

A new beginning...

In response to sanctions received by ACCJC, Victor Valley Community College seeks to re-invent itself as a sustainable learning organization by (1) clarifying its vision, values, mission, and goals; (2) ensuring that each member of the college's workforce identifies with these core elements of the institutional identity; (3) establishing the college's organizational structure in a way that reflects an alignment of values and actions. At the foundation of this work is the establishment of shared governance policies and procedures that redistribute decision-making power as close to *direct positive student impact* as possible. The commitment begins with the Board of Trustees and includes all college stakeholders. Through policy and coordinated action, improvement across the college is being cast as an ongoing, institutionalized, collective activity that begins with assessment of student learning outcomes.

Since the October 15, 2007 Progress Report, the following milestones have been achieved:

- New policies were adopted by the Board of Trustees on November 13, 2007 to confirm the college's commitment to better decision-making and institutional improvement structures: Board Policy 1201, Shared Governance; and Board Policy 1202, Institutional Effectiveness. Also at the meeting, an existing policy on planning was revised to reflect current legislation (Board Policy 3250, Institutional Planning) and ensure consistency with the new governance-related policies.
- Accompanying the new policies are administrative procedures drafted by the College Council and President's Cabinet to guide effective implementation. To date, committee assignments have been made, and some committees have met or have scheduled their initial meeting during which a chair will be elected and the charge reviewed. During the committee formation process, faculty and staff representatives on College Council were faced with a strong showing of volunteers. In some cases, there were more volunteers than there were committee spaces available—a rare occurrence in an organization where ordinarily 20% of the workforce accomplishes 80% of the work. This stands as a testament to the improved morale and willingness found across the campus to be part of our improvement efforts.
- An ad hoc committee was formed to develop recommendations for college re-organization. This group of volunteers from across the college adopted the name "Synergy Group" at its first meeting because it denotes cooperation and working together. These notions better capture the intent of the group, which is to consider the college's organizational structure from new perspectives, rather than simply reshuffling work units on an organizational chart. Foremost in these new perspectives are the themes of collaboration and innovation, two of the newly adopted core values for the college; the writings of Sally Helgesen (*Web of Inclusion*, 1995) and Etienne Wenger (*Communities of Practice*, 2005) are core ideas in the discussion. Most importantly, the group maintains we are stronger together than separate, and intends to create an organizational structure where silos no longer exist.
- The term being used to describe our coordinated efforts to facilitate genuine change at the college is *Project Synergy*. In addition to group members sharing information about *Project Synergy* to their respective areas of influence, information is disseminated to the college community via the internet (http://www.vvc.edu/offices/president/project_synergy.shtml). A series of related educational activities is being planned via the Teaching-Learning Center. The intent of these activities is to provide opportunities for members of the college community to

come together to learn, reflect, dialogue, and activate the improvements necessary to ensure the college's continuing progress.

- College Council and the Synergy Group have collaboratively planned an all day workshop for November 27, 2007 to kick-off *Project Synergy*. The workshop will be facilitated by an organizational change expert from the office of the San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools. The purposes of the workshop are to: (a) enable dialogue about collaboration and innovation; (b) allow for reflection on the implications of redirection/reinvestment of our organizational structures and processes; and (c) to equip participants with fundamentals in facilitating collaboration and innovation. These experiential outcomes are intended to provide a philosophical background. The more practical outcome for the workshop is the creation of a six-month action plan for our reorganization efforts.
- Training sessions were held to initiate the next cycle of our annual program review, planning, and budget augmentation processes. A new addition to this year's activities is the availability of the college's online "self-serve" decision support system, the Institutional Research Query Builder ("IRQB"). This tool can be used to enhance program review by facilitating access to section-level data and to provide a starting point for prioritizing course-level SLO assessment plans.
- A new policy, Standards of Educational Excellence (Board Policy 4000), was drafted and submitted by the college's Faculty Senate to the College Council, and to the Board of Trustees on November 13, 2007 for a first reading. This policy frames educational excellence, its measurement and improvement, in the context of ongoing professional development of improved teaching skills for the benefit of student learning. As far as we know, this policy is the first of its kind in the CCC system.
- SLO assessments have been conducted, faculty dialogue has ensued within and across disciplines, and the college's Teaching-Learning Center has once again become a hub of professional development activities for the college.
- Support for the college from High Desert residents has begun to rally with the support of our local newspaper, and the recent election of a new board member with strong roots in the community.

Overall, the impact of activities spurred by the Commission's sanction can be seen on multiple levels across the college. For example, board meetings are conducted with more efficiency and with less rancor; community workshops have been held before every board meeting on important topics like accreditation and student success; and a collaborative process for determining new faculty hires for the coming academic year was successfully implemented. It is hoped the Commission recognizes the earnestness and effort put forth by the college to ensure its concerns and recommendations are addressed in a manner that has profound, lasting, and sustainable impact—not only for today's students but for generations of students to come. With a renewed campus climate, we continue to build a new future together.