Bellingham Technical College
Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion
Listening Session Executive Summary
Summary 2025
By Anna Ebreo

1. Executive Summary and Key Findings

In the spring of 2025, Bellingham Technical College (BTC) held its third iteration of campus wide listening sessions. In alignment with RCW 28B.10.147, BTC's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Office, in collaboration with Institutional Planning and Assessment (IPA) Department, conducted listening sessions with the goal of gathering qualitative data from students and employees about the campus climate relating to DEI. The 2025 listening sessions were created with the intention to contribute to the already robust body of data that BTC has collected over the last three years of work, with the goal to help keep BTC informed and to assess the outcomes with the information gained in previous years. The 2025 listening sessions continued to focus on the 2024 goal of understanding what is needed to best support and retain all members of the BTC community. BTC held a total of six sessions, three for all students and 3 for all employees; a total of 53 BTC students and 64 employees participated. All participants completed informed consent forms and were given the option to give feedback both verbally and in written form via a worksheet with the same questions asked verbally during the session.

Respondents throughout the spring 2025 listening sessions shared an appreciation for the community and care at BTC through their interactions amongst students and employees. Students emphasized the importance of student resources and basic needs access to better their possibilities of academic success while at BTC. Students cited that interactions with staff specifically in areas like the tutoring center, TRIO, and the basic needs program made a difference for students, created a sense of belonging, or helped students get what they need to succeed. Employees spoke about how flexibility, autonomy, work/life balance, and remote work directly impact their ability to be successful and fulfilled in their roles. Concerns from employees also arose around work/life balance, large workload, ability to take vacation, feeling burnt out, and concerns for leadership, supervision, and the larger political climate of the country. Distinct themes emerged from both student and employee participants, and the overall report is structured around those themes. Below is a summary of the overall student and employee themes, key findings, and actionable items.

1.1 Student Themes

Main Student Themes:

- Student Resources
- Barriers to Academic Success
- Student/Staff Interaction
- Learning Environment

Student Resources

Students emphasized the importance of adequate academic and financial resources. Students described the impact of financial resources that allowed students to meet their academic goals like scholarships and grants, as well as institutional resources that support student achievement, like the tutoring center, TRIO and basic needs program. Students also made suggestions for improvement or areas where they feel resources are insufficient and held concerns for future access to resources due to the current national political climate.

Actionable items related to student resources:
- Continue to be responsive to changes at the institutional, local, state and federal level that impact availability of financial resources that students are heavily utilizing and that support retention (e.g., BFET, scholarships and grants, funding for veterans) to whatever extent possible.
- Increase support for programs that students are heavily utilizing and that support retention (e.g., Tutoring, TRIO, Basic Needs, Impact).

Barriers to Academic Success

When considering barriers to student academic success, respondents frequently mentioned struggling to balance school with other responsibilities and challenges with meeting basic needs. Respondents described that unmet needs or multiple responsibilities like childcare and housing are particularly widespread and have dire access issues throughout BTC's service area. One of the common reasons students indicated that they chose to enroll at BTC was to prepare themselves for a career that would increase their wages in order to come closer to meeting the economic demands of living in this region.

Actionable items related to barriers to academic success:
- Continue to support all aspects of BTC's Basic Needs Strategic Plan including addressing student needs related to housing, transportation, childcare, emergency-based funding, etc.
- Continue to increase outreach focused on facilitating student understanding of the resources available for them on campus and more recently implemented and related policies or changes like Children on Campus and expansion of basic needs program to include hygiene product distribution and storage options.

Student/Staff Interactions

The BTC staff and the campus community was one of the most common positive themes expressed by students. Many students shared impactful interactions including academic support and student services staff that made a difference for students, created a sense of belonging, or

helped students get what they need to succeed. Some respondents also expressed a general sense that they mattered as individuals, reinforced by BTC employees and that students' full humanity is recognized and valued in a way that students feel differs from other institutions or systems they interact with regularly.

Actionable items related to student/staff interactions:

- Assess the consistent use of standards for employee communication with students across student-facing departments
- Increase institutional support for student service areas that students indicated were valuable in supporting them to meet their educational goals (e.g., Advising, Student Financial Resources).

Learning Environment

Student respondents reflected on both positive and negative experiences with faculty interactions, use of the Canvas platform, and feelings of safety and support in classrooms, labs, and learning spaces. Students reported positive educational support around career readiness; employees help to make meaningful connections, network, and gain an understanding of the environment they will be entering once they complete their programs. Students also shared a large amount of program-specific feedback across sessions and formats, which will be shared through presentations on campus.

Actionable items related to learning environment:

- Implement additional Canvas, online teaching and learning, and communication best practice training for instructors.
- Continue to support institutional initiatives and work across campus focused on increasing career-readiness (e.g., career fairs, internship opportunities, field trips to industry sites, in-program activities like resume building and interview preparation).

1.2 Employee Themes

Main Employee Themes:
- Positive Campus Community
- Work Environment
- Tech Concerns
- Leadership and Supervisor Level Decisions
- Political Landscape and Funding Concerns

Positive Campus Community

The positive, friendly, collaborative and collegiate campus community at BTC was a main theme across all employee listening session data, both written and verbal. Many employee respondents

shared that there is a close-knit community at BTC and spoke of colleagues that were very supportive and collaborative across departments. Some employees also shared that the mission of the institution and commitment to serving students contributes to their job satisfaction.

Actionable items related to positive campus community:

- Continue to encourage and incentivize a campus culture of collaboration, kindness, and continuous improvement and preserve the mission-driven focus of the institution.

Work Environment

Many employee respondents discussed how their work environments were supportive or detrimental to their ability to do their job, satisfaction in their roles, and desire to remain at the institution. Employees shared how elements of the institutional work environment – like flexibility, autonomy, work/life balance, and remote work – directly impact their ability to be successful. Several employees also shared about concerning elements of their work environment like a lack of work/life balance, large workload, lack support for vacation, feeling burnt out or overwhelmed, a dearth of support from supervisors, or experiences with microaggressions.

Actionable items related to work environment:

- Conduct a robust assessment of workload across campus and identify steps, as needed, to improve workload parity across units.
- Engage in unit conversations related to employee remote work.
- Clearly communicate guidelines protocols around breaks and leave (e.g., vacation, sick time) to all employees, especially those in supervisory positions, that supports an asset-based community environment that supports a positive work/life balance.
- Implement additional employee training on how to support a diverse workforce and maintain appropriate and empowering workplace communications with a DEI-focused lens.

Tech Concerns

Technology concerns were another prominent theme for employees across constituencies and divisions. Many employees shared frustrations with BTC's technology policies and difficulties getting support. Respondents mentioned challenges accessing necessary technology for work, helping students with tech, experiences of email monitoring, and inconsistent and nebulous communication around technology use policies, procedures, processes, and rules.

Actionable items related to tech concerns:

- Create a better understanding across campus employees of cyber security risks, and processes and protocols to offset risk
- Establish transparent, institutional policies and procedures around technology, including technology access, use of artificial intelligence and communication about technology protocols or access changes that go through participatory governance system.

- Assess current technology needs and concerns in all work areas and adjust offerings to better support the mission of the institution.
- Establish consistent communication protocols and timelines for responding to employee technology use or access inquiries to maximize employee access and understanding.

Leadership and Supervisor Level Decisions

Many employee respondents shared feedback involving leadership and supervisor level decisions and institutional transparency. Several employees shared concerns regarding decisions about professional development and training access and equity, accountability and support for supervisors, standards for supervision across campus, and decisions made regarding hiring. Some employees also shared what they saw as positive moves from leadership, including increased professional development access and an increase in administrative cohesiveness with BTC's current president.

Actionable items related to Leadership and Supervisor Level Decisions:

- Prioritize filling staffing gaps when feasible.
- Create institutional accountability for supervisors to conduct annual performance reviews of all employees and provide an avenue for employees to provide feedback about their supervisors.
- Establish consistent protocols for sharing information with employees about leadership team-level decisions to maximize employee access and understanding.
- Create and share information with employees about how hiring and promotion decisions are made outside of the PARA process.
- Assess current professional development offerings and adjust as needed to better align with employee needs.
- Establish an institutional protocol of training, support and best practices for all staff who supervise other employees.

Political Landscape and Funding Concerns

Many employee respondents expressed anxiety or worry about the impacts of state or federal funding cuts on job stability, student support, student safety and ability to meet the needs of the college's service area. Some respondents shared that uncertainty around funding makes planning difficult and/or that they struggle with a lack of control over changes made at the state or federal level that are very impactful for their work.

Actionable items related to Political Landscape and Funding Concerns:

- Attempt to provide as much clear information as possible about federal and state funding in a timely manner; prioritize sharing information with impacted employees as quickly as possible.

1.3 Next steps

BTC is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion, and this value is upheld through the work of this campus climate listening session report. BTC is engaged in reducing institutional barriers and harm that students and employees are experiencing daily.

Data collected from listening sessions will help support the continued work of DEI and the DEI Strategic Plan on BTC's campus. The DEI Office and the DEI participatory governance committee will work to identify areas of focus for enhanced education, programming, and professional development. Additionally, the DEI Office and IPA will use the results of these listening sessions and this report to facilitate listening sessions in Spring 2026.

For more information please contact 하나 (Hannah) Simonetti, BTC Director of DEI, at hsimonetti@btc.edu with any questions about the listening sessions or this report.