

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT CONCERNS

The project consultants were very impressed with the quality of instruction occurring in Compton Educational Center classrooms. The Compton Center faculty knows its student population and understands that an overwhelming majority of these students are at the basic skills level. As a result, many faculty members have developed appropriate learning strategies to address the needs of this population and effective classroom management techniques to deal with behavioral issues that normally would not be predominant in college classrooms. These Compton Center faculty seemed surprised to learn from the consultants that other institutions are struggling to serve, in rapidly growing numbers, the same student population and that the expertise of the Compton faculty could be of great value to faculty members at these other community colleges.

Several consultants observed that Compton Center faculty members are less in need of professional development than basic instructional support. In fact, an impressive number of these faculty members have pursued relevant professional development opportunities at their own expense and on their own time. However, most Compton Center faculty members are functioning in the classroom without even the minimum level of instructional support colleagues at other institutions would find acceptable. In the words of one consultant:

...these instructors are providing quality instruction in an environment that provides little or no support to either faculty or students... It is incomprehensible how any student could obtain an education under such dire circumstances, yet the instructors I met with continue to inspire and motivate their students to do just that.

Basic Instructional Support:

In some cases, faculty members are not issued keys for assigned classrooms that are kept locked because of equipment stored inside. One consultant who had come to observe a class waited a full thirty minutes with the instructor and students outside a locked classroom until a dean with a key could be located to unlock the door. According to that instructor, this has been a frequent occurrence. Another consultant experienced a similar delay in beginning a class because maintenance work had been scheduled in the classroom without regard to the fact that a class was scheduled during that time. Again, a dean had to be summoned to correct the situation. These are but two of several situations consultants observed in which the inability of instructors to access assigned classrooms significantly impacted instruction.

Consultants also observed that most instructional departments have little clerical support, and many faculty do not have ready access to copiers and office equipment for use in preparing classroom materials. Some vocational programs lack much needed instructional support positions to assist faculty with various equipment and safety issues. Most classrooms are not equipped with basic audio/visual equipment, even when the classes assigned to these rooms regularly require it. (For example, the instructor teaching Music Appreciation uses his own "boom box.") Some classrooms even lack screens for use with overhead projectors. Faculty members with occasional audio/visual needs find it difficult to locate operable equipment.

Consultants found instructional supplies, both generic and specialized, to be inadequate. Many departments apparently have no budgets for instructional supplies, and faculty members seem unaware of a process through which supplies and materials can be requested. Instructional equipment is all too often inoperable, and there seems to be no standardized process through which it can be repaired.

Facility Issues:

Consultants found that classrooms often appeared neglected and in a state of disrepair. All too often, actively used classrooms and other instructional spaces are also being used for storage of furniture and equipment. Safety upgrades are needed in the Physical Education and the Automotive Technology facilities, and it appears that hazardous waste disposal procedures have not been followed in the Automotive Technology area for some time. There are significant heating/air-conditioning issues in classrooms, and some classrooms were found not to have all of the lights working. Electrical upgrades are needed in the Library so that all of the computers can be used simultaneously and in the Physical Education area so that already purchased fitness equipment can be installed. With all of these existing classroom issues, it is very difficult to promote a culture in which the various occupants take responsibility for the cleanliness and security of the spaces they share.

In addition to the classroom problems, consultants found some faculty offices to be in very bad condition. (Apparently, faculty members have been expected to be responsible for cleaning their own offices.) In some cases, restrooms were found to be dirty, to have plumbing problems, and to be inappropriately used for storage of discarded furniture and equipment. Some faculty and students expressed concern that lighting on the campus is inadequate at night.

Technology Issues:

All of the consultants were startled by the lack of technology or even technological support in Compton Educational Center classrooms. It is not at all surprising that many of the individual faculty development plans include training to develop online classes and to incorporate technology into the classroom. Yet, with the exception of a few specialized classrooms/laboratories (Business Administration, CIS/COT, Music Technology), Compton Center classrooms do not have the appropriate infrastructure to support use of technology. Not only do they lack either wired or wireless Internet access, but many of them do not have adequate electrical outlets in terms of number and/or location. Consultants observed several instances in which faculty members who had brought their own laptops and projectors for PowerPoint presentations struggled to find electrical outlets in appropriate locations. In order to serve the current “media-obsessed” generation of students effectively, investing in the infrastructure and equipment to create a reasonable number of “smart” classrooms needs to be an institutional priority.

Unless the issues described above are addressed, the institutional benefit derived from an investment in professional development is likely to be quite limited. When taken together, these issues and the absence of existing processes through which faculty may address them tend to

create the impression of a dysfunctional institution that does not value student learning—the exact opposite of what consultants observed happening in Compton Educational Center classrooms.

Library/Learning Resources Issues:

Central to the future of instructional support at the Compton Educational Center is the campus mystery regarding the status of the new Library/Learning Center building. Beyond the fact that there are legal issues surrounding its construction, consultants were able to get no information as to when the building might open. Since the current Library/Learning Center facility is inadequate in very fundamental ways, accurate information regarding the new building's status is crucial in determining whether modifications of the current facility should be considered. Consultants were quite surprised to find the current Library/Learning Center to be underutilized, given the needs of the Compton Center student population. The attraction of new libraries—particularly those that provide significant access to technology—for students has been well documented. The current facility has just sixteen computers, only eight of which can be used at one time without blowing fuses. This is surely a contributing factor to its underutilization.

The relationship with El Camino College has been particularly beneficial for the Library, and the Compton Center librarians expressed great appreciation for the increased electronic database access and other enhancements this relationship has produced. However, consultants could find little evidence that there was faculty and student awareness of these enhancements. Also, a letter from a library staff member informing faculty of an opportunity to purchase a significant number of new books for curriculum support and reading enrichment was apparently never distributed to the faculty. Consultants were left with the impression that there is a disconnect between the Library and the teaching faculty and that there is little faculty encouragement for students to take advantage of the Library and Learning Center.

Although tutoring services in the Learning Center are underutilized, there are a number of mini-labs on campus to support specific student populations. While this sort of arrangement is quite common among colleges today, it constitutes a duplication of services that markedly increases staffing costs over those in a centralized system. It also tends to confuse faculty and students in terms of what types of services are available to which students in which location. Consultants found teaching faculty not to be well aware of the tutoring services offered on campus, although some expressed the need for tutoring in specific disciplines. If tutoring services are to support instruction effectively, there needs to be a consistent dialogue between the faculty and Learning Center staff. This seems to be a critical element in resolving the apparent contradiction between faculty wanting more tutoring while existing tutoring resources are apparently underutilized.

Student Services Issues:

The merging of the student services operations of the Compton Educational Center and El Camino College has been a monumental task which, on the whole, El Camino College seems to have accomplished admirably. The issues of avoiding unnecessary duplication of services and staffing realities on both campuses had to be carefully balanced with meeting the needs of students at both locations. Although this has been achieved in the general sense of making the Compton Center services operational, consultants found that there are some areas for which the specific

needs of Compton Center students should be more carefully considered. Currently, students with learning disabilities must be referred to El Camino College to be assessed. Since this seems to be a fairly large population, consideration should be given to providing this service on the Compton Educational Center campus. Faculty are concerned that students must go to the El Camino College campus for math assessment and that the El Camino assessment plan for student placement may not adequately serve the Compton Center student population.

Now that El Camino College policies and procedures have been implemented, Compton Center counseling staff need more consistent, reliable methods of receiving information in areas, such as student graduation petitions, for which El Camino counseling staff have assumed responsibility. Compton Center counselors expressed great appreciation for the various information sessions and trainings that have been provided by El Camino College. In particular, they cited articulation updates and IGETC training provided by the El Camino College articulation officer. Compton Center counselors are hopeful that these types of exchanges will continue and expand to other topics.

Project consultants were pleased to learn that the hiring of a vocational counselor to assist with outreach, recruitment, and community relations is in progress (although there was some question as to why the vocational counselor might only be a part-time position). The Compton Center also has a dedicated transfer counselor. The consultants absolutely support the hiring of counselors with specialized expertise. However, given the small size of the counseling staff at the Compton Center, they highly recommend that the department engage in cross-training to ensure that all counselors are able to provide basic information in these specialized areas to students. This should reduce the instances in which students must be referred to other staff or other locations. Consultants also observed that locations of student services are scattered across the campus. This is problematic in serving a student population that tends to be reluctant to access needed services.

Campus Community Support Issues:

The lovely Compton Educational Center campus has long been considered a jewel of the community, and project consultants commented on the number of community members they observed walking or jogging through the campus. Ironically, little is currently being done to keep students (or, for that matter, faculty and staff) on campus beyond the time they absolutely must be there. The only food service available is provided by a truck that is there for only limited hours. The bookstore is open only for limited hours in the first few weeks of the semester, so students waiting for financial aid or otherwise unable to purchase required texts within this narrow window can be simply “out of luck” for the semester. There is no place on campus to purchase needed supplies much of the time. Students who are forced to leave campus after their classes to have lunch or purchase supplies are unlikely to return to visit the library, see a counselor, or seek tutoring. This is further exacerbated by the fact that a large number of Compton Center students use public transportation to get to and from the campus. All of these factors contribute to the fact that student services and learning resources seem to be underutilized on a campus with a student population that very much needs to take advantage of them.

The Compton Educational Center can further support the professional development of its faculty by actively encouraging meaningful interaction with faculty colleagues at other community colleges. First and foremost, relationships with El Camino College faculty need to be nurtured in those disciplines where they have begun to develop and encouraged in the discipline areas where they have not. In addition, the relationships established with the consultants in this faculty development project have resulted in many possibilities for interaction with Los Angeles Community College District and Santa Monica College faculty members.

GENERAL INSTITUTIONAL CONCERNS

The project consultants established an excellent rapport with the Compton Educational Center faculty. Even those faculty members who were initially reticent about participating in the project were eventually quite candid with the consultants in sharing their thoughts on institutional issues they consider important. Faculty expressed their opinions with the understanding that the issues they shared would be summarized and communicated through this report. The consultants are very much aware that some of the issues may be just perceptions, but it was not their role to investigate the validity of the various statements or make judgments regarding them. They have simply honored their commitment to the faculty to bring forward all issues faculty members found important enough to discuss with them. In the life of an institution, perceptions and realities become difficult to distinguish over time. Striving for institutional improvement demands that both be addressed.

Communication Issues:

Communication is a major problem for the Compton Educational Center. Project consultants experienced this at the very beginning of the project when some consultants had great difficulty making initial contact with the faculty members assigned them, both via e-mail and phone. (Eventually, they were forced to seek the assistance of Compton Center administrators and faculty leaders just to make contact with these faculty members.) Although there was some reference to problems with the e-mail system, it was never made clear whether this is a system or a human problem. As the project continued, it became quite clear that this was not an isolated situation. There does not seem to be a dependable channel of communication that is accepted and universally used.

Project consultants observed communication difficulties among Compton Center faculty, between faculty and Compton Center administrators, between the Compton Center and El Camino College in general, and between specific departments at the Compton Center and the corresponding departments at El Camino College. Most, if not all, of the institutional issues brought forward in this report are either rooted in or have been exacerbated by communication issues. Since these communication difficulties appear to be longstanding, clarifying the facts surrounding the various issues and debunking myths may require a “town hall” approach.

Compton Educational Center Administration Issues:

The faculty expressed to the consultants a need for permanent administrators who are committed to the Compton Educational Center. Their discussions with the consultants were much less focused on criticism of individuals than on their despair over a seemingly endless parade of temporary administrators, often retired individuals, who have come in, “put out a few fires,” worked on a few initiatives consistent with their particular charge or areas of interest, and exited after a short time, only to be replaced by individuals with completely different styles and goals. Most have not stayed long enough to build relationships or truly enact change. This has led to a belief of the faculty that even those changes perceived as positive would not be lasting, and it seems that this has often been the case. The rules have changed so often that there has been a tendency

to simply ignore them until they change again. The faculty long for administrative stability and the opportunity to forge true partnerships with committed administrative leaders to plan and build a successful future for the institution. The current ongoing processes for selecting a permanent provost and chief instructional officer provide a golden opportunity to make this happen for the Compton Educational Center.

Faculty also expressed concern about the reorganization of disciplines and departments that resulted in the elimination of some departments. There seemed to be understanding of the need for consolidation addressed through the reorganization. However, there is concern over the large size of some divisions (such as the Social Sciences and Fine Arts Division) and, in particular, the loss of a discipline-specific faculty “voice” within the divisional structure. There is a desire for some sort of officially acknowledged “lead faculty” designation to ensure this “voice” for all disciplines. Counseling and library faculty would like to have similarly designated faculty leaders, both to assist the deans in the daily operations of their departments and to represent their interests in faculty governance matters.

Class Scheduling Issues:

The project consultants found that no other single topic generated as much comment as the Schedule of Classes. Faculty members provided a multitude of examples of the current schedule’s fundamental inaccuracies—classes not listed accurately, some classes not listed at all, incorrect or missing times and locations, room conflicts, etc. It is not surprising that such inaccuracies create significant confusion for students who often experience great difficulty in locating their classes. An example was given of a student who had wandered the campus in search of a class from the beginning of the semester and had expressed great relief in finally locating it upon the third class meeting.

Faculty expressed great dissatisfaction with the current scheduling process. Not only do they feel that they do not have adequate involvement in the process, but also that they receive insufficient communication during the process. Some discipline areas claimed that, after participating in two “runs” of scheduling recommendations, the dean made significant changes in times and locations that were not communicated to them before the printed schedule was distributed. Faculty claim that they have never received an explanation of the reasons for these changes, and their frustration is increased by the fact that a number of these changes resulted in classes being cancelled for low enrollment. They also feel that the class time patterns developed for El Camino College do not necessarily meet the needs of Compton Educational Center students. For example, the 4:45 p.m. start time for evening classes seems too early for students wishing to attend classes after work.

Cancellation of classes with low enrollments has also been a significant issue, both in terms of the process and the decisions themselves. Although faculty completely understand contractual provisions regarding minimum class size, they question whether, in the current “FTES forgiveness” mode, such strict adherence to these provisions is consistent with the need for the Compton Center to build its enrollment base. It is their impression that the decisions are made strictly “by the numbers,” and impacted students are simply told to take the class they need at El Camino College. Faculty question whether appropriate consideration is being given to retaining a course

offering of sufficient size and variety to enable students to complete the requirements toward degrees and certificates in a timely manner. They worry that students will simply lose confidence in the Compton Center's ability to meet their needs and either go elsewhere or abandon their educational pursuits altogether. Project consultants were quite surprised to learn that, at least in some situations brought to their attention, faculty members whose classes are cancelled are not given alternative assignments. Since they are being fully compensated anyway, it would seem far more reasonable to either allow them to teach the smaller classes or reassign them to projects to address some of the many departmental and institutional needs.

Relationship with El Camino College:

Project consultants found the Compton Educational Center faculty to be genuinely appreciative of any and all outreach efforts of El Camino College faculty. There were many positive comments about inclusion of the Compton Center faculty in El Camino departmental discussions of student learning outcomes for the courses they now share and various professional development opportunities made available to them on the El Camino campus. Many Compton Center faculty reported that the interactions between the two faculties have been positive and collegial. However, there were some notable exceptions in isolated areas. At this point, the level of communication between faculty members on the two campuses varies significantly from discipline to discipline, ranging from fairly frequent to practically nonexistent. The Compton Center faculty would like to see even more frequent communication, with less variation among disciplines. They would also very much appreciate having more of the joint meetings and activities scheduled on the Compton Center campus.

In dramatic contrast to the generally positive experiences on a faculty-to-faculty level, Compton Educational Center faculty seriously question the motives of El Camino College and feel that there is no real partnership between the two institutions. Many seem to feel that El Camino College is just "in this for the money" and to build its own FTES. In the words of one project consultant:

There's a lot of frustration with El Camino College... Even more, there's a sense that El Camino will be the death of Compton... They believe that ECC will let it decline to the point that proves it's unsalvageable, a drain, and not worth the resources that would be required to make it go. The state will then shut it down.

While, on the surface, this belief may seem extreme, one does not need to delve too deeply into the recent history of Compton Community College to understand the degree of neglect and betrayal experienced by its faculty. Considering this, it is not at all unreasonable that this faculty would approach being "taken over" by the large and successful neighboring district that has been an historical competitor with fear and trepidation.

Unfortunately, project consultants were given many examples of individual acts, events, and practices that have reinforced this underlying apprehension and suspicion. As previously noted, Compton Center students whose classes have been cancelled are routinely referred to El Camino College. One faculty member shared with a consultant an El Camino recruitment letter targeted

at Compton Educational Center students, seemingly encouraging students to “come to El Camino instead.” The faculty member brought this letter to the attention of the Compton Center administration, but never received an explanation. A VTEA allocation intended for the Compton Center reverted to El Camino College, and the faculty who thought they had submitted their proposals for its use in a timely manner were told that they had missed the deadline. (It was later learned that a Compton Center dean had failed to submit the proposals in time.) Consultants heard frequent complaints from faculty members about a vertical, “top down” approach that minimized their ability to be involved or even consulted in decisions and policies that directly affect them.

It is clear that the dramatically different cultures and traditions of the two institutions have contributed to the obvious communication difficulties that have characterized this partnership. While there may be logical explanations for the various “symptoms” that support Compton Center faculty suspicions, such communication has either not occurred or has been inadequate. Until El Camino College addresses this and clearly articulates a partnership plan for the future of the Compton Educational Center, this basic underlying distrust is likely to continue. Getting past the differences in institutional cultures and the communication challenges to collaborate on the implementation of such a plan can only be of benefit to both entities.

Curriculum Issues:

El Camino College is to be commended for accomplishing the enormous task of establishing equivalencies between its own courses and those of Compton Community College within a timeline that was beyond challenging. Likewise, Compton Educational Center faculty members are deserving of praise for adapting their courses by substituting the El Camino College course outlines for those they had developed and used for many years. Project consultants found these efforts to be quite successful, particularly with the standard general education course offering. As would be the case with almost any two community colleges in the state, establishing common developmental course sequences has proven more difficult. In one instance, a Compton Center faculty member felt that the El Camino reading sequence did not include a lower level course needed for the Center’s student population. This faculty member developed such a course and gained approval for it through the El Camino College curriculum process. This particular course is now being offered on both campuses. Compton Center ESL faculty who feel that higher level credit ESL courses are needed in the Compton ESL program may need to follow the same process.

Project consultants found that not all vocational programs being offered at the Compton Center seem to match the corresponding programs at El Camino College, even though the course descriptions and course outlines of record would indicate that they are the same. For example, it was not at all clear that the two Automotive Technology programs are the same. The merging of the two ADN nursing programs has been difficult, and a consultant observed a “gap in ownership” of the El Camino College nursing curriculum by the Compton Educational Center nursing faculty. The two programs are markedly different in terms of available resources, and the pressures of meeting the requirements of the external accrediting agencies have created added tensions. Consultants found little consistency among vocational programs in terms of complying with the requirement for active advisory committees. In some cases, the Compton advisory committees had not met for years, and the level of participation of the Compton Center vocation-

al faculty in the corresponding El Camino College advisory committees varied from program to program. Minutes of vocational advisory committee meetings could not be located at the Compton Center.

Educational centers in the community colleges are developed for two primary reasons—to serve a community geographically remote from the main campus and to offer programs to meet the specific needs of that community. Certainly, the origin of the Compton Educational Center is highly unusual in that it did not develop organically from a parent campus. Instead, El Camino College “adopted” a mature, troubled institution that is now an educational center. As such, the Compton Educational Center now needs to focus on serving the unique needs of its community. In terms of vocational programs, this means considering restoration (or better, reinvention) of programs formerly offered at Compton Community College, provided that these programs are judged to be viable according to current labor market needs (see the new course offering suggestions listed for many “departments” in the following section of the report). In addition, the development of new programs that will prepare students for employment opportunities offered through the burgeoning business and industrial development in the Compton area needs to be facilitated. Achieving a unique identity in terms of meeting local employment needs is important for success as an educational center and absolutely essential if the Compton Educational Center is to develop into a college again.

Enrollment, Public Relations, and Marketing Issues:

Project consultants did not find current scheduling and enrollment management practices indicative of any kind of plan to build the enrollment base of the Compton Educational Center. Building the enrollment base is absolutely critical, not only for the success of the Center, but also for the continued health of El Camino College. Implementing a successful enrollment development plan will require the leadership and support of El Camino College and the unwavering commitment of the Compton Educational Center faculty and administration.

In addition to correcting ineffective scheduling and enrollment management practices, alternative course delivery methods need to be explored. These might include more online and hybrid course offerings, short term/late start course offerings targeted to specific student populations, off-campus offerings in the community, and an evening offering (and perhaps restoration of a Weekend College) especially tailored to the needs of working adults. (It should be noted that all of these examples were suggestions made by Compton Educational Center faculty in their interviews with project consultants.) A full-blown student recruitment effort is desperately needed, with faculty fully involved in its planning and implementation. This should include meetings with faculty and counselors at feeder high schools and encouragement of concurrent enrollment of high school students.

El Camino College has a very effective marketing plan, but the Compton Educational Center is not included in its current campaign. Consideration should be given to either including the Center in its marketing for the main campus or developing a separate strand that is specific to the Compton Center. Given the high profile of past negative publicity for Compton Community College, it is particularly important for the Compton Educational Center to create positive public relations opportunities through the celebration of notable accomplishments. For example, the

recent success of nursing students on the NCLEX should be publicized. The location of Major League Baseball's first Urban Youth Academy on the Compton Educational Center campus could be the source of major positive public relations opportunities.

All of the consultants have come away from this faculty development project with ultimate respect for the Compton Educational Center faculty. Despite all of the storms these faculty members have weathered and a current environment that provides shockingly little support, they provide instruction of high quality and exhibit an unparalleled commitment to an institution that is absolutely essential to the community it serves. As one consultant states:

I can't help but think that a talented faculty with so much commitment to their students is the strongest asset any college might have. If faculty can be empowered and inspired, they will be a major force in remaking Compton College.