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PROGRESS VISIT REPORT
COLLEGE OF THE REDWOODS

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**A Confidential Report Prepared for
The Accreditation Commission for Community and Junior Colleges
Western Association of Schools and Colleges**

This report represents the findings of the evaluation team that visited

**College of the Redwoods
On
April 23, 2007**

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**College of the Redwoods
Progress Visit Team Report**

April 23, 2007

Introduction:

The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, Western Association of Schools and Colleges issued a Warning to College of the Redwoods in January 2006. The college was required to submit a Progress Report in March 2006. A follow up visit was conducted in April 2006. The April 2006 team's report noted the college had made progress on several of the recommendations.

The Commission required the college to submit a second Progress Report in March 2007. A team visit was conducted on April 23, 2007. The team received the Accreditation Progress Report dated March 15, 2007 in time to prepare for the visit. The report included responses to the 2005 recommendations, a copy of the CR 2020 Educational Master Plan and the Program Review – Self Study Resource Guide prepared by the college since the last team visit in 2006.

In conducting the visit the team reviewed the report from the April 2006 team visit and the college's response to the 2006 team's visit. The team conducted interviews with the superintendent/president, Accreditation Liaison Officer, leadership of the Academic Senate, members of the Financial Advisory Committee (FAC), Technology Advisor Group (TAG), the Institutional Research Advisory Committee (IRAC) and the Program Review Committee (PRC). Representatives from the Academic Senate and the classified staff were included in the meetings with each of the committees. The team also met with the Budget Task Force which included three governing board members, and representatives from each constituency group of the college.

In summary the team found that the college has completed work in preparing the framework for processes necessary to comply with the elements of the recommendations. Progress made is noted within the body of this report. The college has now acted to take steps to reduce expenditures but not sufficiently to stem another year of deficit spending.

The college's use of the Budget Task Force demonstrated the governing board's commitment to a collaborative decision making process that provides consideration to the interests of the various campus constituency groups. It is apparent all college constituencies are working together to solve a significant threat to the college. The team noted while the foundation to advance the college in satisfying the Commission's recommendations is developing, little progress has been made in actually implementing measures necessary to comply with the recommendations. A serious financial situation caused by steady unchecked declines in enrollments is present. The underlying cause of the deteriorating financial condition has not yet been addressed.

Recommendations from the fall 2005 team:

Recommendation 1 (2005)

The team recommends that the college develop and implement a means of systematic, collaborative, and evidence-driven program review for all instruction, student services, and institutional support areas. In order to assure maximum effectiveness, such reviews should be conducted on a regular cycle that links the findings to annual planning processes for all programs and services.

Findings

During this visit, the team found that the college has made progress in implementing this recommendation. The college's accomplishments vary by functional area and are addressed separately below:

- ***Program Review – Instruction***

The college recently unveiled a document entitled “Program Review: Self-Study Resource Guide” dated February 2007 which provides a detailed discussion of the process for program review in the areas of instruction and student services/learning support. The proposed process outlined in this resource guide is systematic and evidence-driven. The document also provides background information describing what program review is meant to accomplish and the intent of the process to tie into institutional planning.

The model embraced by the college and detailed in this resource guide integrates an annual abbreviated program review process and a 5-year comprehensive program self-study. An excerpt from the resource guide illustrates the intent of this annual/comprehensive program review cycle:

Comprehensive Program Review. Occurring every five years for instructional programs, an intensive, comprehensive program review will address each program's courses, pedagogy and other developments related to the future of the program across the district.

Annual Program Review Update allows each program and each discipline to address its needs for resources (staff/faculty, space, equipment, etc.) and to report on outcomes assessment activities for the prior year.

To date, no instructional programs have been reviewed using this new model. The resource guide states that the comprehensive/annual cycle of program review for instructional programs will commence in 2007. The specific cycle for instructional program review is detailed in a companion draft document entitled “Program Review Cycle” (dated 3/26/07) which outlines, on a year-by-year basis

from 2007-2008 through 2017-2018, the schedule for program review of the instructional areas.

Of note are the following elements that have been incorporated into the proposed program review process:

- (1) Student learning outcomes assessment is embedded into both the annual and comprehensive program review processes. As written, the resource guide asks programs to develop an assessment plan, implement assessment of student achievement of learning outcomes at the course and program levels, and describe the improvement plan emanating from these assessments.
- (2) As part of the program review process, instructional programs are encouraged to review the currency of official course outlines of record and describe the plan for updating program curricula.

▪ ***Program Review – Student Services and Learning Support***

The “Program Review: Self-Study Resource Guide” also provides a detailed process for program review in the areas of student services and learning support. The cycle is similar to that described for instructional areas: a yearly review coupled with a comprehensive self-study every five years. A calendar outlining the cycle for the comprehensive and annual reviews for all 13 service and support areas is included on page 63 of the resource guide. The program review process for student services and learning support also includes a section addressing student learning outcomes assessment (i.e., specific program outcomes, assessment plan, assessment findings, program transformation plan). Comprehensive program review in 11 of the 13 student services and learning support areas has been conducted in 2006-2007.

▪ ***Program Review – Institutional Support Areas***

The college’s “Accreditation Progress Report March 15, 2007” did not address program review in areas other than instruction and student services/learning support. During the team visit, no evidence was proffered by the college to suggest that program review was being conducted in operational areas across campus. Following the visit, the team was provided with a calendar delineating the cycle of program review in institutional support areas (e.g., financial aid, bookstore, facilities, fiscal services) spanning the time period 2001-2002 through 2008-2009.

Conclusions

Interviews conducted by the team reveal a general acceptance and understanding of program review across campus. The principal goals of program review were articulated to the team as:

- serving as a vehicle for advocacy for a program;
- linking to wider college planning and budget processes; and
- defining a process for programmatic decision-making and improvement.

It appears that these values associated with the program review process contribute to the general acceptance of and optimism for the process. It will become important to the college to operationalize these goals and ensure that the program review self-studies have meaning and purpose within the institution. Further, as self-studies are completed, it will become necessary for the college to clearly articulate, put into practice, and institutionalize exactly how program review fits into college-wide planning and budgeting. While the resource guide describes the linkage in theory, it is essential that program review connect with annual, long-term, and strategic planning and budgeting in a manner that is genuine, transparent, and understood by all.

In large part, the college's progress with respect to this recommendation can be attributed to the (1) Program Review Committee which led the collaborative efforts in developing the "Program Review: Self-Study Resource Guide" and (2) leadership and staff within the student services and learning support program areas who embarked upon an ambitious program review implementation effort this academic year. From an instructional perspective, it was communicated to the team that the faculty feels a buy-in to the program review process due to the fact that the resource guide was developed with substantial faculty involvement. However, it has been 18 months since the college's last comprehensive accreditation visit (fall 2005) when this recommendation was proffered. During this intervening time, student services/learning support as well as some of the operational areas of the college have implemented program review. However, not one instructional area has undertaken such a self-study. Indeed, it was only quite recently (i.e., April 6, 2007) that the Academic Senate of the Redwoods Community College District approved the resource guide. While there is evidence to indicate that the instructional areas will begin the program review process in 2007-2008, the team is cautiously optimistic and will await results of the instructional self-studies and their effective use for planning, budgeting, and program improvement as evidence of the college's commitment to the process.

Two other areas of concern/note are as follows:

- The college may wish to broaden or augment board policy (No. 122) which addresses program review in instruction and student support programs only. The 2002 accreditation standards speak to program evaluation across a broad spectrum of the institution (including operational support areas). While the college is apparently conducting program reviews in areas other than instruction and student services, in discussions during this team's visit to campus it was clear that no one body took ownership of the process (as is the case of the Program Review Committee for instructional/student services program reviews) because operational areas fall outside the scope of board policy.
- It was noted in the "Accreditation Evaluation Report for College of the Redwoods October 17-20, 2005" as well as in the college-authored "Accreditation Progress Report March 15, 2007" that the curricula is in need of updating. Specifically, 74% of the college's official course outlines of record are five or more years old (with 25% being over 15 years old). The "Program Review: Self-Study Resource Guide" addresses the need for program areas to

update their curriculum. The team hopes that the linking of program curricula to the program review process will serve as a much-needed catalyst for program areas to ensure that all curricula is current and meets best practice standards for course outlines of record.

Recommendation 5: *The team recommends that the district improve its planning processes to include: the development of a long-range educational plan; the development of a facilities master plan; and the development of an information technology plan. It is further recommended that the district develop a long-range financial planning process to provide early notice of structural imbalances between revenue and expenditures; to identify resources needed to adequately support changes in technology systems, facilities, and enhancement to student support systems; and to regulate the pace of changes consistent with available funds.*

Findings

College of the Redwoods published CR 2020- Educational Master Plan in June 2006. CR 2020 includes the following information:

- Master Planning Goals for each of the following areas:
 - Enrollment
 - Programs
 - Facilities
 - Technology
 - Finances
 - Human Resources
 - Student Services and Learning Support
 - Data and Research
 - Community Relations
 - Communications and Marketing
 - Accessibility
 - Land Use
- Master Planning Framework- Board of Trustees Planning Guidance
- College Values, Philosophy, and Mission
- Context for Master Planning
- Current Condition Analysis – Current Status of Redwoods Community College District.

The goals included in the master plan lacked specificity except in the area of enrollment. The enrollment goal is an increase of 2% per year. For all other areas the goals are not quantified and cannot be measured to determine if the goals are actually met. For example here is one of the program goals included in the report:

“Programs Goal: Provide transfer and workforce preparation programs that meet students’ needs, address educational needs, capitalize on regional and institutional strengths and resources, and advance both the colleges and our communities. Programs should be based on statistically demonstrated demand and should capitalize on unique market opportunities.”

Other goals are similar to the Programs Goal in that the goal does not identify a baseline or status of the area and then does not stipulate what the desired end result is for each goal other than objectives such as: provide high quality learning, provide accurate reports, maintain key community relationships, provide a safe, healthy environment, and manage necessary expenses while maintaining a prudent reserve. (CR 2020 Educational Master Plan (pg. 2)). For each goal the college has listed a number of “strategies” or steps to be conducted to achieve progress towards the goal. The descriptions included in the goals clearly indicate that the concepts are identified although it appears there is a lot of work that remains to be done as no specific activities occurred.

CR 2020 includes statistical data regarding student demographics, faculty characteristics, instructional sites available to provide educational services and community demographic information. The information in the CR 2020 is an external scan of the environment and a presentation of the statistical data regarding students and staff.

The report also includes a diagram of the suggested model for Institutional Planning and Assessment Process (CR- 2020 page 21). The process steps include:

- Annual planning to include institutional priorities, and budget
- Determination of whether objective are met or priorities established
- Establishment of goals
- Planning and assessments objectives include a review conducted through a program review process for all courses programs and services.

The process, if implemented, should be effective in meeting the requirements of the standard. However, the team found no evidence to demonstrate that the process is followed. There is no program review being conducted to assess academic programs that would set the academic direction of the CR 2020 Educational Master Plan.

Facilities Master Plan

The college developed a timeline chart showing how it will utilize the voter approved facilities bonds to renovate several buildings on the campus. During the review of the renovation requests, the state determined that one building did not meet current seismic standards and agreed to pay for the replacement of the Student Services/Administration Building. The facilities related documents included scheduled maintenance plans for the five year period 2007-2012. Final Project Proposals have been submitted to the State Chancellor’s Office for these projects:

- New Science/Humanities Building
- Student Services/Administration/Performing Arts Building
- Eureka Applied Technology Building Modernization
- Del Norte Main Building and Art Building Modernization
- Mendocino Main Building and Art Building Modernization

There is no comprehensive Facilities Master Plan. A scheduled maintenance projects sheet, an ADA Transition Plan, a bond project list and construction timeline, and the capital construction projects funding requests submitted to the State Chancellor’s Office

were provided to the team. The majority of the planned work is for renovation of existing buildings. The college has not completed academic program reviews, and hence the product of a comprehensive program review process was not available to inform a facilities master plan. There is no information or narrative discussion about how funding requests were developed or how they related to the overall facilities planning activities.

Information Technology Plan

The 2006-2007 District Technology Plan is dated February 2, 2007. The plan includes reference to the CR 2020 Educational Master Plan. The objectives of the plan are:

- Maintain up-to-date technology to support academic and administrative functions.
- Ensure classrooms continue to meet a technical standard across the college
- Ensure distance delivery capabilities continue to develop

The technology plan identifies the technology components that are to be maintained by the college to include the Datatel ERP system, web sites, support of technology for the "office desktop environment," the overall network, online course management systems, and the support services available through the ITS Help Desk.

The technology plan includes statements of where the college stands today in support of its technology applications. The plan does not define a desired end state that is expected to result from implementation of the plan and does not establish a direction for technology. The report includes a number of comments similar to this comment reported on page 5: "The District will continue its commitment to faculty and staff end-user training as well as the appropriate specialized training for ITS or other technical staff." There are no action plans or any other indication of what the college is pursuing. The technology plan includes references to the Accreditation Standards and is using those as the minimum standard of performance for each area. For example: "(Standard 1b: institution provides...quality training... to students and personnel)"- page 5 of the report. The report then lists the actions completed by the college to comply with this standard. It does not however, assess the current technology situation in light of what is needed in the future to support the CR 2020 Educational Master Plan. Analysis and proposed action plans are not being presented in the plan.

The General Conclusions and Planning Agenda include the following statements:

- The District will maintain its commitment of staff and fiscal resources to the
- The District will continue working with external groups at various levels to promote....
- The District will develop a budgetary plan for replacing its office, classroom and lab computers on regular multi-year cycles.

The college is in the process of hiring a new Superintendent/President. A selection has not been made which has left the TAG in a position where it is uncertain about how to proceed. In discussions with members of the Technology Advisory Group, comments were made that the members did not feel empowered to set goals as there was no administrative support and the TAG did not want to establish a set of goals that may not be supported by the administration and the institution.

Long Range Financial Plan

The college does not have a long range financial plan.

Conclusions

The college has gathered environmental data regarding the communities served by the college. Added to that information is the statistical data about the students and staff of the college. Several general goals were created, and lists of actions that would promote achievement of the goals were listed as strategies within the CR 2020 Educational Master Plan. The goals are not quantifiable, and there was no evidence to show that actions have been implemented to achieve the goals. The foundation for the planning is in place. The college needs to assess the data, determine measurable objectives or outcomes, and establish an assessment or feedback process to determine when goal objectives have been achieved. The college needs to establish the link between planned actions and the resources that will be used to implement those actions.

The team concluded that the college has not implemented this recommendation.

Recommendation 6 (2005): The team recommends that the college develop a financial plan that will accomplish the following goals: Respond to declining revenue resulting from the loss of full-time equivalent students, establish a prudent and sufficient unrestricted general fund balance reserve, address changes in annual expenditures to assure that such expenditures are equal to or less than available resources.

Current information on enrollment reveals a consistent decline in enrollment from 5,650 FTES in FY 02/03 to 4,434 in FY 06/07. This decline of 21.5% in enrollment has resulted in a substantial loss of on-going revenue. The college is projecting yet another decline of as much as 10% in FY 07/08. This additional reduction in enrollment will cause further reductions in revenue and will require still further cuts in expenditures in the next year and possibly beyond unless enrollment suddenly stables or increases.

The lack of a long range financial plan and action to intervene to curtail the trend of declining enrollment has resulted in a loss of ongoing revenue and substantial reduction in the financial reserves of the college. The college reported a deficit of \$217,311 for FY 05/06.

The college has developed a Budget Assumptions and Background Preliminary Budget for 2007-2008 report dated February 6, 2007 which indicated the following:

- Enrollments have declined every year since 2001-2002.
- Enrollment for FY 07/08 is projected to decline once again
- The college is relying on stability revenue in 07/08 based on FTES counts no less than actual for 06/07 which is 4,434.
- The preliminary budget is projecting a deficit of \$3,065,829 in FY 07/08. The beginning fund balance is \$853,708 resulting in a deficit ending fund balance of \$2,212,121.

The projected ending fund balance for FY 06/07 of \$853,708 is a little less than 3% of the total unrestricted fund expenditures and net transfers out. This low level of reserve places the college on the State Chancellor's Office watch list. College staff indicated they are in regular contact with the State Chancellor's Office regarding the financial condition of the college.

The college has access to the \$4,543,335 million that was set aside in a fund to pay for retired employee health benefits. These monies are available to the college to give it more time to realign its revenues and expenditures. If the college's spending trend and the pattern of declining enrollment continues as projected, the college will fully consume its retiree health benefit fund balance by the end of FY 08/09. Increases in enrollment and reductions in expenditures could prevent that outcome.

The information included in the preliminary budget assumption document dated February 6, 2007 was presented to the Board of Trustees on that date. The information within the board agenda indicates that a number of areas are being considered for reduction to close the \$3 million projected deficit. In response to this information, the Board of Trustees established an Budget Task Force and charged it with identifying expenditure reductions that would bring the budget within available revenues.

The Budget Task Force met for two full Saturdays and included representatives from all stakeholders at the college. The committee recommended \$2.234 million in on-going expenditure reductions and another \$452,000 in one-time reductions. If these reductions are implemented the college will have made significant progress toward a balanced budget for FY 07/08. The Board of Trustees is commended for its leadership in working collaboratively with affected members of the campus community to address this sensitive topic.

The declining enrollment and deficit spending patterns were previously identified to the college in the October 2005 report of the accreditation team. The team notes that the college is now acting to reduce its expenditures for FY 07/08. No proposed actions were identified by the college that would assist in reversing the trend of declining enrollment. If enrollment continues to decline unchecked, the college will be faced with further reductions in expenditures and will have to assess the support it can provide to its instructional programs.

In discussions with representatives from the FAC and the Budget Task Force, there were a number of comments that the college community including members of the board had not received unfiltered information that reflected to the actual financial situation within the college. That situation has been corrected with committee members indicating they are receiving more information about the financial position and condition of the college. Additionally, they have been involved in developing solutions to reduce total expenditures.

FAC has not yet developed a long range financial plan. The financial plan is not integrated into the CR 2020 Educational Master Plan. Additionally, the Strategic Plan

planning horizon ended in 2007, and no new plan has been developed. As a result, the financial plan does not support either the CR 2020 Educational Master Plan or the Strategic Plan. The focus of FAC is the immediate fiscal crisis. FAC has not established specific goals that it wants to achieve through a comprehensive financial plan other than to rebalance the budget.

College staff reported that it did not satisfy the State's 50% law calculation for FY 05/06. The college does not expect to achieve the minimum 50% expenditure requirement for FY 06/07 although it may receive an exemption from the state for this current year. Projections also indicate the college will not achieve the mandated minimum expenditure requirement in FY 07/08. This is important because the state imposes financial sanctions on college districts when they do not achieve the required expenditure levels. Those sanctions usually include a requirement that additional funds be expended in the qualifying categories of expense through negotiation with the local Academic Senate and faculty union. It is not known at this time how or if the planned expenditure reductions will be affected by the 50% law issue.

Conclusions

The college has made progress in responding to this recommendation but it has not implemented changes to reduce expenditures or to stabilize enrollment and revenues. The college has nearly \$4.5 million (14% of its expenditures) set aside in its retired employee health benefit fund that can be used if necessary to remain solvent for one of two fiscal years depending on the success of the changes planned by the college. The team determined that the college, while it plans to implement a number of reductions, has not yet done so and has not implemented this recommendation.

Recommendation 7 (2005)

The team recommends that the college improve its capacity for collaborative and data-driven decision making. Such decision making should incorporate broad-based participation, use qualitative and quantitative data, and establish appropriate measures of effectiveness.

Findings

During this visit, the team found that the college has made progress in implementing this recommendation. This is evidenced by the following examples of processes, structures, and perspectives that have been introduced and/or embraced by the college:

- ***Cultural shift***

It was communicated to the visiting team in a number of venues that the college is in the throes of a shifting campus culture to one in which decision-making and problem-solving are based upon trust and are informed by shared data, information, and knowledge. Evidence of this cultural shift can be found by examining the efforts of two groups that have been convened this year to address two compelling issues confronting the college: declining enrollment and reduced funding. The first group, the Enrollment Management Task Force, is comprised of faculty, staff, and administrators. Their efforts to date have been collaborative

and data-driven and have yielded outcomes-oriented strategies and plans of action to promote student recruitment and support student retention.

The second group is the Budget Task Force which is a broad-based, ad hoc assembly of board members, faculty, staff, and administrators who have recently come together to address the ongoing budget shortfall facing the college. As of the date of the team's visit, the task force had held two meetings (on weekends) to collectively identify the action steps needed to address the projected deficit and identify areas of cost containment. It was communicated to the team that this effort has served as a meaningful first step to more open dialog and flow of information. Specifically, the task force has been credited with:

- ✓ beginning to reunify the college;
- ✓ forcing the college to critically examine its fiscal problems;
- ✓ providing evidence that the Board is now more open and embraces more participatory processes;
- ✓ providing a lesson in decision-making steeped in data analysis; and
- ✓ piloting the concept of a collaborative body comprised of multiple constituents and perspectives to steer the college into the future (e.g., the proposed Institutional Effectiveness Committee).

▪ ***Institutional Research***

The capability for institutional research has been established at the college through resources provided by a federally-funded Title 3 grant. Despite staffing challenges in the Institutional Research (IR) department, the college appears to have a genuine commitment to support the role and efforts of this office. Though in its infancy, the IR department is currently in the process of establishing the capacity and infrastructure to support data acquisition and dissemination.

▪ ***Institutional Research Advisory Committee (IRAC)***

The IRAC is comprised of broad-based representation from faculty, staff, and administrators whose efforts are aimed at empowering the college through data acquisition, analysis, and dissemination. The body serves as a steering committee of sorts in overseeing the efforts of the Institutional Research department. Indeed, the IRAC crafted the following mission statement for the IR department:

The mission of Institutional Research at the College of the Redwoods is to provide consistent and accurate information that fosters student success, institutional effectiveness, and a culture of evidence and inquiry.

The IRAC sees itself as an independent organizational unit committed to (1) fostering an institutional culture of inquiry that is evidence-based; (2) providing the infrastructure needed to produce reliable, transparent, and valid data for planning; (3) improving the strength of the institution through data acquisition and sharing; and (3) serving as a buffer for the IR department so that it can carry out its work in a neutral manner.

While there is currently not a college process in place for institutional research to systematically inform planning, decision-making, and institutional effectiveness efforts, the members of the IRAC remain committed to the ideals and value of institutional research. It was clearly articulated during the team's visit that institutional research must play a critical and central role in being the voice for assessing institutional effectiveness and serving as the foundation for planning and decision-making. However, there was limited evidence provided to the team to indicate that such a vision has actually been achieved.

Conclusions

The visiting team found early signs of a shift in institutional culture to one that is evidence-based, collaborative, inclusive, and informed by data. This shift is in its formative stage. Ongoing practice into the future and institutionalizing of this cultural shift will provide evidence over the longer-term of the college's commitment to collaborative and data-driven decision making involving broad-based participation.

While institutional research capabilities are being developed at the college, it is unclear to the visiting team how the college intends to incorporate research and planning into a coordinated effort that is evidence-based and guided by the goals of institutional effectiveness and improvement. The "Accreditation Progress Report March 15, 2007" speaks to the establishment of an Institutional Effectiveness Committee to assimilate the college's planning efforts (e.g., program review, long-term planning, annual planning) into a cohesive direction for the future. The team found no evidence to indicate that the college has made progress in integrating its planning efforts into a coordinated and integrated system. In fact, one interviewee described the Institutional Effectiveness Committee as "fictitious" at this point. To avoid planning for planning sake and to prevent planning in a vacuum, the college must take the next step and tie together the disconnected processes of program review, strategic planning, educational master planning, fiscal planning, enrollment management planning, institutional research, and the like into a comprehensive, holistic, and interrelated set of linked processes.