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For immediate release

Odessa College completes environmental scan of community's needs

ODESSA (Aug. 3, 2010) – Odessa College has just completed an environmental scan of Ector County that has taken more than a year. The research was focused on identifying critical community needs and issues that need to be addressed. According to Odessa College president Dr. Gregory Williams, the downturn in the economy has made Odessa College even more critical to the community. “While we have always responded to the local needs for associate degrees, college transfer and job retraining, this economic shift has brought out new needs that must be met. But first, they must be clearly identified,” he said.

During the last year, the college held community listening sessions and public feedback meetings with community leaders, parents and working adults as well as interviews with numerous local business leaders. OC also conducted employee focus groups with each of its departments. All participants were asked to weigh-in on what Odessa College is doing well, what it should improve and what future needs they see. Members of the Odessa College administrative staff attended the meetings to hear first-hand what people had to say. Once the information was gathered, the data were turned over to Interact Communications for analysis.

“We were pleased to see that the community feels we are providing a quality education in both transfer and career education,” Williams said. “Responses also show they see the college as a key provider of a trained workforce, as well as part of the cultural fabric. Plus, the fine arts, music and theater programs were mentioned as central to the community experience,” Williams said, adding that the three most frequently mentioned strengths of Odessa College were the value of the education (good quality for low cost), its open door policy that allows students of all experiences access to higher education, and the faculty who are focused on student success.”

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According to Dr. Tanya Hughes, Odessa College chief of staff, the community gatherings also identified areas where the college can improve. “They told us we need to work on increasing our outreach to the community, as well as responding to expanding needs for employment training.”

The most frequently identified community needs were facilities that mirror work environments as well as increased training in career and technical, medical, and public safety fields.

The business community still is worried about the overall business environment, citing concern for the lack of diverse jobs in the region and available skilled workers. But three out of four business leaders say they have heard about or experienced good things from Odessa College. Nine out of 10 say Odessa College is important to the community’s future, with 71 percent saying it is “very important.”

“What is clear,” Williams said, “is Odessa College must respond to the community need for career and technical training, trained medical staff and emergency services, while updating our classrooms and expanding the opportunities for our communities.” He concluded, “We have taken the community’s praise, concerns, and their needs to heart.”