

North Idaho College
Long Range Visioning and Planning
Multi-Methodology Executive Summary Report
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Prepared by:

Robinson Research
1206 N. Lincoln St., Suite 200
Spokane, Washington 99201-2559
(509) 489-4361
E-mail: billr@robinson-research.com

Statement of Methodology

As part of a multi-methodology study, Robinson Research was commissioned by North Idaho College's Long Range Visioning and Planning Committee to conduct focus groups, two phone surveys and an online survey. The purpose of the studies was to evaluate attitudes and perceptions regarding NIC to assist with NIC's Long Range Visioning and Planning.

Focus Groups

Robinson Research conducted a series of focus groups on behalf of North Idaho College. A total of nine focus groups were held between the dates of September 6, 2011, and September 15, 2011. Groups were held with NIC faculty and staff, community organization leaders, business leaders, North Idaho higher education admissions and faculty, Spokane higher education admissions and faculty, and high school educators, Principals, counselors and Superintendents.

Business Survey

Robinson Research conducted a telephone study with businesses in North Idaho.

A 50-sample survey, in a universe of 3,000+, has a margin of error of +/- 13.85 percent, which means that, in theory, results have a ninety-five percent (95%) chance of coming within +/- 13.85 percentage points of results that would have been obtained if all businesses in the five northern Idaho counties had been interviewed.

General Public

Robinson Research conducted a 400-sample telephone study with adults in households in North Idaho.

A 400-sample survey has a margin of error of +/- 4.89 percent, which means that, in theory, results have a ninety-five percent (95%) chance of coming within +/- 4.89 percentage points of results that would have been obtained if all households in the five northern Idaho counties had been interviewed.

Student Survey

Robinson Research conducted a self-administered online study with NIC students.

A 400-sample survey, in a universe of 3,000+, has a margin of error of +/- 4.89 percent, which means that, in theory, results have a ninety-five percent (95%) chance of coming within +/- 4.89 percentage points of results that would have been obtained if all students had completed the survey.

Questions regarding this survey may be directed to:

William D. Robinson
Robinson Research
1206 N. Lincoln St., Suite 200
Spokane, Washington 99201
Phone: (509) 489-4361
Email: billr@robinson-research.com

Recommendations

Find ways to make parking more convenient. This was the most oft cited area in need of improvement across most subsets.

Form stronger relationships with Spokane higher education personnel.

Strengthen communication with business leaders. Larger employers perceived that NIC was not as responsive to their needs and ideas as it should be. It should also be noted that three-in-ten businesses felt that NIC does not do enough to reach out to employers.

Remain cognizant of the importance of the *Coeur d'Alene Press*. It was the number one cited source of information and new developments by the business community and the general public.

If possible, consider revising the Math 108 requirement. The perception that this was an unnecessary bottleneck was pervasive among higher education personnel from Idaho and Washington. It was referred to as the “algebra trap” in one group.

Acknowledge that NIC has more cachet than a typical community college and market that strength.

Tout the reputation NIC students have for their preparedness when they move on to a four-year university or into the workforce.

Raise awareness outside of North Idaho (Spokane in particular) so that if enrollment from traditional sources drops the school can compensate by recruiting more students from farther away.

Be aware that stakeholders have concerns that including NIC in a students’ education plan can cause the student to take longer than four years to achieve a four-year degree.

Address concerns about academic advising. Higher education respondents thought it “dangerous” that students could choose their classes without ever having met with an advisor.

Do everything possible to minimize waiting lists for programs and classes. Develop a method for apprising students of changes in their waiting status rather than forcing the students to constantly check-in.

Awareness of NIC

For every person in the general public who was not familiar with NIC there were twenty-five who demonstrated unaided or claimed aided awareness.

Based on descriptions of NIC it can be assumed that the majority of people in North Idaho have at least passing knowledge of the college.

Perceptions of NIC

NIC was most often described as being a good small school with a beautiful campus. With the exception of parking (which was characterized as negative across most subsets) and small (which could be interpreted positively or negatively) the majority of descriptions of NIC were positive.

Satisfaction with NIC

Most people were satisfied with NIC and the direction it is heading. The majority of respondents in the quantitative studies rated NIC above the midpoint of the scale, the highest scores coming from the business community.

Levels of Familiarity

The majority of respondents perceived themselves as being somewhat or very familiar with NIC. Focus group participants showed a high level of familiarity with the college.

NIC has a very large presence in the five northern counties of Idaho.

What NIC Does Well

The nursing program was the most oft cited strength of NIC, followed by their wrestling team, journalism program, and graphic arts programs.

Values

Questions regarding the values of NIC elicited few responses in the focus groups. When students were asked how well each value “fit” the college, most descriptors varied by no more than a few tenths of a point.

Advertising

A sizeable majority of respondents across all subsets reported awareness of NIC advertising. The proportion that could recall the messaging or purpose of the advertising (particularly when those who cited the course catalogue as an advertisement were removed) was significantly smaller.

Most respondents who reported experiencing advertisements mentioned television or the *Coeur d'Alene Press* as the medium in which they were experienced.

Media Coverage

Respondents who reported awareness of media coverage perceived it as mostly positive and fair. It was noted that very little coverage, good or bad, crossed the state line to Washington.

Information Sources

The *Coeur d'Alene Press* was often cited as the primary source of information for most groups. Students were more likely to report relying on NIC's website. *The Spokesman-Review* was rarely mentioned.

Campus

The beauty of NIC's campus received effusive and wide spread praise from all stakeholder subsets.

There was some concern that the trees along the levee would be removed; most agreed this would be detrimental to the school's aesthetic.

Parking

Parking was the one area in which nearly all subsets (excluding Idaho higher education respondents) were dissatisfied. Improve parking was the most often mentioned piece of advice in the general public, business and student quantitative surveys.

Complaints about parking were frequent and emphatic throughout the focus group.

Campus Technology

Technology that is available to students received mixed reviews depending on which specific program was being discussed. It should be noted that students generally held a favorable perception of the technology offered.

NIC faculty perceived the changing of administrative software platforms as difficult on students, staff and faculty in that they frequently have to learn new software.

NIC faculty spoke highly of the help desk, noting that it was a useful resource for students and employees.

Faculty

The faculty was generally perceived as good. There was some consternation regarding the trend toward having more adjunct and less full-time faculty.

Students generally rated the quality of adjunct faculty below that of full-time faculty, but the focus groups (none of which were students) did not show that perception.

Staff

The classified staff (non-faculty), as a whole, was generally perceived as good, however there was some concern that with the influx of students, there may not be enough staff to effectively run the college.

The Financial Aid Department was the second most mentioned area in need of improvement by students. Reading the students' verbatim responses is highly recommended, as the ones who did mention the financial aid department were quite vehement in their responses.

There was some concern regarding the quality of the advisors, though some thought this was not the fault of the advisors as they were overwhelmed by the number of students. Idaho higher education personnel were alarmed that a student would be allowed to choose his/her classes without ever having met with a counselor. There was also mention that it was possible to listen in on "private" advising sessions because of the poor sound proofing in that part of the building, though the respondents who raised this concern were not certain if this was still the case.

Administration

While perceptions of NIC's administration were mixed, most agreed that the current president (Priscilla Bell, PhD) is an improvement; however the constant turn-over of presidents was a common complaint.

Reaching Out

Three-in-ten businesses reported that NIC did not do enough to reach out to employers.

Respondents from high schools, Idaho higher education, and community organizations perceived NIC as very active in the community and doing a lot to reach out to other groups.

It was noted that NIC faculty and staff sit on the boards of many community organizations.

Academic Education

The rigor of academic courses was widely perceived as quite good, however, there was agreement that this was wholly dependent on the particular professor.

Higher education personnel from Idaho and Spokane perceived NIC students as being particularly well prepared for a four-year university. That NIC is on a semester system, as opposed to quarters, was considered a good thing for preparing students for four-year universities.

Professional Technical Education

The rigor of PTE courses were generally perceived as very good, though most agreed that it depended on the instructor.

Community Education Programs

NIC was perceived as offering a good array of community education programs and that these classes were easily accessible.

Communication

A lack of communication between departments was perceived by all groups that had direct contact with the college.