Superior Community Forum Notes
September 24, 2008

Attendance – 29
Bd mbr: Beth Carlson
Admin: Bob Meyer, Diane Vertin, Craig Fowler, John Will, Kim Olson, Charlie Glazman, Debbi King, Laura Wassenaar, Garry Krause, Celia Tarnowski, and Kelly Mullan
Leaders from the community

- Diane Vertin welcomed the group and introduced Beth Carlson.
- Beth Carlson introduced Bob Meyer.
- Bob Meyer talked about the different handouts: 7th Ranking brochure, 2007 Graduate Survey, Forum Schedule, Core Trends, Current Strategic Goals/AQIP projects, and Community Member Survey.

Input was given by key leaders in response to the following questions:
1. What are you willing to share about your business or community plans for the future (that might impact WITC’s planning)?
2. What educational, training, or recruitment issues do you face in accomplishing those plans?
3. In your view, how can WITC best serve your business/community?

a. Renewable Energy
   We should be looking at renewable energy (wind turbines, solar energy, and geothermal) as this encompasses several programs that already exist at WITC. We need to be able to install them and provide service for them. We should get the wind generators and solar panels back again and use them for educational purposes as they can pay for themselves. WITC could be the leader and the “go to” in renewable energy education.

   Bob Meyer noted that we should be doing this and need to figure out how to integrate sustainability and renewable energy into our programs. We can partner with other colleges to help us speed up our implementation. The gentleman who provided this input was interested in being on our sustainability committee.

b. Academic Probation Policy
   There was some concern about the Academic Probation Policy which allows some students to incur debt when academic success is not probable. Probation students get an extra two semesters of financial aid and end up with loans that they have to pay back. The Dean of Students clarified that the Academic Probation Policy is only for financial aid students as required by the federal guidelines. If a student does not maintain the appropriate grade point average, he/she will be put on probation and have two semesters of eligibility for financial aid. We are following the trends that the technical college system was implementing to remove the “barriers” to students.

c. Programming Demands
   Looking at our area from a regional approach, where do we see ourselves (people have done a great job finding a niche for WITC). Can we add programming to keep pace with demand and/or other higher education?

d. Flooded Markets
   There is a concern about paying attention to employment; however, what about when the market is flooded; for example, Massage Therapy and possibly Welding. Is there a demand or are we just putting people out there? They are coming back to say they can’t find work. Another person noted that out of the 20 students in the Welding boot camp, 14 are employed.
e. **Programming Needs**
   Programs that are shorthanded are in the food service area. Bob Meyer noted that overall there is a high need for skilled machinists, nurses, and oral medical services. One person said there are nursing freezes in this area (Twin Ports) and nurses are only being hired part-time right now. Another person said that the nursing freeze may be a local problem as there is a need for nurses in her area.

f. **Slow Response for Programming**
   The reaction time that the college needs in order to add a new program or respond to the market process is slow (it takes some time to get a program developed). Bob Meyer noted that it is typically a two-year process. President Emeritus Levine said you can push a program through in 12 – 18 months but it takes a lot of staff to accomplish the work involved.

g. **Communication of the Importance of the Two-Year Degree**
   Before the year 2000, 80% of the jobs in the 21st Century were requiring no more than a two-year degree. People have to realize how important the technical college is. We need to get the counselors to realize the value of the associate degree (the emphasis needs to be continually brought forward).

   Bob Meyer noted that research he has read indicates two-thirds of the degrees needed are two-year degrees, and one-third of the degrees are four-year degrees. In addition, we need to invest ourselves into the K-12 system so that students understand the career paths that are available – what they are hearing isn’t really part of reality.

h. **Student Concerns – Program Responsiveness and Transferability**
   There is a Superior Days lobbying effort in Superior and some of the concerns about the technical college system at the last event were coming from the students. The length of time it took to add another section, when the class was full, was one concern – students don’t understand why it takes so long. Transferability of credits was another concern of the students.

   There is a lot of misinformation out there amongst high school students relative to what we are really about, our programs, and the opportunities that we offer.

i. **Youth Options Program**
   Bob Meyer asked if there is a possibility that students from high schools can visit technical colleges. We will be making efforts to let the high school students know what we offer. The Dean of Students noted that Youth Options students take the opportunity to take classes and then stay on to continue as our students. One person asked if the youth options students take online courses. The Dean of Students noted that she will need to check on that.

   The Career Specialist noted the following challenges we have with the youth options program: 1) The high schools have to pay for the students to take the classes themselves, and 2) We need to make the counselors aware of the articulation agreements that we have on a regular basis. Bob Meyer noted unless we market WITC, the students aren’t going to know the opportunities that are available.

j. **Transferability**
   Many people look at Lake Superior College, for example, as a place to take their basic generals before they move on to a four-year college; however, WITC does not do this. Bob Meyer noted our mission is about supplying the technically trained students and we need to continue to do a great job doing that.

   One person asked, if students have a potential for an engineering degree would we move them forward? Bob Meyer said yes. The four-year institutions are becoming more cognizant that it is good to look at transferring students in – it is a positive thing.
k. **Aggressive Recruitment for One-Year Programs**
   Twenty-five years ago we had a lot more one-year programs, and in the past four years there has been more flexibility. At that time, however, we catered to the “marginal student” and have gotten away from that to our own detriment. The marginal student isn’t going to go to college. Is there a niche out there where we could be more aggressive than we ever have been? Bob Meyer noted that we will probably do some certificates. He also stated that due to increasing sophistication of careers, the bar keeps moving up on the skill development needs of students who come into the technical college.

l. **Use Technology to Reach High Schools**
   Bob Meyer noted that we do a lot to recruit students to come on campus and the odds are high in capturing them. One person asked if we are reaching high school students with technology; for example, marketing to them via Facebook, texting, or other recruitment tools. WITC’s Public Relations Representative said that we are approaching our advertising with technology. The Dean of Students said we send our catalog out on a CD.

   In the last three years we have done much with the Career Counselors and our partnerships have increased. WITC’s Career Specialist noted that students still need face-to-face contact and that connection with their instructors. Bob Meyer noted that we have changed and need to continue to update our recruitment strategies.

m. **Programming for Baby boomers**
   Have we looked at additional education (one or two courses) to keep the older people (baby boomers) alive in the community? Bob Meyer acknowledged this need and noted that this group is also a great resource for providing instruction.

n. **Continuing Education Books**
   Students have to order their books from the Rice Lake Campus for smaller course offerings and certificates (short-term courses). Bob Meyer noted that we are going to centralize the procurement of the management of books by centralizing the management of the book stores, standardizing the books that we are using as much as possible by having the faculty decide on common textbooks.

o. **Retention**
   We could get better at retaining students collegewide with some cultural intervention.

   Bob Meyer noted that the college is looking at the whole counseling model. The counselors contend that the students coming into the college now are coming in with more issues, and so how do we deal with that? Also, this probably has an impact on retention.

p. **Transitioning into College**
   Counselors aren’t able to provide a lot of support to the high school students who transition to technical colleges, the armed forces, or wherever they are going, in areas such as: getting along, relationships, smart choices, etc. There needs to be a transitions program to help high school students make wiser choices before they get into college.

q. **Ethics Course(s)**
   One person asked for courses in ethics related to each field. The Continuing Education Training Coordinator noted that we have the course in the Supervisory Management program. He also noted the importance of work ethics (showing up for work, etc.). Dr. Vertin noted that ethics is infused in the programs.

r. **Psychology**
   One person said that we moved from Applied Human Relations to Introduction to Psychology; however, this was a bad thing because the information doesn’t apply.
s. **Mentor System for New Students**
   When you went into the Navy you had a buddy that helped you – does WITC have a buddy system for new students? How hard would it be to do so?

t. **Be Aware of Trends (Mining)**
   In the mining industry, we are seeing that the iron range is going to be blossoming. What programs would fit into, or support, the area of mining (heavy equipment operators, machinist)? We need to be aware of trends in our area. Bob Meyer asked everyone to let WITC know if they see an opportunity that we should have on our radar screen.

u. **Water Science/Ecology Training**
   Does WITC do anything in Ecology? The answer was “no”.

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