

VENTURA COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE VISIT
Academic Senate for California Community Colleges
Community College League of California

This report is in response to a request for technical assistance by Chancellor James Meznik and the Academic Senate Presidents in the Ventura CCD, Jeff Baker, Jeanette Redding, and Kathryn Schoenrock. The technical assistance visit was conducted on April 18th and 19th, 2006 by Dr. Diane Woodruff, Interim President/CEO of the Community College League of California and Ian Walton, President of the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges. The purpose of the visit was to assist the board, administration, faculty and staff in improving communication and developing a common understanding of participating effectively in district and college governance in order to improve the campus climate and more effectively serve students.

The team's observations and recommendations were made following separate meetings with: Oxnard College faculty, Ventura College Faculty, Moorpark College Faculty, District Faculty, Chancellor/Trustees, District Classified Staff, District Students, and District Administrators. The recommendations should not be viewed as a set of prescriptive solutions, but rather as catalysts for further discussion and improvements in governance at the college.

Recommendations

- 1.) Campus and district committees that make recommendations on academic and professional matters should be structured to ensure that faculty takes primary responsibility for making those recommendations. This can be achieved, for example, by having more faculty members on the committee, by chairing, or by co-chairing the committee with an administrative representative. In particular, the district needs to find a way to have the administrative perspective reflected in the mutual agreement process at the college curriculum committee level and/or district level, so that decisions about curriculum matters are not changed unilaterally at the district level without consultation with the Academic Senate.
- 2) The district has made a good start on reviewing existing policies and procedures related to participatory governance. Both district and colleges need to use a participatory process to complete this work and to develop a comprehensive set of written policies and procedures that ensure both effective participation for all, and a stronger role for the academic senate on academic and professional matters. The role of administrators also needs to be clarified and the charge of each committee should be clearly laid out.
- 3) The process for creation of written policies at both the college and district level needs to include adequate time for all constituency groups to take issues back to their constituents for discussion and input. If possible, official minutes should be kept and made available to the entire district community to help develop trust and buy-in to the process. It is important that meeting schedules are set after consulting with all committee members to try to accommodate the schedule of as many members as possible.

- 4) All members of the district community need to develop and practice a culture that treats other members, groups and viewpoints with respect. All involved in the participatory governance process should participate with the intent of seeking positive resolutions to issues and reaching consensus whenever possible. Participants should respect the opinions of all, conducting discussions in a professional manner, and keeping focus on the student and learning environment.
- 5) There should be an ongoing process to provide leadership training in both the philosophy and implementation of participatory governance and in the appropriate roles and responsibilities of the board and all members of the college community. A simple annual governance orientation for new participants in the process would be helpful.
- 6) Everyone's role needs to be better understood and respected. Almost every person and group we talked to did not feel that their role in the district was understood, respected or appreciated. Currently, there is not a common understanding in the district of the role of the board, Chancellor, management, academic senate, etc. For example, the relationship between the Department Chairs and the Academic Senate needs clarification as does the role of mid-level managers. Roles must be defined consistently so that all parties have the same understanding of their respective roles. In addition, there needs to be a greater understanding of the concept of delegation and how in effective districts, the board delegates its authority to the Chancellor, who in turn delegates it to administrative staff and to the academic senate for academic and professional matters.
- 7) The formal participatory governance decision making process needs to be clarified and documented in writing so that all district employees are aware of how decisions are made and forwarded to the board. The board in turn needs to give the recommendations coming from these processes greater weight than individual comments that may come to them in their role as trustees. Currently some members of the college community go directly to the board, which undercuts the roles and responsibilities of the faculty and administrative staff and the participatory processes that have been established.
- 8) Both policy creation and day-to-day operations need to be more transparent and communication needs to be improved. Improved communication at all levels will help to increase trust and build collegiality. It should ensure that all points of view are recognized by the process and are faithfully transmitted from grass roots level to district and board level. When difficult program and funding cuts need to be made, the district is encouraged to share information with faculty and staff and use the participatory governance process to generate recommendations that will be forwarded to the board.
- 9) District policies and procedures need to balance the value of college autonomy and individuality for the benefit of different communities and student bodies with the value of consistency across the district. Colleges in the district seem to prefer to operate independently of each other, but this needs to be balanced with what is best for students. Students complained that they had to take classes at all three colleges in order to complete major preparation (e.g. physical geology at Ventura, History of Geology at Oxnard and Mineralogy at Moorpark.)

10) The district needs to provide a more effective mechanism to ensure that staff members have sufficient time and support to participate effectively in governance activities. Classified staff in particular reported that recent cuts have resulted in significant layoffs of classified staff and in increased workloads for those remaining. They indicated that it is very difficult for them to participate in governance activities because they either have to impose on other colleagues in their absence or complete the original workload themselves when they return.

11) The district needs to provide flexibility to colleges to improve student participation in governance by increasing opportunities, reducing barriers and being sensitive to their busy schedules.

12) Board members need to receive training to understand their role as stewards of the public good and to distinguish between the board's role in setting broad policy versus the administration, faculty and staff's role in college and district operations. Board members are encouraged to represent the entire district and determine what is best for all the students in their district rather than just representing their own electoral area and/or constituency.

Conclusion

The Technical Assistance Team appreciated the full and thorough involvement of everyone who participated in the visit and who candidly shared their concerns and solutions about the participatory governance process in the Ventura CCD. We sincerely hope the recommendations will be helpful. We will be available for further explanation of the recommendations if necessary.

During the technical assistance visit, faculty, administration, board members and staff expressed a sincere desire to move beyond the conflicts of the past and improve the functioning of the district. The evident level of passion and emotion among all involved reveals a deep commitment to the district. Their deep regard for students, their love for the colleges they represent and their desire to move forward constitute a reservoir of potential that can be drawn upon to address the multiple issues and conflicts of the past era. All recognize the importance of the community colleges in the district to their surrounding communities. The cumulative talent, energy and devotion of the college's board, administration, faculty and staff bode well for the future. But, it is imperative that the board, administration, faculty and staff come together in a mutually respectful manner to move the district forward.

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