

Survey Analysis Summary and Emergent Themes – October 2022

Introduction

One day following the Strategic Planning Town Hall Kick-off, a survey was disseminated to the SUNY Empire community via email. The survey included the following questions:

- 1) From your experience, what do we do well?
- 2) What could we do better?
- 3) What should we stop doing?
- 4) What are the opportunities for us in the next 5-10 years?

To permit differentiation between stakeholder and steward responses, the survey included a question asking respondents to identify their primary relationship with SUNY Empire State College. Students and alums comprise the stakeholder group and SUNY Empire employees, College Council, Foundation Board members and partners were classified as stewards. The total number of survey responses collected was 1,121, including 624 stakeholders and 497 stewards. In the aggregate, there were 2,621 individual item responses collected. The breakdown of response counts by survey item is presented below.

Table 1. Item response counts and item response rates by constituent group

Item	Stakeholder Item Response Count (Item Response Rate)	Steward Item Response Count (Item Response Rate)
What do we do well?	388 (62.2%)	309 (62.2%)
What could we do better?	377 (60.4%)	314 (63.2%)
What should we stop doing?	326 (52.2%)	284 (57.1%)
What are our opportunities for the next 5-10 years?	331 (53.0%)	292 (58.8%)
Total	1,422	1,199

Survey analysis process

Survey analysis evolved over multiple stages, beginning with an item-level analysis of responses, managed by the Office of Decision Support. The responses from Stakeholders and Stewards were analyzed separately, translating to the iterative review and analysis of 2,621 units of response data. An inductive coding scheme was developed based on the evaluation of responses. Each response was assigned one or more content tags that best characterized the response, or elements of a response.

Illustrative examples of stakeholder responses and related coding appear below:

Well, I do believe you have given not only me, but other people a hope for a better future. [Coded "Access"]

Individual online studies are a life saver. I can work full time and study on my free time. My mentor is a great help as well. [Coded: Online, Mentoring, Working learner, Access (flexibility)]

A side-by-side synopsis of the Stage I Item analysis that differentiates Stakeholder and Steward perspectives is presented in Table 2. Strong alignment was evident in responses to the question asking what we do well, with both groups referencing access, student centeredness, and online offerings. Other common threads observed included references to barriers for students, student success, growth, and our distinctiveness.

Table 2. Stage I Item Analysis Summary

Question	Stakeholders	Stewards
From your experience, what do we do well?	Responses generally spoke to the characteristics of SUNY Empire that make us attractive to working/adult learners: primary among them is access in multiple forms. For example, being flexible and affordable. Additionally, there are many references to being student centered , and the array of student supports that are available. Finally, there were many references to instructional excellence and online offerings .	Steward responses most frequently referenced the characteristics of SUNY Empire that make us attractive to an audience of adult/nontraditional or working learners: primary among them is access in multiple forms. For example, being flexible and financially affordable. Stewards conveyed a student-centric focus , demonstrated through the array of student supports that are available, and commitment to student success . Finally, there were many references to online offerings and indicators of quality offerings that suggest distinction .
What could we do better?	The content of responses to this item paralleled subject matter that came through concerning what we do well (access) but indicated more specific topics like degree planning and technology .	Chief among the things that stewards identified as something SUNY Empire could do better was raising our profile through expanded marketing, reputation enhancement and promotion of our distinction relative to other institutions in our market. Stewards also referenced the need to reduce barriers and provide clarity for current and future students as they navigate the student lifecycle. Additionally, there were many references to aspects of workplace climate .
What should we stop doing?	Notable here is what stakeholders did not have to say. The most recurrent tag was N/A – meaning that the response was literally “N/A” or that the response did not contain enough substance to be interpreted otherwise. Among the more substantive comments were remarks that spoke to service quality concerns , perceived barriers , and aspects of instruction/instructional methods .	Stewards frequently referenced behaviors and practices that negatively impact workplace climate , aspects of educational/degree planning requirements for students, examples of operational inefficiency , and insularity . Insularity was operationalized as adherence to internally based language and practices that are not easily recognized or understood externally. Stewards also referenced the frequency and magnitude of organizational change .
What are the opportunities for us in the next 5-10 years?	Stakeholders frequently referenced multiple aspects of growth such as increasing enrollment, academic program offerings in general, or more specifically at the undergraduate or graduate level, and growth in online offerings. At times suggestions were made for specific programs that correspond to workforce demand or career connections . Stakeholders also expressed an interest in seeing the college maintain or enhance its distinction as an institution.	Stewards frequently referenced multiple aspects of growth such as increasing enrollment, as well as program and curricular offerings, often in areas that are relatable to labor market demand. Stewards also identified opportunities in marketing , and institutional positioning as a leader in online instruction and advancing student success .

The Strategic Planning Task Force (SPTF) engaged in the review and assessment of data and findings across each stage of analysis. The group affirmed the integrity of the process and soundness of the coding. They also discussed parallels observed in the Stakeholder and Steward responses including strong affirmation of our audience (non-traditional, adult learners), our mission (access), and student-centeredness (including student support and success). It was noted that Stakeholders were interested in academic programming aligned to workforce needs and a connection to post-graduation careers, and at times, identified specific programs they would be interested in. There was also discussion about responses suggestive of raising the college’s profile, through advertising, reputation enhancement, and promoting our distinction. Table 3 presents the initial thematic groupings, determined in the second and third stages of analysis.

Table 5. Initial thematic groupings and refined thematic groupings

Initial Thematic Groupings (Stage II)	Refined Thematic Groupings (Stage III)
Student Success	Student Success
Access	Access
Growth	Growth
Profile Raising	Profile Raising/Distinction
Distinction	
Organizational Effectiveness	Organizational Effectiveness

Given consensus on the thematic groupings, each theme was further developed with accompanying prose. During the week of October 24, the Strategic Planning Taskforce, together with academic and administrative leadership will facilitate World Café sessions. The purpose of these sessions is to get feedback from about the themes which have surfaced from the survey. The themes and related narrative are presented on the following page.

SPTF: Emergent themes

1. Students and their success

Every department, office, and functional group—indeed, everyone who works for the college—is invested in and responsible for the success of our students. The definition of “success” changes from group to group and depends upon the particular context of its use. However, given our student body with its diversity of experiences and needs, our students depend upon our ability to work in flexible ways, both to deliver a high-quality academic program and in the various administrative processes. Having a diverse repertoire of online courses and offerings in other modes that speak to current and prospective students’ interests, programming responsive to their goals in further education and employment in the workforce, and being able to progress quickly and efficiently through those programs is a component of student and post-graduate success. Students need to feel supported by and connected to the institution.

2. Access

The mission of our college has stressed access from its inception. While we need to continue to flexibly and nimbly respond to the challenges that create barriers for all of our students (including affordability), we need to focus additionally on our efforts to be a more inclusive institution that reflects the diversity of the population of the state. All students should feel welcome at our school, and all students should have an equitable opportunity to succeed.

3. Organizational clarity and effectiveness

At all levels, clear communication is necessary to promote a climate in which everyone associated with the institution can feel confident about the direction of the college. Strong, stable leadership and a clear plan can ensure an organization that runs efficiently. Students and stewards want their work to be meaningful and valued and resent work that they do not see as serving a clear purpose, leading to problems with campus climate. Clear communication also needs to exist within departments, and between students and their instructors.

4. Reputational enhancement

The growth of our programs and in enrollments and our ability to reach the students who can benefit from the academic experiences that we offer—quality instruction in a variety of modes, credit for prior learning, a flexible path to degree completion—depends upon students hearing of and being able to find us. Marketing and advertising are necessary if we are to raise our profile, expand our markets, and differentiate ourselves in an increasingly crowded field.

5. Growth and expansion

The college’s growth depends upon our ability to expand our reach, and our vision. Many of our former students have benefitted from the programs offered at the college, and many more could be served if we develop more programs in more modalities and fields and at more advanced levels. There are many people whose lives could be improved by Empire State College, and we should expand with them in mind.