

## 2011 Community Perception Survey

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Highline Community College contracted Hebert Research to conduct a survey to clarify public perceptions about Highline Community College. The goals of the research was to better understand issues relevant to Highline Community College, assessed the tools used to communicate to the community, and assess levels of interaction and satisfaction with the College, and targeted the perceptions of the four key constituencies of the College: (1) high school students' (2) current students, (3) community and business leaders, (4) the general community, which included parents.

The survey questions for this 2011 survey were largely the same as in the 2004 survey in order to preserve the comparability of current data with past data to assess changes that have occurred. In addition, the geographic area surveyed was essentially the same as in 2004, which was defined as the college's service area

Hebert Research fielded the surveys from November 17 to January 4, 2012. The sample was 798 respondents including current Highline Community College students (200 surveys), current high school juniors and seniors (200 surveys), the community at large (198 surveys), and business and community leaders (200 surveys).

Responses rates, which represent the proportion of individuals who agreed to participate in the research, were satisfactory. For the Community study, the response rate was 36.9%. The response rate was 55.3% for the Business and Community Leader study. Among Currents Students, the response rate was 81.8%. Finally, for high school students, the response rate was 60.6%.

Analysis of the data used sample mean and sample standard deviation, and multivariate analyses to examine whether differences existed between groups (such as by gender) within each sample. The maximum margin of error for a sample of 798 is  $\pm 3.5\%$  at the 95% confidence level. Statistical significance was established at  $p < 0.05$ .

The key findings of the study are presented below.

# Key Findings

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## Awareness

- When compared to other schools on an ordinal scale, Highline Community College has increased its unaided awareness since 2004. Highline was the second most often mentioned college after the University of Washington among the respondents in the Community and Business and Community Leaders categories, and the third most mentioned college by high school students after the University of Washington and Seattle Pacific University.
- Aided awareness of Highline Community College has increased in both the Community and Business and Community Leaders categories since 2004. Aided awareness has decreased among high school students, though this can be attributed to a general lack of awareness of local colleges and universities in the 2011 survey compared to that conducted in 2004.
- Overall total awareness has decreased slightly since 2004 in the Community sample and Business and Community Leaders sample, notably in the high school student category. General awareness of local universities has decreased however since the 2004 survey.

## Image

- Current Highline students report positive images of Highline, especially in regards to the opportunities it offers for the cost.
- High School Students are generally unaware of Highline Community College unless they know of students in the Running Start Program. Students who are aware of Highline consider it a good school that gives students the opportunity to take classes and move to a four year institution.
- Community members are varied in their image of Highline, though many know it as a good school that is conveniently located.
- Business and Community Leaders report that Highline is a good school with a good reputation. They also note many exceptional programs such as Running Start and continuing education.

## Awareness of Community College Mission

- Over half of the respondents in the Community and Business and Community Leaders categories were able to correctly identify the five missions of the community college system. The exception to this was “Community colleges provide personal enrichment classes that are not tax-supported, but covered by student fees,” which was correctly identified by 41.0% of respondents.

## **Visits to Highline Campus**

- Most respondents in the Community and Business and Community Leaders surveys had not personally visited the campus. The average number of visits among community members was 1 visit in the last year and the average number of visits among Business and Community Leaders was 2 visits in the last year.

## **Comparison to Other Community Colleges**

- Respondents in the Community and Business and Community Leaders categories report that Highline is slightly better than other community colleges in the region. This is statistically unchanged since 2004.

## **Highline Community College's Service to Local Business**

- Only 3.0% of businesses have directed employees to take ESL classes at Highline. This is down from 7.0% in 2004.
- One in six (16.7%) of business leaders have hired Highline graduates in the past five years. Employers noted that their employees are knowledgeable, responsible, and well-prepared.
- Business Leaders reported that they are mainly in need of employees with technical skills as opposed to soft skills. They also reported that finding employees in the current economic climate is not difficult. This means that competition for jobs will be tough. Among the general work skills employers are looking for in an employee are self motivation and communication.
- Only 2.3% of businesses have paid for their employees to take courses at Highline. This is down from 5.0% in 2004.
- Businesses do not use Highline for customized training primarily because they are not aware of the program or they have no need for it.
- Businesses reported individuals in their community need to learn basic job skills such as filling out applications, basic reading and math, and English as a second language. Other businesses reported that individuals in their community need "hands on" training.
- One in six (15.6%) of Community members and 4.4% of Business and Community Leaders report that Highline Community College is fully meeting the needs of businesses in the community. This is down from 18.6% among Community members and 5.0% among Business and Community Leaders in 2004.

## **Highline Community College's Service to Local Education**

- One quarter (24.4%) of Community members reported that Highline is fully meeting the educational needs of the community. This number is down from 27.3% in 2004. This decline, however, can be attributed to an increase in respondents needing more information about Highline Community College.

- When asked what Highline could do to better serve the community's educational or business needs, respondents reported that they needed more information about the school and what it had to offer.
- Respondents reported that the primary reason they believe people attend Highline Community College is to "Take classes that improve current job skills."

### **Communication**

- The majority of respondents in both the Community and Business and Community Leaders categories do not remember receiving Highline Community College's *Quarterly Bulletin*.
- The majority of respondents who reported to read the *Quarterly Bulletin* were unaware of the contents of the bulletin.
- Respondents reported that the two best ways to inform the public of events and programs are by special mailings and on the college website.

### **Community Support**

- Two out of five (40.6%) of Community members and 46.5% of Business and Community Leaders report high or very high support for what Highline does for the community. Over one quarter (26.0%) of Community members and 20.0% of Business and Community Leaders reported that they would like more information as to Highline's impact on the region.
- Over 70% of both the Community and Business and Community Leaders categories report taxes for higher education are a "high" or "very high" priority.

### **Experience of Current Students**

- Over half (54.8%) of Highline students report that they attend the school so that they can transfer to a four year college.
- Satisfaction with Highline is high, an average of 8.50 on a scale from 0 to 10. This is up from 2004 when the average satisfaction rating was 8.15.
- Nearly all (96.4%) Highline students reported that Highline has lived up to their expectations. This is up from 90.2% in 2004.
- Students reported high levels of satisfaction with the elements of the classroom experience at Highline. All of the elements received scores of over 8 on a scale from 0 to 10. Five areas could be improved to increase overall satisfaction, though satisfaction is currently high. These areas are:
  1. Classroom instruction at Highline is creatively designed to be innovative and inspiring
  2. Highline enjoys a widespread reputation for educational excellence
  3. Instructors explain course material in a clear, simple and organized manner with many examples
  4. Instructors present information in an interesting and enjoyable way

5. Instructors do an excellent job of preparing and guiding students so they know what to expect on exams
- Nearly seven out of ten (68.0%) students visited the Highline Community College campus for some reason before enrolling.
  - The main reasons students attend Highline are:
    1. Cost
    2. Location
    3. Programs Offered
  - The importance of cost as a factor for choosing Highline Community College increased in 2011 to 84.0% from 74.7% in 2004.
  - Most students reported that they attend Highline Community College so that they can transfer to a four year college. Students reported that Highline has performed excellently in this regard.

### **What Attracts Students to Highline**

- Nearly two out of five (37.9%) high school students reported that they plan to attend a community college after graduation. Nearly half (46.3%) reported that they want to immediately enter a 4-year university. Only 4.0% reported that they do not intend to continue with school.
- High school students report that the major influence over college selection is parents. Current Highline students report that they decided alone.
- High school students get information about colleges from the internet, school guidance counselors, or personal visits.
- High school students look for “good academic courses” and “quality professors” in their college of choice.
- High school students rated the quality of Highline slightly greater than their college of choice (5.94 on a scale from 0 to 10 where 5 means it is the same). The number is statistically the same as the 2004 survey.
- High school students perceive the typical Highline student as one who is intelligent but cannot afford a four year university.
- The most important quality of a college that appeals to parents is “Services are available such as tutoring, internships, career guidance, and special interest clubs to further the student’s interests and help students with their educational needs.”
- The most important quality that attracts high school students is that “Instructors do an excellent job of preparing and guiding students so they know what to expect on exams.”
- The primary reason current Highline students chose to attend Highline is that the cost of going to Highline was an amount they could afford or were willing to pay.