

February 2003

TO: Members of the College Community
FROM: Dr. Philip R. Day, Jr. Chancellor
SUBJ: Addressing the Challenge of the New Accreditation Standards—Next Steps

As a followup to my address on Flex Day in January in which I discussed some of the broad implications for the College of the new accreditation standards focusing on student learning outcomes, I want to share with you in more detail my thoughts on the next steps that City College should take. This paper proposes a framework to address student learning outcomes and the accreditation self-study that CCSF will need for re-accreditation in Spring 2006¹.

I welcome your feedback and I plan to meet with the leadership of the college organizations to discuss this paper in depth.

The New Standards

In June 2002, the Accrediting Commission approved new accreditation standards for the California community colleges that will become effective as of Fall 2004. The most significant change is the integration of student learning outcomes into four new standards in an effort to promote more interaction among different campus constituencies and service areas. Standard One focuses on institutional mission and effectiveness; Standard Two is on student learning programs and services including instruction, student services and library services; Standard Three is on resources including fiscal, physical and human resources; and Standard Four focuses on leadership and governance. Taken together, the four standards move outcomes to the center of the accreditation process for all colleges, requiring that each institution provide evidence of how it supports and fosters student learning.

The new accreditation standards should be viewed as a welcome and significant opportunity for City College of San Francisco because student learning is at the heart of what we do. The new standards are a challenge that has the potential to enrich us; one that will require a concerted effort during a time when resources are stretched thin. I have no doubt, given the able leadership within our faculty and staff, that City College will be a model for the rest of the state to emulate.

The Outcomes and Assessment Movement

Over the past two decades, the outcomes movement in higher education has sought to redefine the nature of postsecondary education by focusing more on the quality of student learning and development than on the breadth and depth of institutional resources and course offerings as a measure of institutional effectiveness. Traditional outcomes measures like graduation, certificate completion, and transfer rates have been augmented with assessments of the specific skills, knowledge, and abilities students develop in courses, programs, and their college experience as a

¹ The ideas in this framework paper come out of a series of conversations with faculty and administrators at the college.

whole. At the same time, forces outside of higher education (e.g., state and national legislators, other elected leaders, the media, etc.), have begun to exert pressure on colleges and universities to produce outcomes measures and, in many states, this has resulted in mandated reforms connected to funding. Colleges and universities across the nation have come to understand the sea change that is underway and have recognized that they can improve their outcomes while maintaining control over their future development by creating the ways and means for outcomes assessment initiatives within their institutions. Likewise, external governing bodies and accrediting agencies have begun to see the inherent value in the outcomes movement and have provided direction to institutions as they engage in the assessment initiative.

Assessment is not simply an activity; it is an ongoing process aimed at understanding and improving student learning. To that end, the assessment process generally involves making faculty expectations explicit and public; setting appropriate criteria and high standards for learning quality; systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine how well performance matches those expectations and standards; and the bringing faculty together to reflect upon the resulting information to document, explain, and improve performance. Assessment activities help faculty focus their collective attention, examine assumptions, and support a shared academic culture dedicated to assuring and improving the quality of higher education.

Generally, institutions focusing on student learning outcomes align their efforts with their mission and center their deliberations on four key questions:

- What do we expect our students to know and be able to do by the time they graduate? What do our curricula and educational experiences “add up to”?
- What do we do in our classes and programs to promote the kinds of learning and development that support our mission?
- How do we know we are succeeding? How do we assess what students learned in their classes and programs?
- And how do we use what we learn from assessments to refine our expectations and educational activities?

Through an evolutionary and continuous process, such institutions have begun to develop more comprehensive, systematic, and integrative approaches to student learning outcomes at the course, program, and college levels. By keeping the primary focus on the learning experience, teaching and counseling faculty have focused their learning outcomes on essential skills, knowledge and understanding, as well as on higher order thinking and values development. Using instructionally related strategies to assess the quality of student learning such as portfolios, performances, capstone courses and self-assessments as well as instructor, departmental, standardized, and external professional assessments (e.g., professional program accreditation), faculty have documented and improved the quality of student learning and development through multiple venues college wide.

City College is well positioned to initiate the process of developing student learning outcomes. Over the past two years the College has been focused on an intensive effort to increase student success through the Enhanced Self-Study’s five comprehensive Ad Hoc Committees, one of which was focused specifically on Student Outcomes. As a result, many of the recommendations addressed student learning and assessment, with two specifically focused on this issue. The first of these recommendations addressed the development of a plan for the implementation of an

ongoing program focused on student learning outcomes, and the second of which addressed the design of a professional development program focused on the assessment of student learning outcomes within the context of the classroom. Moreover, a third and separate recommendation promulgated by the College Level Learning Ad Hoc Committee encouraged the development of a Center for Teaching Excellence. Much of the work proposed in this paper builds on the foundation established in these recommendations.

Two Major Tasks for CCSF

The new WASC accreditation standards will require that we address two major tasks. First, the College must plan and implement a College-wide system for assessing student learning outcomes and responding to the results of those assessments. Second, the College must plan and implement the accreditation self-study under the new WASC standards, completing it in time for the accrediting team visit scheduled for Spring 2006.

To address the first task, CCSF faculty, administrators, and classified staff will need to develop an understanding of the new standards, the various processes for assessing student learning outcomes, and the implications for modifying and revising courses, programs, and services. The College will not have to fully develop an entire College-wide student learning outcomes system prior to the next accreditation visit, but it will need to document that a process that is well under way.

To address the second task, completing the self-study, CCSF will need to modify the self-study process to increase interaction between the four standards committees. And the timetable will require that the college anticipate the self-study now – three years before anticipated delivery.

I. A CCSF System for Assessing Student Learning Outcomes

I am proposing that the College establish a broad participatory effort to learn about the new standards, especially what the standards say about identifying and assessing student learning outcomes.

Establish a Short Term Working Group.

To address the requirement for broad participation focusing on the new standards, a working group, comprising faculty, administrators, classified staff and students, should be established as soon as possible with a set of specific activities to be completed in no more than two semesters.

During the Spring and Fall semesters of 2003, the working group would undertake the following activities:

- A. Coordinate orientations for faculty, administrators, students and classified staff on new WASC standards and assessment of student learning outcomes during the Spring and Fall 2003.
- B. Coordinate and oversee an inventory of current practices related to the identification and assessment of student learning outcomes within courses, programs and departments by departmental faculty, department chairs, and deans. The initial inventory to be completed by the end of Fall 2003.

C. Make recommendations for a College process to develop and implement a student learning outcomes assessment system based on the current practices and governance structures within the College.

A description of these activities follows.

A. Orientations on Student Learning Outcomes.

A combination of workshops and discussions could be the vehicle for orienting the College community to the new accreditation standards and models of assessing of student learning outcomes,

1. ***Special All-Day Workshop and Follow-up Discussions (Spring 2003)***. A special all-day workshop is now being planned for Friday, February 28, 2003, sponsored by the Research and Planning Group of the California Community Colleges. This workshop consists of three concurrent sessions that address building a College-wide student learning outcomes system, assessing student learning at the course and program level, and sharing practitioners' experiences with developing faculty assessment of student learning at the course level. Up to 80 CCSF faculty, classified staff and administrators will participate in the all-day workshop sessions. During the Spring 2003 semester, the CCSF working group will organize a follow-up to the workshop to review and discuss how the information can be applied to CCSF.
2. ***Professional Development Activities (Fall 2003/Spring 2004)***. Based upon the findings from the inventory of assessment practices, the working group will plan a series of professional development activities for the Fall 2003 and Spring 2004 focused around the theme of Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes. Professional activities provide an opportunity to involve the entire college community in learning about the new accreditation standards, understanding the scope of what the College is already doing, and developing additional steps to be taken to improve upon current practice. Workshops would be devoted to presentations by faculty on student learning outcomes as well as providing significant time for instructional departments, student development departments, and the library/learning resource programs to initiate work on student learning outcomes inventories and plans. In addition, under the terms of the new AFT agreement, faculty will be able to opt for individual study plans that could include activities on assessment of learning.

B. Inventory of Student Learning Outcome Practices.

The College needs to know what we are already doing to assess student learning. In the Spring and Fall 2002, a small group of administrators and faculty held conversations with chairs and faculty from seven departments and found that faculty members are already doing a great deal of work assessing student learning outcomes.

The inventory consisted of three major questions:

1. How do faculty in your department identify desired learning outcomes/skills or competencies for courses and programs?

2. What kind of assessment tools do faculty in your department/program utilize to measure whether students have learned the desired learning outcomes and/or competency/skill?
3. What process do faculty use to analyze the results/data from learning assessment tools? Do faculty work together or do they work individually to assess student learning outcomes? How do faculty use assessment data to modify and improve their courses and programs?

We need to expand this initial work with a collegewide initiative that will provide us with a full picture of what we are already doing that meets the new standards. I suggest that the working group develop a process for expanding the pilot inventory to all departments and programs, a procedure for documenting the inventory, and a format for designing assessment plans at the department and program level. This inventory of practices should begin now this semester and continue through the Fall semester as well.

C. Development of a Student Learning Outcomes Assessment System.

Once the working group completes the inventory of student learning assessment practices and examines how current practices can be integrated into the requirements of the new accreditation standards, the group will propose an implementation process for the college including,

1. Establishment of College-level committees to identify College-level student learning outcomes for GE/Transfer, Student Development, Library/Learning Resources, Basic Skills, and Occupational/Technical degree programs;
2. Establishment of department-level processes to develop and implement plans to assess student learning outcomes at the program/certificate, course and class levels;
3. Modifications, if needed, to the College's shared governance system to ensure that CCSF meets the accreditation standards related to continuous program improvement and accountability.

The working group will complete its work by the end of the Fall 2003 semester and the implementation of the recommendations will begin during Spring 2004, as outlined below.

1. College-Level Activities (Spring 2004/Fall 2004)).

Beginning in Spring 2004, College-level committees will identify broad general student learning outcomes in five major areas: GE/Transfer, Student Development, Library/Learning Resources, Basic Skills, and Occupational/Technical degree programs. Once completed, the College-level committees will identify the assessment tools to be used and a timetable for implementing the assessment processes.

2. Department-Level Activities (Fall 2003/continuing).

Beginning in Fall 2003, departments will develop and initiate the implementation of plans to identify and assess student learning outcomes at the course and program/certificate level. Each department will develop a plan that best meets the needs of students within the context of the department's resources and staff.

3. Integrating Student Learning Outcomes into the College Operations (Fall 2004–Fall 2006).

The new accreditation standards require that we build additional college capacity to accommodate a reporting and review system within the College. The College will have to find cost-effective strategies to increase our capacity without putting an undue burden on the college's budget. During the academic years of 2004/5 and 2005/6, the College will need to modify and change our college organization to accommodate the new standards. The working group should provide recommendations to the college on how to increase our capacity.

a. Professional Development. We have to rethink and re-engineer our professional development activities to provide continuous support to the faculty and staff. There are at least two recommendations from the Enhanced Self Study that can help us do that. One calls for the establishment of a Center for Teaching Excellence; another supports the design of new professional development program to support student learning. We can revitalize and redefine professional development at the College with the support of grants and other alternative funding sources, to enable the college to stimulate and generate new approaches to identifying, assessing, and improving learning outcomes.

b. Program Review. The College program review system will need to be changed to align it with the new standards. Currently, program review focuses on departments rather than programs; the review emphasizes alignment with the college's strategic plan rather than learning outcomes. The new standards raise the possibility of refocusing program review on the extent to which programs achieve their student learning objectives. Use of the DACUM process for program review should also be considered. Some modifications of the curriculum approval and revision processes also may be needed.

Role of the Board of Trustees

The Board of Trustees must also play a key role in the development of our response to the new standards. Our new strategic plan clearly delineates as one of the five imperatives that permeate the implementation of our institutional planning, the vital role of the CCSF Board of Trustees in adopting programs and policies supporting the vision, mission, goals and priorities of the college. Furthermore, the new accreditation Standard Four states that the governing board "is responsible for establishing policies to assure the quality, integrity, and effectiveness of the student learning programs and services" of the college. Consequently, we will include members of the Board in our orientations and educational workshops; we will also bring regular reports to the Education Committee of the Board on our progress and achievements in addressing the new standards; and Board members will participate in the self-study as participants in each of the four standard self-study committees.

Accreditation Self-Study

The approach to the self-study will also require discussion and recommendations from the working group because the new standards require dialogues among faculty members, classified staff and administrators across the traditional college boundaries of instruction, student development, library/learning resources and administration/finance. The working group will also need to address the role of the Board of Trustees in the development of the accreditation self-study.

In Fall 2003, the working group will make recommendations as to how the College will organize and implement the self-study, including a call for membership for the study committees, staffing and office needs. A proposed timetable for these activities appears below.

Initial Organization

The initial effort to assemble membership for the self-study committees, and identify staff and other organizational needs will take place in Spring 2004 and staff will begin preliminary work on the study during Summer 2004.

WASC Training and Report Preparation

The Steering Committee will hold an organizational meeting and attend a WASC Training Workshop in Fall 2004. Standard committees will prepare a first draft and the Steering Committee will review it. First draft responses to Major Recommendations of the accrediting team's 2000 visit will be prepared and reviewed by the Steering Committee.

Report Revision

Standards Committees will prepare responses to Minor Recommendations and the Steering Committee will review them. Standard Committees will submit second drafts. Steering Committee will review second drafts. Introductory section will be prepared, including history, demographic presentation, graph/charts, and standard summaries. Standard Committees will submit final drafts during Spring 2005.

Report Edit

Final Standard Committee drafts edited. Introductory section to the Self Study will be reviewed and completed. Draft will be submitted for duplicating Summer 2005.

Collegewide Dissemination

Self Study featured during Fall Flex Day activities. Draft distributed to College community. Steering Committee will review and incorporate community input. Signature page will be completed. Final document submitted for printing. Mailing list will be completed in the Fall 2005.

Accreditation Team Visit

Self-Study will be mailed to WASC team. Self Study will be available to the college community. Accreditation Team Visit in Spring 2006.

WASC Recommendations

WASC report will be received and distributed. Begin implementation of WASC recommendations in Fall 2006

Conclusion

This paper provides the College with a framework for addressing the new requirements related to assessment of student learning outcomes and the process of building an exemplary self-study for the accreditation visit in Spring 2006. It is intended to provoke thinking and discussion among all members of the college community so that we can produce a student learning outcomes system and an accreditation self-study that will be a model for others to follow in California. During the coming weeks, I plan to meet with the leadership of the college organizations and members of the Board to discuss our next steps. I am hoping to see us start our process by the middle of March.

City College has faced many challenges over the years; its faculty, classified staff, administrators and students have worked together to find the exemplary ways to respond to these challenges. I am confident that the College will once again rise to the occasion and seize this opportunity to pursue the highest standards of educational excellence.

CC: Members of the Board of Trustees