

EVALUATION REPORT

MERCED COLLEGE

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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
Merced College from March 7 through 10, 2011

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SUMMARY OF EVALUATION REPORT

INSTITUTION: Merced College

DATE OF VISIT: March 7, 2011 through March 10, 2011

TEAM CHAIR: Jackie L. Fisher, Sr., Ed.D.
Superintendent/President
Antelope Valley College

A twelve-member accreditation team visited Merced College from March 7 through 10, 2011, for the purpose of determining whether the institution continues to meet accreditation standards. Prior to and during the visit, the team assessed how well the college is achieving its stated purposes, analyzed how well the college is meeting the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior College's (ACCJC) four standards, provided recommendations for quality assurance and institutional improvement, and submitted a recommendation to the ACCJC regarding the accredited status of the college.

In preparation for the visit, the team chair attended a Team Chair Workshop conducted by Dr. Barbara Beno, ACCJC President, on Friday, January 21, 2011. On Tuesday, February 8, 2011, the entire team attended an all-day team training session conducted by ACCJC vice presidents Jack Pond and Dr. Susan B. Clifford. During this training session, team members were taught how to conduct an institutional evaluation in accordance with ACCJC standards.

A month prior to the team's visit, the team chair and team assistant conducted a pre-visit to the college to discuss expectations and logistics. Findings from the visit were shared during the team training, and team members were asked to fulfill two written assignments in reaction to Merced College's self study, evaluate the self study report and respond to the previous team report (spring 2005), and submit requests for individual and group appointments and additional evidence.

The team prepared for its visit by thoroughly reviewing and evaluating Merced College's self study and previous team reports, annual budget reports, and mid-term report; evaluating responses to the previous team's recommendations; assessing online courses; and examining numerous documents provided by the college as evidence in support of the statements made in its self study.

The visit:

On March 7, 2011, the team met for approximately two and one-half hours to review the self study report, confirm appointments and issues to be addressed during the visit, and share information gleaned from a morning visit by several team members to the college's Los Banos educational center. During the visit, the team held meetings at Merced College, the Los Banos Campus, and the downtown Business Resource Center with students, staff, faculty, administrators, and governing board members; visited a variety of classrooms and campus facilities; conducted several drop-in meetings that allowed anyone on campus to meet individually with team members; and hosted three open forums, two at the Merced College campus and one in Los Banos.

Merced College's governing board, administrators, faculty, managers, and students were well prepared for the visit. The staff greeted the team in a professional manner, and the team was provided open access to all documents needed to gather evidence related to the accreditation standards. The college's Accreditation Liaison Officer and assistant, the superintendent/president's executive assistant, and numerous other staff members provided evidence requested by team members promptly. Trustees, administrators, faculty, staff, and students were very generous with their time and assistance.

The team was able to confirm the self study's portrayal of the college and its appraisal of how well the college and center were meeting the four accreditation standards. Though the self study planning agendas did not include timelines for completion or expected outcomes, the team was impressed by the thoroughness of the self study report and by the overall condition of the college, its educational center, and downtown educational facility.

The team believes that if the governing board, administrators, faculty, and staff can sustain an atmosphere of trust and cooperation, Merced College will continue to make progress toward recommendations prepared by the team.

Introduction

The Merced Community College District, covering a service area of 2,184 square miles in Merced and Madera counties, was established by voters of the Merced and Le Grand Union High School districts in February 1962. Merced College, the main campus of the district, is located on 269 acres in the City of Merced, and the Los Banos Campus, an educational center established to serve community members in the cities of Los Banos and Dos Palos, opened in 2007. Most recently, in 2008, the district established the Business Resource Center in downtown Merced to deliver non-credit and community services programs and services. The college also holds courses in local high school and community facilities.

The college reports in its self study that while the population of its service area grew from 211,223 to 257,373 during the last decade; the primary occupations in the area remain in agriculture and related industries. The self study shows the population of the city of Merced as 76,313, the largest population in the county, and Los Banos as 35,120, the second largest population. Also reported was the significant economic decline in the region during the past several years—twenty percent of the district's population lives below the federal poverty level. In addition, the unemployment rate peaked at 22.1 percent, or twice the national average, during 2010 and averaged 10.5 percent from 2001-2007.

With regard to the demographics of the student population, the self study reveals that many students who attend Merced College face challenges in that they are non-native English speakers, the first in their families to attend college, have poor study skills, lack reliable transportation, and/or are working single parents. As of 2009, the population demographic breakdown in the county of Merced was reportedly: 34.3 percent White, 4.1 percent Black (African-American), 53.1 percent Hispanic, 7 percent Asian (primarily Hmong), and 1.9 percent other. The self study revealed that 45 percent of the Merced County population, five years of age or older, speak a language other than English at home, which compares to 40 percent of Californians and 18 percent for the United States as a whole.

In the 2008-2009 academic year, student enrollment was 21,082 unduplicated. By fall 2010, there were 2,000 additional students enrolled at Merced College. During the 2008-2009 academic year, students aged 24 years or less made up 49 percent of the total student population, while those from 25-49 were the second largest group at 34.6 percent. Females made up 60 percent of the total student enrollment population.

Administrators, faculty, and staff at Merced College have fostered close relationships with the surrounding communities and those communities exhibit a strong sense of support for the college. In the last several years, enrollment growth and responsible fiscal stewardship coupled with funds secured through the passage of two local construction bond measures have provided the college with the resources necessary to improve existing facilities, build new buildings, and improve campus maintenance. While still focusing on its successful vocational programs, the college has placed a strong emphasis on improving transfer in recent years.

Merced College and the Los Banos Campus are well kept and attractive due to the district's investments in basic maintenance and dedicated building and grounds staff.

The overall morale of administrators, faculty, and staff is very positive, as evidenced by the self study and supported by interviews conducted by the visiting team.

The self study:

The team found that the Merced College institutional self study a well-prepared and well-organized document that addressed each of the standards and provided evidence that supported descriptive claims. The team suggests, however, that the college more fully develop its planning agendas by assigning each a specific timeline and desired outcome.

Team’s Evaluation of Institutional Responses to 2005 Recommendations

In 2005, the accreditation evaluation team that visited Merced College submitted four recommendations for the college to address prior to the spring 2008 Focused Mid-Term Report and spring 2011 comprehensive evaluation visit. The self study report detailed the consideration given to each of the recommendations, and the 2011 visiting was pleased with the college’s progress in addressing the four recommendations.

The ACCJC in its June 30, 2008, letter to Merced College accepted the college’s Focused Mid-Term Report, but expressed the expectation that the college would “complete the program review as per its own timeline noted in the report.”

The 2011 evaluation team’s assessment of Merced College’s progress in meeting the previous team’s recommendations follows:

2005 Recommendation 1: (Program Review) *“the college should implement a new program review process in a focused and expeditious manner, including a published schedule as to when all college programs and services are committed to undergo the full process. Integration of program review with the institutional planning and budgeting processes, the development of student learning outcomes, and student achievement data is also recommended.”*

The 2011 evaluation team confirmed that the college has made progress in meeting this recommendation. The self study indicated that the college has developed and implemented a program review process that is timely, comprehensive, incorporates user friendly software, and meets the needs of all area constituencies. The college appears to have garnered a commitment from all departments to complete program reviews on a regular schedule. Instructional and student services program reviews incorporate student learning outcomes (SLO) and achievement data as key components and program reviews have been integrated into the college planning, resource allocations, and SLO processes.

However, after reviewing program review reports and conducting interviews with staff, the team of 2011 found that the college only partially meets this recommendation. The team recommends that the college provide evidence it has established an ongoing, systematic assessment that is being used to improve student learning outcome. The college needs to produce evidence to demonstrate that program review has been continually refined to improve program procedures and results in appropriate improvements in student achievement and learning.

2005 Recommendation 2: (Student learning outcomes) *“the college needs to develop student learning outcomes for all courses and programs. Additionally, institutional student learning outcomes need to be integrated with General Education and*

Competency Requirements. Assessment of student learning outcomes needs to show how course credit and the awarding of degrees and certificates are based on student achievement of stated learning outcomes and how outcome assessments are used to improve courses and programs, improve teaching and learning strategies, and promote student success.”

The self study indicated that the college has developed, implemented, and is in the process of assessing SLOs for all its instructional programs and courses as well as student services programs. Institutional student learning outcomes have been created and are assessed as part of course and program assessments. The self study claimed that assessment would be ongoing for all programs and student services, with approximately 35 percent of college courses currently undergoing regular assessment, and improvements would be implemented into programs, courses, and services based on said assessment. In addition, the self study indicated that the results of the assessments would translate into better instruction and services, assist in the development of program reviews, and help determine allocation of additional resources to support programs or services.

The 2011 evaluation team found that the college partially meets the previous team’s recommendation. The 2011 team recommends that the college continue its efforts to establish systematic and ongoing assessment of SLOs, which are required for continuous quality improvement, and ensure that SLOs are intricately connected to program reviews. The college must continue its efforts to establish a culture in which SLOs can become a visible priority in all practices and structures college wide.

2005 Recommendation 3: (Leadership and Shared Governance) *“the team recommends that the college fully embrace its stated commitment to a student-centered environment by structuring a leadership development program for student involvement in the college shared governance process.”*

The self study stated that college has stabilized student government leadership. A new counselor was hired to dedicate a portion of his load to student leadership in order to make student government more cohesive and participatory. The Associated Students of Merced College (ASMC) were provided a list of all shared governance committees and encouraged to become active participants and were given the responsibility of assigning student participants. Students assigned to committees provided the student perspective as well as reporting committee actions to the ASMC.

The team of 2011 confirmed, through interviews with students and faculty, that the college has met this recommendation.

2005 Recommendation 4: (Integrated Planning, Evaluation, and Resource Allocation, and Decision-Making Process) *“the team recommends that the college develop an assessment plan to provide ongoing and systematic evaluation and integration of all institution-wide planning processes. The assessment should include the current planning processes, program reviews, data-driven decision-making and resource allocation processes, and their interrelationships.”*

The self study stated that the Merced College has developed a planning model that addresses the evaluation and integration of planning processes to improve functions. The

Master Planning Handbook describes how faculty, staff, and managers participate in planning and decision-making with each constituent group selecting a representative to serve on each master planning committee. The college's website provides information concerning institutional research data, program reviews, and list of master planning committees. The self study stated the college provides regular, systematic, and detailed program reviews, which are used to assist with college wide planning and resource allocation. A master planning calendar was provided to illustrate the relationship between planning, program review, decision making and resource allocation.

The team of 2011 found that the college partially meets this recommendation. The team perceives that the college has reached the level of development on the ACCJC's planning rubric. The college has established a culture that, given time and continued effort in this area, has the capacity to reach the rubric level of Sustainable Continuous Quality Improvement.

Findings and recommendations of the team:

After carefully reading the college's self study, examining evidence, interviewing personnel and students at the Merced College and Los Banos campuses as well as the Business Resource Center, and evaluating findings related to the ACCJC standards, the team offers the following recommendations and commendations:

With regard to the recommendations of the previous team:

1. **Program Review:** In order to meet the standard and ensure that progress continues toward achieving the Sustainable Continuous Quality Improvement level of the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges' rubric for program review, the team recommends that the college continue to apply the recommendations of the 1999 and 2005 comprehensive evaluation teams, fully implement its new program review process, and ensure that the process is ongoing, systematic and used to assess and improve student learning and achievement and that the results of program review are used to continually refine and improve program practices. (I.B.2, I.B.3, I.B.5, II.A, II.A.5, II.C.2, III.D.3)
2. **Student learning outcomes:** To meet the standard and ensure that the proficiency level of the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges' (ACCJC) rubric for student learning outcomes is reached by the fall 2012 deadline established by the ACCJC, the team recommends that the college continue its efforts to fully implement the recommendation of the previous team and ensure that student learning outcomes and assessment are ongoing, systematic and used for continuous quality improvement regardless of location or means of delivery; dialogue about student learning is ongoing, pervasive and robust; evaluation and fine tuning of organizational structures to support student learning is ongoing; student learning improvement is a visible priority in all practices and structures across the college; a timeline indicating how the college will meet the Commission's fall 2012 requirement of proficiency is created and published; and learning outcomes are specifically linked to program reviews. (II.A.1, II.A.1.a,c, II.A.2.a, h, II.C.2, III.A.1.c)
3. **Integrated Planning, Evaluation, and Resource Allocation, and Decision-Making Process:** In order to meet the standard and to ensure that the college progresses

toward the Sustainable Continuous Quality Improvement level of the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges' rubric for planning, the team recommends that the college continue to apply the recommendations of the 1999 and 2005 comprehensive evaluation teams and ensure that its established planning processes include ongoing and systematic evaluation and planning with clearly established timelines to refine its key processes and improve student learning. The team recommends that the college conduct dialogue about institutional effectiveness that is ongoing, robust and pervasive, continue collecting data, and ensure that analyses of the data are widely distributed and used throughout the institution, that there is ongoing review and adaptation of evaluation and planning processes; that there is a consistent and continuous commitment to improving student learning; and that educational effectiveness is a demonstrable priority in all planning structures and processes. (I.A.4, I.B.2, I.B.3, 4, II.A.2, III.A.2, III.A.6, III.B.2.b, III.C.2, III.D.1.a)

The team also has the following additional recommendations:

4. **Communication:** In order to meet this standard, the team recommends that the College improve communication by engaging in dialogue that is inclusive, respectful, intentional informed, and documented and about institutional quality and improvement. The dialogue should purposefully guide institutional change. This dialogue must include the use of the participatory governance process to develop and implement a plan for effective communication links so that information and recommendations are disseminated to all constituent groups. (I.A.4, I.B.1, I.B.2, I.B.3, I.B.4, I.B.5, I.B.6, I.B.7, III.A.4.c)
5. **Governing board members need to understand roles, responsibility; delegate authority for operating the college to the CEO; and, develop a program for ongoing board development and new member orientation:** In order to meet the standard, the team recommends that the Board model to the college its commitment to continuous improvement, develop and implement a written comprehensive Board development plan that includes, but does not rely primarily on travel and attendance at conferences, and specifically includes delegation of authority to the CEO (policy) without interference in the operation of the college, an examination of the participatory governance processes and the extent to which the Board's behavior supports those governance structures, accreditation standards for Board performance; and analysis of the governing board's 2010 self-evaluation and a plan for improvement. (IV.A.2.a, b; IV.A.3, IV.A.4, IV.A.5, IV.B.1.f, IV B.1.g, IV.B.1.i, IV.B.1.j)
6. **Governing board review its Code of Ethics and Develop a written Process for Sanctions:** In order to meet the standard, the team recommends that the governing board develop, adopt, and implement a sanction or progressive discipline process for dealing with Board behavior that violates their code of ethics and that trustees sign a statement acknowledging that violation of closed session confidentiality will result in sanctions. (IV.B.1.h)
7. **Review and/or update Mission Statement regularly:** In order to meet the standard, the team recommends that the college institutionalize a timeline/schedule for regular and participatory review of the college mission statement with a process for changing

the mission, vision and core values and beliefs when deemed appropriate through the review process. (I.A.1, I.A.2, I.A.3, I.A.4)

8. **Human Resources:** In order to meet the standard, the team recommends that the college develop and implement an organizational structure that includes a fully functional human resources division and develop, implement, and evaluate a Faculty and Staff Diversity Plan in order to adequately assess its record in employment equity and diversity consistent with its mission. The team recommends that processes for hiring classified and management staff be integrated with Institutional Planning. The College also needs to systematically assess the effective use of human resources and uses the results of the evaluation as the basis for improvement. (III.A.1.b, III.A.3, III.A.4.a-c, III.A.6.)

The team concluded that the governing board, administrators, faculty, managers, classified staff, and students to be overall hard working, creative, and optimistic. Team members were impressed and provided the following commendations:

Group commendations:

1. The team commends the college on its commitment to meeting the distinct and varied needs of its student population and the community within its wide service area by establishing and supporting the Los Banos Campus and the Business Resource Center.
2. The team commends the college on its foresight in building up unrestricted reserves that have served as a buffer for the district, its students, and employees during the state's economic downturn.
3. The team commends the college for success in developing a planning process that links to the budget allocation model.
4. The team commends the college for conducting a community charrette as part of its planning processes.
5. The team commends the college for including students in the participatory governance process.
6. The team commends the college for its efforts to increase technology and equipment.
7. The team commends the college's district-wide Staff Development Committee for its exemplary work.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

The team found Merced College to be in compliance with all eligibility requirements established by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges except Student Learning Achievement.

1. AUTHORITY

The team confirmed that Merced College is authorized or licensed to operate as an educational institution and to award degrees by an appropriate governmental organization as required by each of the jurisdictions or regions in which it operates. The college is accredited by the ACCJC, Western Association of Schools and Colleges and is a part of the California Community Colleges system.

2. MISSION

The team found that Merced College's mission statement needs to be reviewed annually. The self study indicated, "The mission statement originally was adopted on December 15, 1998, and updated on May 7, 2002. It was reviewed most recently on November 3, 2009. It will be reviewed again in the fall of 2010 as part of a strategic planning process." A review of minutes from Board of Trustees meetings showed that the mission was most recently reviewed in May 2010. The team recommends that the college review its mission statement annually to ensure relevancy and currency to the needs of students. In other words, annual review and approval of the mission statement will make sure the college remains committed to meeting the needs of students.

3. GOVERNING BOARD

The team found that the governing board remains responsible for the quality, integrity, and financial stability of the institution, thus ensuring that the institution's mission is being carried out. The governing board is responsible for ensuring that the college's financial resources are used to support a sound educational program. A seven member Board of Trustees is sufficient in size and composition to fulfill all board responsibilities.

The Board of Trustees is an independent policy-making body capable of reflecting constituent and public interests in board activities and decisions. A Conflict of Interest declaration is completed annually to ensure that governing board members are impartial. The team confirmed that current board members do not have any employment, family, ownership, or other personal financial interest in Merced College, which is a public institution. Information about governing board policies may be found in Board Policies and Administrative Procedures 2000 series, which is posted on the college's public website. Board Policy/Administrative Procedure 2710 and Administrative Procedure 2712 address conflict of interest.

4. CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Merced College has a chief executive officer (Superintendent/President) who is appointed by the Board of Trustees and holds the necessary authority to administer board policies. The chief executive officer is not a member of the Board of Trustees. The name, address, and educational information about the chief executive officer may be found in the college's catalog. The Superintendent/President's contract makes it clear that it is a full-time position.

5. ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITY

The team confirmed that the college has sufficient staff, with appropriate preparation and experience, to provide the administrative services needed to support its mission and purpose. The organizational structure may be found in the college's website, and the names and educational backgrounds of college administrators may be found in the 2009-2010 college catalog.

6. OPERATIONAL STATUS

Since 1967, Merced College has offered post-secondary education to students seeking to improve the quality of their lives and standard of living. Students are able to enroll in courses to obtain certificates, associate degrees, and/or transfer to universities. The team found that a copy of the college's current class schedule is published on the home page of the district's website, which is located at www.mccd.edu.

7. DEGREES

The team confirmed that a majority of students are enrolled in credit and non-credit courses offered as part of certificate and degree programs at Merced College. There are fewer students who attend not-for-credit or community services courses, which is evidence that Merced College offers programs that lead to degrees or certificates. The college catalog includes a list of the degrees, course requirements, and length of study for each program.

8. EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

The team confirmed that Merced College's principal degree programs are consistent with its mission, are based on widely-recognized higher education fields of study, and are of appropriate length and breadth. The team affirms that the college's level of quality and rigor are consistent with the degrees offered and culminate in identified student outcomes. The team found that because of fewer course offerings due to state budget reductions, students are taking longer to complete degree programs. The team confirmed that information describing programs, courses, curricular sequence, and locations of courses can be located in college's catalog.

9. ACADEMIC CREDIT

The team confirmed that Merced College awards academic credits in compliance with the statutory and system regulatory requirements of the California Community College's Chancellor's Office. The college follows the Chancellor's Office's requirements for the awarding of academic credit. The team confirmed that college provides information regarding the awarding of credit can be found in the college catalog and board policies. The college applies formulas required to calculate units of credit predicated by Title 5 Section 55002.5, which governs the California Community Colleges.

10. STUDENT LEARNING ACHIEVEMENT

Merced College has defined and published each program's expected student learning outcomes and achievement expectations. Assessment procedures are being implemented to regularly and systematically track students who have completed programs, no matter how or where offered. The team found that data regarding student learning outcomes can be reviewed in the college catalog and in departmental program reviews. Other outcome

data can be found on the college website in individual course descriptions and their student SLOs. However, the team found that the college needs to continue its efforts to become proficient in the implementation and assessment of SLOs at the degree, program, and course level.

11. GENERAL EDUCATION

The team confirmed that the college defined and incorporated into all of its degree programs a substantial component of general education to ensure breadth of knowledge and promote intellectual inquiry. The general education component included demonstrated competence in writing and computational skills and an introduction to some of the major areas of knowledge. General education contains comprehensive learning outcomes for the students after completion. Degree credits for general education programs are consistent with levels of quality and rigor appropriate to higher education. A list and description of the general education classes offered are found in the college catalog. The team confirmed that all classes offered by Merced College are approved the California Community College's Chancellor's Office in order to ensure rigor. The college lists all course outlines via its CurricUNET system.

12. ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Merced College's faculty and students are free to examine and test all knowledge appropriate to their discipline or area of major study as judged by the academic/educational community in general. Merced College maintains an atmosphere in which intellectual freedom and independence exist. The right to academic freedom can be found in Board Policy 4030.

13. FACULTY

The team confirmed that the college employs qualified full-time and part-time faculty members. There are a sufficient number of faculty members with the experience to support all of the institution's educational programs. A clear statement of faculty responsibilities is provided to all faculty members. A list of all full-time faculty members and their degrees can be found in the college catalog. Adjunct faculty records are kept in the Office of Human Resources. The current class schedule lists the faculty members who are assigned to each class, and the Merced College Faculty Association contract describes faculty responsibilities.

14. STUDENT SERVICES

The team confirmed that the college utilizes several means of communication to inform students about its student services, which support learning and development appropriate to the college's mission. The college catalog and website contain information about student services, including those for special populations. The college provides data describing student learning outcomes for Student Services programs that can be reviewed on the college's website.

15. ADMISSIONS

Merced College has adopted and follows admissions policies that are consistent with its mission and that specify the qualifications of students appropriate for its programs. The team confirmed that information about college admissions policies can be reviewed in the

college's catalog. The college provides potential students instructions on how to utilize the CCCApply online application tool.

16. INFORMATION AND LEARNING RESOURCES

The team confirmed that the college provides students with specific long-term access to sufficient information and learning resources and services to support its mission and instructional programs in every format and wherever they are offered.

17. FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Merced College makes public its financial documents to prove that there are adequate resources to support student learning programs and services. The team found budgetary and financial information available online and in the Office of Fiscal Services.

Budgetary information about the Merced College Foundation may be located in the Office of Fiscal Services. The team found that a majority of the college's funds are allocated by the State of California and managed through the California Community College's Chancellor's Office.

18. FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

The team confirmed that the college conducts annual audits and provides the reports to the Chancellor's Office and the local community. Each year, results of the independent audits are submitted to ACCJC along with annual reports. Audits are prepared by an outside certified public accountant, certified, and any exceptions were explained. Past, current, and proposed budgets can be found in the Office of Fiscal Services, along with audit reports and management letters. Financial aid reviews also can be reviewed in the Office of Fiscal Services. The team confirmed that the college does not participate in a student loan program.

19. INSTITUTIONAL PLANNING AND EVALUATION

The team confirmed that the college evaluates and provides public notification about how well it is meeting its goals and the methods employed to do such, including assessment of student learning outcomes. The team found evidence of the college's planning for improvement of institutional structures and processes, student achievement of educational goals, and student learning. Progress was assessed regarding achievement of stated goals. Decisions were made through an ongoing and systematic cycle of evaluation, integrated planning, resource allocation, implementation, and re-evaluation.

20. PUBLIC INFORMATION

The team confirmed that the college provides potential and current students with an annual catalog, which contains accurate and current regarding general information, requirements, and major policies. All public information specified by the Commission is listed in the college catalog.

21. RELATIONS WITH THE ACCREDITING COMMISSION

The team confirmed that Merced College provides assurance that it adheres to the eligibility requirements and accreditation standards and policies of ACCJC. The college defines its requirements as required by all accrediting agencies. The college

communicates any changes in its accredited status and agrees to disclose information required by the Commission to carry out its accrediting responsibilities.

The team confirmed that the college adheres to all ACCJC requests, directives, decisions, and policies. The college sustains its accreditation with other organizations. The Diagnostic Radiologic Technology program maintains accreditation with the Joint Review Committee on Radiologic Technology, the sonography program maintains its accreditation with the Joint Review Committee on Diagnostic Medical Sonography, and the Addiction Studies program maintains its accreditation with the California Association for Alcohol and Drug Educators.

Reports of the four standards and related findings, conclusions, evidence, and recommendations are as follows:

Standard I

Institutional Mission and Effectiveness

I.A Mission

General Observations:

The standard self reflection is complete and well organized, however, the study never states explicitly whether the standard was met or not. An added statement regarding the level of satisfaction of the standard would be helpful in the future.

“Students are our focus and we are known by their success” is the mission statement of the college. The college has also adopted a vision statement and core values and beliefs, which help to more fully declare the intentions and culture of the college. The team found Merced College to be very student centered, supportive of the community, and appreciative of diversity both on campus and in the community. (I.A)

The Merced Community College District Board of Trustees reviews and approves the mission, but currently no board policy exists that indicates a process for regular, timely, and inclusive review or change of the mission. The college has not changed the mission, vision statement, or core values and beliefs since 2002. The mission occupies a central position in the master planning process for the college; and the master planning process is well represented by all constituent groups, including students. One change that could influence the mission review process is the college’s recent effort to create a strategic plan, which will result in institutional goals. The strategic plan draft is not yet developed enough for the team to evaluate its long-term effect on the master planning process and its link to mission. (I.A)

Findings and Evidence:

The self study stated the college’s mission statement was originally approved in December 1998, with the most recent update and approval by the Merced Community College District Board of Trustees in May 2002. The mission statement is clearly a statement of purpose, but the lack of recent evaluation and review by the institution and Board of Trustees raises some concerns. The mission and vision statements appear to be well integrated into the planning process of the institution. The mission statement is certainly easy to remember, however does not have the “traditional format.” (I.A)

The Merced College mission statement does not actually address any educational goals other than general student success. The statement could be considered to be very broad based and a commitment to student success, but it is unclear whether this is equivalent to a commitment to achieving student learning. (I.A)

Additionally, the mission does not appear to speak to the intended student population or the diversity of that population. A more fluid mission allows for flexibility in reacting to changing student and community demographics, however, a clear statement about the intended student populations and student achievements helps to set the stage for difficult conversations about the levels of services that the college can support. (I.A)

The team discovered that page two of the college's current catalog includes a message from the superintendent/president in which it is stated that, "our mission is:

- To deliver programs that provide the first two years of university level instruction for students wishing to transfer to the university of their choice
- To provide terminal vocational and technical training programs which prepare students to take their place in the high skill workplace of the new millennium
- To provide lifelong learning and cultural enrichment opportunities for the community."

Though the message would meet the spirit and intent of the standard, to avoid confusion, the team suggests that the college take care to ensure that the only statement referred to as the "mission" is the one approved by the governing board. (I.A)

The college community has discussed the "relevance of the mission statement to student learning." The college identifies the Educational Master Plan Committee (EMPC) as the vehicle to link the mission to student learning. The EMPC has met to discuss the connection between mission and student learning as evidenced by EMPC minutes from fall 2007 and spring 2008. (I.A.1)

There appears to be a consistent theme of developing SLOs that align with the mission statement, vision statement, core values and beliefs, and goals. The SLOs have been developed and refined over time as indicated by the dates of the evidence cited for this area. The college indicated that the institutional outcomes were written from the mission statement, however, a review of Board of Trustees meeting minutes showed that the institutional outcomes appear to be based not only the mission statement, but also the vision statement and core values and beliefs. (I.A.1)

After a review of online resources, SLO assessments, and EMPC meeting minutes, the team found that the college's student learning programs and services are broad based and thorough, serve the needs of the diverse student population, and meet the range of community needs in the college's service area. The college offers varied educational programs and all programs are assessed and modified through program review, which suggests an alignment with the college's purposes, character, and student population. Additional evidence includes reaction to student surveys and non-instructional program reviews, including those in student services. (I.A.1)

According to the self study, the mission statement was approved by the Board of Trustees on December 15, 1998, and most recently reviewed on November 3, 2009. The team was able to verify such through review of board meeting minutes. The mission statement, vision statement, and core values and beliefs are published in multiple locations (e.g. catalog, main website, and other marketing materials). (I.A.2)

The team perceived that the mission statement is consistently used in the institution's governance and decision-making processes; however, it does not appear to be reviewed on a regular basis. The documentation provided to the team indicates a minor revision in the mission statement since its adoption in 1998. The self study stated, and the team confirmed through review of the board of trustees meeting minutes, that the mission was reviewed in 2002, November 2009, and May 2010. (I.A.3)

The self evaluation identified that no board policy exists to provide a framework for mission change. The planning agenda associated with this section suggested development of institutional goals by February 2011, but did not include the writing of a board policy to direct the process of mission review. The district has not changed the mission statement, vision statement, core values and beliefs since 2002. The study suggested that evidence of an effective mission evaluation process was the level of participation in review of the mission, but there was no evidence (including documents and interviews) that anyone other than governing board members officially reviewed and/or approved the mission, vision statement, or core values and beliefs. Although it appears that participatory governance has been infused in the decision-making processes of the institution, the lack of process for regularly reviewing the mission statement, vision statement, and core values and beliefs indicates a problem with meeting this standard. (I.A.3)

The self study states that the institution's mission is integral to institutional planning and decision making as all annual plans and program review documents must reflect the mission, vision statement, core beliefs and values, and institutional goals. The evidence should have reflected that college has conducted a full cycle of program review with the new annual planning process developed to better meet institutional planning and decision making processes. Some of the evidence provided for the mission driving program review, SLOs, and other achievement data included the Educational Master Planning Committee Handbook, program review website, program reviews on CurricUNET, and minutes of governing board meetings where the planning process was approved. The EMPC Handbook states that all departmental and institutional plans are expected to reflect the college's mission, vision statement, and core values and beliefs. (I.A.4)

The self study gave a planning agenda for strategic planning and institutional goals. The self study revealed that the master-planning process, and more recently the annual program review process, provides the opportunity for all constituents to make the mission statement, vision statement, and core values and beliefs central to planning and decision making. During planning and decision making, the mission statement is not utilized by itself, but is taken in conjunction with the vision statement, and core values and beliefs. (I.A.4)

Conclusions:

The college partially meets the standard. To fully satisfy standard I.A, the college needs to create and enact an inclusive and regular mission review and revision process. (I.A.3)

Taken by itself, the mission statement does not satisfy standard I.A requirements, however, whenever the mission is posted, either in print or online, it is accompanied by the vision statement, core values and beliefs, and philosophy. When taken as a whole, Merced College does communicate its broad educational purposes as well as intended student population. (I.A.1)

Although the college has implemented a six-year program review cycle and appears to be improving their planning as a result of including annual reviews, the college must sustain its efforts to ensure that planning and decision making is mission driven, ongoing, and systematic and includes clearly established timelines to refine its key processes and improve student learning. (I.A.4)

I.B. Improving Institutional Effectiveness

General Observations:

Regarding institutional effectiveness, the team found that the college makes conscious efforts to produce and support student learning, assess student learning, and to make changes to the student learning process as a result of assessment. Data from SLO assessment, student achievement, and student demographics are regularly utilized in the program review and the master planning process. Although the annual review process is relatively new, having only completed one cycle, the culture of using data to make decisions is established at the college.

Findings and Evidence:

The college offers a variety of opportunities for faculty, staff, and students to participate, understand, and internalize the purpose of dialogue for continuous improvement of student learning and institutional processes. The master planning and participatory governance committees create forums for dialogue connecting planning with the mission statement, vision statement, goals, and core values and beliefs. The institution's commitment to facilitating dialogue is demonstrated by release time for a faculty SLO coordinator for instruction as well as a faculty coordinator for Student Services program review. The team verified through review of online resources and meeting minutes, evidence of institutional dialogue included in constituent group meetings, such as Academic Senate, Curriculum Committee, Instructional Council, Career Technical Education group, and Student Personnel Executive Committee. The use of "charrettes" in fall 2010 to facilitate development of the strategic plan is also evidence of the collegial dialogue that occurs at the college and the college's faculty and staff development program provides another opportunity to improve skills and to discuss best practices for many constituents. (I.B.1)

At the level of student improvement (primarily programs), participants utilize the following data to discuss planning and recommendations for improvement: SLO assessment, student demographics, student achievement, and labor market demands. Now that the program review process is on an annual basis for instruction, and will soon be annual for student services and non-instructional areas, the college will be better positioned to react to information gleaned from the dialogue. (I.B.1)

A review of the college's program review, SLO, and EMPC websites confirmed that the college has completed one full cycle of the 6-year program review, but only the most recent cycle of program reviews directly linked planning to resource allocation. As a result of the analysis of the planning process, program review is now annual in the years between the comprehensive reviews. The self study identified that all program review products are available to the campus community on the intranet. This ensures that planning and resource allocation are transparent. (I.B.1)

The college sets goals and objectives that are consistent with its stated mission, vision, core values and beliefs, and goals. The college has a program review cycle and a master planning process with committee structures to support the college's institutional effectiveness and continuous improvement cycle. Research supports the process with data, and the Master Planning Handbook guides the process. (I.B.2)

The district evaluates the mission, vision, and core values and beliefs via institutional outcomes and assessment. The understanding of and commitment to goals are established through the program review/master planning process. The results of program review are available to all constituents on the intranet. (I.B.2)

The program areas (including the Board of Trustees) develop goals as a result of the assessment and reflection during the evaluation process. As evidence of closing the goal setting and implementation loop, the district referenced passage of two bonds that impact the implementation of facility master planning, Board goal planning, student access and success, technology, and teaching and learning. The team found evidence, including program reviews, Board of Trustees goals, and EMPC goals and resource allocation process, of broad and significant dialogue regarding institutional effectiveness and educational quality and improvement. (I.B.2)

Though the college has documented processes for encouraging dialogue and the dialogue is occurring in many instances, interviews with faculty, administrators, and staff contradicted the self study to some degree. The team found through its interviews that poor communication has become a serious issue. Employees believe that there is lack of mutual respect between certain senior administrators, faculty, managers, and classified staff, and the team suggests that this issue be addressed promptly. (I.A.2, I.B, I.B.2, I.B.4, I.B.5)

The team found evidence to support that the college has integrated planning that is explicitly linked to budget, such as the calendar identifying processes which are linked to the state budget cycle. Also, the team found evidence of systematic review and evaluation of SLOs with research generated data to support the assessment process. This systematic review and evaluation of SLOs will be considered ongoing if the college continues the process to improve student learning. (I.B.3)

Board of Trustees meeting materials provided proof that the district makes decisions in a systematic, ongoing cycle based on goals, evaluation, planning, resource allocation, implementation, and re-evaluation and online resources revealed that the data used in the planning process is both qualitative and quantitative. For example, during the previous program review cycle, the process did not coordinate directly with the state budget cycle. To remedy the situation, in December 2009, the Board approved a new process. Thus, the evidence of a culture of assessment and a practice of continuous improvement is well-established; however, the clear link to timely resource allocation data is new. The fact that the college made the change to include annual reviews and is developing a strategic plan is evidence of completing the cycle of evaluation for their planning process. (I.B.3)

The college has a Master Planning Handbook that informs the planning and decision-making process and includes the structure of the committees, how membership is defined, and the workgroups supporting the process. The participatory governance process provides that representatives of faculty, staff, students, and management are involved in the decision making process for the college. The team confirmed that the college has implemented a resource allocation model supporting the activities of the institution and receives the additional support of an active non-profit foundation, the Office of Grants and Institutional Research, a department of Economic and Workforce Development, and a community which voted for bond funds to support new educational facilities. (I.B.4)

The college has an inclusive process for planning and resource allocation set forth in its EMPC Handbook. Broad involvement is guaranteed through nomination procedures that constituent groups employ to populate the EMPC and other master planning or program review committees. AB1725 is helpful in guaranteeing faculty presence specifically. The previous comprehensive evaluation team's recommendation focused on greater inclusion of students, and the college has addressed the issue through an enhanced student governance program and the Associated Students of Merced College. A review of committee websites provided evidence that other ad hoc committees are also participatory and inclusive and either directly or indirectly influences the planning process. (I.B.4)

Although the governance process provides the opportunity for inclusion, it was made apparent to the team through interviews that many faculty and staff do not feel valued and welcome in the governance process. Of additional concern was faculty and staff perception of being disrespected and demeaned during governance meetings, which has resulted in a culture of fear to contribute openly during meetings. The team concluded that if faculty and staff do not feel open to share opinions that differ from the current practice, continued participation by faculty and staff on committees will become even more difficult. (I.B.4)

The community recently voted to pass local bond measures to support the building and remodeling of several buildings, including the Los Banos campus. The Merced College Bond website and the facilities strategic plan gave evidence of the community's inclusion in the planning process, for which the district should be commended. Additional evidence of community involvement includes the building of the new Allied Health Center via a donation procured by the Foundation and the arrangement of customized local employee training contracts through a cooperative relationship between the Economic and Workforce Development division and the Merced County Department of Workforce Investment. (I.B.4)

The team confirmed through reviewing evidence and interviews, that the college collects a variety of assessment data at all levels of planning and uses that data to improve institutional effectiveness and improve services to students. The college periodically participates in statewide and/or national surveys to assess student satisfaction. The college indicates in its self study and the team confirmed through a review of advisory committee minutes and SLO website that assessment is used to support student retention, success and persistence; this includes broad planning (placement score results) as well as specific planning at the course level (nursing competencies, capstone projects, common department exams). Also, the college uses data (in addition to FTES, retention, success, and persistence demographics) for enrollment management to ensure that the college is responding appropriately to student demand and need. (I.B.5)

After reviewing evidence and conducting interviews, the team found that the college makes relevant data accessible to campus users from the intranet. The college is planning to make selected data available to the public. The Technology and Institutional Research website is regularly updated and houses district reports and research projects. As evidenced by the website, the college also participates in national studies such as CCSSE and the American College Testing student opinion survey. This information helps to gauge student satisfaction with college services. The college also provides data/reports to the state and the federal government as appropriate. The college uses the intranet to communicate planning/assessment results effectively within the college community. External communications include the required CTE reporting mechanisms and reports on the college website regarding information for the

community. Also, the Public Affairs office utilizes social networking sites to distribute college information. (I.B.5)

The team found that the college recently created a formal process to ensure the effectiveness of ongoing planning and resource allocation, moving away from the informal process of evaluation it has been using. The first cycle of the process occurred in 2009-2010 through the master planning committees. The institution indicates evidence of its commitment to ongoing evaluation and planning through the model of past practices and the changes it has been making as it moves forward. Changes to program review also demonstrate the college's commitment to review the department-level evaluation process. (I.B.6)

The college recommended development of a template and schedule for annual review of college-wide planning processes based upon a "lessons learned approach". The college believes that this evaluation will provide a culture of assessment and continuous improvement for the planning process. Evaluation of the planning processes needs to be efficient, straightforward, and user-friendly. The changes made to program review and resource allocation are in themselves evidence of systematic review of effectiveness. The college has a history of basing changes in policies and practice on data analysis relative to goals from courses and programs to the institution. (I.B.6)

The team found that the college has assessed its evaluation process and has found that program reviews have proven to be an effective tool in providing evaluation. Results of the program review process have been used to improve instructional programs, student support services, library, administrative units and technology and research through resource allocations. Program review and assessment processes have been modified and revised over the past five years in an attempt to make them more responsive to the institution's mission, vision, core values and beliefs, and institutional goals and to promote student learning and increase institutional effectiveness. However, in order to meet the standard, the college needs to be able to show a consistent process with progress toward meeting the goal of sustainable continuous quality improvement. (I.B.7)

The college's evaluations of program review and assessment procedures have resulted in changes to processes, and instructional and non-instructional unit program reviews. For instance, the program review itself will be electronic from now on to make the process more user-friendly in response to feedback from previous review evaluations. (I.B.7)

The college cites the Board of Trustees' "funding handout" as evidence of improvements made from this planning process in: instruction and student support services, library, administrative units, and research and technology. However, the team found that the "funding handout" is not sufficient evidence to prove that the college has achieved the level of sustainable, continuous quality improvement set forth by the ACCJC's planning rubric. (I.B.7)

Conclusions:

The team found that college partially meets standard I.B. The college should immediately seek ways to improve communication between senior administrators, faculty, managers, and classified staff in order to foster mutual respect, which will lead to improved institutional effectiveness (I.B, I.B.2, I.B.3, I.B.4)

Given the work the college has done with the annual program review process, the college could meet the standard in time. Regarding the ACCJC rubrics for program review and planning, the

college is well beyond the awareness and development levels , and, based on the evidence related to the annual planning process, the college is working toward the proficiency level for planning and program review. The college has significant work to do to reach the sustainable continuous quality improvement level. The college has included on its planning agenda completion of the strategic plan to formalize the goal setting - prioritization/allocation process that had been in place previously. A draft of the strategic plan is now available. Based on the evidence, the college partially meets this section of the standard. In order to meet the standard, the college needs to show continuous and sustainable improvement with the new models in place (strategic plan and annual program review process) and continue to use and evaluate its annual planning process to validate changes in programs and resource allocation. In addition, in the self study, the college recommends a planning agenda to include monitoring the use of new program review software that will validate the effective link to resource allocation from program reviews. The college does not meet this section of the standard. In order to meet this standard, the college needs to follow through on the evaluation of the new program review software, and to continue to implement and evaluate the annual program review process. (I.B.1, I.B.2, I.B.3, I.B.4, I.B.5)

The planning agenda recommends a move of data to SharePoint, which the college believes will increase accessibility to the public. The self study planning agenda does not include the types of data to be moved or a timeline. The team suggests that the college make the narrative of program review, annual reviews, and course outlines accessible to the community served by the college and create a timeline as well as a specific list of included data/reports to increase public access to district data. (I.B.5)

The team suggests that the college develop a template for annual review of the college's planning process including a schedule for all to committees to perform and document the review. (I.B.6)

Standard I Recommendations:

- 1. Program Review:** In order to meet the standard and ensure that progress continues toward achieving the Sustainable Continuous Quality Improvement level of the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges' rubric for program review, the team recommends that the college continue to apply the recommendations of the 1999 and 2005 comprehensive evaluation teams, fully implement its new program review process, and ensure that the process is ongoing, systematic and used to assess and improve student learning and achievement and that the results of program review are used to continually refine and improve program practices (I.B.2, I.B.3, I.B.5, II.A, II.A.5, II.C.2, III.D.3).
- 3. Integrated Planning, Evaluation, and Resource Allocation, and Decision-Making Process:** In order to meet the standard and to ensure that the college progresses toward the Sustainable Continuous Quality Improvement level of the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges' rubric for planning, the team recommends that the college continue to apply the recommendations of the 1999 and 2005 comprehensive evaluation teams and ensure that its established planning processes include ongoing and systematic evaluation and planning with clearly established timelines to refine its key processes and improve student learning. The team recommends that the college conduct dialogue about institutional effectiveness that is ongoing, robust and pervasive, ensure that data and analyses are widely

distributed and used throughout the institution, that there is ongoing review and adaptation of evaluation and planning processes; that there is a consistent and continuous commitment to improving student learning; and that educational effectiveness is a demonstrable priority in all planning structures and processes. (I.A.4, I.B.2, I.B.3, 4, II.A.2, III.A.2, III.A.6, III.B.2.b, III.C.2, III.D.1.a)

- 4. Communication** In order to meet this standard, the team recommends that the College improve communication by engaging in dialogue that is inclusive, respectful, intentional informed, and documented and about institutional quality and improvement. The dialogue should purposefully guide institutional change. This dialogue must include the use of the participatory governance process to develop and implement a plan for effective communication links so that information and recommendations are disseminated to all constituent groups. (I.A.4, I.B.1, I.B.2, I.B.3, I.B.4, I.B.5, I.B.6, I.B.7., III.A.4.c)
- 7. Review and/or update Mission Statement regularly** In order to meet the standard, the team recommends that the college institutionalize a timeline/schedule for regular and participatory review of the college mission statement with a process for changing the mission, vision and core values and beliefs when deemed appropriate through the review process. (I.A.1, I.A.2, I.A.3, I.A.4)

STANDARD II

Student Learning Programs and Services

II.A Instructional Programs

General Observations:

The self study stated that the college offers high quality instructional programs in transfer, basic skills, and non-credit areas. The college offers courses in a variety of ways and in several locations to satisfy students' academic and support services needs in the diverse region. Programs and services are offered at three main sites, Merced College, Business Resource Center (City of Merced), and Los Banos Campus (City of Los Banos), as well as several high school and community locations. The three main educational sites provide integrated programs and support services to ensure that students have equitable access to courses, services, and high caliber faculty. (II.A.1)

Since the last comprehensive accreditation visit of 2005, the college has made significant progress. After reading the self study, reviewing evidence, and conducting interviews with administrators and faculty, the team found that the college offers a broad range of programs, courses, and services to meet its student population. Programs and courses include transfer, basic skills, English as a second language, workforce development, and personal development. The team found that the college has 110 students enrolled in a vibrant international studies program.

Courses are scheduled at least five days a week, in morning, afternoon, and evening time. Full learning resources, including supplemental instruction, and library services are provided during these time frames except at the Los Banos Center, however, the college is in the process of employing a full-time Librarian at the Los Banos Center to ensure adequate library services. A block time scheduling plan has recently been implemented to allow students to enroll in courses without overlapping time frames and courses are offered via a variety of delivery systems, including short-term, online, online hybrid, and learning communities. Lecture, laboratory, lecture/laboratory, and performance activity are the primary methods of instruction provided, and the college has implemented a well known assessment tool called Accuplacer, which is used by many community colleges to assess learning needs of entering students. (II.A.1.a, II.A.1.b, II.C.1)

After reviewing evidence and interviews, the team was able to confirm that the college's Teaching and Learning Academy, which is a professional development program, has helped new faculty members develop and implement teaching strategies for those students with varied learning abilities. The program provides new faculty with strategies for identifying different learning styles, information competency, syllabus preparation, grading, and other relevant topics tailored to meet students' varied learning abilities. (II.A.1.a)

In March 2009, the Accrediting Commission approved Merced College's substantive change proposal to offer associate degree breadth requirements and CSU breadth requirements at more than 50 percent distance education. The Distance Education Committee, which is a sub-committee of the Curriculum Committee, oversees faculty training and ensures course equivalency to on-ground courses. The college uses Blackboard's course management system and Pearson's Course Compass management

system to deliver course content, and faculty teaching distance education courses are required by the college to be trained in the course management system. Course quality is overseen by the curriculum committee which is a faculty body with three voting deans and one voting student representative. Distance education faculty are supported by three full-time classified support staff. One works principally with faculty, another maintains the course management system, and the third provides student support. Technical support is offered from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Thursday and from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. on Fridays.

The downtown Business Resource Center focuses on the needs of local businesses and employers seeking workforce training opportunities. Community services (not-for-credit fee base) courses and programs along with non-credit English (ESL) and math courses are offered at this site as well as a few career technical programs. (II.A.1)

The college's effort to balance the offering of transfer courses with career technical education courses is impressive. Prior to establishing a new degree or certificate, a job analysis is conducted to validate a need for the program. Also noteworthy, the team found that the college is particularly sensitive to the business sector in the area. The team found college programs and services offered at the new downtown Business Resource Center indicative of this sensitivity and noted that the college is cognizant of its role in the community of supporting, sustaining, and working within the local economy. (II.A.1.a)

The team conducted two visits to the downtown Business Resource Center. The first visit was conducted during the pre-visit by the chair and team assistant and second time during the comprehensive evaluation visit. Visits to the downtown Business Resource Center and the Los Banos campus confirmed the outreach commitment of the college. These facilities were outstanding, fully equipped with the latest in educational technology and enthusiastic faculty to match. Students are surveyed at the downtown Business Center to assess their learning needs and assessed on acceptance into the college for their math and English language skills and then placed in courses appropriate to their skill level.

Since the last self study, the college has worked extensively on full integration of student learning outcomes and program reviews into the curriculum and planning processes of the college. The team found that the college has achieved substantial progress on the implementation of SLOs throughout the institution. Slightly less than a full-time faculty load has been committed to increase implementation of SLOs. The CurricUNET program that was implemented about a year ago requires the input of student learning outcomes, and the outcomes are linked with those outcomes the next level up in the organizational ladder. Student learning outcomes are included in course outlines and linked to program and institutional SLOs. The team confirmed that since 2010 the college assesses SLOs at the course level twice every five years. However, the team found that the college has implemented SLOs, but SLOs are not used to assign final grades. (II.A.1.c)

The curriculum committee is the body responsible for overseeing the quality of courses. It is comprised principally of faculty, but also includes three deans and a student

representative. The originating faculty member determines the student learning outcomes for the course s/he is revising or creating.

To ensure that SLOs and competencies are identified for career technical educational programs, the college monitors state licensing requirements and utilizes advisory committees to identify and to establish relevant job skills to be learned by students. Advisory committee meetings are being held with appropriate frequency for career technical programs and include industry partners from throughout the county in the given field. Career technical programs evaluate their programs on a regular basis and make modifications as needed.

The self study revealed and the team confirmed that the college's rate of transfer to four-year institutions is about 2.5 percent and has been for about the past ten years. The number of students obtaining degrees has shown a decline in the three years of reported data with the most recent year being 2008/2009. Out of 21,000 students that year, the self study reported that 386 received degrees and 93 certificates. (II.A.1)

Findings and Evidence:

While students are being prepared for transfer, the vast majority are either not transferring or the data on transfer is not being captured accurately. The number of students obtaining degrees is quite low given the total number of students enrolled in the college. An examination of course outlines, program descriptions, and faculty qualifications all suggest that the college offers quality instructional programs for transfer and in career technical education, but the student achievement data is not reflective of high quality programs. Course outlines of record also provide evidence that students are being taught with a variety of teaching strategies and are being assessed in multiple ways. Information on student achievement is available for the public on a website maintained by the college's Information Technology Services Department, but the information is approximately three years old. It is not clear to the team on how easy it would be for an average citizen to access or obtain this information, however, a knowledgeable person could do so. (II.A, II.A.2.d, II.A.6.c)

After reviewing evidence and conducting interviews, the team learned that in the college's English and math basic skills programs, students are completing programs in higher numbers than transfer and career technical programs. In basic skills programs, the courses are shorter time wise, are open entry/open exit, and students progress at their own pace. Additionally, basic skills faculty are collecting and analyzing data to improve their programs. Through interviews with employees, the team found that the data provided in the self study might not accurately reflect the true situation. In contrast to the data reported in the self study, data obtained by the team showed that certificates and licenses awarded during the 2009/2010 academic year totaled about one hundred certificates in the allied health field alone. Through interviews, the team uncovered two issues that negatively impacted certificates awarded. First, students must apply for certificates. The system does not automatically award certificates if the student does not take action. Second, the certificate programs are often more comprehensive than students need. Departmental analyses have shown that students often obtain jobs prior to completion of program. (II.A)

Documentation obtained by the team revealed that pass rates for certification and licensure in allied health programs averages about 90 percent. Interviews conducted by the team provided anecdotal evidence that students meet employment and industry standards upon completion of the Merced College programs. Employers regularly contact CTE faculty leads for recruitment of potential employees with needed skills. Also, several of the CTE programs, especially in the computer networking area, incorporate industry standard certification in the coursework that students complete. Other CTE programs, such as those in automotive repair, are developed according to industry standards to prepare students for the exam given by industry. (II.A.5)

The team found that faculty and deans are engaged in dialogue regarding program completion and transfer rates. Through interviews with employees, the team discovered that there are concerns about students following their Merced College experience. The team found that the college is in the process of resequencing their basic skills courses to more effectively meet student needs. The most basic courses are being moved to non-credit since the open access aspect of non-credit allows students to progress at their own pace. In basic skills, the team learned that the college has recognized that even within a level some students need more time to acquire the skills to progress to the next level. Multiple course options are being developed to allow students to select the modality most effective for them. One example is the linking of courses in learning communities to reinforce skills across areas, for example reading with writing and basic math with writing. The development of certificate programs at the introductory, intermediate and advanced levels in career technical programs are an example of student achievement driving the process of how certificates are awarded. (II.A.2.c, II.A.2.i)

After reviewing documents and conducting interviews with employees, the team found that student achievement in similar courses and programs at the Business Resource Center and Los Banos Campus compared to the main campus resulted in the conclusion that little is done to validate that students are succeeding at similar rates. The exception is for basic skills (developmental) courses. Students use computer programs throughout these courses and take tests, the data of which are recorded and will be compared across all the developmental courses taught. However, the team found that the college performs an extraordinary job of reaching out to meet the diversity of educational needs of the community and should be commended for its outreach and support of the downtown Business Resource Center and Los Banos Campus as well as the programs offered at the facilities. (II.A.1)

The team verified that the integrity of courses at the various sites is maintained through the curriculum process, through which all courses are approved regardless of location. Additionally, the team found that faculty at all locations met established minimum qualifications, and in this way the quality of faculty is maintained. (II.A.1)

The team confirmed that the college has put forth a great deal of effort in developing, implementing, and assessing SLOs as well as applying findings to improve instruction and student learning. However, after reviewing evidence and conducting interviews with faculty and administrators, the team determined that the college's use of SLOs is a work in progress. Disciplines and programs are in the process of assessing student achievement for course, program, certificate, and degree level student learning outcomes. Only a few programs have completed the cycle of using the data to make improvements

in their courses and programs. Some programs, such as basic skills, have been using learning outcomes for some time and have examined data to improve their teaching strategies. The college is to be applauded for the extensive work that has been put into SLOs and for progressing a long way in the past six years. The proficiency level of the ACCJC student learning outcomes rubric has not yet been reached, but the team believes that the college has the capacity and commitment to reach the required level within the timeframe established by the ACCJC. (II.A.1.a, II.A.1.c)

The team conducted an examination of online courses, which confirmed that courses offered via distance education met the same academic standard as courses offered on-campus. Courses to be offered via distance education are examined in the curriculum committee for appropriate student-instructor contact, assignments, and assessment before they are approved. There were not any data comparing the equivalency of student learning via distance education versus on-campus. Inquiry into services available to students enrolled in distance education courses elicited information that in the area of library services much is being done to support online students. For example, a document has been prepared that outlines the library holdings and services available online, web-based databases and online periodicals and books have been purchased, and the college recently changed the source of funding for online resources from one-time library funds to ongoing general fund expenses. (II.A.1.b, II.A.2)

On the Merced College campus, the former Open Computer Lab has been converted into Study Central. The team found that the new location for this lab is significantly smaller than the former location, with only 20 or so computers available to students. An additional 76 computers are available to students in the library for two hour blocks of time, and a walk through the library confirmed that all computers were in use. However, the team discovered that none of the library computers can be used by students enrolled in distance education courses, a use which has been deemed inappropriate for library computers and is precluded by the lack of appropriate software installed on the computers. (II.A.2)

The team found that Merced College's distance education courses fill a need for students with erratic schedules, but because of the demographics of the student population, a significant number of students do not possess a computer or have Internet access. A number of students enroll in online courses anticipating use of computers on campus, but given the limited number of computers available in the Open Computer Lab, access is very limited. These students are having difficulty in succeeding in their courses. There is a need for computer access on campus that is currently not being met. The college is expanding technologically more rapidly than it can support. Through interviews and a review of evidence, the team determined that there is a need for better planning and communication between instruction and support. In addition, the support staff has not increased in several years despite the fact that the number of distance education offerings has more than doubled in that time. The team uncovered that the distance education staff could not provide student support at the level that it is needed the first two weeks of classes. For example, students are forced to leave messages that go unanswered for up to one week. The team commends the college's progress in increasing the use of technology, but suggests that the college review on-campus access and support. (II.A.2)

Through interviews, the team confirmed that the college maintains a high quality International Student Program, and the reduction in the number of international students over the last term was attributed to the economy. About 75 percent of the students are from Japan and a majority of the rest from Southeast Asia. An outside contractor assists with transportation for the students and arranges home stays in town for them, while the Director works with the students to maintain their F1 status. The team found that meetings with students are held at least once per month, and students are provided adequate counseling to guide them into appropriate student services as needed. No data is collected comparing the achievement of the international students to resident students because the international students “do much better.” However, data has been collected comparing the international students to each other. The data suggests that international students involved in athletics have higher achievements than those who did not participate in such. (II.A.2)

Through examination of evidence and interviews, the team found that the college is doing a good job of offering a balance of programs and services to students despite the budgetary cuts. Through interviews, the team confirmed that even with budget reductions, the college has been able to maintain a variety of services to students, including tutoring, counseling, and academic support. Units of credit are in line with generally accepted norms in higher education. (II.A.2, II.A.2.h)

In fall 2009, the college began preparing to migrate from a paper-based curriculum process to a web-based process using an identical program to the one used by the State Chancellor’s office. Implementation of CurricUNET was fall 2010. Interviews conducted by the team revealed a mixed acceptance from faculty members, with some embracing the ease of data entry and some finding the system user unfriendly. The team confirmed that all course and program updates and changes are now supported through CurricUNET. Through interviews, the team found that faculty were now spending more time reviewing the courses as a result of the ease that CurricUNET provides. As a result of the increased review, the curriculum process is being changed to include a tech review intended to reduce the degree of technical discussion occurring in curriculum committee meetings. A concern that emerged from interviews with team members is that the courses that were input by CurricUNET were never validated for accuracy. The team learned that mistakes are being handled as they are discovered, however, over time mistakes that have not been discovered will become a part of the course. (II.A.2)

The team found that courses are reviewed by the curriculum committee at a minimum once every six years (two years for career technical courses), and more frequently if a change is requested by discipline faculty. All course reviews and changes are initiated via CurricUNET and only come to the Curriculum Committee from that vehicle. All courses and programs are evaluated. A number of courses and programs, but not all, have been through two or even three cycles of the required iterative process of establishing the SLO, implementing the SLO, assessing the SLO, evaluating the SLO assessment data, and making modification to the teaching/learning strategy or the SLO. The team found that the more thoroughly the college embraces and integrates SLOs into curriculum and programs, the more SLOs are driving curriculum development. The college’s efforts to resequencing English and math basic skills courses is an example of student learning outcomes driving curriculum changes. Syllabi are expected to contain

SLOs, and the team found that the college is ensuring that faculty report to administrators that they are distributing course syllabi to students. Through interviews, the team was to confirm, that faculty are adhering to designated course content and objectives. (II.A.2.a, II.A.2.e, II.A.2.h, II.A.2.i, II.A.6)

Through interviews and reviewing evidence, the team was able to confirm that departmental examinations are given in very few disciplines. However, the developmental English discipline is using standardized assessments to validate student learning outcomes for the first time. Data was examined after the fall term to improve the spring course, and the team was able to confirm through interviews that the college will conduct a more thorough examination of the data after the completion of the full academic year. (II.A.2.g.)

The team confirmed that about six years ago, the college initiated a plan to undertake a comprehensive review of all programs every six years. Beginning this academic year, the college will commence a review all programs annually with a comprehensive review to take place every five years. Both annual and comprehensive reviews include documentation of needs and future plans, as well as SLO analysis. Documentation is forwarded to the Instructional Program Review Committee via the CurricUNET Program Review Module. The team confirmed that the college will be able to identify and address program resource needs more quickly and with greater transparency through this process and more effectively link student learning outcomes a various institutional levels. (II.A.2.a, II.A.2.e, II.A.2.f)

The team found that career technical courses and programs rely on industry members of their advisory committees to maintain currency in the field. This approval process affirms the college's efforts to identify appropriate course content and sequencing, and to develop certifications of value to the student and employer. As a result of contacts with industry partners, students are placed in jobs after completion of training. Additionally, industry partners have been able to provide career technical programs with some funding to assist in purchasing needed materials in this time of fiscal restraint. In agricultural mechanization, the team was able to confirm that students were not completing the program. Although classes were full, matriculation was low. Examination of requirements for certification led to the conclusion that the number of courses was more than students needed for job placement. Students were obtaining jobs prior to completing the courses needed for certification. As a result, the college developed and approved multiple certificates at introductory, intermediate, and advanced levels. Through interviews, the team found that students were able to enroll into a few courses, obtain a certificate, find gainful employment, and then return to the program at a later time to improve and build additional skills with more advanced courses. (II.A.2.b)

Through interviews with employees, the team was able to confirm that the college is addressing the learning impediments of disabled students, and tutoring services are available for students that learn better with additional repetition and explanation. The Disabled Student Services center works with faculty to address accommodations and offers workshops to educate faculty on working with disabled students. Recently, the Academic Senate approved the requirement that all syllabi include a statement that accommodation is available for students with disabilities. (II.A.2.d)

Interviews provided evidence to the team that the recent reorganization of the college has resulted in one-person departments being left without adequate representation under the current process. The college states that because these disciplines are not considered programs, they do not submit a program plan and as a result are left out of the resource allocation process. The team found that the Academic Senate will be revisiting the definition of a program to make the process inclusive of all disciplines. (II.A.2.f)

The team verified that general education course requirements are clearly articulated in the catalog along with the philosophy of general education in each of the required areas. The Merced College Catalog clearly articulates the general education philosophy and requirements. General education requires courses in language and rationality, natural sciences, humanities, social and behavioral sciences, and lifelong understanding and self-development. Oral and written communication, information competency, computer literacy, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis/logical thinking, and the ability to acquire knowledge through a variety of means are being addressed in the areas of breadth in the general education requirements. After reviewing documents and conducting interviews, the team found that the aforementioned skills have not been reviewed for the allowable courses for some time. The college must review all courses to ensure that these specific skills are being addressed at some point in the future. The team found that data for how well students are achieving the general education outcomes and applying the skills to future endeavors is unavailable. Also, the college's catalog identifies the areas of focus for all degrees offered by the institution, which the team confirmed through an examination of academic programs. (II.A.3, II.A.3.a, II.A.3.b, II.A.4)

The self study states that the college's institutional SLOs map to ethical principles and that faculty are free to incorporate these principles into their courses as they see fit. The team conducted an examination of course outlines and found that such principles are being addressed in a variety of ways in various courses. The college hosts a variety of events for students and the community related to the respect for cultural diversity, historical and aesthetic sensitivity (e.g. the Hartsfest focusing on arts and the humanities, and the Harvest to Table event hosted by the Agricultural Sciences Department). In addition, the team found that college's library had recently exhibited information regarding women of color and disabled women who were significant influences in their time. (II.A.3.c)

Information about courses and programs, including descriptions of courses, course requirements, and institutional SLOs, is advertised in a published catalog, schedule of classes, and on the college website. The team found that the college is expanding its presence on electronic media. In addition to the website and new portal, the college advertises programs on Facebook and a blog site. Additionally, the career technical programs are working together on a website dedicated to information on career technical programs with links to careers in a variety of fields. Information available in the catalog, on the website, and in brochures that was examined appears to be accurate and consistent. Review of the information occurs when it is due to be republished. (II.A.6, II.A.6.c)

The team confirmed through an examination of evidence and interviews that the college has articulation agreements in place with four-year institutions, is developing agreement with local secondary schools, and appropriately accepts credits from other institutions.

The college's Articulation Officer is working with secondary schools to develop articulation agreements for career technical and ROP programs, so that secondary students can seamlessly move into Merced College programs. (II.A.6.a)

The college recently adopted a program discontinuance policy that was then approved by the Board of Trustees. This policy addresses policy and procedures, and the discussion that must ensue, in the event that a program is discontinued. Business faculty made the decision in 2008 to close the Paralegal program due to low student enrollment and lack of local employment. The entry level courses were eliminated first to preclude new students from entering the program. With each succeeding year, the next level of courses is eliminated. This allows students currently in the program to complete it. (II.A.6.b)

The district/college has policies on academic freedom, included in the Faculty Handbook, and student academic honesty, included in the catalog. The team found that the college is committed to academic honesty and integrity. The Academic Senate adopted an ethics statement for faculty in 2009. Faculty adherence to the adopted ethics statement is at the discretion of the faculty member. Faculty that deviate significantly from the ethics statement are identified through student evaluations. The team found that this was not a significant issue. The student academic honest policy makes clear the expectations for student behavior and the consequences for violation of the policy. (II.A.7.a, II.A.7.b)

Standards II.A.7.c and II.A.8 are not applicable to Merced College.

Conclusions:

The college partially meets the Standard. (II.A)

The team suggests that the college continue its efforts to improve low rates of completion to more effectively meet students' learning needs and assess why so few students are receiving degrees and certificates, the low rate of transfer, and what students are doing with the education that they receive from the college. (II.A.2.c.)

Using the ACCJC rubric for student learning outcomes, the team places the college at the developmental level of implementation. Merced College has shown its commitment to the continued development and assessment of student learning outcomes through the resources supporting the process, and administrators and faculty are fully engaged in student learning outcomes development, implementation, and assessment. In order to reach the proficiency level of the ACCJC rubric, which is required of all community colleges by fall 2012, the college needs to continue to work on implementing SLOs, collecting and analyzing the data, and using the data to improve teaching student learning. In addition, the team suggests that the college continue to integrate evaluation and planning to improve student learning. (II.A.1.a, II.A.1.c, II.A.2.a, II.A.2.b, II.A.2.e, II.A.2.f, II.A.2.h)

Validation of courses input by CurricUNET is of concern to the team and should be addressed by the college. Given the increase in technology use required for students, the team suggests that the college plan for student demand for on-campus computers. (II.A.2)

II.B. Student Support Services

General Observations:

The college reports in its self study that the purpose of its network of student support services at both the Merced and Los Banos campuses is to augment the academic needs of a diverse student body and support the mission of the institution which is “Students are our focus and we are known by their success.” (II.B.1)

Merced College uses SLOs, student surveys, program review, and employee input to identify student needs and to measure the access, effectiveness, student progress, learning, and success of student support services. (II.B.4)

Student services are under the administrative leadership of the Vice President of Student Personnel Services, two deans, and several managers who rely upon faculty and staff to successfully implement the college’s many services to students. There are various college committees (Student Success, Student Personnel Executive, Student Services Administrative Managers) set up to address and support student learning and achievement. (II.B.3)

Evaluation of student support services is achieved through the program review processes, and the self study indicates that SLOs, faculty and staff input, student surveys are among the measures used to improve the effectiveness of services.

The college’s commitment to the development, implementation, and evaluation of student services SLOs and to its new program review process is evident with the appointment of a student services SLO coordinator and program review coordinator. The coordinator has helped student services programs to develop and evaluate SLOs and complete the first cycle of the program review process. Student Services programs utilize a three-year planning document that reports the evaluation of current SLOs and changes made based on previous SLOs. (II.B.4)

In the self study, the resource allocation process for student services is described as one in which the programs make resource requests through the Student Master Planning Committee, which, in turn, evaluates requests based on SLO assessments and program review recommendations and submits the requests to the EMPC.

Findings and Evidence

After reviewing evidence and interviews, the team found that Merced College adheres to its mission and provides depth and breadth of services on campus, off-site at the centers, and online to students in for credit, not for credit, and community service programs to meet the needs of the community it serves. (II.B.1)

The college catalog (printed and online) provides students and other constituents with sufficient information to apply, register, graduate, and seek and utilize instructional and student support services. The catalog provides general information: about the college; its policies, regulations, and procedures; as well as information regarding associate degrees and certificate programs. Students indicated that the catalog was easy to use, especially if they had attended an in-person orientation session, and a small survey of students reviewed by the team indicated that students know where to find information on the college’s policies, regulations, and procedures. The 2009–2010 Merced College catalog

spells out (pages 18 – 26) the processes to be followed in order to gain admission to the college, the manner in which students may navigate the process to the completion of their educational goals, as well as information regarding residency and tuition, attendance and grading, obtaining college credit, and the repercussions of probation and dismissal. General information in the 2009 – 2010 catalogs is written in the languages of the three dominant languages spoken on campus: English, Spanish, and Hmong. Information is also available on Academic Freedom, Academic Honesty, Non-discrimination, Transfer, Grievances and Complaints, Student Conduct, Sexual Harassment, and other relevant policies, regulations, and procedures. (II.B.2.a, II.B.2.b, II.B.2.c)

The team confirmed that the all policies, procedures, and regulations can be found at the college's website two clicks away from the home page, and the college offers students many online services (e.g. application to all potential students, proctored testing at feeder high schools, e-counseling, blackboard assistance, and application for Financial Aid [FAFSA]). Students can avail themselves of multiple services provided they have Internet access. A full array of services is available to those without internet access at the Merced College and Los Banos campuses. (II.B.2.d, II.B.3.a)

After conducting interviews and reviewing evidence, the team confirmed that the college has hosted a variety of campus presentations and events and created two committees, the Campus Change Network and the Diversity Committee, to enhance student understanding and appreciation of a variety of cultures. Additionally, the college uses Learning Communities to encourage personal and civic responsibility amongst students. The college assessed students in a 2006 satisfaction survey on items relating to civic responsibility, personal development, and cultural programs and services. (II.B.3.b, II.B.3.d)

The college offers courses in Ethnic Studies, Anthropology, Intercultural Relations, Foreign Languages, Social and Behavioral Sciences, and Child Development for enrichment in the classroom; provides opportunities to participate in student services (Puente, EOPS/CARE, DSPP, International Student Services Program, Educational Excellence for Latinos, Fotonovelas, and California Mini-Corps; and encourages active participation in student (Black Student Union, Hmong Club, Muslim Student Association, and Students for Social Justice just to name a few) clubs and student government. The evidence reviewed provided verification to the team that the college offers a variety of opportunities for students to understand and appreciate diversity both inside and outside of the classroom. (II.B.3.d)

The team confirmed that the college has 21 full-time and four part-time counselors at the main campus and 1.5 full time equivalent counselors at the Los Banos site to serve students in general counseling. An additional 5.5 counselors serve students in EOPS, DSS, and CalWORKs programs. During peak times, students meet with counselors on a walk-in basis, whereas in non-peak times students can make 30-minute appointments. Data from ACT Student Opinion surveys (assessing the levels of student satisfaction with Academic Advising/Course, Personal Counseling Services, Vocational Guidance / Career Planning Services) and the CCSSE (assessing satisfaction, importance, and frequency of use for academic advising/planning and career counseling) were used to evaluate the effectiveness of the counseling services offered to students. The results from 1998, 2002,

2006 surveys indicate that students have high levels of satisfaction with counseling services and rate the services as somewhat to very important. (II.B.3.c)

The college does not use any form of assessment to evaluate admission to the college. Merced College uses Accuplacer, Accuplacer ESL Levels of English Proficiency (LOEPS), and the Combined English Language Skills Assessment (CELSA) for placement of students into English and Math courses. The California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office works with the publisher of the placement instruments to assess the level of unintentional bias in the assessments. The cut-off scores for English and math placement are created and validated by college faculty and institutional research. (II.B.3.e)

Paper copies of Admissions and Records files are scanned and stored in Image Now. Financial Aid, EOPS/CARE, and CalWORKs records locked in file cabinets overnight. Merced College has moved many of their student services processes online such as application to the college, course registration, and application for financial aid. (II.B.3.f)

The team confirmed that the college's Student Support Services relies upon program reviews, student surveys, and student learning outcomes to assure that the college is meeting the needs of the students. Student Services has been using program review since 2007 with a large portion of the reviews conducted in 2010. SLOs within the student services area have been in use since 2006 with a requirement to include the SLO and findings in the annual program review. Examples of SLO assessment outcomes used in program reviews were available in the Merced College portal. Documents were provided to show the linkage between program review, the committee planning process, and resource allocations over a two-year period. (II.B.4)

The instructional area has indicated that they have not created and assessed SLOs for all courses and programs. A timeline was created to show work on SLOs but does not show how or when the college will meet the ACCJC's 2012 requirement to be at the proficiency level of the ACCJC SLO rubric. (II.B.4)

Conclusions

The team found that the college meets this standard.

II.C. Library and Learning Support Services

General Observations:

The college reported in its self study that the Merced College Library, which is part of the Learning Resources Center (LRC), has developed a mission “to support the instructional processes and institutional student learning outcomes at Merced College by providing resources and services to the students, professors, and staff of the institution.” (II.C)

Since the college’s last evaluation visit in 2005, the LRC was placed under the leadership of the Vice President of Technology and Institutional Research, the library added of a full-time faculty librarian, and both the Merced and Los Banos campus libraries moved into new and larger facilities. With the addition of the full-time faculty librarian in 2009-2010 the college was able to increase the accessibility and usability of electronic resources by students and faculty, provide outreach to faculty, increase the library web presence using social networking applications such as Facebook, Flickr, and Twitter, and expand services to the Los Banos Campus. The new library building at Merced College provides students 12 study rooms, two meeting rooms, a media viewing room, and computer stations, and the new Los Banos Campus library includes a meeting room and computer room. (II.C)

The self study reports that because of budget constraints and because of the accessibility and usefulness of online periodicals, no additions have been made to the print periodicals collection in several years. In addition, the college reports that the average age of books in the non-fiction collection is 21 years old, the average age of books in the fiction collection is 29 years old, and current funding levels for the book collection allow for updating a small portion of the reference and circulating collections every year, but not for replacement of items that are checked out and not returned. (II.C.1, II.C.1.c)

Findings and Evidence:

The team found that data supporting the need for collections is not readily available, and it is difficult to evaluate the actual depth of collections. The team suggests that the institution work more collaboratively on resources to enhance currency, depth, and support services. Through examination of documents and interviews, the team found that the library is constrained by existing resource allocations. For example, summer offerings will have 50 percent support services and access compared to 70-80 percent in fall/spring. The library is short on resources in collections, computers, and staff to provide for adequate support. The team learned through interviews that students stand in queue for long hours at peak times for reference desk transactions and to access computers. However, the team confirmed that the college is conducting a hiring process to add more full-time faculty positions to support library services at the Los Banos Campus. (II.C.1, II.C.1.c)

After conducting interviews, the team confirmed that the CurricUNET system identifies the materials for the library. In addition to CurricUNET, regular interaction with the faculty and representation at the CurricUNET committee ensures that selection of the material is based on experts in the discipline. The team learned that the college has developed formal measures to evaluate the quantity, quality, and use of library materials. Additional assessment of the library is done through the Online Computer Library

Center, which has proven effective in updating the library catalog. (II.C.1.e) (II.C.1.a, II.C.1.e)

Through interviews with employees and students as well as a review of evidence, the team confirmed that student orientations regarding library resources are provided through regular workshops and courses. The online portal further streamlines the use of online resources. Based on interviews with students, the team found that users have access to instructions needed to use existing resources. (II.C.1.b)

The team verified that the new library facility is well equipped with scanners at the exit and effective incoming/exit routes that prevent any security breach. Though the team found that the homeless center in the vicinity of the college was adversely impacting the security of the facility, it recently was closed. (II.C.1.d)

Through interviews, the team found that faculty has taken the lead in providing learning support for full time and adjunct professors, with programs such as learning communities, supplemental instruction, study central, and the writing center. The evaluation of the learning support programs continues to be completed through the program review of each area. SLOs need to be identified and assessed for each of these areas. The team learned that labs are in the initial stages of development of SLOs, correlation to course SLOs, and the program review cycle. (II.C.2)

Conclusions:

The team found that the college partially meets the standard. (II.C)

In order to fully meet the standard the college should continue to create, assess, and analyze the assessment of SLOs for all courses and programs and create a timeline indicating how they will meet the commission's fall 2012 requirement of proficiency.

Recommendation for Standard II:

- 2. Student learning outcomes:** To meet the standard and ensure that the proficiency level of the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges' (ACCJC) rubric for student learning outcomes is reached by the fall 2012 deadline established by the ACCJC, the team recommends that the college continue its efforts to fully implement the recommendation of the previous team and ensure that student learning outcomes and assessment are ongoing, systematic and used for continuous quality improvement regardless of location or means of delivery; dialogue about student learning is ongoing, pervasive and robust; evaluation and fine tuning of organizational structures to support student learning is ongoing; student learning improvement is a visible priority in all practices and structures across the college; a timeline indicating how the college will meet the Commission's fall 2012 requirement of proficiency is created and published; and learning outcomes are specifically linked to program reviews. (II.A.1, II.A.1.a,c, II.A.2.a, h, II.C.2, III.A.1.c)

Standard III

Resources

III.A Human Resources

General Observations:

The college demonstrates through policies and practices an appropriate understanding of and concern for issues of equity and diversity. The college's vision statement clearly indicates a commitment to diversity, and a variety of programs, practices and services that support its diverse personnel have been developed.

There is no evidence that the college regularly assesses its record in employment equity and diversity consistent with its mission. The college last updated its Faculty and Staff Diversity Plan in 1994.

The institution has a history of subscribing to, advocating, and demonstrating integrity in the treatment of its administration, faculty, staff and students, however, evidence collected in interviews and open forums during the accreditation visit suggests that currently there are problems and perceptions of mistreatment and a feeling of disrespect.

The college has a campus-wide staff development committee and two subcommittees (one for faculty and one for classified staff). The committees organize and plan events appropriate to the individual groups. The faculty staff development committee plans the major events such as convocation and flex day. The classified staff development committee plans for the Classified Staff Development Day.

The college systematically evaluates professional development programs and uses the results of these evaluations as the basis for improvement. The college assesses its effective use of human resources during the annual program review process. During the program review process, each unit evaluates its ability to achieve its objectives in terms of required human, financial, and technology resources.

The self study states that the college has developed written policies for faculty hiring, recruitment, selection, faculty service areas, minimum qualifications, and equivalencies. Also, the self study indicates that the college has established and implemented a prioritization process for filling vacant full-time faculty positions utilized to maintain the AB 1725 requirement. Part-time faculty are hired in the same manner as full-time faculty, and an administrative procedure regarding screening has been created. Though a board policy has been adopted regarding the hiring of administrators, there is no policy covering the hiring of all other management, supervisory, and support staff positions. The college included in its planning agenda the development of written guidelines for hiring of these positions, but no timeline is indicated.

According to the self study, the district has a written code of ethics for faculty and board members, however, no written code exists for other groups of employees and ethical standards for other groups are only implied through the policy regarding employee standards.

Findings and Evidence:

Through a review of evidence and interviews with employees, the team found that criteria, qualifications, and procedures for selection of faculty are clearly and publicly stated, and program reviews are used to support the full-time faculty positions requested, including those for counselors and librarians. The team verified that full-time faculty in the discipline actively participate in the hiring process, through development of the application, serving on selection committees, and in the selection of the finalists. Adjunct faculty hiring follows the same pattern as full-time faculty. The team discovered that the college has not assessed the hiring process for adjunct faculty in several years, however, the Academic Senate has begun a review and has recommended a new parallel hiring procedure for full-time and adjunct faculty. There is no mention of how equivalencies are developed, maintained and evaluated. (III.A.1.a)

The team found that the college has a board policy for the hiring of administrators, but other management and supervisory positions are not covered. The Staff Planning Priorities Committee assists in prioritizing these positions, but there is no description of the actual process for the hiring of administrators. In addition, the college does not have a written policy for the hiring of classified staff. The team found that the college, in its response to budget reductions, imposed a hiring freeze in 2009, resulting in few positions for administrators, management, supervisory and classified staff members, however, the college has to fill vacant faculty full-time positions to meet the state mandated full-time obligations. The college is presently in the process of hiring full-time faculty, classified staff, and administrators. When vacancies occur, the President's cabinet review process determines the mission critical needs for replacements. The team learned through interviews that the Vice President of Administrative Services, who supervises Human Resources, is conducting a complete review of all job classifications based on reorganization needs and hybrid job duties and titles. (III.A.1.a)

The team verified based on a review of evidence and interviews, that the full-time faculty evaluation process is guided by the collective bargaining agreement. The contract faculty are evaluated each year for four years by a tenure review team composed of the faculty lead or a discipline faculty, a faculty member from an appropriate area of expertise and the immediate supervisor. Part-time faculty are evaluated in the first year and then every three years. The team found the process clearly defined. Classified employees are evaluated by their immediate supervisors as referenced in the CSEA agreement, and management employees are evaluated regularly based on performance related to the assigned job responsibilities and personal qualities. With strong encouragement from the Administration, the team found that all evaluations are being done in a timely manner. (III.A.1.b)

Interviews and evidence revealed to the team that faculty members have been involved in the creation, development, evaluation and implementation of institutional student learning outcomes. Faculty are evaluated on 14 specific criteria related to good teaching and fulfillment of professional responsibilities, and syllabi and the correlation of institutional student learning outcomes to course content are assessed under the area of handouts and course documents. The team found no evidence to show that the effectiveness of producing the student learning outcomes and student progress toward the stated outcomes is included as part of the evaluation. (III.A.1.c)

A written code of ethics has been created for the faculty and the Board of Trustees. Although there are many board policies involving employee ethics, there is not currently a written code of ethics for the classified and management staff. The team suggests that the college update the employee code of ethics to include all employees. (III.A.1.d)

The team determined that college has the number of full-time faculty sufficient to meet the state mandated requirements as required by AB 1725, and the number of classified mostly meets the mission and purposes of the college. However, the team discovered through interviews that the recent and ongoing reductions in state funding have drastically limited the hiring of classified, administrators/managers and supervisory employees. College constituent groups have expressed to the team a need to reconstitute the Staff Planning and Priorities Committee to address the needed classified, supervisory, manager and administrator positions in order to fully support current programs and services, and the team learned that the committee will be meeting during the spring 2011 Semester. (III.A.2, III.A.6)

The team verified that the college follows its written and fair policies. Hiring processes are completed in a timely manner, resulting in a well-qualified candidate being hired. Human Resources staff are planning on a systematic review of all related policies and procedures, but the team was unable to find a timeline for the review. A review of Board Policy 3410 regarding nondiscrimination evidenced that the college conducts all hiring processes with a commitment to ensure equal employment opportunities. The college demonstrates through policies and practices an appropriate understanding of and concern for issues of equity and diversity, and the college's vision statement clearly indicates a commitment to diversity. Policies and documents such as the non-discrimination policy, the student grievance procedure, the procedure for staff member complaints, and the collective bargaining agreements are all indicative of the colleges understanding and concern for issues of equity and diversity. (III.A.3, II.A.4)

Through an inspection of facilities and interviews with staff, the team verified that the college maintains all personnel files in a locked cabinet in a separate room within the Human Resource Office, and only one Human Resources staff has access to the personnel files. The Human Resource staff is present when the assigned custodial staff cleans the office. The team confirmed that employees may inspect their own personnel file, and the review is conducted in the presence of a Human Resource staff member to ensure that documentation cannot be removed or added. Should there be any document containing derogatory information, the employee is advised of his/her right to attach a rebuttal prior to placement in the employee's personnel file. (III.A.3.b)

The team found that the college has developed and maintains a variety of programs, practices and services that support its diverse personnel. The programs developed and maintained by the College include the Puente Program, Classified Staff Development Day, Campus Change Network, Flex Day, Cinco de Mayo celebrations, International Poet and Spoken Word Theater, and World Cultures Music and Dance Festival. The college widely publishes its non-discrimination policy in the catalog, the schedule of classes, brochures and advertisements. Each campus hiring committee has a non-voting diversity representative who has the responsibility of monitoring EEO procedures. The college has also renovated and constructed facilities to comply with the American with Disabilities Act. (III.A.4.a)

There is no evidence that the college regularly assesses its record in employment equity and diversity consistent with its mission. The college last updated its Faculty and Staff Diversity Plan in 1994. The workforce and applicant analysis in the Faculty and Staff Diversity plan is for fall 1993 to fall 1994. The plan calls for an update every 3 years, which has clearly not occurred. The team found that corrective action and the overall philosophy embraced by the college in the outdated plan is very commendable, but is not relevant as the data is over 15 years old. The following statement is taken directly from the outdated plan:

“When District workforce does not reflect a balance representing protected group members, the District must identify and correct policies, practices, and procedures to determine the factors that contribute to the imbalance. Any barriers to equal employment opportunity must be eliminated.”

The college completes an annual review of employment equity and diversity and submits that report to the Chancellor’s Office. There has been a 17 percent increase in Asian and Hispanic staff since 2004. The college claims that information on staff equity and diversity has been compiled, but has not yet been utilized. (III.A.4.b)

The team found that the college has a history of subscribing to, advocating, and demonstrating integrity in the treatment of its administration, faculty, staff and students, however, evidence collected in interviews and open forums during the accreditation visit suggests that currently there are problems and perceptions of mistreatment and a feeling of disrespect. (III.A.4.c)

The team verified that the college offers regular sexual harassment workshops, encourages student participation on governance committees, has clearly defined grievance procedures in collective bargaining agreements, has a student grievance process (BP 5330), and has a complaint process for staff (BP 7366). (III.A.4.c)

Personal interviews and open forums conducted during the accreditation visit suggest that there are problems with respect to communication, inclusion, and respect. Staff from across the campus expressed concern regarding the ability to share ideas and to participate fully in the governance process. (III.A.4.c)

The college has a campus wide staff development committee and two subcommittees (one for faculty and one for classified staff). The committees organize and plan events appropriate to the individual groups. The faculty staff development committee plans the major events, such as convocation and flex day, and the classified staff development committee plans for the Classified Staff Development Day. The Staff Development Committees offer a multitude of opportunities for both faculty and staff. Training and professional development is offered for new faculty through the Teaching and Learning Academy (TLA) and classified staff provide training for faculty teaching online classes. Staff development needs for managers are identified by the Management Council. Training for managers includes webinars, FMLA workshops, and EEOC workshops. (III.A.5.a)

The team confirmed that the surveys are distributed to solicit ideas from faculty and staff to identify needs and interests. Although there is no clear connection between the staff

development opportunities and the college mission, the activities do seem to indirectly reflect a commitment to the students at Merced College. (III.A.5.a)

The college systematically evaluates professional development programs and uses the results of these evaluations as the basis for improvement. Minutes from the staff development committees clearly show that activities are evaluated and assessed on a regular basis. Staff, full-time faculty and adjunct faculty are provided with opportunities to evaluate all activities offered. These evaluations are clearly discussed and assessed during regular meetings. Improvements to existing activities are made based on these feedback mechanisms. (III.A.5.b)

The college assesses its effective use of human resources during the annual program review process. During the program review process, each unit evaluates its ability to achieve its objectives in terms of required human, financial, and technology resources. Planning for full-time faculty hiring is accomplished through the Instructional Contract Faculty Prioritizing Process. All full-time faculty hiring requests must be supported by instructional program review reports. (III.A.6)

Classified positions are filled when the appropriate Vice President deems that an urgent need exists. These requests are reviewed and approved by President's Cabinet. The team found that there is no discussion of how requests for classified or new management positions are integrated with program review or institutional planning. The team found that the use of the Instructional Contract Faculty Prioritizing Process integrates program review with the hiring of full-time faculty, however, no other human resource needs seem to be tied with formal institutional planning. There is no evidence that the institution systematically assesses the effective use of human resources and uses the results of the evaluation as the basis for improvement (III.A.6)

In December 2007, the college hired a consulting firm to review the administrative structure in the Office of Instruction and determined that a blended approach would work best. The college now operates with area deans and faculty leads. This new structure was to be evaluated within 1 year. The team found no evidence that this evaluation has taken place. (III.A.6)

Conclusions:

The team found that the college has partially met the standard.

With the state's budgetary crisis, the college has managed its human resources to ensure that the needs of the students are met. They have shown that they are flexible, adaptable, and able to still meet the needs of the students and the community with less and less financial resources. (III.A.2)

The team found that the college needs to update the Faculty and Staff Diversity Plan in order to adequately assess its record in employment equity and diversity consistent with its mission. (III.A.4.b)

Processes for hiring classified and management staff should be integrated with institutional planning. The college also needs to systematically assess the effective use of human resources and use the results of the evaluation as the basis for improvement. In addition, the team recommends that the college evaluate the blended administrative structure in the Office of Instruction adopted in 2008 to determine its effectiveness. (III.A.6).

The college needs to ensure that participatory governance is used to develop and implement a plan to address the problems that exist with respect to communication, inclusion, and respect. (III.A.4.c)

The District-Wide Staff Development Committee is commended for its exemplary work soliciting ideas and identifying the needs of faculty and staff for the purpose of offering activities and workshops to meet the needs of its personnel. (III.A.5.a)

III.B. Physical Resources

General Observations:

Merced College opened in 1962 at the county fairgrounds and moved to its current location on 271 acres in 1967. The Los Banos Campus, a full-service educational center, was established in 1972. After a donation of 120 acres, a permanent facility was constructed and occupied in 2007. The downtown Business Resource Center opened in 2008. The facilities at all three locations are well maintained and safe.

The college indicates in its self study that it uses its institutional planning documents such as the Educational and Facilities Master Plan to review and update its facilities needs. The planning document includes objectives to address the renovation and expansion of campus facilities, infrastructure and improvement of campus vehicular and pedestrian circulation in support of the educational goals for the expanding student population and the community. The college provides safe and sufficient physical resources that support its programs and services regardless of location. (III.B.1.a)

The college's Education and Facilities Master Plan, "In Cadence with the Future," is the long range plan to meet the district's need to plan for an enrollment of 18,500 students by 2040. (III.B.2.b)

Findings and Evidence:

The team verified through interviews and that the college uses its institutional planning documents such as the Educational and Facilities Master Plan to review and update its facilities needs, and that the Facilities Master Plan Committee meets regularly to evaluate capital outlay requests, work orders (new projects) and service requests (maintenance and "fix-it" projects). The members of the committee include all constituencies, faculty, classified and administrators who are the big users of facilities. The maintenance staff is very quick to respond to the work orders and service requests. (III.B)

The team found that the facilities at the college's Merced, Los Banos Campus and downtown Business Resource Center are well maintained and safe. Classes are also offered in the Delhi Unified School District and other community sites. The Vice President of Administrative Services oversees the maintenance and safety of the college's physical facilities through the departments of Maintenance, Operations and Grounds, Transportation, Facilities, Health and Safety, and Police Services. (III.B.1.a)

With its "Cadence with the Future," the Educational and Facilities Master Plan is used to build, maintain, upgrade or replace its physical resources to assure effective utilization and the continuing quality to support its programs and services. Using state funds, Measures H and J, local bonds passed by the community to support additional buildings, the college has been able to maximize its building needs. The college was able to add 189,551 square feet of additional facility space costing \$72,556,354. The college has also received matching funds for scheduled maintenance projects amounting to \$1,785,357 and has several additional projects in line for state funding. Its Citizens Oversight Committee is ever watchful to ensure that bond program expenditures comply with Proposition 39 requirements. (III.B.1.a)

After a review of evidence, the team found that the college adheres to safety measures established in federal, state and local laws and regulations. Facilities are constructed with

safety and security in mind. The college participated in VIPJPA (Valley Insurance Program Joint Powers Authority) insurance plan, and the Risk Control Manager from VIPJPA conducted an audit in 2008. The team learned that the college did not do an audit in 2010 due to the retirement of the Director of Grounds and Operations, as well as changing its insurance carrier to ASCIP. (III.B.1.b)

The maintenance schedule applies to all campus facilities. The Facilities Department is responsible for the overseeing of the construction and maintenance of campus facilities including off-site locations and also ensures access, safety, security and hazard mitigation through continual evaluation, planning and execution of new and retrofit projects. This department is also responsible for program planning with all user groups, selection of consultants, implementation and personnel training of the completed facilities. User groups assist in planning and designing the space from the initial project proposal through the design development and construction drawing stages. The user groups also work directly with the architect to plan their spaces to ensure that each space meets program needs. (III.B.1.b)

The team determined through interviews and a review of evidence that facility and equipment evaluations occur on a regular basis. Required repairs and replacements also occur on a regular basis. The Facilities Master Plan Committee reviews all requests for new construction, work orders and service requests. Each request is evaluated and prioritized based on its impact on the mission of the college, Health and Safety concerns and other needs. The college has allocated \$50,000 each year for work orders. These requests for new projects (altering facilities – such as removing or adding a wall, adding cabinets) are reviewed by the appropriate deans, all of the vice presidents, Director of Facilities and Fiscal Services as to whether these requests are needed and fit in the master plans. The Director of Facilities then costs out the project, researches the best way to accomplish the request, and, if approved, most requests are done in-house. (III.B.2)

Updates to long-range capital plans are presented at the Facilities Master Planning Committee Meetings and Measure H and J Citizens' Oversight Committee. This committee meets regularly and receives regular updates on construction projects. The college staff is expected to disseminate the information to all the members of their constituencies and community groups. The long range capital plans support the institutional goals and reflect projections of the total cost of ownership of new facilities and equipment. (III.B.2.a)

The Education and Facilities Master Plan, "In Cadence with the Future," is the long range plan to meet the eventual needs the district's anticipated student enrollment of 18,500 by 2040. The Five Year Construction Plan submitted to the State annually assesses the effective use of the physical resources and this becomes the basis for improvement. Currently, the Educational Master Planning Committee and Facilities Master Planning Committees have separate memberships and produced separate planning documents, but the team learned that the two plans will be combined in the future. (III.B.2.b)

Conclusions:

The team found that the college has met this standard.

With the state's budgetary crisis, Merced College has managed its facilities to ensure that the needs of the students are met. They have shown that they are flexible, adaptable, and able to still meet the needs of the students and the community with less and less financial resources.

III.C Technology Resources

General Observations:

The college's resources are designed to meet the needs of learning, teaching, and college wide communications, research and operational systems and are designed to enhance the operation and effectiveness of the institution. The college provides quality training to staff, faculty, students and managers in the effective application of its information technology. (III.C, III.C.1.b)

The institution meets institutional technology needs through a systematic planning process. This process includes planning for upgrades, replacements and addressing infrastructure needs. The college is committed to incorporating technology into all programs and services through an evolving and integrated plan. The plan engages the college community in building and maintaining an appropriate technology infrastructure. The distribution and utilization of technology resources support the development, maintenance, and enhancement of its programs and services. (III.C.1.c, III.C.1.d)

Technology planning is integrated with institutional planning as a result of the existing master planning processes. The Technology and Research Master Planning Committee (TRMPC) makes recommendations to the Educational Master Planning (EMPC). EMPC is responsible for institutional planning. (III.C.2)

Findings and Evidence:

The college's technology infrastructure is a Metropolitan Area Network (MAN), which is connected to Merced County Human Resources, Sheriff's Department, Financial Center and the Office of Education. The Internet connection is through a Gig-E-MAN product. In 2008, fiber optic transmission cables were installed to all buildings on campus from the Main Intermediate Distribution Frame (IDF). The college's Datatel Strategic Academic Enterprise (SAE) system is housed in a redundantly powered UNIX system. The district has provided users with wireless technology access through 64 wireless access points. (III.C.1.a)

The team learned that the college has launched a new portal for students, faculty and staff called mc4me based on Microsoft SharePoint technology. The students have access to more databases; e-mail now includes Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint; and calendaring is available using Outlook. With the implementation of the new portal faculty have opportunities for collaborative resource development and document sharing. The new portal has enhanced security and usage is expected to reach 85 percent. Staff are expected to have access to Datatel in the spring and a major portal upgrade is scheduled for summer 2011. (III.C.1.a)

In 1999 the college purchased and implemented a Strategic Academic Enterprise (SAE) system from Datatel. The team found that the college's MIS system allows for the effective management and administration of student records, financial data, and human resource information. The Altiris computer management software system provides for effective management, maintenance, updates and upgrades to 1700 staff, faculty and student computers. (III.C.1.a)

A review of facilities provided the team with evidence that all classrooms in the Learning Resource Center (LRC), the Allied Health Center, the Business Resource Center, and the

Los Banos Campus are equipped with technology to meet the college's multimedia standards for instruction. Additionally, 119 all purpose classrooms and labs are equipped with instructional technology. The Help Desk is available to all staff and provides timely technical instructional support. In total, the college has 700 staff and faculty computers, 1000 student computers, and 60 laptops. (III.C.1.a)

The team found that the college's current infrastructure supports its technology infrastructure needs, and access to instructional technology both in its new facilities and in its older buildings is being provided successfully. Program review for the Learning Resources Center and Information Technology identify needs for additional technological support. For instance, the college currently has only one programmer, and it is clear from the program reviews that the college needs to seek additional funding for technical staffing in Information Technology Services and in the Learning Resources Center. (III.C.1.a)

Through interviews and a review of online resources, the team found that the college trains students in technology in two ways: one-to-one assistance, print and online learning media. The students have access to a Student Help Desk and information stations in the library. Technical staff and faculty produce training materials that are available in print and in media formats to students. (III.C.1.b)

Faculty and staff training in technology occurs in three ways: online training via the Microsoft IT Academy (MITA), group training during Flex and Staff Development Day workshops, and one-on-one training offered by AV educational media specialists. Additionally, the webmaster trains faculty on how to maintain web pages. The MITA is online and provides training in all aspects of Microsoft software. As of May 2010, MITA has been accessed 395 times with a 95 percent completion rate. The team found that staff assigned to the library have been trained on the new version of its SIRSI automated library system. These trainings included both group and individual training sessions. Managers can participate in these training sessions however, training on the use of new products and systems is provided as needed. (III.C.1.b)

The college's Technology and Research Master Plan sets the vision for planning, acquiring, maintaining and upgrading technology. Interviews and a review of evidence showed that the Technology and Research Master Planning Committee (TRMPC) explores new technologies and evaluates requests. Requests come from the following areas: Research, Learning Resource Center, Grants, Information Technology, and Online Systems. Program reviews from each of the five teams are evaluated by the TRMPC and ranked. The committee then meets to discuss the rankings, makes necessary changes and then forwards the recommendations to the Educational Master Planning Committee. The committee has also created standards with respect to technology with the assistance of the Gartner Group. (III.C.1.c)

Much of the college's technology equipment is purchased with funding provided for new and remodeled facilities. As a result of this funding, upgrades and replacements are funded with one-time funds, VTEA money, or carry over money. Because the funding for upgrades and replacements is limited, the replacement of old technology is often delayed. The team found that the college plans to seek funding for a total cost of

operations mechanism to upgrade and replace mission critical technology in the classrooms, labs, and student support and administrative areas. (III.C.1.c)

Technology resources have been included in new and remodeled facilities such as the Learning Resources Center, the Allied Health Center, and the Business Resource Center. Additionally, technology is distributed and utilized in Student Services areas including Admissions and Records, Financial Aid, and Assessment. The Los Banos campus is equipped with technology resources including new science labs to support a full range of science instruction. There are many instances where technology resources have been distributed to instructional areas where needs have been identified. Technology resources are distributed and utilized appropriately to support, maintain, and enhance existing programs and services. (III.C.1.d)

The method for integrating technology planning with institutional planning is the program review process. Planning for technology support is the primary function of the Office of Technology and Institutional Research (TIR). TIR is composed of six areas that support a variety of instructional, administrative, operational, and research activities and programs. The six areas are Research, the Learning Resource Center, Grants, Information Technology, and Online Systems. Managers from the six areas meet to discuss needs. The mission of the TRMPC is to incorporate technology into all programs and services through an evolving, integrated plan. The TRMPC sends out a call for technology requests to the six areas. Requests must be justified using program review, accreditation, or sustainability. The Technology and Research Master Planning Committee (TRMPC) reviews all technology requests, combined with the area program reviews or other materials justifying the request, and makes recommendations to the Educational Master Planning Committee (EMPC). The Educational Master Planning Committee reviews the requests from the TRMPC (including a review by the Vice Presidents) and forwards the recommendations to the President who makes the final decisions. (III.C.2)

Conclusions:

The team finds that the college meets the standard.

The college recognizes the need for additional staff in Information Technology Services and in the Learning Resources Center. The TIR is working on developing a staffing plan (long term) that can be used with program review to address new staffing needs. (III.C.1.a)

The team commends the college for its ability to support student learning programs and services and to improve institutional effectiveness with the use of its technology resources. (III.C.1.a) However, the college needs to continue its efforts to provide more computers to increase student access. (II.A and II.C)

The college recognizes an unfulfilled need for additional technology training. The plan is to develop a staff development training process focusing on technology training and emphasizing emerging technologies and to seek funding for implementation through the resource allocation process. (III.C.1.b)

The college believes that district wide assessment of the use of technology resources should be improved. The team agrees with the college's efforts to develop a cross

campus assessment tool for end users of technology resources, which is being discussed in the TRMPC. (III.C.2)

III.D. Financial Resources

General Observations:

The college uses financial resources to support the student learning programs and services and to improve institutional effectiveness. The planning processes are well defined and integrated to support continuous improvement. Financial affairs are managed with integrity and ensure financial stability by maintaining appropriate internal controls and sufficient reserves.

Findings and Evidence:

Through interviews and a review of evidence, the team found that the college's financial planning is well defined in the college's Budget Development Process document and is integrated with the Budget Committee, the Educational and Facilities Master Plan, and program review results. In times of limited resources, financial planning is accomplished by prioritization of needs as identified by the various master planning committees. Requests must be tied to the master plan as well as the mission and goals of the college. The Budget Committee has several subcommittees which identify anticipated expenditures as well as make assumptions about revenue resources. Grants and contracts are encouraged and proposals reviewed by the vice president before submittal. (III.D.1.a, III.D.1.b)

The college short-term and long-term financial obligations are included in annual financial planning and given the highest priority for funding. The college provides for all debt payments and has a plan to manage and fund the post employment retiree benefits liability. The college has made changes to its retiree benefits to reduce the liability and is currently making required payments. These are documented in the annual audit reports. (III.D.1.c)

The planning and budget processes are clearly defined in the integrated master planning document and are followed by the various committees. The committees have appropriate representatives from all constituencies who participate in planning as evidenced in the meeting minutes. The processes are relatively new and there is ongoing discussion on how they can be refined and improved. (III.D.1.d)

Once the college budget is established, controls exist in the finance system to ensure resources are spent within the budget. While a process to monitor balances exists, it is not done regularly due to staffing limitations. Expenditure requests and budget transfers are approved by management to ensure they are appropriate. The annual audit reviews internal controls for record keeping and all but one issue related to system security has been addressed. The team confirmed that the college's audit findings are few and responded to as part of the audit report. (III.D.2.a)

Financial information is distributed across the college in many ways. The annual budget, quarterly reports, monthly budget updates and annual audits are presented to the board of trustees and therefore part of the public record. There are also budget forums, trainings, newsletters and committee meetings where information is disseminated and discussed. Staff are very appreciative of Budget 101 training sessions that were provided and feel the budget information is much more transparent than in the past. Committee

representatives are expected to communicate and share the information with their constituents as well. (III.D.2.b)

Through reviewing financial reports and interviews, the team found that the college maintains adequate reserves and insurance to maintain stability. The board policy sets reserves at no less than 6 percent and has exceeded that in recent years. This provides a cushion to manage unforeseen emergencies. Cash flow is monitored regularly and tax revenue anticipation notes are used to bridge state funding fluctuations. The college belongs to a joint powers authority to manage risk for property, liability, auto, and workers' compensation. An injury and illness prevention program is also in place to train staff on safety in the workplace. (III.D.2.c)

The team verified that there is appropriate oversight over all college funds as evidenced in the annual audit reports. Finance staff as well as program managers and administrators review transactions for all funding sources. A finance committee for the foundation monitors their activity and the college fiscal office reviews other programs on a monthly basis. Auxiliary activities and grants, including the foundation, the bookstore, the farm operation, and financial aid support programs and students to meet the college mission. (III.D.2.d, III.D.2.e)

Contractual agreements are monitored and reviewed at many levels including purchasing, vice presidents, and administrative services. A college form is used to assure the appropriate reviews have taken place and that the agreement contains all necessary language required to protect the college and ensure consistency with the educational mission. (III.D.2.f)

The college evaluates the financial management processes through the external audit, program review, committees, and the software user group. Issues raised through the audit are addressed when identified. Recommendations are reviewed and evaluated for feasibility by the appropriate committee or staff. The Budget Committee specifically reviews budget development for ways to enhance the processes. (III.D.2.g)

The college regularly assesses the uses of financial resources through the budget process and regular monitoring of expenses. Requests for expenditures are approved at many levels, and all payments are ultimately approved by the board of trustees. An annual evaluation and audit of financial management processes is done informally through the Budget Committee and results are used for improvement. Program review recommendations are used in the budgeting process to align available resources with expenditures. (III.D.3)

Conclusions:

The team found that the college partially meets the standard. The college manages their resources well given the current fiscal environment. Processes are in place to coordinate all planning efforts the support the college's mission and goals. The college is commended for its efforts in planning, executing, and communicating the budget process. However, since the processes are new, in order to fully meet the standard, the college needs to be able to show consistent progress toward meeting the goal of sustainable continuous quality improvement.

Recommendation for Standard III:

- 8. Human Resources:** In order to meet the standard, the team recommends that the college develop and implement an organizational structure that includes a fully functional human resources division and develop, implement, and evaluate a Faculty and Staff Diversity Plan in order to adequately assess its record in employment equity and diversity consistent with its mission. The team recommends that processes for hiring classified and management staff be integrated with Institutional Planning. The college also needs to systematically assess the effective use of human resources and uses the results of the evaluation as the basis for improvement. (III.A.1.b, III.A.3, III.A.4.a, III.A.4.b, III.A.4.c, III.A.6.)

Standard IV

Leadership and Governance

IV.A Decision-Making Roles and Processes

General Observations:

The responses to the recommendations from the previous site visit focus on a fully developed and a newly implemented planning agenda for institutional shared governance, and an integrated and SLO driven institutional program review plan as evidenced through the Merced College Planning Handbook. In general, the college has made significant progress in establishing a fair and equitable governance process since the previous site visits and midyear reports. (IV.A.1)

The college's goals show commitment to teaching, learning, encouragement of diversity and student success. This is evidenced in the district Goals and the Mission, Vision, and Goals. (IV.A.1)

The Merced College Planning Handbook clearly illustrates that the institution has established and implemented a written policy providing all components of the institution's access and participation in the shared governance process. Faculty, administrators, staff and students have clearly defined roles and have a substantial voice in policies affecting the institution. In addition, the handbook clearly shows the integration of SLOs into the planning process. (IV.A.2)

The institution relies on faculty at large and the academic senate for recommendations about student learning programs and services. This is evidenced by the various workshops and forums on budget, Board Policy 2500, Role of the Faculty Senate, Board Policy 2750, Consulting Collegially on Academic and Professional Matters, and minutes and policies of the Board, the Academic Senate and their constituent committees. (IV.A.2.a)

The planning handbook clearly delineates the reliance upon faculty, the academic senate and other appropriate constituencies for recommendations about student services and programs. This process is confirmed through the evidence listed in the previous paragraph. (IV.A.2.b)

The Educational Master Planning Handbook provides for five master planning committees that report to the Educational Master Planning Committee (EMPC). These include the Instructional Master Planning Committee (IMPC), the Student Services Master Planning Committee (SSMPC), the Administrative Services Master Planning Committee (ASMPC), the Facilities Master Planning Committee (FMPC) and the Technology and Research Master Planning Committee (TRMPC). The role of these committees has experienced "continuous refinement.....for the last 15 years." The link between budgeting and planning was improved with the hiring of two new vice presidents in 2008 and 2009. The implementation took place in 2010. (IV.A.3)

The ACCJC Midterm Report and the Letter of Support for Accreditation Team support that the institution has advocated and demonstrated "honesty and integrity in its relationships with external agencies" and is in compliance with the Accrediting Commission regarding policies, public disclosures, self-reporting, etc.

According to the college's self study, beginning in 2008, the "District instituted a series of meetings and coordinated an on-going dialogue among master planning committees to review and evaluate its master planning process. "This resulted, in 2009, in the Merced College Planning Handbook. This handbook was "implemented immediately and continues to be reviewed and revised as required by the evaluation element imbedded in the new model." (IV.A.5)

The role of the board is clearly defined. This is evidenced through Board Policy and Administrative Procedures. The Board conducts a self-evaluation as expressed in Policy BP 2745, Board Self-Evaluations. Adherence to these policies is reflected in meeting minutes. There is a question of separating board policy role and intrusion into procedures, and operations by individual members of the board.

Board policies (BP 2010 Board Membership and BP 2100 Board Elections) substantiate the governing board as an independent policy-making body reflecting public interest, and protect the board from undue pressure or influences. (IV.B.1.a)

The integrity, quality and improvement of student learning is the goal and responsibility of the board. (IV.B.1b, IV.B.1c)

The board self-evaluates. In addition, there is a clearly delineated code of ethics. However, the process of evaluation is incomplete in that there is no follow up or plan for improvement and there is no process for addressing violations of the ethics code. (IV.B.1.g, IV.B.1.h)

The board is informed of the accreditation process via reports from the EMPC and its constituent committees, as well as the Academic Senate. The board may not understand its role in meeting accreditation requirements especially with regard to its policies and attention to its own growth and development. (IV.B.1.i)

The Board oversees the selection and evaluation of the superintendent/president, and the roles of the superintendent/president as chief college administrator and public liaison are clearly delineated. (IV.B.1.j, IV.B.2.a, IV.B.2.b, IV.B.2.c, IV.B.2.d, IV.B.2.e)

Standard IV.B.3 does not apply to this institution.

Findings and Evidence:

The team confirmed through interviews and a review of evidence that the college has established an environment of empowerment, innovation, and excellence; the level of involvement of constituent groups in the process is well understood; and the college's clear goals, mission, and core values reflect the openness and necessity for such an environment. The team found faculty and staff involvement in the pursuit and implementation of the MDRC Grant and the collaboration with the Hewlett Foundation and Carnegie Foundation in the development of innovative approaches with respect to basic skills students impressive. Also notable is student involvement in Student Services' development of an electronic waiting list and the college's state and nationally recognized Customer Service Academy. (IV.A.1)

Interviews and a review of evidence and the college's web site allowed the team to confirm that the college's mission and vision statement, core values and beliefs are openly dispersed and understood by all. (IV.A.1)

In addition to verifying that student participation on college committees has been corrected as recommended in the last comprehensive visit, the team found that faculty, administrators and students interviewed at Los Banos have a clear sense of having a “voice” and know how to bring forward suggestions and/or concerns. Participants interviewed indicated to the team that they were appropriately involved in district decisions. (IV.A.2)

The effective use of teleconferencing to ensure participation between Los Banos and Merced faculty, staff, and students is praiseworthy. After conducting interviews with employees at Merced College and Los Banos Center, the team encourages the college to consider developing a master calendar of district committee meetings, publish that calendar, and adhere to the meeting times to enable and encourage consistent participation of students, faculty and staff who agree to serve. (IV.A.2)

The Merced College Planning Handbook clearly states those areas in which the college relies primarily on the faculty and those through which they must reach mutual agreement. The team found that the governance and committee structures enable appropriate input and influence in setting priorities and making recommendations to the Superintendent/President. (IV.A.2.a)

After reviewing evidence and conducting interviews, the team encourages the college to consider examining the newly established (three years) participatory governance procedures to determine how effectively it is working for the campus as a whole. Efforts to develop broad based buy-in to these changes need to be continued. (IV.A.2.a)

The Educational Master Planning Handbook (EMPH) and the Faculty Handbook (FH) provide for a thorough and inclusive participatory governance structure. The new faculty orientations Flex and pre-Flex Day activities on planning and budget, placement of students on every governance committee, student email addresses, the college's website and intranet facilitate discussion of ideas and effective communication throughout. (IV.A.3)

After conducting interviews and comments from open forums, the team recommends that the governing board demonstrate a better understanding of the college’s participatory governance processes and work to better understand their role in leading the district, while supporting the need for all employees to participate in and respect the participatory governance processes adopted by the college. Moreover, the team suggests that the college examine committee structures to determine if they support continuous improvement processes and are not overly burdensome to the individuals involved and work to ensure that the voice of the classified staff is more evident college wide. (IV.A.3)

Team members were treated openly and requests for document or additional interviews during the visit were responded to quickly and openly. (IV.A.4)

Conclusions:

The team found that the college partially met the standard.

IV.B Board and Administrative Organization

General Observations:

The self study states that district is governed by an elected seven-member Board of Trustees. A student trustee participates and votes in an advisory capacity. The district has a comprehensive Board Policy and Administrative Procedures manual, which delineates policies concerning student learning programs and services as well as the financial stability of the institution. (IV.B.1)

Board policies are reviewed and updated by the governing board on an ongoing basis. Board policy describes the organization of the district; role and responsibilities of the Board of Trustees; the district's commitment to high quality, relevant programs and curricula; and selection process of the chief administrator. (IV.B.1.a, IV.B.1.b)

The self study states that all participatory governance committees explicitly recognize the Board's authority. The team found that the governing board holds responsibility for approving all contracts and budgets, as well as addressing legal matters. The governing board's role in establishing policy and making financial and other decisions is set forth in its policy as is its right to review and alter policies as needed. (IV.B.1.c)

The district's board policy contains a process for conducting the governing board's self-evaluation process. The evaluation process allows board members to identify those areas of board functions that are working well and areas that need improvement. The evaluation assesses performance of the entire board, not individual board members. (IV.B.1.g)

The district's board policy contains code of ethics/standards that governs the behavior of board members. However, the self study states that this policy does not provide for corrective actions when a board member violates the code of ethics. (IV.B.1.h)

The district has adopted a policy and procedure to delineate the process for selecting the superintendent/president. In 1998, during the selection of the current superintendent/president, the policy was followed. The self study indicates that the superintendent/president has the authority to interpret board policy as required. The board evaluates the superintendent/president annually, and the last evaluation was conducted in September 2010. Input from within the college community (internal) is enabled through the leadership of the various groups to the assistant to the superintendent/president. The extent of this involvement or the process for doing so was not explored. (IV.B.1, IV.B.1.j)

The self study asserts that the college utilizes a collegial process to establish values, goals, and priorities. The superintendent/president has primary authority in overseeing the organizational structure, which reflects the college's purposes, size, and complexity, and delegating authority to administrators and others consistent with their responsibilities. In addition, the superintendent/president has the authority for institutional improvement of teaching and learning. Qualitative and quantitative research strategies are utilized by the college as a means to integrate resource planning with resource distribution to achieve the SLOs. The self study states that the college analyzes data to assess institutional planning and implementation processes. (IV.B.2b)

The self study states that the superintendent/president is in charge of the college's budget and expenditures through the utilization of established guidelines and priorities established by the Board of Trustees. The superintendent/president seeks recommendations from the Budget Committee in establishing the annual budget and submits the college's annual budget to the governing board for approval. The vice president of Administrative Services is responsible for ensuring that internal controls are in place to keep expenditures consistent within allocated budget amounts. (IV.B.2.d)

Findings and Observations:

The team was able to confirm through interviews and examination of evidence that policies are consistent with the mission statement and the processes are in place to support the priorities established through the various program reviews and planning processes. The college and the board is to be commended for being proactive in building reserves in anticipation of the current downward trend in state budgets for community colleges. (IV.B.1.b, IV.B.1.c)

Through interviews and a review of the Board Policy and Administrative Procedures manual, the team found that the district's policy and procedures delineate the separate responsibilities of the CEO and board. However, team members heard in interviews testimony of "intrusion" by one or more members of the governing board. In addition, at least one trustee response in the board's self-evaluation was "we are a rubber stamp." These comments imply a need for a greater understanding of the role of shared governance, the role of the CEO, and the processes whereby information and recommendations are brought to the Board of Trustees, which could help the governing board gain a greater value for its policy role. (IV.B.1.a, IV.B.1.e, IV.B.1.j)

The team affirmed during interviews that certain recent behaviors bring into question the relationships governing board members have with various individuals and/or groups (employees) and whether decisions are being made by individual trustees after public deliberation or whether they come to the "issue" to protect certain groups or interests. (IV.B.1.a)

The self study stated and it was confirmed by the team that the governing board has a code of ethics, but has not developed a sanction or progressive discipline process for dealing with behavior that violates the code. (IV.B.1.h)

The team praises the college and governing board for their decision to seek approval for construction bond to build Los Banos Campus and fund new and remodeled facilities at the Merced campus. These construction projects demonstrate the commitment of the board and the community to the learning needs of the district. (IV.B.1.b)

Through analysis of evidence, the team found that the governing board has written policies that set forth its ultimate authority for the college's educational quality, legal matters, and fiduciary oversight. (IV.B.1.c)

The team confirmed that the Board of Trustees has adopted relevant and required policies and that the college participates in the Community College League of California's service, which helps to ensure that policies are reviewed regularly and kept up to date. The college has published its board policies and procedures on its web site, which is available to the college community and the public. (IV.B.1.d, IV.B.1.e)

The team conducted interviews and reviewed evidence to confirm that orientation sessions were provided for the district's two new board members. However, the team found no indication that the governing board, as a whole, has any commitment to continuous improvement or on-going learning. Until 2010, there had not been a new member of the board elected in twelve years. After interviewing board members and reviewing documents, the team verified that the Board of Trustees have not been committed to engaging in continuous improvement. (IV.B.1.f)

The team found that current policy states that self-evaluation will occur every odd year. Evidence showed that an evaluation process occurred in 2007, however, in 2009, the board chose not to conduct an evaluation while the adequacy of the current instrument was reviewed. Ultimately, the board chose to retain the instrument and conducted an evaluation in September of 2010, but the team found no evidence of a comparison of performance of the ratings of 2007 and 2010, an analysis or discussion of the results of the most recent evaluation, or a plan for improving board performance. (IV.B.1.g)

Through interviews and an assessment of evidence, the team confirmed that board agendas support the fact that trustees have had access to the accreditation process and college's self study report. Members of the team were assured during interviews that the governing board will remedy the shortcomings by preparing a written plan covering the continuous development of all members and a written process for sanctioning members whose behavior violates the governing board's code of ethics. (IV.B.1.i)

The team found that the governing board adhered to its policies in selecting the current superintendent/president and evaluates the CEO annually. (IV.B.1.j)

After reviewing several annual financial reports and conducting interviews, the team confirmed that college has been proactive in its approach to developing reserves to address the downturn in the state budget. Capital bond funds have resulted in improved facilities, technology, equipment, and new buildings that meet the learning needs of students. The assignment of research staff to the technology division supports objective measures of institutional effectiveness. The college is to be commended for its reserves and processes for addressing the downturn in the State's budget. (IV.B.2.d)

The team confirmed that the board's policies set forth delegation of authority that is consistent with the organizational chart. The college's participatory governance, planning, and resource allocation processes are designed to support assessment and program review. Policies and practices reviewed by the team are consistent with the college's mission. The superintendent/president is a long standing member of the Merced community and of various civic groups, including Rotary, Lions, and others. One aspect of his annual evaluation is focused on community advocacy and relations. (IV.B.2.a, IV.B.2.b, IV.B.2.c, IV.B.2.e)

Standards IV.B.3.a through IV.B.3.g are not applicable to Merced College as it is not a multi-college district.

Conclusions

This team found that the college partially met this standard. (IV.B)

The governing board has the authority to establish and update policies for the district/college. The team found that the board reviews, adds to, and updates its policies as required in a timely

manner. The board delegates responsibility to the superintendent/president in accordance with board policy, but retains final authority over the college's budget, finance, legal matters, ethics, mission statement, and board elections. The board, however, has not established sanctions when board members violate its code of ethics.

The team found that constituent groups are afforded the opportunity to participate in the planning and development of the institution's governance and leadership model. The college is to be commended for the progress made since the midterm report in including students into the governance process.

The self study indicated and it was confirmed by the team that the superintendent/president has the primary responsibility for the operations of the college. The superintendent/president provides leadership in communicating the college's mission, goals, and values to both internal and external stakeholders in oral and written forms. The team found that some governing board members have interfered with the superintendent/president's responsibility to have overall oversight of the college's operations.

Recommendations for Standard IV:

- 5. Governing board members need to understand roles, responsibility; delegate authority for operating the college to the CEO; and, develop a program for ongoing board development and new member orientation:** In order to meet the standard, the team recommends that the board model to the college its commitment to continuous improvement, develop and implement a written comprehensive board development plan that includes, but does not rely primarily on travel and attendance at conferences, and specifically includes delegation of authority to the CEO (policy) without interference in the operation of the college, an examination of the participatory governance processes and the extent to which the Board's behavior supports those governance structures, accreditation standards for Board performance; and analysis of the governing board's 2010 self-evaluation and a plan for improvement. (IV.A.2.a, b; IV.A.3, IV.A.4, IV.A.5, IV.B.1.f, IV B.1.g, IV.B.1.i, IV.B.1.j)
- 6. Governing board review its Code of Ethics and Develop a written Process for Sanctions:** In order to meet the standard, the team recommends that the governing board develop, adopt, and implement a sanction or progressive discipline process for dealing with Board behavior that violates their code of ethics and that trustees sign a statement acknowledging that violation of closed session confidentiality will result in sanctions. (IV.B.1.h)