Focused Midterm Report

Feather River College
570 Golden Eagle Avenue
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A Confidential Report Prepared for the Accrediting Commission
for Community and Junior Colleges
This report represents the findings of the evaluation team that visited

Feather River College
On

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Introduction and Overview

In its January 31, 2008 letter, the Accrediting Commission required Feather River College to submit a Focused Midterm Report by March 15, 2009. The report was followed by a visit of Commission representatives on May 7, 2009. Dr. Marie Smith, Chair and Dr. KC Greaney received the college's report and supporting documentation, reviewed evidence and conducted interviews at the college during the one-day visit. In addition to interviewing the President, ALO, and other administrators, the team met with both Faculty and Classified Senates and selected governance committees based on the topic of the recommendations. The team had some difficulty gaining access to all materials prior to the visit, but was able to review all documents while on campus. The team was warmly received by the college. The team wishes to commend Feather River College for its conscientious attention to the recommendations of the 2006 comprehensive team and its commitment to fully satisfy those recommendations by the time of the next comprehensive evaluation in 2012.

The following report provides observations, evidence, and conclusions reached by the team for each recommendation listed in the January 31, 2008 Commission action letter. In addition, at the end of the report, the team provides remarks regarding the two previously satisfied recommendations as well as the self-identified planning issues.

Recommendation 1: Integrated Budget and Planning – The team recommends that the college should integrate the planning and budget processes at various levels of the District so that the budget allocations are directly linked to the planning process, and clearly communicate and delineate the process as well as who is responsible. (Standards I.B.1, I.B.2, III.D, IV.A.2, IV.A.3)

<u>Observations and Evidence</u>

This recommendation was originally made by the 2000 accreditation team and reiterated by the 2006 team. The college has made progress on this recommendation by implementing operational planning at every level, including program review data where available, and then tying these plans to the strategic plan. All constituent groups were represented in the process. In 2007 the Strategic Planning and Budget governance committees were given the responsibility for integrating planning and budgeting, first by creating a budget for all strategic plan objectives. Subsequently, in spring of 2007, a task force created a draft four-year cycle for strategic planning that included a review of the Mission Statement, and program review data. The Strategic Plan then was sent directly to the Budget Committee which then provided specific budget allocations to fund the plan elements. This process is still in draft form and has yet to be formally adopted by the college although the college was using this format in the 2007-08 year. In July 2008, the new president focused renewed attention to strategic planning by resurrecting a moribund Strategic Enrollment Management Committee. This committee is responsible for growth planning that is at the core of the strategic plan. The Strategic Planning

Committee, which has overall responsibility for planning, is responsible for prioritizing the strategic directions of the college, including any new initiatives.

The college governance bodies are in the process of reviewing this revised draft process and expect to adopt a final model by fall 2009. Previously, full campus ownership of the process was lacking. With the arrival of the new president and his commitment to transparency in planning and decision-making, the college's attitude toward these activities has markedly improved. The team heard testimony from all constituencies that there had been a building of trust and confidence over the last academic year that is allowing the college to move forward constructively. As an example, the college held a visioning exercise in the beginning of the spring 2009 semester that is now being replicated with students and soon, the community. The visioning activity has several goals: to map the directions of the college and to improve communication and participation in planning. The college seems to be energized by these events and many expressed confidence that there is now sufficient momentum for all remaining plans (e.g. facilities master plan and distance education plan) to be completed in the coming year.

Under the direction of the new President, the college continues to make appropriate progress in creating and integrating planning. An interview with the college's Cabinet revealed enthusiasm and commitment to the current attention to planning. Members believe that there is a heightened understanding of important decisions. The president is leading the college in building trust so that significant dialog can occur. The constituent group leaders were uniform in their appreciation of this new atmosphere and indicate that there is investment in and commitment to these new processes continuing.

Conclusion

The team was impressed with the college's positive attitude and confidence in their ability to meet current and future challenges associated with planning. In order to fully meet the recommendation by 2012, however, the college must move its draft processes into final form so that implementation can occur and data can be gathered regarding the effectiveness of the planning process. This should occur in a timely fashion so that the college can provide evidence of the efficacy of its integration of planning and budgeting. The team concludes that the college has made substantial progress but must put this process in final form and use it to fully satisfy the recommendation.

Recommendation 2: Program Review – The team recommends that the college instructional program review process be expanded and the non-instructional program review process implemented, to include student services, library and learning support services; where each incorporates good practices, ongoing and timely reviews, data analysis and assessment to support student learning achievement; and is fully integrated into institutional planning and budget processes. (Standards I.B, I.B.1, II.A.1.b, II.A.1.c, II.A.1.e, II.A.2.f, II.B.1, II.B.3.c, II.C.1, II.C.1.a, III.A.1, III.A.1, III.A.4, III.B.3, IV.A.1, IV.A.3, IV.A.5, IV.B.2, IV.B.2.b

Observations and Evidence

This recommendation also occurred in the 2000 comprehensive evaluation and was repeated in 2006. The college has made great progress in the area of implementing program review. By the end of spring 2007, all six administrative units had completed a program review (Office of the Superintendent/President, Office of Instruction, Office of Business Services, Facilities, Information Services Department, and Student Services). By the end of the same semester, all student services programs had also completed a program review under the leadership of a new Dean of Student Services. On the instructional side, the team learned that programs currently are asked to complete a program review every four years, with career and technical programs conducting a "mid-term" review between program reviews, thus they conduct program reviews every two years. This is a longer timeline than FRC had in place when the last team visited in 2007, where program review was scheduled to occur on a three-year cycle. Evidence presented to the team indicates that most (but not all) career and technical programs are current with their program reviews on the new two-year schedule, most (but not all) instructional service areas are current with their program reviews on the new four-year schedule, and all academic programs had reviews due by the end of the 2008/2009 academic year. The team was on site with three weeks remaining in the academic year, and none of the academic program reviews were complete. Both faculty and the Office of Instruction indicated that the statistical reports they use in their program reviews (that had been provided by institutional research in the past) had not yet been provided to the departments, which was the reason for the incomplete reviews. Thus, it was unclear whether academic program reviews would be completed on schedule this year.

It was unclear to the team whether all disciplines are included in program review (e.g., Political Science, Economics, Geography, etc.). The college has struggled with the question of what constitutes an academic "program" for program review purposes, and the question remains unresolved. This confusion is further compounded by the differential interpretation of the word "program" for annual operational plans, program review, and potentially for "program" level student learning outcomes. Defining what constitutes a "program" is a local decision. Disciplines can be grouped into "programs" if the groupings make sense for the local programs and curriculum. The college needs to decide how to define "programs" for the purposes of program review, annual operational plans, and for developing program level student learning outcomes. The college's ability to fully implement academic program review (and to establish program level student learning outcomes) is dependent upon a clear definition of academic "program."

In order for program review to function at the sustainable continuous quality improvement level, there must be an ongoing, systematic process that is used to assess student learning and achievement. At Feather River College, student services appears to have such a process in place. All program reviews are current, and future program reviews are clearly scheduled and expectations are clearly communicated to departments. Program review processes need further refinement in other areas. While administrative

services has current program reviews, there is no apparent plan for regularly scheduled administrative program reviews into the future. And while there are many current instructional, career & technical, and instructional service area program reviews, and a general schedule for on-going program review, the schedule must be adhered to and the college must decide what constitutes a "program" in order to have ongoing, systematic program review as required by the accreditation standards.

Conclusion

The college has made progress in implementing ongoing and sustainable program review processes, but the processes need refinement and need to be consistently implemented on a timely basis in order to completely satisfy this recommendation.

Recommendation 3 to revise the mission statement from the last comprehensive visit remains satisfied.

Recommendation 4: Research Planning (Systems) – The team recommends that the college refine its process for the incorporation of data from its various service areas that assist in planning activities, ensuring that all necessary information is entered into the system so the widest range of research and planning information can be extracted. (Standards, I.B.5, I.B.6, I.B.7)

Observations and Evidence

At the time of the comprehensive site visit, Feather River College employed a grant-funded researcher, and had continued to struggle with a data management system that was less than optimal. Important changes have occurred in the three years since.

In the past year, Feather River College has implemented Banner to manage their local data. The rapid rate of implementation is astonishing, and the team commends Feather River College for their obvious dedication to getting a system up and running that better meets their local needs. Banner has great promise for providing Feather River College administrators, faculty, and staff with accessible data to inform planning and program improvement. Further, Banner has integrated many previously separate data systems at the college, thus streamlining the process of data input and retrieval. This is a tremendous improvement over the past. As an added benefit, staff report that the requirement to develop common data elements has improved the understanding of program functionality between offices at the college.

Also in the past year, the grant funding for the research position expired. Currently, there is a part-time temporary 50% research position, and the district intends to hire a permanent 50% researcher in the near future. Given the demands for accurate and relevant data for program review, learning outcomes assessment, and planning at all levels, and the fact that these areas have been challenges for Feather River College, the team suggests that the college ensure that, in some manner, the research function be maintained. One clear negative consequence of the diminished research capacity is that this year, data have yet to be provided to academic programs so that they may complete

their program reviews in a timely fashion. At the time of the team's visit, program reviews were due within weeks, yet none of the programs had received the requisite data to analyze.

Conclusion

With the implementation of Banner, relevant data and information should become more readily available to administrators, staff and faculty. This promises to be a great improvement over the past, but as it is still not yet fully functional (especially in the area of reports) and utilized, its success remains to be determined. In addition, the research capacity at Feather River College has diminished, potentially hampering the analysis of data and information for planning purposes.

There has been great progress with the implementation of Banner, but the system needs to be fully utilized before this recommendation can be determined to be satisfied.

Recommendation 5: Participation and Collaboration Skills – The team recommends that the college take immediate steps to establish mechanisms and processes that will enhance participation and the collaborative skills of members from all constituent groups who participate in institutional governance. (Standards I.B, III.A.4, III.A.4.a, III.A.4.b, III.A.4.c, IV.A.3, IV.A.5)

Observations and Evidence

The 2006 comprehensive team found that classified staff, in particular, did not enjoy the same representation or inclusion as other constituent groups within the governance processes of the college, thus leading to Recommendation 5. The college responded to this recommendation quickly and in a proactive way, broadening membership in committees (notably the Cabinet and Budget Committee) and encouraging meaningful participation in the governance of the college by all groups. A Board policy on participation in decision-making was revised to include classified, associate faculty, and student participation.

The team gathered evidence through review of committee minutes and interviews with committees and individuals that increased participation has led to greater collaboration in decision-making. The classified representatives feel that since these changes were made, their participation is valued and encouraged. The team found evidence throughout the college and in every constituent group that collaboration and participation at Feather River has been enhanced and grown to be an expectation.

Conclusion

With the steps that have been taken, the college has satisfied this recommendation.

Recommendation 6: Course Outlines/Prerequisites/SLOs – The team recommends that the college review and update all course outlines, desired prerequisites and advisories, while integrated into on-going assessment that supports student learning achievement and student learning outcomes. (Standards II.A.1.c, II.A.2, II.A.2.a, II.A.2.e. II.A.2.f)

<u>**Observations and Evidence**</u>

Feather River College has made progress in implementing a student learning outcomes assessment cycle at the course level. All new or revised course outlines are required to include course level student learning outcomes, and faculty have been asked to assess outcomes in one course per semester. Faculty and administration report that there is much greater "buy-in" to the idea of establishing and assessing student learning outcomes than there has been in the past. This promises to be an effective set of processes for the college; however, there are a few issues that need to be addressed to make it function in an on-going and systematic way.

It is very important that course outlines be regularly reviewed. In the March 2009 *Accreditation Focused Mid-Term Report*, it is noted that "four-hundred and twenty-seven courses have been updated out of the total of seven-hundred and ninety-four 'live' courses in the college catalog," for a total of 54%. Feather River College board policy calls for courses to be reviewed, and outlines updated (as necessary), every five years. The team found evidence that many course outlines, including some for courses currently being taught, are out of date – some with a prior approval date as far back as 1991. The March 2009 *Accreditation Focused Mid-Term Report* further stated that there is a "time line of June 2009 for all live courses to be updated." This deadline did not seem realistic to the team. The issue of out-of-date curriculum was raised in the comprehensive report in 2006 and clearly continues to be a challenge for the college. Part of the reason given for why many courses do not have current course outlines (including student learning outcomes) is that many courses are only taught by part-time adjunct faculty, who reportedly are not required to update curriculum or assess student learning outcomes as a part of their employment. Because of that, currently, only full-time faculty are asked to assess learning outcomes in their classes. As Feather River College employs few full-time faculty (approximately 25), this limits the number and proportion of courses that have updated outlines, including established student learning outcomes, and it severely limits the assessment of course level student learning outcomes. The college is reminded that accreditation standards call for curriculum updating and assessment, regardless of who teaches the classes.

Student learning outcomes at the program level has also proven to be a challenge for the college. In the absence of a clear, widely accepted definition of "program," it would be difficult to establish program level learning outcomes. In the March 2009 *Accreditation Focused Midterm Report*, Feather River College states: "Program-level student learning outcomes will be incorporated with the program-review process for academic programs

so that completion of program-level SLOs will be facilitated." The college has a program review template in place, but there must be a decision about what constitutes a "program," program level student learning outcomes must be identified, and the SLOs must be assessed with the goal of improving student learning.

Student learning outcomes at the institutional level have been established, and an assessment was underway while the team was on-site. This is a great achievement that has occurred in the past year. Outcomes for Associate degree recipients have been identified in the following areas: Written and Oral Communication, scientific/quantitative reasoning, global perspective, information technology, ethical reasoning and responsibility, ability to work independently, ability to work in groups, civic responsibility, creativity, and active learning. Appropriate to the nature and intent of these outcomes, a graduate survey was developed and administered to students who were expected to graduate in spring 2009. The team learned that the SLOAC committee intends for this to become a graduate survey that becomes part of the paperwork all graduates complete in order to receive a diploma. The team commends the SLOAC committee for the collaborative process employed in defining college-level outcomes, and for developing an impressive survey instrument for assessing those outcomes.

Conclusion

Student learning outcomes assessment is well underway at the college level. There are processes and procedures in place for defining and assessing student learning outcomes at the course and program level, but those processes and procedures must be followed for all courses and programs in order for the college to have an ongoing, systematic cycle of assessment for improvement.

The accreditation standards call for the following: "The institution identifies student learning outcomes for courses, programs, certificates, and degrees; assesses student achievement of those outcomes; and uses assessment results to make improvements." (Standard II: A.1.c) Feather River College must accelerate efforts in order to achieve the "Proficiency" level on the Commission's Rubric for Evaluating Institutional Effectiveness as expected by ACCJC by 2012.

The college has made progress in establishing and assessing student learning outcomes, especially at the college level and to a lesser extent at the course level. The college has also made progress in bringing more course outlines of record up to date. However, the college must step up the pace of progress in order to satisfy this recommendation.

Recommendation 7: Professional Development/Diversity Training – The team recommends that the college implement professional development and diversity training for classified staff, faculty and administration to help them effectively address the educational needs of diverse students populations as well as staff diversity issues. (Standards II.A.1, III.A.4, III.A.4.c)

Observations and Evidence

The 2006 team found that the college had some professional development activities for faculty but few opportunities for classified staff. The college's commitment to diversity was described as a shared value, yet minority students on campus did not feel uniformly accepted or supported. To respond to this recommendation, a Diversity/Professional Development Task Force with wide representation was established and met frequently to identify and implement awareness training and activities. The committee surveyed the types of training and development activities that were occurring and assessed needs for new training. Both trainings and conference attendance increased as a result of this increased attention. The college also provided a series of internal training sessions on computer use.

In 2007, to further focus its efforts, the task force split into separate committees, one for Diversity and one for Professional Development. The Diversity Committee surveyed the college to assess perceptions and identify opportunities for training. The team reviewed the action plan developed by the committee and found that it addressed the identified needs of the faculty, staff and students. The activities ranged from multicultural student events to external speakers on topics such as diversity that are open to all, including the community. The Professional Development Committee distributed $10,000 to support a variety of professional development and multicultural activities in accordance with the plan.

Next steps include the inclusion of an ongoing allocation for professional development and diversity training in the annual budget.

Conclusion

The team concludes that this recommendation has been satisfied.

Recommendation 8 on the actuarial study from the last comprehensive visit remains satisfied.

Update on Previously Satisfied Recommendations 3 (Mission) and 8 (Actuarial Study)

Each of these recommendations was satisfied in the 2007 visit and action by the Commission. The 2009 visiting team gathered evidence on the current status of each recommendation for confirmation of continuing adherence to Standards.

The team confirmed that the mission statement of the college continues to be examined and reaffirmed every 3 years, as stated, and is an integral part of the planning process. Board policy has been updated to adhere to this timeline. The president has recently suggested an annual review of mission as part of the strategic planning process.

The actuarial study continues to be updated periodically and data shows that the college will completely meet its unfunded liability for retirement benefits with three future allocations of $50,000. The college is planning for these deposits in future years as part of the strategic planning and budgeting processes.

Recommendations 3 and 8 from the last comprehensive visit remain satisfied.

Comments on Self-identified Issues

The college provided updates on planning agenda items from the last self-study and is using them at mid-term as the self-identified issues for the next three years. The college has made good progress on most issues and provided evidence that the remaining issues are being currently addressed. Issues identified for more attention are: improving dialog; linking college goals to integrated planning; improving assessment testing; evaluation of distance education; increasing services to ESL students; improvement of counseling services; link requests for new positions more directly to planning; increase diversity understanding through curriculum development/redesign; and, improve evaluation of governance system.

Summary

In the opinion of the visiting team, Feather River College has satisfied four of the eight recommendations from the 2006 comprehensive evaluation; Recommendations 3, 5, 7 and 8 have been fully met.

The remaining recommendations (1, 2, 4 and 6) are partially satisfied to some level but have remaining elements which must be addressed to fully meet them. All of these recommendations are linked as parts of the planning and evaluation processes of the college. Integrated planning and budgeting (Recommendation 1), while substantially improved, are not yet fully set in process and procedures, nor are they substantially informed by program review (Recommendation 2), research (Recommendation 4), and other data driven elements such as SLO assessment results (Recommendation 6). The college is working to create these linkages where they are lacking and strengthen the ones that exist. The team believes that the college is well-positioned to complete this work on all remaining recommendations by the time of the next comprehensive visit in 2012.