

**VISITING TEAM REPORT
FOR
COLLEGE OF MARIN**

**835 College Avenue
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**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 April 1, 2008**

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**College of Marin
Visiting Team Report**

Introduction

After a comprehensive evaluation visit in fall 2004, College of Marin was placed on warning after the Commission found the college had failed to implement an institutional, integrated planning process which leads to plans with priorities for allocation of resources, based on program reviews and supported by robust data, systematic evaluation and research. The College was required to submit reports and experienced team visits in spring 2005, fall 2005, fall 2006, and fall 2007. At its January 2008 meeting, the Commission reviewed the Focused Midterm Report submitted by College of Marin and the report of the evaluation team that visited on November 8, 2007. The Commission took action to accept the Focused Midterm Report, to place College of Marin on Probation effective immediately, and to require the college to submit a Report by April 1, 2008 demonstrating that it had completed program reviews for all programs and services. The report was to be followed by an evaluation team visit. A team consisting of Dr. Sherrill L. Amador, chair, and Mr. Edmund H. Buckley conducted an evaluation visit on behalf of the Commission on April 1, 2008.

The College of Marin (COM) submitted its latest Progress Report on time to the Commission shortly before the team visit. The college was prepared for the visit, and staff arranged the requested interviews for the team with governing board members, administrators, faculty, and staff. Specifically, one or both team members met with Governing Board members, the Institutional Planning Committee, the Budget Committee, the Student Learning Outcomes Committee, and the President's Cabinet. Documentation appropriate to the visit was available to the team. The team held an open forum during the visit that was attended by approximately 70 people.

Background

The comprehensive evaluation team that visited College of Marin in fall 2004 gave the institution five recommendations. At the time of the progress report and visit in November of 2006, the team had determined that the college had fully addressed three of the five fall 2004 recommendations. In its November 2007 Focused Midterm Report, the college provided an update on these three recommendations as well as the two remaining recommendations that were still unaddressed in 2006. By the fall 2007 visit, the college had fully addressed the recommendation on implementing an action plan based on a completed actuarial study on retirement benefits. However, the November 2007 visiting team found that the college had still not implemented institutional planning and program review processes, resource allocation processes integrated with that planning, and implemented improvements in educational quality (Recommendation 3 from the comprehensive visit in fall 2004). The team urged in its report that the college "take stock of what it has developed to date and to implement an institutional planning process that would result in planning, plans, and priorities for resource allocation...based on systematic, data-driven program reviews, assessed student learning outcomes, and agreed to planning goals and annual objectives" (p.7).

In January 2008, after its review of the November 2007 visiting team's report, the Commission informed the college that it needed to provide a Progress Report by April 1, 2008, to be followed by another visit, and that the college needed to demonstrate the institution's *complete resolution* of the following recommendation from 2004:

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)

April 2008: Progress Report and Visit

The college provided the Progress Report in a timely manner. In preparation for its evaluation, the visiting team read the Progress Report, as well as the various college reports and team visit reports back to spring 2005. In particular, the team focused on the issues raised by the November 2007 team: lack of program reviews for all programs and services, student learning outcomes as part of program review, lack of documented college goals and plans (strategic and educational), integrated planning with resource allocation, and lack of a program discontinuance policy.

Program Review

Before the November 2007 visit it was the college's intention to phase in the Program Review Plan developed in 2006 in three phases. This would have meant that all phases would not be completed until after the budget development cycle for 2008-2009. After the November WASC visit, the Academic Senate created a Program Review Committee to oversee instructional program review and the college committed resources to ensure the completion of all instructional program reviews by April of 2008.

Based on an examination of several program reviews, the Program Review Committee *Program Overview Summary, March 25, 2008*, the Institutional Planning Committee *Summary of Program Review 2008* Summaries, and meetings with the Program Review Committee and the Institutional Planning Committee members, the team determined that the task had been completed. The college completed 61 program reviews since the last visit. It was apparent that the process, which is quite ambitious, seeks to utilize data effectively, incorporates student learning outcomes, reflects institutional goals and strategic planning initiatives, and links program goals to budget priorities. The faculty chiefly responsible for developing the model has done its homework by looking at the models at other institutions. The team was impressed with the degree to which the faculty seemed to have embraced this challenge, as well as the spirit of cooperation evident

between the faculty leaders and the chief instructional officer and other administrators and staff members. The college seems to understand the purposes and process of program review, and is proud of its accomplishment. More importantly, the summary results of all the program reviews now provide a comprehensive picture of the college from an internal perspective which should improve future planning processes and inform the budget allocation process. The team noted that the program review process informed the college's work on its basic skills initiative, which is a concrete example that the college is taking program review seriously.

The team observed, however, that the program review process was completed in a very short time period, and remains a work in progress. Moreover, the linking to the budget process will be a significant challenge over the next several months. The college has scheduled an all-day Budget Committee workshop for April 25, 2008, with an agenda to use the priorities from the Institutional Planning Committee (IPC) meeting scheduled for April 21. From the outside, the process looks very thorough but fairly labor-intensive, with several resource committees (e.g. equipment, budget, facilities, etc.) reviewing the appropriate sections of each program's document. The team is hopeful that the momentum can be sustained, and urged the faculty and administrative leaders to remain especially focused and vigilant as the first cycle of program review is completed and the next one begins. In addition, the college needs to be sure that instructional program review is parallel and aligned with student services program review and administrative review. The college states in its progress report that it plans to review its program review process at the end of April to make the necessary improvements for next year's cycle. The college has already planned to do annual updates on all 2008 program reviews for 2009/10 planning priorities and budget allocations, which will begin in fall 2008.

Student Learning Outcomes

The November 2007 visiting team identified the institution's lack of consistent work on student learning outcomes (SLOs) and assessment of learning as a concern because of its obvious centrality to program review, planning and educational improvement.

The team reviewed a number of courses and a number of program reviews and affirmed that almost all programs and courses include student learning outcomes. At the course level, the SLOs all appear to be well constructed. The Curriculum Committee has a process that reviews course SLOs for clarity and consistency. At the program level, student learning outcomes are not uniformly well-designed, though many are outstanding. The college has planned a review process for program SLOs comparable to the one used for courses. The team determined that the development of student learning outcomes has been effectively integrated into the culture of the college. What remains to be achieved is the assessment of the SLOs and action plans based on the results of those assessments.

Planning

The college published its strategic plan on March 4, 2008 and it had been distributed to all staff, posted on the website, and is planned for publication in next year's catalog. Based on interviews with the various committees and staff, it was apparent to the team that the college now has one set of institutional goals which will guide planning in the

future. A team discussion with the Institutional Planning Committee (IPC) determined that the college is still struggling with how it will be able to evaluate the success of the college goals and strategic initiatives. The team noted that measurable criteria have not been determined to assess the institutional effectiveness and outcomes of its plan. It was apparent to the team that the intent of the committee is to address this issue in the future. The Educational Master Plan subcommittee of IPC will be using the goals and the 2008 program reviews to complete the Educational Master Plan in fall 2008. The team noted that the college is learning how to implement institutional planning and plans while doing it.

As stated above, the IPC is setting the priorities for the college based on the program reviews at its April 21 meeting. On April 25, the Budget Committee will determine budget allocations based on those priorities for the 2008/09 budget. The team heard a commitment by board members, administration, and faculty that this process will be followed. Clearly, this will be the first time the college has used an integrated planning model. The IPC members stated a commitment to evaluate the planning process once completed to determine future improvements.

Program Discontinuance Policy

The college now has a program discontinuance policy. The minutes of the Board of Trustees meeting of March 18, 2008, record the approval of Board Policy 4021: Program Revitalization and Discontinuance. The Academic Senate presented the policy to the Board.

Conclusions

In the last five months, the college has spent considerable time and effort to address Recommendation 3 from the 2004 comprehensive visit. The program reviews of 61 programs and services have been completed and are scheduled to be used in late April by the Institutional Planning Committee to set priorities and the Budget Committee to determine resource allocations for the 2008/09 budget. The college has agreed to one set of institutional goals and published its strategic plan will college goals and strategic initiatives. These are being used by all committees involved in the planning processes. The college now has a board approved discontinuance policy.

The team determined that this recommendation has been more than partially addressed. What remains of the college's institutional work on integrated planning is the completion of the Educational Master Plan (fall 2008) and the completion of the budget allocation process for 2008/09 as scheduled in late April. It will be the college's responsibility to inform the Commission of the completion of the April processes prior to the June 2008 Commission meeting. Based on the ACCJC rubric for evaluating institutional effectiveness in program review and planning, the team determined that the college has completed the development stage. It is the expectation of the Commission that colleges are in the proficiency stage to meet the Standards. Therefore, the College of Marin must continue using its newly developed processes and plans on an annual basis. The team did observe that the college's processes for program review and integrated planning are

complex which presents a challenge for the college as it performs this necessary institutional work. It is important that the college as a whole be vigilant in sustaining its integrated planning processes and completing its plans over several years to ensure improved quality and institutional effectiveness for its students and communities served.