

## **Evaluation Team Report**

MiraCosta College  
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Oceanside, CA 92056

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

This report represents the findings of the special evaluation team that visited MiraCosta College on May 7-8, 2008

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September 17 and 18, 2007

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## **Introduction**

MiraCosta College last underwent a comprehensive evaluation by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges in 2004, at which time its accreditation was reaffirmed. The College was required to submit a Midterm Report in March 2007. At its June 2007 meeting, the Commission accepted the college Midterm Report. The Commission also took action to require a special team visit by August 31, 2007 for the following purposes:

“...to focus on the institution’s inability to move forward in addressing new accreditation standards on students learning outcomes (ER 10 and Standard II.A. a, b, e, f) as well as the efforts the college is taking to restore the core value of commitment to effective and collegial governance as observed and noted by the 2004 comprehensive evaluation team (Standard IV.A and IV.B.)”

In accord with this action, a four member team visited MiraCosta College on September 17 and 18, 2007. At its meeting of January 2008, the Accrediting Commission sanctioned the college by placing it on Warning status and acted to require that the college submit reports and undergo team visits in the spring of 2008 and the spring of 2009. The college was directed to “demonstrate the institution’s resolution” of the following recommendation in a Progress Report due April 1, 2008:

**Recommendation 3: The team recommends that the governing board establish a comprehensive governing board development plan that builds a shared understanding of board roles and responsibilities, that leads to common agreement about the rules, regulations, and protocols under which the board operates, and that creates a framework that allows the board to operate in a unified manner. (Standards IV.B.1.a, IV.B.1.e, IV.B.1.f, IV.B.1.g)**

The college was also asked to demonstrate substantial progress on Recommendation 1 “such that the institution moves toward the Developmental Level on the Commission’s Rubric for Evaluating Institutional Effectiveness,” with the college fully reaching the Developmental Level expected by the time of the March 15, 2009 Progress Report:

**Recommendation 1: The team recommends that the following items of evidence be in place at the time of the next accreditation visit:**

- **Evidence that the process of establishing student learning outcomes at all course and program levels has been completed.**
- **Evidence that assessment of student learning course and program outcomes is being conducted.**
- **Evidence that students are achieving stated learning outcomes**
- **Evidence that the assessment and evaluation results are used for the improvement of student learning.**

**(Standards II.A.1.a, II.A.1.c, II.A.2.e, II.A.2.f)**

Finally, the college was asked to demonstrate, in the 2008 Progress Report, that it had “set a schedule or plan for beginning the communications that will address Recommendation 2,” with complete resolution expected at the time of the March 2009 Progress Report:

**Recommendation 2: The team recommends that the governing board and college constituent groups engage in a dialogue focused upon identifying and achieving mutual interests central to ensuring a participative governance climate consistent with the college mission, vision and values. (Standards IV.A.1, Iv.A.2.a, IV.A.3)**

A two-member team visited MiraCosta College in April, 2008 to evaluate the college’s work completed to resolve Recommendation 3 and demonstrate progress on Recommendations 1 and 2. This report contains the findings of that team.

## **Background**

In order to fully understand the context in which these actions were warranted, one must be familiar with the recent history at MiraCosta College. The recommendations are related to the impact of events that occurred during the past two years, and this report would be incomplete without a brief summary.

In December 2005, an employee alleged inappropriate conduct in the college Horticulture Department. In the spring and summer of 2006, four college employees were placed on leave pending investigation into reported fraud involving the sale of the Horticulture Department’s palm trees for personal profit. The employees placed on leave included the vice president of instruction, the instructional dean overseeing the Horticulture area, and two Horticulture Department employees. After a yearlong investigation, one of the employees, a faculty member, pleaded guilty to fraud and reimbursed the college the amount of \$305, along with receiving a fine, probation and community service. No other charges have been filed.

During the time that the Midterm Report was being prepared, the campus was divided regarding the handling of the investigation and a perceived breakdown in collegiality between the a majority of the board of trustees and the college president, on one hand, and a minority group of board members and dissenting campus groups, on the other. This division resulted in the full time faculty voting a no-confidence vote in the president and a no-confidence vote in the board of trustees. Campus surveys showed that morale was at an all time low. The Midterm Report described a campus climate that was not conducive to collegial participation in decision-making processes.

In June of 2007, the Board of Trustees reached a settlement agreement with the superintendent/president to end her presidency. Although the board unanimously signed off on the agreement, three members subsequently voiced opposition to the agreement in a press conference.

The Accrediting Commission received a letter from the MiraCosta Academic Senate in May, 2007, which was followed by an appearance of campus leaders during the public session of the June, 2007 meeting. Among other issues, the Academic Senate cited surveys that supported the contentions that college employees were not treated “equitably, with fairness and respect,” that issues related to diversity and unfair treatment of faculty had not been addressed, and that the resulting negative college climate could have an adverse effect on student learning. In order to follow up on this information, the Commission acted to require a Special Visit by August 31, 2007. In order to accommodate the team’s and the college president’s schedules, the visit was subsequently scheduled for September 17 and 18, 2007.

At the time of the September 2007 special visit, the Board of Trustees votes on most matters related to the palm tree investigation and its aftermath typically resulted in a 4-3 split. Trustees had coalesced into two distinct groups: a four member “majority,” and a three member “minority.”

In addition to offering the three recommendations listed above, the visiting team of September 2007 offered the following summary of the campus climate:

“It should be noted that in spite of the dislocating events of the recent past, the college as a whole has maintained an admirable resiliency and dedication to its core mission. There are commendable efforts being made throughout the learning environment at MiraCosta College. Scores of staff, faculty and administrators have prevailed in furthering the ability of the institution to meet its goals in trying circumstances, and there remains a strong belief in the goodness of the enterprise and the importance of carrying out the community college mission.”

In December, 2007, the college reached a termination agreement with the former vice president of instruction. An interim vice president of instruction is currently in place.

An interim president was hired in the summer of 2007. His contract runs through June of 2008. The college conducted a national search process, but the search for a new president was called off in May of 2008 after two finalists were forwarded to the Board of Trustees. The board has determined that a new search process will be initiated, with the goal of having a president in place by January 1, 2009.

## Evaluation of Progress

**Recommendation 1: The team recommends that the following items of evidence be in place at the time of the next accreditation visit:**

- **Evidence that the process of establishing student learning outcomes at all course and program levels has been completed.**
- **Evidence that assessment of student learning course and program outcomes is being conducted.**
- **Evidence that students are achieving stated learning outcomes**
- **Evidence that the assessment and evaluation results are used for the improvement of student learning.**

**(Standards II.A.1.a, II.A.1.c, II.A.2.e, II.A.2.f)**

### Observations

At the time of the May, 2008 visit, the college produced evidence that approximately half the courses in the curriculum had identified three outcomes and appropriate assessment measures.

College representatives report that upon receiving the Commission warning letter, the faculty substantially accelerated their Student Learning Outcomes development plan, which had been scheduled to be completed in 2016. The new plan called for development of three outcomes and appropriate assessment measures in one third of the college's courses by March, 2008, with completion of SLO's and identification of assessments for all college courses by December 2008. In fact, at the time of the Progress Report, the college had exceeded their goal and had completed work on 332 courses, which comprises 49% of the credit curriculum. The college estimates that at the time of the team visit, 55% of courses had been completed.

This college reports that this accomplishment has been made possible because of prior work done to lay the foundation for SLO development, attendance of key faculty at statewide conferences devoted to SLO's, an all-day training session attended by over one hundred faculty and the acquisition of TracDat, a software system that facilitates the collection, management, and evaluation of student learning outcomes and assessments.

The college has also developed student learning outcomes for noncredit courses that lead students directly into transfer level courses. Noncredit ESL and Adult High School courses have developed SLO's for 82% of their curriculum.

Program level outcomes are expected for general education, Career Technical Education and Basic Skills within one year.

The college reports that they expect to have institution level outcomes developed by December 2008, and that they will have integrated SLO's into the program review process by the fall of 2009.

## **Conclusions**

The college faculty has made a strong commitment to meet this recommendation. It is clear that the college moved beyond the Awareness Level and into the Development Level of the Rubric for Evaluating Institutional Effectiveness: Student Learning Outcomes. The team commends them for the earnest manner with which they have accelerated their timeline.

The college has demonstrated the progress called for in the Commission letter regarding Recommendation 3.

**Recommendation 2: The team recommends that the governing board and college constituent groups engage in a dialogue focused upon identifying and achieving mutual interests central to ensuring a participative governance climate consistent with the college mission, vision and values. (Standards IV.A.1, Iv.A.2.a, IV.A.3)**

## **Observations**

A number of activities have taken place aimed at responding to this recommendation.

Meetings have been conducted involving the Board of Trustees president and vice president, the college president, and, variously, leaders of college constituent groups to address the issues central to this recommendation.

On the day prior to the arrival of the team that conducted the May progress visit, the college conducted an exercise arranged by the Dispute Resolution Center, which had board members and campus leaders participate in round table discussions devoted to shared governance roles and responsibilities, building trust and mutual respect, improving communication, and the superintendent/president search process. The team heard that the exercise was effective in allowing campus constituents and board members to address issues in a safe and productive environment. The team heard suggestions that the format would be a viable way to discuss areas of any future conflict.

While the major points of discussion were recorded, and recommendations for improvement were put forward, the team did not find evidence that the college has yet identified mutual interests that can be used to inform and guide the governance process.

The team heard a number of concerns that there is the perception of a lack of trust exhibited by the board toward the administration and college constituent groups as a result of two recent board actions. These include the board decision to jettison the presidential search process after they reported that two finalists (the only fully qualified

and acceptable candidates, according to the search committee) was an insufficient number; the board's procedural objections, announced in public session, to approving salary and faculty load proposals that staff stated had been approved in closed session.

Regarding the presidential search, the team learned that the board had concerns about various aspects of the search process, and they are considering a different format for the new search, which may include a smaller committee that has additional community members and that has board members more actively involved in the first round screening and interviewing process. This has created some concern from campus constituent groups, who fear a lack of adequate input into the selection process. A dialogue between the board members and campus leaders will reportedly be held in June concerning the new presidential search process. There has been no final decision regarding the composition of the committee.

Many employees also commented negatively upon a practice adopted during the tenure of the former president that mandated that any college employee who interacted with a board member should report that interaction to a supervisor, who would then report it to the president. College employees feel that this has contributed to a lack of positive interaction, avoidance of dialogue, and a breakdown in communication. The current administration reports that this practice is no longer being followed.

## **Conclusions**

The actions taken to initiate dialogue are important and necessary, and they will need to continue if the college is to come to terms with the events of the past few years and the more recent events that have sparked campus concern. While the college is engaged in the first steps of this process, it is unclear whether the process will be continued and sustained over time. While a structured discussion regarding the new presidential search has been scheduled, the team did not find evidence that further activity aimed at identifying mutual interests aimed at establishing a participatory governance climate is planned at this time.

The team is concerned that the board's recent handling of the presidential search and the salary and load proposals do not indicate movement toward the elimination of past tensions and the creation of an effective participatory governance structure.

The college has made first steps at creating a dialogue, but additional work will be necessary, and the college has yet to develop a schedule for the process that will allow them to establish mutual interests related to creating a participatory governance climate. This recommendation has been only partially met.

**Recommendation 3: The team recommends that the governing board establish a comprehensive governing board development plan that builds a shared understanding of board roles and responsibilities, that leads to common agreement about the rules, regulations, and protocols under which the board operates, and that creates a framework that allows the board to operate in a unified manner. (Standards IV.B.1.a, IV.B.1.e, IV.B.1.f, IV.B.1.g)**

### **Observations**

The college has initiated a number of significant efforts aimed at board education and development.

A task force consisting of two board members, the college president, and the Human Resources director was established to prepare a board development program.

In January, 2008, a retreat was held in which attorney Mary Dowell, Butte College trustee Bill McGinnis, and former Community College League president (and current American River College president) David Viar guided the board through a session on roles and responsibilities.

David Viar returned to MiraCosta College for two follow-up sessions on effective governance.

The board is reportedly reviewing the Carver Model of Governance and redefining the manner in which they will operate.

As noted above, the Dispute Resolution Center conducted a special meeting with the Board of Trustees and college leaders on May 6, 2008, to discuss relevant topics that included shared governance roles and responsibilities.

Campus constituents and board members report that the board is working together more effectively on an interpersonal level. Board members reportedly do not exhibit the rancor that once characterized their meetings, and they appear to achieve consensus more frequently than in the past. However, the team heard campus concerns that the board has yet to fully embrace their policy management role, and that occasional examples of micromanagement continue to occur.

The team heard concerns that while the board may be adopting a more unanimous approach to college issues, the recent events noted under Recommendation 2 have led some to believe that the board has yet to fully embrace the policy governance goals central to this recommendation.

When asked if an orientation plan is in place for any new members potentially elected in November, 2008, the board members reported that there is no such plan.

## **Conclusions**

While the college has initiated a number of important sessions aimed at board development, the college has not yet developed a comprehensive plan that will insure that board training continues beyond the immediate time frame. The team believes that the board development process should be an ongoing part of college activities, which is not dependent upon the membership of the board or the person assuming the position of president. Such a plan should be specific, it should have resources allocated to it, and it should have a process for self assessment and continuous improvement. While the immediate efforts aimed at educating current board members have been noteworthy, the team found no evidence that the plan called for in the recommendation has yet been established. This recommendation has been partially met.