

ACCREDITATION PROGRESS EVALUATION REPORT

COLUMBIA COLLEGE

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A Confidential Report Prepared for the
Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges of the
Western Association of Schools and Colleges

This report represents the findings of the accreditation progress report evaluation team
that visited Columbia College on November 19, 2007

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**COLUMBIA COLLEGE
Visiting Team Members**

November 19, 2007

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FOR
COLUMBIA COLLEGE**

On October 15, 2007, Columbia College submitted its Progress Report pursuant to the direction of the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) in a letter dated January 31, 2006. The Progress Report focused on the recommendations and concerns listed in the January 31, 2006 letter.

On Monday, November 19, 2007, a two-person site team visited Columbia College. Below is a summary of the team's findings based upon the Progress Report and observations and discussions on November 19, 2007.

Recommendation 1: Communication—The team recommends that the college and district develop a concrete and systematic process to improve collaboration, communication and cooperation. The process should include, but not be limited to, an examination of whether any current functions provided by the district office should be centralized or decentralized to better serve students. (1.B.1; 1.A.4; III.B; IV.A; IV.B).

Columbia College (Columbia) and the Yosemite Community College District have made very significant strides toward improving collaboration, communication and cooperation. The new president of Columbia assumed her post in January of 2007, and the new Chancellor of Yosemite Community College District (YCCD) assumed his post in July of 2007. The new leaders have modeled cooperation and established a framework for communication that has already resulted in opportunities for collaboration and cooperation.

At Columbia, the new president has made great progress in encouraging open exchanges of ideas. The faculty, staff, and administrators we spoke with hailed the efforts and commitment of the new president to encourage participatory decision-making. One of many examples of the openness of the Columbia president is a new newsletter. In addition, the president has established a series of regular meetings and has reinvigorated the Columbia College Council ("CCC"), the primary body for collaborative governance at Columbia. The participants of the CCC expressed appreciation for the new approach the president has presented.

With respect to communication between Columbia and YCCD, the district has literally been meeting Columbia halfway. Several meetings involving the two organizations have taken place at Oakdale, a community almost equidistant between Sonora and Modesto. Central Services from YCCD have also made an effort to be more accessible to Columbia. One example is the Vice Chancellor of Human Resources now makes monthly visits to Columbia to assist with personnel issues. A Budget Allocation Task Force is co-chaired by the Columbia president and the YCCD Executive Vice Chancellor.

Since the new Chancellor has only been in the role since July, Columbia and YCCD are still early in the process of evaluating whether students might be better served by centralizing or decentralizing Central Services. However, the improved dialog between Columbia and YCCD has already lead to a joint decision to centralize campus security to allow for additional coverage of Columbia. The communications infrastructure appears to be in place to make good decisions with respect to how best to provide services from the District Office.

The recommendation has been met.

Recommendation 2: Planning—The team recommends that the college establish an integrated, comprehensive planning process in all areas of the college by emphasizing and strengthening the link between planning, budgeting and Program Review. Particular focus should be in the following areas (I.A.4; I.B.2; I.B.5; II.A.2; II.C; III.B):

- **Communication of a planning calendar complete with timelines and delineated with the person(s) responsible**
- **Instituting and communicating processes that produce evidence that program evaluations lead to the improvement of college programs and services**
- **Development of a strategic plan that will guide the college in integrating the planning processes that result in the college meeting its goals set forth and in line with its mission**

Columbia is nearing completion of an Educational Master Plan that will address many of the recommendations concerning planning. The outline for the timeline for the planning calendar is included in the draft plan (pp. 19-22). The delineation of the person(s) responsible for implementation of the planning calendar is evolving, but progress has been made in assigning tasks and responsibilities.

Under the leadership of the new president, Columbia adopted the YCCD Strategic Plan for 2007-2013. Previously, the acceptance of the district plan had been controversial for Columbia. Adoption of the YCCD plan is further evidence of the improved communications described in response to Recommendation 1 above.

At a series of two retreats for the Columbia College Council, the Council developed a revised mission statement, vision statement, and Columbia core values. The Council's efforts were noted by YCCD when the Board of Trustees adopted Columbia's vision and mission statements on May 9, 2007. The work of the Council laid a foundation for the development of a master plan.

As of November 19, 2007, Columbia had developed a Draft Educational Master Plan. Columbia's goal is to have the plan approved both internally and by the YCCD Board by July 1, 2008. The plan remains a work in progress, but it appears likely Columbia will be

able to complete the planning process on schedule. As written in draft form, the plan would introduce processes that produce evidence that program evaluations lead to the improvement of college programs and services.

The recommendation has been substantially met.

Recommendation 3: Resource Allocation—The team recommends that in order to best serve the needs of students, the district and the college engage in a collaborative process to ensure a transparent and equitable allocation of financial resources and that the district and the college implement a process to communicate budget issues with each other on an ongoing basis (III.C.1a; III.C.2; III.D.1a,b,c; III.D.2a; III.D.2b; III.D.2d; III.D.2e; III.D.3; IV.B.3d; IV.B.3g).

Columbia and YCCD have made significant progress in better communicating the existing model for allocation of financial resources. In meeting with Columbia faculty, staff, and administration, it appears that the previous president often characterized the allocation process in a way that pitted Columbia against YCCD. The District Budget Allocation Task Force—co-chaired by the Columbia president and the Executive Vice Chancellor of YCCD—has improved communication and dialog about the existing distribution of resources. The Task Force was instituted by the Interim Chancellor, but is continuing to function under the leadership and direction of the new Chancellor.

As of November 19, 2007, the Task Force had not made any final recommendations concerning changes in the resource allocation model. Whether or not any changes are recommended or approved, the educational process has already been quite effective. The final report of the Task Force will be an important piece in evaluating this recommendation.

The recommendation has been partially met.

Recommendation 4: Research – The team recommends that the institution adopt a culture of evidence by developing and implementing, with timelines, responsibilities, and evaluation, a research process based on quantitative and qualitative analysis that assesses institutional effectiveness and documents the need for resources, technology, staffing, programs, and facilities which best serve the students needs (I.A; I.B; II.B.1, 3.4; II.C).

The current president of Columbia College, hired in January 2007, has a clear understanding of the relationship between data and decision-making. In her relatively short tenure she has been highly effective in communicating the link between data, planning and resource allocation to all college constituencies. This approach represents a departure from previous practice but one that seems to be generally well accepted by the college community.

The college took a second significant step in moving toward a culture of evidence in May 2007, when a Director of Research and Planning was hired. The Director of Research

and Planning was previously employed in research and accreditation in the allied health field, and as a result began an already challenging job with the additional task of learning the language and practices of the community college system and becoming acquainted with available resources. In addition to tackling this learning curve she has, over the last five months, conducted an initial internal and external scan, developed a research protocol document, and established a process for submitting data requests. She has also held numerous meetings with faculty, both individually and in small discipline related groups, to discuss academic and student services research needs.

Because the college did not previously have a comprehensive Educational Master Plan (EMP), the task of developing an EMP has been particularly challenging and has been a high priority for the Director of Research and Planning. She has worked closely with the President, the Vice President of Student Learning and the College Council to develop the first draft of the EMP. In addition, she has focused on providing the data and other resources necessary to support Program Review and student learning outcomes, including the development of a database to track learning outcomes.

The college has begun a more systematic approach to the acquisition of qualitative and quantitative data, and the link between data, planning and resource allocation is becoming more clearly understood at all levels of the institution. A committee structure has been developed to support the interrelationship of research with key institutional functions including technology, facilities and hiring though the team found no evidence that specific timelines, responsibilities, and evaluation processes have been developed yet. However, the leadership, research capacity and governance structure to support a culture of evidence appears to be in place. Although commendable progress has been made in a short time, a great deal of work remains to be done in order for the college to attain the level of proficiency in which research is fully available, integrated, and systematically employed in all aspects of college decision making.

This recommendation has been partially met.

Recommendation 5: Student Learning Outcomes – The team recommends that the college adopt an aggressive approach with specific timelines and responsibilities for developing student learning outcomes including documentation and assessment at the course, program, and institutional level and demonstrate that evidence is being used for institutional improvement. All employees of the college must assume responsibility to improve student learning outcomes (II.A.1, II.A.2; II.B; II.C).

Columbia College has had various committees working on student learning outcomes since 2003. In response to the Commission recommendation, the college combined their efforts into a single SLO Workgroup with representatives from all constituencies in late fall 2006. The Workgroup expanded upon earlier efforts to stimulate broad dialogue around SLOs. This group also assumed responsibility for gathering and disseminating information, identifying resources, and facilitating training related to SLOs. During this time the college established an SLO website which includes the Columbia College

definition of SLOs, a model of the SLO cycle, minutes of SLO Workgroup meetings and examples of SLOs.

With respect to the essence of the recommendation—to adopt an aggressive approach and develop a specific timeline—the College offers as evidence a table of actions with dates and responsible persons covering the period from March 2006 through January 2008. However, the actions listed in this document focus primarily on training, workshops, website development, sharing of resources, and committee meeting agendas. The plan is primarily an historical snapshot of the initial SLO planning phase. The actions do not provide a specific timeline for the actual future development and assessment of student learning outcomes at the course and program level. Although Columbia College has adopted institutional SLOs, progress on development and assessment of SLOs at the course and program level is moving slowly. At the time of the college's response to this recommendation, SLOs had been identified for approximately 13% of all courses and 23% of all instructional programs. Only about 10% of courses and 11% of instructional programs had identified methods of assessment for SLOs. The areas of instructional support and student services have made considerably more progress with about 85% SLO identification and between 71% to 77% assessment identification.

One possible explanation for the modest progress at the course and program level may be that expectations have been fairly general and flexible. For example, the college required each department or work unit to develop a minimum of two SLOs by December 2006, and they report 95% compliance. However, departments were invited to focus on whatever level of SLOs interested them and to use whatever format they wished. This approach was used in part to maximize the level of engagement, and it may have been effective in accomplishing that goal. But it was not effective in addressing the spirit of the recommendation: to move aggressively to accomplish the task of SLO development and assessment at the course program and institutional level. The college has not developed a specific timeline that commits to a defined rate of progress toward that goal or a specific set of future actions and responsible persons to ensure that this task is accomplished.

The college has completed much of the foundational work needed to support a functional SLO cycle. They have engaged in extensive dialogue, explored definitions and models, provided staff development opportunities, established an SLO website, developed a database for tracking SLOs, agreed on an institutional definition and developed institutional learning outcomes. With the addition of a Director of Research and Planning they are well positioned to move forward. However the core of this recommendation still remains to be accomplished. The college needs to develop a concrete plan that defines *when and how* they will arrive at the point at which all courses and programs are actively engaged in ongoing assessment of learning outcomes and are using that process as an integral component of program review and institutional improvement. Fully meeting this recommendation will require the active involvement of all members of the college community and the development and implementation of specific strategies to accelerate and monitor the pace of progress in this area.

This recommendation has been partially met.