

Surveying Student Needs



Questions: Students and Focus Groups

1. Please tell us about your experiences as a regional student. Why are you taking courses at this UNBC regional Campus? What is your degree plan or what courses are you mainly taking. What opportunities and advantages do you find here, as opposed to Prince George or at other southern universities?
2. What kind of challenges, barriers and frustrations have you encountered while learning in this community? Where or to whom do you go to for support when you need help related to overcoming these issues?
3. What does the term "student services" mean to you? What do you think of? What should the main goal of a student service be?
4. What have your experiences with student services been like while learning in a regional community? Can you tell us a story about using a student service?
5. If you could invent an ideal service for students at regional campuses, what would it look like?



What's Good?

Regional Library Services

Without exception, students praised the services of the Regional Services Librarian, Nancy Black, and her staff. Their services were perceived as excellent in regard to response time, quality of responses, assistance with research skills, help with advice on payments or library accounts. As one student explained:

"While there is no opportunity to browse for resource materials locally, I can't over-emphasize the wonderful and crucial support I have received from the regional library staff in PG – couldn't have done it without them."

Regional Services Coordinators

Students in the South-Central and Peace River-Liard Regional Campuses commented that the support of the Regional Services Coordinators greatly assisted them with administrative, academic and personal issues. According to one student:

"The regional secretary is a lifeline for all regional students. She takes as much personal and professional interest in each and every student as her schedule will allow. She assists in filling out all forms for registration and otherwise walks students through the processes, but has limited time. She assists in the retention of students by providing information on course offerings, forms, registration, Calendar information, academic advising, questions, and directly checks on students who need to declare a major."



Summary of Findings – What Can We Do Better?

Student Support	Learning Support & Counselling	Student Life	Administration
<p>Students at regional campuses need the services provided to those at the main Prince George campus:</p> <p><i>"Regional students need all the same ancillary support services – academic and career, advising, writing, learning assistance – with the possible exception of health care and social support, which they already have in their own community. There is minimal to no coverage available to answer these needs from our partner Colleges who are themselves understaffed in these areas."</i></p> <p>Regional student do not receive the same level of service as their PG counterparts. Students indicated their desire to have access to academic advising, local tutors, recreational facilities, a Registrar familiar with regional programs and connections to locally available services. Students sometimes need help to get in touch with academic advisors, faculty advisors, and other student support services.</p>	<p><i>"There are needs for tutoring services, study skills workshops, writing improvement services, computer use training and support, library skills, etc., that are not being fully met. Instructors try to provide some of these services, but they are not able to do so within the class time available and still meet the educational objectives of their courses."</i></p> <p>Respondents acknowledged that some student services personnel came out sometimes at the beginning of the semester, or on a request basis, and then were not seen again. There is no regular plan for the delivery of specialist services such as learning or writing skills, advising or counselling. Accessing these services from a distance was not seen as a viable proposition.</p> <p>In two regions students found that having no personal counselling was a major drawback and that visits from student services staff were too infrequent.</p>	<p>Students require different supports at regional campuses because they are unlike those at the PG campus: Demographic profile – mature, working part or full time, majority are women with children;</p> <p>Higher proportion of First Nations and rural students;</p> <p>Higher proportion of graduate students;</p> <p>Focus on professional programs;</p> <p>Experience of isolation;</p> <p>Frustration with completing administrative tasks at a distance;</p> <p>Need help to understand policies and regulations.</p> <p><i>"Access to affordable and meaningful education that fits within the constraints of their lives, homes, jobs and geography is paramount. People want a university caliber education, exposure to ideas and discussion and the support to pursue these goals. They want university here in the north for the north."</i></p>	<p>Many student concerns were summed up by a respondent who noted that:</p> <p><i>"Most of the complaints related to student services originate with problems students are having dealing with Prince George, primarily the Registrar's Office, but also Finance, Co-op and Advising. Students are also not happy with the fact that they get almost nothing for the student society fees that they pay. Students often report that, although they have declared major, no-one from the Program has contacted them about advising."</i></p> <p>Other frustrations involved delays in getting responses from people at the PG campus, or being shunted from one administrator to the next before being told to call back. Also regional offices did not have effective systems in place to facilitate administrative or academic processes such as real-time registration, text book orders, and tuition payments.</p>

How can we do it better?

Respondents suggested the following:

- Hire a Student Services Assistant in each regional office; to service all sites in that sub-region, providing learning skills (workshops & individual assistance), career and academic advising;
- Contract a personal counsellor/counselling firm to provide emergency or crisis personal counselling in two centres in each region;
- Develop a network of peer tutors at each regional campus — focus on writing, math, adjustment/transition, computer skills;
- Routinize regional visits by Academic Advisors;
- Make arrangements with local businesses within the communities to provide discount services for recreational, fitness, health and wellness and other such areas that students on the PG campus have access to [this has been done in some regions];
- Provide a regional student service 'trouble shooter' on the PG campus to respond to student enquiries related to registrarial services, academic advising, financial aid, scholarships and other related queries;
- Develop closer ties with the First Nations Centre and Northern Advancement Program personnel.