

SPECIAL VISIT
COLLEGE OF THE REDWOODS

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**A Confidential Report Prepared for
The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges
Western Association of Schools and Colleges**

This report represents the findings of the evaluation team that visited

**College of the Redwoods
On
December 5, 2008**

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Dr. Barbara A. Beno, Team Member**

Introduction

College of the Redwoods underwent a comprehensive evaluation visit in October 2005. At its meeting of January 2006, the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (the Commission) acted to place the college on Warning status and require that it respond to four recommendations still unresolved from the 1999 comprehensive visit (Recommendations 1, 3, 4 and 5) and four recommendations (Recommendations 1, 5, 6 and 7) from the 2005 team, some of which were on the same deficiencies identified by the earlier 1999 team. The College was required to submit a Progress Report in March 2006, which was followed by an evaluation team visit.

At the June 2006 meeting of the Commission, the Warning status was continued and the institution was required to resolve the deficiencies by March 2007. Following the institution's submission of a report in March, the Commission acted at its June 2007 meeting to place the college on Probation for failure to respond to the 2005 recommendations. A required college report in October 2007 documented some progress in resolving deficiencies, and in January, the Commission acted to continue the Probation status. Another college report submitted in April 2008 resulted in a Commission action to remove Probation and place the college on Warning status, signaling that the college still had not completed all work to resolve deficiencies, although one recommendation had been fully addressed. The Commission's action letter instructed the institution to complete resolution of all deficiencies by October 2008.

When the Commission offices received the report in October, the college had not fully resolved the deficiencies as required. The Commission's President, in consultation with the College President, scheduled a Special Team visit for early December, 2008 to examine the work the College intended to complete in the remaining weeks before January 1, 2009.

On December 5, 2008 Dr. Marie B. Smith and Dr. Barbara A. Beno visited the college to review documents and discuss the college's resolution of the remaining Recommendation 5 below. The team met with the college president, the Coordinated Planning Council, the Education Master Plan Committee (EMPC), the Research Committee, and the Budget and Planning Committee. The team also reviewed a number of evidentiary documents that the college prepared, and was given a copy of the second draft of the Educational Master Plan, the Research Committee's "Economic and Workforce Research", and the "Institutional Research Data for Planning." This report represents the team's findings.

Recommendation 5 (2005):

The team recommends that the district improve its planning processes to include: the development of a long range educational plan; the development of a facilities master plan; and the development of an information technology plan. It is further recommended that the district develop a long range financial planning process to provide early notice of structural imbalances between revenue and expenditures;

to identify resources needed to adequately support changes in technology systems, facilities, and enhancement to student support systems; and to regulate the pace of changes consistent with available funds. (Standard IA.1, IA.4; IB.3, IB.4, IB.5, IB.6, IB.7; and IIIB.2b, IIIC.1, IIIC.1c, IIIC.2, IIID.1a, IIID.1b, IIID.1c, III.2)

In the action letter of June 30, 2008 the Commission noted that it is expected that colleges be at least at the proficiency level on the Commission's Rubric for Evaluating Institutional Effectiveness Parts I and II (Program Review and Planning). Also the Commission commented that College of the Redwoods "had the institutional foundation and momentum in place for continued progress and quick resolution of these remaining deficiencies." The purpose of the special visit was to determine whether the college had resolved the recommendation by fully implementing all components.

Findings

As described above, College of the Redwoods has been working to meet Commission Standards in the area of planning and program review over the last several years. What remains is the resolution of the elements of Recommendation 5 above. The team found the college hard at work and enthusiastic in its description of the changes made since the last Commission visit and report in April 2008. The team found ample evidence that the college was using its planning and evaluation processes which had been developed over the last year and was further refining them under direction from the new president of the college, appointed on July 1, 2008.

Planning

The first element of the recommendation called for the development of a series of plans: a long range educational plan, a facilities master plan and an information technology plan. The college is in process of creating the educational and the facilities master plans and has completed the technology master plan.

The college engaged the services of consultants during the spring semester to assist in the development of an educational master plan. Those consultants proved dissatisfactory and were replaced with other consultants in September 2008. Although consultant services were used to build the initial framework of the plan, the team found the college, and its president, engaged and knowledgeable regarding using and modifying the plan as it is finalized. There is an ad-hoc educational master plan committee that has guided the work and is also charged with implementing the plan. The college plans to incorporate this committee as a continuing subcommittee of the primary shared governance committee, the College Planning Council (CPC), when the plan is finalized. The Educational Master Plan, now in draft form, is constructed to define and then provide strategies to meet enrollment targets for College of the Redwoods. This emphasis on meeting targets gives both clarity and direction to college actions and provides the framework for continuous improvement by allocating resources to meet educational goals. The team confirmed, through interviews and document review, that the plan did provide the necessary strategic elements to provide that guidance in the appropriate planning and evaluative processes,

such as program review, facilities, technology, human resources, enrollment management and budgeting were included and aligned with the goals of the master plan.

In the October 15, 2008 report, the college provided a timeline for this work to be completed in April 2009. To meet that deadline, a calendar was produced with tasks and completion dates. At the time of the visit, the college was ahead of its schedule by several weeks and presented that updated draft to the team. A final draft is expected to be completed by December 31, 2008, and the institution will use that plan to guide its priority setting for the fiscal year 2009-10.

One of the key processes that is supposed to provide information to the EMP is the program review process. The college had a program review process in place but it had not been routinely used until this year. As part of the redesigned planning process, the program review process was revamped as well. It conducts its program review by discipline for all non-vocational instructional classes, since the college has not operationally defined a “program” as a course of study leading to a degree. College staff informed the team that students are not identified in a “major” or concentration until close to completion, so it is difficult for the institution to track the progress of students by major.

The team reviewed both the annual and comprehensive program review forms and found them to be quite detailed in their request for narrative and descriptive information on inputs and desired resources, but limited in terms of requiring faculty to analyze the student achievement data trends to determine educational effectiveness. It appeared to the team, and was confirmed through interviews with college personnel, that the current process is largely an opportunity to request resources, rather than examine a program’s strengths or weaknesses. The college staff also stated that there did not seem to be a clear process for program elimination, as called for in the standards. Program review, as described in Commission Standards, calls upon faculty to review student achievement and student learning outcomes data (as the latter becomes available) to determine the program’s effectiveness in achieving its stated goals. Resource requests should be aligned with needs identified from that data review.

The team found that the college had made positive steps in revising and revitalizing the program review process, but must now consider means to link program review to longitudinal data on student needs, successful course completion, retention, persistence, and post-completion outcomes such as transfer or job placement. Only when these analyses are implemented and practiced will the college fully met requirements of the standards, and have the ability to engage in meaningful discussions of pedagogy and the improvement of student outcomes. Some of the required data is currently collected by the research office and placed on the institution’s intranet. Those data include course success, earning, 30 credits, and persistence rate for the vocational, basic skills, and ESL classes that is compiled for the California Community College’s system office (ARCC). The institution has some capacity to collect this data for academic programs. The college will have to decide how it will define a “program” of liberal arts study, and conduct reviews of the course of study leading to a degree where appropriate. Finally, when it has

collected data on student learning outcomes, the college should incorporate these data, and analyses, in to the program review process. This latter requirement should be met by the time of the Commission's deadline in 2012.

Facilities Master Planning

Facilities planning is considered part of the Educational Master Plan with the purpose of supporting the development of new facilities and the renovation of existing ones in alignment with the major goals of the EMP. There is a committee providing broad college input on facilities planning. As part of its new group of planning consultants, the college contracted with an architectural firm to hasten the creation of the facilities master plan that had been delayed under the previous consultants. This work, including an assessment of current buildings is due to be completed in February, rather than in July, as originally stated in the college's October 15, 2008 report to the Commission. Once again, the college is ahead of its stated schedule.

Information Technology Plan

The technology plan was completed in the last academic year, but is scheduled to be revised and aligned with the EMP goals and objectives in the final plan. One technology need discussed with the team was the IT support needed to expand the college's distance education offerings in order to meet its growth strategy outlined in the EMP. The college was cognizant of this resource issue and had plans to build the necessary funds into its budget necessary to be able to offer more courses in an on-line format. The college is concerned that growth in distance education be achieved with concomitant quality, a requirement that is supported by Commission Standards. In order to achieve that quality, the college must direct its attention to creating supporting policies, procedures and training for faculty who teach in distance education courses, and interviews with staff indicate they have begun the work of devising such training.

Budget and Planning Alignment

The college considers its newly revised program review process to be a key feature in providing needed data for budget development in master planning. As described above, that process will be improved when the college uses student outcomes as a driver for resource requests. In addition to relying more heavily on program review, the college also is requiring action plans and reports on their implementation and programmatic impact as evidence that resources are supporting college goals and stated program outcomes.

The budget model is based on achievement of FTES (full-time equivalent student) targets as a mechanism to identify appropriate funding to meet college goals and objectives. Funds for mandatory expenditure items are set aside and all other funding is awarded using a zero-based budgeting activity. This is a new budgeting model for the college, but one that holds promise for clearly identifying both on-going and emerging needs. The

college budget planning committee described its budget scenario planning as an activity which used various income and expenditure projections to create different budget models over multiple years forward. Committee members stated that this allows them to see how an expenditure decision or a revenue shift impacts the overall budget, over time, and they have rejected some spending plans as a result of the exercise. Since the original team Recommendation 6 (2005) required the college to “develop a financial plan to respond to declining revenues and establish prudent and sufficient reserves balance”, the college’s success with the budget planning process deserves commendation. The 2008 team saw and heard evidence that the college is actively engaged in the process of proactive and productive budget alignment with future educational planning.

The college’s governance system, including standing committees, planning support teams and the oversight of the College Planning Council, is appropriately designed to facilitate this educational master planning process and support good communication within the college regarding the outcomes of the effort. The team was convinced that the college was engaged in these new efforts, felt empowered by them to make recommendations to the president, and had confidence that increased effectiveness of College of the Redwoods would be the ultimate outcome. Many college staff members commented on how the change to a transparent governance system and an emphasis on collecting data and facts has improved and revitalized the college as well as many employees’ commitment to and involvement with the college.

Conclusions

The team found College of the Redwoods to be diligent in its efforts to meet all elements of the remaining Recommendation 5 of the 2005 team. Although not entirely completed, the team was convinced that the college will conclude its planning efforts, thus satisfying the recommendation in a reasonable time period. The team saw several examples of the college exceeding its own schedule in order to demonstrate its commitment to satisfy Commission concerns.

Nevertheless, the team was also concerned that the institution’s program review process has thus far failed to adequately include all of the student achievement data required by the Commission, and has not engaged faculty and staff in relevant discussions of student success. Therefore the team offers the following new recommendation:

Recommendation 1 (2008): The college should determine a template for student achievement data and related analyses that is to be included in all program reviews, and should use the institutional research staff and others knowledgeable about data analyses to guide the faculty and ultimately the college in discussions of what these data show about student success; these discussions should become part of the culture and practice of the institution. (Standards II.A.1.a and c, II.A.2.a, II.A.2.e).