PROGRESS REPORT VISIT

Sierra Joint Community College District
Rocklin, 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 that visited Sierra College on November 17, 2008

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Introduction:
The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, Western Association of Schools and Colleges issued a warning to Sierra College on January 31, 2008. The college was required to submit a progress report by October 15, 2008. A follow up visit was conducted on November 17, 2008.

In conducting the visit, the team reviewed all correspondence between the Commission and the college including the Evaluation Report issued at the conclusion of the comprehensive site visit that occurred from October 15 through October 18, 2007. The team conducted interviews with the Superintendent/President, members of the governing board including the Student Trustee, members of the Academic Senate, members of the Strategic Council, the Strategic Plan Steering Committee, the Accreditation Liaison Officer, other administrators, faculty and staff involved in preparing the Accreditation Follow-Up Report dated October 15, 2008. During the visit, the team met with over 30 faculty, staff, administrators, members of the Board of Trustees, and students. The team also attended one open session to allow for comment from any member of the campus or local community. Approximately ten people attended the open forum.

College staff members were very accommodating to team members and available for interviews and follow-up conversations. The college was well prepared and ready for the team's visit. The team commends the college for the collaborative process used to develop the Strategic Plan and Educational Master Plan. Through a laborious, time-consuming process, college faculty, staff, administrators, governing board members and students actively participated in creating the short and long-term plans that serve as the foundation for informed decision-making at the college.

After review of evidence, interviews with a wide range of constituency representatives, and conversations with governing board members, the visiting team concluded that the college implemented Recommendations # 1 and # 6. The college has partially implemented Recommendation #2 having implemented parts 2a, and 2c. Recommendation #2 parts 2b and 2d have not been implemented. The college expects to use the upcoming fiscal year (FY 09/10) to implement both of these parts of Recommendation #2. The college has also partially implemented Recommendation #3 regarding Student Learning Outcomes.

Upon review of the characteristics on the Rubric for Evaluating Institutional Effectiveness for planning and for student learning outcomes, the team’s assessment is that the college has reached the development level of implementation for planning and for student learning outcomes.

Sierra College has a defined planning process with responsibility assigned to departments and individuals responsible for implementing specific actions. There is ample quantitative data available to assist in decision-making, and the planning efforts are linked to the institutional mission and goals. There has been broad participation of constituency groups in the planning processes. The college is not yet evaluating itself in
all areas of operation and has not yet allocated resources based on strategic plan goals and objectives.

Evaluation of resource allocation decisions has not yet been implemented although the foundation for evaluation exists in the electronic Program Assessment and Review (ePAR) document used by departments.

In terms of the Commission’s Rubric for Evaluating Institutional Effectiveness for Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs), Sierra College is clearly operating in the development phase with respect to student learning outcomes. The college has effectively identified assessment methods and established dates for completing student learning outcomes at the institutional level and for all its courses, programs, and services. This process has included performance measures to assess and improve institutional effectiveness of all programs and services. The college has not yet used these results in the strategic planning and resource allocation process, nor has it yet included effectiveness in producing student learning outcomes as part of its faculty evaluation process.

It is apparent from the amount and quality of the evidence reviewed by the team during the visit that the college worked diligently and faithfully to implement the Commission’s recommendations.
Team Recommendations

Recommendation # 1 Mission Statement
To ensure services and programs offered by Sierra College are meeting its stated purpose, the team recommends that the college amend the mission statement to specifically identify its intended student population and its commitment to achieving student learning. (Standard 1A.1, IV.B.1.b)

Findings and Evidence:
Sierra College has revised and approved a new mission statement that identifies its intended student population and states its broad commitment to student learning.

The Board of Trustees adopted the following revised mission statement on June 24, 2008:

“Sierra College provides a challenging and supportive learning environment for students having diverse goals, abilities, and needs interested in transfer, career and technical training, and life long learning. The College’s programs and services encourage students to identify and to expand their potential. Sierra College students will develop the knowledge, skills and abilities to become engaged and contributing members of the community.”

The new mission statement now appears on the Sierra College website. It was adopted through an inclusive process that saw its presentation in draft form to the four senates—academic, management, classified, and student—for input before it was finalized. The draft was also presented for input to a Business and Community Roundtable in May 2008. Now that it has been officially adopted, it is scheduled to be reviewed every three years.

The college also adopted the following statement of its vision for the future and a list of core values that support both the vision and mission statements. The vision statement reads:

“We will challenge ourselves and our community to become fulfilled citizens in a global environment by contributing to and engaging in the thoughtful application of knowledge guided by respect for others and the world in which we live.

The following core values will establish our ethical principles and will guide our institutional decision-making. Sierra College will:
1. Support and model excellence in teaching, learning, scholarship, and creativity.
2. Provide the tools for continuing success in an ever-changing world.
3. Provide, and demonstrate the value of, an inclusive community.
4. Demonstrate collaboration in decision making.
5. Foster active citizenship in our community, our nation, and our world.
6. *Create and nurture meaningful connections to our community.*
7. *Recognize that students are active participants in their education.*
8. *Support and demonstrate the sustainable use of all resource.*

**Conclusions:**

The new statement of the college’s mission identifies its intended student population by referencing transfer, career/technical, and lifelong learning students, populations that the 2007 visiting team felt were not included in the previous mission statement’s scope. Moreover, it speaks of the diversity of its students’ goals, abilities, and needs and demonstrates its commitment to student learning in saying that “The College’s programs and services encourage students to identify and to expand their potential. Sierra College students will develop the knowledge, skills and abilities to become engaged and contributing members of the community.” The college’s vision statement and core values statements support and enhance its mission statement. Sierra College has addressed Recommendation #1 Mission Statement.


In order for the college to ensure an ongoing, systematic, and cyclical process that includes evaluation, planning, resource allocation, implementation, and re-evaluation, the team recommends the following plan development, implementation, evaluation and improvement steps:

2a. Develop a comprehensive integrated long range Strategic Plan including goals that can be used to influence resource allocation decisions. The Strategic Plan should incorporate the priorities established in all of the college’s major plans to include its:
   a. Technology Plan
   b. Facilities Master Plan
   c. Educational Master Plan
   d. Human Resources Staffing Plan
   (I.A.4, I.B.2, I.B.3, 4, III.A.2, III.B.2.b,III.C.2, III C 1 d)

2b. Modify the budget development process in a manner that will place the college’s strategic plan priorities at the center of its resource allocation decisions (III.D.1, 1.c.)

2c. Develop and work to implement as appropriate a Human Resources Staffing Plan that will satisfy the college’s long standing expression of need for additional full time faculty and support personnel to improve student learning. (III.A.2, II.C.1, II.C.1.a, II.C.1.d)
2d. Develop mechanisms to regularly evaluate all of the college’s planning and resource allocation processes as the basis for improvement (I.B.6, II.A.2.f II.B.4, III.D.3, IV.A.5)

Findings and Evidence:

**General Comments**
Sierra College has developed a Draft Strategic Plan and has revised its processes to address the concerns identified in this recommendation. At the time of the team visit on November 17, 2008, the college had created a new process for linking planning initiatives to resource allocation decisions. Using the electronic Program Assessment and Review (ePAR) process, the college requires departments to list the goal and strategy that is being addressed when resources are requested. The ePAR is the second generation of a Program Assessment and Review process that was developed by Sierra College in response to accreditation team comments in 2001. The revised process now adds the link to identify which goals and strategies are being addressed with the resources being requested by a department. This will ensure the resource allocation decisions are based on strategic goals established by the college. At the time of the team’s visit, the process had not been fully implemented but will be used for the upcoming year’s budget development process.

The team noted that in several areas the processes of the college have been revised to address recommendations of the Commission. Those processes have not been fully tested according to college personnel because the college needs one budgeting cycle with live data to determine how the process is working. Throughout interviews with college personnel the team learned that development of the Strategic Plan was time consuming and provided ample opportunity for constituency groups to influence the agreed upon goals and strategies for the college. As a consequence of taking the time to achieve consensus on the Strategic Plan, the college was unable to link planning and budgeting and was unable to evaluate the effectiveness of actions taken. The processes are now in place. The college expects to use the revised process in the development of the FY 09/10 Final Budget.

**Recommendation # 2 a**
The college has a draft Strategic Plan for the period 2008-2011. The plan was developed over a nine to ten-month period of time and is expected to receive final approval by the end of November 2008. The Strategic Plan includes the following topics:

- Vision/Mission/Core Values
- Planning Assumptions and Key Trends
- Internal and External Influences
- Strategic Goals
- Proposed Strategic Initiatives

The segment on Internal and External Influences includes other supporting college plans including Distance Learning and Instructional Technology, Facilities Master Plan, Educational Master Plan, Marketing Master Plan, the Technology Plan and the Human Resources Staffing Plan. Once the ePAR process is fully implemented, the budget will be
linked to the strategies and goals being pursued by the departments thereby linking budgeting to planning efforts. The Educational Master Plan, Technology Plan, Facilities Master Plan and Human Resources Staffing Plan have been developed in support of the Strategic Plan.

The goals and strategies of the college are broadly stated. For instance, under Goal II Organizational Effectiveness, Strategy 2 is “Increase percentage of full-time faculty.” Progress toward the goal can be measured although the college has not yet set benchmarks and performance targets for each of the goals and strategies. The Strategic Plan includes a list of the metrics that the college intends to use to measure achievement of its goals. As stated previously, the college has not implemented the process and intends to use the upcoming fiscal year to fully implement all aspects of this new process.

**Recommendation # 2b**
Modify the budget development process in a manner that will place the college’s Strategic plan priorities at the center of its resource allocation decisions (III.D.1, 1.c)

Sierra College modified its Program Assessment and Review (PAR) to include a requirement that proposed actions address the goals and strategies of the college. The ePAR is a new document that has not been fully incorporated into the college’s operations. The departments will use the form and the related process during the upcoming budget development cycle. The ePAR has a section that calls for the departments to indicate which goal or strategy is being addressed by the proposed action.

The framework for the new process that will link resource allocation requests to the planning process has been developed but not implemented. The college reports that it expects to implement the ePAR process during budget development for FY 09/10. The planning for FY 09/10 begins in February 2009. The college expects to complete the implementation of the ePAR by the end of the spring 2009 semester. The team expects implementation of the ePAR process will satisfy the requirements of this recommendation. However, at the time of the team’s visit this recommendation had not been addressed.

**Recommendation # 2c**
Develop and work to implement as appropriate a Human Resources Staffing Plan that will satisfy the college’s long standing expression of need for additional full-time faculty and support personnel to improve student learning. (III.A.2, II.C.1, II.C.1.a, II.C.1.d)

Sierra College developed a Human Resources Staffing Plan. The plan includes the following data elements:
- Position description
- Date of Board of Trustees Approval
- Range
- Unit (labor unit)
- Department
The plan is a comprehensive projection of needs for all departments throughout the college. The required Faculty Obligation Number is shown for reference purposes when considering full-time faculty hires. The Human Resources Staffing Plan reveals that the college expects to increase full-time faculty from 213 in FY 08/09 to 237 in FY 10/11. The plan also identifies the academic disciplines for each of the proposed hires. In addition to the increases in full-time faculty members, the college also includes projected new employee positions for classified personal, classified administrators and educational administrators.

On September 9, 2008 the Board of Trustees approved the college’s three-year staffing projection that serves as a staffing plan for hiring of additional faculty, classified and administrative personnel. The college expects that by adding positions consistent with the plan, it will be able to raise its full-time versus part-time faculty ratio from 44% to 50%. However, the college has not identified a desired goal of full-time versus part-time faculty ratio. The college has identified the low full-time to part-time ratio as a problem that it wanted to correct for many years. It now appears that the college has developed a plan to achieve its desired increase in full-time faculty members. The plan is in its first year of implementation.

2d. Develop mechanisms to regularly evaluate all of the college’s planning and resource allocation processes as the basis for improvement (I.B.6, II.A.2.f II.B.4, III.D.3, IV.A.5)

The college completed a redesign of its strategic planning process that is supported by a facilities, technology, and human resources plan. The use of the ePAR is intended to link resource allocations to the Strategic Plan. The cycle of planning has not yet been modified to include evaluation of the planning and resource allocation plans. The college indicates it is developing mechanisms to evaluate its planning and resource allocation processes. Recommendation #2.d has not been implemented.

Conclusions:

The college has made good progress on implementing the recommendations related to planning, resources allocation methodologies, and evaluation of resource allocation processes. The college developed the processes in consultation with all user groups and is commended for ensuring significant dialogue occurred so that a well-thought out plan could be implemented. Obtaining input from constituencies took time as plans were developed, modified and refined until ultimately an agreed-upon Strategic Plan was ready for approval. A consequence of the time consuming process used to gain support among constituency groups is that some of the recommendations were not implemented at the time of the team’s visit on November 17, 2008. Below is the team’s conclusion on the status of each subpart of this recommendation.

2a. Develop a comprehensive integrated long range Strategic Plan including goals
that can be used to influence resource allocation decisions. The Strategic Plan should incorporate the priorities established in all of the college’s major plans to include its:

e. Technology Plan
f. Facilities Master Plan
g. Educational Master Plan
h. Human Resources Staffing Plan

(I.A.4, I.B.2, I.B.3, 4, III.A.2, III.B.2.b, III.C.2, III.C.1.d)

Recommendation 2a for all practical purposes has been implemented. The college has an approved Technology Plan, Facilities Master Plan and Human Resource Staffing Plan. The Strategic Plan and the Educational Master Plan were substantially completed lacking only the formal approval that was expected by college constituencies no later than November 21, 2008. Based on interviews will college constituency groups and members of the governing board, the team concludes that final formal approval will occur at the next meeting of the governing board.

2b. Modify the budget development process in a manner that will place the college’s Strategic plan priorities at the center of its resource allocation decisions (III.D.1, 1.c)

Recommendation 2b has not been implemented. As noted earlier in this report, the college revised an older process named Program Assessment and Review (PAR) to include linking strategic plan goals and objectives to resource allocation requests from the PAR. Implementation of this recommendation is expected to occur as the budget development process for FY 09/10 begins in January 2009.

2c. Develop and work to implement as appropriate a Human Resources Staffing Plan that will satisfy the college’s long standing expression of need for additional full time faculty and support personnel to improve student learning. (III.A.2, II.C.1, II.C.1.a, II.C.1.d)

The college has developed a Human Resources Staffing Plan. The team has concluded this recommendation has been implemented. The plan is a three-year plan that has already been used to assist in marking decisions regarding which positions to be hired at the college.

2d. Develop mechanisms to regularly evaluate all of the college’s planning and resource allocation processes as the basis for improvement (I.B.6, II.A.2.f II.B.4, III.D.3, IV.A.5)

The college has not developed mechanisms to assist in evaluating the effectiveness of resources allocated as a basis for improvement. This recommendation has not been implemented.

The team reviewed the characteristics of the Rubric for Evaluating Institutional Effectiveness – Part II: Planning published by the Commission and has determined that the college is operating at the Development level.

Recommendation # 3 Student Learning Outcomes
The team recommends that the college identify assessment methods and establish dates for completing student learning outcomes assessments at the institutional level and for all of its courses, programs and services. This process should also include the development of performance measures to assess and improve institutional effectiveness of all programs and services. The college should disseminate the outcomes widely and use these results in the strategic planning and resource allocation process. It is further recommended that the college include effectiveness in producing student learning outcomes as part of its faculty evaluation process. (II.A.1.a; II.A.2.a,h; II.B.4; II.C.2 III.A.1.c).

**General Observations:**

Sierra College has done considerable work on creating a comprehensive plan for the assessment of course, program and institutional student learning outcomes. In so doing, it has moved into the development stage of institutional effectiveness from the awareness stage.

**Findings and Evidence:**

Sierra College has established an institutional framework for defining student learning outcomes by starting at the course level and moving subsequently to defining program and institutional outcomes. During the 2007 visit, the team noted that over 90% of courses had identified learning outcomes and methods of assessment, but it also raised two concerns: (1) it was not clear that assessments of student learning in courses were actually being done, and (2) it was not clear that the kinds of assessments identified in the course outlines of record could be effectively used to improve learning because they tended to be summative rather than formative assessments. Since the last visit, a draft version of the *Sierra College Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment Workbook* has been developed. The November 14, 2008 (second draft) version of the workbook explains the nature of student learning outcomes assessment, offers examples of effective assessments, and provides a timeline for completing course, program and institutional outcomes assessment. Every faculty member was asked to assess one outcome in one course in Fall 2008. As of November 1, 2008, the information in the college’s data organizing system for Student Learning Outcomes (TracDat) indicated that over 400 full- and part-time faculty had assessed 232 different courses, 31.9% of the total number of courses. In Spring 2009, the focus will shift to program outcomes assessment, and in Fall 2009, the college will concentrate on assessing institutional outcomes.

The College has established assessment strategies for assessing student learning outcomes for courses and some programs (24% of programs had defined outcomes and had submitted assessment results to the campus research office at the time of the team’s visit). While degree learning outcomes have just been established, assessment strategies for the degree outcomes are still to be developed.

Sierra College’s existing organizational structures support strategies for student learning outcomes and assessment and have accepted responsibility for student learning outcomes implementation. To encourage faculty to submit assessments of course-level outcomes
by the November 1, 2008 deadline, the college’s Academic Senate approved the following resolution at its October 15, 2008 meeting: “We encourage you to participate in course-level Student Learning Outcomes (SLO) assessment by completing an ‘Outcomes Form’ and sending it to your department chair or Research office by November 1. This information will provide the basis for department-level discussions on the continuing development of outcomes assessment at the course and program level.” Two of the Academic Senate’s annual goals refer to student learning outcomes: “Assess the role of the Academic Senate and its functions in enhancing student learning” and “Examine faculty evaluation processes with an eye toward the new accreditation standards and student learning and make recommendations to the district.”

The college has also established a Student Learning Committee to guide the process of student learning outcomes assessment and implementation, has appointed a full-time faculty coordinator of Student Learning Outcomes, and has given reassigned time to six other faculty who act as liaisons to different departments regarding student learning outcomes. The total reassigned time for faculty devoted to Student Learning Outcomes is 2.2 Full-Time Equivalent Faculty (FTEF).

The engagement with Student Learning Outcomes appears to be widespread as evidenced by the 400 faculty members who submitted assessments for 232 courses by the November 1, 2008 deadline. Moreover, the College held an all-day workshop on “Creative Opportunities for Outcomes & Assessment” on August 13, 2008, which drew 63 participants. Ambassadors regularly meet with departments to assist faculty and others in developing and assessing student learning outcomes.

The last two sentences of the team’s original recommendation on Student Learning Outcomes remark on issues that have been partially addressed by Sierra College. Because of the recently of their submission (November 1, 2008), the college is just beginning to disseminate course assessment outcomes widely and use these results in the strategic planning and resource allocation process. It has a plan and an infrastructure that should allow it to widely use outcomes assessment for improvement, planning and resource allocation in the very near future. It has also had some challenges in implementing the recommendation to “include effectiveness in producing student learning outcomes as part of its faculty evaluation process.” The progress report notes that “At present, the president has requested a meeting with representatives of the Academic Senate, faculty bargaining unit, and the Vice President of Instruction to discuss strategies for addressing this specific topic.”

Conclusions:

In terms of the Commission’s Rubric for Evaluating Institutional Effectiveness, Sierra College is clearly operating in the development phase with respect to student learning outcomes. The college has also effectively identified assessment methods and established dates for completing student learning outcomes at the institutional level and for all its courses, programs, and services. This process has included performance measures to assess and improve institutional effectiveness of all programs and services. The college
has not yet used these results in the strategic planning and resource allocation process, nor has it yet included effectiveness in producing student learning outcomes as part of its faculty evaluation process; otherwise, this recommendation has been addressed.

**Recommendation # 6 Governing Board Evaluation**

The team recommends that the Board complete an annual board self evaluation to ensure that its policies promote quality, integrity, and effectiveness of the student learning programs and services. (IV.B.1.)

**Findings and Evidence:**

The Board of Trustees completed a self evaluation on March 11, 2008. Board Policy 2745 requires the Board to complete a self evaluation. The Board has now completed the evaluation and has implemented this recommendation. During the evaluation the Board of Trustees assessed its performance in the following areas:

- Understanding the Mission of the college
- Board Members as policy makers for the college
- Board interaction and support of the Superintendent/President
- Board activities to improve the image of the college
- Board member understanding the college finances
- Board establishing of annual goals, objectives and work plans
- Setting of Board specific goals for the year
- Involvement of Board Members in state and national legislative activities
- Board approval of long-range plans and involvement of long-range planning
- Board review of educational programs and services
- Board understanding of collective bargaining activities and its role in those processes
- Board legal obligations and responsibilities
- New member orientation for all new Board Members
- Board compliance with the Brown Act and individual member preparation for meetings
- Board activities and support of the Board’s actions by each Board Member
- Obtaining feedback form constituency groups including faculty, staff, students and the administration

Comments and concerns expressed by each Board Member were recorded on a summary evaluation sheet that was reviewed by the Board during its March 11, 2008 meeting. The Board used that information in part to establish goals for the upcoming year.

**Conclusion:**

The Board of Trustees has returned to the practice of conducting annual self evaluations. The self evaluation required under existing Board Policy 2745 has been completed. This recommendation has been implemented.