

DATE: May 2, 2005

TO: Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges

FROM: Guy F. Lease, Ed.D., Team Chair

SUBJECT: Report on Progress Visit Report  
Santa Monica College, April 20, 2005

Introduction:

A comprehensive visit was conducted to Santa Monica College in March 2004. At its meeting of June 2004, the Commission acted to require of Santa Monica College a Progress Report and visit. The visiting team, Dr. Guy Lease and Dr. Curt Groninga, conducted the site visit to Santa Monica College on April 20, 2005. The purpose of the team visit was to validate the Progress Report prepared by the college and to determine if appropriate progress on the recommendations of the Commission had been made.

In general, the team believes that the college had prepared well for the visit by arranging for meetings with the individuals and groups agreed upon earlier with the team chair and by providing the documents and materials requested by the visiting team in advance of the visit. Over the course of the day, the team met with the Interim Superintendent/President of the college, three members of the Board of Trustees, the Accreditation Liaison Officer, the Academic Senate President, the President of the Management Association, the President of the Faculty Association, the President of the Associated Students, representatives of the Classified Senate and the Classified employees union, as well as many other members of the faculty, staff, and students.

The Commission requested the college to respond to four recommendations that emanated from the comprehensive visit and subsequent Commission action. The Progress Report and visit were expected to document improvement in these areas:

1. The team recommends the college initiate an institution-wide dialogue about student learning outcomes and processes to facilitate learning. This dialogue should lead to documented implementation and results of a cyclical process of learning outcomes development, systemic assessment, and institutional and programmatic improvement.
2. To ensure the economic viability of the institution, the team recommends the college must focus on developing and implementing the enrollment recovery plan, while concurrently developing the specific contingency plans to address alternative enrollment and economic standards.
3. The team recommends the college clarify, develop, document and regularly evaluate the roles of individuals and constituent groups in college governance and decision-making structures, and processes to ensure their effective participation and communicate the processes and outcomes to the college community as the basis for continued improvement.

4. The team recommends that the college develop and implement concrete strategies and processes to improve communication and professional relationships in order to create a campus climate characterized by collegiality and mutual respect.

#### **College Responses to the Team Recommendations:**

1. **The team recommends the college initiate an institution-wide dialogue about student learning outcomes and processes to facilitate learning. This dialogue should lead to documented implementation and results of a cyclical process of learning outcomes development, systemic assessment, and institutional and programmatic improvement.**

Santa Monica College has begun the process of developing student learning outcomes. The 2004-2005 academic year has been spent in “learning about student learning outcomes.” Led by college faculty through its Curriculum and Program Review Committees, Santa Monica has spent the past year in discussing and researching the distinction between objectives and learning outcomes. Rather than engage in a “planning to plan” process, faculty leaders sought to understand what student learning outcomes are and how best to implement them through existing curriculum and program review processes.

During this year of investigation, conceptual development and dialogue, the college has begun to lay a foundation of understanding for faculty acceptance and ownership in the development of course and program learning outcomes. Though not yet developed as a specified plan, Santa Monica College’s approach has been to gain positive faculty participation without overlaying a mandated template for outcomes development.

Through the Curriculum Committee, faculty are now developing student learning outcomes for new and revised course proposals. The Program Review Committee is also beginning to address student learning outcomes. The college and its faculty have clearly wanted to learn about and develop student learning outcomes concepts first before formally structuring its student learning outcomes development process.

The college has documented these initial efforts through agendas, minutes and updated Program Review Process. Led by interested faculty and the Curriculum/Program Review Committees, the college has conducted workshops on student learning outcomes at its spring FLEX Day and has plans for future workshops next fall. With the participation of the new Director of Institutional Research, the college is beginning to offer faculty assistance in development of individual course learning outcomes assessment. The college plans to continue to introduce the conceptual development of student learning outcomes to all faculty in 2005-2006. Through the Curriculum Committee and the Program Review Committee, the college acknowledges that it will need to begin to formalize its student learning outcomes processes and develop a planning and implementation calendar.

**Conclusion:** Santa Monica College’s faculty driven conceptual development of student learning outcomes during 2004-2005 is commendable as are the plans to continue the conceptual development and dialogue with all departments and faculty on campus. Through its Curriculum and Program Review Committees it will be important for the

college to continue the development of student learning outcomes review processes and to continue to provide faculty, at the departmental level, assistance in the writing of student learning outcomes and assessment tools. Finally, the college should develop a student learning outcomes planning calendar leading to complete implementation as part of its six-year program review cycle.

- 2. To ensure the economic viability of the institution, the team recommends the college must focus on developing and implementing the enrollment recovery plan, while concurrently developing the specific contingency plans to address alternative enrollment and economic standards.**

Given the budgetary crisis resulting from a precipitous drop in enrollment in the 2003-2004 academic year, Santa Monica College has been highly motivated to return to the 2002-2003 enrollment base. The college established a rather ambitious enrollment recovery goal of 6,500 Full-Time Equivalent Students (FTES) during 2004-2005. The college set this goal with knowledge that its ending fund balance could drop from \$6.2 million to barely \$200,000 at the end of 2004-2005 if the enrollment recovery plan was not successful.

In the past year college staff made an intensive and concerted effort to retain and recruit students to Santa Monica College. The Student Services operation made a particularly valiant effort to recruit and welcome back students. With the implementation of its *Welcome Center*, a one-stop student enrollment services center oriented to making the application and enrollment processes much more “user friendly,” and the use of direct email and one-on-one telephone communications with past and prospective students, the college focused on a much improved personal approach to its student enrollment efforts. It further expanded its recruitment efforts by enhancing its Outreach Office communication plan, streamlined its admissions application, and expanded its “Fantastic Fridays” which helped assess and counsel local high school applicants to a five day per week open door program. Several staff commented that the intensive efforts permitted them to refocus on student needs that then led to the removal of unintentional barriers to enrollment.

It appears that the enrollment plan has been highly successful in recovering over 4,500 credit FTES through mid-Spring 2005. Through the state’s program based funding formulas and a subsequent adjustment in the number of FTES the college must recover as well as a reduction in prior year audit adjustments, it appears the college will now end the 2004-05 academic year with a fund balance ranging between \$5 million and \$6 million. This is a much more positive financial condition than anticipated earlier in this academic year and relieves much of the anxiety experienced by the college community and the visiting team over the financial well being and future of the college.

The recovery of over 4,500 credit FTES in one academic year reflects a highly motivated effort to make the college more accessible and enrollment policies and procedures more user friendly. Realizing it would not make the initial 6,500 FTES or the reduced 5,500 FTES goal, the college appropriately recognized that the recovery process would take two academic years.

**Conclusion:** In addition to a remarkable enrollment recovery effort, and through a reanalysis of its initial enrollment reports, revised audit adjustments and recalculated budgetary scenarios, it now appears that the college's ending fund balance for 2004-2005 is significantly better than communicated to the college community last fall. Given the overarching governance and communication issues, some concern was expressed that the administration could have been more forthcoming in its development of 2004-2005 budget scenarios. Given an anticipated ending fund balance ranging between \$5 million and \$6 million, the administration has been criticized for communicating its worst case scenario instead of working with the college community in discussing a variety of budget scenarios. While the possible ending fund balance is encouraging, the jump from a narrow \$200,000 to a \$6 million projection reinforced the lack of trust in the administration's financial numbers at a time when trust in those individuals and figures is greatly needed.

Though still in the midst of a budgetary crisis due to the previous year's loss of student enrollment, the college is commended for its efforts to recover its enrollment. The measurable success in this effort is reflective of a strong concerted college-wide effort to increase course offerings; enhance outreach and marketing efforts; and streamline application, advising, and enrollment processes. Santa Monica College is encouraged to continue these efforts and to make the institution an even more student friendly environment. The college is further encouraged to make certain its scenario development and budgetary processes are open and transparent to the college community. It will be necessary to communicate, early in the budget development process and throughout the fiscal year, financial scenarios reflective of current and projected enrollment, fiscal conditions, and anticipated external financial impacts. This is of particular importance during a time when efforts to reestablish an environment of trust and mutual respect depend upon clear and accurate information to all participants in the governance process.

- 3. The team recommends the college clarify, develop, document and regularly evaluate the roles of individuals and constituent groups in college governance and decision-making structures, and processes to ensure their effective participation and communicate the processes and outcomes to the college community as the basis for continued improvement.**

During the March 2004 accreditation visit, team members observed a meeting of the college-wide Coordinating Council and discussed the existing structures with various individuals and constituent groups on campus that convinced the team that a new or more widely accepted structure for collegial governance was necessary at Santa Monica College. In fact, following the team visit, the inability of the college to improve this structure and the relationships between various groups on campus led to a complete breakdown of the participative process. The Collegewide Coordinating Council, Budget Committee and District Technology Committee have not met in an official meeting since June 2004.

During the summer 2004, the Superintendent/President agreed to a proposal made by the Academic Senate leadership that an *ad hoc* workgroup be formed to develop a new planning and governance structure for the college. After extended discussions over many months, on

January 10, 2005 the Board of Trustees adopted a policy that established a college-wide planning committee called the District Planning and Advisory Committee (DPAC). Discussions continued throughout the winter as representatives of the various governance groups struggled with issues related to representation and voting rights on DPAC. On April 21, 2005, the day after the progress report visiting team was on campus, agreement was finally reached on the membership, voting rights and operating procedures for DPAC, and the agenda for the first official meeting of the committee was established. In addition, the workgroup also agreed on four subcommittees (or Planning Resource Work-Groups) and the structure for these subcommittees: Budget Planning, Facilities Planning, Human Resources Planning, and Technology Planning

**Conclusion:** It is evident that the college has made significant progress in establishing a new collegial governance structure that appears to be acceptable to the major constituent groups on campus: the Santa Monica College Academic Senate, Faculty Association, CSEA, Classified Senate, SMC Management Association, Associated Students and the Interim Superintendent/President (and his senior staff.) Of course it is not possible to predict the success of this new structure; however, it was apparent to the visiting team that there is a sincere interest among the vast majority of the representatives of these groups to establish and operate a successful collegial governance structure. The president of the Academic Senate and the Interim Superintendent/President are to be commended for their extraordinary efforts to lead the campus community to this new structure. All participants have had to modify their expectations to enable this structure to be adopted, providing optimism among the representatives that the DPAC can be successful following many years of distrust and rancor on campus. Various representatives commented they believe the gains have been real and tangible. The structure remains untested and will have to be nurtured and carefully protected by all participants to be successful over a long period of time. The original team recommendation remains valid in light of the recency of this development, but the visiting team was impressed with the progress of the college and the commitment demonstrated by the representatives of the constituent groups to making this effort successful.

**4. The team recommends that the college develop and implement concrete strategies and processes to improve communication and professional relationships in order to create a campus climate characterized by collegiality and mutual respect.**

Many of the problems the accreditation self study noted and the 2004 visiting team observed stemmed from the lack of an appropriate campus climate characterized by collegiality and mutual respect. One of the major problems was that constituent groups and the administration did not agree on a workable definition of “participatory governance” and the ultimate authority of the Board of Trustees. The Progress Report states that although “substantial time and energy devoted to clarifying governance and planning issues in the months since the accreditation team visit have served to increase and improve communication,” the definition problem remains as the major barrier to improving the professional relationships on campus.

November 2004 brought about two significant changes in the leadership of the college. Two new trustees were elected to the board, and the Superintendent/President announced her retirement from the college. With the support and encouragement of the board, the Interim Superintendent/President has labored intensely to address this recommendation. Interviews with constituent group representatives confirmed his efforts to be more accessible, to establish relationships on a civil basis, and to demonstrate respect for those in leadership positions on campus.

The Faculty Association leadership stated that there has been a lot of progress made but that hard feelings remain after almost ten years of strained relationships. The President of the Faculty Association indicated a perception that there is a new sense of fairness and fair play; however, he sees many opportunities to improve communication and trust in the future. He indicated that morale is better on campus and that the hiring of a new Superintendent/President is a window of opportunity for an improved campus climate. The Progress Report notes “communication within negotiations between the Faculty Association and the District has been collegial and respectful, although the Faculty Association has expressed dissatisfaction with the amount of progress that has been made.”

The Classified union representatives reported that relationships are better on campus although a level of distrust still exists particularly within some members of the Classified staff. They reported that communication lines are now open with the Interim Superintendent/President and that there appears to be a much better feeling of mutual respect between their leadership and him. The Progress Report states that “Tentative agreements exist for most articles of the CSEA contract, and the tone and quality of communication in the negotiations between the CSEA and the District have improved considerably in recent months.”

Representatives of the Classified Senate indicated that getting rid of the old governance structure was indicative of the enormous progress that has been made in the last few months. They expressed hope that there would be broad and significant participation in the new structure despite the impasse that existed at the time of the interview. Specifically, the classified Senate felt they needed the opportunity to provide input into the planning process and hoped to accomplish this through a proposed College Services Committee. Interviews with other groups did not seem to support the need for another committee to allow all groups to effectively participate in the new governance structure.

Student leaders expressed their disappointment in the behavior of some participants in the governance structure discussions. They expressed concern that some of the classified staff had a personal agenda and were not respectful of other participants in the process. The President of the Associated Students spoke of his concern for the future of the college because of the lack of an effective participative governance structure and a lack of mutual respect at the leadership level.

**Conclusion:** Clearly, the recent establishment of a new collegial governance structure and the efforts of the Interim Superintendent/President and his staff to create improved relationships on campus have paved the way for the college to successfully address this recommendation; however, only time will tell if these efforts can overcome years of problems with respect to communication and professional relationships. This recommendation remains a challenge for all constituent groups on campus, the Board of Trustees, and the new Superintendent/President as he

or she takes office in 2006. All participants must continue to focus their efforts on working together in a spirit of collegiality and mutual respect for the benefit of the employees of the college, the students, and the community the college serves.