening is important.

Obstacles that Get in the Way of Students' Progression toward Graduation

Students said strong lines of communication with advisors and instructors especially important in the remote environment. Students were not always aware of available resources. It was important to have a clear educational path to offset a lack of motivation. It was harder for students to balance school and life since the start of COVID and students needed assistance not related to school.

During the COVID restrictions, students fell behind in their academic journey because sequenced classes were not offered when students needed them, classes students needed were offered at the same time, and students were not able to complete required lab hours.

Infrastructure

Technology Difficulties

Canvas issues were related to instructors not posting assignments on time, empty modules, and the Outlook on canvas sometimes not working.

Lack of internet was sometimes a problem for some, this stemmed from a range of items: Warden's Fiber was down (weeks), the dorm internet could go down, multiple internet users in a home, or not being able to afford internet.

Proctored exams (honor lock) were mentioned as an issue because the program would incorrectly recognize background noise or movement as potential cheating.

Alignment of Students' Experiences with their Expectations

(Did students' experience match what they expected before they started?)

Given the circumstances of COVID, students felt that their experience was better than expected and that the transition was handled well by most of their instructors. A student mentioned "they would have not chosen online" but recognized the positives of online which was a more convenient personal life.

Students who were not local said they had no idea of what to expect but were really happy with their programs (workforce), small class size, and that everyone had been really helpful. One student said "Big Bend is the little gem in the middle of the desert."

Returning Students Feedback Summary	
Why students chose Big Bend?	What helped students return each quarter?
Close to home, Running Start get ahead on education, specific workforce programs	Having an educational plan, having an advisor or instructor in their corner
Online Experience	
Positive Aspects	Challenging Aspects
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Instructors who are prepared ➤ Flexibility of online classes ➤ Up to date canvas sites help with time management ➤ WES, Financial Aid, TRIO, and Registration were helpful ➤ Services are good if students know where to find them ➤ ASB events gave a sense of normalcy ➤ Strong lines of communication with an advisor or instructor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Falling behind in classes ➤ Not getting required lab classes ➤ Canceled classes puts students behind on completion ➤ Instructor access for questions while learning ➤ Inconsistent internet ➤ Background sounds are picked up as cheating in proctored exams ➤ Balancing life in the remote environment
Alignment of Students' BCC Experiences with Expectations	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Experience was better than expected given the remote environment ➤ Workforce students from out of the area found their experiences exceeded their expectations 	