Summary of Responses to the 2007 Accreditation Visit

As a result of the fall 2007 visit by an ACCJC accrediting team, the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, Western Association of Schools and Colleges on January 31, 2008 placed Sierra College on Warning. The college was required to submit a progress report by October 15, 2008, and a follow up visit was conducted on November 17, 2008. The purpose of the October 2008 progress report from the college, and the November 2008 follow up visit from the ACCJC visiting team was to assess progress made by Sierra on the following recommendations:

**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)


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. (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 (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. (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 (I.B.6, II.A.2.f, II.B.4, III.D.3, IV.A.5)
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. (II.A.1.a, c, II.A.2.a, h, II.B.4, II.C.2, III.A.1.c)

Recommendation 4: On-line Support Services for Students

The team recommends that a more robust set of on-line 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. (II.B.3.a, II.C.1, II.C.1.c)

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.

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. (IV.B.1)

The College’s Response:

To quote from the report issued by the November 2008 visiting team, “After review of evidence, interviews with a wide range of constituency representatives, and conversations with governing board members, the visiting team concluded that the college implemented Recommendations 1 and 6. The college has partially implemented Recommendation 2 having implemented parts 2a, and 2c. Recommendation 2 parts 2b and 2d have not been implemented. The college expects to use the upcoming fiscal year (FY 09/10) to implement both of these parts of Recommendation 2. The college has also partially implemented Recommendation 3 regarding Student Learning Outcomes.”
Again quoting from the November 2008 visiting team report, “The College has also effectively identified assessment methods and established dates for completing student learning outcomes at the institutional level and for all its courses, programs, and services. This process has included performance measures to assess and improve institutional effectiveness of all programs and services. The college has not yet used these results in the strategic planning and resource allocation process, nor has it yet included effectiveness in producing student learning outcomes as part of its faculty evaluation process; otherwise, this recommendation (3) has been addressed.”

Recommendations 4 (Online Support Services for Students) and 5 (Plan for Long-Term Debt Financing) were not addressed in the November 2008 visiting team report. Concerning Recommendation 6, the report stated, “The Board of Trustees has returned to the practice of conducting annual self-evaluations. The self-evaluation required under existing Board Policy 2745 has been completed. This recommendation has been implemented.”

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 1: “The Commission requires the college to improve its program review process to include analysis of the currency and relevancy of the programmatic curriculum.”

A two-member evaluation team visited the college on October 23, 2009. In its subsequent report in December of 2009, the team documented the following findings: “The College was well prepared and ready for the team's visit. After review of evidence, interviews with a wide range of constituency representatives and conversations with governing board members, the visiting team concluded that the college implemented Recommendations 2b, 2d and Commission Recommendation 1 (Program Review).”

The report further noted: “It is the team’s assessment that the college has on-going, systematic evaluation and planning in place. Additionally, a wide range of college personnel are involved in the dialogue that culminates in resource allocation recommendations to the Superintendent/President and the Board of Trustees.”

In a letter from the Commission dated January 29, 2010, the college was removed from Warning and had its accreditation reaffirmed: “The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, Western Association of Schools and Colleges, at its meeting January 6-8, 2010, reviewed the Follow-Up Report submitted by Sierra College and the report of the evaluation team which visited Friday, October 23, 2009. The Commission took action to accept the report, remove Warning, and reaffirm accreditation.”

Sierra College submitted its required midterm report to the ACCJC on October 15, 2010. In that report, the college addressed comprehensively each of the recommendations from the 2007 evaluation report. Recommendation 4 (more robust online student services) received particular attention as the college had added many new online student support services in the three years since the 2007 evaluation.
In a letter dated January 31, 2011 assessing the college’s 2010 Midterm Report, the Commission focused on only one of the original six recommendations, long-term debt management. The college was advised that a Follow-Up Report concerning the college’s management of this issue was required to be submitted to the Commission by October 15, 2011. The report should demonstrate the college’s resolution of Recommendation 5 from the 2007 evaluation team report: “The team recommends that the college develop a long term debt financing plan to address the costs associated with implementation of GASB 45 requirements.” The required report describing the college’s long term debt management plan and its compliance with GASB was submitted to the Commission on October 15, 2011.

The Commission notified the college on February 12, 2012, that a further Follow-Up Report was necessary concerning the college’s plan to finance its long term debt in compliance with GASB requirements. The college sent the required report to ACCJC in March of 2012, and was visited by a two-person evaluation team from the commission in April of 2012. In the report to the Commission that resulted from the April visit, the team reported the following conclusion: “The College has developed a long-term plan to address the short-term impact on the financial stability of the institution and therefore complies with the requirements of Standard III.D.1. Recommendation 5 (2007) has been fully implemented.”

In July of 2012, the college received from the Commission a letter stating that “Sierra College has implemented appropriate action to comply with Accreditation Standards on the requirement for a plan to address costs associated with the implementation of GASB 45 as stated in Recommendation 5 from the 2007 comprehensive evaluation.”

Note: All of the documents mentioned above are located at: