As many of you know, JCSU was selected by the White House Initiative for Historically Black Colleges and Universities to work with a team of practitioners to employ Blue Ocean Strategy theory and practice. The objective of the initiative is to significantly improve JCSU’s retention and graduation rates to help achieve President Barack Obama’s national education goals. From October 11-19, 2012 over twenty faculty and staff began the first phase of the JCSU Blue Ocean Strategy (BOS) with a series of Visual Awakening workshops.

A number of prestigious organizations and major foundations have spent decades conducting studies, sponsoring initiatives, and organizing conferences to address the state of retention and graduation rates. And there is much to be learned from them. Indeed, best practices will be addressed in this initiative, but before looking across to others, it is vital to look within ourselves to learn what works and what can work better. Therefore, this first stage of the initiative, called Visual Awakening, will identify factors impacting students’ persistence and graduation rates; the second phase will look well beyond the traditional boundaries of examination and present strategic recommendations for improving retention and graduation rates; and the third stage will focus on implementation.
ABOUT VISUAL AWAKENING

A common mistake in strategic initiatives is to jump to early conclusions and discuss changes in strategy before resolving differences of opinion about the current state of play. Before moving forward we must share a deep understanding of who we believe we are, who we believe our students are, who we believe our wider stakeholders are, who we believe alternatives to JCSU are, and most importantly how we believe we provide an education experience to attract, retain and graduate tomorrow’s leaders. The Visual Awakening ensures that we start on the same page, with a shared and honest assessment of the driving forces behind retention and graduation at JCSU.

And within these insights we begin to see what we are doing right; what hidden assumptions we are undervaluing; and on the flip side, we identify the “pain points” that are making it too difficult for some students to carry on until graduation. This is a critical stage. Insights that may seem obvious or unimportant now, will often prove vital to the creation of the “to be” breakthrough strategic ideas in subsequent stages of the process.
THE FOUR RESEARCH AREAS

The JCSU BOS team's work is focused on four key research areas that will frame the Visual Awakening Work:

1. **Committee Initiatives**: Possessing a vision/conviction that graduating with a JCSU degree outweighs the cost of earning it.
2. **Academic Support**: Receiving timely and effective academic support for each level of coursework.
3. **Advising**: Building up the emotional strength to put in the hard work to persist and graduate.
4. **Validation**: Securing the financial means to complete the coursework required for a JCSU degree.

As the assumptions, incentives and mindsets of different key stakeholders are a critical component of the blue ocean strategy process, these research areas will be analyzed from multiple perspectives, including faculty, administrators, students, parents and employers. This website will continue to update on the team's progress who will complete the Visual Awakening stage of the initiative in late January, 2013.