



Strategic Planning Community Outreach – Community Leaders

As part of the process of creating College of the Mainland's Strategic Plan for 2018-2023, Dr. Nichols will be meeting with various community constituencies. In these meetings Dr. Nichols will gather their input and feedback regarding six questions:

1. What are your perceptions of College of the Mainland today?
2. What are College of the Mainland's strengths?
3. Where do we meet your expectations?
4. What areas do we need to improve?
5. How can we partner with you?
6. Thinking of the future, what would a shared vision for College of the Mainland and the community look like?

On August 9 at 11:30 a.m., leaders in the community were invited to speak with Dr. Nichols at College of the Mainland, Appomattox Suite 4. In attendance were ten community leaders - a mixture of religious leaders, retired educators, and others. Also attending were several COM Cabinet members, Dr. Walker to facilitate the discussion, and supporting staff to document the meeting. Overall, the community leaders were positive about College of the Mainland and related positive experiences they and their associates have had. Several of those in attendance had personal experience working at or closely with COM in various capacities. During the discussion in answering the above questions, some potential points of action became apparent. Four main themes emerged from this discussion: **Communication, Student Services, Community, and Facilities.**

Communication

The theme of Communication ran through many comments in the discussion. An important aspect of communication comments was the need for more visible and widespread marketing. One community leader related that youth in the community do not consider COM, as a 2-year college, to be a "real" college that will lead to their success. It was suggested that COM needs to engage in a marketing campaign highlighting people who started their college career at a 2-year college who then went on to be successful either in Business and Industry with a 2-year degree or certificate or transferred to a 4-year institution and earned higher degrees. Making a clear connection between attending a 2-year college and achieving success, and how COM can be a part of this success, needs to be a high priority for College of the Mainland to be seen as relevant to youths in the community.

Along with letting students know that a 2-year college is a valuable stepping stone to future success, it was suggested that COM increase marketing of the programs it has to offer. Many in the community are unaware of what programs COM has, how successful the programs are, and how those programs can get students where they want to be. There was also a question regarding if COM engages in any social media marketing. COM does have social media marketing, but the attendees have not observed it.

One community member brought up that many in the community still think of the controversy and turmoil of recent years when they hear about COM. It was suggested that anything positive happening



needs to be in the paper and be well-advertised to make sure people know that the college is moving forward in a positive direction.

Dr. Nichols informed the community members in attendance about the Math pathways initiative which allows students to take a college level Math class, other than College Algebra, when appropriate for their program. A former faculty member in attendance had known multiple students who did not receive a degree due to the College Algebra requirement and suggested that this initiative be advertised so that such students could return and have a chance of completing their degree.

The attendees were informed that the *Torch* will soon be going out to the community and will hopefully address some of these communication needs in terms of marketing the college and communicating what COM is doing.

Multiple community members brought up ways in which they could be working as ambassadors of the college to make sure the community knows what COM has to offer.

Attendees also noted that they rarely see anyone wearing College of the Mainland shirts. Those who were previously employed by COM recalled that in the past people were given shirts when representing COM off campus. Attendees thought that shirts advertising COM would add visibility to the college in the public and possibly start valuable conversations.

Student Services

There was much discussion regarding what services College of the Mainland offers to its students and potential students in the ISDs and how those services could be improved. Some comments related to customer service and the need to make some processes easier to navigate.

Many positive comments related to ways in which COM is supporting students in the ISDs. Attendees thought that the Dual Credit and Collegiate High School programs are doing well and provide an important service to high school students in the area. Attendees also thought that the College Connections Advisors embedded in the high schools are valuable. One attendee specifically mentioned Earl Alexander at La Marque High School as being a great boon to the students there and helping them “get past the barriers of academic fear”.

There was a question regarding the number of dual credit teachers COM has embedded in the high schools and the number of classes offered. Dr. Nichols explained that the number of dual credit classes physically offered on the high school campuses is dependent on decisions by the ISDs. If the community wishes to see more embedded dual credit classes in their high schools, they will need to discuss that with their ISD administration.

Attendees encouraged COM to continue to stay focused on facilitating career opportunities in the local community, business, and industry. An attendee associated with a local police department also commented on the success of the police academy program at COM.

Several comments revolved around the idea of customer service and how COM can make it easier for enrolled students to navigate the system and for potential students to enroll. One former COM faculty



member remarked that COM was built on the idea of being innovative – finding different ways of teaching, getting rid of barriers, altering approaches for students to be more successful. A suggestion was made that COM work on returning to that innovative spirit.

An attendee asked what COM is doing to make sure that students know about the scholarships and grants available to them. Along those same lines, upon hearing about the Math Pathways and the initiatives focused on decreasing the number of hours students take while pursuing a specific degree, an attendee questioned what is being done to ensure that former students who took many hours but never received a degree are informed of what they need to finish in order to get a degree. Rather than waiting for students to come to us with questions, and navigating a system they do not necessarily understand, it is important to the community that COM proactively notify students of what is available and make those processes easier.

Another area of focus for the attendees was how COM is helping students decide on an area of interest and guiding them to success. For instance, students who do not know what they want to do might waste time taking unnecessary courses. One attendee suggested that an aptitude test might help direct students by showing them where their skills lie and encouraging them to focus in that area. Dr. Nichols mentioned the Guided Pathways initiative, which involves an assessment for career guidance. Attendees would also like to see the return of a large Career Fair at COM that included many businesses and industries in the area and offered programs for students in elementary through high school as well as COM.

Attendees also expressed a desire for various student services assisting with admission, enrollment, and support become easier to navigate and more student friendly. One attendee expressed that students sometimes feel brushed off when they are seeking assistance. Changes in student services would fix that. Senior citizens who wish to enroll would also appreciate a simplified process.

There is a perception that COM does not offer extra-curricular activities for students. The community members believe that more extra-curricular activities and athletics would be positive for younger students.

Facilities

The community members in attendance had several comments regarding the facilities of College of the Mainland. These comments centered around the age of the facilities. One attendee compared the state of the facilities to “a senior citizen that is not aging very well”. Another noted that the facilities are “antiquated” and the youth in the community see it as a shabby location, especially compared to their more up to date high schools. This, it is suspected, makes them less willing to attend COM. An attendee commented that the campus has not changed significantly in 40 years and seems like it does not have life to it. He believes that students want a campus that “exudes life”, has a strong atmosphere of higher learning, and with up-to-date facilities and technology.

Multiple attendees commented that they regularly use and enjoy the gym, but again, the facilities are not up-to-date. There were also comments relating to the pool and the strong desire to have that reopened due to the program for senior wellness and the social community that was built around that.



Dr. Nichols updated the attendees regarding plans for a maintenance bond to work on updating infrastructure and some key facility points. He also outlined the decision made by the board of trustees regarding the pool, why that decision was made, and what will be done with that space.

Community

Attendees made several comments centered around ways they would like to see COM more involved in the community and ways COM was engaged in the community in prior years. There were also comments regarding the makeup of staff and faculty at COM as a reflection of the community.

Attendees perceived COM as being more engaged with the community in prior years when the President, Cabinet, and Board of COM were all very visible in the community, going to various churches and community events.

Attendees also discussed events that were previously hosted at COM that engaged the community and students of various ages. In cooperation with the local ISDs, academic fairs were previously held on campus. Attendees indicated that it would be positive for COM to hold similar fairs for elementary and middle school students on campus with judges such as Dr. Nichols and COM faculty.

COM also had previously had a Multicultural team that organized and hosted events for the students and community such as an International festival, celebrating diversity in the community. There was also a Speakers program open to the community where invited speakers made presentations or held forums.

Attendees also expressed a desire for COM to be a visible and tangible presence at community events centered around the youth in the community. For instance, as the new school year begins several churches and community groups organize “back to school” events for elementary school children and give children backpacks and school supplies. These groups would appreciate donations of COM branded supplies. There have also been youth centered events about suicide awareness and prevention that attendees would like to have COM participate in.

Attendees also brought up that some of the community perceives COM as being racially insensitive. They felt that the racial makeup of the employees of COM should reflect that of the community it is surrounded by. Attendees also suggested that students and potential students would be better served by employees they relate to and feel comfortable approaching. There is a perception that there are not enough minorities employed at COM and a question as to the employment opportunities at COM.

Summary and Next Steps

In general, the community leaders had positive things to say about COM and how it is serving students. Several of those attending had personal experiences with the college and are still engaged with helping students. They appreciate that COM actively partners with the ISDs and offers the Dual Credit and Collegiate High School programs. Many comments centered around services that COM previously offered to students and the community, that the community would like to see return. They also expressed a desire to see a more proactive customer service approach from the college in reaching out to current, former, and potential new students to offer resources and guidance to maximize their success.



Below are suggestions from the community leaders and action items.

Next Steps – Action Items

Community Suggestions

- ISD events on campus
 - o History fair
 - o Science fair
 - o Math fair
 - o Other events for elementary, middle, and high school students
- Career Fair including programs for elementary and middle school students
- Change mascot – ducks are not perceived as a positive representation
- Athletics and extra-curricular activities
- Pool – senior wellness and community
- Multicultural team to host cultural and international themed events
- Hire minorities to reflect the community

Action Items

- Update facilities and technology
- Organize Citizens on Patrol – communication with volunteer citizens to spread correct and positive information about COM
- Marketing
 - o Successful graduates and their achievements
 - o Academic and Workforce programs
 - o Increase social media presence
 - o Visibility via COM “gear” like t-shirts
 - o Publicize positive occurrences
 - o Increase publicity of existing extra-curricular activities
 - o Increase publicity to community when speakers are brought to campus
- Proactively educate students about financial assistance opportunities
 - o Grants
 - o Scholarships
- Increase faculty and staff involvement with students
- Increase visibility in the community – COM should be represented at community events
 - o Provide COM branded items
 - o August 19 – Back to School and Immunization Health Fair for Children 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. at Greater New Hope Missionary Baptist Church
- Simplified application and enrollment process for senior citizens
- Career Fair
- COM Pride day/week
 - o T-shirts
 - o College atmosphere and pride