

## FOCUSED INTERIM REPORT

Prepared by Linn-Benton Community College for the  
Commission on Colleges, Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges

APRIL 14, 1999

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Linn-Benton Community College was subject to a full-scale evaluation visit by a committee representing the Commission on Colleges in October of 1997. The committee report that resulted from this evaluation was overwhelmingly complimentary. The college had worked hard to prepare for the evaluation visit, and the entire college community was pleased to have its good work recognized by the visiting team. Still, the committee report did contain a general recommendation that prompted the full Commission to schedule a focused interim visit for the college. The text of the general recommendation is as follows:

“Although the college has conducted many campus-wide initiatives to gather information for institutional effectiveness, no central assessment scheme is in place. The process remains a ‘work in progress’. In order to fully comply with Policy #25, Educational Assessment, it is recommended that the ‘work in progress’ be fully articulated; and that an operative, institutional system be put in place for measuring student outcomes, routinely reviewing programs, organizing data, and planning for improvement to ensure and validate quality education for students.

It is further recommended that institutional research and staff development be fully utilized to support educational assessment with on-going, system wide data and appropriate staff training to implement educational assessment.”

Since the college fully discussed both the strengths and weaknesses of its institutional effectiveness program in its self-study document, the general recommendation of the visiting team was not unexpected. At the time of the team’s

visit, the college's institutional effectiveness program was operational, but it was incomplete and not integrated into the working life and culture of the college. In this sense, the visiting team precisely captured the state of affairs by describing the institutional effectiveness program as a "work in progress," characterized by lots of activity but lacking a "central assessment scheme."

The sections that follow have been prepared to demonstrate the significant progress the college has made since October of 1997 in regard to its institutional effectiveness program. We believe that the college is now past the "work in progress" stage and has developed fully formed systems that address the concerns expressed in the general recommendation. The remainder of this report will: a) provide historical context for our institutional effectiveness program; b) detail the progress the college has made with its program since our October 1997 evaluation; and c) provide copies of important source documents related to our institutional effectiveness program, including samples of the work done by faculty and staff to respond to the college's strengthened assessment systems.

## **II. HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

In 1992 the Commission on Colleges adopted its more rigorous policy on Educational Assessment. Soon after this enactment, President Jon Carnahan directed a senior dean at the college to assume a leadership role in regard to assessment and develop a comprehensive institutional effectiveness program for the college.

After considerable research, the dean selected an institutional effectiveness model that was marked by complexity, prescriptive forms, and specialized language. A great deal of institutional energy was expended in an attempt to engage faculty and staff in the workings of this model. Memos were exchanged, meetings were held, inservice programs were conducted, and some tentative efforts were made to prepare departmental goals in conformance with the complex model.

Despite the best efforts of all involved, this initial attempt proved to be a failure. The elaborate and esoteric features of the selected model failed to secure faculty and staff support. The connection between the model's planning and measurement protocols and the "real" work of faculty and staff was not obvious.

President Carnahan recognized in the spring of 1995 that the college needed a fresh

start with its institutional effectiveness program. With the retirement of the dean who had led the previous effort, the president brought the responsibility for institutional effectiveness into his own office. Working through his assistants and the college's staff development office, the president developed a new conceptual model for institutional effectiveness over the course of the summer of 1995.

The new model started with one overarching premise: a comprehensive and meaningful institutional effectiveness program must have faculty and staff support. Starting with this premise, faculty and staff were informed that the college's new approach to institutional effectiveness would begin with "facilitated conversations" designed to have instructional departments develop and record clear, reasonable, and measurable goals to improve teaching and student learning. Service units were scheduled for similar conversations that focused on clear, reasonable, and measurable strategies to improve customer service.

The new model recognized that diffuse conversations will produce diffuse results. Consequently, a companion process was proposed to run parallel to the work resulting from the facilitated conversations. This process, representing a much more objective, data-driven effort, measures college performance in a number of selected areas. The College-Wide Success Indicators (the name of this data based project) are designed to produce data that can be compared from year to year. Over time, this data can be used to inform and shape faculty and staff goal setting, budgeting, and other activities of the college.

Armed with the new model in the fall of 1995, the president's staff invited instructional departments to volunteer as "pilots" for the 1995-96 academic year. Eight instructional departments did volunteer in this initial year for the facilitated conversation model; all but one service unit also volunteered. Departments that did not volunteer were advised that participation would be mandatory for the 1996-97 academic year.

The pilot departments largely achieved their goals in the first year, and the results of this work were summarized in a year-end report. However, the 1995-96 College-Wide Success Indicators effort proved to be more difficult than first imagined. Most of the year was spent determining which activities should be measured and how, once selected, they could be measured. The year-end report on our CWSI efforts reflected the tentative, halting nature of this development process.

All departments were required to participate in the 1996-97 goal-setting process,

and goals were (in fact) developed by every department with results reported in the summer of 1997. The CWSI process demonstrated growth and refinement in this second year, and the college began to receive its first useful data from its CWSI measures.

Still, in this second year there remained significant shortcomings in the college's assessment efforts. These shortcomings included the following: a) the departmental goal development process was uninformed by college-wide goals; b) measurement strategies contained within departmental goals were weak and anecdotal; c) data and goal results were not systematically analyzed; and d) the proffered goals were often less than rigorous.

The college thus began the 1997-98 academic year with an institutional effectiveness program that was intense, active, and (unfortunately) not fully focused. This is where the college found itself when the accreditation team visited the college in October of 1997.

### **III. PROGRESS SINCE OCTOBER 1997**

The accreditation team report confirmed the college's sense that its institutional effectiveness efforts were incomplete. In order to construct a stronger institutional effectiveness system (and respond to the concerns of the accreditation team), the college took the following steps:

1. The college, using a broadly representative group of community leaders, faculty, and staff, completed an extensive strategic planning process. The planning group relied on the accreditation team report, community surveys, and institutional effectiveness data to produce nineteen global recommendations to guide the future development of the college. This process provided the essential context that is needed for meaningful departmental planning and goal setting.

2. During the summer of 1998, the college reviewed the nineteen strategic planning recommendations in conjunction with the published results of its 1997-98 departmental goal activities and CWSI research, the accreditation team report, the college's self-study report, and the college's mission statement. From this comprehensive body of data, six college-wide goals for the 1998-99 academic year were prepared for consideration by the Board of Education. The six tentative goals are as follows:

### FIRST GOAL

\*\* The college should develop a comprehensive and ongoing professional development plan that focuses on the expansion and development of teaching strategies, delivery systems, and assessment processes that will enhance student learning in today's changing world. The professional development plan should complement a faculty and staff appraisal system that is consistently administered for all full-time and part-time faculty.

### SECOND GOAL

\*\* The college should aggressively seek to position itself as the premier provider of quality workforce education and training in Linn and Benton counties.

### THIRD GOAL

\*\* The college should actively implement its Enrollment Management and Marketing Plan to assure future growth and development. The college should expand its educational partnerships and offer programs and courses at times and locations and through delivery systems that are appropriate for our current and prospective students.

### FOURTH GOAL

\*\* The college should strengthen the student assessment system and provide comprehensive remedial instruction for students with deficiencies so that all LBCC graduates are able to demonstrate basic skills proficiencies in reading, writing, and computation.

### FIFTH GOAL

\*\* The college should continue to develop strategies to integrate knowledge and skills essential for students and community members to succeed in employment, further education, family, and community life. These may include, but not be limited to, personal management, social and cultural awareness skills, problem solving, teamwork, communication, social and workplace systems, and career development.

### SIXTH GOAL

\*\* The college should continue developing a long-range capital projects plan.

3. The proposed college-wide goals were first reviewed by the faculty during

a meeting of the broadly representative Academic Affairs Council. Faculty support was particularly high for the first and third goals outlined above.

4. The six proposed college-wide goals were presented to the Board of Education on August 19, 1998. After a lengthy and productive discussion, the Board of Education endorsed the first, third, and fourth goals as the institution's college-wide goals for the 1998-99 academic year. However, in regard to the other three goals, the Board directed the President to view these as personal goals and asked that he report back his progress on these goals within a year.

5. Immediately after the Board's action on August 19, a series of meetings and retreats were held for faculty, classified, and administrative staff. The Board's college-wide goals needed to be refined and sharpened so that instructional departments and service units could effectively use the broad goals to write departmentally specific goals and action plans in response to them. This exercise resulted in the production of several "Priority Initiatives" for each of the three college-wide goals (see Attachment B for a listing of the goals with the Priority Initiatives attached).

6. During the September 1998 inservice period, all faculty and staff were provided a copy of the three college-wide goals and Priority Initiatives. All departments and service units then conducted retreats to develop action plans in support of at least two of the college-wide goals. The Priority Initiatives were used to focus departments and service units more precisely on the kind of activities that would be most useful. A training session was provided for faculty and staff in need of technical assistance with the writing of action plans.

7. The Board of Education reviewed the goals a second time at its September 16, 1998 meeting. The Board also reviewed the Priority Initiatives that had been prepared after its August 19 meeting. The Board enthusiastically and unanimously approved the college-wide goals and Priority Initiatives for the 1998-99 academic year.

**8. Deans and directors will closely monitor departmental progress on action plans over the course of the 1998-99 academic year. Comprehensive summaries of departmental and service unit work will be published in the summer of 1999. These summaries, together with the results of the 1998-99 College-Wide Success Indicators project, will be again reviewed by the President, his staff, and the Academic Affairs Council in July of 1999. Using**

**these results and other information that may come from ongoing planning exercises, budgetary sources, or external events, new college-wide goals will be presented to the Board for academic year 1999-2000. The development of Priority Initiatives and departmental and service unit action plans will follow the Board's adoption of college-wide goals, and the cycle will repeat itself. It is this ongoing cycle of data gathering and analysis, college-wide goal setting, and departmental action plans that provides the "central assessment scheme" needed to complete our institutional effectiveness program.**

#### **IV. EXPLANATORY ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment A: Tentative College-Wide Goals, 1998-99 Academic Year (document presented to the Board of Education on August 19, 1998).

Attachment B: Final College-Wide Goals with Priority Initiatives Attached, 1998-99 Academic Year (document presented to the Board of Education on September 16, 1998).

Attachment C: Strategic Planning Council Recommendations.

Attachments D: 1997-98 Summary Report of the College-Wide Success Indicators.

Attachment E: Sample of Instructional Department Action Plan, 1998-99.

Attachment F: Sample of Instructional Department Action Plan, 1998-99.

Attachment G: Sample of Student Services Department Action Plan, 1998-99.

Attachment H: Sample of Service Unit Action Plan, 1998-99.