Report to the
Faculty, Administration, Staff, Trustees, and Students
of

ATLANTIC CAPE COMMUNITY COLLEGE
Mays Landing, New Jersey

by
A Team Representing the
Middle States Commission on Higher Education

Prepared After a Visit to the Mays Landing Campus on
October 28-30, 2007

The Members of the Team:

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Reasons for the Visit

MSCHE scheduled a small team visit to Atlantic Cape Community College as a follow-up to Atlantic Cape’s monitoring report submitted in compliance with the Commission’s action dated June 22, 2006: To warn the institution that its accreditation may be in jeopardy, and to request a monitoring report, due by September 1, 2007, documenting development and progress toward implementation of (1) a comprehensive institutional strategic plan that links long-range planning to decision-making and budgeting processes; and (2) an organized and sustained process for the assessment of institutional effectiveness. A visit may follow submission of the monitoring report.

The Conduct of the Visit

In preparation for the on-site visit to Atlantic Cape Community College, the team reviewed the following documents:

- Characteristics of Excellence, MSCHE
- 2006 Self Study, ACCC
- Evaluation Team Report
- ACCC Response to Evaluation Team Report
- MSCHE Statement of Accreditation Status
- Cover Letter to Monitoring Report
- ACCC Monitoring Report with Attachments
- Strategic Plan, 2005-2009, ACCC
- Institutional Effectiveness Plan, June 2007, ACCC
- Annual Outcomes Report, June 2007, ACCC
- Annual Budget Message, July 1, 2007-June 30, 2008, ACCC

During the visit, the team conducted interviews with:

- President Peter Mora
- Members of the Board of Trustees
- Senior Staff and designees
- Planning and Assessment Staff
- Director of Counseling
- Director of Advisement
- Chair of Faculty Assembly
- Dean of Instruction/Member of Technology Advisory Committee
- Dean of the Cape May County Campus and Labor Relations
- Dean of Students
- Faculty Member on Assessment Committee
- Registrar

Findings and Conclusions
The findings and conclusions of the team are presented separately for each of the requirements summarized in the MSCHE Statement on Accreditation reflecting the Commission’s action on June 22, 2006:

1. A comprehensive institutional strategic plan that links long-range planning to decision-making and budgeting processes.

The team concluded that the College has developed a comprehensive strategic plan, demonstrated progress in implementing the plan, and established linkages to decision-making and budgeting given the following accomplishments since the team visit:

- Embedded the 2005-2009 Strategic Plan in a new Planning, Budgeting, and Assessment Model.
- Agreed on the abbreviated version of the mission statement and embraced the “student centered” focus of that mission statement as a basis for planning and decision-making.
- Developed measurements for the 31 objectives in the Strategic Plan.
- Engaged the board, faculty, and staff in professional development in support of the new planning model.
- Reorganized staff to integrate support for planning and assessment.
- Established a new budget format to reflect allocation of resources by strategic goal.
- Established strategic priorities to provide yearly focus for implementation of strategic plan, decision-making, and budgeting; linked strategic priorities to annual outcomes report.
- Developed strategic initiatives process to focus available resources on new initiatives in support of strategic priorities.

Further, the team found a broad based understanding and commitment to the new planning model with the result that budget decisions are clearly processed in terms of strategic plan goals and annual strategic priorities. Moreover, the board demonstrated a commitment to planning and assessment as key areas of board responsibility. The board reorganized its committee structure to put added focus on comprehensive planning and has promoted more cross-committee work to ensure integration of planning, assessment, and decision-making. It is also significant that the board established accountability for planning and assessment by incorporating strategic goals into the evaluation process for the president and the president has established similar accountability for his senior staff.

Commendations

- The board, president, senior staff and college community have fully embraced the new planning model as a central commitment to institutional improvement.
- The College has invested heavily in board and staff development to sustain comprehensive planning and ensure its centrality to decision-making and resource allocation.

Suggestion
The College should consider the degree to which it needs to establish a budget target to support new initiatives needed to implement strategic priorities and strategic plan goals.

Recommendation

- None.

2. An organized and sustained process for the assessment of institutional effectiveness.

The team concluded that the Monitoring Report documents that ACCC has developed an Institutional Effectiveness Plan (IEP) that includes the required components of an assessment initiative. The IEP, once implemented and operating as a comprehensive whole, will permit the institution to link assessment outcomes to planning and resource allocation.

There is clear evidence of the progress since the Team visit eighteen months ago that faculty and staff are working to document institutional effectiveness. Staff reorganization has occurred so that institutional planning, research, and assessment offices can function as a team, once key positions are staffed, under the direction of the Dean of Administration, Planning and Research (APR). The Outcomes Assessment Coordinator position, which was grant funded, is now institutionalized.

The Annual Planning, Budgeting and Assessment Model highlights the importance of employing assessment outcomes data in planning and resource allocation so that the feedback loop is continuously employed for institutional renewal. In redefining the strategic plan, ACCC has worked to develop measurable objectives and then to further define the tools that will be used to document outcomes. The student learning assessment plan as well as the newly developed plan for the assessment of administrative units has employed a modification of the Nichols’ five-column model.

Performance Indicators will assist in monitoring trend data on important dimensions of institutional effectiveness. The Annual Outcomes Report is designed to summarize the activities of the past year and becomes the basis for the next cycle of planning and budgeting. Assessment outcomes are currently being used to direct planning and budget considerations in selected areas, and there is a commitment to extend this approach to all areas of the institution. In summary, Atlantic Cape Community College is demonstrating the building of a ‘culture of assessment’ in both its current activities and its future directions.

While a substantial effort is evident, much work remains. Full implementation of the Institutional Effectiveness Plan (IEP) is in the early stages. As noted in the Monitoring Report, “The College has made substantial progress in developing the tools for demonstrating the fundamental elements. However, there have been only limited instances of implementing assessment and renewal activities” (pg. 32).
In reviewing the Monitoring Report and in meetings with staff members, particular areas of concern include:

- Not all objectives derived from the strategic goals are stated in measurable terms. The actual measurements are also frequently not stated in measurable terms or accompanied by benchmarks that define whether the outcome has been achieved at an acceptable level. In several cases, the measurement delineates what will be done rather than the outcome desired;
- There is an enormous amount of data being collected. The institution can easily become mired in the data collection effort and lose sight of the most important factor: being able to analyze the data and develop interpretations that drive planning and resource allocation;
- There are no institution-level student learning outcomes. All three levels are needed (institution, program and course-level) and linkages must be established between the levels;
- While the program review template has a section on assessment, the requirement that assessment data be reported and used to drive recommendations is needed. In some cases, there is a lack of stated program outcomes that are measurable;

**Commendations:**

- The structure of an Institutional Effectiveness Plan (IEP) is fundamentally in place as a product of the extensive work accomplished since the Team visit.
- Staff members are aware of the components of a fully operational IEP and state a commitment to implement the plan, even if the components are not yet in place.
- The President and senior staff members are consistent in their support for the implementation of an IEP.
- Crucial positions in the Office of Administration, Planning and Research have been institutionalized and upgraded.
- ACCC is in the process of acquiring a new Management Information System (MIS) that will facilitate day-to-day operations and data analysis.

**Suggestions:**

- Continue to provide workshops and training for faculty and staff so that the College can move the assessment initiative to the next level.
- Continue the institutional priority of upgrading the technology infrastructure needed to sustain the IEP.
- Clearly articulate the linkages between the various levels of assessment for both academic and administrative assessment.
- Simplify the number of measurements so that crucial strategic questions are answered while employing focused and parsimonious data collection.

**Recommendation:**

- The institution must correct the particular areas of concern noted above and in the recommendations of the original Team that limit the institution’s ability to implement a comprehensive assessment initiative. The college must provide clear and compelling evidence that the Institutional Effectiveness Plan has been implemented and that assessment data/outcomes drive planning and resource allocation.