

# Accreditation NOTES

Accrediting Commission for Community  
and Junior Colleges  
Western Association of Schools and Colleges

## *Some Thoughts on “Shaping the Dialogue”*

As task forces were developing the new standards, it became evident that if an institution is to ensure that its resources and processes support student learning and its continuous assessment, as well as the pursuit of institutional excellence and improvement, an “ongoing, self-reflective dialogue” must become central to institutional processes. This dialogue, it was thought, should serve to provide a college community with the means to integrate the elements of the standards, resulting in a comprehensive institutional perspective that would serve to verify integrity and “promote quality and improvement.” Accordingly, the subtitle of the Introduction to the Accreditation Standards is “Shaping the Dialogue.”

A dialogue is a group discussion among “colleagues”, often facilitated, that is designed to explore complex issues, create greater group intelligence and facilitate group learning. The idea of “colleagues” is important; dialogue occurs where individuals see themselves as colleagues. In order for the group to engage in dialogue, individuals must suspend their own views to listen fully to one another in order to understand each other’s viewpoints. Groups engaged in dialogue develop greater insights, shared meanings and ultimately, collective understanding of complex issues and how best to address them.

Dialogue improves *collective* thinking. A practice of dialogue can have benefits for the individual as well as the institution. Dialogue can help build self-awareness, improve communication skills, strengthen teams and stimulate innovation that fosters effective change. Dialogues are powerful, transformational experiences that lead to both personal and collaborative action. But dialogic discussions also allow controversial topics that may have in the past become sources of disagreement and division to be explored in a more useful context that can lead to greater group insight.

The Standards emphasize dialogue as a means for an institution to come to collective understanding of what it means to be learning-focused in the context of a particular institution’s history and mission; of what the meaningful student learning outcomes at the program and degree level should be, and on how institutional resources and processes might be structured to support the improvement of student learning.

Unlike *debate*, in which most academicians are trained to seek to score points and to persuade, the goal of dialogue is mutual understanding and respect. Dialogue involves active listening, seeking to understand, giving everyone the opportunity to talk, and trying not to interrupt. A conscious commitment to engage in *dialogue* ensures that a group welcomes a range of viewpoints during its search for effective ways of addressing important issues. Retaining the use of a facilitator can help ensure that the ground rules are maintained and can help clarify themes and ideas.

While dialogue may not lead to a resolution of a conflict, it can lead to a makeover of the way in which the conflict is pursued from one which is destructive and divisive to one which is constructive and leads to personal and institutional growth. Too often on campus we avoid certain controversial topics or we take a perspective that leaves us in about the same place we started, with little to no additional understanding of the issue. By assisting in the discovery of common ground and by developing increased willingness to work collegially to illuminate and solve problems, dialogue has the potential to improve an institution's ability to deal with the inevitable disagreements that arise in the life of an institution.

The new Standards' focus on student learning calls for higher education institutions to deal with a very complex issue, improving student learning. It also calls on institutions to change—and to learn. Dialogue can be a powerful strategy for generating the creative discussions and collective wisdom that can enable institutional change.

For more reading on dialogue, see [The Fifth Discipline](#) by Peter Senge, and [David Boehm, On Dialogue](#).

### *Highlights from the Ninth California Assessment Institute*

The ninth California Assessment Institute, hosted by College of the Desert and held on September 29 through October 1 in Rancho Mirage, was titled “Assessment and Learning: Success for Students”. The Institute was attended by teams from 51 ACCJC member institutions, including representatives from the California public community colleges, American Samoa Community College, the College of Micronesia, Leeward College, and two California private colleges.

On Sunday afternoon, some attendees learned the “Nuts and Bolts of Assessment” from Dr. Barbara Wright, University of Connecticut Emeritus Associate Professor of German, and former director of the Assessment Forum of the American Association of Higher Education. Dr. Wright introduced

novices to the terms, concepts, and methods used in assessment. She explored the basic goals and philosophy of assessment activity and strategies for getting an assessment project started, including means for examining quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Other Sunday afternoon participants were introduced to a simple model that has been implemented successfully at over two hundred campuses during the last twelve years by Dr. Jim Nichols, Emeritus Director of the University of Mississippi's Planning and Institutional Research. Dr. Nichols' model has five components to which institutions can fit their unique assessment needs. It is simple and designed to work within the existing academic and administrative structure of the institution, providing a structure that is very sustainable.

In her address opening the Institute, Dr. Barbara Beno, Executive Director of the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, described the intent of the new ACCJC standards, as well as the role of dialogue and leadership in creating institutions whose primary focus is learning. Dr. Beno urged campus leaders to build a sustainable and dynamic college culture and practice in which student learning is placed at the center of focus for attention, thought, and institutional action. Citing the Commission's new standards, Dr. Beno noted that leadership is found throughout the organization, that this leadership should be found in all areas of the college, and that this leadership should enable the institution to identify values, set and achieve goals, and to learn and improve.

Dr. James Anderson, Vice Provost for Undergraduate Affairs and Professor of Counselor Education at North Carolina State University, focused on assessment as a process aimed at understanding and improving what an institution does. Dr. Anderson began with the notion that every college has responsibility for identifying methods of discovery concerning what is working and what is not. Colleges, he stated, must determine if goals are being met and if the shared academic culture is improving the quality of services and education that students expect and deserve; colleges cannot fear

making their expectations and results explicit and public. Dr. Anderson pointed out that effective assessment is an ongoing process aimed at understanding and improving what an institution values and what it does.

Evidence that ACCJC member institutions are engaging in serious assessment activities was provided in the breakout sessions conducted by faculty and administrators from member institutions. All of these sessions provided examples of exemplary practices in some aspect of assessment of student learning outcomes. These sessions included the following:

- Michelle Kalina, Interim Dean of Science and Math, Sierra College; Alex Amigo, Professor of Geology/Earth Sciences, Sierra College; and Scott Corbett, Professor, History, Oxnard College presented a workshop on learning styles and their interactions with learning outcomes. Participants had an opportunity to interact with these presenters as if they were students in a class.
- Teams from Santa Ana and Riverside Community Colleges presented materials on what these two colleges are doing in assessment of student learning outcomes. John Nixon, Vice President Academic Affairs and Ramon Reza, Coordinator Portfolio for Planning and Faculty Development represented Santa Ana College. Susan Mills, Associate Professor, Mathematics and Rick Axelson, Associate Vice President, Program Assessment & Accountability represented Riverside Community College.
- Bill Patterson, Vice President, Instruction and Institutional Research; Charlotte Thumen, Instruction Librarian; Juanita Croft, Computer Lab Supervisor of Foothill College presented the college's learning centered projects, including their use of electronic portfolios, designed to capture important evidence of learning, and organized in a way to facilitate systematic assessment and evaluation.

- Marcy Alan Craig, Professor of English, Cabrillo College; Alan Keys, Professor of Behavioral & Social Science, Sacramento City College; and Michelle Kalina, Interim Associate Dean Science & Math, Sierra College presented a panel on the faculty role in assessment. They discussed the framework in which the classroom-based research model has increased faculty involvement in program and curriculum-based research and in the use of course-embedded assessment measures. The specific strategies used to promote faculty use of assessment and research were addressed. They reported that initial results indicate that these efforts are beginning to promote a positive culture toward assessment and classroom-based research.
- Craig Hendricks, Professor of History, Long Beach City College and Jerry Rudmann, Professor of Psychology, Irvine Valley College and Supervisor of Research, Coastline Community College presented assessment thinking of two disciplines, history and psychology, as examples of assessment in the liberal arts majors and in General Education. Learning outcome statements for the major, as recently developed by a faculty task force appointed by the American Psychological Association, were reviewed with implications for the contribution of Psychology to the general education experience of community college students. The development and content of learning outcome expectations from the U.S. history courses was discussed as part of the assessment program at Long Beach and as part of a national grant on Quality Undergraduate Education Implications for History Majors.

Results of evaluation of the institute by attendees were uniformly positive.

Courtesy of Dr. Bill Scroggins, the Assessment Institute Web site ([www.ca-assessment-inst.org](http://www.ca-assessment-inst.org)) has now posted the Institute Program, including selected PowerPoint presentations and handout materials.

The volunteers who comprise the planning group of the Assessment Institutes are looking for an institution that would be willing to serve as host for an institute in Fall 2003. Colleges interested should contact ACCJC Associate Director Darlene Pacheco at accjcdp@pacbell.net.

### *Implementing the New Standards Workshop*

This workshop will be held at the California Community College League's Conference at the Fairmont Hotel in San Jose on November 14, 2002. Scheduled from 1:15 to 4:00, it is designed to provide insights into the strong and comprehensive emphasis on defining and assessing student learning that is found in the new standards. Strategies for thinking about and developing student learning outcomes and their assessment will be explored, as will Commission expectations regarding self studies based on these new standards. The workshop will be conducted by Executive Director Barbara Beno and Associate Director Gari Browning.

### *Accreditation Liaison Officer Training*

This first-time workshop will also be held at the California Community College League's Conference at the Fairmont Hotel in San Jose on November 14 from 9:00 to 12:00.

The workshop, to be conducted by Executive Director Barbara Beno and Associate Director Darlene Pacheco, will review the roles and responsibilities of Accreditation Liaison Officers and provide attendees with some practical experiences.

### *ACCJC Office Relocating*

**The ACCJC office will be relocating on December 1, 2002 to the city of Novato in Marin County. Look for an announcement of changes in address, telephone numbers, etc.**

### *Spring Team Training*

This training is for those individuals who are scheduled to serve on institutional evaluation teams in spring 2003. Those individuals who are first-time evaluators are required to attend the training, as are those who have not served under the current ten standards. Training will be provided at Napa Valley College in the north on January 20, 2003 and at Moorpark College in the south on January 27.

### *RP Group Plans Student Learning Outcome Workshops*

The Research and Planning Group has scheduled a series of drive-in workshops on student learning outcomes across the state. These workshops are intended to be hands-on efforts offering three concurrent sessions on initiating campus efforts in assessment. The sessions are repeated so that attendees can participate in more than one session. Local California Community College individuals involved in the assessment of student learning outcomes will be leading the sessions.

Co-sponsors of these workshops are organizations of the California Community Colleges Chief Executive Officers, the Chief Instructional Officers, and the Chief Student Services Officers. Other sponsors are the California Community College League and the organization of academic deans. The Hilton Pasadena Workshop will be co-chaired by the California Association of Institutional Researchers.

### Schedule of Workshops

Wed.	11/13/02	Hilton Pasadena
Fri.	11/22/02	West Valley College
Fri.	12/6/02	Riverside Community College
Fri.,	2/21/03	Shasta College
Fri.	3/21/03	Bakersfield College
Fri.	3/28/03	Santa Rosa Junior College
Fri.	4/11/03	Mira Costa College

## *Council for Regional Accrediting Commissions Retreat*

In late August, staffs of the regional accreditation commissions met in San Diego for their biennial retreat to discuss current issues in accreditation. The two-and-a-half day retreat provided representatives from the commissions with an opportunity to examine each other's work and to hear presentations on trends and issues in accreditation in higher education.

Dr. Linda Thor, President of Rio Salado College in Arizona spoke on some of the changes in Higher Education and their implications for accreditation. She emphasized the role that distance learning has played as a catalyst for change. Dr. Judith Eaton, President of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) and Dr. Judith Watkins, CHEA Vice President, spoke on reauthorization and recognition of commissions as well as on national concerns in accreditation.

Since five of the commissions have created new standards emphasizing student learning outcomes, a good deal of time was spent in discussing these standards and the processes for implementing them. These discussions included exploration of staff functions and roles, as well as training for self study and team service.

Staffs reviewed a draft of materials developed by Dr. Jon Wergin of Virginia Commonwealth University on the assessment of student learning. Dr. Wergin's work is being done under a grant received by the Council for Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC) and is expected to result in a guidebook to be completed in the next few months. The discussion of Dr. Wergin's draft was facilitated by Dr. Sherrill Amador, President of Palomar College.

Following a presentation by Dr. Eaton on the status of international accreditation, staff heard a report on the accreditation of free-standing institutions operating abroad. As these institutions brand themselves "American-style", international and regional accreditors are interested in working

to address the issue of providing quality assurance. A sub-committee of C-RAC will continue discussions on the topic with the intent of developing a means for dealing with quality assurance/accreditation concerns.

Staff also participated in discussions on such topics as distance learning, substantive change, office operational and organizational issues, and communicating with member institutions.

## *ACCJC Seeks USDOE Reauthorization*

Like all regional accreditors, the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges must be authorized as an accreditor by the United States Department of Education. This authorization requires that the Commission submit a self study in a five year cycle. Such a study was recently submitted by the Commission.

Mr. Ron Lipton of the USDOE staff has been assigned the preparation an evaluation of the Commission's self study, facilitating a decision about reauthorization by The National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity at its December 2-4 meeting. Mr. Lipton visited the Commission office in early October to review documents and familiarize himself with the Commission's process. In addition, Mr. Lipton accompanied an evaluation team to observe its activities as it visited a campus for a comprehensive evaluation.

A draft of Mr. Lipton's analysis has been received by the Commission to which ACCJC staff can respond to if such is deemed to be necessary. Once the draft is completed, it is sent to the Advisory Committee. Executive Director Barbara Beno, Commission Chair Jack Hernandez, and Associate Director Gari Browning will travel to Washington, D. C. to attend the Advisory Committee meeting at which ACCJC will be reviewed. Notification of the ACCJC's status will be announced immediately following this meeting.

## Comprehensive Visits Spring 2003

Under current U.S. Department of Education regulations, ACCJC must provide opportunity for third-party comment regarding institutional qualifications for accreditation. The institutions noted below are scheduled to undergo a comprehensive visit in spring 2003 and a review by the Commission at its June 2003 meeting. Third-party comment on these institutions should be made to Executive Director Barbara A. Beno at 3402 Mendocino Avenue, Santa Rosa, CA 95403. For consideration, such comment must be submitted in writing, signed, accompanied by return address and telephone number, and received no later than five weeks before the scheduled Commission meeting.

American Academy Dramatic  
Arts  
Butte College  
Chabot College  
College of Alameda  
College of the Marshall Islands  
East Los Angeles College  
Laney College  
Las Positas College  
Los Angeles City College  
Los Angeles Trade/Tech  
College  
Merritt College  
Palomar College  
Southwestern College  
Taft College  
Vista Community College

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