Summary of February Futures Conference
Review of Key Principles and Common Themes

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March 12, 2014
Introduction

On February 18, 2014 Pima Community College (PCC) met with approximately 250 community members to discuss community needs and review possible strategic planning themes and directions for PCC. Approximately 900 individuals were invited to participate in the Futures Conference. The goal for this session was to engage participants in examining the following question — “What should PCC focus on now and in the future to bring the most value to its community and its students?”

To help drive this examination, participants were provided with a series of possible directions/choices related to the following strategic planning themes: Access & Community Engagement; Workforce Responsive, Employer Engagement, and Economic Development; Student Success & Degree/Certificate Completion; Commitment to Serving Target Populations, Especially Adults With No Prior College; Proactive Student Support Systems; Global Education & Awareness; and HLC Targeted Areas. Participants were grouped into tables of 10-12 and a trained, PCC facilitator led participants in a conversation related to each of the planning themes.

Cosgrove & Associates (C&A) observed the table conversations and recorded trends and common points of discussion. In addition, C&A compared its observational data with individual reports from each table. This document is a summary of our observations and table “report-outs”. This summary is designed to further assist PCC in the selection of a set of strategic directions which will help PCC focus on what matters most to its community, its students and its employers.
Common Themes and Points of Agreement

This section describes a set of six areas that participants mentioned/discussed the most during the table break-out sessions. These areas identify participants responses to Dr. Lambert’s question — “What should PCC focus on now and in the future to bring the most value to its community and its students?”

1. Access

Participants seemed to clearly value PCC’s role in the community and strongly advised PCC to be more aggressive in reaching out to a wide variety of sectors to increase access to education attainment. Participants reported that such access is especially important to under-served and traditionally marginalized populations who are currently not taking advantage of PCC’s programs and services. Increasing access to post-secondary education should be viewed as both a private and public good, as it will increase the economic/social mobility of a particular individual, while at the same time positively impact the community as a whole.

Participants recognized that increasing access is not an easy process and will require a coordinated effort between PCC and various community sectors. Obstacles that currently stand in the way of the increased access included but are not limited to: financial challenges; lack of appropriate role models, especially for first-generation college participants; low academic skills; and low self-confidence/aspirations.

Participants suggested a wide of variety of strategies to help PCC address the issue of increased access. Such strategies seemed to focus on two primary areas. First, PCC needs to re-build its image and build a stronger, more trusting relationship between PCC and traditionally marginalized populations. Participants reported that certain populations are either not aware that PCC can help them or have lost confidence in PCC’s commitment to helping them.

Second, PCC should widen its efforts to increase access beyond traditional “college-markets”. Participants defined this suggestion as “Widening PCC’s Brackets of Influence” or “Cradle to Grave”. Comments such as don’t just focus on high school junior and seniors, but develop PCC’s image as a community resource/ and source of education access as early as elementary school; thus, students will see PCC as the next step once they complete high school. Participants also focus on the other end of the spectrum and offered comments such as, work more closely with community agencies to provide, adult-friendly instructional modalities and support structures to help un-employed and/ under-employed adults acquire the skills needed for meaningful employment. In addition, participants
suggested working more closely with employers and industry leaders to provide, customized training programs to enhance skills of incumbent workers. Participants stressed that such training programs not be linked to traditional college terms, but instead link the programs to the needs and schedules of employers and workers.

2. Partnerships

Partnership was widely accepted as a positive approach and most tables discussed the concept as if it were a universal truth; something along the lines of “Mom or Apple Pie”. However, a number of participants, as well as table report-outs took time to more clearly describe how PCC and the community would benefit from increased partnerships. Such discussions centered on the following comments.

**PCC needs to reach out to its community. Don’t be afraid to ask for our help.**

Participants recognized that issues related to adult literacy, increasing access for under-served populations, lack of college-readiness skills; poverty; and improving employment opportunities are not the sole responsibility of PCC, but do understand that PCC sits a key nexus point in the community. PCC touches all rungs of the education ladder and by doing so can bring significant resources to bear on economic and social problems associated with a lack of education. Given its position, PCC should be a “Partnership Leader” and work to bring multiple players to the table in an effort to address community issues.

**Partnerships often fail because they lack specific purpose and definition.**

Although participants expressed an interest to engage in community partnerships, they reported frustration with partnership efforts that failed to clearly define goals and expectations. Given PCC’s position in the community (see comment above), it appears as if PCC is in a unique position to be a Partnership Leader related to any of the following issues: increasing college-readiness skills of high school graduates; better alignment of PCC curriculum with industry and employer needs; increasing access to higher education for adult and traditionally under-served populations. The partnership discussion often seemed to overlap with Access discussion described in #1 above. This relationship is exemplified in a table discussion generated by the following comments: “PCC should not be afraid to widen its sphere of influence. We need you to put community back in Pima Community College”. As PCC considers possible strategic directions, it seems apparent that Partnership should be a guiding principle. Steps taken to establish one or more specific, well defined partnership efforts (i.e., PCC Community Partnership To Increase Access and Grow Enrollment) would be widely supported.
**Improve partnerships within PCC**

As participants reviewed the various strategies/concepts provided on the discussion guide, the conversations often shifted to how PCC is currently responding to student and community needs. Such conversations led to rich discussions related to internal barriers. These barriers/organizational constraints seemed to revolve around the following two key concepts: organizational silos which curtail integrated/coordinated approaches and a reluctance of faculty and staff to engage in innovative, risk taking endeavors.

The organizational silo issues are by-products of organizational growth and development and often found in complex organizations such as PCC. As PCC moves forward with its strategic plan it may wish to examine organizational structure and direct attention to creating and nourishing internal partnerships aimed at what is best for students, rather than what works best to support PCC’s current organizational structures. Examples mentioned during the table discussions focused on a more integrated approach between instructional and student development/support functions.

The reluctance of faculty and staff to engage in innovations/risk taking is linked to the previous administration and a toxic organizational culture. PCC is working hard to address issues and concerns associated with the previous culture. Further support of faculty, staff, administrative, and student partnerships will be needed to increase innovations and organizational change. For PCC to fully benefit from strategic planning, faculty and staff need to feel empowered to act. Regardless of the strategic directions selected, PCC will need to engage in faculty and staff development aimed at collaboration and partnership.

**3. Culture of Student Success**

Student success and taking steps to support a culture of student success were routinely agreed upon as guiding principles for any set of strategic planning directions and related choices. Given the wide scope of PCC’s mission, participants suggested that student success must be viewed from the multiple perspectives contained with the mission statement. The discussions surrounding student success were certainly robust and we encourage PCC to carefully review the detailed summary notes related to this topic. Based upon our review of participant comments and table report-outs we have identified the following key principles.

**Pathways built upon stackable credentials**

Participants recognized that students come to PCC with a variety of educational goals and needs. The concept of student pathways to success seemed to resonate with participants from all tables.
Participants suggested creating such pathways to align with mission components (transfer, career, developmental education, etc.). Furthermore, participants suggested that the pathways allow for multiple on and off ramps which are built based upon stackable credentials and completion points.

Additional discussion of the pathway concept seemed to point to Transfer Education, Career Education, and Developmental Education as the key set of pathways to student success. The following set of participant comments captures the intent of this design.

- Students arrive at PCC with different goals and a one-size fits all program just doesn’t seem to make sense. They need options that are based on their needs and goals.

- The pathway concept would work great for developmental education, especially since we know that some students just need one dev-ed course, while others might need significant dev-ed work; making everyone complete the same set of dev-ed courses or program doesn’t work.

- Transfer education is a perfect place for the pathway approach. Not every student wants to complete the degree and then transfer. In fact, most students plan to take a set of courses and then transfer without completing the degree.

- The pathway idea makes sense for career education. Career programs need to be re-structured to support the pathway idea. Design the career programs along industry-recognized competencies and stackable credentials. Such a design could incorporate internships and learn and earn opportunities. In addition, students would be able to more quickly complete a credential, get a job, and then continue along the pathway to complete additional credentials and the full degree.” “Many career students leave their program with skills, because they need to work, but they are looked upon as drop-outs because they did not acquire a degree, the pathway idea would allow such students to achieve a credential.

- The pathway idea is great, but be careful not create additional organizational silos. Students need to be able move between the pathways if necessary. For example, what is the relationship between the developmental education pathway and the career education pathway? This relationship is really important. Developmental courses should be linked to career pathways, so the courses make sense in the context of the student’s career path.

- The pathway approach will help students see the starting and ending point, and also identify key milestone (stackable credentials) along the way. Students need to know and understand the value of these achievement points. This is especially important for first-generation college students.
During the course of the pathway discussion, a number of participants/tables stressed the importance of helping student select the most appropriate pathway. Participants suggested that “meaningful student orientation” is critical for this area. Participants were critical of orientation efforts that are nothing more than a welcome to college or this is how you should behave in college approach. The discussion surrounding student orientation is summarized in the following participant comments.

- Orientation should be designed to orient students to a culture of success”. Stress the importance of initial choices and DIRECT the student to appropriate courses and services designed to match their pathway.

- Orientation should be like a portal to college and to the student’s pathway to success. The portal should contain a variety of support services---career coaching, academic support systems, student/faculty engagement strategies; student cohort development; student to student mentoring opportunities; and pathway construction. Based upon the decisions made during the portal process, it would be great if students could come away with a roadmap for success and PCC would then help students move along their pathways through sort of a case management approach. This might be too expensive to implement for all students, but it should definitely be used for students who are in the at-risk, target populations.

**Data/Information support and learning analytics**

Participants believe that PCC should be using data/information and learning analytics to examine and support student success. This concept was linked to the idea of student pathways. If students are provided with “roadmaps to success”, PCC should know how students are progressing in such pathways. The ability to identify momentum and loss points associated with student retention, success, and credential/degree completion is critical to helping students move into and through their pathway.

A number of participants stressed the importance of moving from data collection on student success to using and interpreting data for student success. The following participant comments seem to best capture this concept. Put the data/information in the hands of faculty and staff who are working with students; that is how you increase the use of data. Colleges collected so much data on students, but it doesn’t seem like it is used to really support student success and continuous improvement. PCC should develop its data usage strategies along a learning analytics framework.

**Acceptance and incorporation of multiple instructional modalities**

Participants mentioned the need for additional pathways and instructional opportunities that are NON-term based. “People don’t lose their jobs according to a semester framework. If someone is laid-off
in February and wants to upgrade their jobs skills they should not be told the next semester starts in June; how discouraging would that be.” The notion of multiple instructional modalities seemed especially important to the under-served, adult market.

In addition, participants suggested that multiple instructional formats would be good fit for re-designed developmental education structure. Participants suggested that developmental re-design should focus on competencies, not course completion, and achievement of such competencies could be self-paced and designed according to non-term based formats.

**Re-design developmental education**

Based upon participants’ comments, it seems apparent that PCC should re-commit itself to developmental education, but do so in a more student-focused, competency-based manner. As stated earlier, developmental education should be identified as a primary pathway to student success. In addition the developmental education pathway should be directly linked to other pathways (i.e., transfer education, career education, contextualized adult literacy, etc.). Participants also felt strongly that although developmental education is key ingredient to improving access it must be connected to appropriate and intensive student support structures.

Participants also stressed the importance of adopting multiple instructional approaches for developmental education and to avoid the one-size fits all approach. In addition, participants envisioned the idea of multiple on and off ramps for developmental education and the need to incorporate data and learning analytics to examine student success related to such multiple entry and exit points.

**Better alignment of curriculum to industry/employer needs.**

Participants were in agreement that PCC’s career programs should be reviewed with the goal of more closely linking curriculum and program competencies to needs of employers/industry. Participants again linked this concept to the development of career pathways built upon industry-recognized stackable credentials. The need for better alignment of curriculum to industry needs also relates to call for increased partnership between PCC and industry/employer.

Although participants recognized that PCC uses career program advisory committees (some participants were actually member of such committees), in general participants suggested that the advisory committees were not as productive as they had originally envisioned. A number of participants agreed with the following comment related to program advisory committees — “It is nice to meet the PCC faculty from the program, but there doesn’t seem to be much action as a result of the meetings. PCC tells us about the program and when it is offered and when students
can enroll, but they don’t seem especially interested in modifying the program in terms of courses, competencies, and when and how the program is offered.”

This comment is not representative of all discussions related to program advisory group, as some participants disagreed with the comment and offered comments similar to the following — “Our program advisory meetings have been great. The faculty are interested in our comments and use suggestions to make changes. The faculty then come back to us at subsequent meetings and let us know what has changed and how those changes seem to be working.” Regardless of their program advisory experience, participants were much more interested in committees which worked in accordance with the latter comment.

**Better integration of instructional and student support services**

This concept was touched upon during the partnership discussion; however it was also mentioned as a critical point in student success. Participants and PCC faculty/staff all seemed to recognize that “students don’t do optional” and students should be directed to the wide range of instructional and student support programs/services provided by PCC. This concept was presented as Intrusive Student Support, but participants suggested “Proactive Student Support” as a more positive term which can be more appropriately linked/integrated with a culture of student success. Regardless of the term, the following comment seemed to capture the spirit of this discussion — “PCC has great student support services. The key is to not wait for students to ask about such services or wait until students are in trouble to present the services. PCC needs to be more proactive in outlining the services, describing their value and engaging with students to use the services at the best time.”

**Better faculty/staff student engagement**

Participants all seemed to support the relationship between increased student engagement and increased student success. Given the enrollment patterns of community college students, attempts to more fully engage students often present challenges (i.e., student tend to only be on campus for limited periods of time). Participants again stressed the idea that if PCC is serious about developing a culture of student success and expanding faculty/staff student engagement, it must be proactive in that regard. Comments like the following were routinely mentioned and supported by participants —— “Increased engagement with students both in and outside of the classroom should be everyone’s job”. Show students that you care about them and about their success all the time.”

**The completion agenda**

Although student enroll with a variety of educational goals (some degree related and others, non-degree related), it is important for PCC to recognize the degree and credential completion matters.
It matters to the student, to the community and to employers. Discussions and comments related to this topic centered on PCC doing more to support degree and credential completion. In addition, the development of education pathways built upon stackable credentials was once again discussed as a key part of increasing completion. The following participant comment seems to best summarize this concept. When students enroll, it should be clear to them where they are starting, where they intend to go, the steps along the way, and the value of completion. Students may stop out and stop in along the pathway, but they need to know that they are on a pathway and working toward the completion of one or more credentials leading to a degree.

4. **Proactive Student Support Systems and Structures**

Although this theme has been mentioned as part of the previous themes, the depth and passion of the discussion suggests that it merits attention as a key, stand-alone theme. As mentioned earlier, participants recognize the strong student support services currently offered by PCC; however they often describe such services as “best kept secrets”. Participants suggested that PCC should do more to stress the advantages associated with such services and communicate those services as a unique competitive advantage of enrolling with PCC. The following participant comments seemed to resonate with participants — “Use your excellent support services to increase access and enrollment. These services are what distinguishes you from other educational providers; it is your competitive advantage. Make the services part of a student success partnership program. If you really believe you are strong in this area, then make a decision to be The Best.” Participants also supported the idea of linking proactive student support systems to access, achievement, and completion.

5. **Global Education and Cultural Inclusiveness.**

Participants supported the idea of grounding PCC’s curriculum in a global framework. Participants expanded on the idea, by stressing the importance of cultural inclusiveness. Participants stressed the notion that to effectively participate in today’s workplace and society individuals should value and support cultural inclusiveness. Participants also suggested that global education and cultural inclusiveness should not be viewed as an “add-on” to the curriculum, but instead be viewed as an “umbrella concept” that relates to all curriculum.

Participants also mentioned that when addressing under-served and previously marginalized populations, PCC should focus on a variety of demographic groups, instead of targeting only specific groups. Participants seemed to agree with suggestion that in order to more fully develop the social and economic fabric of its community, traditionally under-served populations must be engaged no matter their demographic/cultural background.
6. Faculty and Staff Development

PCC is taking positive steps to restore a more collaborative and trusting organizational culture. The current work of the “Blueprint for Healing” group should be recognized and applauded as a step in the right direction. Although negative experiences associated with the previous toxic organizational culture were not identified as a topic area, issues related to internal and external trust were consistently raised by participants. In addition, participants recognized that possible strategic directions related to community/industry partnerships; intentional/proactive student support systems; alternative instructional designs and modalities; instructional pathways; and greater use of data and learning analytics for continuous improvement will require faculty and staff development efforts. Comments similar to the following seemed to best capture this concept.

- Faculty need more time to talk with other faculty about teaching and learning and reflect on what works best for students. PCC should stress the idea of faculty teaching and learning with faculty.

- If you want faculty and staff to actively engage in new directions and strategies, then be sure to set clear expectations and provide assistance and staff development that supports those directions and strategies.
Next Steps

It is important for PCC to view and reflect upon the The Futures Conference and related summary reports as the start of an emerging planning process. The goal of the Conference was not to provide a recipe or prescription for action, but instead to offer community insights into what matters most. Consistent with Dr. Lambert’s design for the day, such insights can help PCC focus on what it can do now and in the future to more fully develop its students and its community. PCC should keep in mind that the Futures Conference is only one source of information and that a wealth of knowledge exists within PCC faculty and staff. As PCC prepares for the next step in its planning process, faculty, staff and administration should seek a shared understanding of emerging opportunities and a clear focus on strategic directions and choices that will increase student success and community impact.