

# **Evaluation Report**

MiraCosta College  
One Barnard Drive  
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 visit at MiraCosta College on  
April 7, 2009

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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 submitted a Midterm Report in March 2007. The Commission accepted the college Midterm Report; however, 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 initially visited MiraCosta College on September 17 and 18, 2007. As a result of their findings, which included the three recommendations included in this report, the Accrediting Commission sanctioned the college by placing it on Warning status and acted to require that the college submit reports and undergo special evaluation visits in the spring of 2008 and the spring of 2009. After the 2008 report and visit, the Commission took action to accept the report and continue the Warning sanction. The Commission sent a letter to the college on June 30, 2008, informing them that a Commission representative would visit the college in the fall of 2008 in order to discuss Commission concerns with the new interim president and the board president. The letter further stated that the college must complete a report by March 1, 2009 that would, in part, demonstrate considerable progress toward resolution of the following recommendation:

**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)**

The report was also to demonstrate the institution’s full resolution of the following two recommendations:

**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)**

**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)**

In accord with the June 30, 2008 letter, Dr. Barbara Beno, president of the ACCJC, visited MiraCosta College on October 7, 2008 to discuss Commission concerns that could have an impact upon their next comprehensive accreditation visit, which will take place in March, 2010.

The college submitted its report on February 27, 2009. The person who acted as chair of the 2007 and 2008 evaluation teams visited the college on April 7, 2009 to evaluate the college's responses to the recommendations. Prior to the visit, the college report and addenda were carefully reviewed. During the visit, meetings were held with all members of the Board of Trustees, the college president, the three vice presidents, the student trustee and Associated Student Body president, the Academic Senate president and vice president, and the Classified Senate vice president. An open meeting was held to gather input from any college community member who wished to offer comment, and approximately twenty five people attended. This report contains the findings of the visit.

## **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 three 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 year-long 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 were 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 four-member majority of the board of trustees and the college president, on one hand, and a three-member minority group of board members and dissenting campus groups, on the other. This division resulted in the full-time faculty voting "no-confidence" in both the president and 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. That visit led to the three recommendations evaluated in this report and the requirement of two return evaluation visits in 2008 and 2009.

An interim superintendent/president was hired in the summer of 2007. His contract ran through June of 2008. The college conducted a national search process for a permanent superintendent/president, but the search was called off in May of 2008 after two finalists were forwarded to the Board of Trustees. The interim president subsequently took another position, and a second interim president was appointed during the summer of 2008. A new selection process was conducted during the fall of 2008, and a permanent superintendent/president was appointed, with a start date of March, 2009. At the time of this visit, the new superintendent/president had been in office for five weeks.

Three board members ran for reelection in November, 2008. One, who was a member of the four-person “majority,” was defeated. Subsequently, a board member who was a member of the three-person “minority,” resigned in March, 2009 and a new trustee was appointed. Thus, the makeup of the board was significantly different during the 2009 visit than it had been during previous visits and during the events described above.

## Evaluation

**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 April, 2009 visit, the college produced evidence that approximately ninety percent of the credit courses in the curriculum had each identified three student learning outcomes and appropriate assessment measures. The college believes that all credit courses will have student learning outcomes and assessment measure in place by the next comprehensive accreditation visit in March of 2010.

The college has completed student learning outcomes and assessment measures for over sixty percent of noncredit courses, and they believe all noncredit courses will be addressed by June of 2009.

In November 2008, all credit disciplines submitted a six-year student learning outcomes calendar for each course. The calendar identifies when assessment data will be collected, when evaluations will be conducted, and when changes will be made to improve learning. The college is already collecting assessment data, with each discipline currently evaluating one third of its courses (or alternatively four courses, whichever is greater).

The college has purchased TracDat, a software system that facilitates the collection, management, and evaluation of student learning outcomes and assessments. A representative of each academic discipline is being trained to enter student learning outcome assessment data into TrackDat.

The college has also developed student learning outcomes for noncredit courses that lead students directly into credit level courses. Noncredit ESL and Adult High School courses have developed SLO's and assessments for all courses, and they are currently engaged in the assessing courses and evaluating the results of their assessments. An Outcomes Assessment Committee is working with faculty to establish assessment cycles for other types of noncredit courses. The college expects to be near 100% completion of SLO's in non-credit courses by June, 2009.

The progress on program level student learning outcomes is in an earlier stage. The college has identified and written student learning outcomes for two major programs, General Education and Career and Technical Education. These outcomes are being assessed in conjunction with course-level outcomes. Each course-level outcome is being tagged to one or more program level outcomes. The aggregate course level results for each program level outcome will be evaluated. The college reports that they will identify additional programs for student learning outcome development in the fall of 2009.

The college has identified four institutional learning outcomes: Effective Communication, Critical Thinking and Problem Solving, Professional and Ethical Behavior, and Information Literacy. These outcomes are anticipated to go to the Board of Trustees for approval in the spring of 2009.

The college has revamped their program review process in a manner that will incorporate the results of student learning outcomes assessments. The new process is currently being piloted in four disciplines: Letters, Counseling, Allied Health and noncredit Health and Safety. The college reports that they will have integrated SLO's into the program review process by the fall of 2009.

## **Conclusions**

The college has made a strong commitment to meet this recommendation. It appears they could achieve the Proficiency Level of the Rubric for Evaluating Institutional Effectiveness: Student Learning Outcomes by the time of their next comprehensive accreditation visit in 2010. This is a remarkable turnaround from the plan they had in place two years ago, which extended the process out to 2016. The team commends the college for the earnest manner with which they have accelerated their timeline.

The college has met the expectation of progress called for in the Commission letter regarding Recommendation 1.

**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**

In the spring of 2008, two round-table discussions meetings were conducted involving the Board of Trustees and college constituent groups to address the issues of conflict and building community. The first was conducted by outside facilitators on the topic "Fostering Better Communication and Effective Working Partnerships." The second dealt with the presidential search process. While the visiting team in 2008 heard good reports about the effectiveness of these sessions, the 2009 report indicated that there was little

follow-up and many staff did not feel that communication had improved. No further sessions were held in the fall of 2008.

During the spring of 2009, two Board Study Sessions were held, with the entire college community invited, for the purposes of revising the college mission statement and discussing the college's vision and values. These were reported to be positive and productive meetings that allowed all constituents to offer input and ideas.

The team also heard from many constituents that the Board worked effectively with the college and community in the search process that led to the appointment of a permanent superintendent/president.

After a visit to the college by ACCJC president Barbara Beno in October, 2008, the college formed a Governance Organization (GO) Committee, with representation from all college groups, that developed a new governance model aimed at clarifying, delineating, and simplifying the appropriate governance roles of staff, faculty and administration. In the new model, forty five committees have been reduced to seven. The new model has the buy-in and formal approval and adoption of all segments of the college.

The team heard repeatedly that the change in Board membership, the appointment of a new president, the unifying activities that led to new mission, vision, values statements and the new governance model have brought the college together in a spirit of renewed hope and optimism.

Board of Trustee procedures for discussion of college issues in public session have been rethought, with regular study sessions scheduled to facilitate better communication and a regular flow of information.

A survey conducted by a national firm, as well as an internal survey conducted to compare the climate of the campus survey results done in 2006-2007, showed a marked improvement in morale and trust among employees.

## **Conclusions**

The rancor and mistrust that characterized past visits appears to be gone at MiraCosta College. Every person interviewed, including all those in an open meeting, expressed that the college has entered a new era of cooperation, trust and collaboration. The Board of Trustees has participated in a series of activities designed to foster a better relationship with campus groups, college-wide discussions have been held regarding constituent roles in governance, the college mission, vision and values have been revised, and processes have been restructured to facilitate more effective communication and decision-making.

The college has resolved Recommendation Two.

**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 2008 visiting team reported that a number of consultants were brought in to discuss board roles and responsibilities, and a task force consisting of two board members, the college president, and the Human Resources director was established to prepare a board development program.

Analysis of board policies during the past year led the college to determine that the policies had incorporated administrative procedures, which created confusion about the proper role and responsibilities of the board.

The college has joined the Community College League Policy and Procedure Service, which provides templates for board policies and administrative procedures, and the college is in the process of completely revising all board policies in a manner designed to clarify their roles and responsibilities and avoid micromanagement.

As part of this effort, the college developed a policy and procedure on board education, which had never existed before, to ensure that board development is an ongoing college activity. They have also created a policy titled "Policy and Administrative Procedures," which outlines how board policies are to be developed and describes the process by which constituent groups can provide input into their development.

The new policy on board education was used to guide the orientation of the newly elected board member. The member appointed in the wake of a trustee resignation took office in April, and he will receive similar orientation. A Board retreat on leadership and planning has been scheduled at the conclusion of the spring semester where topics of Board self-evaluation, an ethics policy, and goals for 2009-10 will be discussed.

A website has been developed to post new policies and procedures, and a faculty member has been given 100% reassigned time to update district policies in advance of review, discussion and adoption by the board.

### **Conclusions**

The college has taken a comprehensive approach to resolving this recommendation. The use of consultants to train the board, the adoption of a policy on board education, the creation of a policy that defines the process of developing board policies and that allows clear avenues for campus comment, the analysis and revision of all board policies to clarify board roles and responsibilities, and the posting of new policies on a website to

ensure communication with the college and community are all efforts aimed at addressing this recommendation.

It should be noted that the effort of revising all board policies is a large task, but it is one that will ensure that the board “builds a shared understanding of board roles and responsibilities...leads to common agreement about the rules, regulations and protocols under which the board operates, and...creates a framework that allows the board to operate in a unified manner.” This is beyond the scope of the remedy envisioned by the team that made the recommendation, and the college is to be commended for taking such a thorough approach.

The college has resolved Recommendation 3.