



**ACCREDITING
COMMISSION
for COMMUNITY and
JUNIOR COLLEGES**

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January 29, 2010

RECEIVED
SOLANO COMMUNITY COLLEGE

FEB 03 2010

Office of THE
SUPERINTENDENT/PRESIDENT

Dear President Laguerre:

The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, Western Association of Schools and Colleges, at its meeting January 6-8, 2010, reviewed the Follow-Up Report submitted by Solano Community College and the report of the evaluation team which visited Thursday, October 29, 2009. The purpose of this review was to assure that the recommendations made by the evaluation team were addressed by the institution. The Commission took action to accept the report.

The Commission also acted to **continue Probation** and to require that the college correct the deficiencies noted. The college is required to submit a Follow-Up Report by **October 15, 2010**. The report will be followed by a visit of Commission representatives.

Probation is issued when the Commission finds that an institution deviates significantly from the Commission's eligibility criteria, standards, or policies or fails to respond to conditions imposed upon it by the Commission. The accredited status of the institution continues during the Probation period.

The visiting team noted that Solano College has done a good deal of work to address the recommendations provided by the previous evaluation teams. What now remains now is the full implementation of the many improvements the college has planned and begun.

The Follow-Up Report of October 15, 2010 should demonstrate the institution's resolution of the recommendations below:

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. (I.B.1, II, and IV)

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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)

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. (I.B.2, I.B.3, I.B.6, I.B.7, ER 10, ER 19)

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.1-3)

Recommendation 8: 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.2a)

I wish to inform you that under U.S. Department of Education regulations, institutions out of compliance with standards or on sanction are expected to correct deficiencies within a two-year period or the Commission must take action to terminate accreditation. The Commission has extended the time for Solano College to resolve the deficiencies for good cause, but expects that the college will sustain its accomplishments and resolve the issues addressed in the abovementioned recommendations by the time of the next report and visit.

The Follow-Up Report will become part of the accreditation history of the college and should be used in preparing for the next comprehensive evaluation. I have previously sent you a copy of the Evaluation Team Report. Additional copies may now be duplicated. The Commission requires that you give the report and this letter appropriate dissemination to your college staff and to those who were signatories of your college report. This group should include campus leadership and the Board of Trustees. The Commission also requires that all reports be made available to students and the public. Placing copies in the college library can accomplish this. Should you want an electronic copy of the report, please contact Commission staff.

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On behalf of the Commission, I wish to express my continuing interest in the institution's educational quality and students' success. Professional self-regulation is the most effective means of assuring institutional integrity, effectiveness, and quality.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Barbara A. Beno".

Barbara A. Beno, Ph.D.
President

BAB/tl

cc: Dr. Robin L. Steinback, Accreditation Liaison Officer
Board President, Solano County Community College District
Dr. John Nixon, Team Chair
Ms. Linda Henderson, U.S.D.E.

**Solano Community College
Evaluation Team Report**

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

**A Report Prepared for the
Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges**

**This report represents the findings of the evaluation team that visited
Solano Community College on October 29, 2009**

Chair	Title	Institution
John S. Nixon, Ph.D.	President	Mt. San Antonio College
Team Member		
Jon Stephens, Ph.D.	VP Business Services	San Joaquin Delta College

Introduction

Solano Community College last underwent a comprehensive accreditation review in fall 2006. In October 2009, Solano Community College submitted a Midterm Report and a Special Report to its accreditor; those reports were followed by an evaluation team visit. In January 2009, the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges took action to place Solano Community College on Show Cause status, to require the college to address a number of significant deficiencies in order to come back into compliance with the Standards of Accreditation and to show cause why its accreditation should not be terminated. The College took a number of immediate steps to address noted deficiencies, and submitted its Show Cause Report in March 2009. The Report was followed by an evaluation team visit. On the basis of the Show Cause Report, the Team Report, and other documentation from Solano College, the ACCJC took action in June 2009 to remove the institution from Show Cause status, to impose the lesser sanction of Probation, and to require the institution to correct deficiencies by June 2010. The college was required to submit follow up reports in October 2009 and in March 2010; each was to be followed by a team visit.

This Team Report represents the findings and conclusions of the evaluation team that visited Solano College on October 29, 2009. The purpose of the October 2009 follow-up visit was to assess the status of the college's work on resolving deficiencies related to the Standards and Eligibility Requirements cited in the June 2009 Action Letter from the Commission and to report the findings of the visiting team to the Commission. The college submitted a Follow-Up Report in early October, and the visiting team used the report as the basis for its assessment.

With a new president on the job for three months, the college continues to make good progress on resolving deficiencies. The visiting team found that the president has established productive, open dialogue with the college community and enjoys the support and cooperation of the Board of Trustees. As was the case in April, the visiting team found all college stakeholders committed to meeting Accreditation Standards and Eligibility Requirements. The updated (Follow-Up) report that follows documents progress since last April's visit.

The only area of immediate concern is related to Recommendation 6 and Eligibility Requirement 5, dealing with leadership capacity and stability. The college has yet to hire permanent lead administrators for administrative services and human resources, although interviews for the positions were underway when the visiting team arrived at the college. **(Note: as of November 19, both senior administrative positions have been filled. The person selected for the administrative services position begins December 7, and the person selected for the human resources position begins July 1.)** In addition, the college president has proposed a significant reorganization of the management team, including the elimination of separate vice presidents of academic affairs

and student services and the creation of a single position of vice president of academic and student affairs.

Discussion of the Institution's Responses to Recommendations and Eligibility Requirements

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. (I.B.1, II, and IV)

Findings and Analysis

Solano Community College has made some significant developmental changes in response to the ACCJC Show Cause Letter, and, since the April 2009, the college continues to improve and expand college-wide communication and dialogue. Based upon interviews with Trustees, senior administrators, and faculty and staff leaders, it was apparent to the evaluation team that all college constituencies understand the intentions and importance of institutional dialogue that focuses on student learning. All those interviewed expressed commitment to newly revived and developed planning processes, noting that old tensions and distractions related to leadership have subsided. Of particular note is the recent work of the new college president, who has promoted and encouraged open communication and serious dialogue on student performance and success. The visiting team found evidence of improved and expanded dialogue that engages all constituencies in discussion of the college's strengths and weaknesses.

Conclusion

Although a great deal of work remains, the college demonstrates continuing progress toward mitigating the deficiencies cited in the recommendation. Solano Community College has a new President/Superintendent who is leading the college toward resolving deficiencies cited in the recommendation.

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)

Findings and Analysis

The college has made significant progress in integrating institutional planning since the April 2009 report and visit, as evidenced by nascent implementation of the Integrated Planning Process (IPP), through actions of the Process Evaluation and Review Team (PERT), which is now an ongoing committee that meets regularly. The updated process, IPP, incorporates program review and SLO assessment. The college is engaged in revisions to the Strategic Goals and Objectives and Educational Master Plan, which will inform continuing implementation and evaluation of the IPP. The Process Evaluation and Review Team (PERT) is the principal agent of this significant progress, along with the Vice Presidents, who have encouraged and supported the work.

As noted by the April 2009 Visiting Team, the most significant improvements to institutional planning are still very recent, and the college must still achieve institution-wide understanding and acceptance of the various aspects of the planning process embodied in the IPP. The PERT conducted training sessions during the summer and continues that work this fall.

Also noted by the April 2009 Visiting Team, the level of transparency and effectiveness sought by PERT, and along with it the full integration of planning with budget development, will not likely occur until the Vice President of Administrative Services position is filled, and all Vice Presidents are instructed by the President to understand and implement the process, as designed. Accomplishing an acceptable level of effectiveness any time soon may be inhibited by implementation of the proposed reorganization of senior management, which includes elimination of the positions of vice president of academic affairs and vice president of student services, combining the two functions into the position of executive vice president of academic and student affairs.

Conclusion

The conclusion of the April 2009 Visiting Team remains appropriate and accurate as the conclusion of the present Visiting Team: "While the college has accomplished a great deal in relation to this recommendation, and while there are very positive signs that the college is on the verge of confidently establishing an effective planning-and-evaluation system, the college has not fully mitigated the deficiencies cited in this recommendation. The IPP design is not fully

implemented, and the need to clarify and simplify remains. Full understanding and acceptance of the IPP, as envisioned, will undoubtedly require not only training, but further refinement of the IPP design. The college has not fully resolved the deficiencies cited under 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. (I.B.2, I.B.3, I.B.6, I.B.7, ER 10, ER 19)

Findings and Analysis

The observations made concerning Recommendation 2, both in April and in October, are pertinent here. As noted under Recommendation 2, the college is still in the process of refining and implementing its design for integrated planning-and-evaluation processes, and these processes are integral to mitigating the deficiencies cited in Recommendation 3, as well. The present Visiting Team concurs with the college’s self-assessment of its progress on developing, implementing and assessing student learning outcomes (currently between ‘development’ and ‘proficiency’). During discussions with lead staff who have intimate knowledge of the progress on student learning outcomes, the evaluation team was able to confirm that faculty have accepted student learning outcomes and learning assessments as a long-term, substantive change in the culture of their institution, and have learned the benefits of this kind of self-examination.

Conclusion

The college has not fully mitigated the deficiencies cited in this recommendation, as evidenced by the fact that the over-arching, integrated planning process is still a work in process, and that some gaps exist in data-driven decision making in certain units of the institution. It should be noted, however, that the college has continued to make significant progress in generating and using data effectively and is well on the way to becoming a fully data-driven institution. The conclusion of the April 2009 Visiting Team remains: “The college has not fully resolved the deficiencies cited under 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. (III.A, III.D.1-3)

(and)

Eligibility Requirement 5, Administrative Capacity

Findings and Analysis

Since the April 2009 visit, Solano Community College has hired a new president, and this has engendered stability and good morale among the staff. Based upon interviews with staff from the college, the open communicative style of the new president has helped staff to feel empowered as partners in the decision-making processes of the college.

However, the college has also operated for the past year without a chief business official (CBO). A new hire is imminent, and the college is strongly encouraged to complete this hiring process. In addition, the college has used the services of an interim director of fiscal services. The vacancies of a permanent president, CBO, director of fiscal services, and administrator for human resources have caused diminished administrative capacity. However, as noted above, the replacement of the president and the prospect of a new CBO and administrator for human resources have increased the potential administrative capacity. However, the new college president has proposed a reorganization of the management team that would result in the elimination of the positions of vice president of academic affairs and vice president of student services and the creation of a vice president of academic and student affairs. The two incumbent vice presidents may apply for the position of vice president of academic and student affairs; however, implementation of the reorganization would result in continuing change among senior administrators, possibly leaving the college with continuing instability in senior leadership and uncertain administrative capacity.

Conclusion

The present Visiting Team concludes that with a new college president and with the imminent hiring of a vice president of administrative services and senior administrator for human resources, the college has made good progress toward resolving the deficiencies cited in the recommendation (and Eligibility Requirement). However, the Visiting Team is concerned about the impact of the proposed administrative reorganization, which could result in some level of regression in leadership capacity and stability. While the merits of such an organizational change are outside of the scope of this follow up report, the college is encouraged to keep stable administrative capacity as a goal for the reorganization.

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 institution's 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. (III.D.1, 2, 3, ER 18)

(and)

Eligibility Requirement 18, Financial Accountability

Findings and Analysis

Since the April 2009 visit, the college has taken significant steps toward strengthening fiscal integrity. The turnaround is tremendous, and the college should be commended for this dramatic improvement.

At the time of the visit, it was noted that the accounts receivable exceeded a level that is prudent for a college of this size. Since that visit, the college has enrolled in a state sponsored student fee recovery program and has initiated an aggressive collection campaign. It is too soon to determine the effectiveness of these steps but the college should be commended for taking these decisive steps.

Previously, it was noted that the cash handling of the college lacked the internal controls that would be indicative of sound fiscal management. Since the last visit, the college has greatly improved the cash handling and has created a system of checks and balances, accountability and transparency.

Also previously, the college was cited by the State Chancellor's Office for incorrectly reporting FTES. The result was that the college owed \$1.8 million back to the state for the overpaid apportionment. Since last visit, however, the interim director of fiscal services was successful in justifying the entire amount of the apportionment. Not only will the college not repay any of the funds, it turns out the state now owes the college a modest amount of money. The interim director should be commended for her knowledge of the apportionment system and the tenacity for ensuring her college was paid correctly.

Since the last visit, the college has substantially completed its implementation of an enterprise application system (SunGuard Banner). In addition, the operational data store (ODS) component of the Banner system has been used as a reporting tool and allows for administrative decision-making based upon real time data. The college has also moved from a test to a test / production environment with

Banner. This is a great step forward and allows for much improved accounting and fiscal reporting.

Conclusion

The present Visiting Team concludes that the college has now resolved the deficiencies cited in the recommendation and now meets the Standards and Eligibility Requirement. However, the Visiting Team recommends that the college maintain administrative stability and capacity in its fiscal services unit, as the college opens positions and considers proposals for administrative reorganization.

Recommendation 8

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.2a)

Findings and Analysis

The present Visiting Team found that the Board of Trustees has continued to redefine and redirect its actions and communications, reflecting its expressed commitment to become a policy making governance body that delegates management and operational responsibilities for the college to the president. Since the April 2009 visit, the new college president has taken office and has established a productive and trusting relationship with the Board of Trustees. The Trustees appear to have delegated management and operational responsibilities to the president, and they are working well together. During the summer, an outside consultant, who has worked with the Board for over a year, conducted a workshop with the Board on roles and responsibilities of the Board and college president, and the Board has defined ongoing training activities for new and incumbent trustees. Interviews with college constituencies revealed a greater sense of confidence in the Board's actions, but some of those interviewed expressed concern over a few instances of (perceived) micromanaging. The visiting team also interviewed the Special Trustee, who confirmed that the Board and college president have established an appropriate and productive relationship. However, the Special Trustees also expressed concern, with a specific example, over lingering tendencies among some trustees to micromanage.

Conclusion

The Visiting Team concludes that the Board of Trustees has continued to pursue policies and actions that support compliance with the Standards, and that the evolving relationship between the new college president and the Board speaks to both progress and commitment. The observations and findings of the April 2009 Visiting Team are still accurate; however, individual Trustees still exhibit tendencies to act unilaterally and to micromanage, as evidenced through interviews with Trustees, the college president, and the Special Trustee. Consequently, the Visiting Team has reason both to commend the Board for its progress and ongoing work toward full compliance with the Standards and to caution the Board against regressing to behaviors that do not reflect compliance with the Standards.

General Conclusions

Mirroring the conclusions of the April 2009 Visiting Team, the present Visiting Team found an overall tone of optimism and positive attitude, as manifested through discussions with trustees, senior administrators, and constituency leaders. Clearly, the new college president has brought a renewed sense of stability and direction to the college, and all constituencies, including the Board of Trustees, are focused on meeting the Standards and Eligibility Requirements. The present Visiting Team re-validated the findings and conclusions of the April Visiting Team Report and validated the findings and conclusions of the college's October 2009 Follow-Up Report. However, recognizing that the college has until June 2010 to resolve all deficiencies cited in the June 2009 Action Letter, the present Visiting Team cautions the college that much work must be accomplished in the remaining months. The Visiting Team also recommends that the college give special attention to Recommendations 6 and 8, guarding against actions that could result in regressing from compliance. The College has not fully resolved the recommendations.