

DEC 06 2007

**REPORT ON  
FOCUSED MIDTERM REPORT  
AND VISIT**

**COLLEGE OF MARIN**

**835 College Avenue  
Kentfield, CA 94904**

**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 evaluation team that visited  
College of Marin on November 8, 2007**

**Sherrill L. Amador, Ed.D., Chair  
Judith Walter-Burke**

**College of Marin**  
**Report on Focused Midterm Report and Visit**  
**November 8, 2007**

**Introduction**

At its January 2007 meeting, the Commission acted to require the College of Marin to submit a Focused Midterm Report on special issues of Commission concern by October 15, 2007, followed by a visit of Commission representatives. The Commission also acted to continue the College of Marin on Warning for the third year since its comprehensive evaluation visit of November 2004. The Commission has required three progress reports with visits (March 2005, November 2005, and November 2006). The Commission's major concern still remains the college's lack of significant progress on the 2004 recommendation on an institutional, integrated planning process based on program reviews and supported by robust data, systematic evaluation and research which leads to plans with priorities for allocation of resources.

The focused midterm report visit was conducted by Dr. Sherrill L. Amador and Ms. Judith Walter-Burke. The College of Marin (COM) submitted its Focused Midterm Report on time to the Commission; however, the team determined that the initial progress report was incomplete because it contained only the assessment of the five recommendations from the November 2004 comprehensive evaluation visit, but did not include the focused midterm component assessing progress on its self-study planning agendas. When this deficiency was identified, the college quickly submitted a revised document one week before the visit; however, the team determined the report lacked specificity and it did not include a forecast of where the college expects to be by the time of the next comprehensive evaluation (on the second component). At the visit, the team received a second revised document which provided more clarification on institutional progress on COM planning agendas. It was apparent to the team after meeting with the Institutional Planning Council and staff members that these planning agendas and their assessment had not been used for on-going committee planning efforts. The college was prepared for the visit, and staff arranged the requested interviews for the team with governing board members, administrators, students, faculty, and staff. Documentation appropriate to the visit was available to the team.

During its visit, the team met with the President; two members of the Board of Trustees; the Chief Business Officer; the Accreditation Liaison Officer; the President's Cabinet; the SLO Coordinator; the Curriculum Committee Chair; Officers from the Academic Senate, Classified Senate, and Student Senate; members from the College Council, Governance Review Committee, and Institutional Planning Committee; Budget Committee; Data Advisory Group; Program Review Group; and Curriculum Committee. The team held an open forum which was attended by 27 people.

## **Background**

At the time of the last progress report and visit (November 2006), the team had determined that the college had met three of the five recommendations. In its Focused Midterm Report, the college provided an update on these three recommendations as well as the two remaining, one of which was of special concern to the Commission as stated in the Commission President's January 31, 2007, letter to the college president on the need to implement institutional planning and program review processes leading to plans and integrate them with resource allocation (Recommendation 3).

## **College Responses to the 2004 Commission Recommendations**

The following are the Commission's five recommendations to the College of Marin from the 2004 comprehensive evaluation visit, and this visiting team's assessment of institutional progress on these recommendations at the Focused Midterm point in COM's accreditation cycle.

**Recommendation 1: The college should finalize immediately an effective governance structure that reinforces respectful dialog, defines shared commitment, and outlines the roles and responsibilities of all constituent groups for participation in informed decision-making processes. The processes must be designed to result in action with on-going assessment and evaluation of institutional effectiveness to improve student learning. (Standard IV.A.1, IV.A.2, IV.A.3, IV.A.5)**

The COM has continued to use, evaluate, and refine its governance structures. There have been two annual cycles (spring 2006 and 2007) of perception surveys administered to governance members to assess the effectiveness of its Participatory Governance System (PGS). The team's review of the survey data comparisons clearly indicates the members perceive there is positive and constructive constituent participation in COM governance leading to an informed decision-making process. There were percentage improvements on all questions over the two-year period, many significant, with the exception of the question, "all members attended regularly." As noted in the COM Focused Midterm report:

A total of 93 seats on ten committees were filled by faculty (45), staff (23), students (14), and administrative representatives (21) in the new governance system's second full year of operation. The ten committees of the PGS met 78 times in 2005-06 and 103 times in 2006-07. One noted difference in participation was in serving on multiple committees. In 2006, 12% served on four or more committees, and in 2007 no one served on more than three.

Training has been provided to committee members and the college as a whole on the PGS. The president publishes a weekly bulletin that highlights the activities of the committees and the minutes and agendas are posted on the college website.

**Conclusion:** At the time of the November 2006 progress report visit, the college had met this recommendation. It is positive that COM continues to refine its governance system and processes based on evaluation. For spring 2008, the Governance Review Committee plans to do an assessment by surveying all college members on the understanding and effectiveness of the GPS.

**Recommendation 2:** The college complete the reexamination of the college mission statement immediately to ensure it defines the purpose of the institution and addresses the emerging educational needs of the changing and diverse population of the district. The college must establish and adhere to a systematic and regular cycle for reviewing and updating the mission statement. (Standard I.A.1, I.A.3, I.A.4)

A revised, updated COM mission statement was developed and adopted by the Board of Trustees on March 8, 2005. An inclusive process was used by the Mission Task Force and two college-wide workshops were held in January and February 2005 to collect input for the mission statement. The revised statement emphasizes success in the areas of college transfer, workforce preparation, and basic skills improvement. The COM Board policy calls for an annual review of the mission, and the team confirmed that at the Board's March 2006 and April 2007 meetings, the mission statement was reaffirmed.

The mission statement is published in the COM catalog and other college publications.

**Conclusion:** COM had met this recommendation at the time of the March 2005 progress report visit. It is positive that the COM has followed its own policy by continuing to revisit the mission statement annually.

**Recommendation 3:** The college implement, by January 2006, an institutional planning process based on agreed upon institutional values, a redefined mission, and measurable outcomes, that is strategic, systematic, data-driven, evidence based, focused on student learning and holds responsible parties accountable for actions and timelines. The planning process must integrate institutional effectiveness and program review processes to inform educational master planning, facilities master planning, technology planning, student learning and services programs development and revision, and resource allocation. To ensure effective and sustainable plans and informed decision-making, the College must assess its current organizational structure and use of resources to create and support a culture of evidence, research, and data. (Standards I.B.1, I.B.2, I.B.3, I.B.4, I.B.6, I.B.7, II.A.1a, II.A.2e, II.A.2f, II.A.6b, II.B.4, II.C.2)

Upon review of the documentation and interviews with the Institutional Planning Committee (IPC) and administration, the team learned that neither the IPC nor the

administration could point to one document that the college is using as a plan to guide the institution. The college has two sets of published goals, one in the 2007-08 catalog and another in the April 2006 COM Educational Master Plan. The Board has annual goals, and the president has annual goals based on those goals. Yet the team found no documentation to coordinate all the goals, or to identify which goals were used to guide the institution. The IPC seemed to be using the assumption that planning goals should be set annually (and those become the basis of an annual work plan) instead of having longer-term, strategic goals that set the direction of the college for the future and enable the college to monitor and evaluate the progress on the goals overtime. The goals seem to be moving targets (what needs to be done this year). Instead, the college might consider establishing annual objectives and/or activities to reach long-term goals, thus helping to set priorities for institutional efforts and funding to achieve the broader goals. These working assumptions were documented in the Planning Calendar for 2007-08, and the same process of having new goals each year is repeated for further years in the future. The team suggests that the college consider the use of a consultant or expert on institutional and strategic planning to assist the college on how a planning cycle should operate. The team also noted that the college is moving toward the use of a computerized planning tool, TracDat, which is commendable. However, the college may be over-emphasizing the use of this tool and has delayed its implementation by waiting for a new software release. This has held up college-wide planning unnecessarily because long-term goal setting and developing a strategic or educational plan do not require software.

A review of the documentation indicated that COM had taken many positive steps toward improving the planning process. However, these parts of the planning process are not integrated. No one group or person can articulate the direction of the college based on a single strategic and/or educational plan. The college's current educational master plan, which the IPC confirmed was not a plan and no other exists at this time, has only goals for the year 2006. The IPC has focused on trying to develop the perfect cycles, planning tools, models and pilots, instead of developing and implementing a strategic plan. IPC admitted to the team that they do not have an operational planning process or plan. A sub committee is now charged with rewriting the educational master plan, but it was not clear to the team what would be used to create the plan, what form it would take, and IPC's role in evaluating institutional performance based on the plan. IPC's last meeting for the 2006-07 academic year was May 16, 2007, and the first meeting for the 2007-08 year was October 3, 2007. An example of the lack of planning coordination is the current Strategic Partnership Development and Enrollment Planning initiative, which is planned with funding identified in a detailed document. The vice president of student learning provided an update on it at the August 2007 Board meeting, yet there is no mention of this initiative in IPC minutes (December 2006-October 2007). Also, it is not clear how this initiative is tied to college planning goals.

COM had been without an effective program review process for over two and a half accreditation cycles. After the team visit in November 2006, COM finalized its

program review process and cycle, called a "pilot," which by design feeds into the planning process with the intention to impact the resource allocation process. Beginning in January 2007, eight programs were "nominated" to complete program reviews by August 2007, seven did so. These reviews were presented to the Board of Trustees on November 7, 2007. Two additional groups of programs are slated for completing reviews by January 2008 (5 programs), and May 2008 (5 programs) respectively. By May 2008, COM will still have programs that have not completed a review.

Because the college has chosen not to look at operational program indicators on an annual basis, the team confirmed with the Budget Committee that the 2007-2008 budget was a rollover budget. The Budget Committee had not received any planning priorities from IPC. The October 27, 2007, Budget Committee minutes state:

Program review is young, pilots in process, but procedures are influx. Results may not be seen until 2009-10. January/February at the latest to impact 2008-09. Pilot level review should have some impact on 2008-09.

The team suggests that the COM process for completing SLOs at the course and program level might be replicated for completing the program reviews, since it has been more successful in achieving results. Because this recommendation was made to COM in November 2004 and the Commission expected an implemented planning process by January 2006, COM is urged to complete all programs reviews as soon as possible so that the college may have established priorities to influence next year's budget.

The team observed that some faculty seem to be under the impression that because program review is one of the participatory governance items stated in California Title V that some faculty can choose to not participate in program review and thus cause the whole faculty to not perform their professional obligations of accreditation. The team observed that the current faculty leadership understands its professional obligations and is trying very diligently to move ahead with program review and they have done the work to implement those reviews that were completed. But the faculty leaders continue to be thwarted by a vocal minority. The college is reminded that program review, planning, and resource allocation processes which lead to institutional effectiveness have been part of the Accreditation Standards since the 1990s and are also contained in the Eligibility Requirement #19. These integrated processes must be completed for the good of the college as a whole and the students it serves. Even if everyone does not participate by choice, the college will be judged on whether the standards are met over a reasonable period of time.

The team noted that the college does not have a program elimination policy (Standard II.A.6.b) and was informed that in September 2007 an Academic Senate appointed faculty to an Ad Hoc Program Discontinuance Committee. A draft of the

policy was to be ready for review by November 1, but no drafts were available at the time of the visit.

**Conclusion:** The college has not met this recommendation, which was to be completed by January 2006. The college cites many reasons for failing to finalize this recommendation. Even with the difficult governance environment perpetuated by some prior faculty leaders, many faculty members, administrators, and staff are to be commended for the planning components that have now been designed, but the reality is that implementation has not occurred. The team suggests the college take stock of what it has developed to date and **implement** an institutional planning process that results in planning, **plans**, and **priorities** for resource allocation. These should be based on systematic, data-driven program reviews, assessed student learning outcomes, and agreed to planning goals and annual objectives. The plans should be monitored and evaluated using agreed upon criteria to determine the effectiveness of the institutional actions and changes over time. The team suggests the IPC simplify its processes for ease of completing them. The team also recommends that the college communicate its plans, the process, and the outcomes so that the college community is informed on all aspects of the planning process. The team encourages the college leadership (faculty, staff, and administrators) to move forward working with those who are willing to do the institutional work necessary for the benefit of the college as a whole and the students it serves.

**Recommendation 4: The college by January 2006 develop and implement a systematic, inclusive, on-going process that addresses student learning outcomes at the course, program, and discipline level as well as for the general education program. The process must begin with a faculty-driven institutional dialogue that leads to action, assessment and measurement of student learning resulting in institutional improvements. (Standard II.A.1a, II.A.1c, II.A.2a, II.A.2b, II.A.2e, II.A.2f, II.B.4, II.C.2)**

COM continues to put considerable energy toward this recommendation. The student learning outcomes initiative on campus is a faculty-led effort. The college has a new faculty SLO Coordinator who took over this responsibility when the previous coordinator became the Academic Senate President. The team found continued enthusiasm for and commitment to student learning. Faculty reported that the amount of change that has occurred at College of Marin over the past year has been dramatic, with a major shift to a student learning focus.

Existing organizational structures are supporting strategies for student learning outcomes definition and assessment. Since spring 2006, the Curriculum Committee requires all disciplines and programs going through curriculum review to provide evidence of student learning outcomes. SLOs are included in all course proposals and updates which are reviewed and approved by the Curriculum Committee.

The team noted that over the past year, the college has made progress with the development of discipline/program level student learning outcomes. The college

began to implement a new program review process in 2007 which requires disciplines/programs to state their program level SLOs as part of that process. Instructional programs, student services, and administrative units are scheduled to participate in program review. In addition, several categorical programs have developed SLOs as part of the program review initiated by the California Community Colleges Chancellors Office.

This effort to include SLOs in program review helps to institutionalize SLOs and is a positive step toward the integration of student learning and program level planning. The IPC identified SLO documents as among the planning documents that are used to move the college forward. The college needs to further integrate the institutional planning process, including the use of the results of program and course level SLO assessments, to improve the quality of instructional programs and services.

The third year of the three-year pilot program has been completed. An SLO workbook has been widely distributed, and the faculty handbook will include the Seven Steps to SLOs document prepared by the SLO Coordinator. Many faculty members have been trained to assist their colleagues and have attended conferences and workshops to expand their skills in developing and measuring SLOs. In addition, a website is being developed to support faculty and staff.

The College of Marin identified three college level SLOs that are linked to the Mission and values. Each unit has identified how they contribute to the first two of the three goals: "Critical Thinking" and "Building Community". Beginning in spring 2008 they will address the third SLO, "Respond to Changing Demographics and Community Need."

**Conclusion:** The team believes that the college is continuing to make progress in the transition from a teaching centered institution to a student learning centered institution. Using the ACCJC rubric, the college is at the "development level" in the implementation of SLOs. A sound structure for the development of course SLOs has been established through the curriculum process and for program SLOs through program review. College-wide SLOs have been developed, and individual programs are identifying how they support those SLOs. Everyone encountered during the team visit exhibited a "can do" attitude toward student learning outcomes.

The team observed that the faculty, the SLO Coordinator, Academic Senate, Curriculum Committee, college administration, and others support student learning. The momentum that has built needs to be maintained as the college advances through the levels of implementation identified in the ACCJC "Rubric for Evaluating Institutional Effectiveness – Student Learning Outcomes." The college also needs to continue to focus on effective assessment and on making course and or program improvements.

The college needs to clearly communicate the SLOs to its students and the community by including them in appropriate publications such as the course syllabi, the college catalog, semester schedules and college website. In addition, the college needs to address the ACCJC standard in human resources regarding including SLOs as part of faculty evaluation.

This recommendation has been partially met.

**Recommendation 5: The college complete an actuarial study by June 2005 to determine the college's unfunded retirement liability. Based on the findings, the college then must implement an action plan to fund future liability obligations. (Standard III.D.2c, III.D.2g)**

The team found evidence that COM has been addressing the unfunded liability recommendation. The college contracted with Total Compensation Systems Inc. to complete an Actuarial Study of the Retiree Health Liabilities. The report to the Board of Trustees on June 14, 2005 identified the college's unfunded retirement liability at approximately \$8.5 million. The college has transferred a total of \$1 million into a special reserve fund for the liability. In August 2005, the Board of Trustees allocated \$200,000 and in June 2006 transferred an additional \$800,000 into the fund.

While the administration initially intended to recommend a plan and program to fund future liability obligations to the Board of Trustees in January 2007, that action was delayed so that the Board could consider various funding options. In February 2007 Total Compensation System Inc. completed a second actuarial study that estimated the unfunded liability at approximately \$7.3 million. In March, the Board of Trustees approved participation in the Community College League of California Retiree Health Benefit Program Joint Powers Agency.

On October 9, 2007, the college administration submitted a funding plan to the Board of Trustees for first reading. The Board approved this plan on November 7, 2007, the day before the focused midterm visit. The funding plan authorizes the transfer of the \$1 million the college has set aside into the irrevocable trust established by the Community College League of California Retiree Health Benefit Program Joint Powers Agreement. Annually, from funds that were budgeted but not spent during the year, the college will transfer additional funds into the irrevocable trust.

**Conclusion:** This recommendation has been met. The college conducted two actuarial studies (in 2005 and 2007) and in 2005 took action to reduce the unfunded liability from \$8.5 million to approximately \$7.3 million. On November 7, 2007 the Board of Trustees approved the College of Marin Unfunded Liability Funding Plan. To completely meet this recommendation, the college needs to implement the plan to fund future liability obligations.