

Victor Valley Community College District

Victor Valley College

Educational Master Plan 1998-2005+

Chapter 4: Environmental Scan: Assumptions About The Future

1. Introduction

District programs, services, stability, and demographics are influenced in large measure by forces and trends external to the campus. Changes in service area demographics, the composition of the area economy, funding decisions at the state level, and new educational mandates at the federal level have the potential to greatly impact operational aspects of Victor Valley College. A hallmark of any quality institution is its ability to identify, understand, and proactively respond to envisioned trends and market forces. Such is the practice of the college. From its groundbreaking work in the early 1990s regarding forecasts of the economy of the region to the comprehensive reviews of community and campus trends in connection with earlier and current accreditation self-studies, Victor Valley College places great value in efforts to better understand the ever-changing environment in which it operates.

Clearly, District policy decisions are influenced by trends and events in the external environment. Many of these are reflected in the students served by the District. Some affect the careers for which students are prepared. Others influence District responsibilities and the ability of the District to fulfill its responsibilities. The purpose of this environmental scan is to provide decision makers with explanatory context and to anticipate environmental change which may require a future policy response.

2. Environmental Trends And Events

Among the many trends that combine to shape the realities of the region, the following are viewed as particularly important and have been considered by those who have helped to forge the programs, activities, and vision that comprise this educational master plan.

Changes in technology...

Assumption 1: Technology, and especially information technology, is profoundly changing the way we live, learn, work and interact.

Assumption 2: Information technology will influence the way people make decisions, the skill sets that will be required of tomorrow's workers, and the way in which businesses do work.

Assumption 3: Technology, and the rapid availability of information, will change how individuals are informed, educated, and trained. This, in turn, will impact the process of education and teacher - student relationships and interaction.

Assumption 4: Victor Valley College will be challenged to upgrade the quality and use of technology in all facets of campus life, from administrative affairs, recordkeeping, faculty-student-administration communication, to the use of technology in instruction, academic support services, student activities, and other aspects of campus operations.

Changes in the economy ...

- Assumption 5:** Nationally, more of the economy is becoming service related and there will be corresponding pressure to have employees who have good communication and interactive skills.
- Assumption 6:** Increasingly, local based companies will be competing in the global marketplace and will face competitive pressures from companies beyond the High Desert service area.
- Assumption 7:** More and more, businesses and communities in the High Desert will look to Victor Valley College for assistance in producing a competitive and trained workforce, in anticipating future occupational needs, and in providing the technical assistance needed to nurture and sustain the region's economy. This will influence the types of courses offered and the mix of offerings between academic programs, workforce training programs, degrees offered, and certificate courses.

Changes in the demography...

- Assumption 8:** The High Desert is undergoing dramatic change in the demographics of its residents. Communities are becoming more ethnically diverse, inexpensive housing is attracting more families and younger residents, and the changing economy is attracting a wider array of skilled and educated individuals.
- Assumption 9:** Victor Valley College will see an increasingly age, economic, and ethnic diverse current and potential student body. This diverse student body will challenge the college and the nature of its services, programs, courses, and operating protocols.

Changes in community needs...

- Assumption 10:** A growing population base, coupled with an increasingly diverse population, will result in more residents turning to the College for programs and services beyond traditional academics. Residents will challenge the institution to provide more cultural, social, and leisure opportunities and venues.
- Assumption 11:** A growing population base, coupled with a changing economy, will challenge the College to offer programs, majors, courses, and services it has not envisioned or may not yet be prepared to provide (i.e., training in new and emerging occupations, the provision of specialized remedial programs, the offering of specific student support services, etc.).

Changes in teaching and instruction...

- Assumption 12:** Innovation in instruction is a trend that will continue into the new millennium and will challenge the College to explore alternative teaching strategies. National and regional focus on such instructional approaches as mentor-protégé relationships, team teaching, short term/fewer unit courses, technology-assisted instruction, and other methods will filter their way to the High Desert and the College must be prepared to use those strategies to its advantage.

Assumption 13: Given the geographic spread of the service area, coupled with technological advances and a community turning to the campus for more of its needs, the College will be challenged to provide more distance learning, in-community sites, on-demand educational modules, and related academic services.

Changes in funding and support...

Assumption 14: Increasingly, community colleges are becoming state-assisted instead of state-funded. Victor Valley College (as nearly all other community colleges) receives state funding for barely 2/3rds of its true operational needs. As the College continues to grow to meet student and community demand, such growth will require additional funding to sustain or implement new courses, majors, programs, facilities, services, and technology. This will require new relationships and outreach efforts by the College with area industry and government.

Assumption 15: Particularly in Southern California, the trend among voters on ballot measures relating to bonds or special funding for education financing has been primarily negative. This reality will challenge educational institutions to: (1) do more with existing resources, (2) look for ways to self-fund larger capital outlay projects, and/or (3) ensure that programs and services are offered that connect well with community needs so that community support and endorsement is the result.

3. Discussion and Implications

Certainly, Victor Valley College operates at a time and in a place that can be characterized as undergoing tremendous, remarkable change. Information and computer technology are changing every facet of American life and society. The technology is changing the way work is done, the manner by which products and services are created and marketed, and the skills that workers and executives need in order to be competitive and successful.

It is altering the flow of communication and ideas within and across institutions, government, education, and society. The amount, type, flow and format of information is ever increasing. This extraordinary revolution in technology absolutely is affecting and will continue to impact every dimension of Victor Valley College. The institution has the opportunity to have technology influence administrative systems, academic and student support systems, the entire communications and telecommunications network, course content, instructional delivery, workforce development programs and certificates, faculty-student interaction, and the quality of relationships the College has with its various stakeholder groups (business, residents, government, etc.).

The economy of the High Desert has undergone dramatic change and shifts. The recent military base closures, coupled with an invigorated housing construction market and new manufacturing enterprises, have joined with a rebounding economy and new consumer confidence to create a regional marketplace in transition. As more small businesses are emerging and existing companies begin expanding their marketing efforts beyond the geography of the High Desert, there is an increasing need for new vocational programs, workforce preparation programs, and staff development services.

Coupled with the way technology is changing the nature of work, the new economy is creating great pressure on the College to examine what it teaches, how it teaches, and where it offers instruction. There will continue to be a tug and pull on the process of both academic and vocational instruction. There will be an increasing pressure on the College to offer pure workforce training that is short-term in nature and focused on the needs of specific industries. As technology changes, there will be a corresponding requirement of various campus programs to update their own technology, course content, and teaching methods. Emerging occupations that arise from new ways of doing business and new market opportunities will pressure faculty and campus planners to take looks

long into the future and take action to create and implement new courses and programs to keep pace with anticipated changes.

From a related perspective, all of California is undergoing a dramatic restructuring of welfare and work. Recent new legislation has spawned programs such as Welfare-to-Work and CalWORKs, each of which mandate that those on public assistance be trained and transitioned to the world of work. Victor Valley College will play an increasingly important role in remediating, educating, training, and serving this new student constituency. Certainly there will be an impact on campus operations as faculty and staff work to accommodate individuals who may have no tradition of college-going and who may require substantial job readiness services in addition to vocational education and training.

The role of the College in the advancement of the economy of the region will continue to sharpen. As communities struggle to maintain and develop economic viability within a global, knowledge based economy, all community colleges will assume a larger role in economic development leadership. Greater business and industrial mobility are consequences of competitiveness and advances in communication and production technology. These trends enable industry to more easily relocate to environments where the costs of doing business are lower and qualified labor is less expensive. As providers of education and training, community colleges are a community resource critical to community development and redevelopment. Such is particularly the case throughout the service area of the College. As the area's only local public higher education institution, Victor Valley College will have an increasing pressure applied by more and more constituencies looking for assistance and services.

Because the College can be viewed as a neutral resource within a region containing numerous cities and communities, each of which are competing for industry, Victor Valley College can be in a unique position to serve as the source for sage and unbiased advice, research, information, and technical assistance. The campus will be challenged to look for ways to provide more focused economic development technical assistance to business and government, generally within the context of existing or only marginally additional resources.

By their very nature, community colleges are designed to focus on the educational, cultural, and social needs of the residents that surround them. This is particularly true for Victor Valley College. As the demographic composition of the residents in the region moves from a static to a dynamic condition, the campus will be faced with a future student body and stakeholder group remarkably different from those it now serves. As the ethnic, gender, age, and socioeconomic status of the residents of the High Desert changes, if history holds true, there will be corresponding changes regarding the academic and support service needs, educational interests, and interactions of those potential new students. If programs are designed to respond to the needs of students, then reason holds that different students may have different needs and those different needs will require changes to existing programs.

The College family is aware of the opportunities and challenges presented by a changing constituent base. The call to action will be for the institution to adequately plan for such changes and ensure their implementation in ways and on a schedule that meets those new and emerging needs.

Changes in the nature of the region's economy, its population, and technology should well impact how institutions of higher education actually educate students. As the technology of education evolves, non-traditional educational services and products will be adopted to increase the efficiency of educational institutions while meeting the varied needs of students. More students can and will be served through distance education technologies such as on-line interactive instruction and distance learning products (video, CD-ROM, audio tapes, etc.). Virtual libraries and information partnerships will provide access to information resources to supplement, perhaps replace, traditional budget strapped campus libraries. Virtual universities will compete with and supplement traditional facility intensive university systems. Regional postsecondary educational institutions will no longer have a monopoly on the provision of educational services. Many of these services and products will be available from other providers. Institutions of higher education will face increased competition from corporate and other for-profit service providers as well as from distant public postsecondary institutions.

Even now, these trends are evident in the High Desert. While Victor Valley College continues to be the only local public college in the region, proprietary, private or career schools (e.g., National University, Chapman University, University of La Verne, University of Phoenix, etc.) are beginning to offer on-site and distance learning courses and opportunities to area residents. Private ventures, such as New Horizons, are aggressively reaching out to businesses throughout the Inland Empire to offer on-site, customized instruction to employees and management. Numerous California public and private universities are now offering a full complement of Internet-based, fully accredited, for credit courses via this electronic gateway. The community services and extension programs of

area universities, such as UC Riverside and CSU San Bernardino, are expanding their marketing territories to include the provision of courses and classes to High Desert residents and companies.

Against this backdrop, Victor Valley College will be challenged to examine the leadership role it will continue to play in the provision of academic instruction, workforce training, and community services to the residents, companies, and institutions that comprise its service area. The operating landscape of the very near future will be one that is filled with viable competing educational institutions, each quite capable of serving many of the critical needs evident in the High Desert. To maintain its role as a leading provider of higher education, the College will need to examine its current procedures for revising, creating, approving, and implementing courses and programs. Because students and residents of the region will no longer be an "exclusive audience" for VVC alone, there will be pressure to re-examine how the campus family relates to and serves today's and tomorrow's students and users of campus resources.

Whatever programs and services Victor Valley College provides in the coming years, the breadth and availability of those services will be directly related to the budget and financial resources available to the College. Statewide and in the Inland Empire, voter dissatisfaction and declining trust in "government" have resulted in a number of policy trends. Of greatest import have been the revenue raising restrictions and limitations placed upon state and local governments by voter initiative and general opposition to tax increases. Voters, too, have not been favorable to ballot measures for education bonds or related spending projects. School districts have not fared well in convincing voters to assess themselves in order for classrooms to acquire new technology. Colleges have not achieved much success in convincing voters to approve new taxes or bonds for new buildings, technology, or services.

The result has been the need for public institutions and government to "reinvent" themselves. Just as businesses have done before them, public institutions have downsized, eliminated services, diversified funding streams, redirected resources, adopted alternative service provision arrangements, tried to do more with less, and looked for entrepreneurial opportunities and relationships.

Victor Valley College has taken initial steps in this direction and may very well be pushed by circumstances to do more of this in the future. The student activities center facility is a campus financed effort. To operationalize the facility's food court, contract relationships have been developed with food vendors. To enable the health center, a venture relationship was established with a local health care provider. In exchange for public recognition and marketing exposure, the campus has attracted the investment of various private sector donors to help fund the construction of new tennis courts, computer centers, learning labs, and many of the furnishings and equipment of the new activities building.

During this same period, the campus has also examined its organizational structure, services, and expenditures and implemented changes designed to enable the institution to live within its funding realities. In many ways, Victor Valley College has "re-engineered" itself and tried to do more with less. This dual approach of maximizing existing resources while fostering joint venture relationships where appropriate may be a requirement of administration over the coming years. These approaches may well influence programs, services, and infrastructure decisions into the next millennium.