

**PHOENIX COLLEGE  
COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

**PROJECT SUMMARY**

**Study 98-1414 Summarizing**

<b>Student / Employee Focus Group</b>	<b>(97-1396)</b>
<b>Former Student Survey</b>	<b>(97-1398)</b>
<b>Local Employers Survey</b>	<b>(98-1406)</b>

# **PHOENIX COLLEGE COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT PROJECT SUMMARY**

During the months of December 1997 and January 1998, O'Neil Associates of Tempe, Arizona, conducted a multi-part opinion study for Phoenix College (PC). The purpose of this study was to gauge the attitudes and opinions of two broad groups of stakeholders in the college: PC's direct customers (i.e., its students) and its indirect customers (i.e., local employers). With an eye toward collecting information and insight that could prove useful to PC officials in developing the college's next marketing plan, we explored students' and business leaders' impressions of PC, its strengths, its weaknesses, its facilities, its educational offerings, and its role as a trainer and educator of the Phoenix-area workforce.

This project consisted of three distinct components:

- A trio of *focus groups* held in early December at the Phoenix College Conference Center and moderated by Michael J. O'Neil, Ph.D.. These groups consisted of *current daytime students* (December 2), *current night students* (December 3), and *representatives of local businesses* that have special relationships with the college, such as employee-training programs (December 8).
- A *telephone survey* (December 20–30) of 301 *former Phoenix College students* who did not enroll at the college during the Fall 1997 semester despite not having yet completed their degree or certificate program.
- A second *telephone survey* (January 15–20), this one with representatives of one hundred employers located in central Phoenix, in the vicinity of Phoenix College—ZIP Codes 85003, 85004, 85007, 85012, 85013, 85015, and 85017, to be exact. These companies ranged in size from fewer than ten employees to more than five hundred; the median size was 25 total employees. All one hundred respondents identified themselves as a human resources manager, or the person at their company “who deals with employee training issues.”

At the completion of each part of the project, we produced a detailed report of the results for that project component. The present report, therefore, is intended to provide only a general summary of what we have learned from this study, not a comprehensive retelling of results. For further details, readers should consult the study's three primary reports.

## SPECIFIC CONCLUSIONS

### Attitudes of Current and Recently Withdrawn Students

- **STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES.** When asked to cite Phoenix College's strengths, current students in the two focus groups highlighted the college's *wide range of subject matter*, the practical knowledge and experience possessed by its *faculty*, and the *convenient course schedule*, which includes numerous night and weekend options. When asked to cite the college's weaknesses, the current students mentioned the *financial aid process*, particularly its long lines, insufficient hours, and paperwork hassles. A few people also expressed difficulty *finding their way around the college, student parking, and registration*.
- **REASON FOR ATTENDING.** Most students, both current and former, said they enrolled at PC in order to earn a two-year degree or to earn transfer credits for a four-year program elsewhere. As many as one third of the respondents to our survey of recently withdrawn students, however, said they had been non-degree students enrolled at PC simply for personal enrichment.
- **FORMER STUDENTS.** Two fifths of the recently withdrawn students we interviewed said external factors such as family commitments or financial problems were the primary reason for their decision to leave school. Another 30 percent transferred or withdrew as planned—i.e., they were attending PC for transfer credits or personal interest and never intended to get a PC degree or certificate. *That leaves only 16 percent who left because they were dissatisfied with the curriculum or some other facet of school and another 13 percent whose reason for leaving is unclear*—most of the latter group saying their educational goals had changed which may or may not indicate a correctable, unsatisfactory experience at PC. Similarly, when asked to provide letter grades to two dozen specific items, *former students of Phoenix College demonstrated a remarkably high collective opinion of their former school*. As many as nineteen of the twenty-four items included on the questionnaire received a grade-point average of 3.0 or higher, including more than half (13) that scored higher than 3.25. Only two items received a score lower than 2.89—student parking (2.65) and on-campus child care (2.38)—and even for these two items, more than half of the students who offered an opinion gave grades of “A” or “B.” Not surprisingly, then, *as many as four out of five recently withdrawn students said it is likely they will return to Phoenix College in the future*, including half (47%) who said it is “very likely.”
- **LEARNING ABOUT PHOENIX COLLEGE.** Both the current students in the focus groups, and the former students in the telephone survey, said *word of mouth was the primary way they learned about Phoenix College*, rather than formal marketing efforts. Of PC's formal marketing efforts, the most effective appears to be *mass mailing of course schedules* to prospective students' homes—a significant motivating force for 46 percent of the former students, as well as a large number of the current students who participated in the focus groups. Radio,

print, and bus-shelter advertising appear to be less effective, although some former students did say such advertising encouraged them to enroll.

- **ADMISSIONS.** *Many of the current students said they found the admissions process to be confusing, arduous, and time consuming.* It is not clear to us whether this process is objectively more cumbersome at Phoenix College than elsewhere in the Maricopa Community College system or whether Phoenix College serves a specific population within the MCC district that is less comfortable with the process. It is clear, however, that the problems with admissions are far more significant for new college students than for continuing students.
- **ASSESSMENT AND ADVISING.** *Current and former students are broadly and generally satisfied with assessment at Phoenix College, but they do have some concerns.* For example, two thirds (65%) of the former students said the assessment exams could be more convenient, and 28 percent believe they tend to test the wrong material. These opinions echo those expressed by the focus groups' current students, many of whom complained that they ended up taking classes they did not need as the result of an inappropriate assessment exam. *Advising receives a less enthusiastic review, particularly from the current students.* Only one student in the focus groups, in fact, said he had a positive experience with PC advising. Instead, most find the process to be a more a "bureaucratic obstacle" rather than a "useful source of advice and information for students"—sometimes even a source of misinformation.
- **ENROLLMENT AND REGISTRATION.** The vast majority of students, both current and former, told us they registered in person, rather than via telephone, fax, or the Internet. *This preponderance of in-person registration, however, appears to be more a function of a general lack of awareness of alternative methods than a true preference;* in fact, students in the two focus groups told us that they are very receptive to the idea of registering by phone, fax, or the Internet, although they expressed some concerns about getting confirmation of their registered status. Likewise, nearly all students pay their fees in person with a check, credit card, or financial-aid voucher, mostly because they are not aware of other payment options.
- **SCHEDULING:** According to our survey of former students, a plurality (44%) said PC's class schedule would be most improved by offering *more evening classes*, while 33 percent indicated they would like to see more day classes, 15 percent more weekend classes, and 8 percent more distance-learning classes. There is little consensus regarding the preferred number of class meetings per week, although *night students expressed a general preference for meeting only once or twice per week.* Most students express *little interest in alternative classroom settings* such as videoconferencing or the Internet.

- **FINANCIAL AID.** Roughly one quarter (28%) of the recently withdrawn students received financial aid while at PC, with only three percent of those who did not receive aid saying they had applied but were turned down. Instead, most of the non-recipients did not apply because they felt they either did not need financial aid (57%) or that they did not qualify (27%). Most (79%) of these former students think learning about financial aid opportunities at PC is easy. In contrast, *current students described the financial-aid process as one of the college's biggest areas of weakness*, thanks to long lines, insufficient office hours, and paperwork problems.
- **CAREER PLANNING AND PLACEMENT.** *Career Planning at Phoenix College suffers from a lack of student awareness*; most of the students apparently have not heard of the program. In addition, despite the fact that students do seem to be generally aware of the job-placement services at the college, relatively few report using them—virtually no evening students and use by day students that tends to be restricted to part-time jobs “through school.”

## Attitudes of Local Employers

- **OVERALL SATISFACTION.** Area employers, both in the surveys and the focus group, expressed general satisfaction with their relationship with Phoenix College. Those who use the college to train employees said they PC provides trainees with skills necessary to their jobs and find it helpful not to have to provide training on their own. *But as was evident in the survey, these broadly favorable results are tempered by large numbers of “don’t know” responses and relatively small numbers of “excellent” or “very satisfied” responses.* In other words, support for the college is broad but not deep.
- **AWARENESS OF PHOENIX COLLEGE.** *Most of the focus-group participants cited word of mouth as their primary source of information about the college’s job-training services*; only two had the college approach them offering to set up a training program. Not surprisingly, then, very few survey and focus-group participants said they had heard of PC’s Business and Industry Training Institute or of the college’s ability to develop individualized training courses. In addition to the large number of “don’t know” responses we received to some of our survey questions regarding the college, this suggest that *Phoenix College’s presence among the central Phoenix business community is a relatively quiet one.*
- **PHOENIX COLLEGE GRADUATES.** Focus-group participants expressed *great satisfaction with the PC graduates their firms had hired*, finding them to possess both general and technical skills. Survey respondents also gave PC graduates relatively high marks—significantly higher, in fact, than the marks they gave to their current entry-level workers. *Nonetheless, the vast majority said they are indifferent about hiring PC grads*, and only two percent said they prefer PC grads to candidates from other schools.
- **CURRENT TRAINING.** *Three quarters of the local employers currently provide*

*formal training or educational programs to their employees.* Most employers are generally happy with these training programs, and very few plan to cut back on their training; therefore, *moderate growth in demand for such programs should be expected.* Most companies who offer training programs provide at least partial tuition reimbursement and schedule flexibility. The programs tend to be self-designed, but most companies rely to some extent on outside training/education agencies. They typically are held on company grounds, and most offer certificates or college credit to employees who complete the program. **Cost is the biggest hurdle for employers to overcome in providing training and continuing education opportunities to their workers.** Finding appropriate programs and finding enough time are also important considerations.

- **INTERNSHIPS.** According to the survey, *roughly half (48%) of the local employers currently offer internships;* less than one third (29%) offer *paid* internships. *Many of the focus-group participants said they would be willing to offer internships to PC students,* but only if the intern would be committed to being with them for six months or longer. Otherwise, they feel they would be providing the intern with training but not benefiting from this training themselves.
- **CURRICULUM.** Despite a general feeling that their current employees' greatest weaknesses are related to basic liberal-arts skills such as communication, writing, and critical and creative thinking, most training programs currently offered by central Phoenix employers focus on technical job-specific skills or on business-related training (management, people skills, etc.). ***This suggests at least one potential market for an expanded PC training and marketing effort: applied communication skills (business writing, public speaking, etc.).*** Participants in the focus group also said they would like the college to include leadership and general business training as part of the college's vocational training program.

## GLOBAL COMMENTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Throughout the focus groups and the two surveys, *we consistently found Phoenix College's students and employer neighbors to be generally satisfied with the school.* The education provided by PC is widely regarded as being of high quality, the faculty as competent and experienced, and the course schedule as flexible enough to meet a wide variety of students' needs. Even students who withdrew from PC before completing their degree or certificate program give the school high marks.

*This pattern of general satisfaction, however, is tempered by a handful of student concerns and a feeling among the employer neighbors that they are only minimally familiar with the college.* For example, current students in a pair of focus groups told us that administrative processes like registration or applying for financial aid or admission remain too bureaucratic. Options to register by telephone, for example, could be more widely available—or more widely publicized—especially for night students who want to register during the evenings. Most employers, meanwhile, appear to have had only limited contact with the school and its graduates; only a small minority, for example, had heard of the Business and Industry Training Institute. Local employers' generally favorable impression of the school, as well a fairly strong belief in the importance of formal training and continuing education programs for their employees, suggests that Phoenix College has room to expand its visibility and importance in the central Phoenix business community.

*This leads us to conclude that PC, as well as its stakeholders in the community, could be well served by an expanded marketing effort, particularly among local employers.* Word of mouth, after all, was consistently mentioned as the leading source of information about the school for both students and neighboring employers alike. Promotional materials targeted at students should emphasize current areas of student satisfaction, areas such as PC's diverse and relevant *curriculum*, its *convenient* class schedule and uptown location, and its knowledgeable and experienced *faculty*. Among employers, *PC should promote its ability to cost-effectively train (and re-train) employees in a variety of technical skills.* Contact employers directly, for example, and let them know about the Business and Industry Training Institute and the college's ability to develop and conduct custom training programs.

Finally, our survey provided preliminary evidence that *there potentially is high demand for business-relevant courses in applied communication (e.g., business writing, public presentation) or other applied liberal arts*—basic professional skills that would round out the technical training that employees receive and allow them to better handle the diverse load of job responsibilities they inevitably face. Very few employers

This report presents the results of a survey conducted for Phoenix College (PC) in order to assist the college in developing its next marketing plan. Between 20 December and 30 December 1997, O'Neil Associates completed full-length interviews with 301 former PC students who did not enroll at the college during the Fall 1997 semester and had not yet completed their degree or certificate program. This survey of withdrawn PC students follows a trio of focus groups hosted and moderated by O'Neil Associates for PC during the first week

**SUMMARY REPORT: Stakeholder Attitudes Toward Phoenix College**

of December. Two of these groups were made up of *current* PC students, and the material covered by these groups was essentially the same as that covered by the questionnaire employed in the current survey—that is, a general assessment of Phoenix College and its services and facilities. This report, therefore, discusses the survey results in light of what was learned in the two student focus groups.

currently offer such programs, even though communication skills and problem-solving abilities were cited in our survey as being employees' two biggest areas of weakness. To be effective and popular, however, such programs would need to be grounded in the “real world” tasks of private- and public-sector employment.



## STUDENTS AND EMPLOYERS FOCUS GROUPS

This report presents the findings of three focus groups held on behalf of Phoenix College. The groups were conducted on December 2, 3 and 8, 1997 in Phoenix, Arizona. Panelists in two groups consisted of current students at Phoenix College, with one group consisting of day students and the other consisting of evening students. The third group included representatives of local businesses that have special relationships with the college, such as employee training programs.

The primary purpose of the focus group research was to determine attitudes towards the college and various student services among current students and local business stakeholders.

All groups were conducted in Phoenix College Conference Center in the Phoenix College Advisement Center and were moderated by Michael J. O'Neil, Ph.D.

### Students' Attitudes Toward Phoenix College

#### *Strengths*

- When asked to cite Phoenix College's strengths, students mention the wide range of subject matter, courses offered at convenient times and faculty members who often have practical knowledge and experience in the field they teach.

#### *Recommendations*

- Phoenix College should stress these strengths in marketing and recruiting efforts.

#### *Weaknesses*

- The financial aid process is the college's area of weakness mentioned most often, with students citing long lines, insufficient hours and problems with paperwork, particularly if attending more than one college. In addition, students complain of difficulty in finding their way around the college and the parking lot as well as registration problems.

#### *Recommendations*

- Recommendations relating to the financial aid process will be discussed in a subsequent section covering this area.
- The college should attempt to improve signage around the campus and in the parking lot, facilitating students' finding their way around.

### ***Recruitment***

- Paralleling findings of the Maricopa Community College District study of 1995, the majority of Phoenix College students chose to attend the college because it is near their home or work. Many students selected the college for a particular course of study that was available at times accommodating their schedule.
- Most students cite word of mouth as their primary source of information about the college although several obtained information from a class catalog. None of the participants mention advertising as a source of information about the college.

### ***Recommendations***

- Since many students select a college because a particular course of study is available at times accommodating their schedule, availability of night and weekend courses should be emphasized in recruitment efforts.
- The college should endeavor to broaden the reach of its advertising to reach more prospective students.

### ***Admissions***

- Unlike the students in the 1995 Maricopa Community College study who described the admissions process as simple and easy, Phoenix College students find the admissions process to be confusing, arduous and time consuming.
- It is not clear to us whether this process is objectively more cumbersome at Phoenix College than elsewhere in the system or whether Phoenix College serves a District population less comfortable with the process. It is, however, clear that the problems with admissions and registration are far more significant for new than for continuing students.

### ***Recommendations***

- Phoenix College should provide students with specific step-by-step instructions for registration and make special efforts to ensure that these instructions are provided to new and prospective students.

### ***Assessment***

- Assessment tests that most students were required to take before registering in certain courses are perceived as useful by some students, but many complain that they ended up taking classes they did not need and that the test was inappropriate for the class they wanted.

### ***Recommendations***

- The college should consider using assessment tests more selectively and perhaps tailoring them more closely to the courses for which the tests are required.

### ***Advisement***

- Most participants have had to deal with the advisement process. Like the students in the 1995 Maricopa Community College study, most Phoenix College students have found advisors to be of little help to them and, at times, to be sources of inaccurate information.
- Virtually all students found the necessity of getting an advisor's signature on registration materials to be a bureaucratic requirement, serving no purpose.
- Only one student cited a positive experience with advisement. The majority of students find that the advisement process is fraught with advisors lacking in knowledge and operating in an inefficient bureaucracy.
- Observation: The similarity of the problems we found in this study in the area of advisement to the problems we found in our 1995 District study suggests that these are not unique Phoenix College phenomena and how intractable solutions are likely to be.

### ***Recommendations***

- Phoenix College should consider making advisement optional, rather than mandatory, for full-time students, as it currently is for part-time students.
- Advisors should be better informed about course requirements and information about transferring to a university.
- Advisors should be trained to be more responsive to students' goals and be able help them achieve these goals.
- The College should consider dropping the requirement necessitating students to get an advisor's signature on a course schedule before the being permitted to register.

### ***Registration***

- The vast majority of students register in person because they are not aware of the availability of telephone registration.
- Students would welcome the opportunity to register without having to come to the college; they are extremely receptive to the idea of registering by phone, fax, or the Internet—although they have some concerns about confirmation.

- Dissatisfaction with registration focuses on the confusing, time-consuming process as well as the lack of information about which might facilitate it.
- Night students also voice complaints about not being able to register during evening hours.

### ***Recommendations***

- Phoenix College should provide students, and especially *prospective* students, with information prior to registration, informing them when they need to register and explaining the process on a step-by-step basis.
- The college should publicize the availability of registration by telephone.
- Efforts should be made to simplify and streamline the registration process so those students do not have to wait on multiple lines in order to complete the process.
- Consideration should be given to implementing fax and computer registration, which would provide the students with, options which do not require that they be on campus.
- The college should consider publicizing registration times via handouts to current students given out in class.

### ***Billing and Payment of Fees***

- All students pay their fees in person with a check or a credit card, mostly because they are not aware of other payment options.
- There were no problems reported with the billing and payment process.

### ***Course Schedules***

- Many night students feel that the college should offer more evening and weekend classes, and provide them with more courses during these time slots.
- In order to accommodate their schedules, night students differ from their daytime counterparts in that they prefer classes that meet one day per week rather than classes that meet more often.

### ***Recommendations.***

- The college should examine the possibility of providing night students with more classes that meet one day per week.
- Consideration should be given to increasing the number and scope of evening and weekend courses offered.

### ***Financial Aid***

- The financial aid process is often cited as an area of weakness. Students complain of long lines, insufficient office hours and paperwork problems,

#### ***Recommendations***

- In order to alleviate the crowded conditions at the financial aid office, Phoenix College should consider extending hours, increasing staffing and offering students the opportunity to obtain financial aid information over the telephone.

### ***Career Planning***

Career Planning services suffers from a lack of awareness. Most of the students have not heard of the program.

#### ***Recommendations***

- The College should assess what student needs are in this area. Lack of awareness may reflect a lack of need. If needs are found that Career Planning Services can address, these services should be better publicized.

### ***Employment / Placement***

- Although most students are aware of the Employment/Placement services at the college, virtually no evening students have used it. Day student usage has been restricted part-time “through school” jobs.

#### ***Recommendations***

- Phoenix College should examine the rationale of restricting access to multiple job listings at one time.

### ***Curriculum***

- Most students attend the college in order to earn a degree or transfer to a university and express satisfaction the curriculum offered, saying it meets their goals.
- Most students express little interest in alternative classroom settings such as videoconferencing or the Internet.

#### ***Recommendations***

- The benefits of alternative delivery methods need to be communicated to students before they can achieve widespread acceptance.

### ***Other Issues***

Several other issues were covered on a limited basis.

- Students report no problems with transfer services, obtaining records, certificates or transcripts.
- Most are not aware of the tutoring service.
- Most students express no concern about parking lot security.
- A number of students complain about the high price of books at the college bookstore, claiming that off-campus bookstores offer the same books at lower prices.
- Students demonstrate no interest in the child care facility at the college or in student clubs.

### ***Recommendations***

- The college should consider awarding a contract for vending services to the vendor willing to provide the lowest prices to students, inasmuch as we understand the college makes no profit on these machines. With signage, this could win the college some student good will.

## **Local Employers' Attitudes Toward Phoenix College**

### ***Satisfaction With Phoenix College Relationship***

- Stakeholders express satisfaction with their relationship with Phoenix College. Those who use the college to train employees find that the college provides trainees with skills necessary to the job and find it helpful not to have to provide training on their own.

### ***Recommendations***

- Consideration should be given to using testimonials from satisfied stakeholders in promotional efforts.

### ***Sources of Information***

- Most stakeholders cite word of mouth as the source of information about the college's job training services and say they approached the college in order to obtain more information about training options. Only two stakeholders had the college approach them offering to set up a training program.

### ***Recommendations***

- The college should increase efforts to proactively approach businesses and provide them with information about available training options.

### ***Awareness and Usefulness of Programs***

- Very few panelists are aware of the Business and Industry Training Institute or the college's ability to develop specific individualized training courses.
- A number of stakeholders believe the Institute would be useful to them, particularly if the college implements their specific needs as part of the curriculum.

### ***Recommendations***

- Phoenix College should endeavor to publicize the Business and Industry Training Institute among local businesses.
- The Institute's ability to implement individual business' needs in training should be emphasized in promotional efforts.

### ***Current Usage of Phoenix College***

- Many stakeholders currently have employees taking skill improvement or training courses at Phoenix College.
- The courses tend to be narrow in scope, specific to skills needed for the job.
- Stakeholders express satisfaction with employees trained by Phoenix College.
- While only one panelist has had the college provide training at his company's site, several express interest in this option, particularly if the program is specifically set up to meet their individual needs.
- While a few stakeholders offer internship to students, most do not. Financial limitations are cited as the main barrier to offering internship programs.
- A number of stakeholders would be willing to offer internships, but only if the intern would be committed to being with them for six months or longer. Otherwise, they feel, they would be providing the intern with training but not benefiting from this training.

### ***Recommendations***

- The college should make efforts to inform local businesses of the option to have PC provide them with customized training programs at the company site.
- Since businesses are reluctant to use interns for a short period of time, Phoenix

College should consider offering students one-year internship programs.

### ***Assessment of Phoenix College Training***

- The college's ability to stay up-to-date varies by program. Panelists point out that it is easier to stay current in areas such as marketing, where there are relatively few changes, than in computer technology which advances rapidly.
- Panelists are generally satisfied with the college's training programs, which do a good job in providing their employees with technical skills.
- Some stakeholders would like the college to include leadership and general business skills training as part of the vocational training program.

### ***Recommendations***

- Phoenix College should make efforts to stay up-to-date on technology. For example, efforts should be made in the dental hygiene program, which is presently not keeping up with OSHA regulations.
- As an added value feature, the college should include some leadership and general business training as part of vocational training programs.

### ***Assessment of Phoenix College Students***

- Panelists express satisfaction with PC graduates who they find to have both general and technical skills.
- Some panelists would like the college be more active in sending graduates to fill entry-level positions.

### ***Recommendations***

- Employment and job placement services within the college should assess whether they should be more proactive. It may, however, be that some program's students are finding employment so readily that this is not necessary.



## FORMER STUDENTS SURVEY

O’Neil Associates of Tempe, Arizona, interviewed 301 former Phoenix College students who did not enroll at the college during the Fall 1997 semester despite not having yet completed their degree or certificate program. These interviews were conducted via telephone between 20 December and 30 December 1997 and were designed to provide a general assessment of recently withdrawn students’ toward the college—information that may prove useful to PC as it develops its next marketing plan.

Based on this survey, *our overall conclusion is that recently withdrawn students are largely satisfied with their experience at Phoenix College.* Most students left the school for reasons beyond the college’s control, and they give remarkably high grades to the school in nearly every area. While these former students do express some concerns with basic practical matters such as parking, on-campus child care, and the occasional registration hassle, they are widely satisfied with their educational experience. Our specific findings include the following:

- ***Reason for attending.*** Our sample of recently withdrawn students was evenly divided between employment-focused two-year degree seekers, four-year students seeking transfer credits, and non-degree students seeking personal enrichment. Three fifths (61%) of the our sample had attended another college before enrolling at PC.
- ***Concurrent employment.*** Three fifths (58%) worked full time (i.e., at least forty hours per week) while at Phoenix College. Only one in eight was not employed while a PC student.
- ***Reason for leaving.*** Two fifths of our sample withdrew from PC for external factors such as family commitments or financial problems, and another 30 percent transferred or withdrew as planned. That leaves only 16 percent who left because they were dissatisfied with the curriculum or some other facet of school and another 13 percent whose reason for leaving is unclear—most of the latter group saying their educational goals had changed which may or may not indicate a correctable, unsatisfactory experience at PC.
- ***Likelihood of returning.*** About one third of the recently withdrawn students have enrolled at another college, but only 6 percent have finished their degree. Of the students who have not since completed their degree, as many as four out of five said it is likely they will return to Phoenix College in the future, including half (47%) who said it is “very likely.”
- ***Report Card.*** Asked to provide letter grades to two dozen specific items, former students of Phoenix College demonstrated a remarkably high collective opinion of their former school. As many as nineteen of the twenty-four items included on the questionnaire received a grade-point average of 3.0 or higher, including more than half (13) that scored higher than 3.25. Only two items received a score lower than 2.89—student parking (2.65) and on-campus child care (2.38)—and even for these two items, more than half of the students who offered an opinion gave grades of “A” or “B”. PC’s combined GPA for all twenty-four items is 3.26.

- **Learning About Phoenix College.** Fully 95 percent of PC’s former students believe it is easy to learn about the school’s programs and how one becomes a student there. The most popular sources of information about the school appear to be related to “word of mouth” rather than formal marketing efforts. Half (49%) of all respondents, for example, said a friend or acquaintance was important in getting them to choose PC, while family members (27%) and employers (21%) also play a significant role. Of PC’s formal marketing efforts, the most effective appears to be mass mailing of course schedules to prospective students’ homes—a significant motivating force for 46 percent of the respondents—although radio (17%), print (13%), and bus-shelter (12%) ads also attract some students.
- **Financial Aid.** Roughly one quarter (28%) of the recently withdrawn students received financial aid while at PC, but such aid was more common among students acquiring transfer credits (46%), working part-time (42%), or taking mostly daytime classes (40%). Only three percent of those who did not receive aid said they had applied but were turned down. Instead, most of the non-recipients did not apply because they felt they either did not need financial aid (57%) or that they did not qualify (27%). Most (79%) students think learning about financial aid opportunities at PC is easy—23 percent “very easy.”
- **Enrollment and Registration.** Most former students typically registered for their classes in person, although nearly one third (29%) typically registered by telephone instead—somewhat more common among evening and weekend students. Only a small handful of students said they mostly took weekend or distance-learning classes, with evening classes (53%) and daytime (44%) instead being the most popular choices. A plurality of students (44%) said class schedules could be most improved by offering more evening classes, while 33% indicated they would like to see more day classes, 15% would like more weekend classes and 8% would like more distance learning classes. There is little consensus regarding the most preferred number of class meetings per week. Finally, most students did not ever have problems registering for a class at their preferred class time, but as many as 45 percent of the day students and 34 percent of the evening students said they were unable to register for a preferred class time at least “occasionally.”
- **Assessment and Advising.** Roughly one third each of the recently withdrawn students said they had used the assessment (30%) or the advising (29%) procedures while at Phoenix College. Users of these services appear to be broadly satisfied with their experiences—90 percent agree with the statement that PC assessment is satisfactory, 81 percent agree that PC advising is satisfactory—but they do have some concerns. For example, two thirds (65%) said they believe the assessment exams could be more convenient, and 28 percent believe they tend to test the wrong material. Likewise, 45 percent believe it is too difficult to get an appointment with a PC advisor, and as many as one third (34%) agree with a description of the process as a “bureaucratic obstacle” rather than a “useful source of advice and information for students.”

## LOCAL EMPLOYERS SURVEY

O'Neil Associates of Tempe, Arizona, interviewed representatives of one hundred employers located in central Phoenix, in the vicinity of Phoenix College (PC). These interviews were conducted via telephone January 15–20, 1998. They were designed to assess the attitudes of PC's indirect customers—i.e., the purchasers of labor services from PC's direct customers, its students—toward the college's role in training and educating local workers. Combined with previous focus-group and survey research recently conducted by O'Neil Associates for Phoenix College, the results of this survey should provide PC with valuable information as it develops its next marketing plan.

Throughout this survey *we found that PC's employer neighbors place significant importance on employee training and continuing education and that, as a group, they have a generally favorable impression of the college. To some extent, however, this general pattern of support for the college might best be described as being lukewarm;* while we found nothing that suggests a lingering or incipient image problem for the college—we received very few unfavorable comments—it is also clear that Phoenix College could cast a bigger shadow. Respondents' favorable impressions of the college and what it offers local employers appear to be moderate and tentative, based on only limited contact and experience. Generally speaking, what they have seen and heard leads them to think that the school is pretty good—not great, but pretty good.

Our specific findings from this survey include the following:

- *Three quarters of the local employers currently provide formal training or educational programs for their employees.* Most employers are generally happy with these training programs, and very few plan to cut back on their training. *Moderate growth in demand for such programs should be expected.* Most companies who offer training programs provide at least partial tuition reimbursement and schedule flexibility. The programs tend to be self-designed, but most companies rely to some extent on outside training/education agencies. They typically are held on company grounds, and most offer certificates or college credit to employees who complete the program.
- *Cost is the biggest hurdle for employers to overcome in providing training and continuing education opportunities to their workers.* Finding appropriate programs and finding enough time are also important considerations.
- *Despite a general feeling that their current employees' greatest weaknesses are related to basic liberal-arts skills such as communication, writing, and critical and creative thinking, most training programs currently offered by central Phoenix employers focus on technical job-specific skills or on business-related training (management, people skills, etc.).* This suggests at least one potential market for an expanded PC training and marketing effort: *applied* communication skills (business writing, public speaking, etc.).

- ***PC receives mostly favorable general ratings from its employer neighbors. But these favorable results are tempered by large numbers of “don’t know” responses and relatively small numbers of “excellent” or “very satisfied” responses.*** The large number of “don’t knows” points to a larger issue—Phoenix College’s relatively quiet presence among the central Phoenix business community. Despite the presence of PC graduates and/or recent PC attendees in most companies, ***many respondents seemed quite unfamiliar with what the college offers in the way of employee training.*** For example, less than one fifth each (17%) said they had heard of the college’s Business and Industry Training Institute or that they were *very* likely to send employees to a PC training or education program. Similarly, the vast majority of respondents said they are indifferent about hiring PC grads—only two percent said they prefer PC grads to candidates from other schools—even though respondents’ average impression of PC graduates is more favorable than their average impression of their current entry-level workers.