



Summary Report on Community Stakeholders Meeting – June 4, 2008

I. Background

Introduction

Consultation with the community is an important part of the ongoing strategic planning efforts at CSUB. Recently, President Horace Mitchell invited to campus about 120 community leaders, representing a wide range of industries, to engage in focused discussions regarding current and future trends in both their industries and the community as a whole, and their perspectives on future actions that might be undertaken at CSUB to better prepare students for productive employment and citizenship.

The event took place just prior to the end of the academic year on the morning of June 4, 2008 with 36 community leaders in attendance. Sheryl Barbich, community leader, CSUB Foundation Board member and president of Greater Bakersfield Vision 20/20 Inc., provided organizational support and served as the event facilitator.

Over the summer, the data were analyzed and two reports prepared: this summary report and an expanded report which can be found on the CSUB website: www.csub.edu/documents/stakeholders.pdf. This report describes the organization of those meetings, summarizes the feedback provided by the community leaders in attendance, and communicates to the participants and the community as a whole some of the action plans to be undertaken in response to the feedback provided to us.

The Meetings

After beginning the day as a group, the participants were divided into small, industry-specific groups. A broad spectrum of businesses, both large and small, was represented in the following groups:

- Energy, agriculture and construction
- Healthcare
- Non-profit and communication
- Finance and business
- Governmental agencies

The five focus groups, ranging in size from four to eight, were led by CSUB staff and faculty members in discussion that focused on the following areas:

- Most significant trends for the sector

- Implications of those trends and their impact on CSUB's educational offerings
- Major challenges for the community over the next five, 10 and 20 years
- Role CSUB should play in addressing those challenges
- The essential workplace knowledge, competencies and attitudes necessary for success in local and global environments over the next five to 10 years

The information that follows is a summary of the community stakeholders' observations, challenges and needs.

II. Feedback from the community stakeholders

Community stakeholders were asked to convey their perceptions of CSUB and ideas about future directions in two ways.

1. Upon arrival, the stakeholders were asked to complete a brief questionnaire (the *Community Stakeholder Survey*). Thirty-one participants completed questionnaires.
2. Later, all 36 stakeholders in attendance participated in focus group discussions of current and future challenges in their sectors and the role that CSUB might play in preparing students to meet those future challenges.

Community Stakeholder Survey

The survey results show that stakeholders have a very positive image of CSUB. For example, virtually all agree that programs have been improving steadily in recent years, and that CSUB is headed in the right direction. When asked about the most important ways that CSUB contributes to the community, nearly all agreed that CSUB has a positive impact on the local economy in general, and in particular, on the professional development of workers and employers. The majority also indicated that CSUB contributes by partnering with community and business organizations and through research that supports local organizations, though slightly fewer were aware of the contributions made by students through internships and the activities of student groups.

Every person who completed the questionnaire indicated that they hire CSUB graduates. When asked about CSUB graduates' preparation for success in future employment and civic roles, the survey results show that stakeholders believe that a particular strength is in students' mastery of knowledge in their major disciplines. Nearly all also indicated that students have strong interpersonal skills, and more than three-quarters agreed that students are well prepared in oral communication, critical reasoning and problem solving, and understanding diversity and cultural perspectives other than their own. Although the majority of stakeholders felt that students are well prepared in communication and interaction skills, many reported that they would like to see even more skill building in these areas.

Stakeholders felt that CSUB graduates had other important strengths as well, including commitment to and connectedness with the local community, good work experience, and “hands on” capability. Finally, a majority of stakeholders indicated that they are interested in having more information about new developments with CSUB faculty and academic programs.

Focus Group Discussions

Stakeholders discussed current and future trends affecting their organizations, major challenges that may face the community over the next five years, and the role that CSUB should play in community efforts to address those challenges. Embedded within these discussions, participants detailed the types of knowledge, competencies and skills that are essential for students to succeed locally and globally. A number of skills were identified including writing and literacy, oral communication, critical thinking, quantitative skills, and computer skills. The stakeholders also noted the importance of “people skills,” including leadership skills, community engagement, ethics, and interacting and communicating with others from diverse backgrounds.

Within discussions about industry-specific trends and challenges, the groups underscored the importance of CSUB continuing to emphasize skill building in the areas of technology, communication (both written and oral), leadership, and interpersonal relationships and interactions with others from diverse backgrounds, cultures and nations. Stakeholders felt the future trends in their industries were such that these skills would continue to increase in importance.

While the Community Stakeholder Survey data showed that stakeholders have positive perceptions regarding the skills of CSUB graduates, the group discussions included ideas for further advancing graduate preparation. Many indicated that one way CSUB might enhance skill building is by expanding student opportunities for participation in applied assignments, internships and service learning. These activities were seen as ways for students to acquire a realistic set of expectations about entry-level careers.

In all, five major themes predominated across the five focus groups. These themes are summarized briefly below.

1. Stakeholders discussed the increasing complexity of the social and physical environments in which their organizations operate. Locally, population growth appears to be outpacing supporting infrastructure, and an increasingly aged population adds pressure to the health care system. Organizations face a variety of environmental challenges, and often have difficulty finding workers skilled in areas for which jobs exist. Additionally, globalization has resulted in increased emphases on interactions among individuals and groups who are geographically distant and culturally diverse. Stakeholders felt that increasing access for potential students, including recruiting more students from traditionally underserved populations, as well as scheduling and course sequencing patterns to better serve non-traditional students would result in a

better skilled work force. Stakeholders also felt that CSUB faculty and staff have the ability to provide valuable leadership for responding to local and global environments, and hoped that those activities would increase in the future.

2. An important trend affecting all industries concerns generational differences among workers. For example, stakeholders agree that younger and older cohorts differ greatly in terms of their career expectations. Younger cohorts appear to expect more rapid increases in salaries and career advancement than is the norm, without the same levels of focus on the job (i.e. to work overtime) than was true of older cohorts. Stakeholders report that communication and interaction patterns differ as well, with younger cohorts less adept at working in teams and engaging in dialogue. They felt that there was a need for increased skill and understanding on the part of both younger and older cohorts for the groups to succeed in working together productively. Stakeholders indicated that younger cohorts might be better prepared for the existing workplace contexts if their CSUB experiences included greater emphasis on applied assignments, internships and service learning.
3. In all industries, organizations operate within a continuously changing legal environment, and the need to understand and comply with complex regulations, mandates, and uncertain funding streams poses difficult challenges. There is an increased focus on finding ethical solutions to complex problems, both as an intrinsic value and for risk management. Stakeholders felt that in addition to teaching students about laws and regulations and their applications in particular fields, CSUB might also help students to understand how social policies, values and ethics influence decisions and behaviors in the workplace, as well as the possible professional consequences of personal choices. As is true of the other themes reported here, stakeholders across all industries voiced this perspective, from non-profit social welfare organizations and business and professional services to scientific and technical industries, such as oil and agriculture.
4. Stakeholders stressed the need for workers with well-developed interpersonal skills, able to engage in constructive dialogue and interact effectively with colleagues, clients and partners from diverse ethnic and national backgrounds, and to develop and maintain positive connections with the community. Opportunities for students to work in teams with others from diverse backgrounds and national origins were seen as an important way for them to begin to develop these skills prior to entering the work force.
5. Organizations of all types find that nearly all jobs require higher levels of technical skills than was true in the past. Workers need higher levels of proficiency in using common computer software packages (i.e. Microsoft Excel), as well as proficiency in making presentations, writing, critical thinking and mathematics. Additionally, because workers must adapt to

continuously changing technology and work environments, an orientation toward lifelong learning was emphasized. Stakeholders encouraged a continued, and if possible, increased focus on skill building across the curriculum and expressed the desire for expanded course offerings in technical fields such as engineering and allied health sciences.

In addition to the student-focused themes described above, stakeholders articulated a more holistic expectation of the relationship between CSUB and the community. In general, the community expects CSUB to maintain its high standards and continue advancing towards its vision of becoming a premier institution of higher learning. They expressed a desire for the university to become even more integrated into the life of the community including linking faculty and staff expertise to efforts aimed at addressing challenges and needs.

III. Next Steps

The results from the meeting with community stakeholders will be utilized by multiple campus groups and integrated into campus-wide discussions about remaining mission-focused and achieving our vision. Members of the President's Cabinet will review the feedback with each division's vice president to identify new initiatives and changes needed in current practices.

Beginning in September, the Provost Council will use the community feedback in shaping and launching the development of an Academic Master Plan. Working with faculty and staff, this plan will identify new programmatic directions that extend our contributions to our region. The plan will define desired learning goals and ways of assessing how well our students are acquiring the knowledge, values and competencies (including those identified in the survey) that are essential to live, lead and be contributing members to our community, state and nation.

Also starting in September, the University Strategic Planning Steering Committee and the six workgroups: 1) Faculty Excellence and Diversity, 2) Academic Program Excellence and Diversity, 3) Student Experience and Campus Life, 4) Community Engagement, 5) Staff Excellence and Diversity, 6) Campus Culture will incorporate the results of the community feedback into the development of campus-wide strategies that will be linked to specific and measurable outcomes.

Updates on our progress and the ways in which the stakeholder's feedback is being utilized will be provided periodically through multiple communication vehicles, including the winter and spring editions of Inside CSUB and the President's Annual Report.