

Downtown Alexandria Now!



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

February 2014

1. Why is having a two-year college so important to the Alexandria region's future and its **potential student population**?

The simple answer is "it's the economy, silly." Alexandria and Central Louisiana's economy, now and in the future, hinges on the capacity of its human capital. People like Jim Clinton of CLEDA tell us the best and only pure measuring stick for any regional success in the economic arena is whether the workforce can meet current and projected needs: "A community's development and economy are only as good as its workforce potential." Notably, according to CLEDA, 82-84% of jobs created in Central Louisiana over the next decade will require education beyond high school but less than a four-year degree.

The argument of locating a community college in downtown Alexandria or anywhere else in the region starts and ends with what is best for the student and a recognition that the decisions made about properly serving the student will ultimately impact the community.

The **potential student population** is that student body achievable in two to five years assuming moderate growth and sustainability. Data indicate the initial number is approximately 1450-1600 students.

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The single most important investment the Alexandria region can make now and for its foreseeable future is in its human capital and in building intellectual capital.

While considered a substantial expense to most governments, education is actually a critical investment, according to “Smarter Education: Building the foundation of economic success by IBM.”

“Education is one of the most fundamental investments any city ...or nation can make for its future because it provides the human and intellectual capital that are essential to economic growth in our increasingly knowledge-based economies.”

The returns from education accrue at both the individual and societal level. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development found that the more highly educated citizens are the more money they earn, which then contributes to more economic growth as these individuals also will pay more taxes over their lifetimes.

That is why having a top-notch four-year and top-notch two-year program is paramount. Not one, and not struggling or disadvantaged versions, but two best-practice systems functioning with all the community stakeholder support they can get!

Access, however, includes not only location but cost as well. According to the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, average college tuition and fees have risen by 440 percent over the past 25 years. That is more than four times the rate of inflation and almost twice the rate of medical care.

Clearly, this is not sustainable. We need a community college with more affordable and attainable educational programs that provide the opportunity for success in a student’s educational endeavors followed by workplace success because the student is educated and gains skills in those areas that fit the workplace.

2. What are the **employer-driven needs** for our community and how are they best served?

Employers need and want an educated workforce. While that seems an obvious statement, the point is the current workforce must have access to further education while still remaining employed, making location of a community college a key factor for the area’s employers. This can be slightly different from the pure mission of four-year programming —although four-year programming too has adapted to the ever-changing needs of student bodies.

Employers also must have an alignment between skills and workplace demand as well, according to “Smarter Education.”

A recent report from McKinsey & Company showed there were 3 million U.S. jobs unfilled due to the lack of qualified candidates, even with unemployment hovering around 8 percent.

The Alexandria Metropolitan Area is booming. Economic development in the area in 2013 has already resulted in the creation of 310 new direct jobs, 269 new indirect jobs and \$49 million in new capital investment. That is in addition to helping retain hundreds of existing jobs through infrastructure improvements, and it does not include the hundreds of jobs created by the private sector like BestBuy, the Courtyard by Marriott, Sutherlands Global, Hastings Bookstore, Staples, Texas Roadhouse, Chik Fil'A, and several other companies who expanded or opened new businesses in Alexandria during the past

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few years. A Golden Corral recently opened with additional new businesses set to come online this year.

Then, there are Sundrop Fuels and Cool Planet, which also are making massive investments in the area developing “green” jobs that will establish Alexandria as a hub for this industry and create cutting-edge new job opportunities. These additions are in excess of \$100MM in new capital investment, not counting the recent similarly high amounts invested by the two major private hospitals.

For employers, however, the needs still include a future workforce that is trained and educated, as well as a current workforce which has access to programs that will enhance and expand current skills.

As far as specific needs that drive community and technical college programming, the college system must do its research and be responsive to area employers through talking with those here and those industries which are coming. It is crucial that college programming responds to what current and future employers need now, in the next decade, and beyond.

In general, this is called demand-driven workforce development. We don’t tell the employers what training needs to be; the employers tell us what they need, and we tailor our community’s response.

3. What are the criteria that a community college **service area** should use in determining **planning** of this scale?

A community college must place students at the center and be a site of equitable opportunity and outcomes. The location that serves the most students by providing ease of access is key and by far the most important criterion.

Community colleges are a point of access to higher education for low-income and minority students. The community college access mission is built on **convenient location**, low tuition, flexible scheduling, an open-door admissions policy and programs and services designed to support at-risk students with a variety of social and academic barriers to postsecondary success (Cohen & Brawer, 1996).

Many of the assumptions made about community college students and the institutions that serve them bear little resemblance to reality, according to the December 2009 study, “Re-imagining Community Colleges in the 21st Century: A Student-Centered Approach to Higher Education.”

“Community college students have varying life circumstances, the overwhelming majority is at an economic level where they must work, and half of community college students work full time and can be considered workers who attend college, not students who work.

“The recognition that these are the students who attend community colleges should give a distinctly different perception of community colleges than is customarily held. Community colleges are also multipurpose institutions, and students have diverse goals, including short-term continuing education, retraining, critical intellectual development, certificate and degree attainment, and post-baccalaureate credentialing.

“A student-centered approach to re-envisioning each of the colleges’ primary missions will enable institutional leaders, in collaboration with policymakers and constituents, to improve outcomes for all students and achieve synergies between the

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three fundamental areas of community college education — developmental, occupational, and academic transfer.”

Accordingly, we think location is driven by student access to the college and the services needed generally for students and particularly for the “demand side” of programming for our specific region. Examples are proximity to healthcare partners for our region; linkages between the two population centers of Alexandria and Pineville; access to transit opportunities; and proximity to our burgeoning wood basket related spin off.

4. How can a city, and in particular our city, help with this critical **future-proofing** for our region?

Future proofing describes the process of trying to anticipate future developments, so that action can be taken to minimize possible negative consequences, and to seize opportunities. Resiliency, though neither synonymous nor sufficient to describe future proofing, is a major component as is sustainability. In planning terms, we need to think about what the demand-driven programming needs are today, tomorrow, and then into the distant future. What are the ways we can program for “knowns” now and ensure the best opportunity for growing relative to “unknowns”? A specific example: where and how to locate fiber backbone?

5. Why is locating the community college in downtown Alexandria important to Alexandria’s growth and development of its workforce as opposed to any other location?

According to a 2008 report by the International City/County Management Association titled “Local Governments and Schools: A Community-Oriented Approach,” the trend over the last 60 years, which caused school locations to be built more distant from the people they serve, is of particular concern — especially to local government managers and staff seeking to support economic growth, improve environmental and public health, ensure socially equitable development and preserve a high quality of life.

Smart growth policies, which have been adopted by the City of Alexandria, are in line with the most recent studies indicating that the siting of a community college better serves the students if it is located most directly within the community it serves. That does not mean there are not reasons to consider co-location with other institutions or other properties in the region. It does mean that each should be weighed in a process to consider initial feasibility (whether fatal flaws knock a site out before comparisons) and, ultimately, comparative feasibility (looking at sites against each other).

The ICMA study indicates that one way that school districts and local governments can help ensure continued support for education and investments in school facilities is to build schools that help anchor a community’s identity and provide services for all residents — not just those with students.

“Community-oriented schools are generally more sustainable and better for both students and the community,” according to the ICMA study.

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The NCHEMS Study, so heavily relied upon by our stakeholders, strongly suggested that the historically fragmented system be replaced by a single front door. The ICMA and NCHEMS studies, read together, provide evidenced-based and nearly conclusive support for the City's position.

6. Does the location of the campus in Alexandria allow the two-year college an opportunity to work with all other educational stakeholders, such as **dual enrollment** and **co-programming** curricula?

Yes. Locating the campus in downtown Alexandria provides easy access for high school students who wish to pursue postsecondary education. According to recent studies, dual-enrollment programs are particularly helpful to disadvantaged and/or at-risk students. These students, who are less likely to have personal transportation, would be able to use public transportation to meet the requirements of high school and dual-enrollment courses in a timely manner.

The presumed benefits of dual enrollment — the availability of rigorous coursework for high school students, college credits that are often low- or no-cost, a smoother transition to college, which should yield better odds of long-term success — address national concerns about academic standards and postsecondary access and success.

A study released in March 2013 by The Boston Foundation called “Stepping Up for Community Colleges,” found that students who accumulate credits and enter a program of study early meet with better outcomes.

According to the study “Re-imagining Community Colleges in the 21st Century: A Student-Centered Approach to Higher Education,” co-programming between a downtown two-year college and Central Louisiana's four-year campus, LSUA, located several miles outside the city, can be useful to both colleges and students, provided, however, programs are aligned, provide a clear outline and transfer pathways are clear.

Let us be clear, Alexandria Downtown Now! offers a comparison for best practice purposes to co-location but in no way suggests that co-programming is not a linchpin of success no matter what.

7. How important is the location of this campus to the largest population center?

Alexandria is the only metropolitan area in a radius of 110 miles. As such it offers the amenities and job opportunities that the average student/worker would need to be able to work, live and receive an education conveniently.

Alexandria is growing, according to Census numbers from 2010, and reaches a population in this metropolitan area of more than 153,000 people. It actually services a population of nearly 400,000 people, which is eight times larger than the city itself.

Alexandria is the center of a region with a potential CLTCC student population large enough to sustain a community college now and in the future.

In other words, siting this campus in downtown Alexandria means it will provide easy access to a majority of the students who need it.

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“Community colleges are the most inclusive public post-secondary institutions and have long-served communities that otherwise would not have local access to postsecondary education, and student populations that have not been able to realize the opportunities for personal development and social mobility afforded to others. These colleges have served as a refuge and a site of transformation for a significant population of students who, for a variety of reasons, cannot attend any other type of postsecondary institution,” according to “Re-imagining Community Colleges.”

8. True/False: **Co-locating** the campus with LSUA would achieve taxpayer savings.

False: The current location of LSUA is an example of urban sprawl costs although its location was not the result of sprawl. LSUA’s location — 7 miles outside the City — has not only distanced itself from the population it serves but also has taken tax dollars away from our community.

For example: Imagine if LSUA were in the City, the development and other efficiencies would be similar to those synergies we routinely see in other cities, such as Natchitoches, Lake Charles, Monroe, and Lafayette. Imagine the decrease in the cost of extending infrastructure, such as sewer and water, which could have been spent elsewhere.

Given that the current location is no longer an option on our community’s table, imagine if LSUA and the City had partnered to address LSUA’s need for a ball park and the City’s need to refurbish historic Bringham Field. These savings and partnering opportunities would have benefitted all and created attendance for both the City and the school. Co-locating the CLTCC campus at LSUA would, once again, take tax dollars away from the community as well as create another barrier for the community college student because of distance. It would isolate the campus for which immediate savings in building construction would be outpaced over the long term. Amortizing opportunity cost must be done over a sufficient period of time to realize the true savings (or not) for a given opportunity. If the campus co-location created an avoided cost of \$10MM in avoided capital expense but failed to achieve its primary purpose because of isolation, not only is there no true savings, there is a huge opportunity loss.

The ICMA noted the 60-year trend of placing schools more distant from the people they serve, does little to support economic growth, improve environmental and public health, ensure socially equitable development and preserve a high quality of life.

Smart growth policies, which have been adopted by the City of Alexandria, are in line with the most recent studies indicating that the siting of a community college better serves the students if it is located within the population center it serves. Smart growth policies create taxpayer savings because they couch economic development in efficiencies, such as locating projects and infrastructure in the heart of the built areas most likely to be served by those developments. Again, this campus should be the single front door in the population center it seeks to serve.

Underscoring the need for increasing *objective* stakeholder collaboration, the City relied on the single front-door notion to support its position while another site proponent promoted the notion that if the location were not at the promoted site it should be anywhere else but in Alexandria. This simply does not make sense.

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The returns from education accrue at both the individual and societal level. Savings, for taxpayers and, more pointedly, the student, come from adding human/intellectual capital, through education, to the workforce, therefore creating more citizens earning more dollars and sharing the tax burden accordingly — like using existing city comprehensive planning through its SPARC initiative to alleviate blight, joblessness, crime and other social ills.

Also, there are business partnering opportunities within the City that would cost the private sector unneeded expense, such as weighing the location of additional healthcare related resources in close proximity to hospitals and other health assets. A study of these reveals a clear choice in this regard.

9. True/False: Failing to co-locate the LCTCS campus would harm LSUA.

False: There does not appear to be any empirical evidence to support the statement. Studies show that transfer rates to four-year colleges can be improved and therefore help LSUA's enrollment in the future provided proper outreach, financing, more sophisticated data collection, common course numbering, institutional policy alignment across segments, joint-baccalaureate programming and technology-mediated information systems for students seeking transfer and baccalaureate attainment are instituted.

Let's be clear — the commitment is to the student.

“Community colleges provide benefits to an array of constituents, but their primary responsibility is to students ...,” according to “Re-Imagining Community Colleges.”

If a college is properly designed to serve the student's educational needs, then the student will be well served, and the two-year student who wishes to transfer to the four-year institution will have been provided the tools with which to do so by a commitment by both colleges to provide the things mentioned above. Most importantly, the transfer of those students by “2+2” is available wherever the campus is. It is a completely false dilemma to suggest otherwise, and there is no evidence to suggest the physical location of the students who might utilize 2+2 in a co-location outweighs the needs of the majority of students who will not go on to four-year degrees. These students who will not go on to four-year attainment ought to attend in the most conducive atmosphere for them: the primary purpose of the two-year school. This false comparison is nonsense from an educational standpoint, but like the cost-savings argument sounds great until subjected to further scrutiny. These are specious arguments at best.

If you design the two-year school as an adjunctive-only process to the four-year school — given the differences in mission — you might just doom both to failure. In fact, the national trend — and LCTCS' policy — would be to locate an LSUA door to 2+2 activity within the home of the two-year campus through its single front door, not the other way around. Remember, 82-84% of jobs created in Central Louisiana over the next decade will require education beyond high school but less than a four-year degree. This is the mission of the two-year school — not the four-year school.

Co-location is not a panacea to any four-year college's enrollment woes; neither is it a factor in transfer rates. Transfer rates are held back by roadblocks — a lack of communication between institutions, policies that don't align, cost, and a long-standing bureaucratic morass — bringing this argument back, once again, to the student.

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Both the two-year and four-year institution must be dedicated to tearing down the roadblocks and supporting the student's educational needs and wants. That is key in boosting transfer rates and LSUA's enrollment in the future, not co-location.

The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems: An Assessment of Community College Service Needs in Central Louisiana study (NCHEMS), February 2011, found that there is no single front door to community college education in our region and that "when it is everyone's business, it is no one's business."

A single front door to a community college cannot be found at the LSUA campus. In this case it also means the student needs would still be at risk of not being met.

The community college student is attending that school for a variety of reasons, many of which do not immediately align with the pursuits of a university student seeking a baccalaureate degree — although as stated 2+2 is critical and will be appropriate for some students.

Jeff King of StudyMode.com wrote "5 Ways a Community College Makes Sense Right Now." His article touched on many aspects that would be taken away from a two-year student attending school on a campus of students seeking baccalaureate degrees.

For the high school student, the transition to college can be easier if he or she begins at a community college where campus size is smaller and easier to navigate, and class sizes are typically smaller as well.

King writes, "Junior colleges are a notch above high school, but they also provide great learning and social atmospheres on a smaller scale."

Sharing campus facilities and co-mingling with baccalaureate students has at times created a caste system on campuses, according to some concerned stakeholders.

10. Is there any study or data that supports one location or another?

Plain and simple — and from the only expert opinion and the nation's leading opinion maker on the issues — the NCHEMS study concluded, based on population, commuting patterns, and related student service concepts, that a community college in Central Louisiana must be situated in the Alexandria Metropolitan Area. On further refinement of the campus location, the NCHEMS Study noted the following important points:

- The NCHEMS Study concluded that all two-year activity should take place behind a single front door of a unified campus site, moving our community away from the currently fragmented system. This would mean that student services and two-year programming all would occur behind that single front door, including those two-year programs currently at The Learning Center.
- "The distance from the center of the City makes this a less-than ideal location [speaking of the current Learning Center at England Airpark]." In this section, the NCHEMS Study is outlining that the current TCC, located in the City, should subsume all the two-year programming of The Learning Center, which NCHEMS suggests, is too far from the center of the City.
- The overall implication of the NCHEMS Study is that programming on the two-year college level should occur in close proximity to the City and include all aspects of that programming.

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We agree and believe the center of that area is downtown Alexandria.

11. What is the national standard for community college campus locations?

In 2007, Congress enacted the Energy Independence Act and directed the Environmental Protection Agency, in consultation with the Departments of Education and Health and Human Services, to model guidelines for the siting of school facilities (including colleges and universities).

Some of the criteria listed to consider included:

- Examine nearby environment in low-income, minority, indigenous, and other overburdened communities;
- Demonstrate how well-located schools can allow more students, faculty and staff to walk, bike, and/or use public transit to get to and from the school;
- Identify opportunities to serve multiple community purposes (e.g. emergency shelters, community centers, joint school and public libraries, gymnasiums, theaters, and community gardens) so that schools can become a hub for the whole community.
- Economic, racial and ethnic segregation are continuing challenges across the country. More diverse schools can provide educational as well as life attainment benefits to all ... community-centered schools can be part of improved educational, economic, community, and public health outcomes for students, families and neighborhoods

12. What makes the downtown location feasible with regard to location and programming of this community college campus for our particular needs and region?

The Community College Initiative finds Alexandria at a time of revitalization on a large scale in particular corridors of the City, including its downtown. The downtown welcomes the opportunity to first serve Central Louisiana with location of the campus within the region and secondarily by enhancing the commitments of the City and private sector in support of downtown investment. After first reviewing the needs of the campus in terms of feasibility, the downtown option is the only one that has a secondary impact of great regional significance separate and apart from the impact the campus will have anywhere in the region serving our needs. This is an opportunity for the downtown and a community seeking stabilization and growth. The campus, once optimized, would support additional food and beverage outlets, housing choices, and ultimately retail destinations. While this secondary goal must be considered only after the educational partners' needs are determined, it is an appropriate and timely goal of the City supported as a matter of public policy and as enunciated in multiple resolutions of the Alexandria City Council. Some of the feasibility undergirding any decision by LCTCS in favor of the City Downtown can be shown in these important areas:

Geographic Location - The Project's location. The downtown stakeholders can demonstrate the location as the highest and best area for a two-year educational campus.

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Improvement of Public Services - The Project has the ability to improve public services such as water, sewer, sidewalks, parking, improved traffic circulation, etc., to an area currently underserved or congested. Gateway, public green space, and other community assets and commitments are fulfilled along with, and made possible by, the servicing of the college needs.

Urban Renewal Goals - The Project is the highest version of a SPARC Project to date, with the ability to significantly further specific goals found in the current Urban Renewal Plan, such as the SPARC goals and aims.

Environmental Impacts - The Project poses little or no negative impact on the environment in terms of noise, contamination, dust, pollution, public safety, traffic congestion, pedestrian access, visual aesthetics, etc.

Technical Contributions - The Project would help address design and technological capabilities pertaining to the Community College Initiative needs.

Reporting by expert stakeholders and the findings therein address specific considerations, along with providing demographic and related information so decision makers may consider who the population to be served is and where and how that population center is best and most visibly served to ensure a long-term, viable Project. These considerations include:

Logistical/Feasibility Needs of Campus at Downtown Sites:

- 65,000 plus square feet for educational buildings
- modular growth or expandability quotient of the site
- parking availability adjacent or proximate to site
- public service efficiencies
- sufficient acreage for construction with access and visibility relative to major thoroughfares and interstate
- location consistent with population to be served
- transit system availability
- utility tie in and incentives availability
- varying proximity to ancillary student services and amenities
- proximity to hotel and convention space
- proximity to performing arts facilities
- proximity to governmental services complex
- funding match - \$2,800,000 - \$4,000,000