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Report of the Visiting Team

on

THE FOCUSED MID-TERM REPORT

of

VICTOR VALLEY COLLEGE

18422 Bear Valley Road
Victorville, CA 92395

on

November 5, 2008

A report prepared for
The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges
Western Association for Schools and Colleges

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on
The Focused Mid-Term Report and Visit
to
Victor Valley College**

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Introduction and Overview

Introduction: Victor Valley College is located in the High Desert region of Southern California in the Victor Valley on the north side of the San Gabriel Mountains. It serves the communities of Victorville, Hesperia, and the Town of Apple Valley. The College also serves the communities of Phelan, Lucerne Valley, Adelanto and Wrightwood. It was founded in 1961.

The campus is located in the pleasant environment of Victor Valley where the average temperature is 75 degrees, and the average day is sunny with clear blue skies. The campus is beautifully landscaped with well maintained facilities and convenient parking for students. It has a growing enrollment in excess of 9000 students. It offers the total spectrum of transfer academic classes. The faculty includes a number of renowned academics and artists.

Victor Valley is in a region of rapidly growing economic development, abundant and affordable housing, job opportunities, and expansive growth. It has healthy vocational programs. With its close ties to the community, Victor Valley College serves as the educational center of the area.

The stated mission statement is that “Victor Valley College uplifts the diverse communities we teach and serve by promoting educational excellence, enhancing local prosperity, and ensuring environmental leadership.”

Overview: The team received a warm welcome and excellent staff support from everyone. Without exception, the team found staff cooperation, concern for comfort during the visit and support for technical needs during the visit. Team members visited with all levels of faculty, staff, and students and all constituent groups involved in the governance of the college including Faculty Senate, representatives of collective bargaining groups, Trustees, Student leadership and Administrators. In addition we sought input from Foundation and community members.

Although there has been high turnover in administration since the comprehensive team visit in 2005, in the past year the college has stabilized and prospers. The Superintendent

President who was appointed about a year and a half ago has appointed a vice president of instruction and student service who brings a wealth of experience in administration and accreditation. The positive changes at the college and the focused and hard work that it has taken to stabilize the college has been credited to all, but those interviewed give credit to the new CEO and the Board of Trustees that has supported him.

The changes that have been made were apparent in the well-prepared and presented Mid-term report and the supporting documentation. The college presented each previous recommendation from 2005 as though it were one of the focused recommendations. Those preparing the report held the college to a higher standard than was required. The report was clearly written, and well supported. Although some of the support documents were initially difficult to access in the college's new system on its website, the college quickly provided the technical support to assist the team and made internal system corrections while the team was present so that the documents are readily available.

A comprehensive visit took place at Victor Valley College in March 2005. At the meeting held in June 2005, the Commission acted to require the College to submit a Focused Mid-Term Report with a subsequent visit. This resulted in the November 5, 2008 Focused Mid Term visit that was conducted at Victor Valley College. The team consisted of Dr. Jan Kehoe and Dr. Virginia Burley. The visit was a requirement noted in the action letter dated June 28, 2005 conducted with the College's Focused Mid Term report. At that time, the College was required to focus on seven recommendations and concerns the Commission expressed regarding the Comprehensive Self Study Report and a lack of evidence required to verify compliance with Commission Standards. In addition to the Focused Mid Term Report, the Commission requested a Progress Report by October 15, 2005. This report was followed by a visit, conducted on November 9th, 2005 and was to have addressed each of the seven recommendations and concerns.

The Focused Mid Term visit concentrated its efforts on the requirements set forth in the June 28, 2005 action letter as well as subsequent action letters and reports the College was required to submit; these are enumerated below.

The College submitted the progress report in October 2005 which was accompanied by a visit. The team's report indicted limited progress towards addressing the recommendations and concerns. At its meeting in January 2006, the Commission took action to reject the report and required the College to submit another Progress Report by March 15, 2006 and address Recommendations 1, 2, and 3 addressed in this report. This Progress was followed by a visit from Commission representatives. The visit took place on April 10th, 2006 and at its June 2006 meeting, the Commission took action to accept the College's Progress Report with the requirement that the College complete a Progress Report by March 15th, 2007. That report was followed by a visit of Commission Representatives and focused on resolution on Recommendations 1, 2, and 3.

At the June 6th-8th 2007 meeting, the Commission reviewed both the College's Progress Report and the visiting team's report and took action to accept the report and issued a **warning** to the College requiring it to correct the deficiencies noted. The Commission

required the College to complete a Progress Report that was to have demonstrated significant work to resolve the institution's deficiencies, specifically Recommendations #1, 2, and 3 (below) and Commission Concerns 1 (creating an environment by institutional leaders for empowerment, innovation, and institutional excellence) and Commission Concern 2 (demonstrate compliance with the Standard that requires "through established governance structures, processes, and practices, the governing board, administrators, faculty, staff, and students work together for the good of the institution") by October 15th, 2007: a visit by Commission representatives followed the College's report.

On November 26th, 2007, a team visited the College to determine compliance with Commission Standards and the degree to which the requirements as outlined in the June 29th, 2007 action letter were addressed. That report indicated continued progress though resolution had not been achieved. At the January 9-11, 2008 meeting, the Commission took action to accept the Report and continue the College on Warning. The Commission also required a Progress Report documenting full resolution regarding Recommendations 1, 2, and 3 noted below. The Progress Report is scheduled to be submitted by March 15th, 2009.

The College submitted its Focused Mid Term Report on October 15th, 2008; a Commission team visited the College on November 5, 2008 to verify compliance with Commission Standards and determine resolution with each of the Recommendations 1- 7 noted above with particular emphasis on Recommendations 1, 2, and 3. In preparation for the visit, the team members read the college's report and supporting documentation. The College documented substantial evidence of progress on their Planning Agenda. The team found that the Report was comprehensive and clearly presented, the visit was well organized and evidence was available to the team to verify the assertions in the Report.

Team Observations on the Focused Mid Term Report

Recommendation 1: Improving Institutional Effectiveness. The team recommends that the College provide evidence that it assesses progress toward achieving its goals and makes decisions regarding the improvement of institutional effectiveness in an ongoing and systematic cycle of evaluation, integrated planning, resource allocation, implementation, and reevaluation. This continuing cycle should include long-term master planning; short-term strategic planning, including technology planning; and an effective, institutionalized program review process. When fully implemented, this cycle of planning, evaluation and program improvement should result in the creation of a culture of research and evidence that supports all of the College's decision-making processes. (Standard IB.3, IB.4, IB.5, IB.6, IB.7; Standard IIA.1, IIA.2, IIB.3, IIB.4, IIC.2; and Standard IIIA.6, IIIB.1, IIIB.2, IIC.2, IIID.1, IIID.2g, IIID.3 and ER 10)

Team Observations: The team verified through reviewing the evidence that the college has in place Board policies, mission statement, goals, updated plans, and the planning committee reports that all elements are in place to constitute a systematic planning

process for the college. The college also provided evidence of both long-term master plan and short-term strategic plans in technology, environmental health and safety, program review, facilities, staff diversity, student equity, matriculation, transfer, cooperative work experience, and EOPS. All these plans and accompanying appendices are readily available and accessible on the college website. The college has committed to an office of Institutional Effectiveness. This office provides regularly scheduled program review training for faculty and administrators. The office and committee have been operational for one year and have created PRAISE (Program review, Allocation, and Institutional Strategies for Excellence) and annual review process. The college now has documentation of three years of program review, an assessment reporting requirement in the annual program review and planning procedure. In addition, there is planning and budget augmentation procedure widely understood by the college community that results in all funding priorities being based on the Educational Master Plan. Documentation of procedures and Board minutes contain evidence that Board policy as well as college decisions are based on the planning, and evaluation processes.

Conclusion: The College has fully met this recommendation.

Recommendation 2: Student Learning Outcomes. To meet the standards' focus on ensuring student success and the quality of programs and services, the team recommends the College conducts meaningful, timely, and inclusive dialogue with all campus constituents to identify student learning outcomes at the course, program, and institutional levels. The College should also systematically assess these student learning outcomes and use the results of these assessments for the improvement of institutional effectiveness. (Standard IB.1, IB.4, IB.7; Standard IIA.1c, IIA.2a, IIA.2b, IIA.2e, IIA.2f, IIA.2g, IIA.2h, IIA.2i, IIA.3, IIA.6, IIA.6a, IIB.1, IIB.4, IIC.1a, IIC.2; Standard IIIA.1b, IIIA.1c; and Standard IVA.1, IVA.2b, IVB.1b)

Team Observations: The College documented to the team that all courses now have established student learning outcomes (SLOs). The SLOs are documented in the Educational Master Plan. Although the mid term report documented 93% completion, by the time the team visited all had been completed or were documented retired courses and no longer offered. The college is completing program outcomes most notably General Education Student Learning Outcomes and the Associate Degree programs. The assessment of SLOs is well underway with assessment in the disciplines of biology, chemistry, and English which has resulted in a program for improvement known as "best practices." This is being used as a basis for faculty development to assist in changes to improve student learning in other courses and disciplines. The team confirmed that the college had both an SLO coordinator and an assessment coordinator in addition to a very active Senate Learning Assessment Committee which works closely with administration. From minutes of committee meetings and Board minutes, it is apparent that the college engages in dialogue to identify strengths and weaknesses of the college, and determines student learning outcomes, assessment and strategies of institutional changes for improvement of student learning.

Conclusion: The College has fully met this recommendation.

Recommendation 3: Organizational Structure and Staffing. The team recommends that the College evaluate and address its organizational structure and staffing needs. The evaluation should include, but not be limited to, technology support, risk management, maintenance and operations, and human resources. The College should take appropriate actions to implement the results of the evaluation and must address the lack of sufficient staffing. (Standard IIC.1d, IIC.2, IIIA.2 and Standard IVB.2a)

Team Observations: In 2006 the college addressed structural and staffing needs in technology support, maintenance and operations, and some human resources. Evidence can be found in previous progress reports to the Commission. In November, 2007, the College's governing group, College Council, launched Project Synergy. This was with the direction and support of the Superintendent/President and began a six month action plan for reorganization efforts. The college Website documents the progress of the project. The minutes of the Board of Trustees for March 12, 2008 reflect the recommendations for reorganization and staffing developed by the College Council. The newly reorganized structure was implemented in July, 2008. As a result the college has developed a Human Resources Compliance Coordinator position that supports risk management and compliance functions. Faculty positions and staff are prioritized by an established process. The positions of Vice President of Administrative Services, Executive Dean of Technology, and the Director of Evening Services have been filled. The staffing plan is incorporated into the Educational Master Plan and the budget allocation process.

Conclusion: The College has fully met this recommendation.

Recommendation 4: Financial Resources

The team recommends that the college's institutional planning be reviewed so that it reflects a realistic assessment of its financial resources, the development of additional financial resources through public/private partnerships, and the management of expenditures. The team further recommends that the college, to ensure long term financial stability, clearly identifies appropriate resources and plans for full payment of the 1997 Certificate of Participation (Standard IIID.1b, 1c, 2c, 3).

Team Observations: The College presented evidence that the college has reanalyzed its fiscal resources and "right-sized" its operations. The operating budget reflects a realistic management of current financial resources. The college is in a high growth, high industrial development area and has established public/private partnerships to capitalize on their location and growth. The college has a realistic approach to student enrollment management in order to receive an optimal amount of growth revenue. Importantly, it has established a five-year budgeting turn-around strategy. There is an established and well understood list of college operational cost reduction strategies that are reviewed and evaluated during the budget year so that changes can be made as conditions dictate. Some of the evidence of progress in the college budget was an increase in the 2007-2008 ending balance which exceeded the projected ending balance by \$2.6 million, contractual obligations have been met, the College reduced reliance on reserves by \$3 million, the

projected enrollment growth is 15% (it is not currently known what the final state level of funding will actually be for the current year.) The College has made principal and interest payments since FY 2005-2006 on the 1997 Certificate of Participation (COP). In the current budget \$3.05 million has been budgeted to cover costs of the COP. The team visited the college on the day after the \$297.5 million bond issue was passed by the District's voters. A designated project for the bond issue is the retirement of the \$52.5 million in COP obligation for completed capital projects (a legitimate use of bond funds in California.) In addition, the college has set aside almost half of their obligation for retiree and post employment benefits (\$3.1 million of the \$7.1 million obligation) well within the requirements of California law GASB 43/45 for funding post employment benefits in public community colleges. This effort also contributes to the long-term stability of the district. Finally, as an aside, the college has an active and dedicated Foundation that contributes to student scholarships.

Conclusion: The College has met this recommendation.

Recommendation 5: Purpose/Function of Campus Committees

The team recommends that the purpose and functional relationship of campus committees, and their membership, be clearly defined to advance the mission and goals of the institution. Furthermore, the college should eliminate the duplication of committees and committee work (Standard IVA.2, IVA.2a, and IVA.5).

Team Observations: The College governance operational committee structure has been completely reorganized as a structure of nine distinct coordinated committees. There are clearly defined charges and job descriptions for each committee. Communication among the committees is facilitated by access to all committee minutes and actions via the college website. The oversight committee is the College Council comprised of representatives of the college constituencies including faculty, classified staff, students, and administrators. This committee monitors progress on the college's six goals consistent with its mission. The Council is charged with reviewing, evaluating, and monitoring the short term and long term plans of the nine committees. The nine committees represent areas of importance for assuring educational quality and student learning. Central to the operational committee structure is the Institutional Effectiveness committee (IEC) that identifies and defines measurable performance indicators of institutional effectiveness, monitors and ensures the effectiveness of the planning, evaluation and improvement processes and activities. It also validates the assessment of student learning at the course, program and college levels, provides assurance that college effectiveness indicators show improvement by using objective performance data and reviews and reports performance indicators. The team was impressed by the support given the committee structure by all college representatives interviewed including students.

Conclusion: The College has fully met this requirement.

Recommendation 6: Campus Climate

The team recommends that the college establishes a positive campus climate that embodies a culture of respect, civility, dialogue, and trust designed to improve institutional decision-making, planning, and effectiveness (Standard IB.1; Standard IIIA.1d, IIIA.4, IIIA.4c; and Standard IVA.2, IVA.2a, IVA.3, IVA.5).

Team Observation: The improvement in campus climate is a remarkable example of college cooperation. The transformation is attributed by those interviewed as due to the leadership of the Superintendent/President who has set an example for the entire college. The team also observed exceptional leadership by the Board of Trustees and the immediate past chairman of the Board. The Board minutes evidence efficiently run meetings and an interest in accreditation standards and student learning. The participative governance structure and cooperation of all constituent groups has led to an effective institutional decision-making, planning, and assessment process for the college. There is consistently high participation in committee meetings that have been productive in establishing planning agendas for the college. The team observed a climate of respect that extended to all constituent groups including students, faculty, classified staff, collective bargaining representatives, and administrators.

Conclusion: The College has fully met this recommendation.

Recommendation 7: Evaluation of Leadership Roles

The team recommends that the college evaluates the role of college-wide leadership in institutional governance and implements the results of the evaluation to ensure the integrity and effectiveness of organizational processes, practices, and decision-making. Furthermore, the college should eliminate the current leadership configuration of the Academic Senate and the Faculty Union (Standard IVA.1, IVA.2a, IVA.2b, IVA.3, IVA.5).

Team Observations: The team confirmed that the leadership of the Academic Senate and the Faculty Union has been reconfigured. There is acceptance of this reconfiguration and those interviewed felt that it has helped clarify roles in the governance processes of the college. The college evaluated the role of college-wide leadership through a participative governance project known as “Project Synergy” initiated by the Superintendent/President. The result was the Board of Trustees’ taking action on reorganization of the college as recommended. The requirements of the reorganization required that the new structure enable open communication which has been accomplished. The College Council, which oversees the college’s institutional planning and effectiveness, makes recommendations each year based on evaluation of the organizational structure and the decision-making procedures for improvements which will improve the integrity of the college’s processes.

Conclusion: The College has fully met this recommendation.

Commission Concern 1: The Commission asks Victor Valley College to demonstrate that it is in compliance with the Standard that requires institutional leaders to “create an environment for empowerment, innovation, and institutional excellence.” Leaders should “encourage staff, faculty administrators, and students, no matter what their official titles,

to take initiative in improving the practices, programs, and services in which they are involved. When ideas for improvement have policy or significant institution-wide implications, systematic, participative processes are used to assure effective discussion, planning and implementation.” (Standard IV.A.1)

Team Observations: The team observed in the evidence, as well as the Mid Term report that the college has addressed the Commission’s concern and demonstrates that the institutional leaders “create an environment for empowerment, innovation, and institutional excellence” through the restructured organizational structure, committee charges and empowerment, decision-making procedures, budget process, and open communication. The college has a well-established and well-accepted governance structure, and it is widely recognized that innovation is recognized and rewarded. There was ample evidence of participative processes that included all campus constituencies including students. The atmosphere and climate was one of open and inclusive participation in all processes particularly those with institution-wide significance. The one particularly evident example was the wide spread participation in the bond campaign and support for the bond projects. The students were particularly clear on the support for improvements for student learning and success.

Conclusion: The College has addressed the Commission’s Concern 1.

Commission Concern 2: The Commission asks that the college demonstrate that it is in compliance with the Standard that requires “through established governance structures, processes, and practices, the governing board, administrators, faculty, staff, and students work together for the good of the institution. These processes facilitate discussion of ideas and effective communication among the institution’s constituencies. (Standard IV.A.3)

Team Observations: The team verified through the validation of college responses to Commission Recommendations and documentation that it works effectively through its established governance structures. The team observed that processes and practices within the institution involve all constituent groups and the climate is one of cooperation and working for not only the operation of the institution but also for improvement of the institution and its ability to provide an environment for student support and success. There is not only evidence of effective communication, but also productive dialogue for the improvement of the institution which involve all constituent groups: Board of Trustees, faculty, students, staff and administration.

Conclusion: The College has addressed the Commission’s Concern 2.

CONCLUSION

Victor Valley College has responded to the Recommendations and Concerns of the Commission with extraordinary efforts. Beginning with a Mid Term Report that focused on all Recommendations to the readily available support materials, the college has shown evidence of a dramatic shift in placing priority on productive dialogue, institutional evaluation, assessment, and improvement and a cooperative and productive climate. The leadership of the institution has led a productive transformation and reorganization. The constituents not only feel welcome to participate in governance, but take responsibility to

do so. Through an institution-wide effort, the fiscal condition of the college is stable and through a widely accepted and understood plan is projected to maintain that stability.