ACCJC Follow-up Report

Southwestern Community College District
900 Otay Lakes Road
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A Confidential Report Prepared for the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges

This report represents the findings of the evaluation team that visited Southwestern College on November 15, 2010

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Introduction and Overview

A peer evaluation team representing ACCJC conducted a comprehensive visit for reaccreditation of Southwestern College in October 2009. At its meeting in January 2010, the Commission acted to place Southwestern College on Probation. The Commission divided the recommendations into those which the College should address promptly and required a Follow-up Report from the College in October 2010 followed by a team visit and those needing more time for implementation with a requirement of a report due March 2011, also to be followed by a visit. This report focuses on the recommendations dealt with in the College's October 2010 report.

The evaluation team found that the College had prepared well for the visit, both in writing a report with complete documentation available in the team room, and in scheduling meetings between team members and individuals and groups from the College as requested by the evaluation team. The team noted that the College had formed a work group to respond to each of the Commission's recommendations. The evaluation team met with the work groups for Recommendations 6, 8(b), and 9, the Superintendent/President, the Vice Presidents, the past and current Academic Senate Presidents, the Trustees, the Technology staff and faculty, and several other individuals.

In order to address the Commission's recommendations, the College engaged in several types of training. To address Recommendation 8(b), the Board of Trustees, College constituency leaders, and committee members received training on participatory decision making from the Statewide Academic Senate President and the President of a well-known organization that is engaged in trustee training. The Board scheduled two training sessions to address Recommendation 9, one with the ACCJC President. In addition, the College has hired an experienced and well-qualified accreditation consultant to assist in interpreting the recommendations and assuring the college resolves issues in a timely fashion.

Despite progress on the recommendations addressed in the College Follow-up Report as required by the Commission, the team was concerned that the College will not have sufficient time to demonstrate resolution of all recommendations by the due date.

College Responses to Team Recommendations from the October 2010 Follow-up Report:

Recommendation 5:
The team recommends that, in order to comply with the Commission's policies on distance learning and substantive change, the college submit a substantive change report for those programs that currently offer more than 50 percent of a program through distance education (Eligibility Requirement 21).

Observation and Analysis
The College submitted a Substantive Change report to the Commission.   At its June 2010 meeting, the Commission acted to accept the report, thus extending the College's accreditation to the online program.

Conclusion
This recommendation has been satisfied.

Recommendation 6:
As previously identified in the 1996 and 2003 ACCJC WASC Accreditation Reports, the team recommends that the college implement a Technology Plan that is integrated with the Strategic Plan and college goals; relies on Program Review; and provides reliable budgetary process for renewing technology and for providing appropriate technology staffing, support, and training college wide (II.C.1.a, III.C.1.a, and II.C.1.c).

Observation and Analysis
The College responded to this recommendation by enlisting the assistance of a consultant to assess technology needs and create a new plan that would carry the College forward from 2010 to 2015. Although the plan appears to be comprehensive, at the time of the visit it had not yet been approved. The College elected to postpone the integration of this plan with the Strategic Plan, college goals, and Program Reviews until March 2011. Also remaining to be addressed as a result of the assessment are technology staffing, support, and training. The Plan reflects the College's effort to integrate its planning processes and computer replacement cycles, and criteria for prioritizing purchases.

The College has invested an impressive $2.1 million in technology and replacement in the last year. A total of 1,543 computers have been installed since the team visit, and the technology staff reported to the team that more computer purchases had been made. At the same time these purchases were occurring, the College started its technology planning with a needs assessment. Since College staff and faculty report continuing issues of inaccessibility to instructional software on their office computers, the results of the needs assessment and new plan may result in different purchasing decisions.

The College staff that the team spoke to reported they are dissatisfied: they reported that the IT staff does not understand the need for a consultant or a new plan and that the faculty still do not have access on their office computers to software used for their classes or labs. The faculty and staff impacted by technology were not in agreement with the steps taken and did not feel they had been sufficiently involved in the decisions despite the detailed list of participants contained in the plan.

Conclusion
The College has made progress in addressing this recommendation, especially by installing computers, improving infrastructure, and purchasing additional hardware. The new plan, however, has yet to be approved, and it is not integrated with the larger Strategic Plan. This integration is anticipated to be complete by the time of the next follow-up report. Given that the parts of this recommendation yet to be resolved are significant and time-consuming, the team has concerns about whether the issues can be resolved quickly enough to meet the timeline. The concern is further exacerbated by the lack of consensus on the approach taken by the College.

This recommendation has been partially met.

Recommendation 8b:
The team further recommends that the college establish and follow a written process and structure providing faculty, staff, administrators, and students a substantial voice in decision making processes (IV.A and IVB.2.b).
Instructions from the action letter: Particularly by the October report, develop and implement written definitions of the decision process.

Observation and Analysis
In August and September 2010, members of the Board and other institutional leaders participated in a number of training sessions focused on the Board's role and shared decision-making in California Community Colleges, and received training by Accreditation Commission staff on accreditation. Additionally, the College developed and approved a "shared governance" policy and procedure. Their first step was to identify a collegial governance policy and identify the academic areas which the Board of Trustees would rely primarily upon the advice of the faculty senate and those areas on which the Board and senate would mutually agree. In May 2010, later in the process, the College began to address the participation of other College groups in decision making processes. The policy was approved in October 2010, just prior to the team visit. Currently, the College is working on the development of a Shared Planning and Decision Making Handbook to further clarify the role of the Board and its individual members.

At the time of this visit, the team found that feelings between faculty and staff, the Superintendent/President, and some trustees were more strongly divided at the time of the follow-up visit than the previous year. The animosity appears to have been fueled by the recent election process and defeat of two trustees, who will be replaced by individuals who enjoyed staff support. Continued acrimonious feelings were evidenced by harsh statements reported from recent Board meetings. Subsequent to the team visit, the Superintendent/ President resigned and the Vice Presidents of Human Resources and Student Services have been appointed in acting capacities.

On an encouraging note, members of the College community seemed elated at the election results as an indication of a change in direction for the better. While promising, the team noted that this is not the first time Board candidates strongly supported by the faculty and staff have been elected. Previous such

circumstances did not produce lasting improvements in relations among the College, the Board, and Superintendent/President.

Conclusion
With the policy just approved, the College has not been able to implement it as required by the Commission's timeline. The College plan to develop a handbook as a guide for implementation of its newly approved policy is a positive step, one which will help the College take advantage of its progress to date.

The College and Board will need to determine how it will develop mutual trust and respect sufficiently to work together for the good of the college. A change in Board and administrative leadership may help, but the College and Board will need to sustain efforts to be collegial and civil. New trustees should also be trained on trusteeship and participatory decision making.

Again, in light of significant changes in leadership, the team is concerned for the College's ability to satisfy the team recommendations by March 2011, especially this one.

This recommendation has been partially met.

Recommendation 9:
As previously identified in the 2003 ACCJC WASC Accreditation Report, the team recommends the Governing Board adhere to its role as a policy-making body and not interfere with the authority and responsibility of the Superintendent/President for college operations. The team further recommends that the Governing Board act as a whole once it reaches a decision and as an advocate for the college (IV.B.1.a and IV.B.1.j).

Observation and Analysis

Members of the Board and other institutional leaders participated in training sessions focused on the Board's role and received training by Accreditation Commission staff on accreditation. It appears all members of the Board participated in these activities and generally agree on the Board's role as a policy-making body.

In June 2010, the Board took action to eliminate Policy 2432, Selection of Vice Presidents. This policy allowed for Board input into the selection of College vice-presidents. With the elimination of the policy, this operational activity was officially discontinued. Additionally, Board members ceased participating on the College's budget committee, another operational activity. It does not appear that Board members participate in operational activities of the College.

Although Board members interact with College staff, communication appears generally filtered through the Superintendent/President. The Board does not appear to micromanage or usurp the authority and responsibility of the Superintendent/President to manage college operations. However, despite it being made quite clear that communication between trustee and the College staff should occur through the

Superintendent/President, trustees and staff reported the continual involvement of one board member. He was reported to be contacting and communicating with College personnel without the Superintendent/President's knowledge. The trustees report that they have made significant effort to inform this Board member that his actions are inappropriate, and the team witnessed such attempts during the visit.

There continues to be tension between Board members regarding advocating for the College after the whole reaches a decision. This tension is mirrored by the difficult environment leading up to the election of two new Board members in November 2010. Further, the recent unexpected departure of the Superintendent/President raises concerns that the changes will exacerbate the tensions. While the College has taken positive actions to implement part of this recommendation, more time is necessary to assess the extent recent changes support or detract from the action recommended by the Accrediting Commission.

Conclusion
The Board has made significant progress in adhering to its policy making role. However, continued direct communication between trustees and College staff rather than through the College President will interfere with a new President's ability to manage the operations of the College.

The College requires more time following recent leadership changes to determine their effect on satisfying all aspects of this recommendation.

This recommendation has been partially met.

Recommendation 10:
The Team recommends that the Governing Board establish and implement a formal procedure for handling potential conflict of interest and ethics policy violations and document adherence to the protocol.

Observation and Analysis
On June 9, 2010, the board approved Procedure 2701: Conflict of Interest. This action satisfies part of the recommendation. In October 2010, the Board of Trustees approved the final reading of a new Code of Ethics procedure and Code of Ethics policy. The Code of Ethics policy includes specific language regarding conflict of interest and ethics, while the new procedure outlines the process for handling violations. The procedure is specific in the actions required to investigate and respond to violations. For example, the procedures require each Board member to review and sign the Code of Ethics during the Board's annual retreat as well as use the Code of Ethics as criteria in the Board self-evaluation process. Further, the procedures include a review of the Code of Ethics when orienting new Board members. While the Board took formal action to establish the appropriate protocols required by this recommendation, the final approval coincided with the Board's approval of the Accreditation Follow-up Report. The lateness in approving these protocols indicates insufficient time to show adequate implementation. This is evidenced by the following conditions:

- The Board has not conducted an annual retreat including the review and signing of a Code of Ethics form,

- The Board has not conducted a self-evaluation since early 2009, and
- There is no evidence indicating integration of the Code of Ethics into the Board's self-evaluation process.

Conclusion

The College has partly implemented this recommendation and requires additional time to demonstrate appropriate implementation. Further, with the introduction of two new Board members in December 2010, the additional time will allow for assessing the inclusion of the Code of Ethics in the new Board orientation process.

This recommendation has been partially met.