

## Bitterroot College Program

Four presentations made in January 2010 to: Hamilton City Council, Stevensville, Darby and Pinesdale Town Councils. Feedback was subsequently received from councilors and mayors. The main concerns seem to be convenience (particularly providing on-line classes to eliminate driving) and containing costs by using existing facilities.

### Some ideas:

- Political Science class with discussion centered on political issues of local, state and regional importance. Rationale: Citizens in the Bitterroot are politically involved but not always accurately informed. A Political Science class could provide the opportunity for college credits and accurate information about important local issues at the same time.
- The need exists for the Bitterroot College to be a clearinghouse of information for non-traditional students, e.g.:
- Access to academic advisors;
- Information and assistance obtaining financial assistance;
- Information on transportation from the Bitterroot to UM or COT
- Assistance in navigating the university system's website, especially for online classes;
- Assistance in designing a curriculum leading to a degree that incorporates both online classes (anywhere within the university system) and on campus classes;
- Assistance in accessing online classes outside the university system.

### Other ideas:

- Utilization of existing schools and libraries across the valley for online classes.
- Combination of online classes and on-campus classes for students who have chosen a major, and assistance in designing that course of study.
- Provide a central location for students to meet with a video link to the on-campus instructor. This would allow students to meet together in a "traditional" classroom setting without having to drive to Missoula, and it could provide additional opportunities linking students to campuses too far to drive, i.e.: Butte, Billings, MSU.
- Course offerings focusing on preparedness and self-sufficiency for individuals and families, e.g.: emergency preparedness, food processing and storage; and energy independence for homeowners, e.g.: solar panel installation, windmills, etc.
- If possible and where necessary, offer duplicate courses for specific groups of shift workers taking job-attached certification courses.
- Recognize that many students will be non-traditional adapting to a different economy that is service-based. Offer business, computer, public administration and management courses. "We don't need to know how to fall a tree anymore."

Meeting with Linda Guzik, April 21, 2010:  
Needs for TCJC:

TCJC is undergoing a transition, and is tasked with adding additional classes. By January 2011, they hope to add “Medical Informatics” which includes medical transcribing, health unit coordination and insurance claims processing. The instructor has been chosen and will teach foundation office administration courses, but she will need additional resources to add the more in-depth classes. The BCP could assist with linking TCJC with the necessary courses offered elsewhere in the UM system. (Or make those courses available if they’re not offered?)

Additionally, more than half the students at TCJC are from out-of-state and if they are to take advantage of BCP - either online or on-campus presumably – they’ll need tuition assistance (or possibly a waiver from out-of-state tuition?)

She further suggests that the BCP could offer the first two years of general studies curriculum online for those seeking a traditional four-year academic degree.

Per conversation with one individual on April 22, 2010

- Identify the good jobs in the county, eg: lab techs and similar jobs at RML and GSK; MDMH jobs, etc.
- Offer academic/vocational courses geared toward helping people become qualified for those jobs.
- Offer live, interactive classes off campus via video.

May 6: Community conversation with five Hamilton residents: teachers, administrators, a pediatrician and one nutritionist:

- Keep people in the community and transition them off welfare and to jobs by offering basic job training, eg: word processing, learning to use the Internet, excel, QuickBooks, technology courses.
- Provide education for people ready to move to college, but not ready for a college campus for whatever reason.
- Provide education for professionals who need continuing education credits, eg: teachers and administrators need continuing education every five years to keep license current. Currently, teachers shop around for the cheapest credit fees; BCP could offer those courses locally.
- “You’re going to live or die with kids.” Many students cannot afford the drive, the athletic fees, dorm living, health and parking fees. Many recent high school graduates are not ready for college because they’re too intimidated by a college campus, too immature to leave home, don’t have any academic or vocational direction or don’t have the money. Recognize this and address those needs.
- Ravalli County does a poor job of providing health and mental health services. Offer “allied health” classes, such as basic biology, nutrition, etc. Recognize that the demographic is moving toward an aging population, and those folks need basic health and mental health classes.
- BCP could be a service coordinator, or an education broker, by linking students with the many and varied services they need, from financial assistance, academic or vocational advice.

Several common themes that are not detailed here emerged from these discussions. They are:

- **Education as a means to a job:** Identify the county's largest employers and their needs, then offer the classes, training, continuing education or certifications necessary for people to get these jobs, or to retain existing jobs by offering local classes.
- **Offer on-line classes.** This was expressed by many people. I suspect there are a few reasons for this: Many people do not, or cannot, take the time or have the means to drive to Missoula for classes. Also, people do not want to pay taxes to build and/or support a bricks and mortar college when there are many public buildings that could be used for classroom teaching, including public libraries, churches and schools.
- **Link students to services, regardless of what or where those services may be.** Some students may need only information on how to obtain financial assistance; others may need help navigating online services; others may need assistance coordinating both on-line and on-campus classes in pursuit of a degree.