

# **EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT**

**Sierra Community College  
5000 Rocklin Road  
Rocklin, CA 95677**

**A Confidential Report Prepared for the  
Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges**

**This report represents the findings of the External Evaluation Team  
that visited Sierra Community College on October 21, 2013 through  
October 24, 2013.**

**Dr. Lori Gaskin, Chair**

## LIST OF TEAM MEMBERS

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## Summary of the Evaluation Report

INSTITUTION: Sierra College

DATE OF VISIT: October 21, 2013 through October 24, 2013

TEAM CHAIR: Lori Gaskin, Ph.D.  
Superintendent/President, Santa Barbara City College

The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) convened an eleven-member team comprised of peers from across ACCJC-accredited institutions to assess Sierra College's request for reaffirmation of accreditation status. From October 21, 2013 through October 24, 2013, this team conducted a comprehensive evaluation visit to Sierra College. The purpose of this visit was to assess the degree to which the college meets the standards of accreditation, reaffirm and validate the findings documented in the institution's self evaluation, assure ACCJC that the college continues to meet the eligibility requirements for accreditation, confirm to ACCJC that the college has been responsive to the recommendations from the 2007 evaluation team and the Commission in 2009, provide guidance to the institution in the form of recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the college, and make a recommendation to ACCJC regarding the accredited status of the college.

In preparation for the October visit, the team attended a training session on September 13, 2013 conducted by ACCJC. Additionally, the team received the self evaluation and supporting documents from Sierra College. In preparation for the actual site visit, the team completed a set of assignments designed to familiarize members with the self evaluation report, the recommendations from the 2007 team visit and the Commission in 2009, the college's midterm and follow-up reports, and pertinent college research and supporting documentation. The team members were organized into standard teams to allow for more targeted and focused study and analysis. The team began the visit well prepared with a firm grounding of the self evaluation report, a set of written assessments of the report, and a sense of the areas needing further investigation and clarification.

In the afternoon of October 21, 2013, the full eleven-member Sierra College team met to discuss the self evaluation, review areas needing further attention, and assess initial findings. A college tour was conducted on that day as was a visit to the team room at the college to provide the opportunity for members to familiarize themselves with the evidence available in support of the self evaluation report.

Over the course of the visit, the team held numerous meetings and interviews with individuals and groups, undertook painstaking research to validate the self evaluation, visited all campuses across the district and the instruction and support services occurring therein, and conducted a detailed and thorough review of distance education course offerings. The team interacted with faculty, staff, administrators, students, and members of the Board of Trustees. The team held two open forums.

The College's self evaluation provided the underpinnings for this accreditation visit and it clearly was a work emanating from an inclusive self-assessment process. The team found the self evaluation useful and informative. At the same time, it is noted that improvement in the following areas would have created a stronger and more effective report and would have allowed the team to gain a sense of the College more readily:

- addressing the standard with more clarity and focus and avoiding commentary tangential to the standard;
- integrating evidence into the document where appropriate; and
- using the Actionable Improvement Plans to declare an intent to embark upon a new direction, substantive improvement action, or plan intended to be implemented rather than focusing on "continuing" efforts already in place.

Sierra College was well prepared for the team's visit. Staff was extremely accommodating and the entire institution was hospitable and welcoming. The team readily connected with the institution and could sense the genuineness, camaraderie, and common purpose amongst the entire Sierra College "family."

As a result of findings from this October 2013 comprehensive evaluation visit, the team has five recommendations. They are as follows, categorized by those aimed at correcting deficiencies and those focused on institutional improvement:

### **Recommendations to Correct Deficiencies**

**Recommendation 1:** In order to meet the standard, Recommendation 3 from the 2007 *Evaluation Report*, and the Proficiency Level of Implementation of the *Rubric for Evaluating Institutional Effectiveness - Part III: Student Learning Outcomes*, the College should:

1. Complete SLOs for all active courses and programs.
2. Accelerate the process for completing and institutionalizing student learning outcomes assessment at the course, program, and institutional levels.

3. Systematically integrate the results of student learning assessments into the institutional planning and resource allocation processes in order to improve student learning.
4. Ensure that student learning outcomes for courses are included in the course syllabus and that program-level outcomes are intentionally provided to current and prospective students.

(Standard 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.i; II.A.6)

**Recommendation 4:** In order to meet the standard, the team recommends that the College develop a process for the regular evaluation of its governance and decision-making structures to ensure their effectiveness. Specific focus should be on key governance and decision-making councils and committees. (Standard IVA.5)

### **Recommendations to Improve**

**Recommendation 2:** In order to improve, the team recommends that the College leverage the success experienced with special programs for underrepresented student populations and scale these efforts in order to replicate success rates with an increased number of eligible students. (Standard II.B.3.a; II.B.3.d)

**Recommendation 3:** In order to improve, the team recommends the College complete the updating and approval of the Facilities Master Plan that is currently in progress, as noted in the College's Actionable Improvement Plan for Standard IIIB.2. (Standard IIIB.1.a; IIIB.2.a; IIIB.2.b)

**Recommendation 5:** In order to improve, the team recommends that the College institutionalize a systematic approach to regularly review, update, and revise Board policies. (Standard IV.B.1e)

## INTRODUCTION

Sierra College has a long history serving Placer and Nevada counties and portions of El Dorado and Sacramento counties along the western slope of the Sierra Nevada. The college serves a widespread and diverse assemblage of communities by providing high quality education for transfer to four-year institutions, associate degrees, career and technical education, certificate coursework, basic skills, and lifelong learning.

Nearly 20,000 students attend Sierra College each semester. Their demographics reflect the communities served by the institution. These students pursue a range of program and course offerings, including general education, major preparation coursework, basic skills, and career and technical education. Fifty-five percent of Sierra College's students have the goal of transfer.

The geography of Sierra College's district is expansive, varied, and challenged by weather and topography. The siting of its four campuses across diverse settings within the district represents a strong and tangible commitment to effectively meet the higher education needs of the communities served by the institution. Each of the campuses presents a pleasant and inviting environment to students, employees, and the public. The team found all campus grounds and buildings to be well maintained, reflective of a clear commitment to ensuring that the facilities support and strengthen the teaching and learning process.

Overall, the team found Sierra College to epitomize its core values of excellence, collaboration, and connections. The college has a genuine commitment to service and a strong belief in a common purpose - that being to meet the educational needs of students. The feeling of camaraderie and an esprit de corps permeated the conversations the team had with college personnel.

The team specifically commends the college for the following:

- The team commends the College for institutionalizing a well-conceived program review process across all sectors of the institution and for fostering its evolution into a functional and effective planning and resource tool. The program review committees have routinely used a rubric to provide constructive feedback to programs. The program review chairs (instruction/student services and operations/administrative offices) have written exemplary summary reports. Over the years the committees have adjusted the forms and prompt questions to enhance the process. The use of program review for planning and resource allocation purposes, its systematic use, the peer review structure, the effective use of a rubric for review and assessment, and the

summary reports that emanate from this effort are all evidence of a well-structured and productive process.

- The team commends the College for the work of its Program Vitality Committee (defined by BP and AP 4021), and for the establishment of the Strategic Reduction of Educational Programs policy (defined by BP and AP 4023). The Program Vitality Committee was courageous and recognized the importance of communicating concerns when it became apparent programs needed to be examined in light of the realities of budget reductions. By following an inclusive and transparent process, programs experienced a thoughtful, fair and thorough review to determine new directions and enhancements.
- The team commends the College for the quality of its distance education program, as evidenced by the investment in a Distance Learning Coordinator, ongoing training for faculty, an active and motivated Distance Learning and Instructional Technology Committee, robust evaluation of Distance Education courses, and a thorough process in choosing the Canvas learning management system.
- The team commends the College for its online Student Support Services systems and processes. The new technology-based infrastructure, centered around the Banner student information system, has greatly increased access to information and services for both students and staff. The Banner software platform has provided important new functions such as Degree Audit, online counseling services, and student educational plan development. In addition, the Canvas learning management software system provides broad support for distance education courses, and the Accuplacer software provides computerized assessment and release of prerequisite holds for some basic courses. The integration of these multiple systems is a milestone of achievement that will serve the College and its students for many years to come.
- The team commends the College for its efforts in the area of campus life, as exemplified by the Campus Life program, Campus Life Coordinator, Campus Life Office, and Campus Life Committee. Campus life activities exhibit a passionate and vibrant commitment to student-centered engagement in a multitude of experiences (i.e., co-curricular, governance, service, and leadership) external to the classroom.
- The team commends the College for its robust Staff Development program. The College offers a variety of short- and long-term professional development opportunities that cover instructional training needs, compliance training, and many other areas of focus. Commendable programs include the annual multi-day off campus retreat, the Sierra College Collaborative Culture and Civility Training (SC4)

program, the New Faculty Academy, and the annual, four-day, Instructional Skills Workshop.

- The team commends the College for the quality, maintenance, and care of its campuses and grounds. Of particular note is Rocklin campus where its aging infrastructure has posed challenges yet the hallmarks of the physical plant are its setting, functionality, and level of maintenance. The intense and genuine pride that emanates from all employees across the district is recognized and lauded.
- The team commends the College for integrating technology resource planning with institutional planning, and for its use of appropriate technology in support of instruction, student access, and district operational systems. The institution systematically assesses the effective use of technology resources as demonstrated by the electronic Program Assessment Review (ePAR) process and the technology master plan and uses the results of the evaluation as the basis for improvement.
- The team commends the College for its collaborative and inclusive culture. This culture was described in the Self Evaluation and echoed in interviews with Board Members, the Academic, Classified, Management and Student Senate leadership, as well as members of the Standard IV writing team which included all college constituencies including part-time faculty. The theme was also evident in comments in the two Open Forums. The College has a clear and thoughtful leadership and governance structure that encourages “ethical and effective leadership with the goal of ensuring college wide-participation in shared governance ultimately focused on maximizing and improving student learning.”

As well, the team has set forth five recommendations to both address deficiencies in meeting the accreditation standards and to improve upon the efforts of the college. These recommendations focus the college upon: (1) attending to the elements of the student learning outcomes cycle in a sustainable and institutionalized manner; (2) addressing the needs of underrepresented students in a broader way; (3) completing the facilities master plan; (4) evaluating its governance and decision-making structures; and (5) systematically reviewing and updating Board policies. These recommendations are detailed in the earlier summary section and within the body of this report (by standard).

## **Evaluation of Institutional Responses to Previous Recommendations**

As a result of the fall 2007 accreditation visit and the six recommendations made by the 2007 visiting team, the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges placed Sierra College on Warning on January 31, 2008. The College was required to submit a progress report by October 15, 2008, and a follow up visit was conducted on November 17, 2008. In February of 2009, the College received notification from the ACCJC that the Commission had voted to continue Sierra College on Warning and require a follow-up report from the College by October 15, 2009, followed by a visit from an ACCJC team. In addition, the Commission added a new recommendation.

The following paragraphs contain the current (October 2013) evaluation team's assessment of the progress made by Sierra College on the six fall 2007 recommendations, as well as the 2009 recommendation.

### **2007 Recommendation 1: Mission Statement**

**To ensure services and programs offered by Sierra College are meeting its stated purpose, the team recommends that the College amend the mission statement to specifically identify its intended student population and its commitment to achieving student learning. (Standard I.A.1, IV.B.1.b)**

The mission was amended and adopted by the Board of Trustees on June 24, 2008, and requisite components were verified as present by the Progress Report Visit of November 17, 2008. The mission statement now reads:

“Sierra College provides a challenging and supportive learning environment for students having diverse goals, abilities, and needs interested in transfer, career and technical training, and lifelong learning. The College’s programs and services encourage students to identify and to expand their potential. Sierra College students will develop the knowledge, skills and abilities to become engaged and contributing members of the community.”

The intended student population is identified as those, “having diverse goals, abilities, and needs interested in transfer, career and technical training, and lifelong learning.” The commitment to achieving student learning is evident in the statements, “ provides a challenging and supportive learning environment for students,” “encourage students to identify and to expand their potential,” and “ students will develop the knowledge, skills and abilities to become engaged and contributing members of the community.”

In 2011, the Strategic Council changed the mission statement review cycle from three to six years. The mission and Board Policy 1200 were reviewed again by the Board of Trustees on June 12, 2012, with the next mission statement review scheduled for 2017.

The College has effectively responded to the previous team's recommendations and the deficiency has been resolved.

## **2007 Recommendation 2: Integrated Planning, Evaluation, and Resource Allocation Decision-Making**

**In order for the College to ensure an ongoing, systematic, and cyclical process that includes evaluation, planning, resource allocation, implementation, and re-evaluation, the team recommends the following plan development, implementation, evaluation and improvement steps:**

- 2a. Develop a comprehensive, integrated, long-range Strategic Plan including goals that can be used to influence resource allocation decisions. The Strategic Plan should incorporate the priorities established in all of the College's major plans to include its: i. Technology Plan; ii. Facilities Plan; iii. Educational Master Plan; iv. Human Resources Staffing Plan (Standard I.A.4, I.B.2, I.B.3, 4, III.A.2, III.B.2.b, III.C.2, III.C.1.d).**
- 2b. Modify the budget development process in a manner that will place the College's Strategic Plan priorities at the center of its resource allocation decisions (Standard III.D.1, 1.c).**
- 2c. Develop and work to implement as appropriate a Human Resources Staffing Plan that will satisfy the College's long standing expression of need for additional full-time faculty and support personnel to improve student learning (Standard III.A.2, II.C.1, II.C.1.a, II.C.1.d).**
- 2d. Develop mechanisms to regularly evaluate all of the College's planning and resource allocation processes as the basis for improvement (Standard I.B.6, II.A.2.f, II.B.4, III.D.3, IV.A.5).**

**2007 Recommendation 2a. - Develop a comprehensive, integrated, long-range Strategic Plan including goals that can be used to influence resource allocation decisions. The Strategic Plan should incorporate the priorities established in all of the College's major plans to include its: i. Technology Plan; ii. Facilities Plan; iii. Educational Master Plan; iv. Human Resources Staffing Plan. (Standard I.A.4, I.B.2, I.B.3, 4, III.A.2, III.B.2.b, III.C.2, III.C.1.d)**

The College began its response to this recommendation by creating and staffing a new position, Dean for Planning, Research, and Resource Development to provide a focal point for the development of the integration of College planning, evaluation and resource allocation processes. Subsequently, the College formed a group to lead the development of a Strategic Plan with goals and strategies. By summer 2008 the Plan was vetted on campus and presented to the Board of Trustees. The Strategic Plan incorporates priorities in the Educational Master Plan, Facilities Master Plan and Technology Plan. Final approval was accomplished in December 2008. A Technology Master Plan was completed by May 2008. An update to the Facilities Master Plan for the Rocklin campus was started in 2008 and left as a draft document. A site plan was not tentatively approved until June 2011, pending agreement on the placement of the proposed new science building. By April 2013 the Board approved a Rocklin site plan with the science building and childcare center locations established. The College formed a task force to develop a new Facilities Master Plan for the Rocklin campus that will be finished by spring 2014. The Facilities Master Plan for the Tahoe Truckee and the Nevada County campuses have moved forward based upon documents created in 2004.

An Educational Master Plan was scheduled for completion by spring 2009 and work on a Human Resources Master Plan was in progress. The Progress Report prepared to the visiting team in November 2008 affirms these accomplishments in response to the recommendation but notes that the College intended to use the 2009-10 fiscal year to fully implement all aspects of the new processes and metrics to monitor progress on the integrated plans. The subsequent visiting team prepared a December 2010 report affirming the full implementation.

During this period the College revised its annual planning and resource allocation cycle and placed the Strategic Plan at its center. The new electronic Program Assessment and Review (ePAR) process requires all department goal and resource requests to align with District goals and strategies as expressed in the Strategic Plan. The Board of Trustees and Strategic Council agendas are organized around the primary goals of the Strategic Plan. By spring 2009 progress on the goals were analyzed and several suggested revisions to the strategies were embraced. The Board of Trustees approved the Human Resources Master Plan in November 2008 and the Board adopted an Educational Master Plan in December 2009. The Commission action letter of January 31, 2011 acknowledges that the College had addressed the recommendation. As noted later, the Self Evaluation Report affirms that the College continues to practice integrated planning so as to influence its resource allocation decisions.

The College has effectively responded to the previous team's recommendations and the deficiency has been resolved.

**2007 Recommendation 2b. - Modify the budget development process in a manner that will place the College's strategic plan priorities at the center of its resource allocation decisions (Standard III.D.1, 1.c)**

In implementing the electronic Program Assessment Review (ePAR) software, the College also changed the budget development process to require that resource requests be linked to goals and strategies found in the Strategic Plan. The ePAR procedures are supported by the implementation of TracDat software to facilitate linkages among plan goals and resource requests as well as subsequent reporting. The budget development process was further changed with the creation of a Strategic Council subcommittee, Planning and Resource Allocation Committee (PARAC), which functions to provide openness, clarity and consistency to the resource allocation process through focused dialogue on the improvement of institutional effectiveness and student learning outcomes. The Planning and Resource Allocation Committee discusses top tier budget requests, informed by program review findings and College priorities expressed in the Strategic and other plans, and submits recommendations to the Strategic Council. The report prepared by a follow-up visiting team in December 2009 noted marked improvement is the use of the Strategic Plan to influence resource allocation decisions and much greater involvement of college personnel in discussions as to how resources were to be allocated. As noted in the Self Evaluation Report, the College intends to change the format of departmental budgets to identify their alignment with each of the primary goals expressed in the Strategic Plan.

The College has effectively responded to the previous team's recommendations and the deficiency has been resolved.

**2007 Recommendation 2c. - Develop and work to implement as appropriate a Human Resources Staffing Plan that will satisfy the College's long standing expression of need for additional full-time faculty and support personnel to improve student learning (Standard III.A.2, II.C.1, II.C.1.a, II.C.1.d).**

Two Human Resources Master Plans were developed in 2008 and 2012 to support the goal of increasing full-time faculty and support personnel positions. However, the maturing institutional planning and resource allocation processes and the dynamics of the budget crises in recent years proved to be more timely and relevant to ensure the College adequately evaluated and prioritized its staffing needs using fiscally appropriate strategies. As noted in the Self Evaluation Report, the Strategic Council made a decision in spring 2013 to discontinue developing human resources staffing plans and instead identify staffing needs through the development of a goal or objectives in the soon to be updated Strategic Plan.

The College has effectively responded to the previous team's recommendations and the deficiency has been resolved.

**2007 Recommendation 2d. - Develop mechanisms to regularly evaluate all of the College's planning and resource allocation processes as the basis for improvement (Standard I.B.6, II.A.2.f, II.B.4, III.D.3, IV.A.5).**

The College created a set of key metrics with the development of the Strategic Plan in 2008. One year later, annual reporting on progress made on the goals began in conjunction with the summer Board of Trustees retreat and August Strategic Council meeting. The metrics report served as the basis to discuss priorities intended for the subsequent year. During the initial years of implementation, resource request and electronic Planning and Resource (ePAR) processes were subjected to aggressive evaluation and modification as problems were identified. A 15-year schedule for the evaluation, review and updating of District master plan documents was adopted to include the assessment of each related planning process. An evaluation of the program review process was conducted through a survey of staff involved in the process. As a result of these regular evaluations a number of changes were made to the forms and processes. The follow-up visiting team report (2009) concluded that the College had achieved sustainable continuous improvement with respect to planning. As noted in the Self Evaluation Report, in subsequent years the Research, Planning and Resource Development Office staff created a coordinated process to evaluate the efficacy of planning activities and prompted both the Strategic Council and the Planning and Resource Allocation Committee (PARAC) to frequently discuss this topic. The work of the Strategic Council and the PARAC were subjected to an evaluation through a 2012 survey of employees. Most recently, these governance committees have facilitated a change to the planning calendar to allow ePARs to be completed early in the fall term and program reviews to be completed early in the spring term with a term-specific day in flex week dedicated for planning and assessment process as of 2013-14.

The College has effectively responded to the previous team's recommendations and the deficiency has been resolved.

**2007 Recommendation 3: Student Learning Outcomes**

**The team recommends that the College identify assessment methods and establish dates for completing student learning outcomes assessments at the institutional level and for all of its courses, programs, and services. This process should also include the development of performance measures to assess and improve institutional effectiveness**

**of all programs and services. The College should disseminate the outcomes widely and use these results in the strategic planning and resource allocation process. It is further recommended that the College include effectiveness in producing student learning outcomes as part of its faculty evaluation process. (Standard II.A.1.a, c, II.A.2.a, h, II.B.4, II.C.2, III.A.1.c)**

The College responded to this Recommendation in a 2008 Follow Up Report, which was followed by a Progress Report Visit later that year. At that time, the team noted that the College had partially implemented the recommendation and no longer required reporting on this recommendation. Since then, the College made a variety of efforts to comply with the recommendation. In 2008, the Institutional Assessment Plan was endorsed in the Academic Senate and a standing Student Learning Committee was established. Tracdat software was purchased to house the SLOs and the assessment results. Training was completed with faculty during flex days to assure an understanding of how to use the software.

Since 2008, Sierra College has been updating its assessment and outcomes processes related to all levels. Through the Academic Senate, a six-person team of ambassadors led by an SLO Coordinator was formed to support the academic and administrative constituents in understanding and writing SLOs as well as creating appropriate support handbooks. By fall 2012, 94.4% of the courses had written outcomes and 54% had completed the assessment process.

This team observed that the College's initial progress on this recommendation has stalled in recent years. At this time, course SLOs have not been completed for all courses. Further course level SLOs are not included in all syllabi provided to students. SLOs are not available on the website. Program Learning Outcomes are not in the catalog and are difficult to find on the website. Dates to complete assessments have not been consistently implemented. There is no evidence of performance measures or dissemination of outcomes. In addition, there are no rubrics or other evidence to show that assessment results are being used for strategic planning and resource allocation. The College has, however, successfully included effectiveness in producing student learning outcomes as part of its faculty evaluation. In 2011-12, the District and faculty union revised the article concerning faculty evaluation that now includes a provision for assessment of course and program SLOs.

Conversations with college staff indicate that the Academic Senate will take a stronger role moving forward and the College has committed the resources to support an Educational Effectiveness Coordinator to lead the effort to create processes and ensure follow-through. The team is optimistic that the College will be able to fully comply with this recommendation.

At this time, the College has partially met the components of Recommendation 3.

#### **2007 Recommendation 4: Online Support Services for Students**

**The team recommends that a more robust set of online support services be developed for students at Sierra College to effectively serve students in distance education classes as well as students enrolled in traditional classes at developing Sierra College campus sites. These services might include but are not limited to tutoring, financial aid advisement, and library services. (Standard II.B.3.a, II.C.1, II.C.1.c)**

Sierra College has presented a robust response to the 2007 Recommendation 4, evidenced most prominently by the implementation of the Banner enterprise information system, which greatly expanded access to online student support services including counseling, orientation, library resources, online class schedules, financial aid information, degree audit, electronic education plans, and an online portal branded as “mySierra.” The College demonstrates a commitment to the use of technology to enhance student support services.

The College has effectively responded to the previous team’s recommendations and the deficiency has been resolved.

#### **2007 Recommendation 5: Plan for Long-Term Debt Financing**

**The team recommends that the College develop a long-term debt financing plan to address the costs associated with implementation of GASB 45 requirements (Standard III.D.1.c).**

At the time of the last comprehensive evaluation of Sierra College in 2007, the team noted that the College did not have a plan to respond to the short-term effect of long-term debt, specifically Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB), on the stability of its financial condition. Since that time, the College has been addressing its OPEB liability. The College has made significant adjustments to its bargaining agreements, established an irrevocable trust, established a Retirement Board of Authority (RBOA) to provide oversight of the trust, taken action to lower health costs, and contracts for an actuarial study every two years to analyze its liabilities for retiree health benefits. As of the May 31, 2012 actuarial study, there are 85 active employees and 301 retirees eligible for College-provided retiree health benefits.

According to this May 2012 actuarial report, the pay-as-you-go annual actuarial estimate peaks in 2022/2023, at \$3,755,539. The Annual Required Contribution (ARC) is \$3,446,943.

The Actuarial Accrued Liability (AAL) totals \$44,753,479. The irrevocable trust had a balance of \$8,116,832 as of June 30, 2012. The College plans to continue using the pay-as-you-go model, currently \$3,040,820 and not fully fund the ARC.

The team that visited the College on April 16, 2012, concluded that the College complied with the requirements of Standard III.D.1 and had fully implemented 2007 Recommendation 5. ACCJC reviewed the Follow-up Report submitted by the College and the report of the evaluation team at its meeting June 6-8, 2012.

The College has effectively responded to the previous team's recommendations and the deficiency has been resolved.

### **2007 Recommendation 6: Governing Board Evaluation**

**The team recommends that the Board complete an annual board self-evaluation to ensure that its policies promote quality, integrity, and effectiveness of the student learning programs and services (Standard IV.B.1).**

Board Policy 2745 describes the Board of Trustees' annual self-evaluation process. Once a year since 2009, the Board has reviewed and discussed results of its self-evaluation in facilitated open Board meetings, as evidenced by the minutes of those meetings in 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013.

The College has effectively responded to the previous team's recommendations and the deficiency has been resolved.

**2009 Commission Recommendation 1: The Commission requires the College to improve its program review process to include analysis of the currency and relevancy of the programmatic curriculum.**

Evidence throughout Standards I and II sufficiently proves that learning outcomes and assessment are a part of the program review process. Program Review prompts for instructional programs require that authors address alignment with the College mission and strategic goals, thereby ensuring that programs are relevant and meet student and community needs. Instructional programs must also review the currency of their curricula through this process by including a three-year synthesis of student learning outcomes assessment results. Overall, the Program Review process at the College is robust and rigorous; it has been institutionalized and creates a foundation for the improvement of student learning, strategic and long-term planning, and related resource allocation.

The College has effectively responded to the previous team's recommendations and the deficiency has been resolved.

## Eligibility Requirements

1. **Authority:** Sierra College has authority to operate as a degree granting institution due to continuous accreditation by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, an institutional accreditation body recognized by the Commission on Recognition of Postsecondary Accreditation and the United States Department of Education. This authority is noted on the website homepage and “About Us” pages. Further, Sierra College, one of the 112 community colleges in the state, is recognized by the California Community College Chancellor’s Office and authorized to provide educational programs in accordance with the California Education Code.
2. **Mission:** The evaluation team confirmed that Sierra College’s current mission statement was adopted by the Board of Trustees on June 24, 2008, and reviewed with no recommended revisions on June 12, 2012. The Strategic Council, in 2011, changed the mission review cycle from three to six years with the next review scheduled for 2017. The mission statement includes a focus appropriate for a community college. It is published widely throughout the College, including the College’s website and the College catalog.
3. **Governing Board:** The evaluation team confirmed that Sierra College is governed by a Board of Trustees consisting of seven trustees elected from different geographical areas. Board members are elected to four-year staggered terms, with no term limits. Additionally, a student trustee, who is also the Student Senate President, is elected on a yearly basis and has an advisory vote. Within the last 6 years three new board members have joined the board.
4. **Chief Executive Officer:** The evaluation team confirmed that Sierra College’s Superintendent/President serves as the chief executive officer who has primary authority and responsibility for leadership and management of all programs and services provided by the College.
5. **Administrative Capacity:** The evaluation team confirmed that the College has sufficient administrative staff with appropriate preparation and experience to operate the College.
6. **Operating Status:** The evaluation team confirmed that Sierra College is operational and actively serves students seeking certificate and degree completion. Further, it operates in a manner congruent with its mission.

7. **Degrees:** The evaluation team confirmed that Sierra College offers Associate in Arts and Associate in Science degrees in a variety of majors, as well as Associate in Arts and Associate in Science for Transfer in a variety of programs. The College catalog contains a listing of degrees and certificates offered, specific course requirements, and the number of units of study required to complete each program.
8. **Educational Programs:** The evaluation confirmed that Sierra College degree programs are consistent with the mission of the College, and that fields of study are aligned with generally accepted practices in degree-granting institutions of higher institutions. Associate degrees are generally at least two years in length. Programs are of sufficient content and length, are taught at appropriate levels of quality and rigor, and culminate in identified student learning outcomes.
9. **Academic Credit:** The evaluation team confirmed that Sierra College awards academic credit in a manner consistent with generally accepted higher education practices. The College awards academic credit based on the Carnegie unit standard, the California Code of Regulations, Title 5, and on accepted practices of the California Community College system.
10. **Student Learning and Achievement:** The evaluation team confirmed that Sierra College has defined institutional learning outcomes and program-level outcomes. Course level outcomes have been developed for a majority, but not all, courses. Outcomes assessment, integration into the planning process, and student awareness have not reached the Proficiency Level.
11. **General Education:** The evaluation team confirmed that Sierra College incorporates general education into its degree programs, and that this component includes demonstrated competence in writing and computational skills, and an introduction to some of the major areas of knowledge. Degree credit for general education programs is consistent with levels of quality and rigor appropriate to higher education.
12. **Academic Freedom:** The evaluation team confirmed that there is an Academic Freedom Policy (BP 4030), and that there is an atmosphere in which intellectual freedom and independence exist. Sierra College's 2013 Self Evaluation Report states that the College supports the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure.
13. **Faculty:** The evaluation team confirmed that the College has a substantial core of qualified full-time faculty, sufficient in size and experience to meet current needs.

The team also confirmed that faculty members are responsible for curriculum processes and for the assessment of student learning.

14. **Student Services:** The evaluation team confirmed that a wide variety of student services are offered in multiple formats to support student learning and development.
15. **Admissions:** The evaluation team confirmed that admissions policies are clear, accessible, consistent, and are publicized online, in the College catalog, in the schedule of classes, and in Board policies.
16. **Information and Learning Resources:** The evaluation team confirmed that the College provides students and staff access to sufficient learning resources, information, and services to support its mission and instructional programs in whatever format and wherever they are offered.
17. **Financial Resources:** The evaluation team confirmed that the College has a sufficient and documented funding base, adequate financial resources, and solid plans for financial development to support student learning programs and services, to improve institutional effectiveness, and to assure financial stability.
18. **Financial Accountability:** The evaluation team confirmed that the College undergoes annual independent external audits, and that matters and documents relating to internal and external audits are well-managed with proper oversight.
19. **Institutional Planning and Evaluation:** The evaluation team confirmed that the College uses data about student achievement and learning in its planning and resource allocation process. Data about student learning and achievement is presented and discussed at appropriate college meetings. There is evidence of planning for improvement of institutional structures and processes, student achievement of educational goals, and student learning. There is evidence that the institution assesses progress toward achieving its stated goals and makes decisions regarding improvement through an ongoing and systematic cycle of evaluation, integrated planning, resource allocation, implementation, and re-evaluation.
20. **Integrity in Communicating with the Public:** The evaluation team confirmed that the College provides a print or electronic catalog for its constituencies with precise, accurate, and current information concerning its identification and contact information, mission, course, program and degree offerings, academic calendar, academic freedom statement, financial aid, learning resources, names and degrees of administrators and faculty members, names of Board members, and requirements for

admission, fees, degree, certificates, graduation, transfer, and major policies affecting students.

21. **Integrity in Relations with the Accrediting Commission:** The evaluation team confirmed that the College adheres to the Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards and policies of the Commission, and describes itself in identical terms to all of its external accrediting agencies. The College publishes accurate information regarding its accreditation status both in printed documents and on its website.

# **STANDARD I: INSTITUTIONAL MISSION AND EFFECTIVENESS**

## **Standard IA -- Mission**

### **General Observations**

Following an inclusive process, the Sierra College mission statement was amended and adopted by the Board of Trustees on June 24, 2008, and reviewed with no recommended revisions on June 12, 2012. The Strategic Council, in 2011, changed the mission review cycle from three to six years with the next review scheduled for 2017.

The mission statement defines the institution's broad educational purposes, its intended student population and its commitment to achieving student learning. A three-year program review cycle requires all programs to articulate how they aid the District towards mission delivery, and the mission is central to institutional planning and decision making.

### **Findings and Evidence**

The College's mission statement defines the intended student population as those "having diverse goals, abilities, and needs interested in transfer, career and technical training, and lifelong learning." Commitment to achieving student learning is evident in the statements, "provides a challenging and supportive learning environment for students," "encourages students to identify and to expand their potential," and "students will develop the knowledge, skills, and abilities to become engaged and contributing members of the community." Broad educational purposes are explicit via both the intended student population and commitment to achieving student learning statements. (Standard I.A)

Sierra College has established student learning programs and services aligned with its purpose, character and student population. A three-year program review cycle requires each program to respond to the question, "How does your program fit within the district mission?" and to analyze and evidence alignment with the mission categories of "transfer, career technical education, basic skills, personal development/enrichment and lifelong learning." By means of a data informed Program Vitality process, led by a Program Vitality Committee (a standing committee of the Academic Senate), internal and external stakeholder participation is solicited and prompted through established discussion guidelines to ensure programs and services align to meet the needs of the student population. Student support services generate Services Program Review Reports in which they articulate how the program fits within the mission statement and how it aligns with student needs. The College has developed ten

associate transfer degrees and maintains and updates articulation with California institutions. (Standard I.A.1)

The mission was amended and adopted by the Board of Trustees on June 24, 2008. The mission was again reviewed with no recommended revisions on June 12, 2012. The next formal review is scheduled for 2017. The mission statement is published in multiple locations including the website, Board Agendas, the Educational Master Plan (EMP), Facilities Master Plan, college catalog, and in the Community Report. (Standard I.A.2)

The College uses an inclusive governance and decision making process to regularly review and revise its mission as necessary. The Strategic Council reflects broad perspectives with representatives from Academic Senate, Management Senate, Classified Senate, and the Student Senate. A subcommittee of the Strategic Council is responsible for reviewing the mission statement every six years, having recently reviewed the mission in May 2012. (Standard I.A.3)

Central to institutional planning, the 2009 Educational Master Plan lists the mission as a, “guiding principle.” The Strategic Plan goals and strategies were derived from the mission, and are used as a basis for department goals. Central to decision-making, resources are prioritized by the Planning and Resource Allocation Committee (PARAC) in regard to mission alignment. Strategic Reduction of Educational Programs, AP 4023 uses, “Centrality of the program to the mission of the California Community colleges and the mission and values of the Sierra College district” as a “guiding principle to be used in the decision-making process.” (Standard I.A.4)

## **Conclusion**

The College meets the Standard.

The mission statement is central to institutional planning and decision-making, defines the institution’s broad educational purposes, its intended student population, and its commitment to achieving student learning. The mission statement is approved by the governing board and published. The College regularly reviews and revises the mission statement as necessary.

## **Recommendations**

None

## Standard IB -- Institutional Effectiveness

### General Observations

The College demonstrates ongoing self-reflective dialogue about institutional processes and improvements to student learning through their committee structures and governance processes.

The update process for Strategic Plan 2011-14 was conducted in a collegial way and served to further refine strategies and objective markers for progress around the four major goals of the College. An annual (July) report to the Board of Trustees and the campus community documents progress on each of the outcome measures. Based upon this annual (~~July~~) presentation, the Board of Trustees sets future priorities and goals for the upcoming academic year. The establishment of annual areas of focus provides direction to the superintendent/president and College workforce. The institution has created schedules to engage systematically in program review and planning activities. The systematic, cyclical work “in the trenches” expected by this standard is done through comprehensive program review activity on a three-year cycle and in annual updates.

The College has produced several major plans with broad participation by constituencies. Shorter-range planning and resource allocation processes appear to be transparent and inclusive.

The Research, Planning and Resource Development Office staff annually produces a Factbook, the latest edition of which is published to the College website through the Public Information Office. Planning and governance pages of the College website provide extensive documentation on the plans and processes used at the College. Key documents and periodic reports are provided to the Board of Trustees for consideration and adoption, thus entering quality assurance items into public record.

The Research, Planning and Resource Development Office collaborated with the Strategic Council to review and modify the ongoing cycle of planning and resource allocation. Changes have been made to ongoing structures and process based on reviews.

The Self Evaluation Report describes how the College solicits feedback on major evaluation mechanisms. Through interviews, College members articulated examples of how activities have improved instructional programs, student services, and the library and learning support services. Program review work, and particularly the process used to critique reviews and prepare an executive summary (instruction and student services as well as operations and administrative offices) is thorough and constructive. Documents produced through the

program vitality process, applied to five instructional programs recently, are thorough and illustrate how an evaluation mechanism has improved programs and services.

### **Findings and Evidence**

Evidence for self-reflective dialogue about improvements in both student learning and institutional processes at Sierra College are found in ongoing work of committees and in development of major plans. Program Review Executive Reports document ongoing dialogue for continuous improvement of forms, prompts and review processes, articulate contributions of units to College mission, and identify needed resources. When faced with the possibility significant revenues might be lost if Proposition 30 did not pass in November 2012, the Board asked for a policy to articulate criteria to close a program for fiscal reasons. A workgroup moved quickly and collaboratively to devise policy for that new institutional process. Dialogue about student learning is evident in Student Learning Outcomes (SLO) Committee recollections, Student Services Council discussions of survey results, Academic Senate recollections, and in Program Vitality Reports.

The Strategic Council and the Planning and Resource Allocation Committee (PARAC) members engage in discussions about improving institutional processes, and advancing student learning and achievement. For example, the Strategic Council led the campus through an eight-month process to document planning and budgeting and made significant changes to the process. Key work tasks are now synchronized with the faculty hiring process and more time is available to vet requests for resources to support student learning and achievement.

Interviews during the 2007 accreditation visit revealed that the Program Assessment and Review process was purely a paper process supporting planning. Individual unit heads prepared the documents and sent them forward not knowing what happened to the work, or how well they were aligning requests to College goals. Subsequently, the process was converted to electronic form and became known as ePAR (electronic Program Assessment and Review). Current interviews and survey results confirmed that the electronic system has made it simpler to articulate alignment and plan around uncertainties such as Proposition 30.

A new process was introduced in response to survey data about the planning and governance system indicating part-time faculty felt excluded. The Strategic Council consequently dedicated one day each term for planning, ePAR, program review, SLO assessment or curriculum review work. Part-time faculty will be paid and given flex credit for participating.

The planning and budget development process was changed to tighten linkages between processes. In spring 2013, the College attempted to align the percentage of budget resources to the larger goals in the Strategic Plan. The next step will be to drill down with further details about objects of expense in budgets to document how much budget was dedicated to

each objective in the Strategic Plan. The intent is to open further discussion about ways in which the College is supporting goals and objectives.

As a result of Proposition 30 passing, the Board has allowed the College to use funds withdrawn from reserves to address one-time new requests for support as opposed to ongoing funding obligations. Such action provides the College a much larger pool of resources to allocate than has been the case in recent years.

With categorical money, the College is pursuing the state Student Success Initiative by drilling down ways to strengthen student soft skills in topics like test taking or time management. Focus groups were used to develop insights that led to creation of a new Student Support Center initiative. The College intends to translate interest in attending the College into enrollments (access) and subsequent success at the institution.

In response to poor success and retention rates, funds were allocated to improve success and retention in distance education, such as purchase of software and equipment, providing faculty professional development, and supporting conference attendance. A new course was created to teach students how to be successful distance education learners. Faculty new to teaching in the distance education environment were required to complete a training orientation to that modality. A new faculty evaluation provision requires performance evaluation in all modes of instruction. Similar performance concerns about basic skills students prompted the Strategic Council to discuss the topic and devote resources to supplemental instruction, summer bridge and first year experience interventions improving success and retention. And, a popular online writing center was created as a result of an initiative recommended by the PARAC. (Standard I.B.1)

The College has created two Strategic Plans spanning three-year periods each as a means to articulate its four long-term goals, strategies and objectives. Objectives are expressed in measurable terms and goals are widely understood at the College. All units and disciplines at the College set their goals consistent with the College goals as part of the program review process. Progress is monitored through the annual ePAR processes where both detailed and summary reports of goal alignment and action results on progress are readily available and used by College leaders. (Standard I.B.2)

The College has established institutional-set standards for student achievement performance by inspecting the longitudinal trends for appropriate key metrics. These baseline minimal performance measures provided the basis to develop aspirational goals for many student achievement outcomes in both Strategic Plans (2008-10 and 2011-2014). Information developed through interviews indicated these standards were subject to intense debate in the Strategic Council and with the Board of Trustees. Articulated standards are reasonable, given

the mission of the College and the historical data. These expectations have been used in the past to trigger review, creative interventions, and investments in distance education and basic skills instruction. Interventions have brought about substantial improvement in student success and retention. At the program level, the College has evolved a set of criteria to trigger a program vitality process that seeks to deeply inspect offerings and context of the program then fashion recommendations for the program to move forward. In recent years six instructional programs have undergone a program vitality review.

Units and disciplines assess progress toward achieving stated goals by responding to prompts in the program review template using data provided by the Research, Planning and Resource Development Office or from data the unit developed themselves. Comprehensive program review work is accomplished every third year while annual work is an update of activity toward accomplishing goals and an opportunity to request resources or assistance. Metrics crafted in the Strategic Plans are monitored, reported, and discussed in several venues (Board of Trustees and Strategic Council meetings in particular). Board minutes of July 13, 2013, document a particularly thorough discussion of the new Accountability Report for Community Colleges (ARCC) Scorecard, end of year report for 2012-2013, and new tools such as the Salary Surfer and Wage Tracker to facilitate monitoring institutional progress against goals. Information about progress on institutional metrics is disaggregated by the Planning, Research, and Resource Development Office staff and provided (discipline statistics reports) to discipline groups for use during flex week planning then integrated into the ePAR, program review, student learning outcomes assessment work and the activities of the Curriculum Committee.

Student services uses student satisfaction surveys as a core part of its program review processes. Results from surveys have been translated into positive changes such as enhanced communications through the College catalog, mySierra, broadcast emails, fliers, posters and a newly designed student-focused website. The online counseling service was sparked to improve services after a review of the effectiveness of counseling orientation sessions. New services developed undergo an evaluative process to ensure viability and relevance of the service and to determine if resources will continue to support the service. Evidence of this process is provided regarding the summer bridge program and its resulting positive performance in regard to retention and success rates among basic skills students.

The Library regularly participates in program review and engages in the collection of student opinion data about services, holdings, instruction, and facilities. Based on data from a 2009 survey indicating there were insufficient computer workstations, Library staff raised private funds to purchase additional computers and requested College resources to replace older units in the reference computer lab.

Unit program review submissions are subjected to a critique using a grading rubric that evaluates the work and provides constructive feedback as well as recommendations to the PARAC. Program Review Committees work diligently to engage individual units in the process and focus units on ways to advance larger College goals and strategies. An extensive annual Program Review summary report is prepared by the Program Review Committees and shared with PARAC and the Strategic Council to recommend resource allocations. Summaries of resource requests are developed around functional areas such as equipment, facilities, faculty, and classified staff. Requests are prioritized at several levels in the College's organizational structure. Deliberation of the final "top tier" requests is found in the minutes of the Strategic Council and PARAC. The ongoing and systemic cycle of evaluation, integrated planning, resource allocation, implementation and re-evaluation is documented in the recently revised Planning and Budget timetable and flow chart. (Standard I.B.3)

An Education Master Plan, with a ten-year horizon and involving broad campus participation, was created in 2009 to provide long-term planning assumptions and programmatic directions. A Strategic Plan and a series of functional plans (human resources, technology and facilities at Nevada County and Tahoe Truckee campuses) were updated or written in 2008 with participation from shared governance bodies. A task force updates the Facilities Master Plan for the development of Rocklin campus. The group contains representatives from various constituencies and will complete work by spring 2014. Employee surveys (2009 and 2012) affirm broad-based opportunities to influence planning. Recommendations from the program vitality process are focused on ways to improve institutional program effectiveness and are prepared with broad participation. Changes in the faculty hiring prioritization process from 2011 to 2013 further illustrate ways in which the institution has used broad-based, open processes to correct shortcomings in planning and resource allocation processes optimizing institutional effectiveness. (Standard I.B.4)

The Factbook contains evidence of educational effectiveness and quality instruction. The most recent version is posted to the College web page in the Public Information Office area. The Factbook is used in the faculty hiring priorities committee and in Deans Council meetings. The College participates in state accountability reporting to the public known as the ARCC Report and the newer ARCC Scorecard. College effectiveness and quality assurance are conveyed through public posting of these state reports. The College also participates in the federal Integrated Postsecondary Educational Data System (Standard IPEDS) reporting program, which makes educational effectiveness and quality data available to a national audience. Annually, the Research, Planning and Resource Development Office staff prepares a high school graduates performance report. The report is provided to the president who shares the report with leaders in the local high schools that send students to the College.

The annual Program Review Executive Reports for instruction/student services and operations/administrative units provide a very thorough communication regarding quality assurance and document the nature of needed assistance for some units and instructional programs. Each spring the Strategic Council is briefed on progress made towards goals and strategies of the Strategic Plan. Annually, in July, the Board receives the same information for discussion. Department Statistics Reports (DSRs) are generated for each instructional program to inform the comprehensive, annual program review work. Elements in DSRs are standardized for all disciplines to include a trend line and a three-year average calculation in tabular and graphic displays to facilitate analysis and response to program review prompts. Program review materials are retained on an intranet resource, “inside.Sierra”, but are not made available to the public. The report on findings from the 2012 survey of planning and governance documents the transparency of institutional processes and improvements over prior year data on this topic. (Standard I.B.5)

Several aspects about the College’s planning process have been evaluated and changed over the years. For example, Facilities Master Plan discussions were refocused from an effort to support a bond campaign to a longer-term focus for refurbishment of Rocklin campus. The program review template for administrative offices was reworked from the original instructional program template to make it a better fit for administrative and operational units, and the calendar for budget and planning cycles was altered. These changes are discussed in several venues before being implemented. Evidence about the efficacy of these processes and suggestions for changes often arose from systematic surveys conducted among the College workforce. A comprehensive evaluation cycle for major College plans was developed in fall 2009 and a district evaluation cycle plan was created for key processes in fall 2011. Through interviews it was determined the nature of all evaluations has not been determined and it is not entirely clear if all governance and decision making groups will be evaluated as distinct from processes. Changes to key College processes and major College plans that support the systemic cycle of evaluation, integrated planning, and resource allocation are forwarded to the Strategic Council where they are discussed and approved. In 2009 and 2012 the College conducted surveys to help evaluate effectiveness of its planning and governance structures (Strategic Council and PARAC) and resource allocation processes. Over the years the evolving changes made to program reviews and evaluation rubrics used for operation and administrative offices illustrates the institution’s practice of systematic evaluation of processes and planned changes where needed to improve institutional effectiveness. (Standard I.B.6)

Program review, program vitality, the annual report to the campus and Board of Trustees about progress on the Strategic Plan objectives, and assessment of student learning outcome are the major evaluation tools used by the College. The Program Review Executive Reports are thorough and capture judgments of the committees as to the quality of review work

completed by units. The Committee's evaluation criteria are (1) relevance to the mission, (2) program effectiveness, (3) currency of curriculum and completion of learning outcomes assessment, and (4) thoroughness. The Program Vitality Reports are particularly thorough and thoughtful analytical products that engage multiple constituencies. Reports consider the future directions of the studied curriculum in order to improve student achievement and learning. The Program Viability Reports provide evidence of the impact coming from the program review process as they document suggested ways to make improvements in selected instructional programs. Both program review committees, Operations and Administration Program Review and the Instructional/Student Services Program Review, have initiated assessments of the procedures, forms, and prompts used in their respective processes and used those results to make modest changes to improve the effectiveness of the efforts to prompt change in instructional programs, student support services and library and other learning support services. Progress on the Strategic Plan objectives has been faithfully monitored and work has begun to update the plan and adjust metrics.

While the College has made progress in the articulation of intended learning outcomes and assessments of student learning, there is much more to be done. A review of several instructional program review documents judged as exemplary revealed some disciplines were completing learning outcomes assessment and using results to make changes in instruction or the assessment process itself.

In a series of reflective discussions, the PARAC group has functioned as an evaluation mechanism to assess effectiveness of the College's planning, resource allocation and assessment process. To increase participation, PARAC recommended a change in timing to move program review to the spring in lieu of the fall semester, move ePAR activity to the fall in lieu of the spring term, and to create a dedicated planning and assessment day each semester.

When faced with unprecedented revenue constraints and the possibility that Proposition 30 on the November 2012 ballot might not pass, the College formed a workgroup to discuss program feasibility and develop a new administrative procedure that complemented the existing program discontinuance policy, procedures, and structures (BP and AP 4021: Program Vitality Committee). The resulting policy and procedure (BP and AP 4023: Strategic Reduction of Educational Programs) represents a shift in College thinking away from across-the-board budget cuts to more strategic program reductions due to fiscal reasons so that remaining programs and services of the College could continue effectively. (Standard I.B.7)

## **Conclusion**

The College meets the standard.

Planning processes at the College are at the sustainable continuous quality improvement level as there is ongoing and systematic evaluation and planning to make improvements in key processes. Data about College, unit, and student performance is routinely developed, distributed and discussed. Commitment to improving student learning and institutional processes is evident and planning procedures, forms, prompts, and calendars are evaluated and changed to make agreed upon improvements.

Program review processes at the College are also at the sustainable continuous quality improvement level as they are ongoing and systemic and used to improve student learning and achievement. Program review results have been used to improve program practices and have been modified to enhance institutional effectiveness.

## **Recommendations**

None

## **STANDARD II: STUDENT LEARNING PROGRAMS AND SERVICES**

### **Standard IIA - Instructional Programs**

#### **General Observations**

Sierra College offers high-quality instructional programs which it evaluates regularly and improves based on the results of evaluation. Faculty play a primary role in developing and approving courses and programs. The College offers general education at all of its sites and programs for transfer, career and technical education. The highest number of degrees awarded in 2012 were in the Biological and Physical Sciences/Mathematics, followed by the Social Sciences; the highest number of certificates are awarded for Child Development, followed by Industrial Electronics and Accounting. Several programs build connections with the community, such as Music and Drama through performances, and the Natural History Museum lectures. Student learning and achievement are the focus of all college efforts, and the institution tracks whether its processes and programs have a positive effect on student learning. The College's efforts to ensure that its distance learning classes are high quality and that students succeed at a rate comparable to traditional classes are particularly noteworthy. The College has not reached the Proficiency Level in Student Learning Outcomes as required by ACCJC for all colleges by fall 2012.

#### **Findings and Evidence**

The College has a mission statement that guides the development of its programs through well-established Curriculum Committee forms and processes. The College has 57 instructional programs for a variety of students, including transfer, career and technical education, life-long learning through its Osher Lifelong Learning Institute and community education. It has also developed 17 Associate Degrees for Transfer to the California State University system and compares nationally to other colleges of comparable size in the number of students graduating. Non-credit classes are appropriately approved by the Curriculum Committee and community education is reviewed by the Curriculum Committee and Deans' Council to ensure that conflicts with credit classes are minimized. An Academics Foundations Committee oversees programs for basic skills students. An honors program and internship program also exist. The ePAR process, through which programs make resource requests, annually uses data provided by the research office to justify resource requests, and each instructional program completes a more comprehensive Program Review every three years. (Standard II.A.1)

Sierra College's student body identifies itself predominantly as white (70%), although that percentage has decreased in recent years as the Latino (12% in 2011) and African-American (3.3% in 2011) populations have increased. Students are assessed through a matriculation process to identify their levels and needs. Evidence shows that 80% of Sierra students need remediation, and documents show that supplemental instruction and a Summer Bridge program on the Rocklin campus have had good results. The College supports a concurrent enrollment program for high school students at the Tahoe Truckee campus that has a strong faculty mentor component. It has Puente and Umoja programs at the Rocklin campus as part of a more comprehensive New Legacy effort, which also includes altered curricula geared toward supporting underrepresented populations (such as ethnomathematics). The College also supports a chapter of the Phi Theta Kappa honor society for advanced students. To accommodate a variety of student schedules, courses are offered day, night, through cable television, iTunes U, hybrid and online. The College switched recently to a new learning management system (LMS) called Canvas to address "downtime" issues with the previous LMS. The transition was minimally disruptive and faculty received extensive training before the new course management system was deployed. The College notes that it needs to assess student populations at each center to better accommodate their needs. (Standard II.A.1.a)

Sierra College offers a variety of courses and programs in traditional classrooms, online, in hybrid format and via live television transmission. The primary mode of instruction is face-to-face at the four physical campus locations. As of spring 2013, 11.7% of total enrollments were in distance education and 54 certificate and degree programs are offered 50% or more via distance education. The College uses delivery systems and modes of instruction appropriate to the needs of its students. As noted, all courses can be web-enhanced and several delivery systems are used after Curriculum Committee approval. The Curriculum Committee uses a form which asks questions about the appropriateness of the class for a distance education modality prior to approving a course for distance education. Student achievement for each modality is tracked. Various workshops are provided to faculty to increase their teaching effectiveness in different modes. The Distance Learning and Instructional Technology Committee, a standing committee of Academic Senate, sets pedagogical standards for distance education (DE) courses and faculty, and has put in place "an extensive front-end evaluation piece" for courses that requires that 25% of each course be assessed against a rubric. Administrative Procedure 4105 outlines expectations for faculty interaction and faculty must complete a 5-week training course before teaching online for the first time. There seems to be continuing discussion and concern about lower retention and success rates; some of the trainings and review processes resulted in a 10% increase in success after they were implemented in 2009. In 2012, having a faculty member with DE expertise evaluate DE courses was added to the contract and each modality taught by any faculty member must be evaluated. The College relies on faculty and deans to determine which classes should be offered through distance education. (Standard IIA.1.b)

The College has made progress in identifying SLOs for courses and programs, assessing those SLOs and using results for improvement since receiving a recommendation from a visiting accreditation team in 2007. Programs and courses have SLOs identified for the most part, but assessment, integration into the planning process, and student awareness have not reached the Proficiency Level. As of fall 2012, 94% of programs had SLOs with 63% assessed; 81% of courses had SLOs with 54% assessed. According to the College's educational administrators, over the past year or two, some SLO assessments were misplaced and therefore not counted in those percentages. The College reported to the team that it has recently located more completed course-level assessments that had not been incorporated into the tracking process and believes that approximately 63% of course-level SLO assessments have been completed. Further, some of the courses without SLOs are taught by adjuncts rather than full-time faculty, resulting in more impediments to completion of SLOs. The SLO Coordinator, who is now the Educational Effectiveness Coordinator with 60% release time, gives flex workshops each semester. The College reports that the dialogue has shifted in the last two years from questioning the value of SLOs to recognizing the meaningfulness of SLO assessments when identifying and addressing gaps. Many faculty and administrators at the College have spent considerable amounts of time promoting and participating in the SLO assessment process, and they should be recognized. The College needs to accelerate the process overall and integrate results into planning and resource allocation for the purpose of improving student learning more clearly and consistently. Institutional dialogue should take place as well as the current discussions within departments. In addition, SLOs for courses and programs must be made available to the students on a consistent basis, and student awareness should be intentionally promoted. The College noted that the institution also needs to streamline data collection. The Academic Senate plans to take more of a leadership role in the process going forward and college employees are hopeful much progress will be made over the next few months (Standard IIA.1.c, II.A.2.f)

The College uses the Curriculum Committee, the Program Review process and the Program Vitality process to ensure quality and improvement of its programs. The Curriculum Committee operates with an extensive handbook and reviews all courses, including Study Abroad. After Program Reviews are completed every three years by instructional programs, they are reviewed and categorized by the Instructional Program Review Committee using a variety of data. Programs are scored and then labelled as Opportunity Identified, Stable, or Critical Attention Needed. This process informs resource allocation and staffing decisions, and may lead to referral of a program to the Program Vitality Committee. Program Vitality is a public, enhanced review of programs. The College notes that some work still needs to be done on clarifying the Program Vitality process. Overall, the Program Review process is robust and a valuable way for faculty and the College as a whole to examine and improve

instructional programs. This process also creates the foundation for strategic and long-term planning at the College. (Standard II.A.2)

Courses and programs are reviewed by the Curriculum Committee using a handbook that is revised annually. New courses originate with faculty and are submitted via WebCMS. Course outlines of record are reviewed and updated every six years. Since 2011, when it took over the work of the Educational Requirements Committee, the Curriculum Committee also reviews new degrees and certificates. Entirely new programs, however, are reviewed and approved by Academic Senate; the College is working on an administrative procedure that will codify this process and criteria used. It does have Board policies in place for the elimination of programs and has successfully implemented that process several times since 2010 through its Program Vitality Committee. The Program Review process is also well-established and results in commentary on self-evaluations produced by the instructional programs. This process culminates in an Executive Summary that is sent to the Academic Senate, which approves it and forwards to the Strategic Council. Faculty have a central role in the curriculum and program review processes. The College continues to dialogue about what should be identified as a “program” and therefore included in the planning and resource allocation process (Standard II.A.2.a, II.A.2.e)

Faculty have the primary responsibility to propose and revise course outlines and instructional programs; all curriculum is approved by the Curriculum Committee, a standing subcommittee of Academic Senate. CTE programs also make use of advisory committees when proposing or revising curricula.. Statistical validation is used to determine appropriateness of pre-requisites. 92% of CTE programs met with advisory committees in the last year and some held focus groups. The College reports that it is making a more concerted effort to build robust advisory committees and lists members in the back of the current catalog. A recent focus has been to include K-12 partners in advisory committees (Standard II.A.2.b)

To ensure high quality of instruction, the College follows a standard evaluation process and has a New Faculty Academy as well as workshops such as the Sierra Online Summit and Instructional Skills Workshops. A variety of other professional development activities are available on the ten flex days granted in the faculty contract, and the College has demonstrated a concerted effort to provide training to faculty. Faculty evaluate curricula through the Program Review process and time to completion varies by program. Scheduling is coordinated among the various locations to ensure that students can complete programs in a timely manner. (Standard II.A.2.c)

Sierra College uses a wide variety of teaching modes such as online, hybrid, televised classes, iTunesU, lecture, lab, community service, and travel. Canvas replaced Blackboard in

2013 as the learning management system to improve the quality of online instruction. Workshops on pedagogy are ongoing and provide the opportunity for faculty to adopt and practice varied teaching methodologies to address the diversity of learners. (Standard II.A.2.d)

Several disciplines, such as Chemistry, English and English as a Second Language, use program exams which are either nationally-normed or validated using local research protocols. The math department has also developed common assessments for some courses. (Standard II.A.2.g) Units of credit are awarded based on student achievement and using commonly accepted equivalencies. (Standard II.A.2.h)

The College represents that it awards degrees and certificates based on student achievement of a program's stated learning outcomes as measured by the successful completion of courses within a program. The College notes it needs to monitor alignment of course SLOs with program SLOs. As noted in earlier sections, program learning outcomes are not consistently communicated to students and are not in the 2013-14 catalog or in easily found locations on the website. (Standard II.A.2.i)

The College requires a component of general education for all academic and career and technical education degrees and has a philosophy of general education published in the catalog as well as criteria to identify courses as general education. The Sierra College areas of general education are natural sciences, social and behavioral sciences, humanities, language and rationality, health education/physical education, multicultural studies, and learning skills, which encompass writing, reading, oral communication and mathematics. Information competency is integrated throughout general education courses. The College's Institutional Learning Outcomes - which address Communication, Technology and Information Competency, Critical and Creative Thinking, and Citizenship - address several general education areas; two of the four Institutional Learning Outcomes have been assessed at this point. The College has not created or assessed specific student learning outcomes for general education. (Standard II.A.3, II.A.3.a, II.A.3.b, II.A.3.c)

All degree programs include a focused core of at least 18 units. (Standard II.A.4)

Sierra College ensures that students achieve technical and professional competencies in its 56 certificates and 56 degrees in CTE programs via external agency requirements, state certification exams, and advisory committee guidance. Employer site visits by faculty also take place. In 2011, a survey of completers revealed that 41% were employed in the field of their majors and average wage increase was 42%. More extensive data collection may be employed in the future. Sierra College graduates' pass rates on some national exams are consistently high or above average. (Standard II.A.5)

Clear and accurate information about courses, programs and transfer policies is given to students in the annual catalog and on the website. However, the College acknowledges that not all syllabi currently include course SLOs and course SLOs are not publicly available to students on the web. They are also not included in the official courses outlines. Similarly, program learning outcomes are not published in the catalog and are not easily available on the website. (Standard II.A.6)

Transfer of credit policies are in the catalog and on the web. Up-to-date information is available on ASSIST (Articulation System Stimulating Inter-institutional Student Transfer). There is a process to determine course equivalencies and substitutions. Sierra is using C-ID (Course Identification Numbering System) to facilitate transfer and has 17 approved Associate Degrees for Transfer (ADTs). The College reported that the articulation officer has facilitated the creation of ADTs and faculty are motivated to complete them. The articulation officer is an integral member of the Curriculum Committee. (Standard II.A.6.a)

The College has a recently revised process for elimination of programs using the Program Vitality committee, which is governed by the Program Vitality procedure (Administrative Procedure 4021). In 2010 and 2011, several programs underwent this review, with different results. Students are notified if a program will be phased out and offered alternatives to fulfill requirements. However, the College notes there is no formal process to ensure notification of students. (Standard II.A.6.b)

Sierra College publishes the bulk of information needed by the public in its annual catalog, which is printed and on the web. Policies and procedures are also available electronically. The schedule is on the web and updated daily. A yearly Factbook is produced. In its Self Evaluation Report, the College notes that more departments and faculty could develop websites. (Standard II.A.6.c)

The College has a Board policy on academic freedom and covers the topic in the New Faculty Academy. It plans to offer more flex workshops on this topic and on academic honesty. Student academic honesty is covered in Board Policy 5515 and the student handbook, which is available on the website, along with discipline and grievance procedures. (Standard II.A.7. II.A.7.a, II.A.7.b)

The College is nonsectarian and therefore does not seek to instill specific beliefs or world views. It does have published policies governing professional behavior for employees as well as guidelines for student conduct. (Standard II.A.7.c)

The College does not offer curricula in foreign locations. (Standard II.A.8)

## **Conclusion**

The College partially meets the standard.

Sierra College has developed an impressive variety of instructional methods to serve its students and a number of instructional programs to meet their varied educational goals. It has been particularly diligent in its support of the online program through the Distance Learning Coordinator and the Distance Learning and Instructional Technology Committee. Its efforts to ensure that instructors are properly trained to teach online and that online courses meet best practices standards are commendable, and have resulted in noticeable increases in student success. The recent decision to move to a more reliable and user-friendly learning management system was well-researched, thoughtfully implemented and well-received.

Sierra College has put a great deal of effort behind the development, review, strengthening, and potential elimination of instructional programs. The team commends the College for its efforts to make program elimination a transparent process as well as for its robust Program Review system, which culminates in peer review with an intention to support programs and assist them with long-term planning. The annual ePAR system has also shown signs of making planning and resource allocation transparent to the entire college community. However, some parts of the College are not included in the overall planning process and the definition of “program” deserves some attention to ensure that certain components of the district are not left out.

The College has made progress in the number of courses and programs conducting assessment after receiving a recommendation in its 2007 Evaluation Report. However, it is not currently at the Proficiency Level of Implementation for Student Learning Outcomes as defined by ACCJC. The primary issues remaining are the lack of SLOs for some courses; the slow progress made on assessments for all courses and programs; the lack of a consistently used centralized process for collecting information about SLO assessment; the lack of integration of SLO assessment results into the institutional planning process; and the need to include SLOs in course syllabi. The College does not fully meet this Standard for the reasons explained above relating to student learning outcomes.

## **Recommendations**

### **Recommendation 1**

In order to meet the standard, Recommendation 3 from the 2007 Evaluation Report, and the Proficiency Level of Implementation of the *Rubric for Evaluating Institutional Effectiveness - Part III: Student Learning Outcomes*, the College should:

1. Complete SLOs for all active courses and programs.
2. Accelerate the process for completing and institutionalizing student learning outcomes assessment at the course, program, and institutional levels.
3. Systematically integrate the results of student learning assessments into the institutional planning and resource allocation processes for the purpose of improving student learning.
4. Ensure that student learning outcomes for courses are included in the course syllabus and that program-level outcomes are intentionally provided to current and prospective students.

(Standard 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.i; II.A.6)

## **Standard IIB - Student Support Services**

### **General Observations**

Sierra College meets this standard with a recommendation that the institution go beyond the standard requirement in bringing to scale such programs as its Umoja and Puente Programs to reach a greater number of those traditionally underrepresented students. In addition, commendations for Student Services technology, web-based counseling and information resources, as well as the commitment to student centered and directed engagement in experiences facilitated by Campus Life are well deserved. Sierra College presents a high quality and robust response to Recommendation 4 from the fall 2007 visit by ACCJC regarding online student support services particularly in the realm of technology and web-based counseling which is deployed across all campus sites.

Student Services demonstrates its commitment to a level of quality that enhances student learning and achievement. In addition to the traditional services provided by Admissions and Records, Counseling, and Financial Aid, the College has dedicated sufficient resources to fund specialized services to veterans, international students, disabled students, economically disadvantaged and underrepresented students, and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, and Questioning (LGBTIQ) students.

### **Findings and Evidence**

Sierra College exhibits a commitment to quality student support services across all campuses through the alignment of human capital and technology conduits. Satisfaction surveys and needs assessments are conducted to identify gaps in service provision. Sierra College engages in a substantive program review process inclusive of linking the department level programs with institutional planning and evaluation. In addition, student services ePAR reports facilitate a resource request and resource allocation tracking process. Student services participates in a systematic and collaborative meeting process in order to ensure programmatic quality and facilitate a feedback mechanism for the Student Services Coordinating Council to forward recommendations to the institution. (Standard IIB.1)

The team found evidence that Sierra College's Student Services is committed to serving and meeting the needs of the student population that it serves. While the College actively supports all students through its array of student support services, the team recommends an expansion of services to programs that improve the success of underrepresented student populations.

During continuing tight economic times, Student Services has had to leverage institutional resources to create activities and programs that emphasize access, outreach, retention,

persistence and success. Sierra College's attention to the development of support services, such as web-based counseling and information resources that address the College's unique, 3,200 square miles district, engages current students and allows for communication of the institution's mission, vision and service offerings with potential students. Student Service programs have also developed student learning outcomes. (Standard IIB)

Since the last self-study in 2007, the College has made a concerted effort and progress to extend its services to students regardless of the location or mode of delivery. This was maintained despite a system-wide reduction in categorical funding for state-supported programs for special populations such as students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged students and educational disadvantaged students. Through the use of technology, and coordination with Distant Education and the Information and Instruction Technology Division, Sierra College student services has maintained quality support for student learning.

Sierra College provides a clear, accurate, and student-friendly catalog for its constituencies with current information concerning all required areas. The catalog is updated annually to reflect changes in offerings, policy and/or practice and is made available in both printed and electronic online format for prospective and current students. The printed version is provided for reference in Student Services, the Library, division offices and for purchase at the bookstore. All required information including student's rights and responsibilities, the grievance process, student code of conduct, sexual harassment prevention, and the Academic Freedom Policy is available and is readily accessible through the printed catalog and on the College web site. As so much of the catalog is related to Student Services practices, procedures, and policies, it is incumbent for those responsible for catalog production to include all stakeholders in the annual review and updating of this important reference tool and resource. (Standard IIB.2, IIB2.a, IIB.2b, IIB.2c, IIB.2d)

Since the last self-study in 2007, the College has expanded its services to populations that have been disproportionately impacted in their educational access and success. The College provides a wide range of in-person and online and telephone services. Several District forms as well as multilingual staff support are offered in Spanish and Russian - the two most commonly spoken languages other than English.

The College has made a concerted effort and progress towards developing and improving the level of online support services available to all students, regardless of location or instructional mode of delivery.

The College's Distance learning web pages provide students with comprehensive information about televised courses, online course and online support services. The implementation of technology-based infrastructure within Student Services has created an environment of enhanced information dissemination and increased access for students. The implementation

of Degree Audit for student educational plan development, as well as Counseling services that include online scheduling of appointments, email counseling, live Counselor chat and new student orientation provide added service provision to students across campus sites. (Standard IIB.3a)

Sierra College's Campus Life Office encourages personal and civic responsibility as well as personal development through its program offerings and support for student clubs, thereby enhancing student learning and success. The Campus Life Office serves as a hub for student opportunities associated with leadership skill development and is nurtured by a collaborative committee process attended by an array of institutional segments and chaired by the Dean of Student Services. Numerous projects such as the Rocklin campus amphitheater has been delivered through Campus Life involvement while further support is provided by Campus Life to 61 student clubs. Campus Life further encourages student participation in the Associated Students of Sierra College that serves as a conduit for student recommendations to institutional personnel and the Board of trustees. (Standard IIB. 3b)

The College designs and maintains services and prepares key personnel in order to support student development. In this regard, the College provides comprehensive counseling and advising services that meet a wide variety of student needs in different formats. The Counseling department offers orientation, academic counseling and follow-up services to all students. Since the last accreditation site visit, the Counseling Department has expanded the modalities of service to students while incorporating Statewide Priority Registration Changes in Title 5. Evaluation of student surveys and subsequent designs of added services such as online orientation and counseling in numerous languages underscores a concern for student access, progress, learning and success. Faculty development strategies such as the Sierra College Leadership Institute, as well as the Student Learning Outcomes process highlight this commitment toward improving the effectiveness of services.

Sierra College has also designed and implemented counseling and academic advising services in numerous areas. Online Counseling offers access to online live drop-in counseling, ask the counselor chat, email counseling and counseling webinars. The online orientation website depicts orientation offered in English, Spanish, Russian and Accessible modalities. Student satisfaction surveys provide input on the delivery and quality of student services provisions. A New Faculty Academy welcome memo, the Sierra College Leadership Institute and a new faculty handbook, along with counseling training agendas and counseling training schedules speak to faculty development to deliver services. In addition, ePAR and Program Review participation, inclusive of SLO reporting and evaluation support the institutional evaluative process for continuous quality improvement. Furthermore, matriculation and retention data supports more positive outcomes for students who have received counseling and orientation. Finally, data supports Sierra College success with transfer rates. (Standard IIB.3c)

Sierra College's appreciation for diversity is evident in its design and maintenance of programs, practices and services such as its General Education requirement requires all Associate Degrees to be accompanied by a three unit Multicultural Studies course. Since the last accreditation visit, Sierra College has implemented several initiatives to support student success and to enhance student understanding and appreciation for diversity. In 2008, the Academic Senate formed the New Legacy Committee which implemented the Puente and Umoja programs as a strategy to improve success rates for Latinos and African American students. Expansion of such targeted programs to reach a greater proportion of the traditionally underrepresented would take these efforts from small impact/high success to high impact/high success. (Standard IIB.3d.)

In 2011 the Academic Senate established the Spectrum Committee which specifically addressed Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, and Questioning (LGBTIQ). In 2012, the Academic Senate established the Gender Equity Committee to investigate the College's attitudes toward gender and to address issues that might exist in traditional gender specific areas such as Nursing, Early Childhood Development, Education, Athletics, and Administration of Justice. (Standard IIB.3d.)

In response to the growing number of returning veterans, the District has dedicated a variety of resources to serve returning veterans as evidenced by the addition of certification and academic advising, and a Veterans Resource Center which serves as a safe and welcoming place for veterans and their dependents to receive information and academic and social support. (Standard IIB.3d)

The College has a comprehensive international student program that recruits students from forty-seven different countries. Diversity appreciation and education is enhanced by supporting various cultural events such as: Black History Month celebrations, Pride Days, People and Culture Day, Cinco-de-Mayo, Day of Silence, Disabilities Issues, Social justice Days, Love Your Body week and Ridley Gallery Art Shows. Sierra College has made significant efforts to include diversity in the total college plan, and the team recommends that the College take to scale the Umoja and Puente programs while also developing a similar program offering for Native American students. (Standard IIB.3d)

Sierra College engages in a process of instrument evaluation with validated methods. The College accepts the ACCUPLACER and CELSA placement tests, which are endorsed by the California Community College Chancellor's Office as valid assessment tools. Sierra College systematically evaluates placement instruments in accordance with California state regulations and conducts rigorous periodic reviews of cut score validation, test bias/disproportionate impact, and reliability to ensure that students are appropriately placed

in college courses. A set of weighted, multiple measures, as prescribed by the California Community College regulations, have also been created by the College to ensure that all relevant information about a student is taken into consideration before a course placement is recommended. To minimize bias within the admissions instruments used, Sierra College implemented CCCApply, a district admission application process. (Standard IIB.3e)

Sierra College maintains student records permanently, securely, and confidentially with appropriate and secure backup of files. Student access to their accounts is facilitated by “mySierra”, which serves as a single access point. The College's governing board policies outline the maintenance and security of student records as mandated by federal regulations, California Education Code and the California Code of regulations, Title 5. Sierra maintains student records permanently, securely and confidentially. Records retention is systematically and efficiently managed through pre and post technology processes that ensure integrity of archived data for regulatory and program quality purposes. Sierra College’s student records, prior to 1980 are stored on microfiche in fireproof cabinets in a locked room in Admissions and Records at the Rocklin Center with backup copies maintained off-site. Student records from 1981 and forward are stored electronically in the College’s student information system in compliance with Administrative procedure 3721, with a nightly backup process and offsite storage. (Standard IIB.3f)

Sierra College utilizes research in order to identify learning support needs of the students served by the institution. Student Services meeting processes, ePAR process and Program Review process significantly contribute to validating student support services in order to assure identified student needs are met and support is ongoing for the achievement of student learning outcomes. The Student Services Coordinating Council (SSCC) monthly meeting process with the Vice President of Student Services, student services facilitator, deans, program managers, faculty coordinators and leads and administrative assistants, meets monthly for discussions on Student Services Division responsibilities and strategies. In this regard, the council determined in 2005 that standards were to be developed for the measurement of student learning outcomes. This initiative is reflected in ePAR and Program Review processes for 2005. Student services student satisfaction surveys are integral to this process and they are available to students via online, classroom, point of program service for Admissions and Records. Surveys have resulted in enhanced communications through the College catalog, mySierra, broadcast emails, fliers, posters and a newly designed student focused website. Importantly, new services that are developed undergo an evaluative process to ensure viability and relevance of the service offering and whether resources will continue to support the service. (Standard IIB.4)

## **Conclusion**

The college meets the standard.

To improve the College's efforts to support goal attainment and success of traditionally underrepresented students, the institution needs address the constraints and limitations associated with successful programs for these populations. In addition, commendations for Student Services technology, web-based counseling and information resources, as well as the commitment to student centered and directed engagement in experiences facilitated by Campus Life are well deserved. Student Services exhibits a commitment to quality student support services through core and specialized services, disseminates information in an array of accessible modalities and utilizes research that leads toward program and service enhancements that are evaluated in terms of student success. The design and implementation of specialized programs enhance student success rates and student appreciation of diversity, while institutional evaluation of admissions and student placement instruments ensure that critical processes maintain validity. Student Service's research engagement also focuses on the identification of program and student needs as well as emergent trends in the California Community College system. Finally, the institution maintains a secure and confidential archiving of information and records.

### **Recommendations**

#### **Recommendation #2**

In order to improve, the team recommends that the College leverage the success experienced with special programs for underrepresented student populations and scale these efforts in order to replicate success rates with an increased number of eligible students. (Standard II.B.3.a; IIB.3.d)

## **Standard IIC - Library and Learning Support Services**

### **General Observations**

The libraries at Sierra College are providing staff, materials, computers and study space to help students succeed at Rocklin and the other campuses. The Learning Centers are providing tutors for peer tutoring (both online and face-to-face), open computer access, and the proctoring of exams through testing centers. The College is in the process of reviving lab support, as well as an online writing program from 2008-2010 that had demonstrated success. The team discovered some inconsistencies related to the use of program review, the creation of program student learning outcomes, and the use of the electronic Program Assessment and Review or the ePAR process for requesting resources. Library and learning resource centers at the outer campuses have lost resources in recent years and are in the process of requesting additional resources to rebuild.

### **Findings and Evidence**

The College selects and maintains equipment and materials to support the mission and student learning. The overall materials budget for libraries and learning resource centers at Sierra College is \$140,000, which is shared by all the campuses. The Collection Development Policy provides the guidelines for the Sierra College campuses to develop the collections of print, media and e-resources, including subscription databases and periodicals as well as providing guidelines for requests from faculty, students and staff. Faculty are surveyed annually about the adequacy of library collections. Not only are textbooks available in each library's reserve section, students can request books from other campus libraries. (Standard II.C.1.a, II.C.1.e)

The College provides instruction for students in information competency via credit courses as well as orientations at each campus. The main campus offers 60-70 library orientations per semester, and more than 70% of the Rocklin students who take the new and established online quiz following the orientations per semester retain what they have been taught. The courses have SLOs and participate in the assessment process. The Learning Support Services on the campuses include a skill development course for student tutors, 70 computers in the Rocklin campus computer lab, as well as a testing center and a Writing Center that all students can access on a drop-in basis. All labs include printer services and various writing handbooks in both print and online versions. The Nevada County Campus Learning Center provides language lab technologies for foreign language learners as well as assistive speech recognition software. Surveys are given to those students using the facilities and the feedback provided is used to make changes. Learning center hours have been cut back in recent years

because of the fiscal downturn and staff expressed a desire to increase them again to better serve students.

The libraries offer a wide range of instructional activities (library orientations, reference desk consultations, online access, self-paced tutorials) and use the online Searchpath information literacy tutorial that quiz students at the end of each module. Video tutorials have also been added that provides student support during nontraditional hours. Students can access LibGuides online, a new interactive alternative to printed pathfinders. There are two courses in information competency, one offered face-to-face and one online. A new faculty survey is being used to help assess identified SLOs. Finally, in the Student Services Survey given in fall 2010, 59% of students indicated that they had accessed the library from off-campus and 72% had used the library (in person or online) in the past year.

In the Learning Support Centers, most subject areas are covered for the students and include one-on-one assistance on the computers. There is a Testing Center providing test proctoring, collecting homework and other materials for students taking classes online. Additionally, the center is certified through the College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA). The Learning Center provides support services to underrepresented populations such as Veterans, Umoja and Puente students. The Learning Centers on the campuses offer support in basic skills and use trained peer tutors, approximately 6-50 students, paid and certified in a tutor-training program. (Standard IIC1b)

The Libraries and Learning Centers offer adequate hours of operation and with the addition of video support, offer further access during the nontraditional hours. They are all also making strides in offering a greater online presence as well, including a distance ed writing online that is planned for November 2013. The students have 24/7 access to the databases through their verified student proxy. (Standard II.C.1.c)

The College has followed accepted standards of practice for security in the libraries and the learning centers. (Standard II.C.1.d)

The library databases are offered through the Community College Library Consortium as all the campuses' librarians work together to select what is needed. This provides cost effective cooperative buying of online databases. The Colleges also retain and annually review contractual agreements with the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC). (Standard II.C.1.e)

Two campuses, Rocklin and Nevada County Campus, participate in program review and have created annual uniform opinion and satisfaction surveys for both students and faculty that provide an indirect measure of student learning. The skills assessment tests and

worksheets administered at the end of orientations measure the SLOs. For example, in 2009, library skills test data reported a 70% passing score and by fall 2011, the average class score had increased to 85%. The results reveal weak areas that are continuously identified and reworked for better focus in training and the orientations. In 2012, a faculty survey was added to monitor how well the students were applying the learned library skills. Eighty-eight percent of the faculty agreed the students were selecting relevant and credible authoritative resources for the assignments. There is consistency on the other campuses with students demonstrating higher rates of success and retention because of students using the library resources.

For the learning centers, the campuses have collected research data that show 3-4% higher retention rates and 5-8% higher success rates for those who use the various services. On the Tahoe Truckee and Roseville Gateway campuses, program review has not been used nor have SLOs been created. The libraries rely only on student surveys for suggestions. From interviews with the Librarians on each campus, the team learned that Roseville Gateway is more of an extension of the Rocklin campus, collaborating with the Librarian and Dean to receive support. However, the library is not open for a full 40-hour week and is short on staff to meet all the students' needs; in lieu of permanent staff, graduates of the College's Library Tech program take on duties. Tahoe Truckee has grown in the past four years from 700-800 students to more than 1,000 students. Again, the same process occurs here for getting resources. Finally, all the campus libraries do not appear to have any SLOs as they assess the students' learning. (Standard II.C.2)

## **Conclusions**

The College meets the standard.

The College provides adequate library and learning center services on the campuses, both in-person and online, and regularly evaluates the quality of its services, using the results for improvement. There is alignment of support for both information competency and technology competency. To strengthen the library services, the College is encouraged to consider having all campuses participate in both program review and assessment of program learning outcomes, as well as the annual ePAR process that supports requesting resources.

## **Recommendations**

None

## **STANDARD III: RESOURCES**

### **Standard IIIA – Human Resources**

#### **General Observations**

The College has board policies and procedures in place to assure qualified personnel are hired, treated equitably, and evaluated regularly. All Board policies and procedures related to personnel were reviewed and/or updated in 2010. The College has adopted an Equal Opportunity Plan (EEO) and has a trained EEO monitor assigned to all hiring committees.

The Self Evaluation of Standard IIIA.6 addresses the program review of the HR department, rather than addressing how human resource decision making is integrated with institutional planning. However, the College has integrated its staffing with institutional planning in an effective manner.

#### **Findings and Evidence**

The College reviews job descriptions in order to assure personnel are sufficiently qualified for the positions they hold or for which they are applying. When faculty, staff, and management positions become vacant, the College reviews job descriptions for currency and accuracy before advertising a position. Additionally, the Reclassification Committee reviews classified positions on an annual basis. The evaluation team confirmed by interview that positions are selected for review based on recommendations from supervisors or based on other factors, such as an employee working out of class. (Standard IIIA.1)

Faculty have a significant role in the selection of new faculty. Faculty hiring committees are comprised by a majority of faculty members appointed by the Academic Senate. Faculty submit an application to the Academic Senate indicating how they are uniquely qualified to serve on specific hiring committees. The Academic Senate then reviews all interest forms and appoints faculty to the hiring committee. Academic Senate Equivalency Committee, a subcommittee of the Academic Senate, examines each faculty application to determine if an equivalency hearing is necessary. Human Resources verifies that all degrees held by faculty and educational administrator applicants were awarded by institutions accredited by a recognized US accrediting agencies.

The College assures that hiring procedures are consistently applied by requiring that every hiring committee be monitored by a trained EEO specialist. All Board policies and

procedures related to personnel were reviewed and/or updated in 2010. (Standard IIIA.1.a, IIIA.3.a)

The College assures the effectiveness of its human resources by evaluating all personnel systematically and at stated intervals. To comply with AP 7150, HR maintains and monitors the evaluation schedule for all employees and notifies employees and their supervisors when evaluations are due. Interviews with College Human Resources personnel confirmed that evaluations are up to date. (Standard IIIA.1.b)

The College has negotiated contract language concerning full and part time faculty evaluations, the faculty self-evaluation now includes reference to a faculty member's participation in the SLO process. Area Two of the Faculty Self Evaluation instrument asks the faculty to evaluate how they "Employs effective delivery methodologies of teaching or special services." The Sierra College Faculty Evaluation Criteria lists 17 items the faculty member should address in Area Two on the Self Evaluation form. Number 17 on the list is "Participates in the discussion and analysis of program/course outcomes". The College considers this to address the evaluation of faculty effectiveness in producing Student Learning Outcomes. The tenure review committee then considers the faculty Self Evaluation and student evaluations to assess the faculty member's participation in the SLO process. (Standard IIIA.1.c)

The College has written codes of professional ethics. The College Board has a code of ethics policy, BP – 2715. In addition, the Academic Senate Classified Senate, and Management Senate have adopted individual codes of ethics and professional behavior, AP-3050. These ethics policies demonstrate the College is committed to fair treatment of administration, faculty, staff, and students. Interviews with employees also confirmed an ongoing theme of collaboration, civility, and mutual respect. Employees indicated that they are not afraid to express their opinions. Prior to serving on a hiring committee, the College requires participation in a three hour "EEO and Diversity Training for Screening Committees" which includes an element on "Unconscious Bias." Additionally, the College has policies and procedures in place to address discrimination and harassment (AP 3435 and BP 3410). (Standard IIIA.1.d; IIIA.4.c)

As of fall 2012, the College employed 217 tenure track and tenured faculty, 256 classified, confidential, and classified supervisors, 739 part-time faculty, and 19 educational administrators. The College has an agreement with faculty to exceed its state-mandated obligation or full-time faculty by five and in fall 2012 exceeded that benchmark by eight and in fall 2013 exceeded it by 28. The College is interested in continuing to improve its full-time/part-time faculty ratio. (Standard IIIA.2)

The College purchased and implemented SunGard (now called Ellucian) Banner software to track Human Resource information. Security measures are in place to ensure that only appropriate people have access to confidential personnel records. Employees may inspect their personnel files in the HR Office during normal business hours. Additionally, employees can access to their electronic personnel files with encrypted remote access set up by HR for a specific time period. (Standard IIIA.3.b)

The College has a number of committees and activities that focus on diversity and supporting diverse personnel and student populations. Committee examples include the Academic Senate's Spectrum Committee which seeks to provide a supportive work environment for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, and Queer (LGBTIQ) faculty and staff and the Gender Equity Committee dedicated to monitoring and supporting Title IX compliance campus-wide. Activities include "Love Your Body Week" and "People and Cultures Day". The College made diversity the theme for 2011/12 convocations. (Standard IIIA.4a)

The College has an EEO Advisory Committee and a EEO plan was adopted by the Board of Trustees in December 2012. The EEO plan offered as evidence is marked as "Draft" due to revisions that have been made after board approval based on information received from the Chancellor's Office since the plan approval date. Component 10 of the approved EEO plan includes an analysis of the current workforce, but does not include statistics on applicant pools. (Standard IIIA.4b)

The College maintains a Staff Development Office staffed with one full-time classified employee and two faculty with re-assigned time. Flex Week activities are held each semester and consist of over 150 training opportunities offered online, in person, at the centers, and during evening hours. The Staff Development Committee is a standing committee of the Academic Senate and includes faculty, classified, and management. The Staff Development Committee advises and assesses programs offered by the Staff Development Office. (Standard IIIA.5.a)

The College utilizes its LearnerWeb software to actively survey the campus community regarding Staff Development. The software also allows for custom surveying to get feedback from attendees at specific workshops. Presenters then use this information to improve on subsequent workshops. There is evidence that the College uses results to improve faculty professional development. The College recognizes a need to add support and resources back into Staff Development and college staff indicated confidence that the electronic Program Assessment and Review (ePAR) process will prioritize funding when it becomes available. (Standard IIIA.5.b)

In the response to prior Recommendation 2c., the College indicated in spring 2013 that the Strategic Council voted to discontinue the Human Resources Staffing Plan and identify additional full-time faculty and support personnel needs through the College's Strategic Plan. In response to Standard IIIA.6, the College references the 2012-15 Staffing Plan as evidence of meeting the standard. It is stated that the plan provides for the first time a systematic method, supported by data, to maintain an appropriately sized, trained, and educated workforce. There is no mention of the Strategic Council action to discontinue the Staffing Plan. The College Self Evaluation addresses the program review process for the Human Resources Department rather than evaluation how human resources planning is integrated with institutional planning. Review of other areas of the Self Evaluation and interviews with staff confirm that human resource needs are integrated with institutional planning through the ePAR and Program Review process. Staffing recommendations are discussed and approved in the Planning and Resource Allocation Committee (PARAC) and the Strategic Council. (Standard IIIA.6)

### **Conclusions**

The College meets the standard.

The College should complete the Hiring Manual, as required by AP 7120, currently in draft form, and vet as appropriate through the College's shared governance system. The entity responsible for classified appointments onto hiring committees (i.e., the bargaining unit) may want to consider developing a process for such appointments. An application process, which includes criteria, would help assure the appropriate people serve on hiring committees. The Self Evaluation of Standard IIIA.6 addresses the program review of the HR department, rather than addressing how human resource decision making is integrated with institutional planning. However, staffing decisions are integrated with institutional planning through the ePAR and Program Review processes.

### **Recommendations**

None

## **Standard IIIB – Physical Resources**

### **General Observations**

Sierra College meets standard IIIB, Physical Resources. The College's physical facilities are comprised of the Rocklin (main) campus, the Roseville Gateway campus, the Nevada County campus, and the Tahoe Truckee campus. A 2004 local bond measure provided funding to expand and renovate the Nevada County campus. The bond also provided funding to construct the Truckee campus initial facilities. In contrast, two attempts in 2004 did not yield a local bond measure for the Rocklin campus.

The majority of the aging Rocklin campus reflects construction of the early 1960's. In 2007, the new math and technology building was opened. On April 23, 2013, the Board of Trustees set aside \$2 million as a local match to State funding for new science building. Although the institution continues to make repairs and improvements to a number of aging facilities and infrastructure, it is seeking ways to fund modernization and new construction projects. Sierra College is considering a future attempt at a local bond measure for the Rocklin campus as an approach to provide capital construction funding.

The institution leases about 60,000 square feet of commercial space at the Roseville Gateway campus as a means of supplementing the Rocklin campus facilities. The College is planning to accommodate a portion of the Roseville Gateway center's enrollment at the Rocklin campus once the lease expires in 2015 and leasing another facility for community education and public safety programs.

The institution has a draft 2025 Facilities Master Plan that includes the Rocklin, Nevada County, and Truckee campuses. These plans were used by the College to identify capital construction projects. The draft Facilities Master Plan was developed in 2004 to inform the local bond measure. The Rocklin campus facilities master site plan update was Board approved on June 14, 2011. The Board approved a facilities master site plan update on April 23, 2013, establishing the Childcare Development Center and Science Replacement Facility site location on the Rocklin campus. A Facilities Master Planning Task Force was established in 2012 by the Strategic Council to develop and recommend the new Rocklin Campus, Facilities Master Plan - the College anticipates developing this plan by spring 2014. Sierra College anticipates developing separate Facilities Master Plans for the Nevada County and Truckee campuses.

As part of the College's Resource Request and Allocation Process, short-term physical resource planning needs are identified annually by each division utilizing the ePAR

development process. The College's Planning and Resource Allocation Committee reviews the high cost needs and lower cost needs are reviewed by the Facilities Division for incorporation into their planning and budget development for the following year.

### **Findings and Evidence**

Sierra College provides safe and sufficient physical resources that support and assure the integrity and quality of its programs and services, regardless of location or means of delivery. The institution ensures that facilities are designed and constructed in compliance with California's Division of the State Architect requirements. Capital construction projects are identified in the College's five-year construction plan and are in support of the College's educational master plan. (Standard III.B.1)

The institution plans, builds, maintains, and upgrades or replaces its physical resources in a manner that assures effective utilization and the continuing quality necessary to support its programs and services. This is effectively accomplished in part by the College's planning and resource allocation process (evidence: Resource Request and Allocation Process). Interviews with the Facilities Council validated that the facility and equipment requests are initially identified in program reviews and are compiled using the College's electronic Program Assessment and Review (ePAR) system year end reports. Long-term facility needs are addressed through the College's draft facilities master planning process. The renovation or replacement of aging facilities and high-value equipment on the Rocklin campus continues to be a challenge. However, in interview with the Assistant Superintendent/Vice President of Administrative Services, it is noted the institution has established a capital project reserve fund to locally match state funding for the Science Replacement Facility and Childcare Development Center project. Physical resources utilization is reviewed annually - a yearly facilities space inventory is conducted in the fall. The results are found in the College's State Space Inventory Report. The College uses the space assignment process to evaluate and ensure effective use of office space as a result of the College's Space Assignment Process. (Standard IIIB.1.a)

Sierra College assures that physical resources at all locations where it offers courses, programs, and services are constructed and maintained to assure access, safety, security, and a healthful learning and working environment. The College accomplishes this task through the oversight of the Safety Committee. The Safety Committee confirmed the committee meets monthly to review and address safety concerns from all campuses. The Safety Committee is comprised of classified staff, deans, facilities, finance, human resources, faculty, and students (Nevada County and Truckee campuses representatives participate via phone conference). Safety issues are submitted to the committee using the Report of Unsafe Conditions, Hazardous or Work Practice form. In a conversation, the Safety Committee

verified that Plant Operations personnel correct urgent safety concerns immediately. The committee reviews non-urgent safety issues and recommends appropriate corrective measures. The College also has two other standing committees that address access, safety, security and healthful learning and working environments: the Facilities Council and Wellness Committee. (Standard IIIB.1.b)

To assure the feasibility and effectiveness of physical resources in supporting institutional programs and services, the institution plans and evaluates its facilities and equipment on a regular basis, taking utilization and other relevant data into account. The College's Facilities Division effectively identifies the facilities and equipment needs as evidenced in the ePAR reports. The Deputy Director, Plant Operations reaffirmed their data collection process includes a yearly visual inspection, program review information, and the Chancellor's Office three-year Facilities Condition Assessment. (Standard IIIB.2)

Sierra College's long-range capital plans support institutional improvement goals and reflect projections of the total cost of ownership of new facilities and equipment. The institution effectively performs these tasks in a variety of ways, the College's three long-range facilities master site plans, College's five-year construction plan and ePAR process for staffing and operational funding. Both of the above-mentioned processes support the College's educational master plan as verified in a discussion with the Facilities Council and Director, Facilities and Operations. The Rocklin campus was not able to provide a copy of the completed 2008 Facilities Master Plan as noted as "completed" in the visiting team November 2008 follow-up report. The College has provided a draft Sierra College, 2025 Facilities Master Plan as evidence that includes the Rocklin, Nevada County, and Truckee campuses - developed in 2004 to inform the local bond measure. This draft Sierra College, 2025 Facilities Master Plan guided the development of the Truckee and Nevada County campuses. The College commenced efforts to develop a Rocklin Campus, Facilities Master Plan in 2008, the facilities site plan was approved by the Board on June 14, 2011, pending agreement on the placement of the proposed new Science Replacement Facility. At the April 23, 2013 meeting, the Board approved the Rocklin campus facilities master site plan for the purpose of establishing the Science Replacement Facility and Childcare Development Center building site locations. In a conversation with the Assistant Superintendent, Vice President of Administrative Services and Director, Facilities and Construction, it was revealed that a Facilities Master Planning Task Force was established in 2012 by the Strategic Council to develop and recommend the new Rocklin Campus, Facilities Master Plan. The College anticipates completing this plan by spring 2014. In addition, Sierra College anticipates developing separate Facilities Master Plans for the Nevada County and Truckee campuses. (Standard IIIB.2.a)

Physical resource planning at Sierra College is integrated with institutional planning. The institution systematically assesses the effective use of physical resources and uses the results of the evaluation as the basis for improvement. The Strategic Council confirmed that short-

term physical resource planning needs are identified annually by each division utilizing the ePAR development process. (Standard III B.2.b)

## **Conclusions**

The College meets the standard.

Sierra College provides safe and sufficient physical resources that support and assure the integrity and quality of its programs and services, regardless of location or means of delivery. The institution systematically assesses the effective use of physical resources as demonstrated by the ePAR process and uses the results of the evaluation as the basis for improvement. Sierra College would benefit from completing the updating and approval of a comprehensive Facilities Master Plan.

## **Recommendations**

### **Recommendation #3**

In order to improve, the team recommends the College complete the updating and approval of the Facilities Master Plan that is currently in progress, as noted in the College's Actionable Improvement Plan for Standard IIIB.2. (Standard IIIB.1.a; IIIB.2.a; IIIB.2.b)

## **Standard IIIC – Technology Resources**

### **General Observations**

Sierra College has made significant advances in the area of technology since the previous accreditation self-study report. The institution has implemented various new or upgraded software programs in support of instruction, college operations, and communications. These programs include Banner Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system in 2009, that provides an integrated student and faculty web portal system ([mySierra.sierracollege.edu](http://mySierra.sierracollege.edu)); the electronic Program Assessment and Review (ePAR) to assist the institution in identifying funding needs used in the District's Resource Request and Allocation Process; a new Student Information System (Banner from SunGuard Higher Ed) in 2009 which integrates the functional areas including student records, instruction, finance, human resources, payroll, library systems, financial aid, and parking payment services; the Corporation for Education Network Initiatives in California (CENIC) CalREN Video over IP services for video conferencing; and SharePoint web-based collaboration system fosters campus-wide communications.

Due to a local 2004 bond measure, the Tahoe Truckee and Nevada County campuses' technology infrastructure and equipment are modern. In contrast, the aging Rocklin campus technology infrastructure is trailing behind despite improvements between 2008 and 2011 to replace obsolete server, network, and telephone system infrastructure. The institution has upgraded the Main Distribution Frame (MDF) to support a redundant fiber network connecting buildings. However, 30% of the buildings on the Rocklin campus need to be located on the core campus backbone. Sierra College recently completed a redundant Internet connection system and has a generator back-up system that will allow the College to maintain web access during a catastrophic event if electrical power was lost.

### **Findings and Evidence**

The institution assures that any technology support it provides is designed to meet the needs of learning, teaching, college-wide communications, research, and operational systems. Sierra College effectively supports learning and teaching in part by implementing the Banner Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system in 2009, that provides an integrated student and faculty web portal system ([mySierra.sierracollege.edu](http://mySierra.sierracollege.edu)). The institution enhanced its online classroom services to a hosted, cloud-based service in 2012. The College also provides a real-time streaming video service for students taking live, televised classes. The institution

effectively supports college-wide improvement of its systems by implementing the electronic Program Assessment and Review (ePAR) to inform the identification of funding needs and priorities used in the District's Resource Request and Allocation Process. The recently implemented SharePoint web-based collaboration system fosters campus-wide communications between and among departments via their own department home page. (Standard IIC.1)

Sierra College's technology services, professional support, facilities, hardware, and software are designed to enhance the operation and effectiveness of the institution. The Technology Master Plan guides which technology services, professional support services, facilities, hardware and software are necessary to ensure the effectiveness of Sierra College as a learning institution. The institution effectively provides all campuses access to support technicians for computers, printers, audiovisual, telephone, and networking software and equipment. (Standard IIC.1.a)

The institution provides quality training in the effective application of its information technology to students and personnel. The institution effectively provides online tutorials to introduce students to the College's website, mySierra, the online course management system, and library services. The Staff Development Office regularly provides on-campus training on a wide variety of topics, including technology applications. The institution has identified a goal to increase access to professional development in technology training. (Standard IIC.1.b)

The institution systematically plans, acquires, maintains, and upgrades or replaces technology infrastructure and equipment to meet institutional needs. The institution effectively developed and maintains a Technology Master Plan. The Technology Master Plan guides the Information and Instructional Technology department and is used to effectively identify needs for support staffing, hardware and software needs and infrastructure upgrades. The district effectively implemented a new Student Information System (Banner from SunGuard Higher Ed) in 2009. This new system integrated the functional areas including student records, instruction, finance, human resources, payroll, library systems, financial aid, and parking payment services. Sierra College has made vast improvements between 2008 and 2011 to replace obsolete server, network, and telephone system infrastructure. The institution has upgraded the Main Distribution Frame. The technological infrastructure at the Nevada County and Tahoe Truckee centers are current. Sierra College recently completed a redundant Internet connection system and a generator backup system that will allow the College to maintain web access during a catastrophic event were electrical power was lost. (Standard IIC.1.c)

The distribution and utilization of technology resources support the development, maintenance, and enhancement of its programs and services at Sierra College. This is accomplished in part by using technology resources to support television and online courses - four video conference meeting rooms, two at the Rocklin campus, one at the Nevada County campus, and one at the Tahoe Truckee campus, which are capable of connecting to each other and/or to the Corporation for Education Network Initiatives in California (CENIC) CalREN Video over IP services. In addition, students have access to online resources through both the "Entryway for Students" and mySierra components of the Sierra College website. The resources include access registration, course schedules, application (CCCApply), library resources, and the newly implemented F.A.C.T.S payment plan. The intranet MySierra, provides faculty and staff access to online instructor grades, rosters, and schedules, online printing requests (Print Shop Pro), employee benefits, pay stubs, and leave use reports. (Standard IIC. 1.d)

Sierra College's technology planning is integrated with institutional planning. The institution systematically assesses the effective use of technology resources and uses the results of evaluation as the basis for improvement. Sierra College effectively accomplishes this task through its development and implementation of the district's educational master plan, technology master plans, and strategic plan. As part of the District's Resource Request and Allocation Process, technology resource planning needs are identified annually utilizing the ePAR development process. (Standard IIC.2)

## **Conclusions**

The College meets the standard.

The institution assures that any technology support it provides is designed to meet the needs of learning, teaching, college-wide communications, research, and operational systems. Sierra College's technology planning is integrated with institutional planning. The institution systematically assesses the effective use of technology resources and uses the results of evaluation as the basis for improvement.

## **Recommendations**

None

## **Standard IIID – Financial Resources**

### **General Observations**

Sierra College is a fiscally prudent institution and uses a conservative approach when developing revenue and expenditure assumptions for budget development. Internal controls are effective and external audits confirm strong fiscal management. The College maintains reserves at a level that provides a reasonable expectation of both short-term and long-term financial stability. Financial resource planning is integrated with institutional planning. The College's history of fiscal conservancy was a major factor in its ability to weather the 2008-2012, economic downturn.

### **Findings and Evidence**

The College bases its financial planning on the institution's mission and core values. The mission and core values are supported in the ten-year Educational Master Plan. A three-year Strategic Plan is developed and contains strategies which guide institutional planning, assessment and resource allocation. Program Reviews and electronic Planning and Assessments (ePARs) are used by shared governance committees to make allocation recommendations to the Superintendent/President. (Standards IIID.1; IIID.1.a; IIID.4)

College planning reflects realistic assumptions for revenue and expenditures. The College considers local information, such as FTES, and state considerations, such as COLA, growth, potential deficit factor, pending legislation, to inform its budget assumptions. (Standard IIID.1.b)

The College considers long-range financial priorities while making short-term fiscal plans. The College allocates 80% of new funding to compensation. The College maintains a prudent reserve. The budgeted ending fund balance for 2013/14 is currently \$10.5million (11.7%), but relies upon earning growth and RDA backfill from the State. Based upon conversations with college financial management personnel, the 2013/14 budget may need to be revised if either of the assumptions do not hold. The narrative portion of the 2013/14 Adopted Budget that was approved by the Board of Trustees in September 2013 included this potential risk. General fund reserves have been steadily increased from 8.9% in 2006/07. (Standard IIID.1.c)

The District has a budget development process which is described in both a narrative form and a calendar-based timeline format. Constituencies have opportunities to participate through the Planning and Resource Allocation Committee (PARAC) and the Strategic Council. (Standard IIID.1.d)

The budget and audit have a high degree of credibility and accuracy. The College receives clean audits and positive bond ratings. The College has appropriate internal controls and reviews internal controls as needed. The 2011 audit dated October 31, 2011 contained findings regarding cash receipts. The College implemented changes to address the findings. The College works with contracted audit firms to ensure timely audits, as evidenced by the 2012 audit dated November 13, 2012. During interviews, College financial managers indicated the College rotates audit partners and audit managers as a good business practice. The College is considered a low-risk auditee. The College addresses audit findings in an expedient manner. Internal Control Questionnaires (Standard ICQ's) are used as part of the annual external audit process to describe and document procedures in order to assess proper internal control. (Standards IIID.2.a; IIID.2.b; IIID.2.e; IIID.3.h)

Appropriate financial information is provided throughout the institution in a timely manner. Revenue scenarios are reviewed by the Strategic Council. Budgets are presented to the Board of Trustees in June and September and as needed throughout the year. Department level financial information is available online via Banner. (Standard IIID.2.c)

The College uses all financial resources with integrity in a manner consistent with the intended purpose of the funding source. The College has a documented process for reviewing and approving grants applications. External audits confirm compliance with external requirements. The College Purchasing Manual provides detailed instructions on purchasing regulations and procedures. (Standards IIID.2.d; IIID.3.b; IIID.3.g)

The College has policies and procedures in plan to ensure sound financial practices and financial stability. Board Policy 6200 - Budget Preparation, directs district staff to build a budget that supports the institutional goals and Educational Master Plan, communicates major assumptions, and sets a minimum fund balance of 5%. BP 6250 – Budget Management and BP 6300-Fiscal Management address how fiscal operations are managed after a budget is established. The College should review these policies, as BP 6200, 6250, and 6300 were last reviewed in 2004. (Standard IIID.3)

The College uses the Tax Revenue Anticipation Notes (TRANs) program to meet its projected cash flow needs. The College is a member of Alliance of Schools for Cooperative Insurance Programs (ASCIP) for property, liability, and worker's compensation coverage. The College is a member of the Schools Excess Liability Fund (SELF) for excess liability and worker's compensation coverage. The College plans for uncertainties by maintaining a prudent fund balance and engaging in dialogue, such as when the passage of Proposition 30 was uncertain in November 2012. For 2013/14, multiple revenue scenarios were presented to the Strategic Council with varying levels of restoration and growth revenue. This shows that

the College plans for short term uncertainties. The College should consider developing multi-year projections for review by PARAC and the Strategic Council to assure long term fiscal solvency. (Standards IIID.3.a and IIID.3.e)

The College has addressed its GASB45 Other Post Employment Benefits (OPEB) liability. Every two years the District contracts with an actuarial firm to analyze its liabilities for retiree health benefits. As of the May 31, 2012 actuarial study, there are 85 active employees and 301 retirees eligible for District provided retiree health benefits. According to the May 2012 actuarial report, the pay-as-you-go annual actuarial estimate peaks in 2022/2023, at \$3,755,539. The Annual Required Contribution (ARC) is \$3,446,943. The Actuarial Accrued Liability (AAL) totals \$44,753,479. The College contracts with Keenan and Associates to administer an irrevocable trust to prefund OPEB liabilities, the trust had a balance of \$8,116,832 as of June 30, 2012. Since the peak is only \$308,596 more than the ARC, the College plans to continue using the pay-as-you-go model, currently estimated to total \$3,040,820. (Standards IIID.3.c and IIID.3.d)

The College has three outstanding Certificates of Participation (COPs). The College consolidated and refinanced its three COPs in 2012, lowering its annual debt service payments and total life of the debt instruments. The College plans for and allocates funds for the repayment of its debt service payments. (Standard IIID3.e)

The College participates in the Federal Direct Student Loan Program. In order to get a loan, students must complete a FAFSA, complete the Federal Direct Student Loan counseling online, must currently be making Satisfactory Academic progress, and must not exceed total debt of \$22,000. The current official two year default rate is 12.4%. (Standard IIID.3.f)

## **Conclusions**

The College meets the standard.

The College should consider developing and discussing multi-year projections to assure long term fiscal solvency and to ensure all Board policies related to finance and budget are up-to-date and reviewed on a regular and systematic basis.

## **Recommendations**

None

## **STANDARD IV: LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE**

### **Standard IVA - Decision-Making Roles and Processes**

#### **General Observations**

The College has put into place a structure and supports a culture that encourages engagement and participation by all constituencies. In addition to the official constituency of the shared governance structure, the College empowers all employees to take initiative in improving practices and programs. The College consistently demonstrates collaborative practices among its constituent groups. During the team's interviews with the key leaders and constituent groups (including the College president, Board of Trustees, representatives from the Strategic Council and adjunct faculty, and the leadership of the senates), it became evident that there is a consensus that the College climate is collaborative and inclusive. Participation by all constituent groups, faculty, classified staff, managers, students, and when appropriate the community, is fostered through public meetings of groups key to the College's decision making process and by defined roles in those groups which include the College's Academic Senate, Planning and Resource Allocation Committee (PARAC), Strategic Council, Classified Senate, Management Senate, and Student Senate. The College committee structure ensures broad input from all levels of the College's organizational structure. The Strategic Council uses this broad base of input to prepare recommendations to the President.

The constituency organizations hold regular meetings, post meeting agendas and minutes or recollections online, as well as sending them out via email to make them available to the College community. In addition, the College uses "inside.Sierra", the intranet for the district, to assist in the internal communication process, as well as retreats, trainings, and flex activities. Administrative Procedures have been written to codify the committee structure as well as flow charts to facilitate understanding of the shared governance process and timelines. The College governance process appears to work well for all concerned. Constituents clearly feel connected, informed and proud of the growth of the shared governance process and consistently describe the processes as collaborative, however, part-time faculty find widespread participation to be challenging due to timing and scheduling.

Although there is clearly an assessment and evaluation cycle for college processes such as program review and master planning, the holistic assessment of the structures has not been formalized. The Strategic Council recollections for May 2012 discuss the results of a survey which included questions regarding the planning and governance processes and structures and April 2013 discusses the evaluation of processes. There does not appear to be a formal evaluation process for the committees and governance structure.

## **Findings and Evidence**

The College has a clear leadership and governance structure that encourages “ethical and effective leadership with the goal of ensuring college wide participation in shared governance ultimately focused on maximizing and improving student learning” as stated in the August 2013 Institutional Self-Evaluation Report. In 2011, Board Policy 2715 was revised and contains the Board of Trustees Code of Ethics. Administrative Procedure 3050 includes the ethics statements for the Academic Senate, Classified Senate and Management Senate. (Standard IV.A)

The Budget Development and Planning Process Chart is a view of the planning process that includes the councils and college organizational structure, as well as when the decisions are made and which group is responsible. The College shared governance flow chart shows how ideas flow from the various committees and constituency groups to the President, by way of the Strategic Council, Bargaining Units, or directly through the College divisions of Instruction, Administrative Services, Student Services, and Human Resources. Committee agendas, minutes or recollections, and Board of Trustees minutes indicate an environment of empowerment and innovation at the College. The College provides annual training in leadership and innovation through the leadership institute, flex workshops, and orientation processes for new employees including programs specifically for part-time faculty. Workshops are offered during flex week and throughout the year to encourage staff and faculty participants to take a more active role in the improvement of teaching and student learning and shared governance. Conversations with the management and leadership of the various senates confirm a welcoming and transparent environment for taking initiative in the improvement of all areas across the College. (Standard IV.A.1)

Board Policy and Administrative Procedure 2510 define the roles of faculty, staff, administrators, and students in the shared governance process. These documents clearly specify how individuals and constituencies contribute and “work together on policy, planning and special purpose bodies.” They also identify the decision making groups as the Academic Senate, Classified Senate, Management Senate, and Student Senate using the Strategic Council as a forum for making recommendations to the President. Sierra College instituted a designated College Planning Day during Flex Week of fall 2013, to continue each semester forward to include full-time and part-time faculty, as well as staff and administrators. The day is set aside for full and part time faculty and staff to work on student learning assessments, Program Review, and or Curriculum Review and updating. The described processes appear to function well although the evaluation process indicates part-time faculty have limited representation on governance councils due to the limited nature of their work at the College. The Academic Senate President indicated during the interview that the Senate

has been discussing how to ensure appropriate participation levels for all faculty. (Standard IV.A.2)

Faculty, administrators, staff, and students have clearly defined roles in college shared governance structures. Recollections from the Strategic Council and the Academic Senate clearly indicate the active involvement of constituent groups in the planning and allocation of resources including improvements in the faculty involvement in faculty hiring processes, curriculum development, and creation of AP 4023 defining the College process for program discontinuance for financial reasons. The Strategic Council includes representation from Academic Senate, Classified Senate, Management Senate, and the Student Senate with five seats for each of the four constituencies. The Planning and Resource Allocation Committee, a nine member subcommittee of the Strategic Council is made up of the Presidents of the Academic, Classified, Management, and Student Senates as well as the Executive Team of the College. (Standard IV.A.2a)

The College relies on the Academic Senate and Department Chairs for recommendations about student learning programs and services in accordance with state regulations regarding shared governance. AP 2010 clearly identifies the shared governance structure of the College including the recognition that the Academic Senate may make recommendations directly to the Board of Trustees on academic and professional matters. The College's Curriculum Committee is a standing committee of the Academic Senate which reviews all course outlines and is coordinated by and managed from the Office of Instruction. The Student Learning Committee, another standing committee of the Academic Senate, assists faculty with development, assessment, and improvement of student learning outcomes. Development of programs and services originates with program faculty and instructional managers make recommendations as a body through the dean's council. Evidence clearly describes the responsibilities and authority of faculty and academic administrators in curricular and other educational matters. The President of the Academic Senate indicated that both the Vice President of Instruction and the Vice President of Student Services have such respect for the Academic Senate's responsibility for academic and professional matters that more "things are being sent our way for review and consideration - concern of how to keep up." The Academic Senate President described the process as collaborative. (Standard IV.A.2b)

Administrative Procedure 2510 defines the governance structure, processes, and practices and identifies the College constituencies who will work together for the good of the institution. The processes facilitate the discussion of ideas and effective communication among the Sierra College Board of Trustees, faculty, staff and students. Recollections of meetings and interviews with members of the Sierra College Board of Trustees, Academic Senate, Classified Senate, Management Senate, and Student Senate confirm that all constituents work together in a collaborative manner in the established governance structures.

Communication, both formal and informal, occurs regularly among the faculty, administration, classified staff, and students in department meetings, evaluation meetings, resource prioritization meetings, email correspondence, Office Updates, and College publications including the College website and intranet. Information is available to all employees through the posting and electronic distribution of committee agendas, recollections, recaps and minutes, as well as individually initiated messages through Sierra College email. Documentation includes assessment and evaluations of processes and procedures. (Standard IV.A.3)

The College advocates and demonstrates honesty and integrity in its relationships with external agencies, such as POST (Commission on Police Officer Standard and Training), the Board of Registered Nursing (BRN) and other licensing agencies ensuring students receive the certification needed to join the workforce. The College satisfies expectations for its relationships with the Accrediting Commission. The College documents past accreditation history on the College website and has responded to previous recommendations implementing changes to address identified shortcomings. (Standard IV.A.4)

Recollections and minutes of meetings support the commitment of Sierra College to regularly evaluate and improve the integrity and effectiveness of the institution's governance and decision making processes. The formal evaluation cycles are integrated across the institution's governance bodies and processes and include dialog and feedback loops. However, conversations with the Strategic Council leadership and recollections from May 2012 and April 2013 meetings confirm that there is no regular process specifically designed for regularly evaluating the work of the Strategic Council and other governance/decision-making structures and bodies to assure integrity and effectiveness of the efforts of these entities. The Sierra College Evaluation Cycle document lists 22 evaluation processes, defining ownership of each process along with their evaluation cycles. None of the major decision making bodies or structures are included on the list nor is there evidence of processes for committees such as the Strategic Council, the Senates and PARAC (Standard IV.A.5)

## **Conclusions**

The College meets the standard except for the absence of a regular evaluation process for its governance and decision making structures. Although the College has a continuous improvement cycle for college processes as evidenced by the "Budget Development and Planning Process" timeline and the "Sierra College Evaluation Cycle", conversations with the Strategic Council leadership and recollections from May 2012 and April 2013 meetings confirm that there is no formal process specifically designed for regularly evaluating the

work of the College's governance bodies, to assure integrity and effectiveness of the council's efforts. (Standard IV.A.5)

## **Recommendations**

### **Recommendation #4**

In order to meet the standard, the team recommends that the College develop a process for the regular evaluation of its governance and decision-making structures to ensure their effectiveness. Specific focus should be on key governance and decision-making councils and committees. (Standard IVA.5)

## **Standard IVB - Board and Administrative Organization**

### **General Observations**

Sierra College Community College District is a single college district. The Sierra Community College District Board of Trustees consists of seven trustees elected from different geographical areas. Board members are elected to four-year staggered terms, with no term limits. Additionally, a student trustee, who is also the Student Senate President, is elected on a yearly basis and has an advisory vote. Within the last 6 years three new board members have joined the board.

The Sierra College Board of Trustees is the policy setting body of the College as outlined in the Board Member Guide for Sierra College. They also hire and evaluate the College President and are responsible for the fiscal solvency of the district.

The College ensures there are a variety of ongoing training opportunities for new and continuing board members including individual and group discussions and training sessions with the College President and staff, and training workshops such as the annual Community College League of California Effective Trusteeship Workshop and the Student Trustee Workshop. The board has and follows a clearly defined policy for self-evaluation as well as selection and evaluation of the chief administrator of the College. The Board delegates/assigns all decisions requiring administrative action to the president, specifically the responsibilities for planning, organizing, and directing the College. There appears to be a disconnect between Board Policy 2410 on the “periodic review” of board policies, the actual review/revision dates on the Board policies, and statements contained in the August 2013 Institutional Self-Evaluation Report regarding the timeline for the review of board policies.

### **Findings and Evidence**

The Sierra Community College District Board of Trustees members set policies that assure the quality, integrity, and effectiveness of the student learning programs. The Board collaborates with its constituencies in its decision-making in order to ensure it is serving the public interests. Additionally, the board has a clearly defined process for selecting and evaluating the College’s chief administrator. Based on Board Minutes and an interview with board, they adhere to the Board Policies 2431 and 2435, Selection and Evaluation of Superintendent/President. (Standard IV.B.1)

During the interview of the Sierra College Board of Trustees, they agreed that they must speak with one voice and must balance the need to represent the public interest with the interests of the College and the needs of the students. They agreed that they are responsible

for the educational quality, legal matters, and the financial integrity of the College. New trustee orientation along with trustee participation in the College's staff development programs have built trust as new Board members develop in the roles as trustees. When there was the perception that one board member potentially placed himself in opposition to the Board's requirement to defend and protect the institution from undue influence or pressure, there was significant dialogue between the constituencies and ultimately, the Academic Senate and the Board participated in Technical Assistance Training facilitated by Community College League of California leadership and the President of the statewide Academic Senate. (Standard IV.B.1.a)

The Board's policies are consistent with its mission statement, ensure the quality, integrity, and improvement of student learning programs and services, and provide the fiduciary framework necessary to support teaching and learning. (Standard IV.B.1.b)

The Board of Trustees has ultimate authority for educational quality, legal matters, and financial integrity of the district. As an example the board exercised its authority regarding educational quality and financial integrity, in considering the recommendation from the president in 2010 to discontinue three programs, the Board retained the three programs in modified form. (Standard IV.B.1.c)

Board Policies are published and available for review through the College website. (Standard IV.B.1.d)

The Board acts consistently with its policies. Based on conversations with the president and the Board, policy recommendations from the Community College League of California always trigger a review and update of those policies. However, under IV.B.1b and IV.B.1e, the August 2013 Institutional Self Evaluation report states that "the Board reviews evaluates and updates its policies at least once every four years..." A sampling of board policies indicates there are policies that have not been reviewed within the four-year standard stated in the Self-Evaluation report. Board Policy 2410 states that "the Board shall periodically review its policies based upon reports from the Superintendent/President on the content and effectiveness of the policies." There is an inconsistency between the College's statement regarding a four year cycle in the Self-Evaluation report and "periodical review" as stated in the policy. (Standard IV.B.1.e)

The trustees participate in new member training and orientation as well as board professional development activities, including discussions and training sessions with the College president, training workshops such as the annual Community College League of California Effective Trusteeship Workshop, and focused training materials. This was evidenced by Board Minutes as well as responses during interviews with the Sierra College Board of

Trustees, the College President and Academic Senate President. Additionally, three board seats came up for election in fall 2012 and the other four will come up for election in fall 2014, thus the terms of office are staggered to allow the continuity of board membership. The Board used its policy for appointing a replacement for a trustee who resigned in 2011. (Standard IV.B.1.f)

The Board conducts an annual self-evaluation as described by Board Policy 2745, last reviewed in 2008, and has documented those meetings beginning 2009 and every year since, through 2013 in Board Minutes. The Board regularly reviews and updates its Code of Ethics, Board Policy 2715, last reviewed 2011, which prescribes how the Board addresses violations. (Standards IV.B.1.g and IV.B.1.h)

The Board receives information about the accreditation process in a variety of ways. Two trustees served on writing teams for the current Self-Evaluation and made regular reports on accreditation Self-Evaluation process under agenda item “Board Committee Reports.” The Board reviews and approves all official accreditation reports and documents before they are submitted to ACCJC. Board Minutes from June 11, 2013 contain a motion indicating that the Board has read and received the Self-Evaluation Report and the Board President signed the Sierra College Self-Evaluation Report on August 5, 2013 (Standard IV.B.1.i)

In 2010-2011, the Board followed Board Policy 2431, Superintendent/President Selection. The 23 member hiring committee included board members, community members, a student, and faculty and staff representatives. The Board unanimously agreed in the selection of the sixth president of Sierra College. The board delegates authority and responsibility to the Superintendent/President to administer and implement board policies in accordance with the Board Policy 2431 on the Delegation of Authority to the Superintendent/President. (Standard IV.B.1.j)

The President of Sierra College has been in his position since July 2011. The president regularly assesses and evaluates the College’s administrative structure to ensure it is organized and sized to meet institutional needs. When the Vice President of Finance position became vacant, the position was converted to the Vice President of Administrative Services to broaden the focus and better serve the institution. The president delegates authority to administrators and managers and evaluates the individuals, consistent with performance of their position responsibilities. (Standard IV.B.2 and IV.B.2.a)

The president guides the institutional improvement of teaching and learning through educational planning along with integrating institutional resource planning and allocation. The President’s support of professional development for all constituencies is evidence of his commitment to institutional improvement of teaching and learning. Under the leadership of

the President, Department Program Review, completed on a three-year cycle, has become robust as he provided the conceptualization and development of integrated and connected planning and resource allocation. (Standard IV.B.2.b)

The president maintains currency with statutes, regulations, and governing Board policies through active involvement in professional associations, conferences, and discussion at weekly executive staff meetings. Resources like the Community College League of California's Board Policy Administrative Procedure Service and the law firm of Liebert Cassidy Whitmore provide updates in response to revised laws, regulations, and legal opinions. (Standard IV.B.2.c)

The chief financial officer, under the direction of the president and with the involvement of the Planning and Allocation Committee, develops the tentative budget in the spring semester and presents it to the board in June, and develops the final budget and presents the final budget to the board for adoption in September. Revisions are made on a quarterly basis. The board, in compliance with Board Policy 6310, has directed the president to ensure an ending fund balance each fiscal year between 8% and 12% of unrestricted expenditures. The president attends and participates in the Board audit committee meetings, as well as reporting weekly to the Board. (Standard IV.B.2.d)

The President works and communicates effectively with the communities served by the College. As evidence during interviews with the board, this president has been following his plan to increase communication and involvement with a variety of community organizations and activities. (Standard IV.B.2.e)

Sierra College is a single college district with multiple campuses and is considered one college. (Standard IV.B.3)

## **Conclusions**

The College meets the standard.

The Board of Trustees is recognized as the policy making body of the College. The Board delegates authority to the President to administer those policies for the effective operation of the College. The Board has Board Policies defining how it operates and evaluates itself as well as a Code of Ethics for operating as a Board. The Board follows its policies and procedures in the hiring and evaluation of the College President. Reviews of minutes and agendas of board meetings establish that the Board and the College President work well together, and have processes in place to resolve any issues regarding "who does what" with expediency.

## **Recommendations**

### **Recommendation #5**

In order to improve, the team recommends that the College institutionalize a systematic approach to regularly review, update, and revise Board policies. (Standard IV.B.1.e)

## COMPLIANCE WITH COMMISSION POLICIES

The team reviewed each of the following Commission policies to ensure that Sierra College is in full compliance.

### *Policy on Distance Education and Correspondence Education*

The team affirmed the accuracy of the section within the Institutional Self Evaluation entitled *Certification of Continued Institutional Compliance with Commission Polices* regarding distance education. The assessment of distance education is provided in Standard II.A.

### *Policy on Institutional Compliance with Title IV*

The team affirmed the accuracy of the section within the Institutional Self Evaluation entitled *Certification of Continued Institutional Compliance with Commission Polices* regarding compliance with Title IV. This assessment was undertaken by the team in its review of Standard III.D.3.f. Sierra College is in compliance with Title IV based upon its official three-year cohort default rate for FY 2010 of 17.8% is less than the benchmark of 30% which triggers intervention and prevention efforts.

### *Policy on Institutional Advertising, Student Recruitment, and Representation of Accredited Status*

The team affirmed the accuracy of the section within the Institutional Self Evaluation entitled *Certification of Continued Institutional Compliance with Commission Polices* regarding advertising, student recruitment, and representation of accredited status. This assessment was undertaken by the team in its review of Eligibility Requirements 7, 15, 20, and 21 and through interviews and review of evidence.

### *Policy on Institutional Degrees and Credits*

The team affirmed the accuracy of the section within the Institutional Self Evaluation entitled *Certification of Continued Institutional Compliance with Commission Polices* regarding degrees and credits. As noted under Standard II.A.2.h, units of credit are awarded based on student achievement and using commonly accepted equivalencies.

### *Policy on Integrity and Ethics*

The team affirmed the accuracy of the section within the Institutional Self Evaluation entitled *Certification of Continued Institutional Compliance with Commission Polices* regarding

integrity and ethics. The College provided evidence that the Board of Trustees had adopted several policies and the staff had crafted administrative procedures addressing ACCJC's expectations on integrity and ethics including Board Policies 2715, 3200, 3410, 3420, 3430, 3050, 5500, 5530, and 5515, 7120, 7700, 7315 and related administrative procedures.

*Policy on Contractual Relationships with Non-Regionally Accredited Organizations*

The team affirmed the accuracy of the section within the Institutional Self Evaluation entitled *Certification of Continued Institutional Compliance with Commission Polices* regarding contractual relationships with non-regionally accredited organizations. The College does not maintain any such contracts.

*Policy on Student and Public Complaints against Institutions*

The team affirmed that the College has set forth processes for student and public complaints against the institution. These are found in the *Student Rights and Responsibilities Handbook*, on the College website, and in the College catalog. The team also reviewed complaints filed with the Commission regarding Sierra College.