

ADVANCEMENT SECTION

REPORT OF A COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION VISIT

TO

Jefferson College
Hillsboro, MO 63050
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FOR

The Higher Learning Commission
A Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

EVALUATION TEAM

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I. OVERALL OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION

Jefferson College is a mature, comprehensive community college that is often referred to as “the jewel of Jefferson County.” In the years since its last accreditation visit, the College has seen significant growth and change. The development of the site at Arnold, the opening of Jefferson College/Northwest at High Ridge, the acquisition of prime acreage to expand in that area in the northern part of the county where population growth is taking place, and the development of online course work through the A.A. are striking evidence of growth. The clear commitment of the entire College to student success and the close knit partnerships with the communities it serves are indicative of both willingness and ability to carry out its mission.

The College has weathered an unusually high turnover at the upper levels of administration in no small measure because of the constancy of presence and tireless efforts of the retiring president. The Board has selected a new president who will begin his work at the end of the current academic year. The Board acknowledged that they need to support the new president as he seeks to ensure adequacy and stability coupled with vision and collegueship in his leadership team.

Jefferson College will have to be attentive to the learning needs of those displaced from jobs in the recent economic downturn. There are opportunities for growth as well as service. Such growth will require the College to identify mission-critical programs and services, especially related to adding, closing, and/or changing career and technical programs. The College must address the currency of existing programs and provide for change and growth in appropriate and viable career and technical offerings. The current economic crisis which has displaced workers and threatened the quality of life for so many requires colleges to educate and equip people to work in a knowledge-based economy. Jefferson College’s focus on preparing students to transfer is commendable and appears to be meeting the needs of the recent high school graduate population. The College is encouraged to identify and meet the needs of the 76% of the adult population without any postsecondary credential. This will involve a reallocation of resources. How will the College continue the current investment in athletics when balanced against the need to provide expanded workforce training for county residents? These kinds of decisions about resource allocation will demand a continuous monitoring of academic programs in addition to a once-every-five-year program review. Such

decisions will also demand strong and consistent academic administrative leadership. Jefferson College's close alliance with its communities and its clear commitment to serving them suggest that the College will respond to these challenges.

II. CONSULTATIONS OF THE TEAM

The team offers consultative advice in a number of areas. The consultation is divided into three sections.

- A. Extended observations that may assist the College in those areas in which Commission follow up is stipulated in the Assurance Section of the report.

1. Presidential transition and effective organizational structure

Jefferson College is at a turning point in its history. The team is concerned that the expectations for the new president will be built on the experience afforded during the tenure of the retiring president. The outgoing president's breadth and depth of knowledge of the College enabled him to juggle responsibilities beyond those of the executive. The number of direct reports and the turnover of academic leadership, particularly in the career and technical area, are among the most critical challenges for the new president to address.

While the team does not purport to prescribe a structure, all of the members were convinced that if the new president is to succeed in relating to the communities of the county and in providing leadership for the community that is the College, the new president will need an additional administrator who can provide strong and effective leadership for internal operations. As the team discussed with the Board and observed during its time on campus, the lack of strong consistent leadership in the Career and Technical and the merging of the responsibilities of the Dean of Arts and Sciences has not served the College well. Among the possible models that might be reviewed are the Provost/Chief Academic Officer to whom the Deans report. Strong academic leadership is critical in order to keep programs vital and current. An alternative model involves a Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs to whom the academic deans as well as the dean of students report. Either

of these approaches will ensure strong leadership at a senior administrative level for the core operations of the College and will enable the President to focus on the executive functions of the office which are both internal and external.

While flattened organizational charts have appealed to the community and the Board as a demonstration of cost containment, the investment in a strong senior level administrator is at this time both well-advised and essential. The team engaged in extended discussion with the Board concerning the importance of supporting the new President. Such support will enable the president to review and revise the organizational chart so that the executive office is appropriately supported in the upper levels of administration. Having engaged in a national search and identified and selected new leadership for the College, the Board must enable the new President to move ahead with decisions that may often be difficult as the College will grow by reallocation of resources. Strong and effective senior level leadership, especially for academic programs, is essential for Jefferson at this time in its organizational life.

2. Revision of Board policies and procedures

The team has observed that the Policy and Procedures Manuals which inform Board and college operations are neither up to date nor, in many cases, appropriate to a mature, comprehensive community college. (The cover on the Board Policy Manual available to the team in the Resource Room included the words “Jefferson JUNIOR College”). It is clear from a review of the Policy Manual in particular that many of the policies have not been reviewed or revised for ten or more years. The Board Policy Manual contains much terminology and language that still reflects the Junior College/K-14 structure. In addition and as a result, the Board minutes suggest that the Board devotes much of its time for discussion, deliberation and action on issues and items that are not at the policy level. While it is important for the Board to be knowledgeable enough to make informed decisions and engage in the macro-governance of the institution, policies such as I-008 (Rules of Order) and I-009 (Responsibilities of the Board of Trustees) suggest that the Board finds itself occupied in some instances with micromanagement rather than macrogovernance. While approval of the initiation of a new program or curriculum area is appropriate

for inclusion on a Board agenda as it will likely require significant investment in space, equipment, and personnel, the “approval of course offerings” does not rise to that level. This is just one example. Approvals of capital expenditures exceeding, for example, \$25,000 (or whatever amount, if there is one, established by state statute) and approvals of faculty and staff appointments/employment should also require Board approval and likely are required by state statute. Details like overload assignments may be better delegated to a senior administrator.

The College needs to undertake a comprehensive review and revision of its policies and procedures and, once completed, establish a regular review cycle. The revisions should both clarify and reflect the policy making role of the Board and affirm and reflect the administrative authority and responsibility of the President. The Board’s responsibility, noted in Policy I-009, should be expanded from “Select and appoint the President of the College” to wording that includes *supporting* as well as evaluating the President as stipulated in Policy III-002.

- B. Additional observations that may assist the College in those areas in which follow up needed by the organization is noted in the Assurance Section of the report.

1. Continued attention to issues of racial and ethnic diversity

In reviewing the adequacy of the College’s progress on addressing previously identified challenges, the team noted that although there have been some initiatives to address the educational value of diversity, the College continues to remain challenged by the lack of racial and ethnic diversity in its employees. While the demographics of the student body and employee groups may approximate the demographics of the county, there are indications that the county, immediately adjacent to the southern boundary of St. Louis County, is becoming more diverse. The population growth has already begun in the northern part of the county.

More significant is the current self study’s assertion that the mission documents “define the College’s constituencies as a diverse student body and a heterogeneous community “(SS,17). As it moves into the next decade of the new

millennium, the College needs to move beyond the approach of a menu of multicultural events and celebrations and begin to embody and reflect racial and ethnic diversity in its employee groups and student population. Those African Americans who spoke with the team included several employees and a recently appointed member of the Foundation Board. All praised the welcoming spirit of the College and it was clear that while they appreciated being a part of the Jefferson College, they looked to greater engagement of the College with the communities of which they are a part.

2. Reducing/restructuring committees (and revising criteria for professional advancement)

Although commitments to collaboration and shared governance are stated values of Jefferson College, the proliferation of committees appears to have reached the point of diminishing returns. With at least 21 committees each constituted with a number exceeding the optimum 7-9 member size, the College is missing opportunities for appropriate, effective, and efficient engagement and collaboration from committees that are appropriately consultative.

Representatives from every constituent group expressed dissatisfaction with the committee structure that currently exists. The faculty acknowledged that the existing criteria for promotion include the requirement to serve on at least one committee. Reducing the number of committees; considering what may appropriately be designated as “standing committees” and what may better be either “ad hoc” or “task forces” with a timeline should be initiated, perhaps as the new academic year begins. At the same time, the criteria for professional advancement should be revised. Both the committee/task force work and the criteria for professional advancement should reflect and support strategic goals and commitments of the College. The work of the College should be more consistently informed by and measured against data that are shared with the College community.

3. Planning and strategic decision making

The College has an abundance of data that should inform decision-making

at all levels and in all units of the institution and could benefit greatly from collective agreement on a set of annual core indicators of success. These indicators should undergird the annual planning process and inform the setting of strategic priorities and funding allocation. Using trend analysis and benchmarking with peer institutions in relation to core indicators can be useful tools in assessing institutional effectiveness.

Relying on data produced and analyzed to identify and drive decisions that clearly reflect priorities will enable the College to remain faithful to its mission-critical commitments in challenging times. The team observed that many good decisions, supportive of student success and of value and benefit to the College and the community were more ad hoc than strategic in nature. In conversations with constituent groups, the team explored the need for planning and decision-making that is more clearly strategic. Using the data produced by the Office of Institutional Research in planning, budgeting and decision-making, the College will be empowered to move beyond “maintaining and being responsive” and will be equipped to change by design.

4. Assessment

Jefferson College is transitioning in its attention to assessment of student learning from a focus on what the teacher does to what the students learn. Individual classroom assessment techniques are widespread and the Assessment newsletters still reflect a primary emphasis on teaching techniques for and by faculty members rather than documentation and analysis of student learning outcomes. Such an analysis can and should be used to inform changes to improve student learning. Conversations about student learning in multiple section courses, including and especially gateway and sequential courses, are just beginning. The full time faculty and adjunct faculty need to collaborate in these conversations and learn from each other concerning useful strategies to enhance the learning of their students. Rather than being burdensome, such conversation and collaboration can and will enrich the work of teaching which is so clearly valued by students and faculty at the College. The team urges continued efforts to engage in conversations about assessment that move

beyond exercises in compliance and accountability to opportunities for continuously improving student learning outcomes.

Identifying a framework for explicit outcomes for programs and departments in the Institutional Effectiveness Review will provide greater clarity about what programs/departments need to have as a focus. Beyond the single class and course assessments, it is essential for the College to establish clear program/department level outcomes, to measure performance on those outcomes, and to develop strategies to improve performance when the need for improvement is indicated. Members of the faculty and staff and administrators in both Academic Affairs and Student Services should make regular use of the reports and data available to them through the Office of Institutional Research. The extensive reporting and analysis produced by the staff in Institutional Research is a rich and too little tapped resource not only for planning and decision-making at Jefferson on the institutional level, but also for the purposes of assessment of student learning outcomes.

5. Academic Integrity and the learning process

The College values integrity and through the process of self study identified its intent to include a statement about integrity in its mission, vision, and values documents. The College has attended to issues of academic integrity, requiring a statement of its nature and importance in all new syllabi submitted. When academic integrity violations are reported, such violations are handled according to the general provisions of the Student Conduct Code. There is no established process for all faculty to address academic integrity violations. Students and faculty alike would benefit from this. The team urges the College to consider conversations about establishing such a process and suggests as a primary resource the Center for Academic Integrity (<http://www.academicintegrity.org/>)

6. Improving consistency in the collection and maintenance of personnel records

The team has noted that the College needs to establish and consistently implement a clear standard for the content of employee personnel files, including faculty credentials and certifications. These records are especially important for adjunct as well as full time faculty members. The team found a lack of consistency and completeness in personnel files and in required documentation of education and experience. It will be important for the Human Resource staff to complete their review of personnel files; to adhere to the recently established checklist for employment records, including the application for employment, previously required only for those employed as a result of a search process; and to ensure that all files are complete, especially for adjunct faculty.

Because the recruitment and selection of adjunct faculty is coordinated by the academic programs/departments and subject to approval of the division chair, the credentials that adjuncts are required to submit to the Human Resource Office are often not submitted. It may be beneficial to require that the division chairs implement the checklist as essential to their approval and appointment process for adjuncts to ensure that documentation is both timely and complete.

- C. Advice and suggestions offered from the perspective of peer reviewers whose role is to advance as well as assure the quality of higher learning.
- Initiate conversations to create a vision for future identities and connections between the main campus at Hillsboro and the Arnold and High Ridge sites including the scope of programming; staffing/employee mobility; student access to multiple campuses including curricular, co-curricular, and transportation.
 - Consider relying on technology to reinforce some of the connectedness between and among campuses, even to the extent of making the web a fourth campus.
 - Explore possibilities for partnership with the communities served by the three primary educational sites for environmentally friendly transportation between and among those sites—e.g. hybrid shuttle vehicles that travel on a schedule

to support access to and mobility among the campuses for students and employees.

- Investigate the adapting and usage of the Achieving the Dream research model in relation to developmental and gate-keeper courses.
- Strengthen the orientation, professional development, support for, and competitive compensation of adjunct faculty, engaging them with establishing, evaluating, and improving student learning outcomes.
- Strengthen existing and expand for the sake of students the relationships with Transfer Articulation Officers and Transfer Specialists at four-year institutions.

III. RECOGNITION OF SIGNIFICANT ACCOMPLISHMENTS, PROGRESS, AND/OR PRACTICES:

Jefferson College is to be commended for the extensive and intensive campus-wide engagement in the process of self study and in the extraordinary hospitality accorded to the team throughout their visit.