

**Observations of the Visiting Team**  
**MID-TERM AND SPECIAL REPORTS**

**SOLANO COLLEGE**  
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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 team that  
visited Solano Community College on  
November 3, 2008

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**Final Visiting Team Report  
for  
Solano Community College  
Mid-Term Report and Visit  
and  
Special Report and Visit**

**November 3, 2008**

**INTRODUCTION**

**Overview of the College**

Solano Community College was established in 1945 as Vallejo Junior College, Solano was part of the Vallejo Unified School District until 1967 when the College became a countywide institution. Solano Community College is located in northern California between the metropolitan areas of San Francisco and Sacramento. The 192-acre campus, centrally located just off Interstate 80, was completed in 1971 and opened with 5,000 students. Since then, facilities, programs, staff and services have expanded to meet the growing needs of a growing county. The District is divided between urban areas in the south and rural and agricultural areas in the north. This is an important element in the serving the needs of the students of the District.

Solano College is part of California's public community college system of 109 campuses in 72 districts across the state. The College's service area encompasses the communities of Benicia, Dixon, Fairfield, Suisun, Vacaville, Vallejo and Travis Air Force Base as well as Winters in Yolo County. Many students are graduates of the area's 16 public high schools and three private schools. Solano College's classes are held during two semesters each year (spring and fall) and two summer sessions. With the current student population of less than 10,000 divided evenly between day and evening, the Solano College campus offers academic transfer and occupational training as well as special interest courses and flexible scheduling to all area residents.

The Board of Trustees is composed of seven members elected by area in the District.

**Introduction to the Reports:** Solano Community College last underwent a comprehensive evaluation in October, 2005. The College was given eight recommendations, some of which repeated in whole or part recommendations also given by the 1999 comprehensive evaluation team. (See the 2005 Comprehensive evaluation report, pages 9 to 12.) In January 2006, the Commission acted to reaffirm accreditation with a requirement that the college complete a progress report by March 15, 2007, on all

eight recommendations in the comprehensive Team Report. In June 2007, the Commission acted to accept the college's report and require that the institution submit another report by October 15, 2007, showing the its resolution of recommendations 6,7 and 8. It is important to note that the Commission's call for this second report was a clear requirement that the college fully meet the recommendations identified, and resolve the issues that led to those recommendations.

Solano College submitted its report in October 2007, and a team visited the college to verify the institution's report. At its meeting of January 2008, the Commission found that Solano College had failed to fully address Recommendations 6, 7 and 8 as required. The Commission acted to place the college on Warning status and require the college correct the deficiencies noted by October 2008. The institution was required to submit a Special Report by October 2008 showing resolution of these recommendations.

October 2008 was also the date that the college's normal Midterm Report was due; in a midterm report, an institution describes how it addressed all the recommendations provided by the previous comprehensive evaluation team and also reports on hits achievement of institutional plans described in the Self Study Report conducted in preparation for the comprehensive evaluation.

In October 2008, Solano Community College submitted a Special Report on Recommendations 6, 7 and 8 and a Midterm Report on all the recommendations. A team visited Solano College on November 3, 2008. This report reflects its findings and conclusions.

**General Comments:** While both the Midterm Report and the Special Report were apparently conscientiously prepared, and for the most part both seemed to represent honestly the condition of the college at this time, there were occasional inconsistencies in the appendices which included a hand-out dated considerably later than meeting minutes which claimed that the handout had been distributed during meeting. In addition, it should be pointed out that the special report was excerpted almost verbatim from the mid-term report and added little to the information contained in the mid-term report. The team agreed that the last-minute submission of the reports and the lengthy supporting documents to the team members and the multiple addenda made for difficult reading. The reports did, in most cases, present a frank representation of the degree to which the college has addressed the 2005 Recommendations.

The team received a warm welcome, and the visit was effectively facilitated by the ALO and support staff. Individual faculty, staff and administrators willingly made themselves available for interviews, and were very forthcoming and candid in response to interview questions. Moreover, the team detected a consistent spirit of concern among all staff for the well being of the college. Dedication and devotion to the college, its mission and its students were evident from employees and students.

The team interviewed individual faculty leaders, individual classified staff leaders, individual administrators, and individual Trustees. In addition the team held group

interviews of the Academic Senate, the Shared Governance Council, student leadership and the Administrative Leadership Group. These interviews, together with the team's reading of the Midterm and Special Reports and supporting evidence, and attention to verification of a summary of confidential communications to the Commission, constitute the basis for the following findings. In addition, the team read the accreditation background information: the 2005 comprehensive report, the commission action letters and the 2006, 2007 college and team reports.

**Comments on the Self Study Planning Agendas from the 2005 Comprehensive Report:** Generally, the college has followed up on the College's Self-Study Planning Agendas established in 2005. The work that has been completed on these agendas demonstrates the dedication of faculty, staff and administration to the self-improvement of the institution. Under Standard II, the work on developing a supplemental instruction program, the "MAC Center," the "MSC schedule," and assessment reveal a functioning self-monitoring operation. The dedication to providing services to evening-only students is also commendable. Virtually all agendas have been completed.

There are a few exceptions which may deserve attention as the college proceeds with integrated planning. In the area of learning communities (agenda II.2), while it is clear that the college has continued to pursue this methodology, and the overall number of active learning communities has increased since 2003-04, it is not clear whether the college as a whole has made an institutional commitment to learning community expansion. Under SLO's (II.3), a thorough explanation of the use of advisory committees for vocational learning outcomes demonstrates the college's commitment to serious quality control and updating of curriculum, but the absence of any comment on the work of the Computer Technology Division is conspicuous.

**Comments on Eligibility Requirements:** In addition to the comments above, the team wishes to comment on their observations of Solano Community College's compliance with selected Commission Eligibility Requirements. They are as follows:

**E.R. 3 Governing Board:** The visiting team confirms that Solano Community College is governed by a publicly elected seven member independent policy-making Board of Trustees that is given responsible for the quality, integrity, and financial stability of the college by college policy. However, the Board disagrees on how the mission of the college is being carried out and is divided on most major issues brought to it. The Board's dysfunctions are contributing to the dramatic fiscal and administrative instability of the College. The College does not comply with this eligibility requirement. (The day after the team visit, three of the positions on the Board were brought before the electorate. All three incumbents were facing challengers.)

**E.R. 4 Chief Executive Officer:** The visiting team confirms that Solano Community College's superintendent-president is appointed by and reports to the Board of Trustees. There is currently an acting president. However, there have been three

different presidents in the past three years. A search is being conducted which is scheduled to conclude in the summer of 2009 when a new permanent president is to be hired. The current president has served one month in that position and has been a vice-president at the college for about one year. The previous president was first acting, then hired after the presidential search failed and then retired in October. He served less than two years. While the college technically complies with this eligibility requirement, the extraordinary turnover in the last three years has contributed to the instability of the college.

**E.R. 5 Administrative Capacity:** The visiting team found that Solano Community College has an administrative staff that is inappropriate in number. This is due to the high turnover in executive level administrators and the use of other administrators to “fill in” and be used for “interim” and “acting” positions. In some cases the “acting” and “interim” assignments are given to individuals who have little preparation and have little experience at that level or even at their regular position. The college does not fully comply with this eligibility requirement.

**E.R. 17, Financial Resources:** The Team has serious concerns regarding the college’s ability to generate meaningful and accurate fiscal and apportionment reports for both internal decision making purposes as well as annual reports to external agencies including a required report from last year. As of the team visit on November 2<sup>nd</sup> the college had not adopted an annual budget for fiscal year 2008-2009. It was reported to the team that the report submitted to the State Chancellor’s Office the last week in October differed from the report approved by the Board on October 15. To strain matters more, the college implemented a new software system that is to be used for annual budgeting without running a back-up system. The college currently does not utilize a position control system to account for and budget for existing and new positions. Failure to utilize such a system has resulted in miscalculation of salaries and benefits and significantly increases the chances of under budgeting salary and benefit expenses. The College does not fully comply with this eligibility requirement.

**E.R. 18, Financial Accountability:** The visiting team confirmed that Solano Community College annually undergoes and makes available an external financial audit by a certified public accountant. The audit is conducted in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards. However, the college continues to receive audit findings published in their annual financial statements concerning weaknesses in internal controls over the safeguarding of assets, in particular cash. In the college’s 2006 and 2007 audit reports, the external auditors cited findings indicating that the college was not reviewing, in a timely manner, bank reconciliations for many of its bank accounts. The 2007 audit report cites the college for failing to address the concerns in the 2006 report. The College has a recent history of being in arrears in providing students with approved financial aid checks. Financial records have not been transparent to college budget managers nor to the public. The College does not fully comply with this requirement.

**E.R. 19, Institutional Planning and Evaluation:** The visiting team confirmed that Solano Community College has established components of an institutional planning and evaluation process for the development of the college, but has not fully implemented a process for the assessment of student learning outcomes to measure student achievement of educational goals. The college has begun a process that integrates planning and resources allocation but it is not fully implemented. The Commission's requirement that an institution have in place data based institutional planning, that it implement its plans and improve institutional quality, is not yet met. The college does not fully comply with this requirement.

**E.R. 21, Relations with the Accrediting Commission:** The team did note that there were inconsistencies within the report documentation, such as changing meeting minutes to include distribution of a report which was not developed until a later date. Also the "Special Report" was excerpted verbatim from the mid-term report and did not add additional information on the Commission requirement to fully address Recommendations 2, 6, 7 and 8 by October 2008, as requested in the Commission meeting of January 2008. The extensive documentation, some of which was irrelevant to the Recommendations addressed, was sent to the team at a very late date and some team members had only five days to read and evaluate the extensive amount of material received from the college.

### **VISITING TEAM OBSERVATIONS RELATIVE TO THE MIDTERM REPORT and SPECIAL REPORT**

**Recommendation 1, Improving Institutional Dialogue: The College should broaden the self-reflective dialogue about the continuous improvement of student learning and institutional effectiveness among and between faculty, staff and administrators within and across different divisions of the College as well as between the Board and President and vice presidents in order to increase college unity and teamwork. (Standards I.B.1, II, IV)**

**Observations and analysis of the evidence:** In response to this recommendation, the Midterm Report makes reference to the leadership transitions the college has experienced, and to difficulties associated with authoritarian leadership styles that undermined campus governance, and hence, institutional dialogue. The purpose of dialogue is to engage the college in identifying strengths and weaknesses, and committing to action that improves educational quality. Conditions must exist in a college in which dialogue, which should be used to help focus the college on educational and institutional effectiveness, is conducted in a way that promotes educational excellence. During this visit, the team heard new evidence of leadership transitions and lack of inclusive leadership so that the team concludes conditions which helped to trigger this recommendation and inhibit institutional dialogue are still present in the college environment. Therefore, the team concludes that institutional instability still inhibits the use of institutional dialogue for improvement in the college.

Individual interviews as well as group interviews indicated that employees and students perceived that institutional morale improved somewhat under the leadership of the immediate past president, as the college reported. However, statements in interviews during the team visit were made by staff that their morale at the College is tenuous and apprehensive. Many staff stated that they are anxiously awaiting greater stability in order to proceed with institutional improvement. This excuse did not resonate with the team, however; if staff had been conducting adequate assessments, including data driven program reviews, and developing good plans for improvement, there would be no reason not to implement those plans. As noted in the reports, the collective bargaining process has stalled, and this “unsettled environment” has caused important governance discussions to be ineffective during the last few months due to a refusal on the part of union members to participate in advisory, governance, enrollment management and other committee meetings.

In the March 2007 Progress Report, the college stated that it was making a “concerted effort” to stimulate institutional dialogue on the improvement of student learning and institutional effectiveness. An effort is not enough to accomplish dialogue on improvement. The team found that those interviewed pointed to construction projects and implementation of the new data management system as distractions from focus on student learning and educational effectiveness. The team did find that there was evidence of limited discussions among faculty and some administrators through the Academic Senate in documented discussions on student learning outcomes and academic integrity, and through task force and divisional discussions on such topics as basic skills learning, student discipline, and instructional techniques such as learning communities. Interviews with employees during our visit confirmed that the faculty and academic administration have been engaged in dialogue on issues related to student learning, and that these discussions continue. However there was no evidence of accomplishments such as implementation of improvements resulting from dialogue or of assessment of student learning or improvements. This leads the team to question whether the reported dialogue actually constituted dialogue as defined by Commission standards.

While using “preoccupation with facilities planning” and the “implementation of the new data management system, Banner,” as a reason for change of focus away from student learning, employees interviewed also indicated that the reported time consuming discussions related to the implementation of the Banner system have not been sufficient to prevent implementation problems. Functional areas such as Institutional Technology and Fiscal Services were allowed to proceed with different approaches and pace of implementation than other operational areas, and employees believe a lack of coordination has slowed the implementation process. In this area of institutional implementation, the stalled collective bargaining process with two of the employee collective bargaining groups has also caused ineffective governance discussions of this implementation process during the last few months. In addition to its having been a reason for distraction from productive dialogue and focus on student learning, there is also evidence that insufficient discussion and lack of transparency further eroded institutional unity and teamwork and may be used as an excuse for further delay of productive dialogue for improvement of educational quality.



While the college has made an effort to address this Recommendation, the efforts are sporadic and limited in scope. Changes are not the result of an institutional plan for improvement. There is no evidence of documented implementation of improvements made as a result of institution-wide dialogue. There is no evidence that productive dialogue on institutional improvement focused on student learning has occurred between the Board and any of the Presidents, as stipulated in the original recommendation. The college's April 2007 Progress Report evaluation noted that in the wake of the decision to replace the former President, there had been "a change in the organizational culture" and that a collaborative climate had emerged among faculty and staff, encouraging open dialogue and discussion. However, there is no evidence that the described culture resulted in institutional improvement as the result of productive dialogue.

There is collaboration and team spirit among many employees and organizational areas, but it is not a part of an institution-wide focus on student learning. This recommendation has not been met and the team suggests an even stronger Recommendation (below) with special emphasis on those areas of institutional dialogue that have adversely been affected by the stalled collective bargaining as well as including the involvement of classified staff and classified administrators in discussions related to the improvement of student learning and/or institutional effectiveness, since recent dialogue on these issues has involved faculty and academic administration only. Importantly, most interviewees suggest that a great obstruction to efforts of institutional improvement of student learning is the Board of Trustees involvement and participation in day to day activities on campus.

**Conclusion: The College has not met nor made significant progress towards achieving this recommendation.**

**Visiting Team Suggested Revised Recommendation 1: It is the responsibility of every constituent group at Solano College, including the Board of Trustees, to participate in productive dialogue, as defined by accreditation standards, that engages the entire college in identifying strengths and weaknesses of the college, and every constituent group must commit to action that improves educational quality and student learning. The college must proceed immediately to take this action and should not allow operational or collective bargaining issues to distract them from participating in planned opportunities for this dialogue, timely implementation of changes for improvement resulting from that dialogue, and assessment of the results of implemented changes. (Standards I.B.1, II, and IV)**

**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. (Standards I.A.4, I.B.3, ER 19)**

**Observations and analysis of the evidence:** The College has made some improvements in institutional planning. The college has produced a new Educational Master Plan (EMP)

that links the planning processes developed during the interval(s) between the 2005 comprehensive visit and the 2007 progress visits. Interviews confirmed a general acceptance of the EMP as a driving force for the institution, and that it has influence and implications for the college's strategic directions. Moreover, interviews confirmed a general understanding of the linkages between the 2006-09 Strategic Plan goals and objectives, and the EMP; and a broad awareness of the new strategic proposal process. In recent months, due to stalled collective bargaining issues, there has been a lack of a quorum in the college governance advisory council, the master planning group, in which all constituents should be represented. This has prevented the closing of the crucial loop of linking planning to budget allocations. The closing of this loop has long been designated in the college's planning process design, but has been stalled now that it is on the threshold of implementation.

The Special and Midterm reports document a number of institutional plans regarding strategic planning, budget development, evaluation processes and designated linkages among these three areas. The documents that were reviewed by the visiting team outlined these plans, but the team could find very little evidence or documentation of any implementation of such plans, in particular the plan for participative budget development and its linkage with planning. In speaking with a broad group of individuals representing various constituent groups (from students, faculty, administration and staff to human resources, fiscal services, associated students, and research and planning areas) it was clear to the team that there was confusion and a common theme of concern because of lack of transparency regarding implementation of plans at the college. Most importantly, the college has not fully implemented a process for the assessment of student learning outcomes to measure student achievement of educational goals.

The college has begun a process that integrates planning and resources allocation but it is not fully implemented. The college does not have a mechanism in place nor a governance committee currently functioning to disseminate budget and financial data, to seek input from various constituent groups, and to provide transparency of the decision making process. An example of this lack of transparency is documented in the college's Special Report regarding the procurement of maintenance equipment which was not in the approved budget for the college.

Solano Community College District has opened two new centers. There have been problems in the implementing functions of these centers as may be expected. However, two concerns in regards to the openings were raised as major issues during this visit. The first is the discussion of the 'weeds in the parking lot' issue that was a matter of public consternation of a Board member. The Team recognizes that a Board member has a right to be concerned about the appearance of an institution for which they have responsibility, but several individuals from different constituency groups who were interviewed felt that the commentary went beyond concern and became abusive, political and unprofessional. Another concern raised in the visit was the lack of planning for the necessary increase in staffing needed to operate the new centers.

The college has continued work toward improving institutional planning, despite leadership changes, administrative instability, and lack of clarity concerning the college's

fiscal situation (see Recommendations 6, 7, and 8). The crucial linkage of budget to planning is yet to be fully realized, even though there has been extensive preparation for establishing this linkage, and there has been continued focus on integrated planning but very little implementation. Although the college has taken some concrete steps such as the creation of an Educational Master Plan (EMP), employee bargaining groups have withdrawn from the planning process as a part of the collective bargaining strategy. Neither implementation nor review of the success of the planning process is currently taking place.

**Conclusion: The Commission required the College to have fully met this Recommendation by October, 2008. The College has not met this recommendation.**

**Recommendation 3. Improving Institutional Effectiveness: In order to improve institutional effectiveness the College should establish and implement a clear, systematic, consistent, and ongoing method of measuring and evaluating its effectiveness in achieving stated strategic planning goals and student learning outcomes. (Standards I.B.2, I.B.3, I.B.6, I.B.7, ER 10, ER 19)**

**Observations and analysis of the evidence:** The College is documenting progress on strategic goals in the Educational Master Plan (EMP.) Progress on goals is being monitored by departmental updates, and this information has been utilized in governance councils to inform the institution on possible avenues of improvement. The progress statements did not appear in measurable form in the documentation presented by the college. Student Services administrators have been very actively engaged in identifying the best strategies to accomplish a number of the goals, and have reported to shared governance groups on progress.

Program Review for instructional divisions was changed to a “new” schedule in the 2007-08 year. However the schedule has not been in effect long enough for documentation of results of program review or any evaluation of overall institutional effectiveness. The Humanities Division is the only example in the mid-term report in which changes due to program review have been implemented and there is evaluation of effectiveness of those changes through measurable results. Health Occupations is in process of program review during the current fall semester. While there was documentation of instructional divisions tracking of progress toward stated goals, as mentioned before, the team found no evidence available of any results of program review prior to Spring semester 2008.

A new program review process and schedule is claimed by the college to provide more consistency in measures used and evaluation technique. Because the stated college’s plan for measuring and evaluating institutional effectiveness is new, there is no current evidence that the measuring and reporting tools developed are having an impact on student learning outcomes or have been linked to the budget process. It not possible for the college to measure outcomes and make changes for improvement much less measure institutional effectiveness until all program reviews are completed. Only after needed changes are determined and implemented, results are measured and effectiveness and

future needs are determined can program review results drive the budgeting process. Without a completed program review and budgeting, there is no accountability for use of resources or verification of institutional effectiveness. For accreditation purposes, the time for completing all program review is long past due. Accountability for use of fiscal resources through review of all programs at the college does not exist at this time.

**Conclusion: The College has not met this requirement.**

**Recommendation 4. Student Learning Outcomes: The College must develop institutional procedures for the identification of student learning outcomes at the course, program, degree, and institutional level. It must also develop a timeline for the accomplishment of this process and expand this process to include assessment measures for each level, analysis of these assessment processes and results, and documentation of how results of the assessments are used to improve student learning. In addition, the College must involve all faculty, including those in Student Services and Library Resources, in the dialogue about process and results. (Standards II.A.1.a, II.A.1.c, II.A.2.a, II.A.2.b, II.A.2.f, II.A.2.h, II.A.1.i, II.A.6.a, II.B.4, ER 16)**

**Observations and analysis of the evidence:** During the April 2007 Progress Report visit, the college had made progress in the realm of student learning outcomes, and the current visit confirmed that progress on student learning outcomes and learning assessments does continue. The college is able to show that substantial percentages of individual courses in each instructional division have Student Learning Outcomes (SLO's) established. College faculty have positive relationships with their Research and Planning department (where records on SLO's have been kept), and with their Learning Outcomes Academic Coordinator (LOAC).

The college has a plan for mapping course SLO's to the adopted degree/institutional SLO's (Core Competencies). And the college has just recently adopted a curriculum support software program to enable better documentation and tracking of progress, and has begun a shift of the SLO record-keeping to Academic Affairs so as to associate it more firmly with the Curriculum Committee. Service Area Outcomes (SAO's) have been established in some Student Services areas, but the college acknowledges this as an area of weakness, and looks forward to a workshop planned for the current semester to help move SAO's forward more aggressively.

Another area of weakness is the establishment of, and tracking of, concrete learning assessments for the various SLO's and SAO's. A pilot project for assessment of SLO's was begun in fall 2007, and as a consequence, the college is able to report that six percent of active courses have had specific assessment results reported. The positive side of this situation is that fifty per cent of fulltime faculty actively participated in the assessment process during this pilot, and 83% participated in discussion of the results.

The college clearly has a core of faculty committed to the conscientious assessment of learning for purposes of institutional improvement, especially evident in the areas of

basic skills (a uniform exit assessment is well established in the composition program, and the strategic proposal recently advanced by the mathematics faculty gives good evidence of attention to actual learning results). Moreover, institutional commitment has been demonstrated through sponsored activities in 2007-08 and 2008-09. Institutional dialog about SLO's has been robust, but it is not specifically clear that Learning Resources faculty and staff have been engaged in the dialogue (as originally stipulated in the recommendation).

The college was slow to take up the charge to develop student learning outcomes and learning assessments, but is now beyond the stage of awareness, and in the midst of a serious implementation process which promises to help the college with its work on institutional effectiveness as well as with the improvement of student learning on a program-by-program basis. Much yet remains to be achieved in establishing assessments for SLO's and SAO's, and tracking them. While the college has made progress on the requirements of this recommendation, it should be reminded that further progress must be made on assessments and their institutional use by 2012, which the Commission has set as the deadline for institutions to fully implement requirements on student learning outcomes and assessment of learning.

**Conclusion: The College has not fully met this recommendation.**

**Recommendation 5. Library Resources: In order to have Library holdings and services sufficient in scope and currency to support its curriculum, and be able to extend its services to the off-campus centers in Vallejo and Vacaville, the College will have to address the Library's funding level and, at a minimum, be responsive to the recommendations of the October 1993 and 1999 accreditation teams. (II.C.1)**

**Observations and analysis of the evidence:** The current reports, together with the 2007 Progress Reports, have made the case convincingly to the team that the library holdings have been properly supported through budget allocations and actual purchases of learning resources. Allocations have been increased, and specific provisions have been made to provide learning resources and staff support for the Vallejo Center. When the new Vacaville Center is completed in 2010, additional staffing will be needed, but there is evidence that this particular need has been anticipated and is included in the college's Educational Master Plan. The college must remain vigilant to the need for increased resources and adequately budget for the library resources needed when the Vallejo Center opens in 2010.

**Conclusion: The College has met the requirements of this recommendation.**

**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. (Standards III.A, III.D.1, III.D.2, III.D.3)**

**Observations and analysis of the evidence:** Even though the college reported significant progress in staffing key positions in leadership, fiscal services and human resources in each Progress Report and in the current Special Report and Midterm Report. However, recent changes in executive level leadership, Student Services, Administrative and Business Services, Facilities, Fiscal Services and Admissions and Records, indicate that administrative and managerial turnover is still a serious issue for the college. Staff interviewed felt compelled to comment spontaneously on the extraordinary turnover in management ranks since 2004. While much of this record of instability is mentioned earlier in this report, the fact that it has continuing effects on the morale and confidence level of current staff is a deep and serious problem for the college. The significant gap in Fiscal Services that was noted in the 2005 comprehensive evaluation has actually increased rather than improved since that report.

As of the site visit, the College has an interim Superintendent/President, a vacancy in the Vice President of Student Service, the Vice President of Administrative Services is on administrative leave pending the result of an investigation, an interim Director of Fiscal Services, an interim Bond Director, and a vacancy in the Dean of Admissions and Records position among others. With such turnover and lack of continuity at key positions, the College has not improved stability in personnel. Further, relations between the Human Resources and Fiscal Services Departments appear strained due to confusion and lack of training associated with the software conversion from their legacy system to Banner. As one staff member stated, "...lately the level of interaction has been like oil and water and very adversarial..."

Numerous factors are contributing to a diminished organizational stability. Several descriptors were utilized to indicate the frustration. The one most recurring is that there is a "Culture of Contention." The first and most prominent factor is a Board that has individual Trustees who are continually involved on a direct basis with day-to-day operations and in some cases are physically present daily on the campus. Concerns about conflicting directions provided by the Board are continuous and distracting. Administrators perceive that they are subjected to possible personal and/or public scrutiny and potential ridicule for each decision made. This causes a climate of indecision and creates a fear of making needed decisions and hesitancy in making even some of the most elemental decisions.

Multiple directions, unprofessional demeanor, and the divisiveness of the Board were voiced in many interviews with administrators, students, and staff members. These concerns included abusive public treatment of each other in Board meetings, a Board member refusing to lead the Pledge of Allegiance (Note: the team realizes that it is the right of a Board member to refuse, however, the Board member may have been purposely embarrassed by being called upon after having made her views known), argumentative dialogue over details, and open defensiveness of individual Trustees' parochial interests for their area of representation rather than concern as a Board for the welfare of the District as a whole. In one-on-one interactions with administrators, Board members are openly contentious and unprofessional in their references to fellow Board

members. The consensus of employees interviewed was that Board leadership has seriously deteriorated in the past two years.

Another critical factor is the continual shifts within the senior executive staff. In the last three years there have been three different presidents, five vice presidential changes and two dean changes. The consensus of all employees interviewed is that in the last two years that there is less stability now with senior administrative staff than there was two years ago. There is a curious difference in regards to the stability of other levels of the organization. There is a perspective that was also shared with the team that there is perceived relative stability in the staffing at the dean/director level of the organization as well as within the faculty.

The consequences and the stress caused by the aforementioned concerns are extensive and pervasive throughout the District. These problems contribute to a continual frustration and consternation by faculty and staff. Below are listed several areas of contention that may be the result of the fragmentation of the instability of the Board and administrative leadership:

- An extensive integrated student service and financial system of Banner has been installed with no additional staffing. Further, the District was begun the process of severing the ties with the County offices that have completed its payroll function since the District began. While there are Districts in California that perform all financial functions without the assistance of the County Offices, they are typically very large Districts. This has caused wide spread frustration in a time of turmoil.
- Two new centers are opening. According to a union representative they are opening without a plan for staffing them.
- Solano College Chapter of California School Employees Association (CSEA) has filed an unfair Labor Practice in regards to the over 16 months of negotiations.
- Solano College Chapter of California Teachers Association (CTA) is currently at impasse.
- Excessive attorney fees dominate the budget with over \$650,000 being paid to a law firm based in San Diego. (Note: There many well-known law firms who can provide excellent legal counsel without the expensive air fare charged to the District for travel from Southern California.)
- Multiple unlawful discrimination complaints have been filed.

**Conclusion: The Commission required the College to have fully met this Recommendation by October, 2008. This recommendation has not been met at any level that will support the continuing health of the institution. This problem of organizational instability cannot be resolved until the leadership problem as described in Recommendation 8 is also resolved; the two problems are interdependent.**

**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. (Standards III.D.1, III.D.2, III.D.3, ER 17)**

**Observations and analysis of the evidence:** The College has not made progress towards meeting this recommendation and in some respects the college has regressed. As of the date of this visiting team's site visit, the college continues to satisfy current obligations related to the Student Center Revenue Bonds and Capitalized Lease Obligations. The college annually provides and budgets for the annual principal and interest payments related to the bond and lease debts.

With regard to California State Regulation, GASB 45 (Other Post Retirement Benefit Obligations), which requires a level of funding for a college's retiree and other benefits liability, the college has done the following. The College contracted with an Actuarial Firm to provide an analysis of its retiree health program liability as of March 1, 2008 and report dated July 16, 2008. This report concluded that the College's Actuarial Accrued Liability is valued at \$16,087,726 and the Annual Required Contribution (ARC) is \$1,728,414. To satisfy the requirements of GASB 45, the college has joined the Community College League of California's Retiree Health benefit Joint Powers Authority (JPA). To date, the college has deposited \$917,000 in an irrevocable trust maintained by this JPA, as mentioned in Summary of Progress Report Visit dated April 18, 2007, but according to staff no further transfers have been designated in the fiscal year 2008-09 budget.

Because of the significant liabilities created by the current retiree health program, the college should plan, budget and provide for the transfer of funds into the irrevocable trust to pay for future benefits in accordance with GASB 45. Additionally, the college should maintain exploring all options available to reduce its continuing health benefit costs. Working through the collective bargaining process the college has successfully placed a cost containment "cap" on the costs of health benefits provided to its Local 39 bargaining unit comprised of operating engineers. The college has had no success in reaching similar agreements with either California School Employees Association (CSEA) or California Teachers Association (CTA). In fact, the college is at impasse with these two bargaining units. The inability to negotiate a cost cap will raise the district's long term costs for health benefits.

The Team has serious concerns regarding the college's ability to generate meaningful and accurate fiscal and apportionment reports for both internal decision making purposes as well as annual reports to external agencies. As of November 2<sup>nd</sup> the college had not adopted an annual budget. (Staff was still working from a tentative budget.) The college had just completed the required California annual financial report, CCFS-311, the prior week although the visiting team was told by staff that this report differed from the report approved by the Board at its October 15<sup>th</sup> meeting. The college had not yet submitted its California recalculated attendance report, CCFS-317, nor the certified Recalculated attendance report, CCFS-320, which was due October 30<sup>th</sup>. This is significant in that the external audit findings indicate the college has made mistakes in calculating and reporting apportionment or student enrollment figures, which drive the state funding



awarded to the college. The 2007 audit report findings note, “The number of full time equivalent students used in the GANN Limit worksheet was incorrect. The District is not in compliance with the calculation requirements for the GANN Appropriation Limit.” That audit also states “The District has overstated the appropriations limit by .62 FTE or \$111,710.” In addition the college had not submitted the required Management Information System (MIS) file to the California State Chancellor’s Office for the spring 2008 term. To strain matters more, the college implemented a new software system that is to be used for annual budgeting.

Because of “glitches” in the implementation process the college currently does not utilize a position control system to account for and budget existing and new positions. Failure to utilize such a system significantly increases the chances of under budgeting salary and benefit expenses. Further, the college continues to receive findings published in their annual financial statements concerning weaknesses in internal controls over the safeguarding of assets, in particular cash. In the college’s 2006 and 2007 audit reports the external auditors cited findings indicating that the college was not timely reviewing bank reconciliations for many of its bank accounts and on some occasions was unable to reconcile the cash collected with bank deposits.

Lastly, until just prior to the evaluation team’s visit, a representative from the Administrative Services Division did not sit at the bargaining table with the three constituent groups. Within the last few months, the Interim Director of Fiscal Services now routinely participates in negotiations and provides fiscal advice and analysis for the college’s negotiating team. The decision to include an administrator knowledgeable in the institution’s fiscal condition and obligations should assist the college in analyzing negotiated settlements to determine the short term and long term impacts on fiscal stability.

The team found the situation to be critical in that the college’s not having immediate access to accurate financial data could place the institution in a financial crisis with little or no warning.

**Conclusion: The Commission required the College to have fully met this Recommendation by October, 2008. The College has not met this recommendation.**

**Visiting Team Suggested Revised Recommendation 7: The College must take immediate and necessary action to address its inability to timely and accurately generate financial and apportionment reports. In order to assure the institutions future fiscal stability, the College should immediately develop a detailed plan with a timeline and fixed responsibility to address the establishment of a reserve for retiree benefits. The College must take immediate responsibility for planning all long-term financial obligations including financial obligations associated with negotiated collective bargaining settlements which should be evaluated and managed to determine long-range impact on institutional financial stability. (Standards III.D.1, III.D.2, III.D.3, ER 17)**

**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. (Standards IV.A.1, IV.A.3, IV.B.1.j, IV.B.2.a)**

**Observations and analysis of the evidence:** In the Accrediting Commission's letter dated January 31, 2008, the Commission stated the Board of Trustees of Solano Community College does not delegate full responsibility and authority to the President to implement and administer board policies without board interference. The Commission recommended the Board of Trustees seek assistance from outside entities such as the Association of Governing Boards or the Community College League of California to develop greater Board member understanding of appropriate board roles and behavior.

In response, the Board of Trustees implemented a self-assessment tool entitled "Board Leadership: How Do We Rate," to rate the Board's progress in the Commission's recommendation. The Board completed and discussed the first self-evaluation in July 2008 and a second evaluation in September 2008. The Board held in-service training sessions and passed a Delegation of Authority to Superintended/President policy. In July 2008, the Community College League of California conducted a training session regarding board roles and responsibilities.

During the visit, team members met individually with all seven Trustees, two student trustees, and members of administration, faculty, and staff. Our interviews revealed the Board professes to care about students, faculty, and staff. Trustees maintain strong ties with District staff, regularly attend college events, and maintain relationships with faculty and staff at all levels of the District.

The visiting team found that the Board of Trustees have difficulty focusing on institutional effectiveness, student learning, and policy governance and remain overly involved in operational detail. Continued board member interference in District operations negatively affects the District's ability to maintain stable leadership with authority to effectively and independently manage the District. Lack of stable, independent leadership fosters strained relations and distrust between the Board, administration, and staff which has worsened since the previous Accreditation visit.

The Board conducted two self-evaluations to gauge progress in meeting Commission Recommendation 8. The results of the second self-evaluation show the Board's perception of itself has worsened from July 2008 to September 2008. Interviews of Board members and staff confirmed a majority of the Board believes Board members engage in micromanagement and operates as individuals and not a collective Board. The team heard from all quarters that the lack of cohesive leadership contributes to a climate of hostility and instability throughout the organization. The climate of the college

according to all constituents, including students, is filled with uncertainty and lack of focus on institutional effectiveness and student learning.

The Board is aware that it has been cited for micro-management and for not reinforcing the authority of the Superintendent/President. Despite the Board's awareness of the need to establish a unity of purpose and to resist micro-management, the Board has continued to engage in micro-managing activities. Conflict on the Board is at a level of crisis. The extended and pervasive nature of the problem requires the Board to respond immediately and decisively to reduce Board members' interference in operations, to stabilize district leadership, and policies transform the board into a cohesive body focused on policies that promote institutional and student success.

Just one month prior to the team visit, the Superintendent/President position was vacated, and filled on an interim basis. While the Board has announced a search for a new Superintendent/President, given the level of conflict on the Board itself, and the attendant collective bargaining impasse, administrative turnover, fiscal uncertainty and morale issues, it may be difficult for the district to recruit a capable Superintendent/President.

**Conclusion: The Commission required the College to have fully met this Recommendation by October, 2008. The College has not met the requirements of this recommendation, and is in serious jeopardy of losing existing executive leadership and having difficulty in recruiting future highly qualified leaders for the college.**

**Additional Team Recommendation on the Issue of Diversity:** Under the Commission Standard regarding EEO rules and diversity (III.4), there is a need for the college to develop a new planning agenda to ensure consistent use of college hiring guidelines by selection committees, as well as to resolve the question of the Diversity Committee's involvement in these activities.

Previous reports have not made reference to the diversity or the lack of diversity of the faculty, staff, and administration of Solano Community College District. Overall the student population consists of various minorities accounting for sixty per cent of the student population. This is in direct contrast with the faculty, staff and administration which has a minority population of twenty-seven percent. This was not a focus point of the Mid-term or Special Reports or of this visit but this disparity is notable. It was apparent that the administration appeared to have a significantly smaller number of minority members than the student population.

**Visiting Team Additional Suggested Recommendation 9: The College should thoroughly address the issue of diversity in the Educational Master Plan, ensure consistent use of hiring guidelines for faculty, staff and administrators, and clearly define the role of the Diversity Committee in college governance. (Standard III.4)**

## **Conclusion**

This report represents the findings of the visiting team on both the Mid Term Report and Special Report of Solano College on November 3, 2008. The team is seriously concerned about this college and finds that although the college has had three years to comply with the previous recommendations, it has complied fully with only one recommendation and failed to comply with the other seven. The Commission required full compliance with four of the eight Recommendations (2, 6, 7, and 8) by October, 2008. The College has complied with none of these and has regressed in some very critical areas including the fiscal stability of the college. The failure to fully address the issues in a timely manner especially those issues related to an institutional focus on improving student learning outcomes have seriously eroded the educational quality of the college.

Administrative instability and turnover and the current fiscal situation of the college, including audit findings, and fiscal reporting and accountability, are serious issues of great concern to the visiting team. Furthermore, Board behavior has led to deterioration of climate, and structure of the college. The team is gravely concerned that the college has become fiscally at risk, that Board leadership of the college is currently dysfunctional, and that the college is non-compliant with eligibility requirements and standards of accreditation. The team is seriously concerned that the college has reached a critical state of institutional instability.