ACCJC Follow-up Report

Los Angeles Valley College

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

This report represents the findings of the evaluation team that visited Los Angeles Valley College on April 28, 2014

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Introduction and Overview

At its June 5-7 2013 meeting, the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, Western Association of Schools and Colleges, considered the report of the External Evaluation Team that visited the college March 11-14, 2013. The Commission issued a warning and asked Los Angeles Valley College to correct the deficiencies noted. A follow-up report and visit were to take place within a year. The Commission specified that the follow-up report demonstrate that the institution has fully addressed the recommendations and fully meets the Accreditation Standards.

On April 28, 2014, a peer evaluation team of three members representing ACCJC conducted a follow-up visit to Los Angeles Valley College for reaffirmation of accreditation.

Los Angeles Valley College is one of nine colleges in the Los Angeles Community College District, the largest community college district in California. The college was established in 1949 and is located on 105 acres in the San Fernando Valley. The college serves more than 19,000 credit and noncredit students annually, and offers about 150 associate degree and certificate programs.

The team found that the college had made a laudable amount of progress since the last visit. The team also found a spirit of collaboration at the college, and a genuine dedication to the success of its students. The follow-up report prepared by Los Angeles Valley College was well done, with complete, comprehensive documentation readily available online. The college was well prepared for the visit. A comfortable, conveniently located work room was provided to the team and meetings were scheduled with both college and district staff. Additional documentation requested by the team was provided quickly and with ease. The team found that the college, under the leadership of a new interim president, had greatly involved all constituents in the preparation of the follow-up report and was very eager to resolve the deficiencies identified by the previous visiting team. The interim president, appointed in September 2013, came from within the district, and was very knowledgeable about the culture of both the college and the district.

The team noted that since the March 2013 visit, the district had a special visit from ACCJC, related to oversight of the Bond Program. At its January 8-10, 2014 meeting, the Commission accepted the special report and noted that the district had provided evidence that it had addressed the recommendation and met the associated eligibility requirements and standard.

The team also noted that in February 2013, prior to the last visit, the college contracted with The College Brain Trust, a consulting group that specializes in fiscal matters. The College Brain Trust issued a report to the college on March 21, 2013 that included 11 recommendations along with a 3-year strategy to address the college's fiscal issues.

The team conducted eight interviews/meetings with 14 individuals representing both the college and the district, including the president and vice president of the academic senate, the interim president of the college, both district and college fiscal officers, the dean responsible for enrollment management, as well as the chairs of the major tier one and tier two governance committees. The team carefully reviewed information related to eight college recommendations and one district recommendation. Based upon the team's review of the evidence, interviews, and documentation, following is the team's observations, findings, and conclusions specific to each recommendation.

College Recommendation 1:

In order to achieve sustainable continuous quality improvement, the team recommends that the college use ongoing and systematic evaluation and planning to refine its key processes and improve student learning. The team recommends that the processes:

- **Provide learning and achievement data on students enrolled in all delivery formats.**
- **Fully evaluate indicators of effectiveness and make improvement based on findings.**
- **Assure systematic analysis of data to inform decisions.**
  (Standards I.B, I.B.1, I.B.3, I.B.4, I.B.5, I.B.6, I.B.7, II.A.1.c, II.A.2.a, II.A.2.b, II.A.6.b, IV.B.2.b)

Findings and Evidence: The College has made significant progress in response to this recommendation. The team was able to verify that the College is using ongoing and systematic evaluation and planning to refine its key processes and improve student learning. The Follow-Up Report provided evidence of the extent and quality of the data and analysis now available to inform the College in its decision making. Evidence demonstrated that data are included and analyzed in annual planning modules, viability reports, Student Learning Outcomes assessment, decision-making and resource allocation, enrollment management, targeted initiatives, including Achieving the Dream and other student success strategies, and as needed by individual programs and departments. This was verified by the team through interviews and examination of additional documentation provided by the College.

The team was able to verify that the College evaluates its decision making. The Follow-Up Report included evidence that shared governance tier one and tier two committees conduct annual evaluations of the work they accomplish. The team confirmed that annual planning modules are evaluated, as are SLOs, both of which are validated during the process. Information and data from both annual planning and outcomes assessment reports are used for strategic planning purposes.

In the Follow-Up Report, evidence was provided indicating that the College conducted a final evaluation of indicators of effectiveness and goals from the current Educational Master Plan to inform the draft of its Educational Master Plan 2014-2020. The College has made extensive use of data to inform the direction and content of the new plan, and in setting institutional targets for student achievement.

Learning and achievement data for students enrolled in all delivery formats, including distance education, were verified. Achievement data are disaggregated by multiple criteria for the purpose of supporting more effective decision making. In addition, the College's draft Student Equity Plan uses a disproportionate impact methodology to identify achievement gaps, which will inform future strategies.

Conclusion: The College has made great progress in its work to address this recommendation. The use of data and analysis is pervasive and at the center of all planning. Of note, the Office of Institutional Effectiveness now employs one full-time research analyst and an assistant research analyst, which has led to increased research capacity in support of the College's evaluation and planning efforts.

The team believes that the College has fully met the expectations of the recommendation and now meets Standards.

College Recommendation 2

The team recommends that the College evaluate its institutional planning process, including hiring decisions, and ensure planning practices are integrated and aligned with resources. (Standards I.B.3, I.B.4, I.B.6, III.A.6, III.B.2.b, III.C.2, III.D.4)

Findings and Evidence: The Follow-Up Report provided extensive detail regarding the College's effort to address this recommendation in the past year. The team verified that planning process evaluation is conducted by the Program Effectiveness and Planning Committee and submitted to the tier one committee for review and action. The team reviewed evidence that significant dialogue and planning regarding the budget deficit and possible solutions, with implication for planning and resource allocation, occurred in 2013 and 2014. The College engaged the services of a consulting group, the College Brain Trust, to analyze the budget situation and make recommendations for achieving a balanced annual budget, with adequate annual surplus to repay the District for five years of overspending. The report was provided to the college in March 2013, which was concurrent in time with the ACCJC External Evaluation Team Visit and its findings.

The College engaged in extensive planning and resource discussion immediately. Review of documentation and interviews confirmed that the College had read the reports of the consultants and the external evaluation team, and were seeking to address the budget deficit. The strategy that emerged from the College was based upon the consultants' recommendations to increase FTES and efficiency while reducing expenditures, particularly with hiring, balance their annual budget, and pay off their debt to the District over a five-year period.

The team met with leadership representatives of the multi-level shared governance committees and separately with the Interim President and Budget Analyst to discuss their strategy and outcomes. The College has developed a new enrollment management plan that aligns course offerings with student course needs in terms of sequencing, number of high demand course sections offered, and times and modalities of delivery. The intent is to keep students enrolled at LAVC and progressing toward their educational goals to increase FTES and grow revenue. Concomitant with this, the College has made plans to reduce spending. However, the team could not confirm that the two actions were aligned at a level to significantly reduce the deficit. The enrollment management plan makes assumptions that are as yet unproven, especially given the recent statewide trend of lower enrollment. Additionally, the College has continued to hire replacement faculty and award a high number of reassigned time FTEF positions. It was confirmed through interviews and document review that the College has continued to overspend its budget in 2013-2014. The District will be providing support for a summer session in order to generate additional FTES, however this is onetime funding and there is not a plan to sustain the growth in future years.

Conclusion: The team found that the College has made significant progress toward integrating and aligning its planning practices with resources and involving all campus constituents in the process. However, the team found that institutional planning decisions are being made by the college that are not aligned with resources, including the hiring of contract faculty positions.

The team concludes that the College has not fully resolved this deficiency.

College Recommendation 3

In order to fully meet the Standards, the College must assess and align SLOs at the course, program, and institutional levels and use the results to improve student learning and institutional effectiveness. (Standards I.B, II.A.1.c, II.A.2.a, II.A.2.b, II.A.3.b, IV.B.2.b)

Findings and Evidence: In the Follow-Up Report, evidence was provided indicating that the College had assessed and aligned all Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) at the course, program, and institutional levels and used the results to improve student learning and institutional effectiveness. Evidence that all divisions, including Services and Instruction, have assessed their SLOs and Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs) was verified by the team through interviews and review of assessment reports and summaries. Evidence was provided indicating that 100% of all Services and Institutional Outcomes were assessed, 98.4% of all courses were assessed, and 100% of program pathways were assessed. Team review of motions approved by the Institutional Effectiveness Council verified that the College is enforcing its commitment to the assessment of courses by archiving those few courses that did not complete an SLO assessment, and by requiring that all new courses complete assessment as scheduled following the first term taught.

Evidence of impact on student learning was provided through specific action plans created by programs resulting from assessment analysis. Broad dialogue and communication of findings and actions were documented in instructional division meeting notes and services dialogue and assessment reports. Evidence of improvements made in student services and administrative services as a result of assessment findings were reviewed by the team.

Through interviews and review of evidence, the team verified that the College has institutionalized its commitment to student learning as a component of integrated planning. The college should be commended for its significant progress since the last visit. The College created linkages between outcomes improvement, goal setting and attainment, and annual planning modules. The Outcomes Assessment Committee reviews how results of assessments are being used to improve student learning and institutional effectiveness, and reports to the college annually.

Conclusion: At the time of the 2013 External Evaluation Visit, the evaluation team found that the College was making progress in meeting this Standard; however, it had not yet completed all assessments. By the time of the 2014 Follow-Up Report and site visit, the College demonstrated that it had assessed 100% of all SLOs and was acting upon findings, and integrating them into planning.

The team believes that the College has fully met the expectations of the recommendation and now meets Standards.

College Recommendation 4

The team recommends that the College develop a formal definition of correspondence education that aligns with the U.S. Department of Education regulations and Commission policy and a process for determining the differences in practice between correspondence education and distance education. (Standards II.A.1, II.A.2, II.A.2.c, II.A.2.d, II.A.2.e, II.A.7, II.B.1, II.B.2.c)

Findings and Evidence: Through interviews and review of evidence, the team verified that the Campus Distance Education Committee (CDEC) initiated action on April 17, 2013 to address this recommendation. Using language from U.S. Department of Education Guidelines section 602.3, CDEC drafted a formal policy statement on the definitions of correspondence education and distance education, and standards of practice required to meet the definition of the latter. The Valley College Curriculum Committee (VCCC) provided input for the policy, which was then approved by both the Institutional Effectiveness Council and the College President.

Evidence was provided demonstrating that VCCC Distance Learning Course Approval Guidelines have institutionalized this policy and its standards of practice. Extensive professional development has been made available. In addition, faculty must complete distance learning training and certification prior to assignment to a distance learning course.

Conclusion: The College took immediate action to address this recommendation. It did so in a thorough and responsive manner, and completed a policy with standards of practice that is now in its second semester of implementation. The College has acted in a commendable manner in addressing this recommendation.

The team believes that the College has fully met the expectations of the recommendation and now meets Standards.

College Recommendation 5:

To fully meet the Standards, the College should ensure that records of complaints are routinely maintained as required by the Policy on Student and Public Complaints Against Institutions. (Standards II.B.2, II.B.2.c, II.B.3.a, II.B.4)

Findings and Evidence: The College provided evidence of its policies and procedures for addressing complaints from students and the public. There is extensive documentation beginning with District Administration Regulation E-55, which addresses student grievances. The College's Office of the Ombudsperson administers all student grievance complaints. The team was able to confirm through interviews and review of documentation that the College maintains records of grievance complaints and their resolutions, and keeps the President apprised of their status in monthly reports.

The team reviewed evidence regarding processes and procedures for filing complaints of prohibited discrimination and harassment, which is now administered through the District Office of Diversity Programs, effective fall 2012. The team verified that there is appropriate maintenance of files related to these types of complaints.

Conclusion: Processes employed by the College to maintain records of student complaints are consistent with the Policy on Student and Public Complaints against Institutions.

The team believes that the college has fully met the expectations of the recommendation and now meets Standards.

College Recommendation 6

To fully meet the Standards, the College should ensure that all employee performance evaluations are conducted in a timely basis in accordance with the employee contracts (Standard III.A.1.b).

Findings and Evidence: At the time of the March 2013 visit, about 83% of staff evaluations were current. At the time of the follow-up visit, the College provided evidence that 97.7% of evaluations of classified staff are current and maintained in a spreadsheet for careful monitoring. The policies and procedures for evaluation of staff are posted on the Administrative Services website.

The team was provided documentation that showed that all administrator evaluations are current and all faculty evaluations will be current by the end of spring.

The team noted that the college has made improvements in both monitoring the status of employee evaluations, as well as notifications to management of delinquencies.

Conclusion: The team found that the college has partially resolved this deficiency.

College Recommendation 7

The team recommends that the college, in collaboration with the district, put measures in place to ensure the effective control and implementation of the bond program and that decisions related to facilities are aligned with institutional planning (Standards I.B.3, I.B.4, I.B.6, III.B.1.a, III.B.2.a, III.B.2.b).

Findings and Evidence: The team noted that since the March 2013 visit, the college had a special visit from ACCJC specific to the Bond Program. At its January 8-10, 2014 meeting, the Commission noted that the college had provided evidence that it had addressed the recommendation and met the associated eligibility requirements and standard.

The team noted that while the moratorium on the bond construction program has been lifted, the Media Arts and Performing Arts building at LAVC is still on hold. The College reports that the District Program Management Office (PMO) and the college have been working closely to identify a solution to allow the construction project to begin. Further, the college reported that it is counting on the revenue generated from use of the new facility to help with the college budget challenges.

College and district staff has been meeting, and a final report with recommendations was due to the board in February. The team inquired about the status of the report and learned that it has not been completed. The college anticipated the report to be completed soon.

Conclusion: The college has addressed the recommendation and met the associated eligibility requirements and standard.

College Recommendation 8

To fully meet the Standards, the college should establish appropriate management and control mechanisms needed for sound financial decision-making. The Institution should ensure that it has sufficient cash flow and reserves to maintain stability with realistic plans to meet financial emergencies and unforeseen occurrences and to ensure long-term

financial stability. The team recommends that the President effectively control budget and expenditures (Standards III.D, III.D.2.c, IV.B.2, IV.B.2.a, IV.B.2.d).

Findings and Evidence: In response to the recommendation, as well as the district's response to district recommendation 1, the College has developed an aggressive multi-year plan for enrollment growth, repayment of the significant District budget loan and budget reductions. The team found that some budget reductions have been identified and implemented. College committees are currently engaging in significant dialogue regarding additional potential budget reductions. Page 27 of the College Follow-up Report states "the College is developing new processes, forms and budget practices to foster a culture of fiscal responsibility." The College is to be commended for the reallocation of FTEF to high demand areas, and for its plans to monitor student success through the newly formed Enrollment Management Committee, a subcommittee of the Educational Planning Committee. However, the team found that there was evidence of decisions still being made that contribute to the deficit as evidenced by: budget overruns in overtime, hourly budgets; hiring of contract staff, including non-teaching faculty; and the planned offering of an enhanced winter intersession in 2014-15 to achieve FTES targets and growth, without the financial resources to increase the planned course offerings.

The aggressive multi-year enrollment plan first implemented for spring 2014 to achieve growth targets includes increasing average seat counts to 45 and pushing WSCH to over 600. While the College should be commended for evaluating the scheduling of classes in detail, and creating efficiencies that were not previously present, the team noted that the ambitious plan is already appearing to have set unrealistically high goals as the community colleges in general are experiencing enrollments reflecting a period of lesser demand due to the improving state economy. The evidence provided the team shows that actual seat counts, WSCH, FTES and budget reductions achieved so far are below targets established in the multi-year enrollment plan, yet the plan has not been revised to incorporate the actual data for future years.

Based on P-2 enrollment statistics available, the College is falling short on enrollment targets for 2013-2014. With a substantial one-time budget supplement from the District, the College has plans for a summer program with approximately two-thirds of the FTES pulled into 2013-14 to reach the target. When College staff were asked how the target would be sustained in 2014-2015 without the budget infusion, it was explained that an enhanced winter intersession would be offered and the budget would be deficit spent to achieve the FTES goal. The college also reported that in addition to potentially allowing for the College to reach the current year FTES target, the one-time budget augmentation also allows for potential net income, which will reduce the projected 2013-14 deficit. The District has also agreed to defer the debt repayment for 2013-14. However, there is some question of whether this projected debt reduction and FTES target are sustainable into next year.

There continues to be some instability in the oversight of the budget. When the Team visited in 2013 the Vice President of Administrative Services (CBO) position was vacant. Subsequent to the visit, a Vice President was hired (April 15, 2013) which was to bring anticipated expertise to guide the stabilization of the College finances. By the Follow-up visit on April 28, 2014 the position was again vacant.

Interviews were conducted with key College and District financial staff, and College enrollment management staff. There was a dichotomy in the responses to similar questions asked of the District and the College. The District pointed to evidence that the District budget allocation had been recently evaluated and adjusted, and documentation was presented of the District's clear expectation that the College would be accountable for a balanced budget and reaching FTES targets. In addition, the district has increased the required status reporting requirements from a quarterly update to monthly updates from the College President on enrollment and budget. It was also indicated by the district chief financial officer that if the College is unable to make the expected progress in this area, as measured by year-end figures produced in August 2014, that a finance team may be sent to the College with the intention to improve outcomes in this area. The evidence provided to the team included a revised Board Policy on accountability for the College President. The College provided evidence that identified continued inequities in the model and verbalized an expectation that debts owed the District could ultimately be forgiven. The College acknowledged the need to demonstrate an effort at budget reduction, and a multi-year plan for budget and enrollment, but did not demonstrate an urgency to accomplish a balanced budget.

The team noted continued hiring of contract faculty (a guideline was established that the college would fill 50% of contract vacancies). This was of concern since the team noted in the 2013 visit that the previous College President had hired 20 new contract faculty with an ongoing budget deficit. At the time, the President reported that the new faculty were needed to maintain the college FON, however, the district leadership were not in agreement. During the follow up visit, the interim president reported that hiring was necessary to contribute to the district FON, yet the district Chief Financial Officer reported that hiring was at the complete discretion of the college president.

The College Brain Trust was retained to issue an analysis of the College's financial situation and a report was issued in March 2013. There was evidence that the College concurred with the 12 recommendations and has implemented several, including: 1) Strengthen enrollment planning, 2) Examine curriculum mix (lower enrolled v. high demand), and 3) Develop a multi-year strategy of response to budget and enrollment concerns. Yet the team found that a year later, many of the recommendations had not been implemented, such as: 1) Critically examine and reduce a high FTE of reassigned time so that faculty can return to teaching assignments to resolve budget challenge, 2) Develop a culture of rapid response to budget challenges, 3) LAVC should balance their budget without anticipation of subsidy or District reserves, 4) Work with the District to downsize staff via transfers to categorical funds or other colleges if necessary, develop a plan for staffing reduction and request of the District that LAVC be held harmless until the agreed on attrition occurs. The team found that reassigned time remains extremely high, contributing to an overextended adjunct budget for instruction, where approximately $5,000,000 is budgeted for over $8,000,000 in expenses. Hiring continues on the general funds. Reassigned time is still being analyzed for possible reduction.

Conclusion

The College has not fully resolved the deficiency.

The team urges the district Chief Business Officer and the college Business Officer to work together to formulate a joint plan to address the structural problems with the college budget including expectations for contributing to the district FON, debt repayment, and enrollment targets, including adequate funding to meet enrollment targets, to ensure that the college and district resolve the deficiency.

District Recommendation 1

In order to meet the Standards, the team recommends that the Chancellor and Board put accountability measures into place to ensure the long-term fiscal stability and financial integrity of the college (Standards IV.B.1.j, IV.B.3).

Findings and Evidence

The District has engaged in significant work related to this recommendation. The team reviewed the written reports which were provided as evidence of the work completed, and interviewed the District Chief Financial Officers and college budget analyst. The team found that the District provided the funding to LAVC to secure consultants, College Brain Trust, to review the College's spending practices and issued a comprehensive fiscal analysis with 11 recommendations for the college to take to balance its budget. The report was available to LAVC in March 2013. In April 2013, the LACCD Chief Financial Officer requested a follow-up on the 2012-13 Second Quarter Review. The College responded in May 2013 with the required information and requested a budget augmentation and debt relief.

Upon receipt of the College's request for relief, the LACCD Chief Financial Officer asked that the College: 1) direct the request for debt relief to the Executive Committee of the District Budget Committee (ECDBC); 2) describe how the Brain Trust recommendations would be implemented; and, 3) submit a multi-year budget action plan to balance its budget. The District CFO indicated that consideration of debt relief or budget augmentation would depend on review of the multi-year plan. By August 2013 the plan was submitted for an in-depth review by the ECDBC. The ECDBC requested that the College strengthen its enrollment management processes and recommended that the District develop accountability measures to hold all its colleges accountable for balancing their budgets.

In October 2013, in consultation with the District Budget Committee and the District's College Presidents, the Interim Chancellor developed District Financial Accountability Measures that were approved by the Board of Trustees, effective for 2013-14. The new accountability measures consider the college's fiscal condition as part of the college president's annual performance evaluation, including corrective measures up to, and including, possible non-renewal of his/her contract. The policy also allows for the Board to appoint a special emergency response team to monitor and regulate the fiscal affairs of a college. The District's Chief Financial Officer indicated that a decision about appointment of a response team for Los Angeles Valley College would take place after the 2013-14 books are closed in August 2014.

The College submitted its Enrollment Management Balanced Budget and Debt Reduction Plan to the District in January 2014. By February 2014 the ECDBC reviewed the plan and asked for additional detailed information about the enrollment, outreach, the athletic program budget, a review of reassigned time, and a monthly financial status report to assure the college is on track.

Conclusion

The District has resolved the deficiency. The District and the College have been, and continue to engage in significant work related to this recommendation. It will be important to continue to monitor the College's process to see if they are able to follow the multi-year plan which was developed. Early indications are that the college is falling short of the targets set.