Focus Group 2012 Results presentation by the AtD Data Team
May 9th AtD Core Team meeting
May 14th CPC meeting
Focus Groups Background

• Qualitative methodology-- more in depth understanding of a group’s experiences
• Serves as a new source of inquiry for further quantitative analysis (triangulation)
• Focus Group Facilitators/Note-takers
  – Used Matching group characteristics between interviewers and participants for in-group communication (age/gender/race/ethnicity)
  – 2.5 hours/training including conducting Pilot Groups (2)
    • Pilot Groups were convenience participants. Self identified as AGS students, ASO student, 2-4.0 students. None on probation or other sanction
  – Focus Groups: all were students on probation. Recruited by Retention Counselor. Received workshop credit for participating
  – 2 Latino male groups: Jassiel Dominguez, Daniel Ruiz, Joaquin Arias, Andres
  – 2 African American groups (one male, one female): Ralph Davis, Angela Sanders, LaShelle Daisy, Tungie
4 Areas of Strong Agreement

• Important to go to college for the future
  – Jobs, lifestyle, to have something no one can take away from you, become a better person
• Outcomes
  – Opportunities, better salary, be successful
• Academic preparation
  – Felt needed more preparation coming in the door
  – “I just jumped in head first”
  – “Counselors come to the high schools, [there are] college fairs, which are beneficial, but need more one on one visits [from college personnel]”.
4 Areas Cont.

- Transitioning from high school to college...
  - “...is tough”
  - “it’s complicated. You got to eat so you work, but if you don’t go to school, you don’t move on”
  - “high school had an Avid program, but you had to be selected to get into Avid. Those students got the college preparation piece. I got kicked out of high school so they told me it was a badge of honor to be here [in college]. My own anger drove me to prepare. I learned most about college from what it was like on tv, so it didn’t match; but I also knew it was on me to prepare. They told me I couldn’t make it here and it made me even madder. I knew an education would solve that” (pilot group participant, Latino male over 35)
Advice about attending college

• Sources of advice

• Latino Males
  – Sisters, brothers, cousins, aunt, uncle, grandfather, parents and family, Counselor, high school teacher

• African American Males
  – Counselors at high school—“the ones that actually care”, parents, sports, Boys and Girls Club

• African American Females
  – High school teachers, parents, “Counselors at the college once I got here and was struggling”
Opening the Front Door

• Need access to counselors. Waiting for an appointment 2 weeks out or longer is a major obstacle to success. Students leave without an appointment and struggle on their own experiencing frustration in both the lack of an appointment and not having what they need.

• Would have loved to have had an orientation!
  – “When you think of an orientation, you think of a tour of the school, you think of people, not flipping through things on a screen”
  – “The online orientation was a waste of time after the placement test”
  – EOPS orientation was helpful. Clear expectations. Tours, guidelines of the college presented.
What students want from an Orientation

- Face to face with a Counselor leading it
- Use terms that students will understand or when using new vocabulary, explain what it means or what it refers to
- Campus Tours– what is in the new buildings?
- “Tell people to study for the placement test”
  - Orientation needs to happen BEFORE placement
- Explain how Counseling and Tutoring work
- Student panel of Harbor students to tell how to be successful and learn the ropes
- All resources need to be highlighted.
- Counseling sessions at Orientation to explain choosing goals, options, careers, and paths to future degrees
- “Needs to be more than a day so that it allows students to digest the information” (Pilot group participant)
Skills Students Identified as Important and Needing Improvement

- Time management and discipline
- Work and school conflicts
- Reading/writing (essays)
- Test Taking
- Math
- Computer skills
- Public Speaking skills
- Organization skills
- Critical Thinking Skills
- Financial Management
- Research skills/Information processing
- Although not identified verbally by students throughout the focus groups were themes of life getting in the way or derailing them temporarily
Skills Students Identified as Important and Needing Improvement

• How to form and use Study Groups
  – “I see a lot of ‘Lone Wolfs’ out there [and they should be using study groups more often]. They try to do it on their own. I got an email from another student about wanting to cheat on a paper and I couldn’t understand why he would do that. If I can’t pass on my own, I don’t want it. Form a study group and you don’t need to cheat”
  – “Group studying is good. It helps to develop interpersonal skills and you learn to collaborate”.
What do you do when your Academic Skills don’t match current demands?

• Latino Males
  – “Find help. Teacher/family member” 1 occurrence
  – “Don’t have time to seek out help” 4 occurrences
  – “Take a personal day to clear my mind and focus” 2 occurrences
  – “Get an extra resource book, use YouTube” 1 occurrence

• African American Males
  – Study groups, Read, Library, Study and don’t go out too much, “Ask the teacher. Talk to the teacher and get to know them. Establish some kind of relationship”

• African American Females
  – Ask a counselor or a teacher (both participants), go to the lab

• Pilot groups
  – SPS program; see the Professor, go to office hours, ask peers
• Majority of Students had over a 3 year gap between math classes
• Very few had gone straight from a h.s. class to enrollment at Harbor
• Prepare for Math placement?
  – Overwhelmingly No
  – Only 1 went in prepared 1
  – 1 student had AP Math credit
  – 1 student given a choice based on self placement and didn’t take advantage of it at the time. Expressed regret and wants to go back and take it.
• Reaction to placement
  – “Shock! I placed really low and I am really good at Math... the class I am in now, I feel like it is so simple and yet I see people struggling. I wonder why I am here just because I messed up on my placement test”
  – Despite not preparing for the placement test, most all students expressed surprise, shock, and disappointment in their scores
  – A few students expressed surprise in a positive way because they placed higher than they thought they would (African American females)
Experience in Math classes at Harbor

• Latino Males
  – Teachers have language barriers and can be hard to understand
  – “Pace is too fast. [Instructors] won’t go over things again because the teacher ‘doesn’t have time for that’ and yet if don’t learn the first part, can’t learn the next. Have only taken one math class and won’t take another one after it” (expressed by 2 students)

• African American Males
  – “Very helpful (professor) not rushing through if you didn’t understand it, she’d go over and over and take her time.”

• African American Females
  – They should make Math 123 A B C into one class like Southwest does Math 115
  – None of the math classes are relevant to Stats class and it is very discouraging
  – There “comes a point where you can’t put it off any longer”.
  – “It didn’t go so well for me. I took Math 123B twice and still couldn’t do well. I ended up taking it at El Camino and I am in stats now.” The first time Math123B didn’t go well, the instructor told her to take Math 123A and “I was like Oh My God...[that course is so basic!]”
English

• Latino Males
  – Satisfied; except 1 student being surprised because took English all through high school and thought he placed better

• African American Males
  – Satisfied; except 1 student was “depressed. I rushed through it. Wish I would have taken my time.”

• African American Females
  – Shocked: “Tested into 28 and English was my favorite subject”
  – Shocked and disappointed: “Also tested into 28”
  – Both students stated that at the time, based on high school transcripts, 28 was not needed and should have been able to go straight into college level

• Pilot group 1
  – While not surprised at Math placements, they were surprised with English placements. Males in the pilot groups expressed that English was not their best subject
Experience in English classes at Harbor

• Latino Males
  – “Felt lost in 101– don’t like it and teacher just kept moving forward”
  – “101 is pretty easy. Good teachers”
  – There’s a perception that English 101 is easier than English 28.

• African American Males
  – “People make the class better. Interactions. Working in groups. Discussions”
  – Fun people in my class the first semester.
  – The “classes by nature make it so you actually get to know the students in your classes. Become more familiar throughout the semester. Makes it better. Have a sense of humor helps. People make the classes better”

• African American Females
  – Both stated they have done well and have taken up through 102

• Pilot group 2
  – “Good. Helpful professors and office hours. Math was fine in high school, didn’t struggle and struggles now. Hated English in high school and is fine here”
  – “Helpful. Able to open up and communicate and come out of shyness”
  – “[the] Professor- very helpful gone through English 21, 28, and 31 with consistent support and essay help”.
Equity

• Subtle issues of tension between Latino Males and African American males. Groups gave examples which reflected discomfort.

• Overall though, students indicated...
  – “everyone goes to class for the same reason”
  – “never seen a fight here”
  – “People are here only for class. Get in and get out.”

• Gender issues identified by Latino Male groups
  – “one of my [male] professors is more helpful and friendly to the young, pretty female students. It’s happened 3 times. Just because I am not a cute girl, you still need to help me”
  – “I had a female teacher who wouldn’t answer this girl’s questions. She would give [the questions] to me to ask for her”

• Finances
  – No feelings of “have’s” versus “have not’s”
  – “affects being able to afford things”
  – “At times cannot purchase books [so] can’t do homework”
  – “Financial aid helps pay for school, insurance, gas, a lot, but it is tight”
What would an Urban Center offer?

- It would help students connect. Would want to see concerts for a small fee.
- “The big space up in Seahawk is a ‘waste of space’ because it isn’t used”
- “A better selection of activities and things to do at Seahawk would make me want to stay and spend time on campus”
- “Seahawk is a big place and yet people don’t use it”
- “Nothing is open in the evenings, except the library, which is when I am here”
- “Computers would be beneficial”
- Space like at “CSU-DH where they have couches, chairs, tables, electronics”
- “A place to have a beer after class would be a draw for people to stick around” (group laughed)
Who would use the Urban Center?

• Latino Males
  – Only 2 said yes; 1 maybe depending on programming; other 9 said no (total 12)
• Both African American groups said they would use it and thought everybody else would, too.
• If you used it and found it helpful, would you recommend it to a friend?
  – All groups said yes
• Suggested names
  – Keep it Seahawk; The Nest; Seahawk II, The Harbor College Help Center
Additional Feedback from Students

- “Need a short term book loan program so you can purchase them all at once instead of having to space them out to buy them. Pay back the loan throughout the semester”
- “more copies of books on reserve at library”
- Signage
- “Bookstore hours- need to be here until 9 p.m. after classes start, also open on Fridays and Saturdays, so you can get scantrons and food”
- “Need login instructions for the available wifi so students can get online with their own computers
- Too time consuming to do Math 123 A B C. Need to be able to do it in one semester
- Face to face orientation for internet classes; need to learn the lms/cms
- Need and want summer school
- Need more classes!
- “Have been trying to get into Math every semester since I’ve been here and haven’t been able to get in”
- “Need to have an assigned counselor”
- “Counselors need to know the schedule of classes better. They recommend classes that conflict”
- “Need instructors that connect with younger students”
Next Steps:
Questionnaire regarding Math
In depth interviews regarding Equity
Surveys regarding Equity