

Continuing Studies
Best Customer Advisory Sessions
Report

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Introduction

In early January 2008, Continuing Studies conducted three advisory sessions with their Best Customers. The sessions were intended to garner feedback about student experiences with Okanagan College and generate ideas for new courses and programs. 26 customers attended the three focus groups and provided a wealth of information. Two participants provided additional feedback by email after the focus groups, and their feedback has been incorporated.

Participants were also asked to provide feedback about the Continuing Studies brochures. The last two advisory session participants were asked to provide ideas and suggestions about possible instructors.

Recommendations

1. Goals for advisory groups process

In all three advisory groups participants stated their appreciation of being asked to provide ideas and feedback. They provided comprehensive and detailed feedback and had come prepared to provide their ideas for courses and programs. The concept of engaging Continuing Studies best customers as experts appeared successful in meeting the following goals:

- build continued commitment to OC Continuing Studies
- develop ambassadors for courses and programs
- identify opportunities for courses, programs and faculty
- Identify common themes and areas of feedback
- provide feedback on “college experience” questions and marketing efforts

2. Conduct advisory sessions annually or semi-annually

A few advisory groups a year will build a group of committed “best customers” who will serve as ambassadors for Continuing Studies (see Appendix A for Advisory Group process). In addition to face-to-face advisory groups I suggest that you provide an email address to which advisory group participants may send their ideas and comments.

3. Use your website to obtain student feedback

Develop a section on your website where students can provide course, program and faculty ideas and promote the feedback opportunities on all course materials.



4. Seek instructors through advisory groups

Advisory group participants were unaware of the credentials or experience required of continuing studies instructors. Expand the mandate of the advisory groups to include garnering ideas for additional courses and instructors and identifying students who may have an interest in and ability to teach.

5. Business course advisory groups

Develop advisory groups from specific sectors such as small and medium size employers. Best customers may be recruited from participants in current business classes. In addition, I suggest you involve partners such as Kelowna, Westbank and Lake Country Chambers of Commerce to reach small and medium business owners. You may wish to attend meetings to obtain feedback both formally and informally.

6. Develop partnerships

Partner with other learning providers such as Parks and Recreation departments throughout the Central Okanagan to share ideas for course development. There may be courses and programs, for example, that Parks and Recreation have been asked to provide and are not able to deliver, and vice versa. Explore opportunities for joint marketing. .

Key themes from advisory sessions

- Offer more advanced courses, especially in Spanish where the need was identified in each of the focus groups. Several advisory group participants identified an interest in attending more advanced courses in various program areas.
- Market other services to continuing studies students – for example, of the 26 best customers who attended, none were aware of the availability of library services or of library hours. I suggest that you include additional information about library services available to continuing studies students both in registration materials and during classes.
- Develop a partnership with Infusions to market the restaurant directly to Continuing Studies students. Many advisory session participants were unaware of the restaurant, and those that were aware were positive about the quality of the meals at Infusions. The availability of a quality restaurant may be attractive to Continuing Studies students who may wish to have a meal between leaving work and starting classes.



- Find ways of having the book store open for students. There may be opportunities to extend book store hours especially for classes where text books are required. While there may not be sufficient interest in having the bookstore open for the full duration of courses, there may be opportunities to have it open for the first week or two of courses.
- Work with DeBeans to have coffee services available for evening classes - and advise all students and instructors. DeBeans may want to consider experimenting with opening for a few weeks, and work with Continuing Studies staff and instructors in marketing the coffee shop to students and instructors.
- Add new courses and programs as quickly as possible so it's clear that ideas were heard and acted upon, especially Spanish Level 3. In adding courses and programs ensure that print and web-based materials refers to best customer feedback in developing new courses. Reinforce your interest in customer feedback by providing ways for customers to continue to provide feedback.

Advisory Group Session Results by Topic Areas

Registration

- Works well
- Phone works – answered quickly
- Once or twice – problems with rooms – would change, are not always convenient, A building is easier to navigate, what is the rationale as to how rooms are picked
- Online – had a hard time finding course online. What it said in the catalogue and where it fell (categories) didn't make sense
- Course cancellation – quick to help when course was changed. Got into course even on the day of the course, no problem cancelling
- Advertising in newspaper was very useful, was able to find courses she wanted to take
- Both phone and on-line – both were fine. Like on-line (quick)
- Phone – excellent – no problems.
- Quick response.
- On-line was good.
- Applied in person – frustrating length of time between applying and being accepted. Pre-requisites are then expected immediately. Challenge between waiting and hearing back.
- CS – very efficient customer service wise



- Registration
- Very simple
- Fine for mail in and on line
- Course confirmation in the mail is good
- Phone in process was easy
- Very well handled
- Very quick when registering in person
- Great idea to have map on the back

Brochure

- Very well laid out
- Would prefer courses be by area – convenient as is, too many courses if you have all of them in there, you get the brochure, then go online. Could improve with more advertising
- Lives close to Vernon, wonders what's in Vernon -- Is there a way to promote brochure by postal code, people closer to Vernon might want the Vernon brochure
- Into the piece of paper, uses web as a tool and for work, and likes to spend time with (brochure)
- People might be willing to drive for a course
- Cover is a great opportunity as to what is available here to learn, at a reasonable cost
- Market continuing studies by linking to health. So fun to see it expressed on the cover.
- Newspaper ad should tie into brochure launch
- Do different themes as to “what is continuing studies” – it is many things
- Would be helpful to have a bigger format – bigger titles
- Tie in weekly advertising, do by section; do you know what is here?
- Doesn't pay much attention to cover, thought it was a course, picture not as important
- Likes the format and size – very workable
- Lots of people do not get the newspaper
- Drop off at libraries, advertise where the brochures can be found
- Put brochure on web – webzine – have articles and testimonials
- Develop a webzine to Email
- Web site was good for navigating
- Some use the brochure, some use on-line.
- All courses in one brochure – bit confusing, plow through information, like more centralized one – not wondering where courses occur.
- On-line specifies which centre so courses are easy to find.
- J.I. courses – nice to see what is available in other centres.



- Like to sit down and browse through the brochure with cup of coffee.
- Nice to have everything in one place – if I see something at another centre I might inquire why they aren't offering in Kelowna (food for thought for next year as a course I might want to take etc.)
- Mix of just Central courses is enough in one brochure
- Love the brochure, like the smaller version of the brochure.
- Question about who is teaching – sometimes the instructor is in the brochure and other times not
- Too confusing if all campuses are in one brochure

Facilities

- It would be nice to have more handicapped parking, especially in front of all the buildings

Bookstore/coffee kiosk services

- Not available in the evening.
- Coffee (including Saturdays would be good). Bookstore hours wouldn't be an issue except some of the courses requires purchasing of a text. Suggestion: choose texts that are available at other venues (Chapter, Mosaics)
- Cafeteria – nice to have it open earlier than 8:00 a.m.
- Infusions – more access to the community (more like a restaurant). Excellent, inexpensive food. Buffet – nobody seems to know about it. Better advertising.
 - Wine list needs improving!

Services

- Would be nice to have a coffee for evening and weekend classes
- Would like library access
- Bookstore should have different hours – open in the evening and weekends
- More information about FREE parking and where to park for classes
- Create a better sense of community – looking as much for community as learning
- Spanish class should not be in Automotive classroom
- Kodak camera presented a problem in the Digital Camera class
- Audio Visual equipment didn't work for two of the Gardening classes
- Parking is bad during the day (weekday).
- Instructor gave tips and hints regarding parking (arrive early etc.)
- Rooms – received a map but it was not helpful.
- Portable and Plant building are confusing.



- Evening classes – not a problem to park – but didn't know I could park anywhere
- Website – there is a map but isn't easy to find. Too deep in the website.
- Would be helpful to have a map in the front foyer. Help area or something would be helpful.
- Course registration was sent out early and room had changed. Students weren't notified. Need to keep students better informed if classroom changes.
- Appreciate classes available during the evening. Like the variety of different classes. Accessible, pay with VISA etc.
- Scheduling of classes: Mon & Wed., or Tues. & Thurs. – too long of a space between classes. Mon. & Thurs. would be preferable (better for retention).

Library

- Didn't know they had privileges to library access. Would be useful to have this information in their material.
- Certificate students are aware of picture and library access.

Furniture

- Need to get rid of the yellow plastic chairs. Some students don't attend because of the uncomfortable chairs.

Instructors

- are wonderful, adaptable.
- Allan D. is phenomenal. Works with the individuals. Helps out individuals when extra help is required.
- Liked the continuity of having the same instructor throughout the programs.
- Instructor is able to handle the age gap
- The Spanish teacher is amazing
- Instructors should receive copies of their evaluations immediately after course is completed

Ideas for new courses/programs (ideas that generated discussion in the focus groups, or were mentioned several times have been underlined)

- Open drawing classes (model available)(paint/draw etc. – not so structured)
- More general courses at the University level – Japanese (languages)(people who are traveling)(both credit and non-credit)



- Spanish – Level 11 is like Level 1A (requesting another level)(assured there would be but instead another introductory level has been offered). Somewhere else to go for individuals at an Advanced level.
- College does a good job of offering introductory courses.
- JI – folks are looking for level 11 courses.
- Horticulture classes – frustrated about timing of the courses. If courses are cancelled, perhaps offer in another semester. Perhaps not only offered in the applicable semester (i.e. spring courses could be offered in the fall). Growing industry and there should be more courses.
- Writing courses
- Disappointing when courses are offered and then cancelled.
- Wine and food pairing – evening cooking classes. Chinese night, French night
- Organic Crop Inspection – available through Distance (Assiniboine College) -- offer it a OC
- Outdoor hike – offered through Penticton (Cathedral Lakes). More outdoor education type courses.
- Sewing classes
- Nice to have instructors having “fun” in their classes.
- First Nations – languages, plants, cooking etc.
- general home repairs
- career development for individuals in “sales”, advertising to specific companies – already in sales and looking to improve
- Current events that relates to what’s happening, delve in deeper, few weeks in duration, 8-10 weeks, turns over each week
- Some courses are discontinued – gerontology, courses about getting older, how can interest be revived?
- Aging parents – how can I advocate for them, the process, the options for care, Advocacy course, what our community offers, how to be proactive and not reactive. Get health care professionals to come in, public health care nurse
- Trades – evening welding course, carpentry was popular, bring them back in – appeal to middle age and older population – as a hobby
- Spanish Dilemma – have level 1 and level 2, level 3 is not offered, college seems reluctant to offer it, would like to see it here. It’s discussed in class. Would be willing to pre-register for level 3. canvas intermediate class for endorsements.
- Courses with levels – do you survey class and see if there is interest? If it is desired we put it on.
- This hasn’t happened in Spanish classes. Interest has always been expressed by the students, maybe have a lower minimum for higher level courses.



- Organic gardening, green movement
- archeology – weekend dig
- blacksmithing and jewelry making, pottery courses
- Artisan work – draw a whole new group
- Artisan bread making, outside
- Partnerships with wineries
- Seniors – there is a lot out there already, a lot of the CS courses appeal to seniors...
- What is there to do? Class – a Saturday morning to plan things you'd like to do, destination/field trips
- Parenting courses
- Nutrition courses for beginners
- Seminar , ½ day, hear all of the pieces, everything that is required for horticulture for this area, we are going to be doing more gardening because of the weather, gardening courses under leisure
- Menopause course – how to get through
- Parents and teens
- Herb and veggie garden course – small space, windowsill, tie into nutrition
- Series that builds of the other courses
- Combine or develop existing courses into series
- CBC call in show – can't get all the calls in, people have a lot of questions and like talking to an expert
- Need captivating instructors – some courses are terrible because of the instructor
- How to become a vegetarian
- Gold panning for beginners
- Courses to upgrade office skills – Blackberry, technology, new software, USB's
- Be you OWN Helpdesk
- Technology in the workplace
- Computer courses are excellent
- Would like to see more language courses – French, German, Russian, Spanish
- More like a college campus, it should look at night the same as it does during the day. All the other things that people have during the day
- By nature evening classes are a little less social
- Ken – horticulture guy – Ken's Tree Service?
- Maybe stagger the start times
- Kids camps extended, more life skills, more options for Spring Camp, do not repeat the same courses – add new ones
- Making clothes, sewing, how to make your pants fit



- Alternative cooking, vegetarian, raw food diets
- Carpentry – learning how to use tools
- Common home maintenance – what’s safe to do and what’s not
- Financial Planning was excellent
- What to do with your retirement time – hobbies, volunteer work
- Extended Spanish classes – offer level III
- Partnership with the community – perhaps the schools or the Y
- Mac computer courses – introductory courses
- More conversational foreign languages
- What the individual can do to make a difference with the environment
- Different products that you can use that are eco friendly
- Ethical investing – finding out about companies that are doing alternative energy
- Xeriscaping – Micro irrigation
- Some students are interested in taking courses during the day
- Combination of theory and practice
- Some of the daytime programs being offered at night
- Horticulture course that is specific for the valley conditions – Kwantlan College, modeled on their program
- Switch around the nights that courses run
- Fly fishing or outdoor sports
- SLR – Seniors Learning in Retirement offers courses for seniors
- There should be financial assistance (support) to attend courses
- Wardrobe planning and buying – how to de-clutter your wardrobe, how to dress for success
- I have taken several AutoCAD courses and use the program regularly in working as a designer. There are parts of that computer application that I have not used since college, and would be interested in taking a “refresher”. (Assuming the book store and coffee shop are opened up)
- I feel the most crucial suggestion that came out of the Thursday evening session was that of instituting classes on how people can, on a day to day basis, make decisions which impact favorably on Global Warming. I think people are really concerned, but have no idea how day to day actions really do impact, and how they may be ameliorated.
- You may wish to consider breaking down the AutoCAD skills part-time certificate 160 hour program into individual courses, such that a person could enrol for segments of interest.
 - This approach may also appeal to younger folks who are working but would like to get training so that a career change could be possible. They may not be in a position to sign on for a 160 hour course but might consider 4 – 40 hour courses over a longer period of time to get their certificate.



- Also, offering a day-program credit course at night would allow potential students to 'sample' a course of study they are considering enrolling in but cannot for financial or other good reasons.

Ideas for Business Classes or Programs

- Offer Chamber members some sort of discount
- Reach the HR Directors – downtown business association
- Courses for seasonal workers
- Direct mailing package – free seminar to explain what we are selling

Are there better ways to market these courses?

- Suggestions: Radio – Power 104 and CBC
- Radio 1150 – have someone from CS on the talk show
- SLR partnership/Parkinson Rec. – referring people
- Advertisement about courses were starting soon (long weekend) and no ability to register over the phone. Timing of advertisements.
- Monthly listing of courses in the newspapers (October courses, November courses etc.) Remind folks of upcoming courses.

Ideas for faculty

- SLR – presenters have a passion and perhaps they could be approached to see if they are interested in instructing courses.
- Instructors should be sharing their qualifications at the beginning of the course.
- Can we bring in “famous” speakers (an evening with...)
- There is the perception that you need a formal education to teach in CS. Students are drawn to people with a passion.
- Potential teachers may not think they are qualified to do teach at OC despite their years of experience and passion for what they do. CS can position themselves to recruit those people.
- Skills fair – people would come in and show what they know –
- Business world – retired people to teach, mentoring program for those interested, learn college policies, how to teach, how to demonstrate your passion in the classroom setting



Appendix A

Okanagan College Continuing Studies Advisory Group Session

Opening Remarks

- Welcome and introductions – your name, and courses you've attended
- My role as facilitator
- Your role in providing feedback
- Scribe's role
- What we're going to do with your feedback
- Rules of engagement

Agenda (on flip chart)

- **College experience** – registration, getting information, parking, safety, other services
 - What worked best for you? Why? What didn't work well? Why?
 - Feedback on brochure? Central Okanagan focus? Front page graphics and picture
- **Ideas for courses and programs**
 - Break into 2 groups
 - Give everyone a brochure for reference
 - Give us some ideas for new courses and programs, don't worry if we may offer something similar – we'll look at all the info later
 - Provide us with some detail about your ideas – what would you like to learn and how – in class or on-line?
 - Any ideas you might have for potential instructors (and info about what credentials and experience c.s. instructors need)
 - Scribe will note your feedback

Finishing off

- Thanks for your participation – your energy, time and commitment
- If you're interested in the results – they'll be posted (put the details in their packages)
- If you think of anything else that you'd like to add – my email address

