

LTCC takes hard look at creating goals to improve

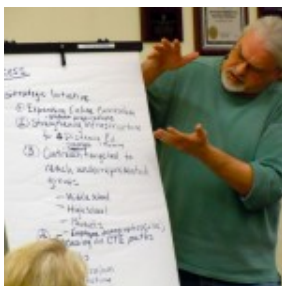
By Kathryn Reed

Lake Tahoe Community College knows what it needs to work on, but how to get there is another matter.

“We want to develop a shared understanding of opportunities and challenges,” Tom Greene, vice president of Academic Affairs and Student Services, explained as the five tables of eight people chatted among themselves. “This is critical because everyone looks at data and interprets it differently. When everyone is on the same page you move forward together.”

By the time the stakeholders of the two-year college finished the five-hour session, to some degree a shared vision emerged. From the reams of information gathered Friday, specific goals will be developed, with the board of trustees ultimately signing off on everything after the other necessary leadership groups have given their input.

Greene led most of the 9am-2pm planning session, with the help of Aaron McVean, director of Institutional Research and Planning.



LTCC
instructor Jon
Kingsbury goes
over his

group's ideas.
Photo/Kathryn
Reed

The master plan is something the college does every six years. The strategic planning session is usually an annual event in the fall, but was delayed this year to accommodate a slew of changes at the college. Plus, the institution is in the middle of the self-study process of the six-year accreditation cycle.

Most tables had students, administrators, faculty, classified and a trustee at them so all sectors of the campus were heard. They spent the better part of Feb. 11 brainstorming how to put substance to the four strategic goals that will be part of the college's Education Master Plan for 2011-17. Those goals are Student Access; Student Learning, Success and Achievement; Community Engagement; and College Sustainability.

When it comes to student access, data reveals the college population does not mirror the community or Lake Tahoe Unified School District. The college has more Caucasians.

"By and large we are white people over 40," Virginia Boyar, director of Career and Technical Education, said of the group. "We cannot just assume what they want and need. We need to get them at the table and listen. We can't listen if they are not here."

It's the Latino population she was speaking of.

Recruitment and outreach were repeatedly stressed when it comes to getting the Latino community interested in attending LTCC. Recognizing cultural and financial barriers exist was also talked about.

Creating a student ambassador was an idea – to have LTCC students talk to high school and middle school students about what college life is about, the benefits of an associate of arts degree or getting a certificate.

Looking at the curriculum, what is taught online and providing appropriate tutoring were other avenues to look at in regards to student access.

When it comes to the students' learning, success and achievement it was noted these might be measured in different ways. For some it's finishing the class, for others it's graduating, still others it's transferring to a four-year college.

"Can you separate learning from success and achievements?"

McVean asked the group to think about this as they delved into that strategy.

One table stressed the need for academic advisors for students, something the college does not have. Other support services such as counseling and financial aid were mentioned.

Preparedness was a recurring word – in terms of being ready for college level courses and ready to move on from LTCC.

Another group said students' goals need to be defined before anyone can tell if they have been achieved.

Michael Ward, project manager for the Lake Tahoe Basin Prosperity Plan, spoke to the group before they dissected the community engagement strategy.

His overriding message was to "invite career pathways that are consistent with why people live here." This means looking at what the curriculum has to offer related to the outdoors and recreation.

"We are growing tourists, not a middle class," Ward said of Lake Tahoe as a whole.

He wants LTCC and the other institutions of higher education at the lake to focus on educating people who will stay in the basin. This in turn will help with the escalating unemployment

rate. Ward said 50 percent of El Dorado County's unemployed are on the South Shore. In the city limits the official rate is 17.2 percent, though with the underemployed it's closer to 19 percent.

From there the groups came away saying the college is only selectively engaged with the community. Creating partnerships was a theme most of the groups championed – whether it is with other education outlets, the private or public sectors.

Hosting community-wide events, like today's rail jam, is an opportunity for non-students to get a feel for the campus. Doing more of that was encouraged.

Knowing what the community wants was also pointed out. Being proactive instead of reactive was the message.

The last strategy talked about was how to keep the college sustainable, with money, facilities, human resources and technology being the components.

Greene stressed it's time to look at moving from a state funded to a state supported institution.

A possible bond to raise money was floated, as were increasing summer programs and using the college when traditional classes are not scheduled.

Working with partners could also be a moneymaker. So could bringing in outside entities to host their meetings at the college.

Tying in with the community and recreation aspects, one table thought an intensive kids sports program is a good idea.

On the flip side, elder hostel was brought up.

"We will establish goal teams to establish clear, strategic goals. Don't expect to see too many goals," Greene told the group as he wrapped up the session.