EVALUATION REPORT

PALO VERDE COLLEGE

Blythe, California

**A Confidential Report Prepared for
The Accrediting Commission for Community
And Junior Colleges**

Western Association of Schools and Colleges

**This report represents the findings of the evaluation team's visit to Palo Verde
College from March 20 – 22, 2002**

D. Roe Darnell, Chair

ACCREDITATION EVALUATION REPORT
FOR
PALO VERDE COLLEGE

Comprehensive Evaluation Visit of March 20-22, 2002
D. Roe Darnell, Evaluation Team Chair

REPORT SUMMARY

An eleven-member team, appointed by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, conducted a comprehensive visit of Palo Verde College March 20-22, 2002. Team members interviewed a broad representation of the college community, held a well-attended college forum, observed a specially scheduled meeting of the Board of Trustees, and visited facilities of the college (including the Spring Street facility and the Needles facility) in order to establish a thorough understanding of the college and its programs.

Palo Verde College is a comprehensive, public community college, founded in 1947 and serving the eastern California desert communities of Blythe and Needles. The college has experienced several significant changes since the last accreditation visit. A satellite site serving Needles, California has been established with the annexation of eastern San Bernardino County. A new 200-acre campus has been constructed. Educational services have been expanded to include a new inmate education program at Ironwood State Prison, a distance education program, adult noncredit programs, and a joint public safety-training program.

During this time the college has experienced leadership changes. There were three changes in the President's office with the identification of a new CEO in 2001. With the annexation of the Needles area two new Board of Trustees seats have been designated. Other faculty and administrative positions have been vacated and replaced due to retirements and several new positions have been added.

The purposes of the visit were to validate the college's self study in reference to the ten standards of accreditation identified by ACCJC, to determine how well the college had addressed the previous visiting team's recommendations, to provide recommendations regarding quality assurance and institutional improvement as an effort to assist the college in strengthening its programs and services, and to enable the team to make a recommendation to the Accrediting Commission regarding the accredited status of the college.

The team found that Palo Verde appropriately considered all of the previous team's recommendations. This consideration included a vigorous attention to those recommendations that led to the college's recent probationary status. The team found that the college addressed, in a good fashion, those recommendations that most impact the college's probationary status – planning, governance, and program congruence. At the same time the team recognized that these recommendations focused on long-standing and

difficult topics that require in depth attention. This resulted in many commendations acknowledging the college's response to the recommendations coupled with recommendations for a continued and deeper response to those topics.

COMMENDATIONS

The team commends the college for:
1. Beginning a strategic planning process that benefited from the use of a facilitator and included representation from the college's leadership groups.
2. Initiating a needs assessment, performed by a professional firm, to assist them further in the planning of programs, student services, strategic planning and, most importantly, the College's role in the Community.
3. Identifying a full-time researcher position to fill the need for data that will assist the college in fully meeting the requirements related to institutional effectiveness.
4. Taking the first steps in implementing program review that at the time of this visit had been completed as planned by instruction and student service departments.
5. Serving the community through the spring street non-credit programs.
6. **Providing** educational opportunities to the Needles community and the Ironwood State Prison inmate population.
7. Its positive response to the recent crash of the college computing system.
8. The improvement of the quality and quantity of information and learning resources available to students, faculty and staff.
9. Providing support whereby approximately 50% of the classified staff is currently enrolled in AA, BA or MA programs.
10. The progress the Board of Trustees has made in governance, establishing its roles as a policy maker rather than a management body and for its work towards a planning agenda for the District.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The team has made ten recommendations directed toward the improvement of programs and services provided by Palo Verde College. Three of the recommendations are broad-based and address college-wide efforts that have begun and are in progress but will benefit from a broader consideration.

Recommendation3.1
In order to foster institutional effectiveness, the team recommends that the institutional Planning Committee, under the leadership of the President, immediately redefine and publish its institutional planning process. This process should ensure the use of comprehensive, reliable, and relevant internal and external data sources for setting strategic priorities so that institutional goals and outcomes are congruent with community needs. It should also delineate the campus constituencies who must participate to ensure interactive campus-wide involvement, define the intended outcomes of planning efforts, and state how these outcomes will inform the decision-making process. It should also describe the process by which linkages to other college plans, such as those for facilities

and technology, will be guided by the strategic plan and clarify the method by which planning developments will be shared with the college and community at large [3.A.1, 3.A.3, 3.B.1, 3.B.2, 3.B.3, 3.C.1, 3.C.2, 3.C.4].

Recommendation 3.2
In order to increase the effectiveness of program review, the team recommends that the Program Review Committee evaluate its overall structure and process to ensure that all units or appropriate functions such as the non-credit, distance education, and off-site programs and centers are reviewed and that reviews are consistently and systematically data-based, linked with the college's mission, goals and objectives, measure specific outcomes, and improve the teaching and learning function across instruction, student services, and administrative services departments. The results of these reviews should also be utilized for decision-making and allocating resources at all levels [3.A.4].

Recommendation 4.1

It is recommended that the college review the catalog to insure that all programs and courses are described in clear and complete terms and that those descriptions are consistent with the course outlines of record. To facilitate the review process the curriculum committee, public information officer, and instruction office should work diligently to insure that there is consistency between catalog description of the courses and the description included in the official course outlines. (Standards 2.1, 4.C.1)

Recommendation 5.1
It is recommended that, in coordination with recommendations relating to institutional planning, the college develop and implement an effective enrollment management plan based on current and projected data about the college service area and students served. The plan should address declining and/or increasing student enrollments, changing demographics, current instructional needs of the community, and excessive cancellation of the printed course offerings in the schedule of classes. (Standards 1.2, 1.3, 2.1, 3A.1, 3B.1, 3C.1, 4D.1, 4D.5, 5.3, 5.4, 5.6, 5.7, 5.10, 6.6, 6.7, 7B.2, 9A.2, 10C.1)

Recommendation 5.2
 It is recommended that, the college develop policies and procedures that delineate the roles of counselors and para-professional advisors and formalize selection standards, training and referral mechanisms for advisors and counselors to improve student support. (Standard 3C.1, 5.3, 5.6, 5.7, 7B.1, 7B.2, 7C.2)

Recommendation 6.1
It is recommended that the college review its learning support services for students at off campus sites, in order to provide comparable access to information and learning resources to support the courses, programs and degrees offered at these sites. (Standard 6.1)

Recommendation 7.1
It is recommended that the college develop a strategy to ensure legal, fair, and effective hiring practices and further the diversity of faculty and staff so that they more closely mirror the diversity of the larger community and the students they serve. (Standard 7.D.

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Recommendation 7.2
It is recommended that the college develop a clear process for the evaluation of academic administrators that, where required by law, include the broader participation of appropriate faculty and staff in that process. (Standards 7.B.1, 10.A.4)

Recommendation 7.3
It is recommended that the college, through the Staff Development committee work to address the expressed training needs of staff, particularly in technology, research, cultural sensitivity, safety and emergency procedures and link evaluation of staff and faculty to professional development opportunities. (Standards 7.B.2, 7.C.2, 3.A, 8.3)

Recommendation 10.1
It is recommended that the college develop a comprehensive process for soliciting broad input from the campus on issues and providing opportunities for the campus to respond to decisions while they are being formed. This process should include provisions for continuous feedback to all constituent groups regarding the status of decisions. It is equally important that these processes be formed in a manner that facilitates efficient and timely decision-making.

The team strongly believes, that for the college to continue its progress the college must focus on the completion and integration of its several efforts in planning and communication. Work must be focused on addressing the issues identified in the college's self study and the recommendations made by team.

Standard One - Institutional Mission

RESPONSE TO THE PREVIOUS TEAM'S RECOMMENDATIONS

There were no recommendations from the previous team regarding this standard.

OBSERVATIONS

Palo Verde Community College has experienced significant changes the past two years, which were well documented and validated through interviews with members of the Board of Trustees, the President/Superintendent, and members of the institutional self-study team. These changes were further reflected through board minutes and strategic planning task force.

The current mission statement, which broadly focuses Palo Verde College toward a comprehensive public community college, was adopted in 1997 during a period of turmoil and served as a living document to guide the college in planning and budgeting decisions through those difficult times. Under this mission statement the college has developed new programs, expanded its service area and implemented new modalities of instruction. The president has established a strategic task force to develop a long range planning document that will drive planning and budget.

CONCLUSIONS

With the addition of distance learning, annexation of the most eastern portion of San Bernardino County to the District to include the Needles community, and the addition of prison inmate programs a review of the college mission statement is appropriate. The Board of Trustees, the President and the college community is committed to this review through the strategic planning process supported by a college task force and the recently completed needs assessment. The new mission statement, vision statement, goals and functions will define the uniqueness of Palo Verde College role in its community. The new mission statement promises to be an inclusive statement, truly reflecting a living document, which will drive planning and budgeting at all levels of decision-making.

COMMENDATIONS

The college is commended for beginning a strategic planning process that benefited from the use of a facilitator and included representation from the college's leadership groups. They are very close to finalizing a document that will be shared with the College staff and then presented to the Board for final approval.

The college is commended for initiating a needs assessment, performed by a professional firm, to assist them further in the planning of programs, student services, strategic planning and, most importantly, the College's role in the Community.

Standard Two - Institutional Integrity

RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PREVIOUS TEAM

There were no recommendations from the previous team regarding this standard**.**

OBSERVATIONS

The College substantially meets all standards related to Institutional Integrity.

The Palo Verde Community College District communicates to its constituencies through a variety of methods. College publications such as catalog, class schedule, and student handbook describe the college's programs, course offerings, student requirements, and the purpose of the college. Other media is used to increase the college's communication with the public. Through the use of a college web page, announcements to the local cable television channel and news releases the public is informed of college events, current class schedules and opportunities for registration.

The College has enhanced this effort through the identification of a public information officer whose job responsibilities include the coordination of publications.

Even with the college's attention to an accurate description of its programs in the institutional catalog there are individual cases of differences between the course description in the catalog and that of the official course outlines. It appears that some course outlines are not updated.

The college has taken the self-study process and its relationship with the Commission very seriously. There is evidence that attempts were made to involve all constituencies in the self-study process while still responding to the pressures of completing a self-study document in a timely manner. Faculty leadership was involved in key roles as the Accreditation Liaison and the editor of the self-study document. Interviews with faculty and staff indicate that the institution as a whole view the accreditation process as an opportunity to make the college a better place for learning to occur.

CONCLUSIONS

The college has undertaken a significant program review process and a review of course outlines, both focused on establishing continuity between the college's curriculum offerings and catalog statements. As noted in the self-study the college continues to struggle with ways to schedule all the elements of a program in a predictable way. This struggle is complicated by the interactions of the college's multiple locations and the limitations of a student body that is small in size. This disconnect is reflected in the seemingly high number of addendums to the course catalog. The college must remain vigilant in its effort to accurately portray the time period over which all required courses in a program would be offered and the location in which those courses will be offered.

The college may be aided in this effort by the development of an enrollment management plan as recommended elsewhere in this report.

The college's self-evaluation document clearly identifies the college's strong areas as well as those areas that need continued attention. Those areas needing continuing focus include the continued review of public documents and publications for relevancy and accuracy. The completion of the college web site is of particular concern.

The college has adequately addressed these issues in its Planning Agenda. However, the Planning Agenda items could be strengthened by the identification of those responsible for action and a target completion date.

Standard Three - Institutional Effectiveness

RESPONSES TO THE PREVIOUS TEAM'S RECOMMENDATIONS

In response to the previous team's recommendations the college has taken additional steps towards developing good practices in planning and assessment of effectiveness. This has been an evolutionary process and in some cases the college abandoned the practices they previously described. As a result of the college's continuing attention to improving its response the previous team's recommendations have been attended to. (Recommendation 1.2)

OBSERVATIONS

The college has supported its research effort through the addition of an institutional researcher and the establishment of a research office. This office has enhanced the college's planning and program review processes

The program review process provides for self-evaluation whereby faculty determines the effectiveness of each instructional program. Following the guidelines in the *Instructional Program Review Notebook*, faculty review program data elements such as faculty ratios, enrollment trends, degrees and certificates awarded and results of faculty and student surveys. The analysis of this information is the basis for recommendations for change and requires that faculty state how the educational program meets the college's mission and purposes. Public discussions are conducted to review and refine the recommendations of the Program Review Team before the Program Review Committee forwards recommendations to appropriate committees or processes for implementation. Non-credit, off-site and distance education are included in program review only to the extent that a review team has a course that is taught at an off-site location or through distance education. Program review results have provided opportunities for instructional programs to make improvements in the teaching and learning function.

The policy related to program review allows the campus community to provide feedback on their experience with the process. It is interesting to note that although many of the letters from the faculty stated they did not like the process, there are positive comments about the benefits of having gone through the process. One faculty member writes, "In conclusion, I did not enjoy doing this report, nor do I want to do it again. However, it did

provide insight and new perspectives of problems and strengths found within my areas that I was unaware of, and as such, made the process worthwhile." Another faculty member wrote, "This study, however, imperfect it is, allowed us (forced us?) to get together as faculty in similar areas and identify and discuss at least some of our common problems and concerns (and some successes) and the process can only make our areas stronger." There appears to be no linkage between program review and college-wide goals or the college strategic planning process.

At the time of this accreditation visit, one full cycle of program review in instructional areas had been completed. The team was not able to validate that program review in student and administrative services has been implemented to meet the standards set in the college's *Program Review and Educational Planning Policy* manual. The manual states "First and foremost, the educational plan should not simply be a continuation of the status quo but a goal for the future and direction on how to get there." However, student service reviews require that only general recommendations be made without stating specific goals to ensure change and time-lines for their completion. The instructional program review process requires academic programs to state how it supports the overall mission of the college and what unique institutional goal(s) it satisfies. However, program review policy allows for those in non-instructional areas to adjust the format. In the process of adjusting the instructional program review format to meet student service department needs, it eliminated these two very important questions. The absence of these two questions diminishes the opportunity to demonstrate clear linkages between student service programs and the college's mission, goals, and purposes. In administrative services, the location of the program reviews was unknown and was unclear how program reviews are used in decision-making.

Board Policy 6011 defines the responsibility of the Planning Committee as it relates to the planning process. As part of that responsibility, the Institutional Planning Committee organized an Institute Day on March 9, 2000 to initiate institutional research efforts at the college and, under the leadership of the new President; a strategic plan is being developed for 2002-2005 that utilizes current research and information provided by local focus groups.

Since the institutional research office was opened in the spring of 2000, the researcher has administered a Student Satisfaction Survey (n=561), Faculty, Staff, Administration and Board Institutional Priorities Survey (n=91), a needs and information survey of the local high schools (2000, 2001), provided and interpreted data for program review, and developed a college fact book. Additionally, the college has submitted a Title V proposal that was funded and contains a wealth of demographic data on Hispanic students that make up nearly half of the college's student population. The college also has access to data from other sources such as VTEA Core Measures, Unemployment Insurance Wage data, Student Right to Know, Intersegmental Postsecondary Education and California Post Secondary data. Additionally, important data is available to the college through the work of vocational advisory committees. Each of the career and certificate programs meets with industry representatives to evaluate the effectiveness and relevance of each vocational program. However, the Strategic Planning Task Force mainly relied on the results of a very limited phone survey of faculty and staff (n=50), past students and graduates (n=50), Needles general public (n=150), and Blythe general public (n=150) by

Robinson's Research, Inc. to serve as the spring-board for selecting institutional strategic priorities, goals and objectives. The 50-sample surveys have a 95% chance of having a +/- 13% margin of error. However, it is not clear that this wealth of institutional research is fully integrated with institutional planning and evaluation and that the institution uses the planning processes to identify priorities for improvement. It appears that important data and research results are currently not being effectively utilized or integrated to guide the development of strategic priorities and goals at the institutional level.

The team was also not able to validate that the college has a plan to incorporate campus-wide and interactive participation in the strategic planning process and that the institution engages in systematic and integrated educational, financial, physical and human services planning and implements changes to programs and services. A review of an annual budget proposal revealed that although the form requires that applicants state the specific college goal the proposal for additional funds meets, the application showed that all requests for funds related to a broad-range of items were linked to college goal 5.3. However, college goal 5.3 appears to have little relationship to the request. At face value it appears that the college is attempting to make linkages across various planning efforts but upon closer review, this does not appear to be working effectively.

CONCLUSIONS

The college has recognized the need for on going research and has developed and filled a full-time researcher position. However, the role and responsibilities of the new researcher as well as his research agenda must be clarified. The researcher directed the CalWorks and TechPrep program before taking on his new responsibilities and is only recently developing skills as a researcher. Additionally, the recent crash of the college's data system has further challenged the researcher's ability to immerse himself in the task of learning how to work with data sets and conduct research. The college might benefit by providing resources to ensure that the researcher obtain the appropriate technical support needed to skillfully establish a fully functioning and effective research office.

The College has taken important initial steps in implementing program review. However, it has not included all appropriate units and functions to include non-credit, distance education, and all service locations. They are not included in the matrix that sets the time-line for program reviews. The team was informed that the Needles site is interested in conducting program review in April but does not have a model for how to conduct this review. The college may benefit from ensuring that all appropriate units and functions are integrated into the program review process as defined college-wide.
The college hired a consultant to provide support on developing a strategic planning process. This support included revising the college's vision, mission, values, and establishing goals, objectives, and action plans. However, it appears that this approach failed to utilize and integrate full range of data available to the college in determining priorities, setting goals, and objectives. Additionally, the team was not able to fully validate that the institution defines and publishes its planning processes, specifies its intended outcomes and involves appropriate segments of the college community in the development of institutional plans. The team was also concerned about whether the

college would ensure that institutional goals as defined by the board would be congruent with and are incorporated into the strategic priorities in the new strategic plan.

Despite these areas of concern, the college should be commended for recognizing the importance of establishing a research office, for finding the resources to pay for hiring a professional expert to guide the college in developing a strategic plan and for taking important initial steps in developing program review.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to foster institutional effectiveness, the team recommends that the institutional Planning Committee, under the leadership of the President, immediately redefine and publish its institutional planning process. This process should ensure the use of comprehensive, reliable, and relevant internal and external data sources for setting strategic priorities so that institutional goals and outcomes are congruent with community needs. It should also delineate the campus constituencies who must participate to ensure interactive campus-wide involvement, define the intended outcomes of planning efforts, and state how these outcomes will inform the decision-making process. It should also describe the process by which linkages to other college plans, such as those for facilities and technology, will be guided by the strategic plan and clarify the method by which planning developments will be shared with the college and community at large [3.A.1, 3.A.3, 3.B.1, 3.B.2, 3.B.3, 3.C.1, 3.C.2, 3.C.4].

In order to increase the effectiveness of program review, the team recommends that the Program Review Committee evaluate its overall structure and process to ensure that all units or appropriate functions such as the non-credit, distance education, and off-site programs and centers are reviewed and that reviews are consistently and systematically data-based, linked with the college's mission, goals and objectives, measure specific outcomes, and improve the teaching and learning function across instruction, student services, and administrative services departments. The results of these reviews should also be utilized for decision-making and allocating resources at all levels [3.A.4].

COMMENDATIONS

The team commends the college for developing a full-time researcher position to fill the need for data that will assist the college in fully meeting the requirements related to institutional effectiveness.

The team commends the college for their progress in taking the first steps in implementing program review that at the time of this visit had been completed as planned by instruction and student service departments.

Standard Four - Educational Programs

RESPONSES TO THE PREVIOUS TEAM'S RECOMMENDATIONS

The previous evaluation team recommended that the college review its curricular process with attention to revising course outlines. The previous response indicates that all course outlines were reviewed and updated. The college also indicates that all courses being taught without existing course outlines have now been reviewed and current course outlines are now on file. The evaluation team was able to verify that all courses have a course outline and that most of the course outlines have been reviewed since the last team visit.

The previous evaluation team also recommended that the college develop a two-three year schedule of classes that would allow students an opportunity to complete majors or certificates in a timely manner. The college has responded that, after a review by the Vice President of Instruction, no substantive problem exists for students who take 15 units per semester. There may be several reasons why student perceptions, and actual academic progress, appear to contradict the institution's claim. First, if the data collected by the Vice President of Instruction is valid it may be that although the pattern of scheduling suggests a full-time student can complete his/her course of study in two years the reality may be that students experience class closures, class cancellations, or time conflicts that preclude them from completing the necessary course work. Another possible cause may be poor academic planning by the student or poor academic advisement by the college. Finally, there may any number of personal reasons why students fail to complete their course of study that may not reflect negatively on the college. After closer examination it appears the single largest factor may be the pattern of class cancellations.

The previous team also recommended that the college update the catalog to accurately reflect the current programs, policies, and procedures. The college response to this recommendation indicates that committees were convened and a catalog is now updated and published on a two-year cycle. The team was able to determine that the catalog has been updated and is published every two years. The team commends the college on its' efforts to produce a current and accurate catalog, but as recommended later in Standard 4 the college should continue to check the accuracy of all information, and seek to include information as required by accreditation Standard 4. (Recommendation 2.1)

The previous team recommended that the college develop a system of program review. The college's response to this recommendation indicates that a process is now in operation and that a full cycle of program review has been completed. However, the response also indicates that there is an ongoing problem with data collection, including access to MIS data. The lack of data is a problem that still existed at the time of the site visit. (Recommendation 3.2)

Another recommendation by the previous team was that the college review both the transfer and articulation process and develop a plan to strengthen these services. The response indicates that there is now a part-time articulation officer and that articulation agreements are now in place with several UC and CSU campuses. The response also indicates that there is now a counselor assigned part-time to the transfer center. It is not clear what outcomes have resulted from the new transfer center organization. The team determined that there has been a high turnover rate in the Transfer center and that the

position is currently vacant. The college is currently advertising this position and hopes to bring some stability to this student service area. (Recommendation 3.1)

OBSERVATIONS

The team attempted to validate Standard 4 through interviews, document reviews, and direct observations. The Spring street facility offers a variety of non-credit, community service, and fee-based courses that are responsive to the needs of the community. This facility has shown steady growth and anticipates additional growth in the future. A strong element of this facility has been a steady increase in the number of students who matriculate to the credit program. The students indicated a high level of satisfaction with the facility, the instructor, and the instructional program. The non-credit division is also offering classes in the city of Ripley. These classes were in direct response to an identified need to provide educational opportunities to migrant workers.

The construction program, located on a lot owned by the city redevelopment agency, focuses on the construction of a 1300 square foot home by students under instructional supervision. The team found the instructor to be enthusiastic, knowledgeable, and professional. This is a great example of a partnership that serves the purposes of the demographics and economy of the community. (Standards 4.A.1, 4.A.4)

The team also visited the automotive program located at the high school. Although this program is serving a need in the community and specifically a need to provide a vocational opportunity to high school students it is experiencing challenges related to equipment and the size of the facility. The college has indicated that the long-term plan is to build a vocational education building at the new campus on the mesa. (Standards 4.A.1, 4.A.4)

The college is currently offering educational opportunities by distance education at a local prison, by face-to-face instruction at a facility in the city of needles, and at the Ben Clark Training Center in Riverside. All of these programs deliver educational experiences to a specific group, or population, with identified needs. (Standards 4.A.1, 4.A.4)

The review of class seat count data revealed that a pattern of many class cancellations persists. Student interviews indicated that the number of class cancellations is a source of dissatisfaction. (Standard 4.A.2) In special circumstances where the student is unable to complete program requirements the college makes an effort to substitute an Independent Studies contract for an unavailable class. The Vice President of Instruction indicated that approximately 10 of these contracts are made each year. (Standard 4.A.3)

The college maintains a student to counselor ratio of approximately 300:1 at the main campus. However, there is a need to provide increased academic services at the Spring street, and Needles facilities. (Standard 4.A.5)

The team also reviewed the program review documentation, and conducted interviews with both faculty and administration in an attempt to validate Standard 4.D.1. The

program review process is a form of self-study with some limited statistical data included. The faculty expressed some lack of knowledge regarding how the program review material was used in planning or if it was used. On the other hand the Vice President of Instruction gave clear examples of how the material was used to schedule classes, hire faculty, and identify programs that might not be viable. The disparity between faculty and administration reinforced a common theme that permeated the college. There is a need to better involve the faculty in college processes through a systematic approach that includes familiarization with all college processes, the purpose and outcomes of the process, and the consistent application of those processes.

In an attempt to validate Standard 4.D.2 the team reviewed evaluation processes, syllabi, and course outlines. In addition, interviews were conducted with faculty, and administration. The team was unable to validate compliance as indicated in the self-study. The team observed a lack of consistency in the content and quality of individual syllabi. The team also could not validate the existence of any syllabi for many classes. In addition, the syllabi that did exist did not always clearly state how student learning is evaluated, or on what basis credit is awarded. (Standard 4.D.3)

CONCLUSIONS

The college demonstrates several strengths. The wide range of programs delivered at a variety of sites in a large geographic area serves a very diverse population sometimes with very special needs. The new physical facilities (on the mesa) of the college are a strength that the college can continue to build on for many years. The faculty and staff are another strength. The team found them to be enthusiastic and committed professionals.

There are also some areas of weakness. The team was concerned about the process for developing the schedule, no clear enrollment management plan, the number of class cancellations, and the lack of any institutional standards for syllabi. The team strongly suggests the implementation of an enrollment management process as recommended in Standard 5.

The team found that there is a need to provide better physical plant facilities and financial support for the industrial trades and non-credit programs. The team suggests that the college engage itself in a comprehensive planning process as recommended in Standard 5 and as a part of that process develop both short-term and long-term plans that provide for improved educational experiences for these programs.

While the college has made significant improvement in the catalog the team found some inconsistency in course descriptions when compared to the course outlines.

The team found the planning agenda to vary widely in structure, utility, and effectiveness. Many of the planning agenda items appeared to be a statement of current conditions rather than a directive for future action. For example in response to Standard 4.A.1 the planning agenda states "The college, through the Matriculation services, provides

campus-specific assessment test results to appropriate college constituents and to the Vice President of Instruction". This appears to be a statement of fact and does not include a plan for future action or improvement. Again, in Standard 4.A.5 there are statements of fact that do not create a clear plan of action. The team would encourage the college to revisit the planning agenda and identify clear courses of action that will result in strengthening the educational programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the college review the catalog to insure that all programs and courses are described in clear and complete terms and that those descriptions are consistent with the course outlines of record. To facilitate the review process the curriculum committee, public information officer, and instruction office should work diligently to insure that there is consistency between catalog description of the courses and the description included in the official course outlines. (Standards 2.1, 4.C.1)

COMMENDATIONS

The college should be commended for the progress made in updating course outlines, and insuring that all courses have current course outlines.

The college should be commended for its significant progress in developing and implementing a program review process.

The college should be commended for its effort to remove barriers and serve the community through the Spring street non-credit programs.

The college should be commended for its effort to provide educational opportunities to the Needles community.

Standard five - Student Support and Development

RESPONSES TO THE PREVIOUS TEAM'S RECOMMENDATIONS

The college appropriately responded to previous recommendations in this standard. These recommendations are reviewed elsewhere in this report.

OBSERVATIONS

Palo Verde College provides a broad range of student services to meet the needs of its diverse student population under the direction of the Vice President of Student Services. The college catalog and schedule of classes list information pertaining to college programs, admissions procedures, student conduct, refund guidelines and graduation requirements. Student complaint and discipline policies while referenced are presently being revised and are awaiting approval by the applicable constituent groups. Although these documents are clearly referenced in the catalog and schedule it may be prudent to clearly state where students can obtain copies of the specific documents. Interviews

reveal that copies of the various policies are kept in the student services office. Student needs may be served by placing pertinent documents in high traffic areas for student access and perusal.

PVC's services to students are equivalent to those being offered by various community colleges in the state. However, the new course offerings and services at the local prisons are to be commended for its hard work and joint venture. The college provides personal, academic and career counseling. The Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOP&S) utilize Para-professional advisors to assist in providing counseling services for an understaffed counseling component. Besides counseling students, EOP&S along with the general counseling faculty provides two-hour orientation to college session to new and first time Palo Verde students. Additionally, the college provides educational support services to students having learning disabilities and/or psychological difficulties through Disable Student Program and Services (DSP&S). DSP&S makes referrals to the Blythe Community Health Services for those students needing mental health assistance.

There appears to be a need for the college, as part of an enrollment management plan, to perform public relations to enhance the college's relationship with the local high school, community and outlying areas.

The counseling and advising discipline is centrally located in one area and appears to have a broad based support throughout the Blythe campus. There is, however, no consistent support provided to the extension campuses. Counselors and EPO&S Para-professional advisors are used to make available advising services and educational planning for students.

The College has established an early alert program to identify students having academic difficulties or attendance problems. The program appears to have college-wide acceptance from faculty and administration.

Counseling and advising are uniquely structured and the design appears to have broad based support within the college. Counseling services are provided by means of appointment or walk-in. However, there are reported inefficiencies in how the broad ranges of student needs are addressed. There does not appear to be written materials to help distinguish the role of a faculty counselor from that of a Para-professional advisor. Selection of advisors seems to be informally done subject to approval by the Vice President of Student Services, because there is no policy that delineates the criteria, selection process, or requisite skills for Para-professionals. Nor is there any formal document for initial training these advisors to orient their work beyond a Counseling Handbook. Lastly, there is no apparent document that delineates the method for evaluating the effectiveness of the advisors. The College is encouraged to develop a policy that defines the roles of counselors and advisors that helps formulate a referral relationship between advisors and counselors to improve student support. When utilizing advisors to augment the duties counseling faculty significant oversight is required to assure that accurate and consistent information is being provided to students; needs that surface during the advising session are properly addressed; and that students be referred

to discipline specific advising to best be served.

The College administered a Student Satisfaction Survey that assessed current services but not necessarily to identify needs not currently met.   In addition, with the changing demographics reflected in enrollment, there is no apparent process to identify new services that may support success for a changing population. Research indicates that there has been a steady decline in the transfer rate over the last few years. Increased communication between programs and integration of services may serve to spot emerging needs of students. Additionally a marketing plan, as a part of enrollment management, will provide useful data to consider for integrating and/or modifying student services.

There are a number of committees that allow for student input on the planning and evaluating of student support and development services. Student surveys and program reviews research inform the College about how present services are meeting student needs. However, there are reported shortcomings in the service to evening students as compared to the day students. Development of an enrollment management plan identifies the servicing requirements for all students regardless of whether they are day or evening.

Assessment instruments utilized by the College have been approved by the Chancellor's Office.   Placement services are aided by publication of assessment scores and course recommendation in the Schedule of Courses. In addition to assessment, a challenge process is in place that allows individual instructors to determine whether a student is appropriately prepared for the enrolled course.

Student enrollment reflects an increasingly ethnically diverse population. The College should study enrollment trends to identify emerging populations in order to contribute to the development of an inviting campus climate for new populations entering the college. A coordinated work effort with schools and marketing would be helpful in this endeavor.

The Transfer Center is located in the college library. One primary recommendation of the previous team was that the college review the transfer and articulation process and develop a plan to strengthen these services. The college serves a diverse population and has endeavored to strengthen its articulation and transfer process by assigning a counselor to the part-time position of articulation officer. As recently as 2001, a counselor was assigned a fifty percent assignment to the college's transfer center to provide stability and continuity to the transfer process. In furthering their efforts to improve transfer, the institution has established several articulation agreements with various UC, CSU, and private institutions. Palo Verde has also aligned itself with colleges in Region 9 to facilitate increased transfer opportunities for its students and matriculation between colleges. Recent activity and interview data suggests transfer is the weakest link in the student services department. Dialogue also revealed there is a transfer plan but little or no commitment to develop or implement a system of transfer. While college personnel state transfer as an area of concern, there is no documented evidence that there has been a system for the monitoring and implementation of the plan. At this time, the plan is not widely distributed and there is little documented evidence of measured progressed. A new full time position has been created to support and coordinate the transfer effort.

However, responsibility for coordinating transfer efforts can be better defined through the development of an "Enrollment Management Plan."

There is no active student government and student activities program at Palo Verde presently. Discussions with many students indicate no desire or enthusiasm to participate in the student activities. A Leadership course is offered to develop leadership skills and parliamentary procedures.

Admissions and Records maintain all student records. Despite a crash of the college computer system the college has managed to resurrect all student records and files manually. The college has yet to fully implement a new computer system to manage its institutional needs.

Following a regular schedule, the College's student services department conducts a Program Review of the individual components of its services to assess program effectiveness and to recommend changes to each evaluated program and service. Review of the records show that a Program Review was conducted on the following programs/services since the last site visit: Admission and Records, Assessment and Course Placement, Career Development, Child Development, Counseling, DSPS, EOPS, Financial Aid, Student Activities, and Transfer Center. Program Review generally relies on student surveys to assess effectiveness. The College would be served to explore alternative quantitative measures to enhance program review and assessment of services. It is apparent that much concerted energy is given to provide the very best services possible in individual areas and innovation stems from these independent areas. One notable and recent innovation is the ACE grant to assist Latino students. There are many other efforts and initiatives to serve students that demonstrate the deep commitment PVC Student Services has to better support student success.

CONCLUSIONS

New institutional expansion, relations with the community, the Needles project and increased enrollment at the prisons necessitate an evaluation of potential staffing increase, public relations and marketing and relations with high schools. PVC's recent activities reveal a number of students aspire to complete the four-year degree. Moreover, college responsibility for coordinating enrollment management concerns is not established. Consequently, the transfer process appears to be uncoordinated and does not have a broad based effort involving the entire spectrum of the college. This college-wide effort requires alert attention, assigned responsibility, and resources to assure full implementation of a viable enrollment management plan.

The Self Study committee made comprehensive evaluations and developed realistic plans which should meet the accreditation standards. The College provides an array of student services and makes efforts to improve services and initiate new innovations in student services. It recognizes a need to improve efforts to provide appropriate services to new populations with emerging needs. Improved communication and integration of services is key to make the best use of services already available and necessary to draw on the wealth of experience and rich knowledge provided by student service providers. This includes the growth and future development of a comprehensive and integrated student

service programs. As new student populations emerge, the college needs to rely on objective needs assessment and an established plan to respond to associated needs. Implementation of reported plans in a timely manner should result in accreditation standards being met and will result in the desired improvements the College is interested in achieving.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that, in coordination with recommendations relating to institutional planning, the college develop and implement an effective enrollment management plan based on current and projected data about the college service area and students served. The plan should address declining and/or increasing student enrollments, changing demographics, current instructional needs of the community, and excessive cancellation of the printed course offerings in the schedule of classes. (Standards 1.2, 1.3, 2.1, 3A.1, 3B.1, 3C.1, 4D.1, 4D.5, 5.3, 5.4, 5.6, 5.7, 5.10, 6.6, 6.7, 7B.2, 9A.2, 10C.1)

It is recommended that, the college develop policies and procedures that delineate the roles of counselors and para-professional advisors and formalize selection standards, training and referral mechanisms for advisors and counselors to improve student support. (Standard 3C.1, 5.3, 5.6, 5.7, 7B.1, 7B.2, 7C.2)

COMMENDATIONS

The college is commended in the establishment of partnerships to provide services to the prison population.

The college is commended for its response to the recent crash of the computer system.

Standard Six - Information & Learning Resources

RESPONSE TO THE PREVIOUS TEAM'S RECOMMENDATIONS

The team found that the institution responded appropriately and positively to the previous recommendations for this standard. The college developed a Library Technology Plan, increased library holdings, both print and electronic, and provided campus wide Internet access for staff and students. The LSC now provides tutoring for students in all subjects, including tutorial assistance in Spanish for non-native English speakers, and has increased the number of adjunct faculty and peer tutors available and the training they receive. (Recommendation 5.1)

The college also reviewed staffing patterns for the Library (LRC) and the Learning Skills Center (LSC) and hired a Director, Learning Resources Center and a Coordinator, Learning Skills Center, beginning in the 1996-97 academic year. (Recommendation 5.2)

OBSERVATIONS

The team found that the information and learning resources available are sufficient to

support the institution's programs at the Palo Verde campus. The Learning Resources Center (LRC) is now housed in a larger, new facility, which has greatly improved the access to books and other materials, as well as increased support for computer access, including DSP&S computer use. The new facility was well planned and offers students and staff an aesthetically pleasing environment in which to pursue study and research. LRC computers have been networked and have Internet access. Wireless access is also available. The book print collection has increased as well as the periodical holdings, videos, DVD's, etc. The library's electronic catalog is available from any computer on campus. Full-text electronic periodical databases are available for research. There are plans to increase the use of the LRC web pages to direct students not only to additional information on the web, but to provide more in-house generated information about the library and its resources, including a directory and opening hours, etc. (6.1)

The Learning Services Center (LSC) supports students in a new "computer mall" location in the laboratory/classroom wing, and offers students tutoring and learning skills support in a variety of subjects, accessible to all students from remedial to advanced, including ESL. A collection of videos and other curriculum support material is housed in the LSC. The material is not catalogued and therefore not accessible through the electronic catalog. The LSC plans to launch its web pages in the near future. (6.1)

Although the LRC Director selects the majority of the library material, faculty are encouraged to participate informally in collection development and are forwarded information about new material in their disciplines. Faculty requests receive priority in purchasing and recommendations are also taken from staff and students. Faculty is notified of new additions to the collection each semester in the form of a published bibliography. (6.2)

The LSC now houses state of the art equipment as a result of the move to the new building. The Coordinator of the facility selects the collection of videotapes and other CAI material for classroom support, with input from the faculty. (6.2)

The team found that information and learning resources are readily accessible to students, faculty and staff on the Blythe campus with both the LRC and the LSC maintaining operation hours, which include early mornings and evenings. At present, no weekend hours are offered at either center, although the LSC is exploring the possibility of opening four hours on Saturdays. (6.3)

At present, the LRC electronic catalog is accessible from any computer on the Blythe campus. However, it is not accessible over the web, nor are the electronic periodical databases available for access either from home or from off campus sites. The Library Technology Plan does address the issue of providing off-campus access. (6.3)

As pointed out in the self-study, the LRC and LSC services are available primarily to students enrolled in on-campus programs. Students at other sites have limited access to learning resources, tutoring and other academic support services. (6.3)

The LRC employs a professional staff, which includes the Director and one part-time adjunct librarian. A full-time faculty Coordinator staffs the LSC with additional adjunct faculty tutors and trained peer tutors. Clerical support staff is employed in the Library and Media Services areas. The self-study notes the lack of paraprofessional training opportunities in the area for the support staff and includes, in the planning agenda, a cooperative effort with Staff Development to create new training avenues for these employees. (6.4)

The institution has made an effort to provide financial support for improving its information and learning resources. This support, however, has not always been sufficient and consistent in the past. Library materials' budget has been reduced and is supplemented by grant funds from outside and state sources. The LSC seems to be well funded at this time. (6.5)

The Library is a member of other county (SIRCLS) and state cooperatives (Library of California). Students have access to resources at UCR through interlibrary loan. Plans are being made to explore membership in a joint cataloging utility, such as OCLC, funding permitting. (6.6)

The institution uses a combination of program review, master plan and student surveys to evaluate the effectiveness and adequacy of its learning and information resources. The Library Technology Plan has been developed and is followed as priorities and funding permits. As noted in the self-study, student participation and input in LSC questionnaires has been poor. Both the Library and Learning Skills Center plan to seek student input in a variety of ways to more accurately judge student satisfaction with their services. (6.7)

CONCLUSIONS

The institution does provide sufficient information and learning resources and services to support the institution's intellectual and cultural activities and programs at the Palo Verde campus. However, access to these information and learning resources at off-campus sites is not sufficient and needs to be addressed. This deficiency is recognized in the self-study and is evident through conversations with staff and students.

With the planned retirement of the current Director of Learning Resources at the end of this spring semester, attention needs to be paid to recruiting professionally qualified staff who provides appropriate support to users of information and learning resources.

A decision needs to be made regarding the physical location of the Learning Skills Center. The college is considering moving the center into the Library area, splitting it between the two buildings or leaving it where it is presently located in the mall area of the classroom/laboratory building. With the arrival of the new Vice President of Instruction, this decision should be made soon.

Funding for learning resources has been sufficient in the past but not always consistent. Funding for information and learning resources should be a district priority, even though

outside funding sources and state monies to supplement district funding are also available.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the college review its learning support services for students at off campus sites, in order to provide comparable access to information and learning resources to support the courses, programs and degrees offered at these sites. (Standard 6.1)

COMMENDATIONS

The college should be commended for responding appropriately and positively to the previous recommendations for this standard. Substantial progress has been made in the improvement of the quality and quantity of information and learning resources available to students, faculty and staff. In addition, tutorial services have been expanded to cover all disciplines and learning skills support is present across the curriculum, increasing opportunities for student success.

Standard Seven - Faculty & Staff

RESPONSES TO THE PREVIOUS TEAM'S RECOMMENDATIONS

The prior 1996 report called for consideration of "follow-up of faculty who have left to determine if adjustments can be made to reduce the turnover rate." The college indicated it did not conduct such a survey and that the turnover rate has not been as dramatic in recent years. (Recommendation 4.1)

The 1996 report also called for an examination of the job descriptions for all classified staff; those have not yet been finalized. The consultant hired to survey staff prior to submitting a report and recommendations has not completed that assignment. A reclassification survey has recently been completed and awaits implementation. (Recommendations 4.2, 4.3)

OBSERVATIONS

An early retirement incentive program is creating substantial impact with the retirement of six faculty and administrators throughout the Spring 2002 semester. The college recognizes that these retirements could have a negative impact on the college's ability to offer some courses or programs and could exacerbate its current difficulty in offering needed GE courses in a timely fashion. The college is also aware of the opportunity to reshape the college's offerings through the strategic selection of new faculty.

In response to these retirements, the college is seeking four replacement faculty and four new faculty who will be partially assigned (40-60%) to the burgeoning distance education project with the prisons. This transition period offers both challenges and opportunities

to the college, especially in light of rapidly expanding non-credit programs at the Spring Street facility; the curricular needs at the Needles campus and the credit offerings at the prisons.

The self-study speaks candidly of the college's overall difficulty in attracting and retaining qualified faculty, staff, and administrators. Several individuals spoke to the need to "sell Blythe to sell the college." Identifying attractive regional features may become an important element in the more aggressive recruiting strategies being advocated by all constituencies. To bolster effective hiring, the college has altered its advertising approach, and now lists openings on the Chancellor's registry. The college may want to consider direct recruitment at universities located in similar geographic circumstances (e.g., Northern Arizona University, University of Arizona, Arizona State University, University of Nevada, Las Vegas; University of Utah, CSU Bakersfield, CSU Fresno, or at smaller private institutions in these western states).

Additionally, to retain flexibility as the college determines its new direction during this transitional period, rather than seeking to replace retiring faculty in specific disciplines "generic job descriptions" have been created. Applicants for the new positions are expected to demonstrate interest in and qualifications for two or more fields, thus potentially extending the offerings into new areas or providing greater depth in existing disciplines.

The college's Affirmative Action Officer seeks to ensure fair and effective hiring practices; however the college's faculty and staff do not yet reflect the diversity of the local population or of its students. There is an understanding that, with the significant number of open faculty positions, the college has an opportunity to impact the diversity of its faculty in a very positive way.

The college catalogue lists the degrees and institutions for full-time faculty and administrators. The self-study reports an over-reliance upon the equivalence process; administrators (who generally evaluate equivalencies rather than faculty) report that they exercise judiciousness in evaluating these equivalencies. However, degrees and institutions are not listed for part-time or non-credit adjunct faculty, and listings in schedules of courses indicated that individuals in areas very far from their training are teaching classes.

The self-study details the mechanism for faculty and staff evaluation; however faculty reported that evaluations were not conducted regularly, and part-time credit faculty were rarely evaluated. Faculty teaching in the noncredit program are evaluated each semester, but the process and form is not the same as that used on the main campus. Academic administrators' evaluations are, by the college's admission, "spotty" and without clear processes (7.A.2). At present, only the Superintendent/ President conducts those evaluations without involvement of appropriate faculty or staff. The report notes that evaluation of many faculty is hampered by the current structure in the Office of Instruction and the multiple responsibilities of the Vice President of Instruction.

In its 1998 Mid Term Report, the college indicated its intention to "develop an orientation process and peer review for new faculty that should help new faculty and staff to transition into the College." That process has not emerged; the peer review, linked to faculty evaluation, appears in documentation but is not universally practiced.
At present, the link between evaluation and staff development to "encourage improvement" cannot be validated. The Evaluation section (7.B.2) focused only on faculty and did not indicate how feedback encouraged improvement. The self-study acknowledges the need to "plan for a continuous program of employee development" (I-4). One significant area of employee development, particularly at this juncture, is the need for orientation and perhaps mentoring of new faculty and staff. As new employees assume duties and even leadership roles on the campus, it is crucial that they understand their professional obligations to students and the college community as soon as possible.

Faculty and staff spoke positively about the diligence of the staff development committee and its efforts to ensure equitable distribution of funds to support faculty and staff. Contractual agreements include a $6000 professional development fund, providing $200 per unit for continued study for classified staff. Encouraged by the college culture, approximately 50% of the classified staff are currently enrolled in AA, BA or MA programs under this plan.

There is ample opportunity for all employment groups to share in decision-making regarding expenditure of staff development funds. However, for reasons of geography, family obligations, and scarcity of staff for coverage, all categories of personnel expressed frustration about attending workshops, conferences, and other professional development opportunities off-site. At present, the college does not bring experts on site for purposes of training. The self-study and discussions (particularly with classified staff) identified desirable areas of training, particularly in the use of technology, cross-training, and safety. The Flex Chair and his committee who plan the four flex days annually are not formally affiliated with Staff Development. Based on a campus-wide survey, the top preferences for flex activities led to flex days devoted to College Days for high school visitors and exploration of the college's expanding distance education program.

CONCLUSIONS

In addressing the pressing needs for hiring qualified personnel, the college--its faculty, staff, administrators, and board of trustees--recognizes the juncture at which it finds itself and sees both the challenges and opportunities of the moment.

That recognition must now promote the overarching planning of the sort recommended in Standards Three and Four. Presently, at both the Blythe campus and the Needles facility, course offerings predominantly arise out of the expertise of those hired rather than as a result of a comprehensive and coherent academic planning. Without singularity of educational purpose that comes from institutional planning and enrollment management efforts, courses or programs are dependent upon opportunistic hiring rather than being linked to "institutional objectives" or "contribute[ing] to the mission of the institution." (Standard 7 A.1, Standard 7.A.3)]

The college, as noted in Standard One, is responsive to community requests for programs, evidenced by the prison program, Needles site, and Ripley efforts. Yet, as the analysis of the self-study reveals, "As the District has developed new programs, it has not always planned the personnel resources needed to sustain those programs." Systematic and systemic planning must precede such development.

The decision to hire personnel must be predicated on planned objectives. The college must identify effective mechanisms to attract, recruit, hire, retain, and support qualified faculty, staff, and administrators sufficient for its growing programs and services. Administrative structures and employment categories should reflect the college needs and guarantee regularly scheduled evaluations for all employees, in full accord with approved, published evaluation processes. (Standards 7.A.1, 7.A.2., 7.D.3)
The self-study does not directly respond to the standard in several areas:
1. qualifications for faculty are not linked to institutional objectives and there is no general indication of how those qualifications contribute to the mission of the institutions (7.A.2);
2. disciplines are not provided for academic administrators, although several of them teach in fields seemingly only remotely related to their degree(s) (7.A.4);
3. ethic diversity of four administrators is noted; however, diversity of faculty and staff is not addressed (7.D.2), though crucial; and
4. evaluation processes for faculty are spelled out in detail, alluded to for staff; and non-existent for academic administrators. In the latter case, references to evaluation processes for academic administrators contained in Board Policy could not be found.

These omissions reflect significant gaps in the college's hiring and evaluation practices. Representatives of all employment groups reported erratic, differential, or non-existent evaluation practices, although coherent and negotiated processes appeared on paper. While the pragmatic difficulties of evaluating all employees are evident, employees welcome evaluation as a valuable tool for their professional growth; simultaneously, the larger community deserves accountability of its employees. The college may wish to consider alternative supervisory structures to ensure full and timely evaluation of all employees, particularly of classified staff and part-time faculty; adherence to tenure review policies; and oversight of syllabi and course outlines to ascertain curricular integrity. (See recommendations of Standard Four; c.f. Standard Two). These evaluation tools are particularly crucial as new faculty and administrators come aboard.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the college develop a strategy to ensure legal, fair, and effective hiring practices and further the diversity of faculty and staff so that they more closely mirror the diversity of the larger community and the students they serve.(Standard 7.D. 2)

It is recommended that the college develop a clear process for the evaluation of academic administrators that, where required by law, include the broader participation of

appropriate faculty and staff in that process. (Standards 7.B.1, 10.A.4)

It is recommended that the college, through the Staff Development committee work to address the expressed training needs of staff, particularly in technology, research, cultural sensitivity, safety and emergency procedures and link evaluation of staff and faculty to professional development opportunities. (Standards 7.B.2, 7.C.2, 3.A, 8.3)

COMMENDATIONS

In addressing the pressing needs for hiring qualified personnel, the college--its faculty, staff, administrators, and board of trustees--recognizes the juncture at which it finds itself and sees both the challenges and opportunities of the moment.

Encouraged by the college culture, approximately 50% of the classified staff are currently enrolled in AA, BA or MA programs under this plan.

Standard Eight - Physical Resources

RESPONSES TO THE PREVIOUS TEAM'S RECOMMENDATIONS

The previous team recommended that the college focus on the development of an information system and network that integrated management information and computing services. These recommendations included evaluation of the need for increased hardware and software support. The college was quite candid about the setbacks they have experienced in attempting to set up an adequate MIS system in the last 2 years. They also point to the replacement of the hardware/software vender and hiring of the Directory of Information Technology and staff as the main solutions to these problems, and express faith that the system will improve over the next 12 months. Interviewees also pointed to the move to the new campus as causing particular strain on the ability of MIS staff to move forward with other technology projects when they have had to assist in the integration of many new computers into the campus infrastructure, as well as assist in the finalization of the technological aspects of a new campus. (Recommendations 1.3, 6.4, 6.5)

The previous team also made recommendations regarding the adequacy of the physical plant including the consideration of relocatable buildings, the need for facility planning and the adequacy of maintenance and custodial staff. Additions to and improvements in the old facilities and the addition of the Spring St facilities temporarily addressed these issues. Then, by Sept 2001, the college had planned, funded, constructed, and moved onto a new campus, which alleviated more of the facilities limitations. Along with the move, more people were added to the Maintenance staff. In addition, in the abstract and responses, the college notes that it still needs more classroom and office space, and that planning is proceeding for an as yet unfunded Phase II. (Recommendations 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.6)

OBSERVATIONS

The descriptions of the new campus and all the different sites were accurately described in the self study. However, since the self study was written before the move, the new campus had not yet been experienced. From these descriptions, observations, and interviews with staff members, the following facilities currently support educational programs.

At the "mesa" campus the College Services building holds the administrative offices, student services, the library, cafeteria, bookstore, and student union. The Classroom/Laboratories building holds the learning skills center, a computer lab "Mall," instructional computer labs, classrooms, a music room, science labs, and offices. The buildings are beautiful in design, inside and out, and have aesthetically pleasing and comfortable furnishings. There are stunning views of Blythe and the surrounding desert from many vantage points, including an outdoor walkway that connects the two buildings. Most of the defined areas were planned, built, equipped and furnished with extensive consultation with the head staff in that area, so that areas such as the library and the science laboratories have workable, functional, pleasing, and modern designs and equipment. Students and staff are universally pleased with the buildings aesthetically and functionally in the case of most of the areas and equipment. They are cleaned several times a day, and the custodial staff report that the design makes it easier to clean than the old site. Overall, the provision of educational and support services are well supported by these new facilities.

The college continues to maintain several instructional and service sites throughout the community. In contrast to the new campus, the facilities that remain at the old campus are adequate for their educational purpose, but are not as modern or convenient. These facilities are adjacent to the high school, and the college still uses the handball courts, tennis courts, and basketball courts, which are maintained by the high school district. PE facilities are part of Phase 3 of the construction plan. The self-study suggests adding tennis courts to the new campus earlier, but it could not be verified that this has been formally proposed. Also left on the old site is the childcare building, which is moveable. As mentioned in the self-study, this facility will be moved to a nearby parking lot which the college still owns. The parking lot is used as the bus stop for the shuttle to the new campus, and is big enough for the stop, the childcare center, and parking. There are no plans to move the childcare center to the new campus because many non-students use the center since it is county-funded and must be open to the general public. In addition, it is seen as more convenient to student parents to have their children in town, where other relatives can pick them up. The college leases an instructional facility in town located on Spring Street This facility is aging but functional, and provides easily accessible classrooms for the popular non-credit classes. However, the non-credit programs now need more classrooms if they are going to continue to grow.

The major vocational programs of Palo Verde College—automotive, building trades, and welding—were left in their current sites, pending the state approval of Phase II of the new campus construction plan, which includes a "Technology" building to house the programs. Building trades instruction is conducted on the job at a building site with a

trailer office/storage space. While these facilities and maintenance are adequate for instruction, they present some safety issues which are mentioned in the next section.

The college has recently expanded its offerings to include a full program in Needles, a community approximately 100 miles from Blythe. This is a beginning effort to offer educational credit courses to this area and classroom and office space are provided by the high school. However, the community has expressed a need for a college owned and operated facility and soon decisions will need to be made about the amount of separate facilities to provide.

Other sites are used to provide specialized courses or courses to special populations. These include the Ben Clark Training Center in Riverside, which offers courses in Administration of Justice, Criminal Justice, and Fire Science in a joint program with other agencies. There are also numerous local sites that host mostly non-credit courses, such as the Ripley Migrant Center. In addition, inmates in the Ironwood State Prison near Blythe are offered courses in several distance education formats—correspondence and video materials are delivered via courier, but this is not a site that the college maintains

The physical facilities at the main campus have been newly constructed and are being maintained under strict guidelines for accessibility, safety, and health. The Director of Facilities and Maintenance supervised the entire construction process and has documents on the components and safety/emergency information of equipment and the facility. The Director is to be commended for his knowledgeable and proactive approach to construction, maintenance, custodial services, and health, safety and environmental compliance issues. However, it is unclear that faculty and staff other than the maintenance staff know how to deal with emergencies or safety situations on campus. As recommended in Standard Seven, a program should be started to train all staff at the new campus in safety and emergency procedures. In addition, this would be a good time to develop standard posted emergency procedures for the rooms in all the college facilities for both students and staff.

Most equipment and furniture in the new campus is new, including new computers, phones, and printers for all faculty. Inventory labels were observed on most equipment, and the information files for all new equipment were observed in the Facilities and Maintenance Office.

However, as the planning agenda in Standard 6 indicates, given the level and amount of technology that the college has invested in, commensurate amounts of resources in staff, training, and equipment will be needed to maintain, support, and upgrade it. Specifically, current information technology staff will be hard pressed to respond not only to the numerous day-to-day technological needs around campus and the desire to move the campus forward in new technological areas. In addition, some technology that was available at the old site, such as an electronic media center in the Library, was not built into the new campus, and needs to be recreated in some way.

The college must consider support needs to develop integrated data systems and coordinated responsibilities for the input, maintenance, reporting, and analysis of student data and state MIS reporting and validation. In addition, IT needs to work closely with Institutional Research to develop an Institutional Research database for comprehensive and accessible student and course data.

Building the new campus—a new comprehensive community college campus—was one of the stated college goals in the 1997 Palo Verde College Educational Master Plan. In addition, as Phase I was planned, the specific facilities plans were based on extensive consultation with the users. Now that Phase I is completed planning for Phase II and III buildings should take place to determine whether changes are needed in these facilities in order to support the college's current institutional and educational goals.

CONCLUSIONS

Palo Verde College has recently moved onto a stunning new campus that provides the basis of the comprehensive community college envisioned in the 1997 Educational Master Plan. The programs and services provided on the new campus are beautifully supported by the new facilities. The maintenance of the facilities in a safe, economical, and environmentally sound manner is exemplary. Although a facility planned five years ago could not have anticipated all the enrollment, staffing, or technological needs of today, and there are still not enough classrooms or offices, for the most part the facilities provide a successful first step towards a campus that will eventually provide all the educational programs of a comprehensive community college.

Facilities to support vocational and physical education programs are waiting the next phases in construction. However, the Phase II and III construction plans might not be funded for 5-10 years, and temporary alternatives need to be found, especially for the vocational programs located in potentially unsafe and hazardous facilities. Another safety concern is that the dissemination and training of safety, emergency, and hazardous materials information and procedures for staff on the new campus could not be confirmed.

As a new campus, most equipment and furniture is new, so maintenance issues are not a concern at this time. However, technological equipment, while also new, is more problematic. Luckily, a Director of Information Technology and a small staff had been hired just before the crash of the old computer system and the move to the new campus, so they were able to help the college cope with these situations. In addition, the college was lucky to have a Registrar who had back-up systems that saved the college's historical data before the computer crash and has expended a great deal of effort to provide accurate data to the state MIS after the crash. However, since the information technology staff has been providing intensive tech support and set-up for the new computers and other technology on campus, they have not been able to move forward rapidly with larger projects such as developing an integrated MIS system, on-line registration, the automation of state MIS reporting, the establishment of an institutional research database, web site development, and data access for all staff. However, this IT staff is to be

commended for the amount of technical support they have provided to the campus staff and students during a tough transitional time.

Long-range technology planning that includes consideration of needed resources is an area that the college needs to address. The college could move forward by developing integrated data systems and coordinated responsibilities for the input, maintenance, reporting, and analysis of student data and state MIS reporting and validation. In addition, IT needs to work closely with Institutional Research to develop an Institutional Research database for comprehensive and accessible student and course data.

Future planning for facilities would also be helped by having a planning process that is embraced by all constituent groups and integrates the college community's educational priorities with the facilities master plan. Although the construction plan for the new campus was based on an Educational Master plan of 1997, this plan was not kept alive on campus so that the facilities plan became an isolated plan, rather than a plan supported by a comprehensive view of the educational programs. The over-arching recommendation regarding planning in Standard Three addresses this need.

Before building or buying any more facilities or off-campus sites, the college community needs to engage in a thorough assessment and process of planning related to the current educational priorities of the college. Such a process would guide decisions related to the expansion of the Spring Street facility, the Needles site, and the type of occupational technology that should go in the 'Technology' building. These decisions should be based on enrollment trends and labor market and economic projections and assessments of local community needs. The newly-developing strategic plan is a good start toward identifying college educational priorities that could help guide those decisions.

RECOMMENDATIONS
Recommendations related to this standard are included in the overarching recommendation reported in Standard Three.

Standard Nine - Financial Resources

RESPONSE TO THE PREVIOUS TEAM'S RECOMMENDATIONS

The previous accreditation team identified two areas of concern with regard to the financial resources standard: (a) the lack of clear fiscal policy to guide the institution; and (b) the inexperience of the Chief Business Officer in working with community college financing.

The previous team noted a lack of clearly defined integration between budget planning and educational programs and services. Evidence now exists that there is linkage between budget expenditures and the Educational Master Plan of the College. The budget preparation and request forms include a provision requiring a cross reference to the Educational Master Plan for new budget requests. Additionally there is broad based input in the budget development process. (Recommendations 7.1,7.2)

The previous accreditation team identified the need to stabilize the leadership in the position of the College Chief Business Officer. The current Vice President of Administrative Services has served in this position for the past 4 years. Multiple team interviews with budget committee members, administration, staff and the Vice President of Administrative Services provided evidence that this recommendation of the prior accreditation team has been met.

OBSERVTIONS

The self study describes the College fiscal condition as historically stable due to conservative financial management through the use of district formulas and cooperative collective bargaining units.

The notation represents examples of fiscal conservative management that money is only spent after the amounts are known and certain, that the College has no long term debt that budget formulas are used for division allocation, and that compensation formulas are used for collective bargaining. Following interviews with the budget committee, the Vice President of Administrative Services, and after reviewing the budget development documents, audit reports, and collective bargaining agreements the team concludes that this in fact is a fair representation of the overall financial management of the College.

The self study describes that the budget is the result of annual planning in accordance with the Educational Master Plan. A budget calendar serves as a guide to the timely and orderly preparation of the budget. The allocation of categorical dollars are based on institutional objectives formulated by advisory committee recommendations, the deferred maintenance plan, and the educational and facilities master plans.

Also noted in the self study and evidenced in interviews during the team visit is that the budget committee provides an avenue of communication among students, staff, and administration on campus budgetary matters. This committee also reviews and monitors the budget processes and procedures making recommendations where appropriate.

Another example of excellent financial planning is the district financial effort required for construction of the new campus. The College recently purchased land and constructed a new campus in Blythe. This required approximately $3 million dollars of district general fund support on a budget volume of what is now approximately $8 million dollars. This $3 million dollar transfer was made from the general fund to the capital projects fund in 1998-99, while the College was still able to maintain an ending fund balance of approximately 20%. As noted in the financial audit the general fund ending fund balance in 2000-01 remains at approximately 20%. The ability to plan and save for this level of expenditure while maintaining an appropriate level of educational program support and stable reserves is very impressive and demonstrates excellent compliance with the financial planning standard.

The self study describes that the College complies with regulatory mandates and

requirements as stated in the Education Code and Accounting Manual. The District receives an annual financial audit. Financial records are prepared and reviewed with broad participation by shared governance groups. The Board of Trustees regularly reviews the College budget and financial reports. A consulting firm was recently hired to prepare a 5 year financial plan. The district has not yet received this plan.

During the team visit, financial audits were reviewed from the previous four years. The audits substantiated that proper accounting and the College maintains financial records. During the period of review there were very few internal control weaknesses identified by the auditors. When the auditors did note areas that needed to be improved these were properly addressed with corrective action and so noted in the subsequent audit.

Based on the self study, review of the audited financial statements, and interviews during the accreditation team visit it appears the financial management section of the financial resources standard has been satisfactorily met.

As noted in the self study and as evidenced in the audited financial statements the district has a sound budget process and is in a stable financial position. The self study describes the College fiscal condition as historically stable due to conservative financial management through the use of district formulas and cooperative collective bargaining units.

A review of the collective bargaining agreements show that the faculty have a multi year contract with compensation tied to the funded state cost of living adjustment through fiscal year 2002-03. The classified employees also have a multi year contract with compensation tied to the funded state cost of living adjustment through 2001-02. The faculty and administration were also offered a golden handshake in 2001-02 in the form of a 14% annuity tied to their final salary schedule compensation. 6 faculty members elected to take this option and either retired in December of 2001, or will be retiring in June 2002.

The cost of this annuity will be partially funded with salary savings that the district will realize as replacement staff are hired at a lower cost than retiring staff. The balance of the cost of this annuity will be funded as a new expenditure in the general fund. Based on interviews with the Vice President of Administrative Services this future cost will be quantified after replacement staff are hired and will be included as a line item in the 2002-03 budget and future budgets as appropriate. Based on team interviews, and our review of the financial records, the costs associated with this annuity and other terms of the collective bargaining agreements appear to be affordable and within the resources available to the College.

As evidenced during the team examination of the audit reports and other financial records, the district has a history of balancing expenditures within the annual allocation of revenues and has maintained an adequate and appropriate level of general fund reserves. Overall the College has effectively managed financial resources and maintained a very stable budget environment.

CONCLUSIONS

The College has satisfactorily addressed the two areas of concern identified by the previous accreditation team by implementing a clear fiscal policy and budget development procedures and by retaining a Vice President of Administrative Services now with over four years of experience at Palo Verde College.

Overall the Financial Resources section of the self study was concisely written but did address all of the major requirements called for in this standard. These requirements are financial planning, financial management, and financial stability.

Since the previous accreditation team visit the College has instituted a clearly defined budget development and financial planning process. The College has retained an effective Vice President of Administrative Services to manage the financial resources and has demonstrated an excellent pattern of financial stability through the retention of a 20% general fund reserve and a practice of balancing general fund expenditures to revenues.

For future planning, as the College looks to expand their educational programs into new district markets it will be important to strategically and financially prepare for the new demands placed on the College facilities, support staff, and budget resources. Also the College should strategically and financially plan to address the distict-wide student and administrative management information system needs.

RECOMMENDTIONS

There are no recommendations for this standard.

Standard Ten - Governance and Administration

RESPONSES TO THE PREVIOUS TEAM'S RECOMMENDATIONS

The previous team made two recommendations regarding the establishing of a shared governance process and its use in planning. The college has moved to establish and follow a shared governance process that seems to work well in implementing college discussions and consideration of college plans. However, there is some doubt as to whether the process has resulted in a college-wide involvement in the planning process. (Recommendations 1.1, 8.1, 8.3)

Another recommendation related to the adoption of a formal communication process related to Board actions. The college has responded to this recommendation. (Recommendation 8.4)

It was also recommended that the Board develop protocols for their interaction. The Board has responded to this recommendation with the adoption of a Code of Ethics. Additionally, the Board has clearly identified their role as policy makers while

recognizing the importance of holding the President responsible for policy implementation. (Recommendation 8.5)

OBSERVATIONS

The Board has worked hard since the last accreditation visit to reshape its role as the policy making body rather than the managing body of the District. The Board has two new members who represent the Needles area of the District. The Board seems very clear about its role and is careful, as evidenced by the comments made at the Board meeting attended by the visiting team, not to interfere in the daily operations of the College. The Board has hired a new Superintendent/President and a new Vice President of Instruction (who will begin in May) and has established a set of goals for the President. The Board has considered and discussed a variety of goals and general directions it wishes to see the College move towards and these seem very appropriate given the mission of the college and some of the special considerations of the community it serves.

The Board is involved in setting their goals which include serving the very diverse needs of a community that is dispersed and geographically large. The Board has identified special needs in the Needles community and hopes to be able to provide them with the same services as students receive in the Blythe area. The Spring Street facility, which serves yet another aspect of the community, is also part of the goals identified by the Board.

A review of Board minutes and agendas supports the comments made in the self study that periodic program reviews are shared with the Board and that the Board honors the role of the Academic Senate in shared governance and is careful to ask that – where appropriate – they have been consulted before the Board discusses particular items.

The Board Policy Manual is updated as new policies are adopted but the process for developing a complete review of Board Policies during the 2001-02 year was not able to be verified. The College has purchased a program from the Community College League of California (CCLC) which will help them develop appropriate policies where necessary. The President is planning a retreat with CCLC personnel to help update the policies.

While the College has a policy (4140) which addresses the recruitment and selection of all staff it has not been updated since about 1990. For example, it uses the criteria of credentialing for academic employees.

The Board has adopted a set of guidelines for evaluating the President and for itself as a Board. The evaluation areas include Business, Education, and Professional Development of the President as well as Board relations. The Board has established a one year evaluation timeline for the President with a midterm report, but this has not been accomplished to date.

The Board has asked the President to complete regular performance reviews of major

administrators using Board approved goals as a basis for those reviews. This has not been accomplished to date. A letter form the President (March 18th 2002) was sent out to senior administrators asking them to set up a meeting with him to review goals and outcomes.

The President meets weekly with the senior administrators in a cabinet format. The self study made mention of the fact that some proposals get "pocket vetoed" and this appears to be true with several issues that have been on the agenda for at least a year or two (computer use policy). The self study states that the Council has agreed to procedures effectively preventing this in the future but it could not be validated.

The Board has adopted a policy (6011) which deals with Collegial Governance.

The Academic Senate at the College is a Senate of the whole. As such, it has been difficult to always get a quorum at meetings. The Senate is called upon to make appointments to a variety of committees including College Council, screening committees, Curriculum Committee and others. The self study made mention of the fact that it is often difficult to clearly delineate the boundary between the Senate and the union responsibility with respect to shared governance. A review of the Academic Senate agendas revealed that often the unions announces its meetings on the Senate agenda which occur immediately at the conclusion of the Senate meeting. Although there is no evidence of any animosity between the two groups, the functions are sometimes blurred. For example, the union was given the job descriptions for several faculty positions rather than the Senate. Clarity between the two organizations needs to be established both in procedure and in functionality.

The College has a list of standing committees, with membership by constituency groups. In meeting with members of the classified staff there was no mention of interest in a classified senate. It appears that the classified staff is well represented by CSEA.

While the College seeks the involvement of students in the governance functions of the District, there are few students who are involved. There is a student Trustee but the number of other students involved in committees and overall governance is very limited.

CONCLUSIONS

The Governance section of the self study has addressed a number of concerns which have been raised in the past about the micro managing of the Board and the lack of involvement of the Academic Senate in shared governance matters. A review of the documentation, discussion with Board members, administrators, Academic Senate leaders and others have confirmed that these issues have been addressed. The Board has assumed a leadership role in policy while remaining interested but not intrusive in the overall management of the District. The Board seems involved and excited about the direction of the college with respect to the new campus, the Needles site, the Spring Street program and the outreach efforts to the community of Blythe. They invite and support the involvement of the Academic Senate in matters of governance and are

working on ways to improve their functionality as Board members.

The lack of a clear process for evaluation of senior administrators should be addressed.

The College is working on a Strategic Plan and, since it is not completed, it is not possible to comment on how it will shape and direct not only programs but also budget and staffing but, as a small college, these relationships are critical and need to be encouraged.

The issue of communication between and among constituency groups came up both in discussions with members of the campus community and in the documentation. While Board Policy (6011) clearly states that "collegial governance is facilitated by communication, timely and appropriate notice of meetings, public deliberation. …Full campus participation and published records." And the committee "is expected to take action minutes" and clerical support for "college council is provided by the office of the President" the last College Council minutes were published for the meeting on May 9th, 2000.

A minor point, with respect to duplication of committee effort, it appears – from the organizational chart which delineates committee responsibility – that both the Academic Standards and the Curriculum committee deal with pre and co requisites. This responsibility might be best assigned to one or another of the committees.

The Planning sections in Standard 10 are generally weak in that they do not provide specific timelines nor do they identify the parties responsible for the proposed tasks. For example, in 10.B.5 it states that "the District needs to continue to refine its policy-making process to assure that there is effective shared governance," it does not set a timeline nor does it provide how this process will begin. In the section 10.B.6 which deals with delineating the boundary between the responsibilities of the Senate and the Union, it does not outline a process by which to begin or a timeline. This has been an ongoing problem.

The Planning agenda statements need the who, what, when in order for them to be able to really be used in planning

The Board Policy manual needs serious attention. Most of the policies do not have an adoption or a revision date. Many of the policies are quite old and in some instances out of date and not current with revised Education Code. A process and timeline for Policy revision is necessary.

The College should continue to work on refining the shared governance process, making sure that the appropriate distinctions are made between the various constituency groups in their particular areas of primacy so that the roles of the Academic Senate, the Faculty Union, and CSEA are clearly delineated where needed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the college develop a comprehensive process for soliciting broad input from the campus on issues and providing opportunities for the campus to respond to decisions while they are being formed. This process should include provisions for continuous feedback to all constituent groups regarding the status of decisions. It is equally important that these processes be formed in a manner that facilitates efficient and timely decision-making.

COMMENDATIONS

The College should be commended for the progress the Board of Trustees has made in governance, establishing its roles as a policy maker rather than a management body and for its work towards a planning agenda for the District.