

Solano Community College Follow-up 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 November 1, 2010**

Chair	Title	Institution
John S. Nixon, Ph.D.	President	Mt. San Antonio College
Team Member		
Ronald Taylor, Ph.D.	President	Feather River College

Introduction

Solano Community College last underwent a comprehensive accreditation review in fall 2006. In October 2008, Solano Community College submitted a Midterm Report and a Special Report to the Commission. Those reports were followed by an evaluation team visit. In January 2009, the Commission 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 Commission 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 October 2010; each was to be followed by a team visit.

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. In January 2010, the Commission reviewed the Follow-Up Report submitted by the college and the report of the evaluation team that visited on October 29, 2009. The Commission took action at its January 2010 meeting to accept the Follow-Up Report and to continue Solano Community College on Probation, requiring the college to correct the noted deficiencies by October 2010 and to submit a second Follow-Up Report to the Commission by October 15, 2010. The report was followed by a visit, and this document is a report of that visit.

With the new president on the job for 15 months, the college has resolved the deficiencies cited (vis a vis Recommendations 1, 2, 3, 6 and 8) in the January 29, 2010 letter from the Commission. 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 October 2009, the visiting team found all college stakeholders committed to meeting Accreditation Standards. This updated (Follow-Up) report documents progress since last October's visit.

The present evaluation team interviewed 25 college constituents, including six Trustees, the Special Trustee, and the President of the Associated Students. All those interviewed by the evaluation team gave evidence and sincere testimony of a college that is on course, and confident in its future. All of the employees interviewed, as well as the student, Special Trustee, and elected Trustees, expressed confidence in the leadership of the college president. Similarly, the college president, Special Trustee, and leaders of the employee constituency groups expressed confidence in the elected

Board of Trustees to maintain its appropriate policy role and to delegate operational responsibility for the college to the president. While the hiring last year of a vice president and director of fiscal affairs did not work out, the president took swift action to hire two respected community college veterans to serve as interim administrators until the positions could be filled. The Board of Trustees also accepted the President's recommendation to raise the salaries for the senior fiscal positions, in order to attract qualified candidates. Final interviews for the two positions are scheduled for November. It is also important to note that all constituencies interviewed, including the student, were knowledgeable about institutional planning and evaluation.

Discussion of the Institution's Responses to Recommendations

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 significant developmental changes and progress in response to the ACCJC Show Cause Letter, since the April and October 2009 visits. 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 the planning processes, noting that old tensions and distractions related to leadership have ended. Of particular note is the ongoing work of the college President, who has promoted and encouraged open communication and serious dialogue on student performance and success. The evaluation team found evidence of improved and expanded dialogue that engages all constituencies in discussion of the college's strengths and weaknesses, and, just as significant, the evaluation found evidence that the culture of dialogue and evidence will be sustained.

Conclusion

The college demonstrates resolution of the deficiencies cited in the recommendation. Solano Community College has a President who is leading the college to sustained commitment to dialogue and to student success.

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 continues to make progress in integrating institutional planning. The Process Evaluation and Review Team (PERT) continues to guide the various processes related to integrated planning at the college, and the Integrated Planning Process (IPP) continues to be the central point of reference for these processes. PERT has continued its training efforts, developing new tools such as YouTube videos and a detailed set of web-posted documents that present a thorough explanation of the IPP.

Representatives of PERT continue to make presentations in governance committees and councils, ensuring understanding and institutional priority for planning processes. The three-year plans remain an important process for collecting input on institutional needs at the division level; they continue to ensure effective planning at that level; and they provide for linkage between program-level planning and the institutional Strategic Plan objectives. In the last year, strategic planning proposals have been made by several units or committees of the college and reviewed by the designated Review Group. Moreover, two of these have been funded and implemented, establishing an UMOJA program and authorizing a revamping of the Teaching and Learning Center. Thus, the proposal process designed by PERT and incorporated into the IPP has seen a full cycle of implementation.

The college has initiated and completed the formulation of a new Strategic Plan for 2010-13, based on fresh input from community representatives, as well as from faculty, staff, and students. At the time of the evaluation team's visit, reporting tables for both the previous strategic goals and objectives (from the 2006-10 strategic plan) and the current goals and objectives had been updated, clearly showing the level of implementation of the institution's goals, which is substantial. The tables map out expected outcomes, timelines, departments responsible, and actual results. The table for the 2006-10 goals and objectives shows that the college has made significant progress on virtually all objectives, and is tasking itself with reporting centrally on its achievements.

Since the last report and visit, there have been changes among staff positions that are important to continuing the momentum established in the realm of institutional planning. In particular, the previous, long-time Director of Research and Planning has retired. In addition, as part of an administrative reorganization, two vice presidents have departed and a new Executive Vice President has been hired. The former Academic Senate President, a strong faculty advocate for integrated planning, has stepped into a dean-level role, with responsibility for institutional accountability and effectiveness. These changes do not appear to have undercut the momentum achieved in the last year; yet, it will be important for the college's leadership to give attention to continuing this all-important momentum as it seeks to fill two remaining administrative positions, and monitors the activities of those who are new to their roles.

A core aspect to Recommendation 2 is whether the college has framed and communicated its planning and reporting processes so that they are widely and readily understood by members of the campus community. The current Follow-Up Report presents evidence that various committees, councils and divisions of the college have received briefings on the IPP, and that central governance groups such as the Shared Governance Council and the Administrative Leadership Group have planning as a standing item on their agendas.

Conclusion

The college has accomplished a great deal in response to this recommendation, establishing and continuing its focus on an Institutional Planning Process that provides assurance of ongoing integration of, and fulfillment of, institutional plans. The process has been recognized as a possible model by members of the RP Group, a professional organization among California community colleges that is dedicated to promoting effective data-based planning. The process has been well communicated to the campus community, and interviews confirmed familiarity and confidence among the constituency leaders. The new leadership of the college appears to be committed to ensuring ongoing implementation of the IPP. The evaluation team concludes that the college is now proficient in institutional planning and has entered into sustainable continuous quality improvement, and thus has resolved the deficiency cited in 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 are pertinent here. The college has a long-standing and effective system of program review, and is using student learning outcomes as an approach to institutional improvement in various venues. Methods to measure and evaluate effectiveness in achieving strategic planning goals have been established by means of a tracking table that guides regular reporting in the highest governance councils of the college, under the continuous stewardship of the PERT.

The Follow-Up Report provides substantial evidence of data-based decision making in the college. The new Executive Vice President has strengthened coordination of effective schedule development based on thorough data review. Student learning outcomes and learning assessment continue to be a focus of activity among faculty as well as student services professionals at the college, and figure into program review reports. Review groups are designated for these reports, and the college presents good evidence that the review process influences institutional planning and budgeting.

The updated reporting tables described above under Recommendation 2 show that the college is monitoring its progress on shared goals and objectives. The table for the 2006-10 goals and objectives shows that the college has made significant progress on its objectives, and the table for 2010-13 goals and objectives indicates delegated responsibilities and expected outcomes.

Conclusion

The evaluation team concludes that the college has fully resolved the deficiencies cited in this recommendation, as evidenced by the fact that the IPP has seen more than a full cycle of implementation, and by the fact that the groups responsible for institutional effectiveness are now of long standing and well schooled in the college's own processes. While there are several new faces in these groups, the institutional commitment to continue implementation of the planning and accountability processes appears to be solid. Constituency leadership expresses confidence in the continuance of institutional improvement based on the use of relevant data.

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)

Findings and Analysis

The President, hired 15 months ago, has engendered stability and good morale among all constituencies, including the Board of Trustees. Based upon interviews with staff from the college, the open communicative style of the president has helped staff to feel empowered as partners in the decision-making processes of the college.

However, the college has also operated for much of the past year without a permanent chief business officer (CBO). The college has benefited from two interim employees in fiscal services who have brought significant experience and expertise to fiscal affairs. New, permanent hires are imminent, and the interim CBO and the Special Trustee reported to the evaluation team that the candidate pool has several strong candidates for both positions. The college now has a permanent, senior administrator for human resources, bringing additional stability to college leadership. The college president has implemented a major reorganization of instruction and student services, consolidating two vice presidents' positions into one position of executive vice president. The person hired as executive vice president has been well received and has further enhanced a sense of confidence and stability in college leadership.

Conclusion

The evaluation team concludes that the college president is building a solid team of administrators and that the college has resolved the deficiencies cited in the recommendation.

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 evaluation 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 October 2009 visit, the college president has established a productive and trusting relationship with the Board of Trustees. The Trustees 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 second

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 sense of confidence in the Board's actions, as well as confidence that the Board will continue to act appropriately. The evaluation team also interviewed the Special Trustee, who confirmed that the Board and college president have established an appropriate and productive relationship. The Special Trustee also expressed confidence in the capacity of the Board to sustain the positive changes it has made in the future.

Conclusion

The evaluation team concludes that the Board of Trustees has continued to pursue policies and actions that support compliance with the Standards, and that the relationship between the college president and the Board speaks to both progress and commitment. The evaluation team also concludes that the deficiencies cited through this recommendation have been resolved and that current policy and practice, which follow Commission Standards, will be sustained.

General Conclusions

Reflecting the findings of the October 2009 evaluation team, the present evaluation team found an overall tone of optimism and cooperation, as manifested through discussions with trustees, senior administrators, and constituency leaders. Clearly, the 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. Just as significant, the evaluation team found that the college has resolved all deficiencies and found good evidence to conclude that the positive work undertaken by all constituencies will be sustained. The evaluation team further concludes that the leadership of the college president and his relationship with the Board of Trustees is solid evidence for sustaining the appropriate roles and responsibilities between the President and Board when the Special Trustee ends his work at the college.