

MDC Strategic Plan 2010-2015 Student Focus Groups Results (N=325)

Introduction:

To assist the Strategic Plan Coordinating Committee (SPCC) gather input from the various MDC community stake holders, the Office of Institutional Research (IR) conducted a series of focus groups with MDC students at seven of our eight campuses. In order to obtain input from diverse student perspectives a wide variety of course types were selected including College prep, Baccalaureate, and Honors.

Through the use of a pre-focus group questionnaire, thoughts and ideas were gathered from students about the College's proposed Value Statements. Through the use of group discussion student views about what MDC does best, what it could do better, and what its top priorities should be were also gathered. An approximate total of 325 students participated in this process. Results are presented below and will be used by the SPCC to finalize recommendations for the *MDC Strategic Plan 2010-2015*.

Section #1: The proposed Miami Dade College Values

Please rank the following proposed Miami Dade College Values in order of importance to you. Give a 1 to the most important one to you, 2 to the second most important until you have assigned a rank to each. Rank 1 through 8 by writing in the space before the statement.

- _____ **Exceptional learning environment** (innovation, state-of-the-art technologies, teaching excellence and student support initiatives to prepare each student with the knowledge, skills and values to succeed in a changing and dynamic world)
- _____ **Culture of evidence** (faculty, staff and students are committed to accountability for learning and achievement of measurable learning outcomes)
- _____ **Exceptional work environment** (make MDC the "employer of choice" for an exceptional workforce)
- _____ **Quality community partnerships** (develop relevant workforce, cultural and civic programs, and reinforce the importance of education)
- _____ **Commitment to cultural and academic initiatives** (promote the arts in all forms to contribute to the richness of our multicultural community)
- _____ **Sustainability practices** (educate our students as contributors to a healthy planet, and recognize our institutional responsibility to preserve the natural environment)
- _____ **Resource development, state-of-the-art technology, and operational efficiency** (ensure effective support for the College's future)
- _____ **Global reach and awareness** (enrich the curriculum and provide a truly global perspective to students)

As a warm-up to the group discussion students were first asked to rank the eight proposed MDC value statements according to their personal preferences and perception of importance. Of the 325 completed pre-focus group surveys, 58 surveys contained missing values or repeated rank selections thereby reducing the pool of valid instruments for this portion of the analysis to 267. Results are presented below.

Ranking Question: Please rank the following proposed Miami Dade College Values in order of importance to you. Give a 1 to the most important one to you, 2 to the second most important until you have assigned a rank to each.

VALUES	RANKING							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Exceptional learning environment	66.7%	11.6%	9.4%	5.6%	2.6%	1.5%	0.7%	1.9%
2. Culture of evidence	6.4%	19.1%	18.7%	13.5%	17.6%	9.4%	5.6%	9.7%
3. Exceptional work environment	2.2%	16.9%	10.5%	13.1%	10.9%	13.5%	13.9%	19.1%
4. Quality community partnerships	3.7%	9.4%	16.9%	16.5%	12.4%	19.9%	14.2%	7.1%
5. Commitment to cultural and academic initiatives	4.1%	9.7%	8.2%	11.6%	13.9%	17.6%	17.2%	17.6%
6. Sustainability practices	6.0%	10.1%	11.2%	11.6%	10.5%	16.1%	20.2%	14.2%
7. Resource development, technology, operational efficiency	4.1%	16.9%	13.5%	15.7%	18.4%	7.9%	13.5%	10.1%
8. Global reach and awareness	7.5%	7.9%	12.0%	13.1%	13.5%	13.5%	13.5%	19.1%

Out of the 267 valid student responses for this portion of the analysis, 178 (66.7%) ranked value statement 1 -- **Exceptional learning environment** -- as most important. This was the only value statement receiving such overwhelming majority in agreement of ranking from students. Other value statements receiving clear majorities and that also had no bi-modal frequencies or overlap in ranking with other value statements included:

- Value Statement 2 – **Culture of evidence**: 51 (19.1%) and ranked as 2nd in importance
- Value Statement 7 – **Resource development, state-of-the-art technology, and operational efficiency**: 49 (18.4%) and ranked as 5th in importance
- Value Statement 6 – **Sustainability practices**: 54 (20.2%) and ranked as 7th in importance

For the remaining four value statements there was overlap for 6th place between two value statements (4 and 5) and overlap for 8th place between three value statements (3, 5, and 8). One value statement had a bi-modal split of 17.6% for 6th and 8th place (value 5). Another important note is that aside from the clear majority preference seen for Value Statement 1, most all remaining majority preferences range from approximately 18 – 20%.

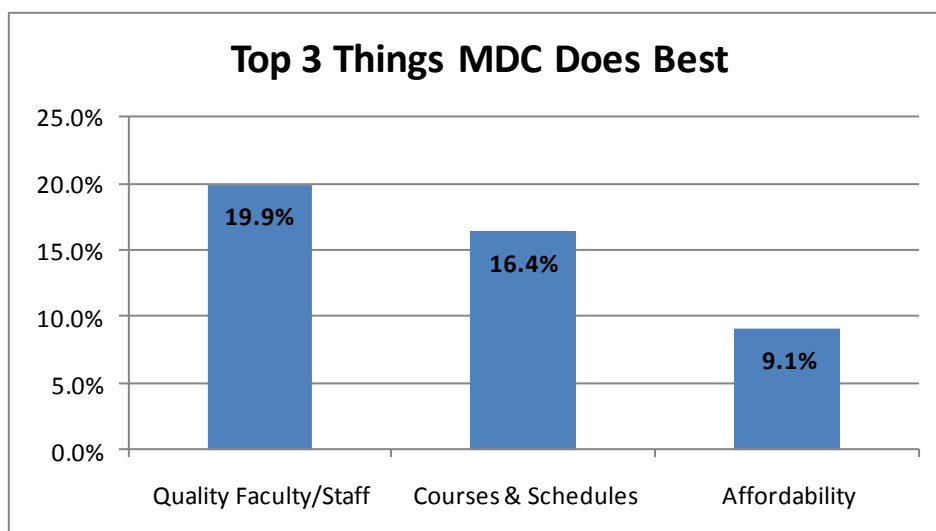
The clearest outcome from this portion of the student focus group process is that the presence of an exceptional learning environment is something that resonates with a vast majority of our students and subsequently ranked as the MDC value statement of highest importance to them.

Section #2: Discussion Questions

Please answer the following questions and be prepared to discuss.

1. What are the top three things that Miami Dade College does best?
2. What are the top three things that Miami Dade College could do better?
3. If you were the president of Miami Dade College, what would be your most important priority for the next five years?

Discussion Question #1: What are the top three things that Miami Dade College does best?

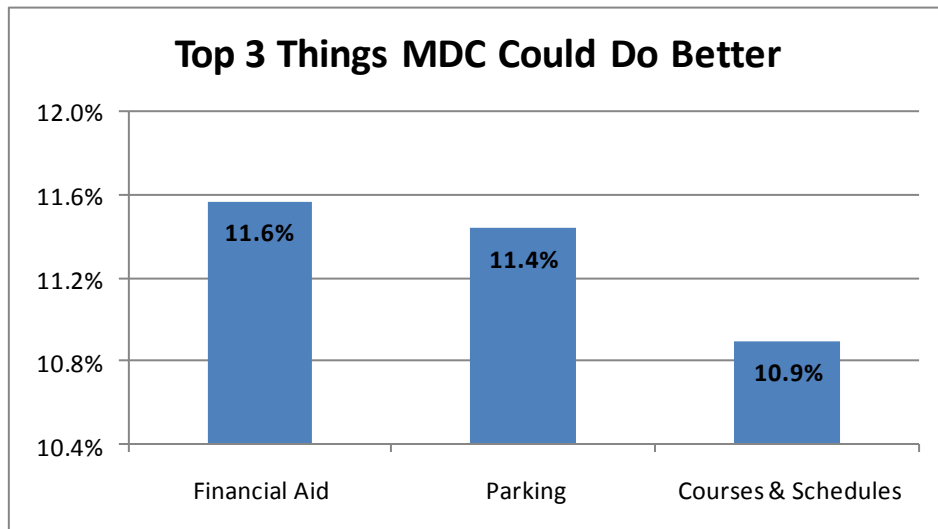


Quality Faculty / Staff – Students were very complimentary of their professors and faculty in general. A clear majority of students (19.9%) reported positive experiences with faculty in terms of communication, making subject matter engaging, accessibility during office hours, willingness to help students, that they are treated with respect, and what they perceive as a genuine interest on the part of faculty to see students do well and succeed.

Courses & Schedules – Also cited as one of the things MDC does best by a majority of students (16.4%) was the wide variety of course offerings and the scheduling flexibility that is made possible by offering courses throughout the day and early evening and on multiple campuses. Working students were particularly appreciative of the expanded hours to accommodate their schedule needs.

Affordability – Despite voicing concerns over the challenges associated with financing their education, students acknowledge that the cost of tuition at MDC is affordable when compared to other institutions of higher learning. A substantial number (9.1%) of students indicated that providing good quality education at an affordable price is one of the things MDC does best. Students also expressed their desire to see MDC do what it can to ensure that tuition rates can remain affordable.

Discussion Question #2: What are the top three things that Miami Dade College could do better?

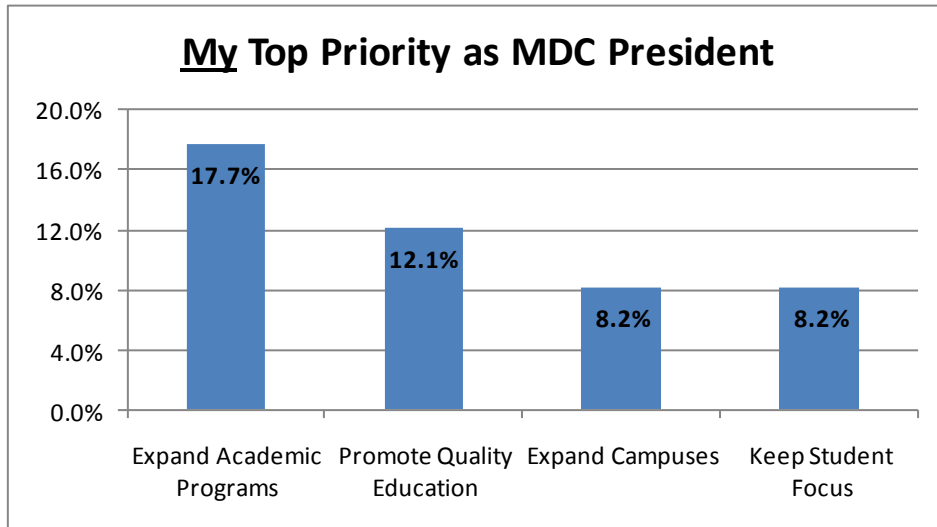


Financial Aid – Few other topics generated as much discussion for needed improvement as did student concerns over financial aid. Comments covered virtually all aspects of financial aid operations but most frequently cited were concerns over the length of time it takes to receive assistance (wait times of multiple hours are common in their experience). Students also voiced frustration over what they perceive as inadequate staffing levels to handle the volume of students requiring assistance and the inability to obtain quick answers to questions without having to personally go to a financial aid office. A substantial portion of students (11.6%) indicated this as the top thing MDC could do better.

Parking – A close second to Financial Aid was concern over parking (11.4%). Comments provided by students ranged from concerns over lack of enforcement of speed limits to a visible lack of security features that create a sense of safety in the campus parking lots – particularly at night. Most frequently mentioned by students, however, was the desire for a greater number of parking spaces. While this particular issue was raised in all focus groups, students from the InterAmerican and Hialeah campuses were most concerned about this.

Courses & Schedules – While recognizing the variety of courses available and the flexibility in scheduling the existence of multiple campuses provides, a sizeable portion of students expressed a desire for even greater variety and flexibility (10.9%). Students indicated that MDC could improve its course and scheduling offerings by providing the option of taking more courses on weekends. They would also like to see more courses offered in multiple campuses (as opposed to certain courses being made available in just one or two campuses) so as to minimize their commute time to campus.

Discussion Question #3: If you were the president of Miami Dade College, what would be your most important priority for the next five years?



As with the previous two discussion questions, responses provided by students varied widely. For ease of analysis and presentation student responses were grouped into themes with the most frequently identified themes discussed below.

Expand Academic Programs – While students generally ranked the variety of courses and flexibility in schedule as something which MDC does best, nearly 18% indicated that their top priority would be to expand the curriculum to include not only more classes in subject areas but also to add more academic programs (particularly baccalaureate programs). Some were more ambitious and indicated they would make it a priority to offer Master and Doctoral degree programs as well within the next five years.

Promote Quality Education – While students readily acknowledge the positive academic experiences they are having at MDC, promoting and maintaining academic excellence is the priority that a majority (12.1%) of students expressed. To quote the top priority of a student participating in the focus groups:
“Creating a Miami Dade culture based upon the foundation of an extraordinary education ...”

Expand Campuses – In keeping with the desire to expand academic programs, a substantial number of students (8.2%) indicated that their top priority would be campus expansion. The expansion, as described by students, varied from adding class rooms, laboratories, or buildings to creating new campuses all together – even suggesting expansion into southern Broward County.

Keep Student Focus – The same number of students (8.2%) indicated that their top priority would be to keep a student focus to everything that MDC does. While comments within this theme varied widely, they focused on making sure students receive motivation, encouragement to pursue their dreams, and assistance as they embark on their academic and professional careers. Students also indicated that listening to students, asking about their needs, and setting out to make sure these are met would also be part of this priority.