

OBSERVATIONS ON THE
FCMAT
FIRST SIX-MONTH PROGRESS REPORT

In January of this year FCMAT submitted its first Six-Month Progress Report. One section of the report was entitled Academic Achievement and provided a summary of their assessment of the instructional programs at the Compton Educational Center. The assessment was primarily based on information collected from their on-site visit from October 29 to October 31, 2007.

While the Faculty Development Project team was assembled for the purpose of collaboratively developing individual faculty development plans, it also seemed to provide a unique opportunity to assess the comments of the Academic Achievement section of the FCMAT report. In fact, there has probably never been such a comprehensive outside examination of a college's instructional program as was provided by the efforts of this project team. As stated earlier, the project team was composed of 24 faculty consultants, all are exemplary faculty members in their own discipline. They in turn met on a one-to-one basis with each of the Compton Center full-time faculty members in their related disciplines. Every Compton Center full-time faculty member was included in the project and the consultants' interactions included document review (program reviews, course outlines and class syllabi), classroom observations and individual meetings. Obviously, this was a much more comprehensive assessment than was possible by the FCMAT team and is the reason that the consultant observations are so important.

As one might expect, there are areas in which the consultants agreed and supported the FCMAT commentary and areas in which the consultants disagreed. For purposes of this report, the areas of disagreement are probably the most important. The most critical disagreement is with the statements in the FCMAT report which directly and indirectly impugn the competency and performance of the Compton Center classroom faculty. These comments are included in the "Status" section with statements like "Still, the center is faced with major problems including the quality of classroom instruction..." and most of the commentary in the "Instructional Strategies" section. It was the consensus of the 24 consultants that these denigrating comments were not valid. Where limitations do exist, it is because of the lack of institutional support for classroom activities (e.g. limited or no technology in many classrooms) but not because of the lack of competency, commitment, performance or dedication of the faculty.

This issue is such a critical part of the institution's assessment that it needs to be underscored by direct quotes from the consultants. While it would probably be possible to quote all 24 of them, here is a representative sampling.

Susan Sterr, English Department Chair, Santa Monica College said, "All in all, I am deeply impressed by these Compton instructors and would be happy to have any one of them on the English faculty at Santa Monica College. They are dedicated to and caring of their students, professional, talented, and remarkably resourceful. In all cases, I found their rapport with students to be excellent and their knowledge and skill in their subject matter superior. In every case, I saw teachers consciously employing active learning strategies, as well as pacing classroom activities and choosing materials to engage students. Syllabi were complete and

thorough in outlining course objectives, classroom procedures and expectations, class calendars and due dates. These are faculty who know what they are doing and love what they do. All of them are fully invested in Compton and believe in its potential to serve the best interests of the community.”

Greg Gilbertson, Art Professor, Pierce College said, “My observation of Wednesday’s April 16th Art History class confirmed that the instructional limitations in this instance are not due faculty instruction but rather to the lack of technological and other material resources. I found the instructor’s lecture and visual slide presentation informative and engaging as students asked relevant questions and made comments confirming their understanding of the material.”

Perviz Sawoski, Theatre Arts Department Chair, Santa Monica College said, “During my class observation and participation, I found the instruction as good as any professional or college dance studio. The class progressed from warm-ups and basic techniques to movement progressions, to choreographed material in a smooth manner. The students were at different levels, and were attentive and interested.”

Robert Martinez, Math Department Chair (and Academic Senate Vice President of Academic Policy), Pierce College said, “It is my report from what I observed that whatever led to the non-accreditation of Compton College did not have to do with the Math faculty and the learning experience in the classroom, but rather, there must have been problems at the administrative level. So concerning the FCMAT report, I would disagree with the criticism of the faculty and the criticism of the learning environment in the classroom.”

Diane Young, Business Administration Professor Emeritus, Glendale College said, “The four Business Administration faculty I observed were every bit as competent as my colleagues at Glendale College. Each of the four was clear, organized, and engaged students in the learning process. They brought in real business examples and current business events that tied in with the subject and encouraged student questions. Technology was used effectively by three of the four instructors. Given the circumstances at Compton, it is amazing that the faculty have created and preserved such a positive learning environment.”

Donna Accardo, English Department Chair, Pierce College said, “It was a gratifying experience to meet and confer with the faculty at Compton Education Center. Based on my consultations and observations, I found no evidence to confirm the findings of the FCMAT Academic Achievement Report. The fact that there is quality and inspiring instruction at Compton is a tribute to the faculty. These dedicated teachers continually demonstrate their commitment to the school. They are teaching successfully despite woefully inadequate facilities, lack of technology, an inaccurate schedule, new curriculum and little or no shared governance. Despite these challenges, each instructor is deeply involved with the center, committed to professional development, and passionate about student success. They are an inspiration to any teacher, and once their prodigious efforts are both recognized and supported, the goal to re-gain Compton’s accreditation will be possible.”

Jeff Shimizu, Vice President of Academic Affairs (and former Director of Athletics), Santa Monica College said, “Overall, the instructor is an outstanding faculty member. I would hire

him immediately at Santa Monica College. He coached major sports for over 20 years and still has the enthusiasm and passion to motivate his students to succeed. He has internal pride in the College and the Compton community.”

Susan Aminoff, Sociology Professor, Pierce College said, “FCMAT alleges that faculty were on cell phones during class, and that students were inattentive and not displaying behavior consistent with the student role. After spending time with the instructor, and participating in her class, there is nothing to indicate that she is anything but a dedicated instructor, modeling and requiring professionalism of herself and her students.”

Lesley Kawaguchi, Social Sciences Professor (and Academic Senate Past President), Santa Monica College said, “In terms of Instructional Strategies, if FCMAT team members attended classes not only in the community colleges, but also the CSUs and UCs, they would discover that the vast majority of instruction in general education courses is exactly as they found at Compton – the traditional lecture format or lecture with PowerPoint. Some disciplines lend themselves better to small group discussions; others lend themselves better to integration of technology. The vast majority of history and political science courses in California and the United States are taught exactly as I observed them – and the ones at Compton were in fact above average. Overall, my assessment of the Compton College social science faculty and their program is that more community college faculty throughout the state should be looking to them for teaching techniques that serve basic skills students.”

While the aforementioned quotes represent nine of the twenty-four consultants, comparable quotes could be provided from all of them.

The other major area of disagreement between the consultant assessments and the FCMAT Report has to do with the course outlines and the absence of adequate student learning outcomes within the course outlines. When Compton College lost its accreditation and became an educational center of El Camino College, the entire faculty of Compton was required to jettison their own course outlines and teach classes according to El Camino course outlines. Therefore, any inadequacy of those course outlines is the responsibility of El Camino College and is more appropriately addressed by the Accreditation Commission during El Camino’s next reaffirmation of accreditation and is outside the domain of FCMAT’s work with the Compton Center. At most, the faculty are only contributors to necessary changes in the El Camino course outlines and it is clearly outside their designated authority. Therefore, they should not be held accountable for correcting these problems.

The consulting team was fortunate to have as one of its members (Lesley Kawaguchi) a faculty member who is part of the statewide academic senate’s task force on SLOs. For that reason, it is useful to include her analysis of this issue. She said, “With regard to Curriculum, the FCMAT report is misleading. The entire issue regarding student learning outcomes should be placed in context. Because of its relationship with El Camino College, Compton Center is using El Camino College’s course outlines of record and therefore, any SLOs developed need to be worked on mutually by both entities. As a member of the Academic Senate for California Community College’s (ASCCC) ad hoc team, which included Janet Fulks, considered a lead faculty person in the state of California regarding SLOs and assessment, I worked with Compton

faculty to develop their own SLOs and began the discussion on assessment back in 2005. Compton Center's faculty members have not moved appreciably beyond these initial discussions and attempts, not because of any failure on their part, but rather because of subsequent events, including their relationship with El Camino College. If the Compton faculty have not moved forward with assessment measures and data, I would conclude El Camino faculty may not have moved very far either ...”

“In terms of the course outlines of record and course syllabi containing specific information regarding assessment, the statewide Academic Senate Accreditation and Student Learning Outcomes Committee has recommended that it is up to individual colleges to determine how they will house their SLOs (on the course outlines of record or separately) and their assessment results. While course syllabi can state student learning outcomes, the process of instruction, particularly for critical thinking skills which these three disciplines seek to develop in students, is not formulaic. Finally, the FCMAT report misses the larger goal of SLOs and curriculum. The process is iterative – not final. If Compton and El Camino are only beginning the process, the other elements should eventually appear, and then will be reexamined and reevaluated. The Compton faculty do place the course learning objectives into their syllabi, which could then be linked to SLOs and assessment. However, I would like to see the Compton faculty provided with some best practices in the essential elements that should be included in a course syllabus.”

“Finally, in terms of Assessment and Accountability, the FCMAT reliance on the standards, while important in gauging the state of Compton Center faculty and their curriculum, needs to be applied to El Camino as well. I would have recommended professional development in this area, but as long as Compton's faculty are considered part of El Camino, then it is up to El Camino faculty to work with the Compton faculty to establish SLOs, means of assessment, best practices for course syllabi, etc., not the Compton faculty alone. Moreover, the FCMAT conclusion that syllabi ‘revealed little evidence of the use of authentic assessment techniques’ such as journals, portfolios, student presentations, and problem-based projects are not necessarily best practices for students in transfer-level general education courses, such as history, political science, and philosophy, where the typical CSU and UC upper division courses in these disciplines rely on research papers, essays, and in-class midterm and final essay exams.”

“In short, FCMAT used a checklist or template to determine the adequacy of instruction, curriculum, assessment and accountability, not the actual academic and professional work that is typically done in distinct areas of academia.”

While these two areas represent major areas of disagreement with the FCMAT Report, there were also areas of agreement. While many of these areas of agreement are discussed in greater detail within the section of the project report that discusses institutional issues, those areas should still be referenced here. The team agrees with the frustration over the Center's failure to occupy the new library and LRC which has perpetuated problems in both of the old facilities. Furthermore, the team agrees that the part-time bookstore is inadequate. The consultants from vocationally related disciplines also support the FCMAT recommendation to hire a vocational counselor and they will be heartened to learn from the counseling consultants that such a hiring is in process. Hopefully, the implementation of this project's recommendations will resolve the FCMAT concerns over professional development for faculty. However, probably the most

vehement consultant support for the FCMAT recommendations is in the area of technology. As the report cited, "...technological approaches in the teaching and learning process occurred consistently only in those areas where technology was the primary learning tool." There is a serious shortage of technology in the other classrooms. It is not just the necessity to create more "smart classrooms" but even many of the rooms lack rudimentary technology (e.g. an overhead projector and a screen). Unfortunately, because of the consternation created by the FCMAT comments on Compton Center faculty competency and the FCMAT criticism of the course outlines, it was difficult for the institution to hear the areas of agreement with the FCMAT Report.