

# **Foundations of Excellence**

## **Roles and Purposes Dimension Report**

### **Pulaski Technical College**

*Foundations Institutions promote student understanding of the various roles and purposes of higher education and those unique to two-year institutions, both for the individual and society. These roles and purposes include learning for personal growth, career enhancement, workplace preparation and retraining, transfer for additional education, engaged citizenship, and serving the public good. Institutions encourage new students to examine their motivation and goals with regard to higher education in general and to their own college. Students are exposed to the value of both a general education and focused study in an academic or career field. (Foundations of Excellence)*

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#### **Current Situation:**

Pulaski Technical College is an institution in transition. Originally founded as a vocational school, since its elevation to technical college status in 1991, PTC has evolved into an comprehensive two-year college offering associates of arts and science degrees, transfer programs for continued education at four-year institutions, and vocational programs that prepare students for direct entry into the workforce. In the years since the college has grown from a student body of 875 to 7072 by Fall 2005. The make up of the student body has changed too. In 1991 only 34% of students were female and 14 % were minority. As of Fall 2005, 67% of students were female and half of all students identified themselves as a minority. The college's roles and purposes for serving this increasingly diverse student population have also changed, broadening the scope of this institution to meet student needs for developmental education, university preparation, and technical training for the workplace. However, PTC has fallen short of providing new students with adequate student advising and support services designed to inform this population of the roles and purposes of higher education due to budgetary constraints, low student funding by the state, rapid enrollment growth, and high student demands on the college.

Overall PTC appears to do a poor job of communicating its vision for the purposes of higher education to new students. When questioned about PTC's ability to provide knowledge for personal growth, learning for engaged citizenship, and learning to serve the public good students opinions of PTC were far more generous than those of faculty/staff members. Ratings from

students in these areas ranged from a low of 48.1% for preparation for being an active member in your community (Q045) to a high of 56.9% for increasing knowledge for personal growth (Q044). In contrast, only 33.2% of faculty/staff rated PTC “High” or “Very High” for encouraging active engagement in the community (Q044). This was the lowest percentage of high ratings from faculty and staff members for any of the dimensions surveyed for *Factor 8: Roles & Purposes*.

Learning to prepare for future employment was the only area that more faculty/staff members than students rated high or very high, but the difference between the two surveyed groups was only two percentage points: 61.4% versus 59.4%. The relatively high opinion of both faculty/staff and students in this area may be due to PTC’s good reputation for workplace training. Interviews with workplace training program faculty members suggest that they may have been predisposed to rate this area higher than other faculty members because their students tend to have more personal motivation, direction, and a clearly defined goal. As a result students in the technical and occupational areas may have a more connected, cohesive college experience than that of undecided or university transfer students since they are enrolled in an intensive program that requires a higher level of faculty involvement and provides more opportunities for guidance and advisement from these faculty members. Given the rapid growth PTC has experienced, especially in its general education programs, these departments may not have had the time to focus on building the infrastructure and unified educational vision necessary to provide the level of advisement and support that is available to students in the more established vocational programs. By their very nature, general education programs do not have a built-in mechanism for an intense level of faculty-student interaction; however, as the departments in general education refine their practices they can borrow ideas such as faculty advising from the vocational departments and incorporate them into their culture.

The college has not been successful in its efforts to effectively communicate to its students the rationale for required competencies or the requirements for entry into program and majors. The philosophy statements for Technical/Occupational Education, Developmental Education, and General Education appear in the catalog but they are buried in the middle of the catalog and not given prominence so students can find them easily. This information is also found on the college website but again these statements are not placed where they may be easily noticed.

Students who are interested in a particular degree program may find the program’s course requirements on PTC’s website or obtain them directly from the department, but that is yet another step students must take on their own. Even when students do take the initiative to contact a department, that department may or may not reply with a list of required courses and their prerequisites. Established departments with a tradition of sustained student contact and involvement already have a system in place to facilitate a positive and informative contact with a prospective or new student. New students who contact the college admissions department receive no correspondence relative to one particular program of study or reason for the program’s course structure.

The most telling statistic from this entire survey may be that only 41% of students felt that PTC did a good job of encouraging students to examine their personal reasons for getting a college education (Q041). Students who are fortunate enough to take College Seminar or enroll in a

technical or occupational program early in their college career may receive guidance, advisement, and encouragement as part of the classroom experience that can help them to clarify their personal reasons for obtaining a college degree, but not every student's education experience is so serendipitous. Unfortunately no system exists to track the number of students who may miss these opportunities for guidance and ultimately fall through the cracks. PTC may take a big step toward increasing its attrition rate by helping students discover their personal motivations for obtaining a college degree.

If this institution cannot help students discover their personal purposes and motivations for obtaining a college degree, PTC will continue to see high rates of dropout and failure among its general student body.

### **Opportunities and Challenges:**

As the only comprehensive two-year college in the most populous county in Arkansas, PTC has an admitted monopoly on the market for students seeking a vocational or university transfer education. For many of these students PTC's low tuition and open enrollment policies make it the only choice for accessing a higher education. Since PTC may be the only chance for some students, they should encounter an atmosphere that provides ample support and motivation to stay in school and complete their course of study.

Many of the programs that are already in place to assist students present both opportunities and challenges to our students. For example, Career Pathways and TRIO Scholars are two programs that provide extra assistance to students who qualify, however due to caps on enrollment in these programs; they can service only a small number of students.

The Student Orientation, Advising, and Registration (SOAR) Program is open to all new students, however only 64% participate. Several factors may contribute to this low participation rate. SOAR is only offered at the beginning of each semester, and then only on certain days and during limited hours. Open enrollment students, students who register late, and evening and weekend students may miss the opportunity for advisement through SOAR, leaving them to guess at which classes they should take. By missing SOAR these students start out at risk by enrolling in courses that may be too advanced for their level of education, or taking online courses without realizing they need the necessary computer skills to complete the coursework.

Programs like SOAR and TRIO Scholars, give their enrolled students extra guidance through the processes of registration, financial aid application, and advising. However, these programs reach small numbers of students because of their funding limitations. Students who do not find their way into one of these programs are often left to their own devices, seeking help from friends. Students may also ask faculty members for advice but this occurs only after students enter classes. Detailed program requirements that list the courses required for various degrees are available on the college website, but they are difficult to find. More of an effort should be made to provide uniform advising to all students who need it, especially first-year and developmental students.

Once in classes, students have access to many programs and facilities on campus that can help them stay focused on their goals; however these opportunities may not be publicized or utilized as much as they could be. Students can receive assistance with their program and career decisions from Counseling Services and special Single Parent Counseling. The Learning Assistance Center is staffed with subject specific tutors who are available throughout the semester to assist students in all of the basic subjects. All of these services are free, but students may not know about counseling or tutoring services, or they may not be able to come to campus during the hours these services are available.

For PTC, one of its greatest contributions to the students is its ability to prepare their students for employment. Offering technical programs in Technology and Industry, Information Technology, Business, and Allied Health reinforces the mission of the college to prepare students in these areas. A majority of students and faculty/staff rate PTC high on this service; however, approximately 40% of both groups believe PTC is doing only a moderately good job at best of producing workplace-prepared students. This slim majority in an area that PTC has long made its name in and staked its reputation on indicates that even in areas where the institution approaches excellence, the college still has a long way to go.

### **Sources of Evidence:**

In rating the aspects of the Performance Indicators for the Roles and Purposes dimension the committee members discussed the evidence provided to us through the academic catalog, Pulaski Technical College website, CPI, faculty and student surveys. Student and Faculty surveys were used to acquire the ratings reported in this document. Personal interviews and conferences with PTC management added additional points of study to correlate the surveys to current practices.

### **Recommended Grade: D**

PTC's grade for its level of attainment for "excellence" at this time is a D based on the review of available evidence. There is ample room for improvement and change if the communities of interest subscribe to the idea that each reform in PTC's student offerings results in advancement for our students, our college, and for our community.

### **Recommended Action Items:**

- 1. Require College Seminar for all students with 30 hours or less of credit who meet one of the following criteria: required developmental classes, declared university transfer student, or undecided student. (High Priority)**

First-year students at PTC who have work and family demands outside of school may not have the time or the resources to cultivate the basic skills necessary for college success. Especially for students who require developmental courses or those students who do not enroll in a technical or occupational program, College Seminar can lay the foundation for success in college by providing a background in areas such as time management, information literacy, and financial matters that will enrich the student far beyond the

classroom walls. Currently only 17% of all first-year students enroll in College Seminar, and more than a third of those drop the class, suggesting that there is a cavernous gap between the number of students who could potentially benefit from the course, and the number who actually do.

## **2. Required new student orientation. (High Priority)**

A comprehensive orientation program for new students would ensure that all PTC students have a clear understanding of the goals and purposes of higher education. A standard orientation will serve as an orientation to the physical campus, technology, and provide an opportunity to introduce students to the roles and purposes of higher education. As PTC has such a high percentage of first-generation college students an orientation would also provide the opportunity to expose students to the expectations and demands of acquiring a higher education. PTC currently has an online orientation available through its website, however only 34% of students surveyed by SOAR in 2005 reported completing the orientation. A required on-campus orientation offered at a wide variety of times that are accessible to day, evening, and weekend students at all PTC locations would have the potential to reach 100% of new students.

## **3. Increase Counseling/Advising Staff and Student Services Staff (High Priority)**

In order to provide a positive college experience that includes adequate guidance from the very beginning of their college career; new students should be required to meet with an advisor at the moment of registration. Currently many of the 64% of students who participate in SOAR are rushed through the system in the last day or two of registration without receiving a clear understanding or explanation of the reasons for taking particular courses, or the purpose of a higher education. By increasing Student Service capabilities PTC could reach more students on a one-on-one basis. Existing programs such as SOAR and tutoring services should be promoted more in an effort to reach and assist first-generation college students who may not have anyone outside of school to guide them through the processes.

A survey of students participating in SOAR in 2005 found that students continue to give low marks to the knowledge of their advisors regarding transfer requirements to other schools. SOAR students also ranked PTC low in ease of information access. Although PTC has shown improvement in these areas since the 2002 survey, knowledge of transfer requirements and getting the “run-around” when seeking information have consistently been the lowest ranking service areas cited by SOAR students.

## **4. Add division philosophy statements to all class syllabi. (High Priority)**

New students may enter college without a clear understanding of the purposes of higher education, or the roles of the required courses for a particular degree or certificate program. Departmental philosophy statements can provide students with guidance and justification for these requirements. These statements are found in the catalog and on the college website; however they are not obvious to students who may not understand their

purpose and meaning. Discussion of these statements at the class level, especially in the first year can lay a foundation for success by clarifying the reasons for particular classes and the purposes and benefits of a higher education.

**5. Increase the number of full-time faculty members. (High Priority)**

As a two-year college PTC relies heavily on adjunct instructors to meet student demand for classes. Demand for certain courses dictates that some areas of study rely more heavily on adjunct instructors than others. Unfortunately, this use of adjuncts tends to be highest in those areas where new students are likely to have their very first contact with a college instructor. At PTC the full-time faculty coverage of courses ranges from a low of 16.6% in English to a high of 48.7% in Computer Information Systems. For the four areas where most first-year students enroll in at least one course: English, Speech, College Seminar, and Developmental Education, all have full-time faculty coverage below 30%, suggesting that even in the best of circumstances, new students have only a one in three chance of receiving instruction from a full-time faculty member in one of their first college courses.

For many adjuncts teaching one or two classes a semester is a part-time job, and like our students, they do not have the time to provide extensive service to the college. In addition to their service in the classroom, full-time faculty members have a vested interest in the improvement of their institution and the experience of its students. Full-time faculty provide a consistent knowledge base for the development of curricula which results in a standard dissemination of knowledge and a uniform college experience for all students, regardless of the faculty status of the instructor. By virtue of their status as full-time faculty these instructors can also fulfill the necessary duties of providing service to the institution outside of the classroom to develop programs that will support and entice students to come to PTC and succeed in their pursuit of higher education.