

PROGRESS VISIT REPORT

Victor Valley College
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A Confidential Report Prepared for the Accrediting Commission
for Community and Junior Colleges

This report represents the findings of the evaluation team that visited
Victor Valley College on November 26, 2007

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TO: Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges

FROM: Christopher C. O'Hearn, Ph.D., Team Chair

SUBJECT: Report of Progress Report,
Victor Valley College, November 26, 2007

Introduction:

A comprehensive visit was conducted at Victor Valley College on March 8-10, 2005. As a follow-up to the comprehensive visit, a third Progress Report visit was conducted at Victor Valley College on May 3, 2007. The visiting team consisted of Dr. Christopher C. O'Hearn and Dr. Jeffrey L. Bobbitt. During the visit, the team met with the President of the Board of Trustees, the Assistant Superintendent, the Vice President of Student Services, the Vice President of Administrative Services and the interim college President/Superintendent, Dr. Louis Zellers.

The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, WASC, requested that the Progress Report focus on the progress made by the College in complying with three specific recommendations cited in the Commission's action letter of June 2006.

At its meeting on June 6-8, 2007, the Commission took action to accept the Progress Report, but also acted to issue a **Warning** and required that the college complete a Progress Report by October 15, 2007. The college complied with this requirement, and a fourth Progress Report visit was scheduled. On November 26, 2007, Dr. Christopher O'Hearn and Dr. Virginia Burleigh visited Victor Valley College to determine if the college had appropriately addressed three recommendations and two Commission concerns cited in the Commission's action letter of June 29, 2007.

The visiting team met with the college's new Superintendent/President, the College Council, the Academic Senate President, the Board Chair, Classified leadership, the Accreditation Liaison Officer, and the Associated Student Body President.

It should be noted that the current Superintendent/President commenced his tenure on July 9, 2007. With the appointment of a new chief executive officer, there is clearly a positive and impressive transformation taking place at the college, under Dr. Silverman's leadership, seeks to reinvent itself as a sustainable learning organization and to identify viable solutions to the concerns expressed by the Commission. ✓

Recommendation 1: Improving Institutional Effectiveness

The team recommends that the College provide evidence that it assesses progress toward achieving its goals and makes decisions regarding the improvement of institutional effectiveness in an ongoing and systematic cycle of evaluation, integrated planning, resource allocation, implementation, and reevaluation. This continuing cycle should include long-term master planning; short-term strategic planning, including technology planning; and an effective, institutionalized program review process. When fully implemented, this cycle of planning, evaluation and program improvement should result in the creation of a culture of research and evidence that supports all of the college's decision-making processes.

Although not all planning processes are entirely integrated as yet, much has been accomplished since the last visit. The annual review and planning process, Program Review, Allocation and Institutional Strategies for Excellence model (P.R.A.I.S.E.) uses data for the planning and budgeting of instructional programs. P.R.A.I.S.E. has been implemented and is designed to structure unit-level planning with a focus on the budget allocation process. Also, Student Learning Outcomes assessment is in its early implementation stage with the creation of a Teaching and Learning Center to train faculty in outcomes assessment. An Institutional Effectiveness Committee has been established with appropriate inclusion of individuals with a strong research background. The campus has documented significant work in the development of an Integrated Planning Process that includes a redefinition of its vision and core values, actionable goals, and strategic priorities. This planning process established the framework through which the Institutional Effectiveness Committee may provide oversight for measuring and guiding improvements to institutional effectiveness. Two new Board policies were adopted on November 13, 2007, to confirm the college's commitment to better decision-making and institutional improvement. The documents frame institutional effectiveness in the context of institutional planning.

The College Council, a representative, college-wide committee, has been created to develop, implement, and evaluate planning processes. This Council has served as the hub of institutional dialogue and the means of transforming the spirit of the college into an institution where pride in their accomplishments and steady focus on their potential for excellence emerge as dominant themes. Through the work of the Council, the necessary components of a systematic institutional planning and evaluation process have been established. Given that the components necessary for this planning process are evident and that the energy and momentum essential for carrying through the ideas exist, the team believes that the planning processes established this far should continue to function effectively.

In addition, significant work in the evaluation of current administrative staff is evident in the team's meeting with the college president. It is clear that the college has focused appropriately since the last visit on creating inclusive planning processes and building an environment of collegiality, respect, and trust as the foundation for further refinement and development of its institutional planning processes. With this foundation and planned changes in administrative staffing that are critical for balanced decision-making and appropriate implementation of decisions made through participatory governance, the college is poised to move forward in improving institutional effectiveness.

Current problems identified by the visiting team in planning processes relate to integration of budget processes. The faculty retain a separate budget allocation process for instructional equipment, and this process is disconnected from both the College Budget Committee input and academic administrative input. This process reveals a deeper lack of systematic interaction and dialogue between the Academic Senate and the Vice President of Instruction that would serve to bring a balanced and integrated foundation for the support on institutional planning, especially related to dominant faculty-related issues such as Student Learning Outcomes, planning and budget, and institutional effectiveness.

Given the relatively short length of his tenure, the Superintendent/President has made enormous strides in creating an infrastructure and an environment in which serious focused planning can take place.

Conclusion:

The College has made significant progress in addressing this recommendation with the establishment of components necessary for systematic institutional planning and decision-making. The strong foundation for evaluation of institutional effectiveness includes a College Council that regularly brings together representatives from all constituent groups on campus and forms a centralized venue for dialogue and communication. The Council has established and implemented an institutional program review through the Institutional Effectiveness Committee. The program review model P.R.A.I.S.E. has been implemented but needs further refinement to address the lack of integration between faculty/Academic Senate processes and institutional and administrative budget allocation processes. Additionally, the Institutional Effectiveness Committee will monitor the redefined mission and core values and the actionable goals and strategic priorities for Victor Valley College. The team believes that stronger administrative leadership in the Chief Instruction Officer position will be essential for balanced functioning and integrated implementation of these planning and evaluation processes.

Recommendation 2: Student Learning Outcomes

To meet the standards' focus on ensuring student success and the quality of programs and services, the team recommends the College conduct meaningful, timely, and inclusive dialogue with all campus constituents to identify student learning outcomes at the course, program, and institutional levels. The College should also systematically assess these student learning outcomes and use the results of these assessments for the improvement of institutional effectiveness.

The Superintendent/President has expressed his commitment to institutionalize learning assessment, a commitment shown in an augmentation of \$80,000 to the Teaching-Learning Center (TLC) to support professional development. To date 22 faculty members have received training, resulting in Student Learning Outcome (SLO) assessment plans for a number of disciplines. In its response to the recommendations, Victor Valley College indicates that the following disciplines are currently implementing outcomes assessment: anatomy, microbiology, chemistry, astronomy, business, and English-reading. Three additional disciplines have proposed assessment plans: agriculture/natural resources, English-composition, and construction technology. The faculty who have received training and have implemented SLO assessment plans are required to train other faculty at Friday session in the TLC and to share with their colleagues the assessment work in which they are engaged.

In addition, the Superintendent President has proposed to the Academic Senate an aggressive timeline for the completion of assessment planning of SLOs at the course, program, and institutional levels. The proposal has been vetted to relevant faculty groups; however, at the time of the visit, there was no indication that Victor Valley College has, in fact, established a timeline for the completion of outcomes assessment implementation.

Discussion of SLOs in Student Services has occurred since the last Progress Report. Definitions of outcomes, including possible assessments, have been drafted and distributed.

Conclusion:

The College has made significant progress in addressing this recommendation. The financial support for the Teaching and Learning Center, the faculty stipends awarded for training and development of SLO plans, and the functional Academic Senate committees that monitor the quality of assessment plans are significant components of the college's response to this recommendation.

Recommendation 3: Organizational Structure and Staffing

The team recommends that the College evaluate and address its organizational structure and staffing needs. The evaluation should include, but not be limited to, technology support, risk management, maintenance and operations, and human resources. The College should take appropriate actions to implement the results of the evaluation and must address the lack of sufficient staffing.

The interim Superintendent/President served from September, 2006, to the appointment Of the Superintendent/President in July 2007.

The college has formed an ad hoc committee, the Synergy Group, to develop recommendations for college reorganization. The College Council and the Synergy Group are planning a workshop to create a six-month action plan for reorganization. One goal of the reorganization is to create a structure in which communication among all constituencies can be better realized. The organization of the college is being examined for improvements that allow for increased empowerment of faculty and staff. The current structure is deemed to be flawed due to an excessive number of academic departments and several structural misalignments. A recommendation regarding reorganization is due by December 2007. Further, the college plans to implement the new organizational structure by July 2008.

With the departure of the Vice President of Student Services to assume a presidency in another District, the positions of Vice President of Academic Affairs and Vice President of Student Services have been temporarily combined into the position of Executive Vice President. This change and the lack of an adequate number of Academic Deans have resulted in several administrators assuming additional responsibilities. Additionally, there are currently 37 Department Chairs and many small, somewhat autonomous departments. As part of the reorganization, there is a plan to reduce this number of academic departments by half. The college President is aware that administrative staffing changes due to unexpected vacancies have created a structure that is inadequate for the needs of the college. He is working with his administrative staff to address the vacancies more effectively as soon as it is possible to open positions and follow through on replacements.

Three technology-related departments have been consolidated under the Vice President of Administrative Services; they are Technical Services, Computing and Information Resources, and Instructional Media Services. Additionally, a Technical

Services Director has been added to facilitate daily management of that department. The college has also taken steps to identify appropriate external benchmarking to determine the necessary staffing levels in the Technical Services Department. The college is engaging the services of a consultant to review the overall college technology platform and to offer suggestions to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of support operations.

The college has reassigned an employee to perform risk management duties.

The college has used the staffing guidelines of the Association of Physical Plant Administrators (APPA) and has determined the Victor Valley College ranks in the lowest levels of service based on the available staffing levels. Discussions are underway to address this shortfall.

Conclusion

The College has made progress in addressing this recommendation. The college has provided the team with evidence that it is focused on restructuring technology support more effectively and has sought benchmarking through review of State standards for technical services staffing levels. An additional Technical Services Director has been hired, and the college is in the process of bringing in a consultant to analyze and review the overall technological effectiveness and efficiency of support operations. The college has also reassigned an employee to assume the responsibility for Risk Management. In the area of Maintenance and Operations, the college is aware that it ranks in the lowest levels of service based on external benchmarks; the college is prepared to review this shortfall in the preparation of future budgets based on overall priorities established for staffing in this area. Finally, the college has embarked on comprehensive review of college organization in the context of its current focus on appropriate participation of constituencies in the planning and evaluation process. The planning process is based on a college-wide commitment to creating a flexible, responsive, and highly integrated structure for doing the important work of the college.

The college is suffering from a number of key vacancies in academic administration that have required immediate redistribution of assignments, creating a structure that is not optimal to the critical job of implementing a functional participative governance system and improving its institutional decision-making processes. The team suggests that the Superintendent/President examines the feasibility of strengthening the academic administration, both in depth and number.

Commission Concern 1: Environment for Empowerment

The Commission asks Victor Valley College to demonstrate that it is in compliance with the Standard that requires institutional leaders to “create an environment for empowerment, innovation, and institutional excellence.” Leaders should “encourage staff, faculty, administrators, and students, no matter what their official titles, to take the initiative in improving the practices, programs, and services in which they are involved. When ideas for improvement have policy or significant institution-wide implications, systematic, participative processes are used to assure effective discussion, planning, and implementation.” (Standard IV.A.1).

The visiting team found that the college has made great strides in meeting this standard. The College Council was convened and established as the college-wide committee through which participatory governance is practiced. Its membership includes representatives from all constituent groups. The Board adopted Board Policy 1201 on November 13, 2007, confirming the commitment to better decision-making and institutional improvement. The role of the Faculty Senate has been clarified, and a new committee structure has been formulated.

Since the hiring of the Superintendent /President, there is strong evidence of a campus climate change, a focused desire to dialogue campuswide on matters affecting quality, a renewed commitment to re-inventing the college consistent with Commission expectations, and an excitement about the possibilities for the future of Victor Valley College. Comments from individuals participating on the College Council in regard to the issue of empowerment provide evidence that the campus climate is changing qualitatively:

- *We are experiencing renewed energy to focus on what we do well.*
- *Everybody wants the college to be the best it can be; we want to comply [with the Commission's recommendations].*
- *We are experiencing inclusion with integrity; it is based on sensing a real invitation to participate in planning.*
- *Vice Presidents are being given appropriate authority.*
- *Planning is emerging from diverse constituencies. The tremendous progress we have made is based on the contributions of all groups. We were ready.*
- *Faculty feel that they are being listened to. Faculty no longer feel 'under siege.'*
- *We are committed to sustainability and excellence as the basis of our planning. We can be innovators.*
- *The resolution of problems is pushed to the point closest to the origin of the problem.*
- *We're not throwing water on a fire anymore; we are building a fire department.*

Conclusion

The college has made significant progress in addressing this concern. The newly adopted Board Policy on Shared Governance reveals a process that is centered not only on a representative decision-making council, but a council whose members are committed to conveying important issues to their constituencies and bringing back important input for multiple drafts of planning documents. Individuals in leadership positions are taking seriously the recommendations made by the Commission and they are working closely with the Superintendent/President. They are eager to take responsibility for the decisions they make. Processes set in place emphasize the opportunity that all constituencies have for engaged dialogue and responsible follow-through.

Commission Concern 2: Governance Structures/Working Together

The Commission asks that the college demonstrate that it is in compliance with the Standard that requires “through established governance structures, processes, and practices, the governing board, administrators, faculty, staff, and students, work together for the good of the institution. These processes facilitate discussion of ideas and effective communication among the institution’s constituencies.” (Standard IV.A.3).

Many of the team’s observations in Commission Concern 1 have relevance here. The restructure and re-conceptualized participatory governance model clarifies and enables more effective working relationships with all constituencies. Empowering college committees, department chairs, and staff should result in better decision-making. The following is an example which demonstrates how communication and participation have dramatically improved. The Superintendent/President facilitated two workshops with the Board of Trustees in which the Board revised its vision, core values, mission, and goals to reflect the intent of this Standard. The College Council considered the Board’s draft and made some recommended changes. The draft was disseminated for college-wide input. Ultimately, a final version was approved by the Board of Trustees on October 9, 2007.

It is clear to the visiting team that the college community has rallied around efforts to become a more inclusive institution. Respect, civility, and trust are being restored.

Conclusion

The college has made significant progress in addressing this concern. In contrast to the previous environment which disallowed diverse input for decision-making, the

environment set by the Superintendent/President has fostered a dramatic shift in institutional functioning. The work group of faculty, staff, and administrators who are reviewing college organization demonstrates a commitment to principles of participative decision-making and evaluation. The design principles for this work group include the search for a structure that enables open communication, a structure that is flexible and responsible to internal and external demands, and a structure that will support a redistribution of power in which constant reorganization will be enabled. These principles suggest that the college seeks processes and practices that facilitate the discussion of ideas and effective communication.

The Visiting Team wishes to inform the Commission that much has been accomplished at Victor Valley College since the Commission action letter of June 2007. This has been accomplished in large part because of the leadership of the Superintendent/President, who brings to the college a wealth of experience in fiscal affairs, planning, participative governance, and accreditation. The momentum campuswide for positive change appears to be strong and unwavering.