FOCUSED MIDTERM VISIT REPORT

Bakersfield College
1801 Panorama Dr.
Bakersfield, CA 93305

A Confidential Report Prepared for the Accrediting Commission
For Community and Junior Colleges

This report represents the findings of the evaluation team that visited
Bakersfield College on April 16, 2002

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Introduction

At its meeting of January 7-9, 2001, the Commission acted to affirm accreditation of Bakersfield College and required the College to complete an Interim Report with a focused visit to follow.

The purpose of the visit was to validate the Interim report and determine if sustained, continuous and positive movement toward institutional good practice was occurring.

The interim report and visit were expected to document improvements in the following areas:
- comprehensiveness of the college mission
- documentation of institutional outcomes
- accessibility of college data
- implementation of college plans and evaluation of resulting outcomes
- development of outcome measures for vocational and other programs
- production of timely and accurate fiscal information
- Board of Trustees training

Generally, the team was impressed with the positive change in climate and the improved communication between administration and faculty and between the college and the district. As a result, the campus constituencies exhibit a mutual sense of purpose and behave in a more collaborative manner. The team was also impressed that the institution is focusing on developing a comprehensive plan for assessing student learning outcomes. The fiscal issues that were present during our visit remain a major concern.

College Responses to Team Recommendations

Recommendation 1:
While the existing mission of the college has been revised numerous times and is prominently displayed in each building, the college mission should be inclusive of its broad-based educational programs and articulate the diversity of students to be served by the institution. The vocational education and economic development elements of the mission should be specifically addressed. (Standards 1.1, 1.2, 2.6, 4A.1)
The mission of the college has received extensive review. The major effort has been to incorporate vocational education and the diversity of Bakersfield College students without adding excessive language. The latest version of the mission statement drafted in early April is currently undergoing final review.

Conclusion:
While not completed, the review and revision of the mission statement is progressing and the campus community is broadly engaged in the conversation regarding the mission statement and that in itself has been beneficial.

Recommendation 2:  
Evidence exists that the college has attempted to establish good planning processes; however, the college should document achievements for its intended institutional outcomes. The final college authority in the decision making process should be identified and methods for tracking progress and completions be developed. To assist the college in accomplishing this recommendation, district leadership should provide a response to the recommendations made by the college within a well-defined timeline. (See Standard 7, Response to Recommendations of the Previous Team, and Standards 3C.1, 10B.5, 10B.6, 10B.9, 10B.10)

Once again, evidence of new planning efforts was presented to the team. As before, the team was concerned that while the college was very diligent in planning, no evidence was presented documenting the outcomes of any plans. However, in discussion with the President and the various groups, we discovered that they verbally review the outcomes of former plans in preparation for developing new plans. These discussions and outcomes are not documented. Rather, they appear to consider that as things are completed, it is no longer necessary to dwell upon them.

Conclusion:
This campus continues to be overly process-oriented. From their material, and with some confirmation during our visit, processes appear to be more important than the resulting actions.

In order to satisfy the recommendation, the college should document the successes they have attained as a result of their planning efforts. For example, an annual report might highlight and celebrate accomplishments and provide benchmarks for future performance. Annual reports could also provide evidence that new plans are built upon careful analysis of both successful and unsuccessful efforts. While focus on processes is important, from an accreditation standpoint, the resulting outcomes of plans are most important in assessing the quality of the institution.

In feedback seeking corrections of error of fact, the President indicated that while she concurs that the college must be more diligent in documenting its achievements, it does document its
progress in written updates to the Administrative Council, the Budget and Program Review Committee and the KH Steering Committee. Additionally, in the past year the President has initiated the publication of an annual report and a monthly newsletter, THE SOURCE. The team recommends that these documents be used in future self studies and made available to visiting teams.

**Recommendation 3:**
To obtain data to be used in the various planning and evaluation processes, the college depends on data retrieved from the State Chancellor’s Office. Significant improvements can be achieved if the district works cooperatively with the college to make data accessible and understandable. In order to meet the accreditation standard, the recommendation is that the college and the district develop processes and methods to access timely and accurate data from the District Management Information System. (Standards 3A.1, 3A.3, 10C.4)

Significant progress has been made in getting data and reports from the District office. A district data and research advisory group composed of representation from each college is helping District staff to understand what data elements are needed by institutional researchers. However, more work needs to be done to ensure the college gets data in the most efficient and usable form. The college needs to be able to manipulate the data for a variety of purposes. For this kind of function, generic reports are not always the most useful.

College researchers do not have direct access to data collected and maintained by District MIS. College research staff must submit query requests to District MIS personnel. This limits the query capability of the researchers and delays timely production of necessary college reports.

It would also be helpful if data definitions were agreed upon by the inter-college committee so that the data can be applied consistently and analyzed across functions and colleges.

**Conclusion:**
While great improvement has occurred, more remains to be done. The increased communication and cooperation across colleges should allow the college to keep moving forward. Of critical importance to the college in providing access to data from the District is the implementation of the data warehouse system that is currently under development.

**Recommendation 4:**
Although the Strategic Action Plan identifies specific measurable objectives related to the mission and purpose of the college, the institutional outcomes assessments section of the Institutional Effectiveness standard is weak. Considerable improvements can be made. It is recommended that the college systematically implement its plans and evaluate the outcomes of its current plans prior to embarking upon a new planning process. (Standards 3C.1, 3C.2, 3C.3, 6.5)

As previously mentioned, this college appears to discuss and analyze the outcomes of previous plans but does not do a good job of presenting outcomes in accreditation documents. For example, one of the college’s key goals in a previous plan was to attract outside funding. When the visitation team requested more information regarding successful grant applications, we were
given a report on the success they have achieved. This success was not described in the material presented in the interim report.

Regarding student outcomes data, the college is in a study mode and has written several white papers for discussions in identifying big student outcome goals.

PFE has provided them yet another avenue to look at outcomes. The college is making good use of this data.

Conclusion:
The college access to data improved through the efforts of the district research advisory group and college's research analysts. As a result, the quality of college reports has improved and reports are more useful for evaluation purposes. While student outcomes are one measure of institutional effectiveness, measures that benchmark efficiency and effectiveness of systems, processes, policy, practices and procedures also determine institutional effectiveness. The college should distinguish between institutional outcomes and student outcomes and should reach agreement with the District on common definitions for such terms as goals, objectives, strategies, or intents. Such agreement would help focus on achievement of desired outcomes, standardize reporting, and facilitate the planning process.

Recommendation 5:
To strengthen educational programs and counseling services, the team recommends that the college develop measurable pathways to student success for vocational students and other specific populations of students that promote access, monitor progress, and track goal attainment. (Standards 4B.3, 4B.6, 5.3)

Vocational career pathways have been developed and promoted and progress has been made in this area. Issues within the Counseling Department remain and continue to be problematic. However, the college is hopeful that the hiring of new staff, and the high priority given by the Vice President for Student Services to address these problems on the agenda will alleviate some of the persisting problems.

Conclusion:
Progress is being made, especially regarding career pathways for vocational education programs. The remaining issues in the Counseling Department need to be addressed if the students are to be well served.

Recommendation 6:
The college and District Office should produce timely and accurate financial information that:
- Drives financial decisions.
- Clarifies all essential functions at the District Office and the level of financial support for each function.
- Outlines the required level of financial support for all essential functions at the college and is tied to its strategic plan.
- Is promulgated throughout the district in a manner that is clear, consistent and understandable to the Kern Community College District community.
Although the District has made some progress in producing financial information, the underlying concern for the fiscal health of the District expressed in this recommendation remains unresolved.

During the Interim visit, the team learned of the decision of the Chancellor and Board of Trustees to purposely reduce the District's reserves to approximately 1% of the budget. Related decisions to negotiate substantially higher faculty and staff salary schedules over the next three years were made in part as an overall attempt to bring the District into compliance with California's "50% law" and to improve salaries for full and part-time employees. Although the District had not sought a waiver to the "50% Law", during the visit, staff indicated they are now planning to seek a waiver.

The Chancellor and the Board of Trustees feel that the plan now in place to cut non-classroom expenditures and increase faculty salaries is a workable financial plan and that financial projections are realistic and attainable. The District is counting on growth funding for its over cap enrollment to help fund salary increases. Smaller classes are being cancelled to make the college more efficient.

It is difficult for the team to be as optimistic as District staff and the trustees that they can return the reserve to 5% by 2005. Given the financial crisis in the State of California, the confidence expressed in the District's projections may put the college at risk. Any unforeseen negative change in the forecast of enrollments or funding may lead the district to a financial crisis that would seriously affect the educational programs at Bakersfield College. The team acknowledges the very high risk being taken by the District. The College mid term report is due in one year and if the financial condition of the District has not improved significantly, the Commission may want to consider further action. Therefore, a new recommendation is included in this report as follows:


The Trustees and Chancellor should closely monitor annual enrollments, district-wide expenditures, state funding allocations, cash reserves and cash flow, and make timely decisions to increase their reserves to maintain fiscal stability for Bakersfield College.

**Recommendation 7:**

*It is recommended that the trustees systematically engage in board training as a continuous, ongoing process and focus on their roles of setting policy and serving the best interests of the entire district and all its students. Of particular concern is the need for the trustees to address their role of keeping the district fiscally sound.* (Standards 10A.1, 10A.2, 10A.3, 10A.5, 10C.4, 10C.5, 10C.6)

Board membership has changed slightly. This as well as the training they have received (two retreats, each with a different consultant), has greatly improved the Board's performance. The territorialism that was evident during our last visit when trustees appeared to function only as
advocates for their "own" college has abated and they act as one body in support of the entire district. The Board has instituted a committee structure that allows them to carefully and critically study key issues before taking action.

Conclusion:
The Board appears to be functioning as a unified entity to support the District as a whole. The new committee structure provides Board members with an opportunity to be much better informed about the decisions they make and the risks they take on behalf of the District.