



2016 SEATTLE COLLEGES COMMUNITY SURVEY

Executive Summary

Community Survey and Regional Context of the Seattle Area

The Seattle Colleges traditionally has appealed to student populations characterized as low-income, first-generation, minority, or working adults. This trend, however, is starting to shift due to changes in regional context and local economy. With local employment rapidly growing in well-paying sectors such as information and professional services, the region's residents as a whole are becoming more educated. Overall, King County has a reputation as one of the most educated regions in the United States, with 48.1% of residents age 25 or older holding a bachelor's degree or higher in 2013¹.

Migration is another factor contributing to this shift. King County attracts highly educated citizens from elsewhere in the United States and the world. In 2013, over 60% of residents who moved to King County from another state or country within the previous year held a bachelor's degree or greater, compared to less than half of workers already residing in King County.

The City of Seattle alone outpaced King County, with 57.9% of the city's residents age 25 or older holding a bachelor's degree or higher. However, data across the neighborhoods within the City of Seattle vary. There are neighborhoods (e.g., Wedgwood/Laurelhurst, Eastlake/Madison Park, Wallingford/Fremont, University District) with more than 70% of residents age 25 or older with a bachelor's degree or higher, while others (e.g., Columbia City/Rainier Valley, First Hill, South Lake Union/Denny Triangle) have less than 40% of residents with a bachelor's degree².

The 2016 Seattle Colleges Community survey, a Seattle area wide probability survey of residents, highlighted these changes in the pattern of educational attainment of the region's residents. Of 432 respondents, 51.5% had a four-year college degree or lower, while 48.6% had some graduate school or higher. Overall, more than 70% of survey respondents had a four-year college degree or higher.

A total of 539 households distributed throughout the Seattle area were screened for eligibility in the study, and of those 432 eligible households completed the survey, while 107 households were not eligible due to lack of awareness about the Seattle Colleges.

The survey consisted of 50 questions encompassing more than 215 variables. The inclusive nature of the survey made it possible to examine the role of the Seattle Colleges in attracting students from all backgrounds and educational levels with the main mission of providing open access and affordability to those in its service district. The survey highlighted profiles of potential students, potential barriers that may keep prospective students from enrolling, and identified programs that might be beneficial to the residents in the area. This brief overview of the survey findings can guide future efforts of the Seattle Colleges in enhancing visibility and attractiveness to the residents in the area.

¹ Source: Data for educational attainment by place of birth, race/ethnicity, and new residents taken from the American Community Survey via the [US Census Bureau](#).

² Source: https://downtownseattle.com/files/file/Demographics2011_WEB.pdf

Principal Findings from the Survey

- **Seattle Colleges has high recognition.** Overall, the Seattle Colleges has a high level of recognition with 80% of respondents reporting they had heard of the Seattle Colleges prior to participating in the survey.
- **Respondents have an overall positive disposition towards Seattle Colleges.** The survey results revealed an overall positive disposition toward the Seattle Colleges when respondents in an open-ended manner were asked to describe the positive and negative descriptions that come to mind when they think of the Seattle Colleges. A majority of residents said it is affordable, conveniently located, and accessible to many people. Many made references to the good quality community-based education offered at the Seattle Colleges, affordable access to college education, good quality instructors, small class sizes, and a variety of programs/courses.

“I think they [Seattle Colleges] are innovative and they try to work with a wide variety of people and try to meet the needs of the market and the students.”
- **Respondents had few negative impressions.** Not many negative descriptions of the Seattle Colleges were reported. From the few that were stated, most mentioned parking issues, low-paid adjunct instructors, and the impression that the range of courses offered at the Seattle Colleges is somewhat limited.
- **Education quality is positive.** Opinions regarding the quality of education provided by the Seattle Colleges were overwhelmingly positive. A majority of residents as well as employers in the area believe that the Seattle Colleges provide a great educational value. The same trend was observed regarding the perceived value of an associate degree from the Seattle Colleges, with a majority of residents believing its value to be very good or good. Technical training from the Seattle Colleges is respected by employers. A majority of employers would hire a Seattle Colleges graduate as well as consider the Seattle Colleges for training opportunities for their employees.

“Best teachers I have ever had. Better than my professors at both University of Washington and the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen.”
- **Programs and services are important.** Practically all the services and programs included in the survey were viewed as extremely important or very important by more than a half of residents regardless of the usage of these services. This indicates the importance of availability of these services in the community. At the top of the list were access to classes in the evening and weekends, services enhancing connections with employers, instruction in career fields, job training, and certificate programs.
- **Access to 4-year college and university programs are important.** Additionally, the residents ranked important the importance of access to 4-year college and university programs through the Transfer Center, assistance available to students who are not ready for college, and English language classes for those who speak other languages. Apprenticeship degrees and associate degrees provided by the Seattle Colleges were ranked as important by

more than 70 % of residents, while bachelor’s degrees were deemed as important by more than 59% of the residents.

- **Respondents cited a range of reasons for enrollment.** *Former students and potential students* cited a variety of reasons for enrolment. The four primary reasons for former students were to satisfy a personal interest, get a new job, earn credits to transfer to a 4-year college or get an associate degree. The top four reasons cited by potential enrollees were taking self-enrichment classes, getting job training to advance career, exploring different kind of jobs or careers, and earning a certification. In general, the better educated the population, the greater the interest in “self-enrichment studies,” but the same trend was observed for lower-income survey respondents.

“Share more information about adult continuing education classes.”
- **Information technology, health care, adult basic education, manufacturing, and professional and scientific services are of greatest interest.** The survey also explored the relationship between the Colleges’ program base and its ability to be market responsive. According to the survey data, the major program areas of interest include health care, information technology, professional and scientific services, manufacturing, and business and administrative services. The importance of programs varied by population segment. For residents who are interested in job training (those who presumably are already employed), information technology, health care and adult basic education were the top three choices. For low-income residents, information technology, manufacturing and professional and scientific services ranked among the top three.
- **Programs offered align with industry trends.** Interest in these programs is aligned with overall employment growth in major industry sectors in King County: professional and business services, government, education and health services, retail trade, leisure and hospitality, construction and manufacturing³. Most of these industries (e.g. construction, computer systems design, education and health services) are expected to continue to experience growth into the future. This growth also creates strong incentives to upgrade the basic skills of recent immigrants and lower-income residents, so they can get entry-level jobs with career paths.
- **Class times, locations, and online services are key factors for enrollment.** For potential enrollees, the main deciding factors as to whether to attend college classes are the times the classes are offered, location of the classes, online student services (registration, orientation), parking, and having a program of interest offered. For residents, who are interested in job training, in addition to already mentioned factors, getting time off from work is also an important factor. For low-income residents, financial aid is at the top of the list of main deciding factors for enrollment.

“I always read the brochures to see if there are classes I want to take.”

³ Source: King County Profile by Anneliese Vance-Sherman, Ph.D., regional labor economist updated September 2015 retrieved at: <https://fortress.wa.gov/esd/employmentdata/reports-publications/regional-reports/county-profiles/king-county-profile>

- **Evening, weekend and online classes are key.** It is very important for potential enrollees, regardless of their educational interest, that the Seattle Colleges offer classes in the evening and on weekends. Many ranked online classes or hybrid classes as very important. With the explosion of online offerings and programs, the Seattle Colleges has to continue to broaden the online programming and provide online support services for the students choosing online delivery of degrees.
- **Maintain visibility through direct mailings.** The survey results suggest that in order to maintain visibility within the communities and keep residents aware of its services and programs, the Seattle Colleges should continue using direct mailings. The residents, when asked whether they had seen or heard any information about the Seattle Colleges in the last year, were most likely to recall receiving home mailings of class schedules. Traditional media such as brochures and other admission materials, local newspapers, or billboards were also found to be valuable for promoting the Seattle Colleges' academic programs and services.
- **Residents want to learn more about the Seattle Colleges.** The survey also explored the type of information the residents would like to learn about the Seattle Colleges. Some themes that emerged from the open-ended comments included information about continuing education for adults, information about the Running Start program, enrichment offerings (culinary, arts, local history) or practical programs (coding, web design), and information about community events. There is also an interest in personal testimonials, especially about how well students do in 4 year settings after community college, stories of engagement in the surrounding communities, and accounts of recruiting community members to volunteer as tutors.
- **“Word of mouth” is a useful marketing tool.** Finally, the Seattle Colleges relies on “word of mouth” marketing tool which is one of the most trusted forms of advertising. In fact, almost half of survey respondents reported hearing information about the Seattle Colleges from other people. Establishing lasting, mutually beneficial relationships with members of the community can ensure that the Seattle Colleges can achieve its goals of promoting services and educating the public.

“I have a friend taking courses there to prepare for a medical program, and another friend taking a career course.”