SPECIAL REPORT

*Submitted to the Accrediting Commission
For Community and Junior Colleges,
Western Association of Schools &
Colleges on October 15, 2008*

Solano Community College
4000 Suisun Valley Road
Fairfield, CA 94534-3197

Solano College Accreditation Midterm Report Approvals:
Academic Senate 9/22/08
ASSC 9/23/08
Executive Council 9/23/08
Shared Governance Council 9/24/08
Governing Board 9/29/08

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**Certification of the Accreditation Special Report**

Date: October 1, 2008

TO: Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges,
Western Association of Schools and Colleges

FROM: Solano Community College
4000 Suisun Valley Road
Fairfield, California 94534-3197

This Accreditation Special Report is submitted for the purpose of assisting in the determination of accreditation status.

We certify that there was broad participation by representatives of the campus community and we believe the Progress Report accurately reflects the nature and substance of the institution.
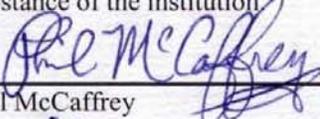
Phil McCaffrey	President, Governing Board
Gerald F. Fisher	Superintendent/President
Robin L. Steinback, Ph.D.	Vice President of Academic Affairs Accreditation Liaison Officer
Jeffrey N. Lamb, Ph.D.	Academic Senate President
Lillian Nelson	President, Associated Students of Solano College
Thomas E. Grube	President, Solano College Faculty Association
Cynthia Simon	President, California School Employees Association
Jeffrey Lehfeldt	President, Operating Engineers, Local 39
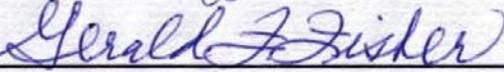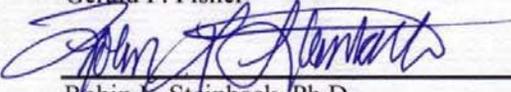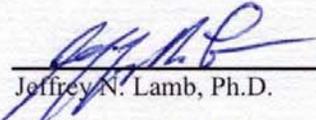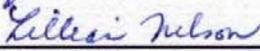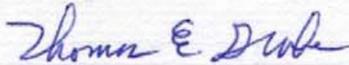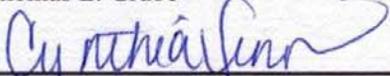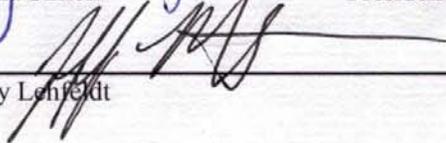
STATEMENT ON REPORT PREPARATION

This Special Report, prepared in conjunction with the College's Midterm Report, is submitted in response to the requirement by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges that the College take action to correct deficiencies noted in the Commission's January 31, 2008, action letter.

At its meeting on January 9-11, 2008, the Commission reviewed the Progress Report submitted by Solano Community College (October 15, 2007) and the report of the evaluation team that visited the College on November 29, 2007. At the Commission's direction, the Progress Report focused on three of the eight recommendations made by the visitation team on their comprehensive evaluation visit to Solano Community College on October 25-27, 2005. The Commission accepted the report, but also acted to issue a Warning, with the requirement that the College complete a Special Report by October 15, 2008. The Commission specified that the Special Report should demonstrate the College's resolution of the three recommendations addressed in the 2007 Progress Report, along with an additional recommendation from the original comprehensive evaluation. These four recommendations addressed the needs in the area of institutional planning (General Recommendation 2), staffing and organizational stability (General Recommendation 6), fiscal integrity and stability (General Recommendation 7), and leadership (General Recommendation 8).

As the four recommendations are in areas for which administration is primarily responsible, administrators assigned to each of the recommendations led the initial work on report development and data gathering [Evidence 1]. However, the Academic Senate did discuss ways that the faculty could help to resolve the problems identified in the four recommendations. What became clear in the course of these discussions was the need for more broad based dialogue and participation in planning in areas, such as budget and finance, that historically have been outside the purview of the Senate at the College [Evidence 2]. As faculty reports needed to be compiled before the summer break, the Senate did vote to serve as the Faculty Steering Committee for the Midterm Report. Work on the Special Report responses was delayed because the campus conversion to Banner for implementation in summer 2008 consumed most of the time of key management personnel who would normally be heavily involved in coordinating with the Senate and other constituencies in planning the institutional responses to the report. To facilitate dialogue and accommodate schedules, faculty and administrators were invited to post report submissions to an accreditation wiki [Evidence 3] created by the Vice President of Technology and Learning Resources. This input was then refined into single responses to each recommendation, which were then sent out to leadership of all campus constituency groups for comments and elaboration.

As the four recommendations are also addressed in the Midterm Report, the content of the Special Report was initially reviewed as part of the Midterm Report, which was made available to everyone in the campus community, via e-mail and on the campus intranet, in August 2008. Subsequently in later drafts, the Special Report was reviewed separately,

but according to the same process and at the same time as the Midterm Report. On September 10, 2008, the Shared Governance Council, as the group that includes representation from all campus constituent groups (the three bargaining units, the Academic Senate, administration, and student government) voted to serve as the Review Board for the Midterm and Special Reports and agreed to convene a special meeting to review the drafts and recommend revisions for final drafts for action by various campus groups [Evidence 4]. Due to a work-to-contract action, the representative for the faculty bargaining unit was not present at the meeting. All groups were represented at the meeting of September 17, where the Council agreed to approve the documents contingent on the incorporation of revisions developed at the meeting. On October 1st, after having been approved by the Academic Senate, the Associated Students of Solano College, the Executive Council, and the Shared Governance Council, the final draft of the Midterm Report was received by the Solano College Board of Trustees.

General Recommendation 2: Improving Institutional Planning

In order to improve institutional planning, the College should clarify and simplify its terminology and processes used in planning so that the vocabulary is more easily understood and accepted institutionally, the planning processes are more integrated, and the plans actually get implemented. (I.A.4, I.B.3, ER 19)

Response: Since the evaluation team's visit in 2005, the College has taken significant steps to improve institutional planning by integrating its planning processes and clarifying the terminology used in these processes. In its 2006 report, the team noted several weaknesses in the College's planning processes, including a lack of broad goals or comprehensive vision and poor integration of the multiple levels of planning. Individual plans did not seem to reflect the priorities of the Strategic Plan. In addition, the team cited an "overwhelming" focus on process and limited emphasis on outcomes and measurement of results. Finally, the team was concerned that the College did not have an "integrated educational and facilities master plan" that would show how "current and projected educational needs drive the development of facilities." The College's response to this recommendation includes a new Educational Master Plan that guides all of the College's planning processes.

The College began to address the team's recommendations by developing a new Educational Master Plan (EMP), an updated version of which was published in May 2007 [Evidence 5]. This document was developed with the assistance of MIG, Inc., a planning and design firm having considerable experience in strategic planning and design in higher education. (MIG worked with Los Rios CCD in the development of its strategic plan and was engaged by the CCCCO in a comprehensive yearlong planning process that culminated in the development and adoption of a system-wide strategic plan, adopted by the Board of Governors in January of 2006.) The EMP is comprehensive, representing the College's broad educational goals and overall directions, while the College's Strategic Plan identifies the strategies for achieving the goals identified in the EMP.

Educational Master Plan

Work on the new EMP commenced with a comprehensive environmental scan, including population demographics, trends and growth projections, student success rates, and the economic and business climate in the College's service area. Current and projected program needs were identified through a questionnaire completed by faculty, academic staff, and division deans. Qualitative information was gathered through a series of open meetings with local business and community leaders and the College's faculty, staff, and students. Attuned to the College's adopted vision, mission, value statements, and strategic goals, the EMP used the data and information collected to assess current programs and services and to outline changes to address both existing and projected needs. Because the EMP is considered "the driving force" for the institution, copies of it were distributed to all faculty and administrators, who were to read it and use it as the basis for planning within their areas [Evidence 6].

2006-2009 Strategic Goals and Objectives

In conjunction with the development of the new EMP, the District developed a new strategic planning process, including timeline, planning form, and college-level goals, objectives, measures and targets [Evidence 7]. The EMP has shaped the seven strategic goals of College's Strategic Plan, which also defines achievable objectives for each of the goals. The College community specifies annual targets, and develops strategies and designs measures of success for these strategies for achieving the objectives. This document was updated to work in conjunction with the institutional SLOs (student-learning outcomes) [Evidence 8], SAOs (service-area outcomes) [Evidence 9], and program review process [Evidence 10], to provide the administration and campus community with clear, systematic, consistent, and ongoing measures of institutional effectiveness. The document has set campus goals over a four-year period and measures are reported each year.

The College strategic plan includes seven strategic goals, which are supported by more specific objectives and strategies designed to attain each objective. The goals include:
- Improving student success while maintaining academic quality;
- Providing a college environment that attracts and supports students from our diverse community to increase enrollment and success via access and retention;
- Fostering a college environment and strong connection to the community that will attract and support a diverse and excellent faculty, staff, and student body;
- Improving internal operations through effective communication and participatory governance structures;
- Supporting and expanding technology and learning resources to address the current and future educational and technological needs of the students and the College;
- Developing and managing fiscal and other resources to support institutional effectiveness;
- Foster a strong connection to the communities we serve and be responsive to local and regional needs [Evidence 11].

Strategic Planning, Budget Development, and Evaluation
During the fall of 2007 and the spring of 2008, the Director of Research & Planning presented an overview of the new strategic proposal process, including examples and timelines, to several academic divisions. The strategic proposal process provides the link between strategic planning and budget development in that all funding proposals will be tied to specific strategic objectives and strategies approved in the strategic planning process [Evidence 12]. Towards the end of spring 2008, Review Groups were activated to prepare to receive and provide an initial critique for strategic proposals. Examples of proposals prepared by the faculty and administrators are: Promoting Student Success in Mathematics [Evidence 13], Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Certificate Program [Evidence 14] & Umoja Program [Evidence 15]. The Enrollment Management and Student Retention committee agreed to review all proposals related to student access and all of the 2007-08 Student Services strategic proposals were presented in summary detail to the committee in spring 2008. The Student Services deans and directors reviewed their proposals at their 2008 summer retreat and will forward the detail of the proposals they want to continue into the 2008-09 and 2009-10 planning and budget cycles.

These proposals have completed the review and prioritization processes in fall 2008 and will then enter the AY 2009-10 budget development process. Budget recommendations will be finalized by the end of May 2009, subject to acceptance by the Governing Board, at which time the first new planning and budgeting processes will be completed. The implementation and evaluation processes will be completed by the end of the 2009-10 academic year. The new institutional planning process will be evaluated in two ways. First, the campus community provides ongoing feedback (process evaluation) to the administration through various channels: unit managers, faculty/staff organizations, and the Shared Governance Council. Implementation issues can be identified and corrections/enhancements made as the model is put into practice. In order to ensure the broad campus participation in evaluation of the process, the vehicles for this level of feedback will include informal discussions, as well as formal surveys and reports. Second, the Shared Governance Council has been identified as the agent that will provide an overall assessment (product evaluation) of the College's planning process, including recommendations for change. This annual assessment will begin at the conclusion of the first planning, budgeting, and implementation cycle (summer 2010).

While there has been significant progress in improving institutional planning, the solid integration between the fiscal process and practices of the College, the Educational Master Plan, College Goals, Objectives and Strategies has been a process of fits, stops, and starts. In 2007, the College did follow a complete budget and planning process. In 2008, the College struggled to meet its own standards and while some notable progress was made, in the end, it has been unclear exactly where some decisions have been made and how they were made. A recent debate over a major purchase of maintenance equipment at the end of the fiscal year 2007-08 revealed the need for more transparency and dialogue about processes for expenditure, repair, and replacement of equipment. While the purchases were necessary for the health and safety of staff, neither the need nor the processes for these types of purchases was widely discussed in any forum (not even in Executive Council) until the purchase of the equipment was announced in summer 2008

at an administrative leadership retreat. The Financial and Budget Advisory Council has formed a subcommittee—the Equipment Repair and Replacement Task Force—for the specific purpose of reviewing requests for these types of purchases [Evidence 16].

General Recommendation 6: Staffing and Organizational Stability

The College should continue to focus on prior accreditation evaluation reports and implement the recommendations. Stability in personnel, particularly in leadership positions, fiscal services and human resources will help the College to meet the requirements of Standard III and assure institutional integrity. (III.A, III.D.1, III.D.2, III.D.3)

Response: Since the October 2007 Progress Report, the College has filled all of the senior leadership positions, including the Vice President of Academic Affairs, and the Vice President of Student Services with full-time permanent personnel, which is a significant accomplishment given the well-documented competition in recruitment of qualified administrative personnel at community colleges. Though the College has made a concerted effort to recruit and hire full-time staff for all available positions, there are two director positions, the Director of Fiscal Services and the Director of Facilities, which was recently vacated, that remain unfilled. In addition, the Dean of Admissions and Records recently became an open position. All full-time faculty positions are currently filled and the College plans to continue to replace faculty positions as faculty retire.

The hiring of the new Vice President Academic Affairs has solidified the institutional progress with much needed leadership stability and expertise in academic issues, which includes a depth of knowledge in curriculum at a critical juncture for the College as it moves into using new technologies for institutional service and reporting needs. Through her leadership, the College has made critical decisions on curriculum technology, including the purchase of CurricUNET to replace an outdated course management system. Additionally, she has focused administrative leaders on their individual and team strengths [Evidence 17]. Her vision and creative focus have provided a positive force in support of faculty and the student learning process, which had been reported as a struggle in prior self-studies and visiting team reports. The new Vice President Academic Affairs and the new Vice President Student Services collaborate well and the campus community has responded positively to their leadership and focus on student learning.

Despite the significant enhancements to organizational stability as a result of the hiring of permanent vice presidents in all areas, frequent turnover in administration is a common occurrence at community colleges, and Solano Community College is no exception. In the last stages of completion of this report, the College will have undergone a change in leadership, with the recently announced retirement of Superintendent/President Gerry Fisher, as of October 3, 2008. In December 2006, in an effort to promote campus unity and stability when they terminated the responsibilities of the former Superintendent/President, the Governing Board named Gerry Fisher, a long time Solano employee, Interim Superintendent/President. The College then conducted an extensive

search for a new Superintendent/President [Evidence 18] [Evidence 19]. After interviewing the three finalists, the Governing Board chose not to select any of the finalists and, at its September 19, 2007 meeting, named Mr. Fisher as the permanent Superintendent/President through June 2009 [Evidence 20]. The November 2007 visiting team found this to be a positive development, noting "a clear sense of a more collaborative climate and open dialogue" on campus. When Superintendent/President Fisher announced that he would be retiring effective October 3, 2008, the Governing Board appointed Vice President of Student Services Lisa Waits to serve as interim Superintendent/President, which the College perceived as an effort to maintain that positive climate and promote institutional stability, despite the change in leadership [Evidence 21]. The Board has also formed a committee and approved a timeline for recruitment and hiring of the permanent Superintendent/President, in accordance with Board policy [Evidence 22].

While the College has focused on filling the senior leadership roles, the mid-level leaders (deans and directors), faculty, staff and student leaders continue to effectively maintain stability at the College, ensuring that student academic and service needs are met, and that the College makes progress on accreditation recommendations despite changes in administration. This is especially evident in faculty leadership in the development of SLOs and SLO assessments, an area in which the College has made significant progress despite having had at least three different Vice Presidents of Academic Affairs in four years. This progress is discussed in detail in the College's October 2008 Midterm Report [Evidence 23].

General Recommendation 7: Fiscal Integrity and Stability

The College should develop a detailed plan with a timeline and fixed responsibility to address the long-term financial obligations including debt retirement, capital lease options, and establishment of a reserve for retiree benefits. Financial obligations associated with negotiated settlements should be evaluated and managed to determine long-range impact on institutional financial stability. (III.D.1, III.D.2, III.D.3, ER 17)

Response: The following discussion includes faculty commentary on points of substantial disagreement with the District, as well as issues that are unresolved as part of the ongoing collective bargaining process.

All constituent groups concur that the College has an ongoing interest in ensuring sound financial management. With the changing budget climate within the last ten years resulting in reduced revenues appropriated by the State, the College continues to evaluate financial management and adjust accordingly. To determine the long-range impact on institutional financial stability, Finance has provided three-year financial projections to the Governing Board in order to gain approval to proceed with negotiated settlement offers and other College priorities [Evidence 24].

The College is also very much aware that it needs to focus on long-term debt reduction, and it has taken steps to do so in the areas of Student Center Revenue Bonds, General Obligation Bonds under Measure G for capital improvement projects, capital lease obligations, and retiree benefits.

The Student Center Revenue Bond currently has an outstanding balance of $57,200 and is scheduled for debt retirement in 2009 [Evidence 25].

The College has issued voter-approved General Obligation Bonds, payable from proceeds of ad valorem taxes, in the amount of $124,500,000 for the purpose of constructing and repairing College educational facilities. Due to significant growth in the District's tax base, the voters will experience a five-year shorter repayment term than originally anticipated [Evidence 26]. All bonds sold received "AAA" ratings [Evidence 27]. The retirement of this debt has no impact on the College's financial resources. Overall, the current timeline for repayment of the Measure G Bond is reasonable and should have no negative impact on the financial solvency of the College in future years.

On April 26, 2006, the College joined the Community College League of California's Retiree Health Benefit Program Joint Powers Authority (JPA) to begin addressing the GASB 45 compliance requirement for unfunded post-employment benefit obligations. The College has deposited $917,000 into an irrevocable trust to address the unfunded liability for retiree health benefits. The College contracted with Total Compensations Systems, Inc. and has a *first draft* dated July 16, 2008, where the actuarial figures are approximately $16, 087,726 [Evidence 28]. This estimate will be refined prior to the adoption of the 2008-09 budget. The Board has set funding retiree health benefits liabilities as one of their 2008-09 annual goals [Evidence 29]. Solano Community College expects to meet the compliance requirement starting in fiscal year 2008-09 and, therefore, is about two years ahead of the federal timeline.

The November 29th Evaluation Team cited concerns around the College ensuring "financial obligations associated with negotiated settlements should be evaluated and managed to determine long-range impact on institutional financial stability." The Finance Office believes that there still needs to be progress made with regard to finance staff "costing out economic negotiated items prior to being offered as a part of any possible negotiated settlement."

However, the three employee bargaining units object to the District's use of the recommendation to pre-condition bargaining. Moreover, the bargaining units contend that, if the District is to responsibly and effectively plan for necessary salary increases and health care benefits, then it should likewise budget for other costly items with the same eye toward cost savings. Among those costly items, the recent substantial increase in the District's legal expenditures is of particular concern to the bargaining units.

Finally, it is the faculty association's position that financial obligations associated with negotiated settlements have not posed any threat to the District's financial stability. Further, the faculty association contends that, while health care costs have risen in the

past few years, the burden of additional health care costs has not adversely affected the District's bottom line [Evidence 30] [Evidence 31].

Nevertheless, as all of the bargaining units recognize the necessity of working with the District to research and possibly secure ways of providing employee health care options at more reasonable costs, representatives from each unit serve on the Employee Health Benefits Cost Containment Committee, formed in February 2006, in accordance with the College's collective bargaining agreements. The Committee met three times in the academic year 2007-08. At the first meeting in mid-October, a staff member reported information gleaned from her attendance at a regional meeting of the California Education Coalition for Health Care Reform (CECHCR), a group dedicated to training public sector employees to make informed decisions regarding health insurance [Evidence 32]. The second meeting, February 29, 2008, was devoted to CECHCR Training, which took the form of two modules: Module I, on the subject of "Joint Labor Management Health Benefit/Insurance Committee Training," and Module III, on "Health Benefit Committees Current Trends" [Evidence 33] [Evidence 34] [Evidence 35] [Evidence 36]. A final meeting on March 17, 2008, was dedicated to reformulating the Committee in ways that would better serve the needs and interests of the represented groups [Evidence 37] [Evidence 38].

While some constituent groups consistently attended meetings and other Committee functions, full participation in all events by representatives from all groups was sporadic. The campus community agrees that serious rededication to this effort is important. More planning and input from all groups in scheduling meetings, as well as more continuity of membership from year to year is necessary in order for the Committee to achieve its stated goals.

General Recommendation 8: Leadership

In order for the Governing Board to focus on the institution's major issues and questions of policy, the Board of Trustees is encouraged to delegate full responsibility and authority to the President to implement and administer board policies and the operation of the College. The institutional leaders should likewise foster empowerment, innovation, and institutional excellence through dialogue that builds trust and increases focus on student learning and assessment of learning outcomes, institutional effectiveness, and integrity. (IV.A.1, IV.A.3, IV.B.1.j, IV.B.2.a)

Response: While the visiting team acknowledged in its November 29, 2007, progress visit report that the Board of Trustees has made some progress in addressing its tendency to get involved in the "day-to-day operations of the College," they nevertheless found that this recommendation had not been fully addressed. The Commission expressed concern that the Board continues to intervene in College operations in ways that are "not appropriate" to their roles. The campus leadership groups share the Commission's

concern and believe that the Governing Board has not adequately addressed this recommendation [Evidence 39]. At the same time, the leadership recognizes that as part of the remedy to this problem, members of the campus community must cease to invite Board members to intervene in the day-to-day operations of the College [Evidence 40].

In response to the team's recommendation, the Board held a retreat on April 5th, 2008, to discuss the Commission report and develop an action plan, which began with the establishment of a Board subcommittee to address the issues raised in the recommendation [Evidence 41]. The subcommittee met three times, on April 7th, April 21st, and May 9th to develop a self-assessment tool to rate their progress in the recommendation. The resulting document entitled "Board Leadership: How Do We Rate" checklist was introduced to the full Board as an information item at its May 21st meeting and adopted in its final form on June 4th [Evidence 42] [Evidence 43] [Evidence 44]. The Board discussed the results of the evaluation at its July 16th meeting. Board members, who discussed the results of the self-evaluation at their July 16th meeting, completed the checklist, an instrument designed for use by the Trustees and CEO [Evidence 45] [Evidence 46]. A second use of the checklist results was discussed in September [Evidence 47]. The Board plans to use the checklist quarterly to assess progress in meeting the recommendation.

In response to prior team visits, the Board has held in-service training sessions on March 3, 2007, [Evidence 48] and adopted Board Policy 1075: *Delegation of Authority to Superintendent/President* on June 6, 2007. The most recent in-service, a discussion and training session on board roles and responsibilities with Bill McGinnis from the Community College League of California, took place on July 26, 2008.

Index of Evidence

1. Executive Council Minutes

2. Academic Senate Minutes: 1/28/08, 2/25/08, 4/7/08, 9/15/08

3. Accreditation Wiki Site

4. Shared Governance Minutes: 9/10/08

5. Educational Master Plan: 5/07

6. Education Master Plan Progress Report

7. Strategic Goals, Objectives, Measures, and Targets Document

8. Student Learning Outcomes SCC Core Competencies

9. Example SAOs (service-area outcomes)

10. Program Review Report (example from Humanities Division)

11. Strategic Goals, Objectives, Measures, and Targets Document

12. SCC Strategy Proposal and Evaluation Form

13. Promoting Student Success in Mathematics

14. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Certificate Program

15. Umoja Program

16. FABPAC Minutes

17. Division Dean Retreat Notes 6/17/08

18. Superintendent/President Job Announcement Description

19. Members of the Superintendent/President Interview Committee

20. Governing Board Agenda 9/19/07

21. Governing Board Minutes 9/09/08

22. Superintendent/President Selection Procedure Timeline

23. October 2008 Midterm Report-General Recommendation 4: Student Learning Outcomes

24. Governing Board Minutes Showing Three-Year Report

25. Student Center Revenue Bond

26. Annual Debt Service on General Obligation Bond (excerpt USB Investment Bank Statement and Audited Financial Statement)

27. General Obligation Bond Rating (excerpt USB Investment Bank Official Statement, Cover)

28. Total Compensations Systems, Inc F*irst Draft* Dated July 16, 2008

29. Governing Board Minutes

30. Table: Official Ending Balance Report

31. Table: Faculty Generated Ending Balances

32. The Employee Health Benefits Cost Containment Committee Meeting Notes Mid-October 2007

33. Table of Contents of Mod I: Joint Labor Management Health Benefit/Insurance Committee Training

34. Table of Contents of Mod III: Health Benefit Committees Current Trends

35. The Employee Health Benefits Cost Containment Committee Agenda 2/29/08

36. The Employee Health Benefits Cost Containment Committee Handwritten Notes 2/29/08

37. The Employee Health Benefits Cost Containment Committee Agenda 3/17/08

38. The Employee Health Benefits Cost Containment Committee Handwritten Notes 3/17/08

39. Academic Senate Minutes May 2008

40. Minutes From Shared Governance Special Meeting 9/18/08

41. Governing Board Retreat Notes 4/5/08

42. Board Leadership: How Do We Rate Checklist

43. Governing Board Minutes 5/21/08

44. Governing Board Minutes 6/4/08

45. Governing Board Minutes 7/16/08

46. Completed Survey: Board Leadership: How Do We Rate Checklist

47. Governing Board Minutes September 2008

48. Governing Board Minutes 3/3/07

Appendix: Substantiating Evidence