The researcher identified current trends and emerging issues that potentially impact the future of South Texas College. The study is focused not only on highly discussed trends, but also on emerging issues identified by futurists and other opinion-leaders on the fringes. Indications of what may headed to the Rio Grande Valley in the future are based on observations and multiple hits on specific issues that were reported in newsletters, journal articles, conference proceedings, websites, blogs, magazines, researcher reports, futurists’ sites, and other periodic publications. The findings are discussed in their regional context to highlight any potential impact on the task, general, and global environments of the College. This study was intended to create an awareness of coming changes, to elevate and broaden thinking, and to set the stage for pro-active strategic planning. The findings are organized into the following categories: social, technological, economic, environmental, and political.
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Executive Summary
The researcher identified current trends and emerging issues that have the potential to impact the future of South Texas College. The study is focused not only on highly discussed trends, but also on emerging issues identified by futurists and other opinion-leaders on the fringes. Local, regional, national, and international findings are based on observations and multiple hits on specific fringe issues that have been recently discussed in newsletters, journal articles, conference proceedings, websites, blogs, magazines, researcher reports, futurists’ sites, and periodic publications. Observations from the literature review are then discussed in light of the regional context of the Rio Grande Valley and the potential impact that they may have on the task, general, and global environments of the College. This study was intended to promote awareness of changes that may reach the Valley in the near or distant future and which should be considered in order to be pro-active in strategic planning and in staying engaged in the shaping of that future so that the College is successful in carrying out its mission to improve the quality of life in Hidalgo and Starr Counties. The findings are organized into the following categories: social, technological, economic, environmental, and political. In addition to published regional information the researcher requested input from STC administrators related to their field of responsibility. The information provided is useful in fleshing out a local perspective on the findings.

The major social issues identified in this study for the College to consider during strategic planning revolve around expanded and purposeful collaboration and reciprocation of genuineness and caring with regional, national, and global partners for the common good. The recognition is made that social extremes are still prevalent in the Rio Grande Valley due to the mixture of people living in poverty and in colonias while people with wealth also reside in the area and live not far away. Studies are showing that the use of “promotoras” has provided the greatest success in programs to address social issues related to poverty. This finding may help generate ideas for methods to reach the adult population that remains underserved for educational needs. Due to the close proximity of border violence, the local populations may shift toward the Valley. Population shifts within Mexico have already been documented as a result of the violence. A sense of global as well as regional connectedness should be anticipated and should be encouraged as a venue for increasing mutual gains.

A variety of new technological issues were identified, as well as the ripple effects such as security and privacy risks. Virtual environments, or ‘bring it with you’ devices, and touch screens are only the beginning. Whereas administrators may be quick to think that these advances may not reach the Valley for some time, the research shows documented plans to bring new fiber optic services to the Valley and beyond. There is also evidence to show that organizations plan to make electronic gadgets and devices available for people of lower incomes around the world. The shrinking of the globe can always be felt when thinking of technological advances, as is the case here. New neighbors, new venues for outreach and interactivity, new security risks are all part of the anticipated future environment.

The economic issues can be summed up in a couple of words, uncertainty and hard-times. Frequent planning is encouraged during these turbulent days and years ahead. The College will need to be extremely efficient and fiscally responsible and innovative as will the students and their families. Watching what is on the distant horizon while maintaining close alignment with regional economic...
efforts will take some balancing by administrators. New and innovative packaging of programs and services will be critical. Posting of open positions does not necessarily mean filling the openings.

Environmental or international issues hit close to home when one thinks of where food and other products come from that the community buys from local markets. Local economies are impacted by the availability of worldwide food production and other goods and resources. Uncertainty in food production, weather patterns, and global economies lead to questions. Would the College ever need to develop programs for food production and agriculture? If the Valley lost its citrus crops, what would the impact be on local, state, or national distributors? What is the College’s part in promoting green technologies or helping to create demand for them? Can the College provide an educated workforce to support them? What about strange and unpredictable weather patterns? Are there rapid response teams in place to handle unknowns? What would global political power shifts mean to the United States? What would Valley residents do differently if the drug cartels took over? Or if the Valley suddenly had an influx of hostile terrorists coming across the border into our region to do damage to the United States, what would be the College’s role? What is the College’s responsibility to the community in such cases? Successful navigation through these types of scenarios is suggested during strategic planning to develop and refine the College’s agility, preparedness, awareness, flexibility, connectedness, partnerships, priority shifting, process modifications and backups.

Political issues are expected to remain the somewhat the same as they are now but become more and more intense in regards to education. The federal and state level pressure is not expected to diminish anytime soon regarding accountability for educational funding. The demand for graduates is escalating across the world. Decreasing access to funds has already been experienced and is expected to remain so for the foreseeable future. Maintaining faculty, staff, and administrators during these times will require innovative thinking and creativity to stay ahead of the competition of other global educational communities that are suddenly within reach. New policies regarding intellectual property, not only for faculty and administrators, but also for the protection of students’ rights will be required. Again, lots of uncertainty will be anticipated in this environmental sector.
Introduction and Context
Conway, M., (2009) from Thinking Futures defined environmental scanning, or horizon scanning, as “the art of systematically exploring and interpreting the external environment to better understand the nature of trends and drivers of change and their likely future impact on your organization.” Figure 1 clearly distinguishes this process from other critical information gathering processes, namely competitor intelligence, competitive intelligence, business intelligence, social intelligence, and future view.

Figure 1: Conway, M. (2009), Thinking Futures, “Where environmental scanning fits...”

Where environmental scanning fits...

This distinction from other types of information gathering provided a clear framework for defining the current purpose of study: to scan available information in order to provide a broad view of the external environment within which South Texas College functions, with a focus on major trends and identified forces or drivers that could change, shape, or influence the future of the College. The findings from this study are intended to complement and to be used simultaneously with the other forms of intelligence that the College administrators, faculty, and especially the offices of research, institutional effectiveness planning, and the data teams provide regularly.

Since strategic planning is about the future, the researcher has attempted to include emerging issues that may or may not develop into major trends down the road to encourage decision-makers to broaden
their context when thinking about the future. Forces and counter-forces, new findings from science, or innovative technological inventions or capabilities are an example of the information that has been identified for consideration in planning. Without knowing the future, planning is difficult, and it is imperative to recognize and consider rising issues long before they become common educational trends. This allows time for leaders to get engaged in developing future scenarios rather than simply responding to them. Sometimes ideas may be so new that they seem silly, as Futurist, Jim Dator said, “Any useful idea about the future should appear to be ridiculous.” One might question whether it is worth the time it takes to stay informed about these emerging issues. However, it is impossible to be pro-active if one does not know, or at least have an idea of, what is coming. Shaping Tomorrow, 2008, provided this bit of wisdom, “Competitive advantage comes from the periphery, from emerging issues – not from trends.” Trends are already in action and must be dealt with, but this is reacting to the past rather than preparing or shaping the future. This report provides a host of information combining both current trends and emerging issues.

South Texas College

In a recent (2010) publication, Celebrating Our Achievements: Changing Lives, Changing Communities, South Texas College presented the context of the College and its surrounding environment. During its brief 18 year existence, the College faculty and staff have focused on shaping and improving the future for their local service district, while at the same time ensuring that experiences and what is learned is formally and informally shared with the broader state, national, and even global peers and stakeholders.

South Texas College (STC) was created on September 1, 1993, by Texas Senate Bill 251 and House Bill 1102 to serve Hidalgo and Starr counties, which are located in deep south Texas along the U.S.-Mexico border region. It was the only community college in Texas to have been legislatively established because of the compelling need for a comprehensive community college to serve the almost 700,000 residents of the region, with over 95 percent being Hispanic and who previously did not have access to such an institution. In the fall of 1993, STC opened its doors to just over 1,000 students on the site of what had previously been the McAllen extension center for Texas State Technical College.

Today, STC is a nationally recognized and award winning comprehensive college serving over 30,000 students with 2,103 faculty and staff across five full-service campuses, one virtual campus for online students and programs, and numerous dual enrollment partnering high schools. The five campuses are:

- The Pecan Campus – Central McAllen
- The Ramiro R. Casso Nursing and Allied Health Campus – McAllen’s Hospital District
- The Technology Campus – South McAllen’s Industrial Park District
- The Mid-Valley Campus – Weslaco
- The Starr County Campus – Rio Grande City

STC’s student population is predominantly Hispanic and first-generation students. Over 75 percent of the entire student population is the first in their family to attend college, and as many students are participating in need-based financial aid. The students of STC are “heroic”
and rise to the challenge of high expectations established for them by STC. Their success can be seen in STC’s increasing number of graduates and university transfers.

STC is the third fastest growing community college in the nation according to Community College Week, offering over 100 associate degree and certificate program options, and is the only community college in Texas to offer two baccalaureate degrees. STC is situated in the southernmost part of Texas just 60 miles west of South Padre Island and the Gulf of Mexico. The college is committed to providing affordable access to a quality higher education and improving the economic vitality, social mobility and overall quality of life of the people of South Texas.

In 2008 South Texas College received the MetLife Foundation Community College Excellence Award for promoting educational and economic advancement. STC was one of only two institutions in the entire nation to receive the award.

Methodology

The methodological framework selected as most appropriate for this study was one of the more recent models for classifying observations from a scan of the environmental context of an organization. Environmental scanning is typically done prior to and included in the process of strategic planning in order to create awareness of changes and anticipated events on the horizon of an organization’s environment. Analysts have developed a variety of models for conducting environmental scans, each with its own acronym representing the segments of the environment that are included in the model, i.e., PEST, PESTEL, SLEPT, STEER, STEEPLE, STEEPLED, etc. The basic environmental elements or categories are the same, but some models include or exclude categories based on the specific need or type of organization. The selected STEEP model fits well with educational organizations and specifies the Social, Technological, Economic, Environmental, and Political segments of the external environment. A further description of each of the elements is provided later in the report.

This study is focused not only on highly discussed trends, but also on emerging issues identified by futurists and other opinion-leaders on the fringes of society. Experts in the field of environmental scanning suggest that an organization is wise to anticipate what is coming in order to stay ahead of the curve, rather than to defensively spend much time responding to the effects of past events and trends. Items that the researcher found mentioned multiple times, and that in the opinion of the researcher may be relevant to the future of the College, have been identified and listed in the findings. These will hopefully lead to some indication and discussion among College leadership regarding what might happen in the future. These findings have been selected from newsletters, journal articles, conference proceedings, websites, blogs, magazines, researcher reports, futurists’ sites, and periodic publications. Additionally, the College administrators were asked for input from their own perspective and personal observations.
Observed Environmental Trends and Major Issues
A recent recommendation to store managers that was published by the Follett Higher Education Group provides a great introduction to the intended outcome of citations of findings and discussion of them that follows: “New store designs (should have) a **futuristic and global vision while maintaining local perspective and affordability**” since “the world of higher education...is undergoing rapid, unprecedented change,” Community College Journal (2011).

Information gleaned from scanning the horizon of the South Texas College environment to identify forces of change that may impact current trends, or that may be the beginning of a new trend, is presented in the subsequent pages and organized under environmental categories or segments of the College’s external environment. The experts in organizational management have defined those categories within the external environment that should be monitored periodically.

Furthermore, Daft (2010) provides discussion on the interaction between environmental complexity and environmental stability, and states that during periods of great change planning should become more frequent. The College environment will most likely remain uncertain for the foreseeable future and will need to be monitored regularly. This systematic monitoring process is commonly found in administrative job descriptions. As more is learned about the various segments of the environment, within each segment, College administration must decide what strategies are needed. Balance is the key. Should the goal of strategy be to improve relationships with, or dependence upon other elements or entities in the segment? Or, should the College develop more self-control or independence from the elements contained therein? Perhaps both are needed. For example, in the political segment, the College must strive to maintain viable relationships with political figures, while maintaining its own independence and distinct reputation to uphold its commitment to its communities. Strategy development helps to maintain balance, by reaching out to, and shaping, or influencing the future of the various sectors, and also, building understanding, relationship, and mutually beneficial partnerships in order to access resources provided within each segment.

Each of the elements of the external environment of the College, or any other organization for that matter, has been identified and defined by planning experts. Where differences of opinion were found regarding environmental elements, the definitions from experts with academic, or even more specifically, with higher education organizational planning experience, were used. This study will explore the following environmental sectors: Social, Technological, Economic, Environmental, and Political (STEEP).

Social Issues
Daft (2010) and Morrison (1992) describe the social or sociocultural sector of the environment to include: demographics or descriptors of the population, values, beliefs, religion, culture, education, work ethic, and lifestyle. Social highlights from the recent literature were:

- **Observations of Social Issues:**
  - *Being alive* is crucial so anything related to better health and wellness is important, and the more customized to “me” the better, BrainReserve (2011); Trendwatching (2011).
• Arlington Institute (2011) cites BBC News reporting that nearly half of cancers diagnosed in the UK are from *avoidable life choices* and are extremely costly.

• There are some “border . . . health trends that mirror the nation’s . . . obesity, diabetes and heart disease linked to high-fat, low-cost diets. But . . . also . . . the unusual: rates of tuberculosis that are two times the state average and four times the national rate, and the lingering presence of Hansen’s disease, or leprosy, almost unheard of in most of the country,” Texas Tribune (2011), Department of State Health Services.

• Data show Border “(health trend) improvements . . . In the last four years alone, the number of residents living in the worst conditions dropped by 17,000, according to state data; 250 more colonias got potable water, paved roads and wastewater systems.

• *Flawsome*, Trendwatching (2011), and *Go Genuine*, Brain Reserve (2011) are two names for a growing trend that would encourage marketing experts to demonstrate an up-to-date, new genuineness, even if it reveals some flaws, which will appeal to consumers who just want people and organizations to be real.

• Collaboration, social movements, and partnerships across organizations and across fields of expertise are widely cited as critical to addressing social issues and hugely supported by social networking websites, Hammond (2011), Athena Alliance (2011), Sampson and Reardon (2011), Burns, Williams, et.al, (2011), EDUCAUSE (2011), Arredondo and Castillo (2011), and many, many more.

• Barna Group (2011) “nationwide study shows that three-quarters of U.S. adults believe the presence of a church is “very” (53%) or “somewhat” positive (25%) for their community. In contrast, only one out of every 20 Americans believes that the influence of a church is negative—either very (2%) or somewhat so (3%). That leaves about one out of six adults (17%) who are indifferent toward the role of churches.”

• *Cocooning* is a lifestyle trend named by BrainReserve that is growing in response to fears of what’s out there that might hurt us, or what may happen in the future, and is being demonstrated by people creating their safe nests at home with air and water filtration and alarm systems and spending as much time at home as possible.

• *Religious freedom*, the old and the new discussions and debates continue to be a hot bed of passionate discourse over the intersections of government or religion with human rights, social safety nets, matters of conscience, healthcare, or wherever else government crosses ways with religious values and beliefs, Google News (2012) 11,000 hits.

• Although 2 anecdotal reports of Mexican investors moving into the cities of Mission and El Paso were cited by the Center for Immigration Studies, there were conflicting reports. Some state that there is no hard data to confirm the influx of the newcomers.

• Current (2010 US Census) population for Hidalgo County is 774,769.

• Current (2010 US Census) population for Starr County is 60,968.

• Increasing numbers of college graduates are unemployed, in debt and with no return on their educational investment are expressing frustration. SCUP Trends (2010) suggest that this may also generate negative feelings toward their educational institution and may motivate them to discourage their children from considering enrolling in college.
EMSI (2011) reports that the total 25 and older population of Hidalgo and Starr Counties combined is expected to increase by 52%, whereas the total 25 and older population of the two counties with at least some college up to and including bachelor degrees should increase by 97%. (See Figure 3)

Figure 3: Educational Attainment Levels of the Hidalgo and Starr Counties 25 and Older Adult Population in 2001 Compared to 2010

Discussion of Social Issues:
Health trends in the Rio Grande Valley are a mixed bag. Increasingly, people are interested in themselves as uniquely different from everyone else. Things related to their health, well-being, appearance, the longevity and quality of their lives are increasingly important. But here in this region, there is a combination of wealth and poverty, and often right next door to each other. This would indicate that the future health issues that may become increasingly popular among the wealthier
residents may take years to become relevant to those still living in poverty. As the observations indicate, significant improvements in colonias have been documented regarding the living conditions and the health of residents. The Texas Tribune reports, “The most successful (creative solutions) have teamed with so-called “promotoras,” Spanish-speaking volunteer nurses who block-walk the colonias offering free medical advice, notifying residents about public health screenings and teaching new mothers, who get free formula through the state’s Women, Infants and Children nutrition program, the value of breast-feeding.” Finding ways to be inclusive and speak to the needs of the variety of populations in the College service district will continue to be a challenge that will require thoughtful strategies. Perhaps there is a way to utilize a “promotora” type strategy to impact these same populations for educational attainment.

Where should the line be drawn between social responsibility and individual freedom? With the increased connectedness around the circle of the earth, the realization of just how interdependent we are with the rest of the people on this planet is serving to increase passions about how what each person does may impact the other person. With the terrorist attacks of 9/11, Americans began to question just how much of their own personal freedoms they would be willing to relinquish in order to promote greater public safety. The argument and debate continues. Some of the social trends feed into, or perhaps stem from, these debates. Locally, these issues stir up a variety of emotions and thoughts since the College’s proximity to Mexico, a country struggling to gain public order, is at times too close for comfort. The College seems to be situated in the perfect storm scenario in which it can anticipate the combination of trends surrounding cocooning, collaboration and a common desire for genuineness at the expense of exposed imperfections. When personal safety and comfort require collaboration, people want to know who they can trust and perhaps follow. Who will lead them to safety and better living circumstances without exploiting them? The College has a history of being a strong leader, if not the strongest leader in community development within its service district. During upcoming tumultuous times the community will no doubt increase their expectations of College administrators, faculty and staff to step up to the plate ready to lead and serve down uncharted waters.

Partnerships, collaboration, and the idea of reciprocity for mutual gains are critical in south Texas. How could the College do more to improve the breadth and quality of connectedness and fair play with its regional health, educational, religious, business, industrial, governmental, and political partners? A College administrator thought that, “Not everything we are doing needs to be directly tied to a registration or enrollment outcome. We need to be in the business of relationship building with our community. We could do better in the one-on-one marketing in the business community.” Connectedness is a two-way street in which each needs the other. The College works with economic groups, but does it reciprocate genuine thoughtfulness and care about their partners’ events and concerns? “Do we attend the events of elected officials? Overwhelmingly the answer is no. We need to assign specific people to each area business group and official. They should be in charge of relationship building with that office so we are aware of opportunities.....it can’t just be one or two people....(and) only when we need something.”

Another trajectory of the increasing move toward collaboration for common good within the Valley region may be coming from a reported influx of Mexican business people or investors to the US side due
to border violence. Data to substantiate these claims was scarce, but there were a couple local news reports mentioning that local US business leaders believe the influx is occurring. One of the reports also mentioned the use of the EB-5 visa, which is being used by the US government to promote immigration of people of with money. It is a program that was developed in the 1990’s and allows wealthy people to obtain a visa to enter the USA for an investment of $500,000-$1,000,000 into certain business opportunities in the US. Other news sources reported that investors from China and Seoul are taking advantage of this program. Whoever they may be that are moving into our region, one STC administrator believes that the College should partner more closely with the local visa administrators to ensure that STC is offering the right programs to support these newcomers, and especially if they are incoming investors in local businesses. On the other hand, news of continued drug-war violence in Mexico and along the border cities in the US includes deaths and movement of people away from the violence. Within the country of Mexico there are reported shifts of people moving from rural areas to cities for work and safety. Efforts to gain public peace have not yet been as successful as is needed, so the College should expect continued impact from, and demand for collaboration to help resolve, these social issues.

While religious issues are a hot bed for debate, still nearly 78% of Americans believe that churches are a positive influence in the community, Barna Group (2011). Though the respondents in the Barna study believed largely that churches provide a sense of unity and support for communities, most respondents were unsure of specific ways for churches to serve their communities. This may be an opportunity for the College to recognize and appreciate the contribution of its community church partners while building new and growing partnerships to promote and provide support toward the pursuit of higher levels of education.

STC has made great strides in enrollment growth as well as in completions as was noted in the data for the service district. Some enrollment forecasters are anticipating a slowing down of enrollment in higher education. In the current economic situation, it will be critical that the College work to re-evaluate not only its partnerships, but also its degree and certificate offerings. Are the current offerings still relevant to today’s social interests and social needs? Are they valuable to employers as they relate to available jobs? How much is a degree worth in additional pay? Do the statistical averages still stand that show income increases with educational attainment? Students will look for genuineness and readily available evidence of where they might expect to end up working if they spend the time and effort to earn a College credential, degree, or certificate. In some places, when their expectations for getting a job were not met, students filed law suits against the educators.

Consideration in new program development could be given to health and wellness, supporting individual health, retail sales, lifestyle changes, medical equipment, or even manufacturing or gaming industries that provide new apps and gadgets for personalized health and wellness. Perhaps the push toward higher levels of social responsibility will trigger federal, state, or grant funding if community colleges promote stronger curricula that encourage lifestyle changes to reduce cancers. What new program needs relate to better health and wellness of the American public, or the colonias down the street? Additionally, how can the College reach out and shape the globalization, global connectedness,
partnerships, collaboration, and cocooning that to respond to the need for larger and quicker expansions of virtual and online processes, courses, services, and even jobs?

**Technological Issues**

According to Daft (2010) and Morrison (1992), the technology sector not only includes topics such as information technology, computers, internet technologies, and other sciences, but also new techniques or technological advances made in work processes such as e-commerce, learning, and social networking.

**Observations of Technological Issues:**

- Looking forward, Follett (2011) anticipates: “textbook rental, digital textbook and ecommerce services and solutions that enhance the accessibility and affordability of higher education.”
- BrainReserve (2011) warns to “watch your digital diet” – new Stanford studies are showing that multi-tasking is not efficient and that the overload of digital intake is creating mental and physical disorders. Information overload can lead to a paralysis in decision-making and anxiety.
- Rassaiah, Chidambaram, et.al (2011) refer to younger students as digital natives (Prensky) in that they will be more digitally savvy than most faculty and yet they will expect digital integration into curricula.
- Students are becoming so used to social networking where nearly instantly they can know a lot about everything “nearby”. They are becoming so connected, and addicted, to their “touch screens” of varied sizes that they will expect to be able to use them to navigate their way through a college, or perhaps match a building photo to its online photo to get detailed information – a new “point and know” technology, Trendwatching (2011); BrainReserve (2011).
- Trendwatching (2011), BrainReserve (2011), Barna Group (2011) and others agree that technology will become more mobile and cheap. The population living “at the bottom of the urban pyramid” will be provided access to laptops, ipads, and other touch screen technologies since it will be their interface to anything beyond themselves. New campaigns to provide every student with a laptop or other internet device have been reported.
- SCUP (2012) “The merging of mobile devices and learning in traditional institutions has yet to be realized. Some educators have been effective, but the vast majority is not even thinking about it.”
- BUSINESS WIRE (2012) – “Transtelco . . . has turned up additional fiber network routes in Central and South Texas consisting of Dallas, Austin, San Antonio, Laredo and McAllen . . . (and) plans to continue to build approximately 350+ Kilometers of Fiber south of the US-Mexico Border in order to reach the Northern Mexico Cities of Reynosa, Monterrey and Saltillo enabling Transtelco to connect both Wholesale and Enterprise customers in all markets . . . (and) offer new types of services over a significantly wider range of locations to much better serve end-users and Service Providers in Mexico and the USA.
- SCUP (2012) “The speed with which the technology used in and out of educational institutions changes continues apace with Moore’s Law. With two billion users online worldwide, the globe may soon experience a different resource crisis, a lack of bandwidth.”
The Monitor (2012) reports McAllen Mayor’s excitement and challenge to direct the city toward becoming a “frontier for innovation”, citing a new pilot project of “renewable energy buses that charge on the go . . . (and) as this technology becomes more widespread, folks from all over the world will be coming to McAllen to see how it’s done . . . using these facilities to retrofit their own buses and shipping them back home. . . creating hundreds of new, high-paying, high-tech jobs for McAllen residents.”

Security (personal, organizational, national) concerns escalate with the ubiquitous devices of all shapes and sizes and demand for connectivity, Athena Alliance (2011).

New Building Blocks, Athena Alliance (2011), conference attendees discuss data and security concerns. “Data is another basic driving force of the information age. Utilization of large data sets may be the next frontier for innovation, competition, and productivity. How should public policy help to assist new data-related markets and facilitate the creation of private and public economic value from personal data? The range of policy issues here includes questions of data security and privacy, the availability of analysts and managers with the requisite skills, and the terms of access to public-sector information and its use for commercial purposes.”

Cashless society is pretty much upon us, but newer technologies will support it even more by allowing people to bump their phones to one another to pass funds to each other, or to bump the box at the register to pay for a purchase, Trendwatching (2011).

Multiple trend watchers noted that technology will play into the trends of individualism, and personal health care – perhaps where one knows their health stats 24/7 by looking at their phone. Another example is sleep monitoring applications that will monitor your sleep and only wake you when it is good for you to get up.

Staley and Trinkle (2011) describe the new “invisible college” where the practice of science is “facilitated through an information network” that becomes larger and more important to these knowledge workers than their physical institutional connection. These networks are “international in scope and scale and outside the direct funding and control of any national organization.”

A new artificial leaf has been developed by MIT scientists simulating photosynthesis in that when it is placed in water it separates the hydrogen and oxygen. The next step is to figure out ways to capture the gases, BrainReserve (2011). “Scientists at MIT hope that the Artificial Leaf will soon be able to be housed in “algae-like material” that will live in lakes, generating tremendous amounts of energy for cities. On a smaller scale, ponds full of the material could be maintained on personal property, producing enough energy to run a household. That level of self-sustainability would doubtless reshape our current concept of cities, conservation and the future in general.”

Discussion of Technological Issues:
While the Rio Grande Valley may lag behind some parts of the world in realizing some of the technological advances, which does not mean the advances are not on their way, or that the Valley will remain unaffected by nearly all of the observed issues listed. Most of these technological advances are potentially global in regards to their scope of impact.

A variety of combinations of the issues and trends could impact STC in multiple ways. Expansions of virtual environments available to humanity may exacerbate the social trend of cocooning or staying at
home. This in turn may result in more students choosing distance courses from STC from anywhere in the world. It is only a matter of time. The advances in virtual technologies expose the College to a much broader pool of students, faculty, and employees who may not necessarily reside in the region. Many faculty are already teaching for other institutions of higher education, and they may become so involved in global scholarly communities, finding fulfillment in the new collaborative relationships and working to develop new knowledge in their fields of study. These apparently more powerful relationships could quickly become their highest priority as researchers have reported as already occurring around the globe. Furthermore, with a struggling economy, faculty who have employment opportunities in the private sector may find themselves leaving the rewarding teaching experiences at community colleges to return to more gainful employment out of the sheer need to make ends meet.

With an increasing desire to take care of “me,” smartphones or robots that monitor “my” sleep and “my” health statistics may dictate whether “I” should stay in bed or get up to go to school. Schedule demands may become more important to students, faculty, and staff. Machines may dictate just when and where “I” should get “my” coursework. It seems that more and more demand for education in a virtual setting, at a time when “I” want it, or when it fits into “my” life, and with a social network adapted curriculum may become expected and demanded. The literature is full of ideas of the mixing of the real and the virtual worlds where the two just seem to blend together through the use of screens of one size or another. The push to live “99-lives”, BrainReserve (2011), with all the multiple roles required by each of the multiple lives, encourages people to utilize technology to make it even possible. Educators and researchers will be kept busy trying to determine whether these technological advances are promoting or hindering learning.

Keeping up with technological change is an evident concern to STC administrators as it is to others in the literature. One administrator explained, “The pace of technological change is accelerating, and thus maintaining current technology for student use and supporting the teaching function of the college is becoming more challenging and expensive. There are several examples of this, including the move to widescreen displays in the computer industry; projectors and screens will need to be replaced throughout the college at greater cost than current models. In addition, computer displays are moving to an all-digital format by 2013. This means that the existing analog classroom display infrastructure will be outdated and in need of replacement as we approach 2013-2015. Additionally, the advent of eBooks and student and faculty preference for these resources is another example, which at present could result in the splintering of the college’s library collection development funding.”

Regarding the constant transition to remain current in an increasingly digital world, another administrator described the importance of balancing the transition from physical resources to virtual ones. An additional concern was noted of providing library and curricular resources for audiences that are not on campus, as many dual enrollment students are not. Of course these numbers could explode via the new eSTC – Virtual Campus and the impact of global connectivity. With virtual space, will campus space even remain an issue?

New research is finding healthier ways to multi-task, i.e. spend dedicated chunks of time on individual tasks rather than doing multiple tasks at once. These new findings will need to be kept up with and
promoted in order to help students from driving themselves to anxiety or panic. Keeping up on new findings will be critical for the College in order to remain current, relevant, and competitive with all the changes. One of the new waves of doing things that combines technology, collaboration, and social connectedness has been named “idol-sourcing,” Trendwatching (2011). One of the administrators mentioned something very similar in suggesting the College solicit text communications from students to monitor or gain feedback regarding campus security. The idea of “idol-sourcing” is just that – providing a source of information while idle. In other words, the idea is that people seem to be willing to provide input or to contribute to something if it is completely or nearly effortless on their part. An example of how this might be used in the STC context might be for a student to contribute input to fixing campus navigation problems while they are standing in a line that is way too long, like pointing out shortcuts on an online workflow map, or playing a game to get from point A to point B the fastest on a digital campus map. Perhaps students would input a parking spot number or a map coordinate where a vacant parking spot is located, or where there is a parked vehicle with no sticker. In other words, these are valuable inputs that basically take little to no effort on the part of the contributor but are very helpful to the service organizer.

Along with new advances come new challenges. Security concerns regarding networking have already been identified by College leaders, “Wi-Fi utilization by students is increasing. Employees are also bringing personal devices to use on the network. Students and employees expect to have Wi-Fi services available anytime, anywhere. Not to provide them could be considered a dis-service, but it’s risky. Sensitive data could be transmitted to non-college owned devices.” SCUP (2012) agrees, “Security and privacy are two policy areas where institutions need to try and stay ahead of the game, but that won’t be easy with the move to ‘bring it with you’ technology and the increasing use of mobile devices.”

Just how close are technology developers to point-and-know professors with new face matching technologies? Does this expose students or employees to a different kind of new danger – perhaps people deceptively posing to know someone when in reality they only know what they read in an online profile? Would this lead to new versions of “identity theft” where people posing to “know” you request favors that might lead to theft or other harm? What about the cashless society technologies? Could the College or individuals get “bumped” with a thieving electronic device of some kind, or hacking into information systems?

How do the current College technical program offerings fit in with preparing students to work in these fields of advancing technologies? What about Web 2.0 development? Are faculty and student services using social networking to engage students in coursework or in services or even in a community service of some kind? Could students get engaged with employers through social networks? What sort of virtual environments have been established to expand on-campus capacity? How about training for employees to bring them up to speed on advances and their integration into the way the College does business?

**Economic Issues**

The economy is quite a popular topic of discussion these days and will be for the foreseeable future. Daft (2010) and Morrison (1992) agree that the definition for the economic sector should include topics like recession, unemployment rate, inflation rate, rate of investment, economics, and growth.
**Observations of Economic Issues:**

- SCUP (2011) reports that “the economy will continue to dominate higher education’s discussions, as well as the world’s, for at least the next ten years.”
- The national number of unemployed persons per job opening sank at the end of December to a post-recession low. The ratio stands at 3.9, down from a high of 6.1 when the recession ended in June 2009. EMSI (2012)
- The Wall Street Journal (2012) highlighted: The rate of churn in the job market — workers leaving their jobs for another — is not nearly as high as it was before the recession, when the economy was much healthier. According to the BLS, “Quits tend to rise when there is a perception that jobs are available and tend to fall when there is a perception that jobs are scarce.”
- December unadjusted unemployment rates for Hidalgo and Starr Counties bottomed out in 2007 at 6.7 and 12.2 respectively, with the most recent December 2011 rates much higher at 11.2 and 16.7. These current rates have decreased slightly for the last two consecutive years.
- “Tough times may be ahead for Border Economy” is the headline of a regional news article discussing the relationship between the Mexico and the US economies, and exacerbating factors related to political leadership of both countries, El Paso Times-McClatch-Tribune Information Services (2011).
- Economic wild cards must be anticipated, i.e., a recent tweet that created havoc for a Swedish bank as clients heard the bank was in trouble and wiped out a host of ATM’s, The Arlington Institute (2011). Similar unknowns could be due to extreme weather, war, terrorists, power-shifts, etc. A recent statement by Rummler and Brache (2012), organizational design experts, was that “if anything is certain, it is uncertainty” for the foreseeable future.

Figure 4: STC Service District December Unemployment Rates 2000-2012, Texas Workforce Commission (2012)
Several buyer trends noted by Trendwatchers (2011) are inter-related: *Dealer-Chic* is about “the thrill, the pursuit, the control, and the perceived smartness” of saving money; *Recommerce* allows resale or trading in of one’s possessions promoting the idea that anyone can experience lots of new things with much less cost. *Eco-cycology* is the vendor side of it in that they “will increasingly take back all of their products for recycling.”

Employers struggling to “return to profitability” are turning to colleges to partner for training needs, i.e., Correia (2011) community college partnerships with extended healthcare industry; Alliance (2011) New Building Blocks for Jobs and Economic Growth with focus on “collaboration boosting competitiveness, jobs, and growth”.

Stephens and Richey (2011) promote more partnerships between the learning sciences and the workplace, “indeed the classroom and the workplace are where innovation and cross-fertilization can best occur for the mutual betterment of learners, communities, and businesses”. In reference to a current partnership with Boeing, the researchers report, “Academia/industry partnerships can profoundly impact educational ecosystems by (i) integrating theories of learning with situative environments, (ii) linking rigorous research with real-world practice, and (iii) dissemination of successful methods and findings through peer-reviewed educational networks.”

Upcoming elections could lead to philosophical shifts in who is responsible for education, which revenue streams should be utilized and how much.

A recent, non-published, research study shows that social movements, i.e., going green, which are on the rise due to social networking are powerful in moving people from a social movement framework to actual occupational commitment. (Citation not available for publication).

Career changes can be expected for most people, BrainReserve (2011), and work is being done to assist in transitioning from one career to another, Rottinghaus, Buelow, et. al (2011) through the development of tools such as the Career Futures Inventory-Revised (CFI-R). On the other hand, Sampson (2011), finds that basic occupations remain the same for the most part, i.e. construction, business and social services, food production, manufacturing, transportation, and education, but the specific jobs or technologies for the work processes are changing.

Staley and Trinkle (2011) describe a need for change in the focus and packaging of the general education curriculum based on employers’ expectations of an educated person: “critical thinking, writing, speaking, arguing, researching, and mathematical reasoning.” The package should be presented to the students as something employers require – not a hurdle to get over on the way to the “more important” major courses, which may be obsolete by the time the student obtains employment. This should also change the way we assess and admit students at the onsite – what are they lacking of these critical skills?

“Social networking tools, like Twitter, are beginning to demonstrate their potential as powerful communication and collaboration tools in social, political, and educational arenas. As smart phones and mobile computing devices become less expensive and more powerful, they will also become more pervasive. As a matter of economics, institutions will need to adapt to learning experiences that can occur in a wide range of contexts and over multiple channels. Having more technologically adept learners will also compel educators to develop innovative ways to promote students’ active learning and equitable participation in class discussions,” Corbeil and Corbeil (2011).
McAllen Mayor Cortez (2012) states, “McAllen’s sales tax revenue remains flat. Traffic across the Rio Grande Valley’s international bridges continues to fall. And deep cuts to education and health care, which account for 26 percent of Hidalgo County’s economy . . . are expected . . . Going forward, we must understand that in an era of complex challenges, simple solutions will no longer suffice.” City leadership met early in 2012 to discuss new ideas, i.e., Boeye Reservoir, La Plaza Mall expansion, a new “major manufacturer” coming to McAllen, a research park involving STC, UTPA, and Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology.

The Top 20 High growth/High wage jobs with educational requirements from certificate to associate’s degree from 2010 to 2020 are listed for the STC service district in Figure 4, and the Top 20 High growth/High wage jobs requiring an associate’s or baccalaureate degree are listed in Figure 5. STC is offering the majority of these programs, however there are some that are not offered or that are offered but not producing enough graduates to cover the annual expected openings, i.e., dental hygienists, surgical technologists, cardio vascular technologists and technicians, geological and petroleum technicians, and others.

Of those occupations in the top 20 ranked by high growth and high wage and requiring an associate’s or baccalaureate degree, which yields a different list than that in Figure 4, diagnostic and medical sonographers is listed as the 20th, and is also one that STC is not currently offering.
Figure 6: Top 20 Occupations 2010-2020 Required Educational Level of Associate’s to Baccalaureate Degrees, Ranked by Wage and Growth for STC Service District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOC Code</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>2010 Jobs</th>
<th>2020 Jobs</th>
<th>Change</th>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>2011 Hourly Earnings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25-2031</td>
<td>Secondary school teachers, except special and vocational education</td>
<td>4,417</td>
<td>5,237</td>
<td>820</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>$34.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-2022</td>
<td>Middle school teachers, except special and vocational education</td>
<td>3,687</td>
<td>4,640</td>
<td>953</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>$32.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-2021</td>
<td>Elementary school teachers, except special education</td>
<td>7,298</td>
<td>9,209</td>
<td>1,911</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>$31.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-2041</td>
<td>Special education teachers, preschool, kindergarten, and elementary school</td>
<td>501</td>
<td>652</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>$33.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29-1111</td>
<td>Registered nurses</td>
<td>4,302</td>
<td>5,678</td>
<td>1,376</td>
<td>Associate's degree</td>
<td>$31.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-2021</td>
<td>Physical therapist assistants</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>Associate's degree</td>
<td>$33.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29-1126</td>
<td>Respiratory therapists</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>435</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>Associate's degree</td>
<td>$28.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-2012</td>
<td>Kindergarten teachers, except special education</td>
<td>394</td>
<td>490</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>$29.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29-2034</td>
<td>Radiologic technologists and technicians</td>
<td>387</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>Associate's degree</td>
<td>$27.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29-2021</td>
<td>Dental hygienists</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>Associate's degree</td>
<td>$32.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-1199</td>
<td>Business operation specialists, all other</td>
<td>842</td>
<td>968</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>$24.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-2042</td>
<td>Special education teachers, middle school</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>$31.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-1022</td>
<td>Medical and public health social workers</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>388</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>$23.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-2043</td>
<td>Special education teachers, secondary school</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>$31.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29-9091</td>
<td>Athletic trainers</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>$36.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29-2011</td>
<td>Medical and clinical laboratory technologists</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>$23.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29-2031</td>
<td>Cardiovascular technologists and technicians</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Associate's degree</td>
<td>$30.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-1071</td>
<td>Network and computer systems administrators</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>$20.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-1051</td>
<td>Cost estimators</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>$21.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29-2032</td>
<td>Diagnostic medical sonographers</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Associate's degree</td>
<td>$29.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: EMSI Complete Employment - 2011.4

Discussion of Economic Issues:
Economically, there seems to be an extended period of great uncertainty not only for the region, and the nation, but for the whole planet. Frequency of planning should be increased with more uncertain times. The combined economic factors provide much input for planning.

Evaluation of the contribution of the College to students will be more and more restrictive where funding agencies are concerned. What learning can the College document for each student? What skills have been added that an employer could verify?

The same demand will be true from the student perspective in making their purchase of an educational program. What individual students and graduates expect to gain from the College will continue to be of critical importance in their decision of whether or not to attend. The personal need for income
combined with the need to be in control and consumer savvy, may provide some ideas of ways to package programs, tuition payment plans, or even discounts that can be obtained by meeting specific criteria (i.e., 4.0 GPA or perfect attendance) to get the “discount coupon” for next semester. Workers who get laid off may need additional motivation or guidance as to the quickest training route back into a good job. The College can utilize new databases that help in transitioning workers from one job to another. Program faculty may need to rethink their intended student learning outcomes to teach students how to be more flexible and adaptable to frequent shifts in work environments and job procedures as technological advances are adapted.

Keeping a clear and current focus on regional economic development as business and industry leaders interact with the changing global markets will continue to be critical. With a view of new technologies coming in, the College can build programs to support workforce needs for manufacturers, i.e., new retrofitting of buses with energy efficient systems. Ensuring that STC graduates carry with them the critical knowledge, skills, and abilities to adapt to changing jobs is highly valued by employers. Graduate profiles will be inspected for outcomes of the general education curriculum. One STC administrator expects course and perhaps even faculty credentialing impacts due to tighter restrictions on the core curriculum by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB). “The THECB will not be allowing core course substitutions in government, and they would like to see college success courses offered for credit and integrated reading/writing courses.”

It is important to note here that job postings or openings does not necessarily mean jobs will be filled. With the uncertainty in the market place, employers are cautious about hiring. It is also noted that the listed regional demand for some of the medical professions occupations per year would not meet the requirement of the accrediting agencies for graduates (5 per year). Perhaps it would be possible to develop a general medical associates or bachelor degree program with specialties that would lead to certifications or credentials in the specific field? Perhaps this could tie into the third bachelor degree that the College is offering for health professions managers.

New forms of energy will remain critical and their use may need to be promoted through social networking or other forms of social movement to get sufficient critical mass behind the development of related programs and services here in this region. Although the economy seems to have negatively impacted current shifts toward going “green”, it is still clear that “clean energy (biomass, hydro, wind, solar, and geothermal), has now surpassed nuclear power as an energy source in the US,” SCUP (2012). Continued movement of programs to support these industries in the Valley will be important. Innovative partnerships with other educational entities will help to build critical mass.

New innovative packaging for critical programs must be aligned with human and workforce needs incorporating the shifting procedural changes for doing the work into program packaging and design. One current administrator notes that, “The Academy Program is a great tool for increasing completion in STEM fields, and also the Recovery Program helps smooth the transition to STC allowing the students to progress more readily.” Keeping programs relevant and current with the lives of students is one aspect of the work ahead. On the other hand the faculty will need retraining and upgrades to their own
knowledge in their field of study and exposure to job changes in the careers where their graduates will be working.

**Environmental/International Issues**

Daft (2010) refers to the international environment rather than an environmental or ecological sector as does Morrison (1992). Daft describes this sector to basically encompass the global environment which may impact an organization’s task environment. For this study, the researcher will refer to the environmental sector to include ecological issues, i.e., weather, global food production, as well as international or global issues, i.e., competition from and acquisition by foreign entities, overseas markets, foreign customs, regulations, and exchange rates.

**Observations of Environmental Issues:**

- SCUP (2010) reports that the environment remains a priority but institutions are “moving beyond green buildings and energy consumption as their only strategies”. They cite the “Americans for Energy Leadership” program urging legislators to do more curriculum and program changes to include green literacy and research.
- Built by the YouthBuild program of the Community Development Corporation of Brownsville, it’s the first LEED-certified house in the Rio Grande Valley, according to CDCB officials. LEED stands for "Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design," an internationally recognized "green" building certification, The Brownsville Herald (2012)
- International Business Times (2011) reports: Global consumers and manufacturers dependent on rare earth metals for their products better brace themselves for a further supply crunch as China, the world’s foremost supplier of the precious minerals, will cut down overall production output to just about 70 per cent by 2015. In its latest report, “Rare Earths & Yttrium: Market outlook to 2015, 14th edition 2011,” international metals and minerals research firm Roskill said much of the total output would go to Chinese manufacturers to address the demands of domestic industry, leaving only a small amount for export.
- International Business Times (2011) reports: WXRISK.COM, the weather site used by the agricultural industry sees a monster heat dome entering in South America, primarily in Argentina, bringing the season’s hottest and driest conditions with the longer-term forecast potential for January to stay warmer and drier than normal throughout Argentina and Brazil. Argentina is the world's second-largest corn producer/exporter, and last spring, it reached an agreement to sell more corn from its new crop to China. This agreement to some extent is in jeopardy. Argentina is into its key yield development time through most of January, when production is made or lost. The import agreement between Argentina and China has caused U.S. corn exports to lag last year's record pace.
- Agri-Life Texas (2012) experts hope citrus greening disease is not widespread. Years of proactive efforts to protect the Texas citrus industry should fend off the ill effects of the recent finding of citrus greening disease, according to industry leaders and citrus experts. Public assistance is needed to ensure continued defense.
- Hao Li (2011) of International Business Times and other trend watchers fear the “sovereign debt crisis” of multiple countries. Li blogs about it after hearing a speech, “Before 2010, most people in developed countries did not know what a sovereign debt crisis was because they never experienced
it firsthand. After Greece... the phrase “sovereign debt crisis” was on the lips of virtually all Europeans... generally defined as economic and financial problems caused by the (perceived) inability of a country to pay its public debt... happens when a country reaches critical high debt levels and suffers from (perceived) low economic growth... when investors doubt the debt repayment ability of governments and government debt turns from risk-free to credit instruments, “the consequences are likely to be severe,” said Caruana, general manager at the Bank for International Settlements (BIS) in his speech.

Discussion of Environmental Issues:
Global power shifts, scarcity of natural resources, unpredictable and extreme weather patterns, the broadening scope of concern from regional or national to global, unprecedented risks from new and developing technologies, and the list of the global, environmental unknowns and uncertainties could go on and on. Several of these issues have already been discussed in the previous segments on global connectedness and wide-reaching technologies. It would be redundant to discuss these issues again in this section.

So, what is it about these global issues that the College should be aware of? How frequently do they need to be monitored and considered for community well-being? Local economies are impacted by the availability of worldwide food production and other goods and resources. Would the College ever need to develop programs for food production and agriculture? If the Valley lost its citrus crops, what would the impact be on local, state, or national distributors? What is the College’s part in promoting green technologies or helping to create demand for them? Can the College provide an educated workforce to support them? What about strange and unpredictable weather patterns? Are their rapid response teams in place to handle unknowns? What would power shifts mean to the United States? What would Valley residents do differently if the drug cartels took over? Or if we suddenly had an influx of hostile terrorists coming across the border into our region, what is the College’s role? What is the College’s responsibility to the community in such cases?

Successful navigation through these types of scenarios might be useful during strategic planning. Group discussions of hypothetical scenarios may help with continued development and refining of agility, preparedness, awareness, flexibility, connectedness, partnerships, priority shifting, process modifications and backups, and so much more. STC is already remarkable in its ability to be flexible and quick to respond as has been frequently noted by community partners. Continuing to sharpen these skills beyond quick response and out into the realm of reaching forward to shape and protect the future and to formulate strategies in advance through scenario planning and other future-thinking exercises could be very beneficial to the organization.

Political Issues
As before, Daft (2010) and Morrison (1992) use different methods for organizing the items included in the political sector. Daft refers to a government sector and includes many of the same items that Morrison includes in the political sector. For this study, the political sector includes public agendas, legislation, public opinion, government, activists, social critics, and some of the futuristic reported issues.
Observations of Political Issues:

- Federal government is increasing pressure for higher retention and completion rates which is being felt by educators, SCUP Trends (2010).
- Debates over the validity of measures of student success or widely used testing instruments is surfacing, McClennen and McCormick (2011); Llosa and Bunch (2011).
- Staley and Trinkle (2011) report the “mounting pressure to demonstrate the value added of a college degree” and suggest that “part of this reassessment of higher education will center on the value of a degree versus the value of other credentials, such as certificates. In a growing number of fields, a certificate is a perfectly sufficient credential for employment, especially in several “middle-skill” positions. Indeed, students may prefer to collect a succession of certificates over the course of their working lives rather than earn a degree at the start of their working lives. In this sense, higher education will increasingly consist of just-in-time training over a lifetime, a trend that will affect both admissions and alumni relations.”
- Completion: political pressure to substantially increase the numbers of students earning credentials by 2020 is stressful in and of itself, but it appears to also be generating kickback from educators regarding data sources and assessment methods, i.e., McKlenney (2011) response regarding CCSSE, and What’s in a test – ESL requirements.
- “Judicial decisions and laws have affected intellectual property rights and patent law for institutions in the US,” SCUP (2012).
- Environmental scanners state that humanity appears to be at a cross-road, and that the new global connectedness will demand power shifting which will lead to a “new world”, Peterson (2011); AACC (2011); BrainReserve (2011); Trendwatching (2011). SCUP (2011) refers to this trend as “global reordering”. How does this relate to the predicted “red carpet” treatment that businesses, hotels, airlines or even entire cities will give to increasing numbers of wealthy visitors from China (up some up some 20% over 2010 in the first half of 2011)?
- “Brain Circulation” instead of “Brain Drain” is the new trend in higher education in the global context, Staley and Trinkle (2011). This tends toward a global faculty and mobile students.
- Wilson County News (2012) reports: WASHINGTON, D.C.--Today, Congressman Henry Cuellar, (D-TX), released the following statement after The State of Texas and the Plaintiff Latino Redistricting Task Force reached an agreement to accept a temporary congressional district map for the State of Texas: “This is a historic development: the State of Texas has, for the first time ever, created congressional districts to reflect the looming Hispanic Community growth . . . THIS HAS NEVER BEEN DONE BEFORE. In none of the past four decades has the State of Texas given the Hispanic Community fair representation.”

Discussion of Political Issues:
The federal and state level pressure is not expected to diminish anytime soon regarding accountability for educational funding. Decreasing access to such funds has already been experienced and is also anticipated to continue for the foreseeable future. New and more rigorous measures of documented value added to persons earning credits and degrees will most likely be required. These requirements are causing educators to question the validity of measuring instruments and methods. More research into the documentation of learning and value added to students is in demand. “Economics and politics in the
US will likely mean not just less funding for institutions, but also increased accountability in areas they may not expect,” SCUP (2012). Be diligent! Be genuine! Be ready!

With the scarcity of jobs and the apparent long-term and globally-spread economic difficulties, perhaps it makes sense to focus on the “just-in-time training over a lifetime,” mentioned by Staley, et. al. Individuals will need to provide for themselves and their families while finding ways to fund their education. This may cause people to be more thoughtful about which courses and programs to pursue and also when to pursue them.

SCUP (2012) discussed another aspect to political changes impacting educational institutions regarding intellectual property rights. This time it is regarding students’ rights rather than faculty or staff. “Increasingly, institutions need to consider how to handle the intellectual property rights of students. Undergraduate research, an emphasis on entrepreneurship, and the digital revolution have now made such policies mandatory.” With moves toward advanced technologies and adding bachelor degrees, a future concern like this is not too far-fetched for the College.

The shifting powers and connectivity around the globe will most likely demand greater accessibility of more and more venues for the pursuit and offerings of education via internet technologies. Most likely, this will serve to increase the competition, collaboration, and even “brain circulation” with new virtual neighbors. With the idea of global re-ordering, who knows? STC may find itself reporting to an educational agency from a foreign country.

Since this is the first-time ever for redistricting to follow the growth of the Hispanic population across Texas, it remains to be seen how this might impact the political horizon. New doors for leading the way are opening for STC leadership in this realm.

**Conclusion**

Current trends and emerging issues were identified and discussed throughout the study that definitely have the potential to impact the future of South Texas College. Local, regional, national, and international findings were presented based on the most recent news and other information venues from the past year. The findings from the environmental scan discussed here in light of the regional context of the Rio Grande Valley should only be the beginning of the discussion and investigation into these oncoming trends and issues. This study serves only to create general awareness of changes that may reach the Valley in the near or distant future and which should be considered in order to be proactive in strategic planning.
References


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