Executive Summary:
Project P (Student Equity Plan) Focus Group Preliminary Findings

Overview:

Between April 22 and April 30, 2025, four focus groups were conducted to gather insights from 42 students (out of 78 confirmed) who had not met key student equity plan metrics during the 2023–2024 academic year. Participants included Black/ African American and Hispanic current and former Crafton students who had not completed transfer-level Math and English in their first year, had not persisted semester-to-semester, or had not earned a degree, certificate, or transferred to a four-year institution. Our Black/African American and Hispanic students were prioritized because these are the racial/ethnic groups that Crafton Hills College has identified as disproportionately impacted in our 2022-2025 Student Equity Plan. The purpose of these focus groups was to explore student experiences, identify challenges, and gather recommendations to enhance student support, equity, and success initiatives.

Key Findings Across Focus Groups

Barriers to Academic Success

- Limited Course Availability: Students expressed frustration with scheduling and lack of class options, especially for evening and in-person formats.
- Online classes perceived as isolating and ineffective
- Faculty Challenges: Reports of disorganized or unresponsive professors and emotionally inappropriate behavior (e.g., trauma-dumping).
- BookSaver Issues: Widespread criticism due to delays, outdated materials, and poor alignment with course requirements.
- FAFSA and Financial Aid: Students with complex family situations struggled with guidance and felt pressured to falsify information.

Communication Gaps

- Students consistently noted poor promotion of campus events, resources, and workshops.
- Recommendations included weekly announcements by professors, more engaging visual materials, bulletin boards with improved signage, and club involvement in outreach.
- Website usability problems such as broken links and old contact information (e.g., old emails).

Student Support and Resources

- Counseling Services: Experiences ranged from highly supportive to completely absent. Students requested proactive engagement and consistent counseling.
- Tutoring & Academic Help: Strong demand for better tutor training, integration into classrooms, and promotion of services like writing centers.
- Mentorship: High interest in peer or alumni mentorship for academic and career guidance.

Sense of Belonging

- Clubs and peer support systems (Canvas groups, group chats) were important for creating community.
- A need for more intentional strategies to create a sense of belonging.

Positive Experiences

- Students praised specific support programs such as EOPS and BooksPlus.

For questions, please contact Diana Vaichis, Senior Research & Planning Analyst, at dvaichis@craftonhills.edu.

- Participants highlighted positive experiences with campus events such as therapy animal visits, club rush, faculty and staff art shows, and food trucks. They also appreciated professors who attended events with their classes.
- Professors who provided no- or low-cost materials and built community through icebreakers were also appreciated.

Recommendations:

1. Enhance Communication: Implement targeted, multi-channel promotion of events and services. One suggestion was to organize event information into categories such as, Career, Financial Aid, Mental Health, etc.) as well as day/time. Promote tutoring and writing center services in classes and throughout campus.
2. Expand Support Services: Develop mentorship program, expand counseling services, and enhance tutoring resources; increase in-class academic support. Improve tutor training and availability (including in-class tutors).
3. Adjust Course Offerings: Improve access to evening, weekend, and in-person classes.
4. Strengthen Faculty Training: Address classroom management, communication, and professional boundaries.
5. Sense of Belonging Suggestions: Increase events that promote wellness and connection. Foster peer-led support/mentorship networks. Offer more diverse scheduling for events and classes.
6. Reform Resource Delivery: Overhaul BookSaver to better align with student needs and course requirements.

Summary:

The focus group sessions revealed a consistent pattern of challenges that current and former Black/African American and Hispanic students face in achieving academic success and feeling a sense of belonging at Crafton Hills College. Across all groups, there was strong agreement that communication gaps, inadequate academic and financial support, and limited access to resources are significant barriers. These issues are compounded by the personal and professional responsibilities many students juggle, limiting their ability to participate in campus life.

However, the discussions also uncovered areas of strength that Crafton can build upon. Students appreciated engaging events, supportive faculty, and effective programs like EOPS and BooksPlus. There is a clear desire for peer mentorship, improved outreach, and more tailored academic guidance. Addressing these needs through coordinated efforts in communication, faculty training, resource delivery, and scheduling flexibility can foster a more inclusive and supportive environment that drives student success and equity.

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