

# Student Support (Re)defined

Equitable  
Integrated  
Cost Effective

## Focus Group Summary Los Angeles Valley College | June 2012

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### Introduction

This report presents findings from focus groups conducted in March 2012 with students from Los Angeles Valley College (LAVC). The focus groups were part of *Student Support (Re)defined*, a multi-year research project conducted by the Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges (RP Group) with funding from the Kresge Foundation. The purpose of the study is to articulate how community colleges can deliver student support—both inside and outside the classroom—in a cost-effective manner with the goals of helping to narrow the achievement gap for Latino and African-American students and enabling more learners to complete certificates, degrees and transfer. For more information about Student Support (Re)defined, please visit: <http://www.rpgroup.org/projects/student-support>.

### Research Framework

Student Support (Re)defined is divided into three phases. Phase 1 collects student perspectives on student supports inside and outside the classroom through surveys and focus groups. Phase 2 gathers faculty, student services professionals and administrators perspectives on the findings generated in Phase 1 with particular attention paid to scalability and sustainability. Phase 3 is a series of facilitated dialogues with college practitioners and state-level leaders about how to take action on the findings at both the college and system levels. Twelve California community colleges were invited to participate in the study, including Los Angeles Valley College. For more information about the project's overall research framework, please visit: <http://www.rpgroup.org/content/research-framework>.

## Student Focus Group Methodology

Designed to capture the student experience and perspective on support services, the project's Phase 1 included surveys with 800 students at 12 colleges and focus groups with students from four of these institutions. LAVC's focus groups were part of this process.

The student survey and focus group protocols were derived from the RP Group's literature review of student supports inside and outside of the classroom. This research identified six factors that have been found to increase student success. These are identified below along with the definitions that the RP Group's research team provided to focus group participants who were asked to consider each factor in relation to their own experience and success. Readers can find detailed definitions of these success factors and related citations in the Student Support (Re)defined [Literature Review Brief](#).

Success Factor	Definition Provided to Students & Used in the Research
Connected	You feel connected to the college
Directed	You have a goal and you know how to get to it
Engaged	You listen and participate in class and participate in extracurricular activities
Focused	You stay on track – keeping your eyes on the prize
Nurtured	You feel somebody wants you to succeed as a student and helps you succeed
Valued	You feel that what you have to contribute to the college is valued

The focus groups began with a general question asking students to identify the most important thing that had happened to them at the college to help them be successful as a student. This question was asked before the six factors for success were introduced in order to see whether students' responses would fit within the framework of the six factors. This question was followed by one question related to each of the six success factors. At the conclusion of the focus groups, students were given a brief survey asking them to rate the six factors in order of importance to their own success and to write one or two sentences explaining why their number one choice was the most important to their success.

### Los Angeles Valley College Focus Groups

Three focus groups were conducted on March 27, 2012 with a total of 25 participants. Each focus group lasted roughly 60 minutes. The focus groups were conducted in the administration building where the campus's institutional researcher is located. The first focus group took place at 12:00 pm, the second at 1:30 pm and the third at 5:00 pm.

Participants were diverse in terms of ethnicity, age and gender, although most appeared to be in their 20s. Focus groups were comprised of students who participated in campus support services and student activities, such as Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS), Puente,

TRIO and the Associated Student Body. Focus groups also included several parents who had returned to school after many years away from education.

Focus group participants were given the opportunity to enter into a drawing for a \$50 gift certificate.

## Findings

The following summary presents themes, highlights and illuminating quotes from the focus group sessions. The findings are organized around seven areas of questioning.

### **Question 1: What makes you successful?**

In response to the open-ended question about what made them successful at the college, participants referenced getting involved with the college community, joining programs and clubs and connecting with counselors, faculty and peers.

A majority of students across focus groups spoke of the importance of becoming involved in the college community, inside as well as outside of the classroom. Students across all three focus groups highlighted the important role programs like EOPS, TRIO and Puente have played in their success. The elements of these programs cited as most helpful were access to counselors, development of an educational plan, priority registration, and belonging to a community. One student spoke of how programs like Puente have impacted their social engagement on campus, which in turn has positively influenced their academic success. He stated that Puente,

*. . . has allowed me to do networking and get to know more people, be more involved in school and that has actually helped me in my studies because the more social I am the better I do, the better I can get help from others, like other students and such.*

Clubs were also highlighted by students as important to their success. These organizations facilitated their involvement with college, helped them meet other students, and enabled them to “come out of their shells.”

Students emphasized how other individuals had helped them be successful such as faculty and peers. One student shared how friends had helped her navigate LAVC and how a teacher had mentored her:

*. . . what motivated me to keep going on was basically the students on campus. I had friends from high school [also taking classes at LAVC] that told me about the resources. I had no clue about what resources were on campus. And I found EOPS through a friend who told me in an ample amount of time before the [program] stopped qualifying people to go. And then [EOPS] helped me all throughout the first year. . . . I met an amazing professor on campus that actually was like a mentor to me. And she helped me. She asked me questions like what’s your major, what are you trying to do and then she just kept following up over my whole time here.*

Students in two of the three focus groups additionally emphasized the value of receiving information and assistance upon enrollment in the college. A couple of students shared how seeing a counselor soon after arriving at the college was instrumental in helping them navigate the institution and plan their education. Others indicated that they were completely lost when they arrived on campus and would have liked if there was somewhere they could go to get help and ask questions (e.g., a welcome center). Other students emphasized how taking a personal development class had introduced them to available resources, taught study techniques and showing them how to “survive in community college.”

Overall, the main theme raised in response to what students believe makes them successful was the importance of staying actively engaging in the college community mostly through developing relationships with teachers, counselors or fellow students. A sub-theme was the notion that you are more likely to succeed if you feel you are able to contribute to something, advocate for others, set a good example or make others proud of your achievements.

## **Question 2: What makes students connected?**

When asked what helps students to feel connected, participants referenced the role of counselors, peers, clubs and faculty in creating those connections.

Students identified counselor relationships as critical to a student’s capacity to become involved on campus. For example, several students asserted that their counselors will “go out of their way for them.” Several students again pointed to their involvement in programs such as EOPS, Puente and TRIO as playing a key role in them feeling connected at the college.

Participants also emphasized feeling connected to the college through other students, primarily by making friends, participating in clubs and helping their peers. In reference to the role joining a club and being able to help other students played, one student shared:

*So one of the bigger things that helped me personally is joining a club and becoming part of a group. And it’s knowing each other and every student, every person in the club helps each other out. If you don’t know something, they’ll help you out. If you know something they don’t know, it helps out.*

Students also spoke of what faculty can do to help students feel connected. One student shared how teachers can help students connect to a class:

*I think . . . making the student feel more connected, it sort of lies a bit within the professors as well. Because there’s been some classes where the professor has one or two tests a semester and doesn’t lecture and it’s all based on the book. And you don’t feel very connected to that class. Whereas you can have a professor that fully engages you in lectures. There’s classwork spread throughout the whole semester and you can see he really cares. You’re more motivated to go to that class to be at the school.*

Another student explained how his instructors have encouraged school pride and engagement outside of class and raised an interesting question about whether faculty themselves felt connected to the college:

*This is a community college. The word community is in there. You might think there would be a sense of community. So I've had some teachers that do advertise clubs. 'Oh, go to this. You'll get extra credit. Go to this.' But I feel like maybe and this is just a personal guess, but maybe it could be that the teachers themselves are disconnected from the college . . . they tell their students to go and extra credit and those are the teachers you can tell are really connected to the college. They really want to help.*

Another participant highlighted that faculty interact with many students and therefore should help inform students learn about various college resources and opportunities:

*I think a student should know about the grants, about the benefits of college maybe from teachers. That's going to be best connection because if I can tell only five or six people, the teacher can tell whole class. I think the teachers must be more informed about this.*

In contrast, other students felt that is the responsibility of each student to make his/her own connections with faculty. One student put it very simply:

*. . . don't forget it's one professor against 20 students. We're all just faces at a desk. I've always made a point within the first week of introducing myself, telling them something about me so I'm not just one of 28 students.*

In addition to potentially weak faculty connections to the college, students noted two other impediments to connecting including the inadequate advertising of services and supports and an unwelcoming student body. When talking about the role of advertising, one student said:

*. . . what I've seen is the lack of advertisement. Our school lacks a lot of spirit in my opinion. There's a lot of things people aren't getting a benefit from like scholarships. People don't go [to financial aid] because there's no advertising for that. People don't know that the Associated Student Government is hosting an event . . . and they're giving out free food, free Scantrons. People don't know that. The only people that know about that is the people that are in the inner circle. . . . And I feel like if there was more advertisement in the school of all the benefits and all the things that we probably get, the school would be more united, more spirited and have more pride in itself.*

Other students agreed that too many community college students are unsuccessful in connecting with the campus community in general. One student cited an unfriendly student body as one possible reason:

*You can actually stand in the corridor and no one will ever say anything to you. That's the problem and that's the disconnect with school . . . Students, they don't know each other. They don't even want to know each other. You can sit with a person . . . day after day and nobody even cares who is sitting in the class.*

### **Question 3: What makes students directed?**

Students commented on a range of factors that motivated their selection of an educational goal and different supports that helped them know how to reach it.

In terms of motivations, students talked about receiving inspiration at an early age and having parents that influenced their direction. One student in particular shared how an illness in childhood had impacted his career choice:

*. . . when I was younger I was constantly sick and then constantly spent time in the hospital. And I admired the doctors who took care of me. And from that I had an interest.*

Students spoke of receiving direction from a caring K-12 teacher or community college faculty member. One student shared how a middle school teacher influenced their direction:

*Well in middle school I had my science teacher. Well, she kind of took a special interest in me because I was really good in science. And then she would teach me outside of, after school, she would teach me different things from science. And that's when I got into genetics and that was the part that I really enjoyed and that's where my interest grew for . . . the medicine field.*

Several students spoke of being directed by faculty who spent time sharing with them information about a particular discipline and possible careers, exposing them to experts in the field, or helping them access internships. Participants seemed to agree that more faculty could be encouraged to provide discipline-focused counseling. Students also spoke of receiving direction from EOPS and Disabled Students Programs and Services (DSPS).

Participants cautioned that their peers, especially those who are first-generation college goers, desperately need direction and guidance. The following quote articulates this assertion:

*. . . some people just don't know how to start. I didn't know how to start school. I'm the first in my family to go. I didn't know how to apply. I didn't know. It was easy but there's a fear. There's a fear in there about you're going somewhere and you have no guidance. And that's the big issue and when new students come through the door to see a counselor for the first semester, that's scary. And when these counselors . . . scoff at you . . . that right there just breaks your college education. That right there just breaks it for a good year, a good semester and that's why people drop out and that's why they do badly.*

#### **Question 4: What makes students engaged?**

Students spoke about two types of engagement: academic and extra-curricular.

Focus group participants identified many actions faculty can take to make students feel academically engaged. Suggestions included showing passion for a subject, using accessible language, creating opportunities for open dialogue where multiple perspectives are welcome and asking personal questions that show they care about students as people too. One student commented on the passion his psychology professor demonstrated in the lessons, and her authentic and caring rapport with students.

*. . . something about the way she teaches and the fact that . . . if you were there in class early, she would just walk by and just be like, 'How are you?' 'How's your day going?' . . . I just feel like going back and telling her all these things because I'm like, you got me*

*to go for this . . . maybe she didn't mean to, but I told her before. I'm like, you have one of the best lessons I've ever enjoyed because she showed us such interesting material.*

Another student emphasized the teacher's energy as critical to feeling engaged:

*I would say feeding off the professor's energy . . . he's like, so animated . . . he's so pumped and yeah, yeah, yeah . . . really animated, so it keeps my attention. And he draws me in and then when he's lecturing, I'm actively taking notes and listening . . .*

Students also felt engaged when they had an opportunity to dialogue in class with the teachers and the other students. One student said

*In the class we have for English we always . . . talk about topics and everyone's so involved and we'll be like, we'll hear everyone's opinion. And then people say 'Oh, I didn't think about that. That's a really good point of view.' So that's when I feel the most [engaged], when I talk in the class, going back and forth with the teacher and with the other students as well.*

Another student shared how she felt more engaged when teachers either called on students to speak or solve problems in front of the class and how that engagement is helping her learn:

*The first time I felt actually engaged is when the professor would select students to actually say something that's on [their] mind which allowed them to actually think about the topic that is being discussed in class or giving the students a chance to . . . speak out and stuff like that . . . in my math class, we're able to actually go up and do problems and get worksheets and help out other students. And most of my math classes . . . that I've taken on campus, it's more like here's the lesson, everyone be quiet. . . . This is more like a social class and I've never actually engaged in math. I'm not confident in math, so yes, I'm actually learning a lot.*

For extracurricular engagement, many participants highlighted the value of student clubs. Several students also noted the connection between academic and extracurricular involvement and many focus group participants said that engagement in student government had significantly increased their academic confidence and success.

Some students additionally noted the importance of being self-motivated to engage with the college. One student stated:

*I came in there just being like sign me up for everything. So, that's what I did. It's how I got into Puente. It's how I started going to clubs, how I got . . . interested in the student union, how I tried to figure out programs like EOPS and TRIO.*

Another student explained that her own self-awareness led her to become actively involved on campus. In this context, she was conscientious that weak involvement could impact her educational advancement. In her mind, college presented limitless opportunities to build a network that could strengthen her academic success and inform her career path.

*. . . I know me good enough to know that if I am not engaged, that if I am not always stimulating my mind I'm not going to get anywhere. And the thing about being engaged with school is that it benefits me. It's a real experience of college. You meet people. I've met tons of great people. I made good connections. And I'm not sure if people realize when you pay for an education you're not just paying to go to class. You're paying for the people you will meet. These people can influence your life. For all you know these are future doctors, lawyers and shopkeepers, whatever. Those are good things to have, build bridges with people.*

One focus group questioned whether or not students know why it is important to be engaged, especially outside of class. Some participants indicated that they did not have time to be engaged in extra-curricular activities (mostly due to work schedules) and did not see the need for this kind of involvement. In response, other participants reporting learning about the importance of engaging with the college outside of class time in their personal development (PD) class. Two student comments included:

*. . . we learned in personal development that it's important to attend these types of things, to go to college fairs, to go to where all the colleges come and rep their colleges . . . if it was mandatory . . . to take at least one PD class it would really help out a lot. (Student 1)*

*I say make that your first semester. You have to take a PD class because basically after that, you're set. You already know what to do . . . [some students] aren't aware that they need certain classes to transfer. And then depending on your major, you need pre major [courses]. Most people don't know that, so they should be aware. (Student 2)*

#### **Question 5: What makes students focused?**

Students largely reported three motivations for staying focused: (1) because they cannot afford to delay their educational goals; (2) because they can see the progress they are making toward their educational plan as they complete each semester; and (3) because they want a different and better life.

When talking about the motivating effect of making educational progress, focus group participants remarked that having an educational plan was instrumental to their ability to stay on track. Plans helped to sustain their self-confidence and give them a boost when things got particularly tough. Two students illuminated:

*On [the] Valley College website they have a "degree works"[system] where I can go ahead and check all my classes that I have taken. And I keep looking at it when I'm a little down. 'Oh, I'm almost there. I'm almost there.' So, it's kind of a big motivator. And then I see my grades and what I've accomplished and it kind of lifts my spirits. (Student 1)*

*. . . when I have specific plan, I look at it and I know . . . I'm focused on it. (Student 2)*

One student lamented the economic reality of a minimum wage job. He expressed his desire for increased economic security and his perspective that a college diploma is his way "out."

*I have a part time job. And it's like you get paid \$8.00 [an hour] and they treat you like you're a slave, like cleaning people's stuff and it's just, no, I don't want to be doing this for my life. So that keeps me [going]. You have to stay in school even though it's so hard.*

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Participants also highlighted the role a counselor can play in helping students stay focused. One student stated:

*I formed a relationship with her . . . she's just on me, like, she checks up on me here and there. If you don't have a relationship with your counselor, you're not going to make it.*

However, it is important to note that three of the eight students in this same focus group indicated they had never seen a counselor at LAVC. The main reason they cited for not having seen a counselor is simply not being able to get an appointment and not having the time to wait during drop-in hours. As a result of not having seen a counselor, these students had essentially counseled themselves and felt they had reached a point where they no longer needed a counselor. One student shared a specific experience:

*Well I was never able to get an appointment . . . I call because and then they said you have to do it online. I think it opens like, Tuesday mornings at 7:00. I swear I log in at like, 7:05 and all the appointments are taken and they open a week early and then you can never get in. So, if they made it more available to get to talk to somebody, I mean, even if they just went in. But they never have anybody that you can talk to . . .*

Participants also cited their fellow students as another source of motivation. Some indicated that their friends provide motivation to keep going either through moral support or the desire not to be the only one of their group who is left behind; “if everyone else is finishing you want to finish.”

### **Question 6: What makes students feel nurtured?**

Students spoke of the importance of feeling that others care about their academic progress and success. Mostly students spoke of the nurturing they are getting from faculty and family members. One student spoke of how important it is to feel that faculty want you to succeed. She described a scene where she told her English professor that she wanted to be a flight attendant. The faculty member encouraged her to think of additional career options because she had so much potential. This conversation altered her self-perception and her career trajectory immediately.

*He's like you have more potential to be a flight attendant from your essays. You should consider something else. And that gave me the wake up call. I'm like oh. You know it gave me that little boost like . . . oh, I guess I'm not that bad. So, I guess someone telling, kind of like giving you that support, that works here, kind of gives you that little boost, that, “Oh, I am pretty cool, you know, like . . . I could do that.”*

Another student described a very personal tragedy in which a faculty member stepped in and helped him find subsidies for his education.

*I lost my job and then so [my teacher] found out that I lost my job and she found out that I was homeless, living in my car. And then so she immediately started a, she did a, what do you call it? The grant, a scholarship and she did it in three days. And so that made a difference . . .*

Yet another student shared how a teacher helped her academically and personally:

*I have to say one professor came to mind when you asked that question and that was my 125 teacher. Because in the very beginning, that class is intense, it's a five unit class. And it was just a lot for a person who can't handle math. And I would talk to the professor. And I said I can't handle the class. I think I'm going to be dropping out. So she was able to keep me here, she welcomed me during her office visits. And she helped me personally . . . she gave me that emotional support and she really cared. And she also was interested where my future was going. She says "Oh, are you thinking of going to Northridge? You don't want to take those noncredit classes. You want to really earn your grade." And she really gave me some advice and she really cares about her students. So, that's where I got my nourishment.*

Some students, primarily seasoned, re-entry focus group participants, identified their family and children as their main source of nourishment and support. Many of these students were also immigrants to the United States and expressed deep gratitude for childcare assistance and other familial support. One female student cited:

*My mother-in-law because my mother, she's not with me. She was in my country. And, I have three-year-old daughter and my mother-in-law, she is my supporter. My daughter stays with her. And it is the greatest help . . .*

Finally, there were a few students who indicated that they were self-nurturing because they could only rely on themselves. Three students expressed it this way:

*All my life through education I have to motivate myself to achieve. Education is not a big thing in my family, well, my immediate family. (Student 1)*

*I never thought somebody that needs to me nurturing me maybe . . . I never thought . . . I need that. I came and why somebody have to come and nurture me for learning? I don't know. (Student 2)*

*I need this education, nobody else. Why [would] they have to care I'm learning or not? (Student 3)*

In response to this idea of self-nurturing, one student responded as to why being nurtured by others could be important to some students:

*I agree with you. So not everybody needs that. A lot of people are really self-motivated. But other times you're in situations where you really just need somebody to care and somebody to take that extra step to help you. And again, it could be serious . . . or it could be just help me understand this math.*

## Question 7: What makes students feel valued?

The research team found it most challenging to explain the “valued” factor to students. Valued is the idea that students need to feel that they bring value to the campus. This value can be experienced in activities such as leadership, outreach and support of others and sharing personal and cultural experiences with others.

The most common theme was the pleasure students felt through opportunities to help others or share their knowledge with peers. Other themes included students feeling valued because of their leadership in clubs and their engagement with other students and faculty in opposing college budget cuts. One student shared:

*I started to feel valued when like I help out with clubs because I'm big on clubs on campus, when I inspire students to go and run for office . . . then to me, that's being valued and being a resource for someone else throughout like the connection thing. And they'll be like hey, you know, thanks for helping me pick up my books the other day . . . I feel valued there or even just a helping hand which is mainly what I am, so.*

Students also spoke of opportunities to share what they know and, especially, to help others take advantage of the time they spend in college. One thing that was clear was the significant difference small gestures can make (e.g., students stopping to say hello or pointing a lost student in the right direction). One student noted:

*I feel valuable with other students where they don't have the experience. Maybe they have bad counselors, and with my experience and what I've gone through, I'm able to kind of tell them, this is kind of like a choice, that you should research it further. And so I'm kind of giving them the opportunities.*

One student cautioned, though, that joining a club does not always manifest in action and that it is sometimes hard for him to feel valued when his peers do not seem interested in engaging. He stated:

*I'm actually president of [a]club this year. And, ironically, you would think being in a position of power would you make you feel valued. But sometimes it doesn't. For me it's been, I've had to fight tooth and nail to get people to be active. And I think that's the other issue is that you can't just join a club and expect people to be active. They just sit there. Some people do, but it's like there's just something so difficult about getting people to want to do things.*

A few students indicated that they were not seeking value externally and did not expect others to make them feel valued. Instead, they emphasized that everyone should be more focused on valuing themselves. One student put it this way:

*. . . whatever I give I don't expect appreciation and praise. That's not why I give. I give to help. And if I feel valued great and if I don't it's irrelevant I think. I mean I already have myself, I already value myself. . .*

## Rating the Importance of the Six Success Factors

In response to the exit survey that listed the six success factors (i.e., connected, directed, engaged, focused, nurtured and valued) and asked students to rate their top three in order of importance to their success, “engaged” was selected by the largest number of students (17 out of 25, 68%). This response was followed by “directed,” identified as a top three factor by 16 out of 25 students or 64% and “focused,” identified as a top three factor by 15 out of 25 students or 60%. Below are three statements students wrote about why they chose engaged as most important to their success.

- *Engaged. . . . I chose this one most important because I strongly believe that being engaged helps me to understand class material and show my professors that I take time to study the material and feed it back to my classmates. Also being engaged helps inspire others to voice their opinions.*
- *I believe it's important to stay engaged. This way resources can be communicated thru peers. Secondly it's essential for students to stay focused. This way time is not wasted. Third connections always help the college experience.*
- *I feel like being engaged by teacher's lectures has really helped me achieve high grades. If the teacher is dry and does not care for the students then I won't be as successful as it would with an engaging professor. Being engaged in school activities such as ASU and school clubs has engaged me completely in the school and it has helped with my success due to building connections.*

When we examine which factor received the largest number one (1) ratings, “directed” had 10 students identifying it as most important to their success. This response was followed by a large gap, whereby “focused” received four top ratings and “nurtured” received three. Below are four comments from students who identified “directed” as most important to their success:

- *You need to know how to achieve your goal. "Crawl before you walk."*
- *If you don't have a goal, then you have nothing to achieve.*
- *Goal setting is a vision first and foremost. If there is no idea, how can I achieve anything? It helps me stay on task, even if I fall off (slack) I still know what my objectives are.*
- *I chose number one because if a student does not have an idea of a goal in mind, the other faculties are useless.*

## Budget Cuts

While budget cuts were not referenced in any of the questions asked of these students, the issue surfaced in all three focus groups and thus it seemed the subject warranted inclusion in this report. The primary issue raised by participants focused on not being able to get the classes they

need. Students shared how they are going to have to stay longer at the college because they cannot get all their classes in a timely manner, are taking classes they do not need, or are attending multiple colleges in order to get their classes.

*I can't really get into the classes anyway because they're always full. So it doesn't even matter if I knew which one to get in there they're always full. I wind up taking like two, three classes every semester, or I take two here, two at Pierce, some at Mission because they're full.*

At the end of one of the sessions, one student gave an impassioned speech about how the budget cuts are affecting students today as well as impacting their potential futures:

*These programs are being cut. They are affecting students. . . . They can't just cut things over and expect us to be leaders of tomorrow. We need to be trained. We need to be taught. We need to be educated unless we don't want us going anywhere. . . . You talk about the younger generation like "oh, man, these kids don't want to do anything." Well when our alternative is going into media and music because our own education doesn't even promote math or science or literature or engineering . . . I feel like the school . . . they aren't pushing us forward. They're pushing us back. They're pushing us away from going to school with these budget cuts because that's the clear message they're sending me. They don't want me at school because they're cutting down my class sizes. They're cutting down the courses I need to take. And now I have to be here three years. And if worse comes to worse, I'll be here for four years just to get my prerequisite just to transfer.*

## Overall Conclusions

The researchers found that recurring focus group themes included the importance of having a goal that provides focus and developing the willingness to be engaged. If you arrive at the college with a vision of where you want to go and of why you are there, it is much more likely that you will be engaged and successful. If you don't have this focus upon enrollment, you are much less likely to persist, particularly because you are in an environment where help is unlikely to come to you; it is up to you to seek it out.

These students also repeatedly highlighted the importance of being engaged both in and out of the classroom. What is interesting about both of these themes is that while students felt the college could definitely be doing more to help students be successful, they also emphasized that students do have a responsibility to be proactive in seeking out what can help them be successful, whether that's approaching a faculty member for help or participating in clubs.

Finally, these students emphasized the critical role faculty can and do play in student success in general and specifically in each of the six factors of success. Students cited how faculty had made them feel connected, helped them find direction, engaged them in class and helped them connect to extracurricular activities, helped them stay focused through continuous feedback on performance, nurtured them by showing an interest in them and their futures and helped them feel valued by recognizing their talents and potential.

## Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges

The Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges (RP Group) strengthens the ability of California community colleges to undertake high quality research, planning and assessments that improve evidence-based decision-making, institutional effectiveness and success for all students.

For more information...

Contact Dr. Darla Cooper, Project Director, [dcooper@rpgroup.org](mailto:dcooper@rpgroup.org).