

College of the Redwoods Follow-up Evaluation Team Report

**College of the Redwoods
7351 Tompkins Hill Road
Eureka, CA 95501**

**A Report Prepared for the
Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges**

**This report represents the findings of the evaluation team that visited
College of the Redwoods, November 22, 2010**

Chair	Title	Institution
John S. Nixon, Ph.D.	President	Mt. San Antonio College
Team Member		
Norval L. Wellsfry, Ed.D.	Faculty	Cosumnes River College

Introduction

In 2005, College of the Redwoods underwent a comprehensive evaluation for reaffirmation of accreditation. Over the next five years, College of the Redwoods underwent a series of visits and received recommendations from the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) regarding its ability to meet accreditation standards and sustain activity that will lead to institutional improvement. The most recent actions have included attention to a last remaining recommendation from the 2005 comprehensive evaluation and a new recommendation (Recommendation 1(2009), concerning improvement in communications and operations.

In December 2008, a visiting team report indicated the college had made significant progress in meeting that last 2005 recommendation (Recommendation 5) to integrate educational, facilities, technology and financial planning processes, and also found a new issue regarding the use of student achievement data in the program review process. This last concern resulted in a new recommendation (Recommendation 1 - 2008), calling for the use of templates for student achievement data in program review. The Commission acted in January 2009 to remove the college from warning and reaffirm accreditation. The Commission also acted to require submission of a Follow-Up Report by April 1, 2009, demonstrating the college's resolution of the latest (2008) recommendation on program review. The college was also to present evidence that it had continued its momentum, sustained the achievements to date and completely resolved the remaining issues related to the integrated planning and Educational Master Plan (EMP), including the development of a long-range educational plan, a Facilities Master Plan, and the implementation of budgeting and planning frameworks Recommendation 5 (2005).

A two-person visiting team went to the college in April 2009 to review the institution's resolution of the 2008 recommendation and to verify that the college had sustained its momentum in completing and implementing the planning recommendation (Recommendation 5) from 2005. The team's findings resulted in a report indicating that the 2008 recommendation on program review had not been met, in that the college had completely redesigned its process and put itself back at the developmental level of program review. In addition, the final planning documents supporting the complete resolution of Recommendation 5 had not yet been approved by the Board of Trustees. The college informed the Commission by letter in May 2009 that the Board of Trustees had approved all planning documents in May. The team that visited in April 2009 identified a new concern regarding the breakdown of communications at the college. A recommendation was developed to resolve that situation (Recommendation 1-2009). In a June 30, 2009 action letter, the Commission put the college on Warning status and required a Follow-up Report demonstrating the resolution of both Recommendation 1 (2008) and Recommendation 1 (2009).

On October 20-21, 2009, the same team from April 2009 visited the college to determine resolution of the two remaining recommendations. That team's report

concluded that the college had resolved all deficiencies cited in Recommendation 1 (2008). Although the visiting team found that the college had made progress in its work to resolve deficiencies cited in Recommendation 1 (2009), the team concluded that the college had not completely mitigated the breakdown in communications and the lack of clearly defined roles and responsibilities attendant to governance and planning, cited in Recommendation 1 (2009). Subsequently, the Commission, at its January 2010 meeting, accepted the Follow-Up Report from the college and removed the college from Warning. The Commission also required the college to submit a Follow-Up Report by October 2010, demonstrating that College of the Redwoods had resolved Recommendation 1 (2009). Submission of that report was to be followed by a visit of Commission representatives.

On November 22, 2010, a two person team visited College of the Redwoods to determine whether the college had fully resolved Recommendation 1 (2009). The team carefully read the Follow-Up Report submitted by the college and reviewed additional evidence sent with the Report prior to the visit. During the visit, the team interviewed seven members of the Board of Trustees, the college president (by phone), the College Cabinet, administrators, confidential employees, Academic Senate and faculty bargaining unit leaders, and classified bargaining unit leaders. In addition, the visiting team conducted an open question and answer session, at which approximately 50 employees interacted with the team. The college was well prepared for the visit and all constituencies were eager to discuss both progress and concerns related to the issues reflected in the recommendation. The visiting team found all documentation thorough and all employees and trustees candid and thoughtful. The following report presents the visiting team's findings and conclusions regarding Recommendation 1 (2009), and includes an additional recommendation intended to provide direction to the college.

Discussion of the Institution's Responses to the Recommendation

Recommendation 1(2009)

In order to meet the Standard and improve both communication and operations of the college, the team recommends that the college undergo a review of roles and responsibilities of each member group. In so doing, the college should develop means by which trust can be enhanced and respect increased among the constituent groups to create an environment that supports empowerment, innovation and leads to institutional excellence. (Standard IV.A.1, 2A, b, 3, 5)

Findings and Analysis

The historical context that informed this recommendation is well documented in the October 2009 visiting team report. With four presidents in five years, as well as significant turnover among the other senior administrative positions, including two dismissals by the current president, the college experienced a leadership vacuum, and, among the employee constituency groups, the faculty assumed levels of autonomy for

operational decisions that clearly tipped the scale of decision making to their control and preference. In hiring the current college president two years ago, the Board of Trustees directed him to redefine and rebalance roles and responsibilities for governance and operations.

The 2009 visiting team report indicates that with the emergence of new frameworks for governance and planning, the college had presented evidence that the climate of mistrust and poor communications was showing signs of improvement. Indeed, the 2010 Follow-Up Report presents the college's response to Recommendation 1 (2009), which calls for "..... clarification of roles and responsibilities, " describing actions taken in five areas: revising mission and vision statements (in process); revising organization of administration and committees (completed); revising Board Policies and Administrative Procedures (in process); improving planning processes (completed); and establishing a Management Council (completed). However, the current visiting team found that the past year has not brought increasing trust and effective communications to the college, reflecting a continuing lack of understanding and acceptance of the roles and responsibilities of college stakeholders in governance and planning, in spite of the actions taken.

While frameworks for governance and planning are in place, increasing tension exists between the faculty and the college president, with the faculty asserting, along with classified union leaders, that the president too often ignores established processes of planning and participatory governance and makes decisions, or recommendations to the Board of Trustees, unilaterally. The President asserts in response that when he makes decisions that differ from, or are outside of, planning and governance processes, he is acting from his appropriate role as college CEO and in the best interests of the college. Clearly, the college president has authority and responsibility under local policy and state law to make decisions and recommendations to the Board of Trustees, including decisions and recommendations that deviate from recommendations developed through governance and planning processes. However, the visiting team found that several of the President's decisions and recommendations criticized by constituency leaders came without prior communication or consultation with groups or committees charged with responsibilities affected by the decisions and recommendations under planning and governance processes.

Prior to its 2010 visit, the ACCJC team received correspondence from the Academic Senate, addressed to the Board of Trustees, detailing a litany of concerns related to recommendations to the Board of Trustees and decisions by the college president that are alleged to violate college planning and governance policies, as well as state law pertaining to participatory governance. The following day, the ACCJC team received a detailed rebuttal to the Senate's correspondence, also addressed to the Board of Trustees, from the college President. For the visiting team, looking through the lens of Recommendation 1 (2009), the substance of the concerns in question, ranging from site acquisition and expenditure of categorical funds to faculty hiring and faculty appointments to committees and tasks, is overshadowed by unresolved issues of communication and trust.

Following-up on the individual concerns during the visit, the ACCJC team found accuracy and truth on both sides, depending on the specific concern. The constituency groups and the president are talking over and at each other, rather than with each other. The lack of open, direct communication between the college president and constituency leaders is a significant roadblock to resolution of the recommendation. The substance of issues and concerns, expressed by both sides, is almost irrelevant unless and until the players can achieve common understanding and acceptance of their respective roles and relationships and of the policies and procedures of governance and planning that inform those roles and relationships.

Conclusion

This recommendation has not been fully addressed. As a paper exercise, the college has defined roles and responsibilities for processes of governance and planning. Nevertheless, trust and respect between the college president and faculty and classified employee groups is at a low ebb at College of the Redwoods because the stakeholders either do not accept or do not follow (or possibly understand) their defined roles and responsibilities. The college stakeholders recognize the seriousness of the issues reflected by the recommendation, and, separately, the opposing sides express a willingness to work together on the underlying issues of communication and transparency, which could lead to mutual respect and trust. However, at this point in time, the college has not resolved Recommendation 1 (2009).

The remaining underlying deficiencies concern communication and trust, for which the complaints and counter complaints about specific actions and decisions are symptoms. As noted above, the substance of the decisions or actions, taken or not, is secondary to concerns about communication and lack of a common understanding and acceptance of policies and procedures that define governance and planning. College stakeholders do not consistently use and honor planning processes. If the college president has reason to change or negate recommendations derived from governance and planning processes, he should communicate with the affected stakeholders in advance of his decisions to offer clarification and rationale. The same should apply to unilateral decisions affecting programs, services and resource allocation, which would otherwise be derived through governance and planning processes. At the same time, faculty and classified stakeholders should recognize and accept the scope and limits of their roles and responsibilities, as defined by local policy and State law. Unless and until open, direct communication between the president and faculty and classified stakeholders is achieved, trust and respect will remain out of reach, resulting in the inability of the college to meet the Standard.

To assist the college in addressing these deficiencies, the 2010 visiting team has the following recommendation:

(New)Recommendation 1 (2010)

In order to improve institutional effectiveness through actions and decisions affecting programs, services and resource allocation, the team recommends that the college use and follow its established policies and processes for planning and evaluation. (Standard I. B. 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6.)