

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

Merritt College
12500 Campus Drive
Oakland, California 94619

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

This report represents the findings of the External Visiting Team that visited
Merritt Community College on March 09, 2013 through March 12, 2015.

Dr. Loretta Adrian, Chair

Final May 8, 2015

LIST OF TEAM MEMBERS

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Summary of the Report

INSTITUTION: Merritt College
DATE OF VISIT: March 9, 2015 through March 12, 2015
TEAM CHAIR: Dr. Loretta Adrian
President, Coastline Community College

A team of ten professional educators visited Merritt College on March 9 through the 12, 2015, to evaluate the College for the purpose of reaffirmation of accreditation relative to meeting Accreditation Standards, Eligibility Requirements, and Commission Policies, to make recommendations for quality assurance and increasing institutional effectiveness, and to submit recommendations to the Accrediting Commission regarding the College's accredited status. The Team members prepared for the visit in advance by reviewing the College's Institutional Self-Evaluation Report in Support of Reaffirmation of Accreditation and examining carefully substantial pieces of evidence provided to the Team electronically in support of the Self-Evaluation Report. Members of the Team visited the District and College websites to learn more about the District and the College. The Team reviewed the college catalog and class schedules. The Team completed a number of assignments prior to the visit, including their initial impressions of assigned Standards, Eligibility Requirements (ER's), and policies and their overall impression relative to the Self-Evaluation Report. Team members were asked to identify additional evidence needed to complete their evaluation of their assigned standards, ERs, and Commission policies, including a list of college and district staff they wished to interview. The Team chair and standard chairs also coordinated with the District Team regarding the visit and the examination of the accreditation standards. Shortly before the visit, Merritt College provided the Team with a brief update document outlining changes or developments that have occurred since the completion of the Self-Evaluation Report.

Since Merritt is one of the four colleges in the Peralta Community College District, there was also a District accreditation team comprised of members from the College teams, including the college team chairs. The District team focused on evaluating standards relevant to multi-college districts, including the role of the Board of Trustees and the effectiveness of district services to the colleges. The chair of the District team coordinated meetings and interviews with the Board of Trustees, the Chancellor, and various District staff on March 11, 2015. Standard chairs for Team Merritt attended the District meetings and interviews relevant to their standards.

The Merritt College Visiting Team found Merritt to be prepared for the visit. The Team was welcomed at the campus entrance with a welcome banner. A secure team meeting room was provided, equipped with internet access, a printer, and other supplies. Boxes and binders of hardcopy evidence were also available for review by the Team. Snacks and lunches were delivered by the College's food service provider. The Team room was comfortable and provided easy access to various parts of the campus. Team members were oriented to the College through a college tour, led by a long-time staff member who was extremely knowledgeable about the college. The Vice President of Instruction, who

also serves as the Accreditation Liaison Officer, conducted a tour of the newly remodeled Merritt College Library.

During the visit, team members who were designated as standard chairs began their work by attending a District Team meeting held at the Waterfront hotel on Sunday, March 8th, and meetings and interviews were held at the District office on Monday morning until noon on March 9, 2015. The full college team met at the hotel in the afternoon. Later in the day, Merritt College hosted a college tour, followed by a reception at the Student Services Center. The reception was exceptionally well attended, and team members were warmly welcomed into the reception room with a loud applause. The President provided brief welcome remarks. The Team chair was given the opportunity to introduce members of the Visiting Team and to comment on the purposes of the visit. The Team members were able to interact with college faculty, staff, students, and administrators. As well, the Team was able to connect with members of the Accreditation Self-study Task Force and key college governance committees. Prior to the visit and during the visit, various college staff members kindly assisted the Team, in particular the Accreditation Liaison Officer and the Assistant to the President, who responded gracefully and vigilantly to all requests made by the Team members through the Team assistant to arrange interviews and to provide additional documentation.

During the visit, the Team examined hundreds of additional pieces of evidence—both hardcopy and electronic provided by the College and the District. The Team counted at least eleven boxes of hardcopy evidence in the Team room and several binders of program reviews; the latter were provided to the Team somewhat late in the course of the Team visit. More than 70 interviews were conducted with college and district faculty, staff, administrators, and students; most were scheduled while others were not. As noted previously, interviews were conducted with the Board of Trustees, the Chancellor and Vice Chancellors, the District research team, the District Planning Council, and other district committees. Team members walked around campus and talked with various constituencies, including many students; attended classes on site and on line. Two open forums were held—one on Tuesday and one on Wednesday. Both forums were well attended, including by members of the external community. The Team chair met with the President every day to update her on how the visit was going.

The Team met at the College during the day and at the hotel in the evening. The college team chair and the standard team chairs met with the District team chair and his team by telephone and in person. The Team discussed potential recommendations and commendations from day one and continued to revisit and refine these as the visit progressed and more evidence was examined. A lengthy meeting was held on the evening of March 11 to review findings and evidence and to focus on potential commendations and recommendations. The Team met again on the morning of Thursday, March 12 to incorporate any new information and to finalize the summary to be shared with the College President and the College community. The Exit Report, which was held at the Student Services Center, was also exceptionally well attended.

The Self-Evaluation Report was beautifully packaged and published, but was difficult to read for a number of reasons. The document was long, a total of 419 pages. Links to supporting evidence were not embedded in the body of the narrative, rather at the end of

each standard following the conclusions. This format made it very difficult to connect the evidence with the observations, findings, or conclusions being made. The Team found many of the links to be broken. In numerous instances, the evidence provided did not adequately support the statements or assertions being made. For example, much of the evidence for program reviews and student learning outcomes were templates of program review, as opposed to the actual program review document. The same was true for evidence related to integrated planning. Links to meeting minutes and other documents required the Team members to conduct additional searches for date-specific or topic-specific information needed as evidence. Evidence of broad-based dialogue was scarce. Overall, the Team found that the Self-Evaluation Report did not provide the Team with an accurate description of the College and its status relative to the Accreditation Standards. There were key pieces of evidence missing, for example, comprehensive program reviews and annual program updates in instructional and non-instructional areas, course outline of records, student learning outcomes assessment; access to online classes, Taskstream and CurricuNet, which the College was not able to provide until some point during the visit. This situation created a huge challenge for the Team in terms of time, and it seems for the College as well. It appears that due to changes in key leadership positions as well as the manner in which certain documents had been stored, the search for certain key documents requested by the Team proved time-consuming and frustrating. In some instances, documents referenced in the self-evaluation as evidence did not exist at all (e. g., the Student Handbook). The patience and evidence-seeking efforts of the President, ALO, and the President's assistant were greatly appreciated. The process of finding evidence was unusually laborious and the examination of evidence was meticulous, but the Team wanted to make sure that it conducted its work thoroughly and critically so that it could be confident and fair in making its assessments and recommendations.

Throughout the visit, the Team found faculty, staff, administrators, and students to be very proud of and loyal to the College. The majority of the faculty had been at the College for a long time and spoke highly of the College. The Team met a number of staff members who had been at the College as students and have since then returned as a faculty, classified professional, or administrator. The students expressed satisfaction with their experiences at the College, both academically and with the support services available to them. The Team felt a tremendous sense of pride among the faculty, staff, and students for the legacy of social justice that is deeply entrenched in the history of Merritt.

The Team found Merritt to be in compliance with the Eligibility Requirements, except for ER 10, Student Learning and Achievement; ER 18, Financial Accountability; and ER 19, Institutional Planning and Evaluation. The College has made significant progress in meeting these eligibility requirements, but will need to complete a cycle of planning that is linked to resource allocation, including a full cycle of comprehensive program reviews and student learning outcomes assessment. While the District and the College have made great strides in addressing the audit findings, some of the audit findings in 2013 and 2014 noted in the District's Corrective Action Matrix are not yet fully resolved. The College meets the Commission Policies addressed in the self-evaluation, except for the Policy on Institutional Compliance with Title IV.

Relative to the Standards, the Team found that the College has more work to do in meeting the Standards. With the President and two permanent Vice Presidents now in place, the hiring of additional administrators and staff, including a college-based researcher, the College is poised to be able to move forward, with leadership that is able to sustain the College's work on institutionalizing accreditation Standards.

The Visiting Team that visited Merritt College in 2009 submitted eight recommendations; four were specific to Merritt College and the other four were district recommendations. The college-specific recommendations were related to the mission statement, program review, student learning outcomes and assessment, and performance evaluations. The AACJC Action letter dated June 30, 2009 contained two college-specific recommendations on Program Review and Performance Evaluations. The College submitted a progress report and had a follow-up visit in April, 2010. Following the Team visit in April, 2010, AACJC issued one college recommendation on Program Review. The College was required to submit another follow-up report on October, 2010 and a Commission Visiting Team visited the College on November 17, 2010. The AACJC Action Letter dated January 31, 2011 commended the College for its substantial work to successfully address the recommendation on Program Review and resolve the deficiencies.

There were also a number of District recommendations. Merritt College cleared all the College and District recommendations identified by the 2009 Visiting Team by April 2013. The College was removed from warning and its accreditation was reaffirmed. This action suggests that, in 2013, Merritt College met the Standards related to program review, student learning outcomes assessment and evaluation, and performance evaluations.

The findings of the 2015 Merritt College Visiting Team suggest that the College was not able to sustain its work in meeting all of the Accreditation Standards, due in part to turnover in leadership.

During the visit, the Team sensed a strong commitment and desire from the President and her executive team, the faculty and staff leadership, and the college as a whole to meeting all Accreditation Standards. The college community recognizes the critical role that accreditation plays in terms of the College's ability serve its students and to improve institutional effectiveness. Much work has been done to lay a solid foundation for improving institutional practices at Merritt College, for example, in the areas of planning and budgeting, formalizing governance structures, and implementing program reviews in all program areas. The Visiting Team left the College with a sense of optimism that the impetus around efforts to institutionalize accreditation standards would not only be sustained in the future, but that it would also grow.

Introduction

Merritt College is a public, comprehensive two-year college. It is one of the four colleges in the Peralta Community College District in Alameda County. Located on a hilltop, the College has a breathtaking view of the San Francisco Bay. The campus, which is comprised of eleven permanent buildings, four tennis courts, a renovated sports field, remodeled library, and an Allied Health Center under construction, occupies a 125 acre site in the hills of East Oakland.

Merritt College has a deeply rooted history in social activism. The College founded the first Black Studies department in 1967. The Soul Advisory Council, later called the Black Student Union, provided advocacy for student participation in college decisions. Student leaders, such as Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale, were Merritt College students when they formed the first chapter of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense in 1966. This legacy of social activism is a proud part of the College's history and serves as a strong foundation for the social justice orientation that is embraced and celebrated at the College and the surrounding community.

The College offers associate degrees and certificate programs that are aligned with its mission: 22 Associate in Arts (AA), 11 Associate in Science (AA) degrees, and four Associate Degrees for Transfer (ADT), as well as certificates of achievement and proficiency in various disciplines, including career technical education fields. Merritt College has number of highly regarded career technical education (CTE) programs, including the Landscape Horticulture program, which is one of the largest programs in California.

Merritt College offers most of its courses at the main campus, but also offers a limited number of English as a Second Language (ESL) classes at a location in Fruitvale. The College offers instruction in face-to-face, hybrid, and on-line (distance education) delivery modes. In each of the past six years, the College has served between 6,500-8,200 students, with an enrollment of 6,900 in the fall of 2013. The majority of students come from the San Francisco and East Bay areas. The largest number of students come from Oakland, followed by Alameda, San Leandro, and Emeryville. The student population is diverse, with Black/African American students being the largest group, followed by White/Non-Hispanic, Hispanic, Asian, Filipino, Pacific Islander, and other groups. The majority of students who attend Merritt indicate AA/Transfer as their educational goal, followed by transfer to four-year without a degree. From 2008-2013, the number of degrees and certificates awarded by Merritt has decreased. At its peak in 2010-11, the College awarded 444 Associate Degrees and 290 Certificates. In 2013-14, 137 Associate degrees and 140 Certificates were awarded.

The celebration of diversity is one of the hallmarks of Merritt College. The College has a vibrant multicultural environment. The Associated Students of Merritt College and the twelve clubs on campus sponsor cultural events throughout the year, supported by faculty and staff. These events are a great complement to the robust Ethnic Studies courses at the college, which includes African American Studies, Asian-American Studies, Mexican and Latin-American Studies, Native American Studies and a full range of ESL.

Commendations/Recommendations

Commendations

College Commendation 1:

The Team commends the College for its accomplishments in relation to diversity. The diversity of the college's faculty and staff mirrors the demographics of the student population and of the surrounding community. The symbiotic relationship between the College and the community provides a source of strength and pride that is apparent to all who visit the campus. In addition, the College models excellence in the design and implementation of programs that support and enhance student understanding and appreciation of diversity. The College's notable accomplishments in the area of diversity are reflections of its strong legacy of social justice - a legacy that is proudly embraced by various internal and external constituencies and sustained through a robust Ethnic Studies program and multicultural events all-year round.

College Commendation 2: The Team commends the college on its Landscape Horticulture program as a model instructional program that can be emulated. The program integrates a) breadth and depth of curriculum with clear student learning outcomes, b) evidence-based program review that ensures continuous, quality improvement, and c) a commitment to student retention and success that leads to gainful employment; and exemplifies the College's commitment to service in their surrounding community.

District Commendation 1: The Team commends the District and the individual colleges for their efforts to ensure that hiring practices cultivate a workforce that is as diverse as the student population. The District and the colleges within it have successfully maintained college personnel that mirror the student demographics, which enrich the college environment and promote equity.

College Recommendation 1: In order to meet the Standard, the Team recommends that the College develop and implement policy and procedures for systematically reviewing the college mission statement. (I.A.3)

College Recommendation 2: In order to increase institutional effectiveness, the Team recommends that the College implement an evidence-based process that links institutional planning and decision-making to the college mission. (I.A.4)

College Recommendation 3: In order to meet the Standards, the Team recommends that the College implement systematic and evidence-based integrated planning processes that show clear linkages between planning, program review, Student Learning Outcomes (SLO) assessment, and resource allocation; delineates the roles of faculty, staff, administrators, and students participating in the planning process; and "closes the loop" through ongoing evaluation of the processes and the impact on student learning and achievement. The Team further recommends the College put in place institutional structures that can sustain and stabilize the planning processes. (I.B.1-6; II.A.2.a; II.B.3.c; II.B.4; II.C.2; III.A.6; III.B.2.b; III.C.2; III.D.4; IV.A.2.a-b)

College Recommendation 4: In order to meet the Standards, the Team recommends that the College accelerate the completion of comprehensive program reviews and Annual Program Updates (APUs) for all instruction, student services, learning resources, and administrative services; ensure that the process is systematic, integrated into college planning and resource allocation, and utilized for continuous program improvement. (I.B, I.B.1, I.B.3, I.B.4, I.B.6, II.A, II.A.2, II.A.2.a, II.A.2.e, II.A.2.f, II.A.6.b, II.B, II.B.3.c, II.B.4, II.C, II.C.2, III.A.6, IV.B.2.b, III.C.2, III.D.4, IV.A.2.a-b)

College Recommendation 5: In order to meet the Standards, the Team recommends that the College establish institution set standards for student achievement and systematically assesses the institution's progress in meeting or exceeding these standards. (I.B, I.B.1-6, II.A, II.A.1.c, II.A.2.a,b,f,g,h; II.A.5, II.A.6)

College Recommendation 6: In order to meet the Standards, the Team recommends that the College accelerate the identification and documentation of student learning outcomes for all courses, programs, certificates, and degrees; assess student attainment of those outcomes to ensure that all of its instructional courses and programs are of high quality and to make improvements. (I.B.1, I.B.3, I.B.5; I.B.6, IIA.1, IIA.2, IIA.2a, II.A.2b, IIA.2c, IIA.2e, IIA.2f)

College Recommendation 7: In order to meet the Standard, the Team recommends that the College work with the District Human Resources Department and follow its policy to systematically complete all personnel evaluations. (III.A.1.b)

College Recommendation 8: In order to meet the Standard, the Team recommends that the College assess and determine the adequate number of qualified faculty and staff to support the College's mission. (III.A.2)

College Recommendation 9: In order to meet the Standard, the Team recommends the College establish and implement a written policy providing for faculty, staff, administrator, and student participation in decision-making processes which specifies the manner in which individuals bring forward ideas from their constituencies and work together on appropriate policy, planning, and implementation. (IV.A.2a, IV.A.2b, IV.A.3)

Fiscal Management

District Recommendation 1: In order to meet the Standard, the Team recommends that the District follow the 2014 audit recommendations and develop an action plan to fund its Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB) liabilities, including the associated debt service. (III.D.1.c, III.D.3.c, III.D.1.c)

District Recommendation 2. In order to meet the Standard, the team recommends that the District resolve comprehensively and in a timely manner the ongoing deficiencies identified in the 2013 and 2014 external audit findings (III.D.2.b, III.D.1.h).

Global Planning

District Recommendation 3: In order to meet the Standards, the Team recommends that District General Services (DGS) work with college personnel to implement a plan to address total cost of ownership for new facilities and equipment, including undertaking critical deferred maintenance and preventive maintenance needs at the college in order to assure safe and sufficient physical resources for students, faculty and staff. (III.B.1, III.B.1.a, III.B.2.a)

Institutional Effectiveness

District Recommendation 4: In order to meet the Standards, the Team recommends that the District should clearly identify the structures, roles, responsibilities and document the processes used to integrate human, facilities, technology planning, and fiscal planning in support of student learning and achievement and regularly evaluate the process in order to fairly allocate resources to support the planning priorities. (III.A.6, III.B.2, III.C.2, III.D.4, IV.B.3.g)

District Recommendation 5. In order to meet the Standards, the team recommends that the district ensure retention of key leadership positions and that adequate staffing capacity is available to address the demands of three critical areas reflected in the accreditation standards: institutional effectiveness and leadership, institutional research, and financial accountability and management (III.A.2, III.A.6).

Governance

District Recommendation 6: In order to meet the Standard, the Team recommends that the District clearly delineate and communicate the operational responsibilities and functions of the District from those of the colleges and consistently adheres to this delineation in practice; and regularly assesses and evaluates district role delineation and governance and decision-making structures and processes to assure their integrity and effectiveness in assisting the colleges in meeting educational goals. (IV.B.3)

District Recommendation 7: In order to meet the Standards, the Team recommends the Governing Board adhere to its appropriate role. The Board must allow the chancellor to take full responsibility and authority for the areas assigned to district oversight. (IV.B.1, IV.B.1a, IV.B.1.e, IV.B.1.j)

District Recommendation 8: In order to meet the Standards, the Team recommends that the District systematically evaluate the equitable distribution of resources and the sufficiency and effectiveness of district-provided services in supporting effective operations of the colleges. (IV.B.3.b, IV.B.3.c, III.D.1.a, III.D.1.b, III.D.1.h)

Evaluation of Institutional Responses to Previous Recommendations

College Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Program Review: The Team recommends that the College further refine its program review, planning, and resource allocation processes so that they are based on an analysis of quality, effectiveness, and student learning. Furthermore, the College must develop a systematic means to evaluate those processes and assess whether its plans actually lead to improvements in programs and services.

During the April 2010 follow up visit to the College, the Visiting Team noted that the College was undergoing its first program review cycle. During the same time period, the three other colleges in the Peralta Community College District launched their instructional program review cycles. The Team was able to confirm activities in what they viewed as productive program review process. The Team noted that the college faculty, staff, and administrators reported positive outcomes leading to overall improvement of programs. The process was also reported to the Team as collegial. Data from unit plans was integrated into program review documents. The Vice President of Instruction compiled recommendations and priorities from all Instructional Program Review Narrative Reports and submit the summary to the President, the college planning and budget committees (if applicable), and the Vice Chancellor of Educational Services.

The 2010 Visiting Team acknowledged that the program review cycle had not been completed by the time of the visit. However, a list of college priorities was compiled from unit plans and program reviews, and this list was approved by College Council. The approved priorities were then forwarded to the District Technology Committee, Education Committee, and Planning and Budgeting Committee.

The 2010 AACJC action letter required Merritt College to provide a follow-up report by October 2010 demonstrating that it has fully addressed Recommendation 2, Program Review, of the 2009 comprehensive Visiting Team and compliance with associated Standards. The report would be followed by a visit with Commission representatives and the College was advised to have evidence to support its follow-up report.

A Commission Visiting Team visited the College on November 17, 2010 following receipt of a follow-up report submitted by Merritt College on October 10, 2010. Based on the follow-up report and the Visiting Team Report, the Commission noted in its January 31, 2011 Action Letter that the College had successfully resolved College Recommendation 2 regarding program review.

Based on the findings of the 2015 External Visiting Team, it appears that the College's work on program review was not sustained. The program review documents provided by the College showed a more limited number of comprehensive programs reviews, compared to annual program updates. The program reviews were dated 2011-12, 2012-13, and 2013-14 academic years. The College has not addressed the recommendation and resolved the deficiency.

Recommendation 2

Performance Evaluations: In order to increase effectiveness, the Team recommends that the College develop a plan to complete all outstanding performance evaluations expeditiously. This was also a recommendation of the 2003 Visiting Team.

The April 2010 Visiting Team noted that in the Fall of 2009, the college developed and executed a plan that ensured up-to-date evaluations and would sustain a regular cycle of evaluation. During the visit, the Team was able to confirm that evaluations for all classified employees, administrators, tenured, tenure-track and full-time faculty were current. Substantially, all part-time faculty evaluations were current and the Team was able to review a definitive schedule for completing all part-time faculty evaluations. The 2010 follow-up Visiting Team determined that this recommendation was addressed in full.

This recommendation has resurfaced during the 2015 comprehensive external evaluation visit to the College. The Team confirmed that that written criteria have been established for evaluating all personnel. Evaluation procedures and timelines for FT faculty, PT faculty and classified staff are outlined in each group's bargaining unit contracts. Evaluation processes for administrative personnel are outlined in the College's Management Performance Evaluation Handbook. Administrators are to be evaluated on an established cycle, pursuant to the management evaluation procedures and the Board Policies 7250 and 7260. Each evaluation process is coordinated with the District Human Resources Department. Though the employee evaluation process is well documented, this recommendation was fully resolved when the College's accreditation status was reaffirmed in 2013. The College's 2014 Self-Evaluation Report provided no quantitative evidence to demonstrate a sustained level of improvement towards resolving this Recommendation. The College could not provide the 2015 Visiting Team evidence that performance evaluations are completed on a consistent and timely basis. (III.A.1.b) The recommendation has not been addressed and the College does not meet the Standard.

District Recommendations

2009 District Recommendation 1: Board and District Administration:

The team recommends that the district assess the overall effectiveness of its service to the college(s) and provide clear delineation of functional responsibilities and develop clear processes for decision making.

Response:

Central to addressing this recommendation was the implementation in Fall 2009 of the Planning and Budgeting Integration Model (PBIM) and the district-level committee structure comprised of the District Technology Committee, the District Facilities Committee, the District Education Committee, and the higher level Planning and Budgeting Council, which reports directly to the Chancellor. Each of these four committees includes the appropriate district office vice chancellor or associate vice chancellor, appropriate district and college administrators, faculty, and staff from the four colleges and district office service centers. What was noted in 2009, and has proven to be

true, is that these committees and their membership are able to actively address district services and through well-designed meeting agendas are able to focus on collaboration between the District Office service centers and the colleges, especially in relation to centralized services. This structure has provided clarity regarding district versus college functional responsibilities and a clear process for decision making, with all final decisions being made by the Chancellor. The Chancellor's Cabinet is comprised of the four college presidents and lead district administrators.

As noted previously when this process was implemented five years ago, it was agreed that college planning is the foundation of the Planning and Budgeting Integration (PBI) process since the colleges are closest to and most responsible for the educational needs of the students and it is the colleges that are charged with ensuring student success. The PBI requires the colleges to conduct program reviews every three years, to provide annual program updates, and to develop annual educational and resource planning priorities. These efforts are in alignment with the five district strategic planning goals and the annual institutional objectives/outcomes. The colleges integrate the results of their program reviews into planning, in technology committees, curriculum committees, facilities committees, etc. During the annual institutional planning process, the colleges develop plans addressing instructional and student services programs, staffing priorities, fiscal priorities, IT and equipment, facilities, and marketing. It has been established that the planning of the four colleges must drive district planning, which then drives the provision of district services or centralized services.

The role of the Education Committee, Technology Committee, and Facilities Committee is to support the colleges in coordinating their efforts and resolving issues. These committees also provide subject matter expertise in their respective areas by including college and district representatives with relevant knowledge, responsibility, and experience. These committees are responsible for communicating with their counterpart committees at the colleges. These district committees are charged with developing district-wide recommendations that best serve students and the community by using evidence-based processes and criteria. Further, the overarching Planning and Budgeting Council is charged with making recommendations to the Chancellor. The Council often receives draft policy initiatives from the Chancellor in his effort to seek input and recommendations before he takes any significant action.

The Planning and Budgeting Council (PBC) is responsible for providing oversight on the implementation of strategic planning and annual institutional objectives/outcomes. In fact, each of the four committees is required to set annual objectives aligned with the strategic planning goals. The PBC also ensures accountability.

The PBI process begins each year with an all-day off-site summit wherein all committee members gather and hear from the Chancellor regarding the key issues that need to be addressed during the year. The committees begin to set their annual objectives and to review the previous year's objectives. The summit has proven to be a key reminder of the need for District Office service centers and the colleges to work collaboratively,

transparently, and accountably – which addresses functional responsibility and decision making.

Complementing the PBI process, the Chancellor’s Cabinet meets weekly. The Chancellor’s Cabinet is comprised of the Chancellor, the four vice chancellors (Educational Services, Finance and Administration, Human Resources and Employee Relations, and General Services), the Associate Vice Chancellor of Information Technology, the Associate Vice Chancellor of Students Services, General Counsel, the Director of Public Information, Communication and Media, and the four college presidents. The cabinet has helped to clarify functional responsibilities and processes for decision-making. The Chancellor’s Cabinet reviews the work and actions of the PBI Committees and addresses topics which may be sent to the PBI Committees for input and feedback. The ongoing weekly interactions among these cabinet members facilitate open dialogue regarding all aspects of district planning and district operations.

During the process of updating Board Policies and District Administrative Procedures, two administrative procedures relevant to this recommendation were approved. AP 2430 (Delegation of Authority to the Chancellor’s Staff) details the roles and responsibilities of district managers who report directly to the Chancellor. AP 3250 (Institutional Planning) details decision making through the district-level committee process.

The district has continued to address this recommendation regarding a clear delineation of functional responsibilities and clear processes for decision making. The district and colleges meet the standards association with this recommendation.

Since the fall of 2009, the district administration has been implementing the Planning and Budgeting Integration Model. The district has revisited the district level committee structure to provide clarity on the functions of each unit at the district level. The district has developed the Planning and Budgeting Integration (PBI) process directly linked to the college planning process. The PBI process outlines the decision making process and evaluated every year. Board policy related to establishing clear functional responsibilities and decision making has been revised.

Conclusion:

With the additional structure established, the district has fully implemented the recommendation.

2010 District Recommendation 2:

In order to meet the Standards, the team recommends the District evaluate the reporting structure with regard to the inspector general so that the position is properly placed in the hierarchy of the district organization.

Response:

The inspector general position has been eliminated.

Conclusion:

This recommendation is no longer applicable to the District's organization.

2010 District Recommendation 7:

In order to meet the Standard, the visiting team recommends a change in the reporting relation of the Inspector General from the Board of Trustees to the Chancellor.

Response:

As reported in the Follow-Up Report of October 15, 2010, at the District Board Meeting on July 19, 2010, it was unanimously agreed that the Inspector General position would report directly to the Chancellor. On January 5, 2011, the individual serving in this position resigned from the District. At that time, the position was discontinued.

The Follow-Up Report dated October 15, 2010 demonstrated the change in the reporting structure of the Inspector General. Furthermore and according to records, the position of Inspector General has been discontinued as of January 2011.

Conclusion:

The district has fully implemented the recommendation and recognized the change to discontinue the position.

2010 District Recommendation 3:

In order to meet the Standard, the team recommends that District clarify the role of the board members with respect to the work of the District managers. This would include a review of reporting structures, methods for board inquiries, distinction between board policy setting and oversight, and management, leadership, and operational responsibilities for the District.

Response:

Board policies have been updated to clarify the role of Board members with respect to the work of the district Chancellor. The delegation of responsibilities has been defined through board policy. During an interview with the Chancellor, this standard remains an area of concern as the district must clarify the role of board members with respect to district managers and operations.

In the Special session meeting held on March 9, 2015, the Board discussed the mechanisms for communicating with the Chancellor, methods for board inquiries, delegation of authority issues and role distinction but articulated the challenges operationalizing board policy.

Conclusion:

The recommendation has not been implemented.

2010 District Recommendation 4:

In order to meet the Standard, the team recommends the District provide ongoing and annual training for board and management on roles and functions as it relates to District policy and operations.

Response:

Since 2010, a series of board workshops have been provided to the board on critical topics: roles and responsibilities, and financial responsibilities of trustees, discussion on 2010 accreditation recommendations, accreditation issues on governance and leadership, board governance, policies, strategic planning, board- chancellor relations, chancellor's goals, board goals and professional development (June, September, October of 2010, November 2011, October 2012 (2-day session), November 2013, December 2014, February 2015 board meeting agendas). In addition, the Board evaluation tool has been aligned to accreditation standards and district strategic goals.

It is noted that two trustees have completed the CCLC Excellence in Trusteeship program.

Conclusion:

The district has implemented the recommendation.

2010 District Recommendation 5:

In order to meet the Standard, the team recommends the District engage in ongoing discussion about the role of the board and how it serves its trustee role for the good of the District. The role of the board should be reviewed regularly with each board member.

Response:

The review of the ACCJC October 10, 2010 Follow-up Report highlights the board development activities that have engaged the board in understanding their role as trustees. Over the last five years, trustees have received trainings related to roles and responsibilities, governance and leadership. Most recently the board held a workshop to further develop knowledge and skills as a high performing team. Results of evaluations conducted by the board continue to demonstrate the need for ongoing development. The Board would benefit from evaluating the impact of the development activities as it relates to board effectiveness. It is noted that trustees must pay more attention to the chancellor-board relationships.

Conclusion:

The district has implemented the recommendations. Continued focus on this standard is imperative.

January 2011 District Recommendation 1:

The team recommends that the 2010 Recommendation 5 be revised to include the following language: The Team additionally recommends that the Board of Trustees continue to redefine the appropriate roles of the Board and its relationship to the Chancellor. The Board of Trustees should refine and change the roles and charges of the Board Committees so that they also reflect an appropriate role for the Board.

Response:

As noted in recommendation 5 (2010) above, the recommendation, the trustees have completed a series of training to address trustees roles and responsibilities and governance. According to information posted on the Board Committees website page, the board of trustees have the following board committees in operation:

- Audit and Finance
- Board Policies
- Chancellors Search Committee
- Public Hearings
- Redistricting Committee
- Resolutions
- Retirement Board

Concerns about the board roles and its relationship to the chancellor are still evident based on information gathered through conversations with chancellor and the board. Evidence on the charge and responsibility of board committees was not found.

Conclusion:

The district has not implemented the recommendation.

2010 District Recommendation 8:

In order to meet the Standard, the visiting team recommends a regular review of board roles to assure that the board is relying on the Chancellor to carry out the policy set by the board.

Response:

The board workshops conducted annually have been focused the review of the board roles to assure the chancellor is carryout his responsibility to implement board policy.

Conclusion:

The district has implemented the recommendation.

2010 District Recommendation 9:

The team recommends the Board of Trustees and District adhere to their appropriate roles. The District must serve the colleges as liaison between the colleges and the Board of Trustees while assuring that the college presidents can operate their institutions effectively. Meanwhile, the Board must not interfere with the operations of the four colleges of the district and allow the Chancellor to take full responsibility and authority for the areas assigned to district oversight.

Response:

Over the last 5 years, trustees have received a variety of training to address the way in which they can adhere to their roles. The review of the 2010 ACCJC follow-up report provides the description on how the recommendation has been met.

In recent meetings with the chancellor and the board, it is worth noting that there are areas of concern related to how well trustees are adhering to their roles. Trustees are not evaluating how effective training and development activities are changing behavior and clarifying roles.

Conclusion:

The district has partially implemented the recommendation.

2010 District Recommendation 6:

In order to meet the Standards, the team recommends the board consider regular review of the code of ethics to assure thorough understanding and application of its intent.

Response:

The district completed the revision of the Board Policy 2710 Conflict of Interest and 2715 Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice. The policies delineate tenants for ethical conduct and conflict of interest. The policies reflect the duty of public officials under Common Law, the Political Reform Act, Government Code 1090 and specific statutory requirements and prohibitions under the Brown Act. Board workshops conducted during the cycle reveal annual training session on ethics, conflict of interest, and open government. The board self-evaluation includes the evaluation of the code of ethics.

Conclusion:

The District has implemented the recommendation. Board Policy 2715 Code of Ethics could include statements on behavior contrary to the Code of Ethics as part of the policy.

January 2011 District Recommendation 3:

The team recommends that the Board of Trustees develop and implement a plan to review all Board policies so that the policies reflect only policy language and that the operational processes for these policies be reflected in a system of administrative regulations (procedures).

Response:

The review of policy indicates that Board policy and administrative procedures revisions has been completed and meet the Community College League of California (CCLC) numbering system. The revisions began in 2011.

Conclusion:

The district has fully implemented this recommendation.

2012 Commission Recommendation 4:

[In the June 2011 action letter, ACCJC stated the following:]

While evidence identifies progress, the District has not achieved compliance with Standard IV.B and Eligibility Requirement #3. Specifically, the District has not completed the evaluation of Board policies to the end of maintaining policies that are appropriate to policy governance and excluding policies that inappropriately reflect administrative operations.

Therefore, in order to meet Standards and Eligibility Requirements, the District must evaluate all Board policies and implement actions to resolve deficiencies.

[In the July 2, 2012 letter, ACCJC updated the recommendation:]

The District has revised a significant number of its Board Policies. This project needs to be completed so that all policies are reviewed and revised as necessary by March 15, 2013.

The review of policy indicates that Board policy and administrative procedures revisions has been completed and meet the Community College League of California (CCLC) numbering system. The revisions began in 2011.

Conclusion:

The district has fully implemented this recommendation.

Eligibility Requirements

1. Authority

The Visiting Team confirmed that Merritt College is a public, two-year community college operating under the authority of the State of California, the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges, and the Board of Trustees of the Peralta Community College District. Merritt College is accredited by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, Western Association of Schools and Colleges.

2. Mission

The Visiting Team confirmed that Merritt College's updated mission statement was adopted by the Board of Trustees on June 24, 2014. The mission statement includes a focus appropriate for a community college. It is published widely throughout the College, including in the college web page and the college catalog. Because the college publishes its catalog once every two years, the mission statement in the current (2013-2015) catalog shows the mission statement as it was prior to the most recent revision. The College has indicated that the revised mission statement will be published in the 2015-2017 catalog.

3. Governing Board

The Visiting Team confirmed that a seven-member Board of Trustees, elected at large by Alameda County residents, governs the Peralta Community College District. The Board has ultimate responsibility for the quality, integrity, financial stability of the District and for ensuring that the mission is being carried out. Its membership is sufficient in size and composition to fulfill all board responsibilities. Two student trustees also sit on the board, elected by the student body to represent student issues and concerns. They have an advisory vote.

The governing board is an independent policy-making body. The Board has a conflict of interest policy (BP 2710) and a Code of Ethics and Standards of Practices (BP 2715) and procedures for handling code of ethics violations.

4. Chief Executive Officer

The Visiting Team confirmed that the President serves as the institutional chief executive officer of the College. Appointed by the governing board, the President has primary authority and responsibility for leadership and management of all college programs and services. She has the requisite authority to administer board policies.

5. Administrative Capacity

Maintaining a sufficient number of qualified staff to support its mission has been a challenge for Merritt College in recent years. Due in part to state funding reductions and district-mandated budget cuts, turnover and loss of key administrative positions have

resulted in a significant decrease (more than 20 percent) in all classifications of college employees since 2008. With the partial return of funding and the hiring of the current president and two vice president positions as well as other permanent employees, staffing levels are increasing. With the stabilizing influences that a permanent administrative team has brought, the College meets this eligibility requirement

6. Operating Status

The institution is operational, with students actively pursuing its degree and certificate programs.

7. Degrees

The visiting Team confirmed that a substantial portion of the institution's educational offerings lead to degrees, and a significant portion of its students are enrolled in them. In the fall 2013, approximately 64 percent of students enrolled in credit courses identified a goal of completing an Associate in Arts degree, career technical certificate, or transfer requirements. A majority of the College's credit courses are applicable to the Associate in Arts degree and/or meet requirements for career technical certificates. Non-degree applicable courses meet the College's mission of basic skills development.

8. Educational Programs

The Visiting Team confirmed that Merritt College degree programs align with the College's mission and that fields of study are aligned with generally accepted practices in degree-granting institutions of higher education. The Team also confirmed that 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 Visiting Team confirmed that Merritt College awards academic credit in a manner consistent with generally accepted higher education practices. The College uses the Carnegie formula and clearly distinguishes between degree applicable and non-degree applicable courses.

10. Student Learning and Achievement

The Visiting Team confirmed that the College has substantially defined course, program/degree, and institutional learning outcomes; has assessed student learning outcomes at the course and program levels; and has engaged dialogue to promote continuous quality improvement for its instructional programs. The Counseling, Library and Learning Resources programs appear to have also done the same. However, the Team was unable to find conclusive evidence that the identification and the assessment of learning outcomes have occurred in non-instructional areas (i.e., student services, learning support services, and administrative services). Further, the Team was not able to find evidence that institutional learning outcomes have been assessed and that broad dialogue have occurred and have been documented.

11. General Education

The Visiting Team confirmed that Merritt College incorporates general education into its degree programs, with a significant emphasis on demonstrated competencies in writing, computation, and other major areas of knowledge. There are comprehensive learning outcomes for the students who complete the general education component, and degree credit is reflective of the quality and rigor appropriate for higher education.

12. Academic Freedom

The Visiting Team confirmed that Merritt College has adopted an Academic Freedom Statement (Board Policy 4030) to ensure that faculty and students are free to examine and test knowledge appropriate to their discipline or area of major study as judged by the general academic/educational community. Both the full-time and part-time faculty contracts also address issues of academic freedom and responsibility.

13. Faculty

The Visiting Team confirmed that Merritt College has a sufficient core of qualified faculty with full-time responsibility to the institution to meet current needs. The College currently has 73 full-time faculty members. The Team also confirmed that faculty members are responsible for curriculum processes and for the assessment of student learning.

14. Student Services

The Visiting Team confirmed that the College provides a comprehensive array of student services to support student learning and development within the context of the College's mission. Student services programs include Admissions and Records, Articulation, Assessment, Financial Aid and Scholarships, CalWorks, Child Development Center, Counseling, Disabled Programs and Services (DSPS), Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS), Health Services Center, Student Life, Transfer Services, and Veterans Affairs Services, Learning Center tutoring, and campus safety.

15. Admissions

The Visiting Team confirmed that the College has adopted and adheres to admission policies that specify the qualifications of students appropriate for its program. The admissions policy is clear and consistent with the College's mission. Information regarding admission requirements and procedures are published in the College catalog, schedule of classes, and on the District/College websites. The Admissions office staff is qualified to fulfill the various responsibilities in the admissions process.

16. Information and Learning Resources

The Visiting Team confirmed that Merritt College provides students and staff with access to adequate information and learning resources to support its mission and all educational programs. The College library has adequate physical and electronic resources to support

the curricular needs of both the traditional and online students. The library has designated spaces for library instruction, study groups, and computers. The College's Learning Center includes an English Center, a Math Center, and the Science Tutoring Center. There are also designated computers for writing across the curriculum and for DSPS students.

17. Financial Resources

The Visiting Team confirmed that the College's funding base is documented in the adopted Budget Allocation Model (BAM) developed by the District. Day to day operations of financial aid, grants, programs, and contracts by the college and overall management is centralized by the District. External and internal audit results attest to the financial integrity of the College.

A review of the Peralta Community College District 2014-2015 Budget Summary, presentations, and audit reports confirm that the District and the College document financial resources and assure financial stability.

18. Financial Accountability

The Visiting Team confirmed that the District undergoes annual independent external audits. The District financial audits are publicly available and are reported and reviewed at regularly scheduled board meetings. The College is also reviewed by an Internal Auditor on a regular basis throughout the year.

Significant deficiencies were noted in multiple year external Audit reports for the College in connection to Financial Aid: (1) Auditors were not able to determine date of return to Title IV; (2) Failure to return funds to Title IV and no process in place to identify dropped students (FY 2013/2014 Audit Report, p. 85); (3) COD disbursements were more than 30 days past the reported date (FY 2013/2014 Audit Report, p. 83); (4) Not reconciling SAS and Loan details to financial records (FY 2013/2014 Audit Report, p. 86); and (5) Auditors were not able to determine date of return to Title IV (FY 2013/2014 Audit Report, p. 102).

The District has hired an internal auditor who has created a corrective action matrix listing all of the audit findings with timelines for resolution of the findings. The College and the District have made significant progress in addressing the audit findings. Evidence provided during the visit and prior to the finalization of this report, after the visit, indicate that the District and Colleges have developed oversight committees, identified internal audit, management accountability as well as procedures to address #1, #2, #3, and #5. One document identified overpayment to students, however did not indicate they have been returned to Title IV. The evidence provided for #4 reflects the College has resolved this and may not be providing Direct Loans any longer. The 2014 Corrective Action Matrix provided subsequent to the visit indicates that procedures are in the implementation stage. While these procedures are in progress, there is no evidence since the last Audit report of 2014 or the last Department of Education Program Review that the deficiencies are fully resolved.

Both the college and district Visiting Teams found that the District and the College have not fully resolved all of the 2012-13, and 2013-14 audit findings. Therefore, the College does not meet this Eligibility Requirement.

19. Institutional Planning and Evaluation

The Visiting Team confirmed that the College is in the nascent stages of systematically evaluating how well it is accomplishing its purposes. The College has begun implementing a strategic planning process that includes programs review. The program review process includes a section on student learning outcomes. Before and during the visit, however, the Team was not able to find conclusive evidence that the program review process is systematic, complete, nor inclusive of all instructional programs, student services, and administrative services. In its Self-Evaluation Report, the College states that it is following the 2010 planning and budgeting flow chart. The Team did not find sufficient evidence to validate this assertion. The evidence provided to the Visiting Team did not clearly establish linkages between the college mission, the college-wide plans, and the resource allocation process. Additionally, the Team did not find evidence that the relatively new integrated planning process has gone through a complete cycle that includes comprehensive implementation, broad-based dialogue, evaluation, and re-evaluation. The College does not meet this eligibility requirement.

20. Integrity in Communication with the Public

The Team confirmed that the College meets this eligibility requirement. Merritt has a printed catalog that is published every two years and an electronic catalog that is available on the College website. The catalog includes general information about the College's official name, address, telephone number, and website address; the College mission; course, program, and degree offerings; academic calendar and program length; academic freedom statement; available financial aid; available learning resources; names and degrees of faculty and administrators; and names of governing board members. Requirements about admissions, student fees and other obligations are outlined, as well as requirements for degree, certificates, graduation, and transfer. Major policies affecting students are also included in the catalog, e.g., grievance and complaint procedures, nondiscrimination, sexual harassment, refund of fees, academic regulations including academic honesty, and acceptance of transfer credits.

21. Integrity in Relations with the Accrediting Commission

The Team verified that the College has demonstrated honesty and integrity in its relationships with the Accreditation Commission and other accrediting agencies in relation to its programs. The College communicates any changes to its accreditation status and agrees to disclose information required by the Commission to carry out its accrediting responsibilities. The College complies with Commission requests, directives, decisions, and policies and makes complete, accurate, and honest disclosures.

Compliance with Commission Policies

Policy on Distance Education and Correspondence Education

The mission of Merritt College is to enhance the quality of life in the communities it serves by helping students to attain knowledge, master skills, and develop the appreciation, attitudes and values needed to succeed and participate responsibly in a democratic society and a global economy. To accomplish its mission, the College provides open access to excellent instructional programs and comprehensive support services. Distance Education (DE) and hybrid-education offerings at the College support the mission of the College; both of these instructional methods provide the community access to quality education and services through the use of technology. When courses are proposed for DE delivery, the approval process begins with a conversation with a department chair. Then the originating faculty provides detailed description and rationale for proposing DE delivery, including sample assignments focusing on the appropriateness of DE delivery for the content of the course and SLOs.

Distance Education classes are the same in content, rigor, and quality as site-based classes. The College requires that all courses proposed for DE delivery be separately reviewed and approved by the Curriculum and Instructional Council (a sub-committee of the Academic Senate) before being forwarded for multiple levels of approval at the District and regional approval in the case of Career and Technical Education programs.

The College also requires “regular effective contact” between faculty and students as part of Title 5 requirements of the State of California. At Merritt College, “regular effective contact,” is equivalent to “regular substantive interaction.” Therefore, the College ensures that all approved courses offered as distance education include regular and substantive interaction between students and the instructor. This requirement is often completed through group or individual meetings, orientation and review sessions, supplemental seminar or study sessions, field trips, library workshops, telephone contact, voicemail, e-mail, or other activities.

The District offers a variety of processes in its distance education program to ensure that a registered student is the same student who participates in and completes the program and receives academic credit. Identity verification includes such methods as electronic authentication using an assigned student ID and password, student email using a college provided email account, the creation of randomized test bank questions and timed test delivery, and plagiarism detection software. Proctored exams are also an option for instructors, to be administered either at designated locations on campus or pre-arranged approved locations off-campus. Student privacy is guaranteed using the designated course management system at all times.

The College meets the Policy on Distance Education and on Correspondence Education.

Policy on Institutional Compliance with Title IV

The College follows the federal regulations that require first-time borrowers of Direct Loans to receive entrance counseling which is available at studentloans.gov. The College directs students to that site. All Title IV and State Student Eligibility Requirements and Policies are stated in the Financial Aid Handbook and available on the College website. The Handbook is updated every new award year to remain compliant with regulatory changes. A Financial Aid Manual of Policies and Procedures is also updated annually.

The College assists students who are in need of funding to meet college costs by providing information and access to an array of federal (Title IV) and state student financial aid programs and scholarships for successful college completion. The College provides a variety of workshops throughout the year. All workshops are listed on the Department's calendar on the college website, as well as advertised throughout the campus's announcement boards. One-on-one appointments are available to students who cannot make workshop times for financial aid assistance and financial literacy coaching. Training sessions are also conducted for other service providers within Student Services so faculty and staff are aware of the Federal and State changes that may affect their student population.

Significant deficiencies were noted in multiple year external Audit reports for the College in connection to Financial Aid: (1) Auditors were not able to determine date of return to Title IV; (2) Failure to return funds to Title IV and no process in place to identify dropped students (FY 2013/2014 Audit Report, p. 85); (3) COD disbursements were more than 30 days past the reported date (FY 2013/2014 Audit Report, p. 83); (4) Not reconciling SAS and Loan details to financial records (FY 2013/2014 Audit Report, p. 86); and (5) Auditors were not able to determine date of return to Title IV (FY 2013/2014 Audit Report, p. 102).

The District has hired an internal auditor who has created a corrective action matrix listing all of the audit findings with timelines for resolution of the findings. The College and the District have made significant progress in addressing the audit findings. Evidence provided during the visit and prior to the finalization of this report, after the visit, indicate that the District and the colleges have developed oversight committees, identified internal audit, management accountability as well as procedures to address #1, #2, #3, and #5. One document which was provided after the visit, on May 4, 2015, identified overpayment to students. However, the document did not show if and when funds were returned to Title IV. The evidence provided for #4 reflects the College has resolved this finding and may no longer be providing Direct Loans. The 2014 Corrective Action Matrix provided subsequent to the visit indicates that procedures are in the implementation stage. While these procedures are in progress, there is no evidence since the last Audit report of 2014 or the last Department of Education Program Review that the deficiencies are fully resolved.

Therefore, the College does not meet the Policy on Institutional Compliance with Title IV.

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

The College utilizes the catalog, schedule of classes, College website to advertise courses and programs, and to recruit students. These publications include regulatory and enrollment information and are updated electronically to ensure they are factually accurate.

ACCJC accreditation status is referenced appropriately in the catalog, schedule of classes, and the College website. All accredited programs, licensure requirements, and state certifications are identified and advertised appropriately.

The College meets the Policy on Institutional Advertising, Student Recruitment, and Representation of Accredited Status.

Policy on Institutional Degrees and Credits / Policy on Award of Credits

The College awards credit according to the Carnegie unit in alignment with Title V, California Code of Regulations, Section 55002. The College is in compliance with commonly accepted practices for hours of instruction and content. The Curriculum and Instructional Council Chair review curriculum in order to ensure course rigor and compliance with established standards. Based on review of programs and syllabi, the College does not award credit on clock hours.

The Curriculum and Instructional Council reviews curriculum in order to ensure course rigor and compliance with established standards. All programs offered at the College include a major or concentration in at least one area of focused study or interdisciplinary core, and students are required to follow the requirements of this area as outlined in the college catalog. Overall requirements for Associate Degree include at least 60 degree-applicable semester units, 18 units in the Major or Area of Emphasis, and a minimum of 19 units in General Education requirements with at least a 2.0 ("C") average.

The College has a review process in place to ensure that course outcomes and objectives meet the general education criteria and learning outcomes in order to be included in the College's general education pattern. Faculty and staff use Taskstream to manage and monitor the assessment results of student achievement for instructional, learning support, and student services. Although sufficient evidence of ongoing student achievement based on the analysis of regular assessment results was not available, some evidence indicates that the College has the capability and the tools to manage assessment at the College on a routine basis. Additionally, the District's Office of Institutional Research posts program data, annually. However, student learning outcomes have not been assessed and analyzed in all courses.

The College meets the Policy on Award of Credit. However, to meet the Policy on Institutional Degrees and Credits, the Team recommends that the College identify criteria and processes to conduct thorough and ongoing systematic evaluations of course level student learning outcomes in order to ensure that all of its instructional courses are of high quality.

Policy on Institutional Integrity and Ethics

The College upholds and protects the integrity of its practices through its mission statement and institutional strategic initiatives, commitment to diversity, policies and procedures, and compliance with the California Education Code and other relevant regulatory requirements. The College regularly reviews its institutional plans and the District regularly reviews its educational policies to ensure that they are current and accurate.

The College completes and submits required reports to the Accreditation Commission, California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO), state and federal governments, and any other body requiring information about the College. The College ensures that information related to its mission, strategic initiatives, educational programs, admissions requirements, student services, tuition and other fees, financial aid programs, and policies related to transcripts, transfer of credit, and refunds of tuition and fees is accurate and readily available to the public. The College Catalog, Schedule of Classes, and website are the main sources of information with regard to the College's educational programs and institutional policies. The College's accreditation status is published in the catalog.

Merritt College has policies to ensure academic honesty, integrity in hiring and prevention of conflict of interest violations. The College Catalog, Schedule of Classes, and related policies and procedures address how violations of integrity are addressed. Due process protections for employees are also addressed in collective bargaining agreements. Merritt College utilizes established policies and procedures to receive and address complaints, which may be submitted confidentially and anonymously, regarding questionable accounting practices; operational activities that are in violation of applicable laws, rules, and regulations; or questionable activities that may indicate potential fraud, waste, and/or abuse. The District/College regularly reviews its policies and procedures through its governance process to ensure they are equitably and consistently administered.

The College meets the Policy on Institutional Integrity and Ethics.

Policy on Contractual Relationships with Non-Regionally Accredited Institutions

The College does not have contractual relationships with any non-regionally accredited organizations.

Standard I – Institutional Mission and Effectiveness
Standard IA – Mission

General Observations

The Mission Statement for Merritt College defines the College’s broad educational purposes: “...enhance the quality of life in the communities we serve by helping students to attain knowledge, master skills, and develop the appreciation, attitudes, and values needed to succeed and participate responsibly in a democratic society and in a global economy.” Recent changes in this mission statement are found on posters hung around the college campus and on the college website.

Findings and Evidence

The Board of Trustees of the Peralta Community College District approved the College’s mission statement on June 24, 2014. Prior to that, the mission statement had not been updated since 2004. In 2009, the College Council recommended changes to the mission statement, however, the Board of Trustees never acted upon the recommended changes. It is unclear whether the College brought the recommended changes to its mission statement for board approval. The college Self-Evaluation Report states that the mission statement is to be reviewed every six years, however, the Team found no evidence to indicate that such a review cycle has been codified. Interviews with college constituencies during the visit revealed that there has not been broad-based dialogue and no formalized process to consistently review the College mission statement. (Standards I.A.1; I.A.2; 1.A.3)

The revised mission statement was found on posters hung around the college campus and on the college website. The evidence provided in the 2014 self-study indicated that the college brochure included the updated mission statement. However, the brochure on the website reviewed by the Team on March 10, 2015 did not have the updated mission statement. The Team confirmed that the updated mission statement would be included in the 2015-2017 college catalog. (Standard I.A.2)

The 2010 Merritt College Integrated Planning and Budgeting Process flow chart (Self Study Evidence I.A.28) clearly shows the college mission at the top of the planning hierarchy, suggesting that the college mission drives the planning process. A review of the Comprehensive Instructional Program Review (CIPR) template, however, does not show any linkages between planning and the College Mission. The evidence provided to and examined by the Team suggests that while some of the instructional programs may discuss their program mission during the planning process, the link between planning and the college mission is not clearly established. Additional review of CIPR and Annual Program Update (APU) documents found that the plans draw linkages between the instructional programs plans and the College’s strategic goals, but do not integrate the College Mission into the budget allocation process. Based on interviews with constituency groups and governance committee members, the Team found other discrepancies and inconsistencies regarding the implementation of the CIPR and APU

with integrated planning, and the budget allocation processes in relation to the centrality of the college mission. (Standard I.A.4)

Conclusion

Merritt College's mission statement describes the college's broad educational purposes including their target audience and their needs. A recent addition of the phrase 'and in a global economy' was added when the Peralta Community College District Board of Trustees approved the mission statement in June of 2014. (I.A.1; I.A.2)

The report states that the college mission statement is to be reviewed every six years. Evidence provided indicates that prior to the most recent update of the mission statement (June 2014), the college mission statement had not been revised since 2004. In 2009, the College Council recommended changes to the mission statement, however, those recommended the Board of Trustees never acted upon changes. Based on the interviews and evidence provided, there is no specific policy or codified systematic process in place. (Standard I.A.3)

The Merritt College Integrated Planning and Budgeting Process flow chart (evidence I.A.28) shows the mission statement at the top, suggesting that the college mission is central to the planning and budgeting process. The flow chart also shows that the mission statement links to and drives the college strategic directions and program review, leading to a series of reviews by management and the College Educational Master Planning Committee (CEMPC) and culminating in a recommendation by College Council to the College President. Evidence outlining the College's strategic directions for 2014-2017 is a draft document (Self Study Evidence I.B.17); as such the Team could not definitively state that the college mission drives the current strategic directions. The Team did not find evidence demonstrating that the college is following its established planning and budgeting process. (Standards I.A.1; I.A.4)

The College does not meet the Standard.

Recommendations

College Recommendation 1: In order to meet the Standard, the Team recommends that the College develop and implement policy and procedures for systematically reviewing the college mission statement. (I.A.3)

College Recommendation 2: In order to increase institutional effectiveness, the Team recommends that the College implement an evidence-based process that links institutional planning and decision-making to the college mission. (I.A.4)

Standard I – Institutional Mission and Effectiveness
Standard IB – Institutional Effectiveness

General Observations

The college's motto, 'We change lives!' is consistent with the mission, vision and core values of Merritt College and indicates a strong focus on promoting student learning. The College offers courses at levels appropriate to meet the needs of its students, including basic skills, transfer, career technical education, and life-long learning.

The 2014 self-study report asserted that the College systematically assesses college data and learning outcomes, and conducts broad-based dialog to drive integrated planning and resource allocation.

Findings and Evidence

The Merritt College Educational Master Plan (EMP) 2009–2015 was developed in 2009, providing a six-year strategic direction for the College. The Integrated Planning Committee (IPC) established the EMP in 2005. The direction of the 2005 plan established Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs) for the period 2005-2009 and was adopted by the college in 2008. Additionally, the plan has set a seven-year strategy for achieving assessment proficiency with regard to student learning outcomes (SLOs). The College stated that the purpose of the EMP is to present a shared road map for the college and district service centers for several years, effectively aligning college goals with the District goals. The EMP states that the college will conduct annual reviews of the implementation milestones for each District-wide strategy in addition to a five-year regular update. The EMP process is charged to follow a five-year cycle; the latest EMP (2009-2015) was a six-year plan. The 2014 self-study report specified that the EMP is being updated with revisions scheduled for completion in June 2015; however, no evidence was provided of any ongoing activities to support this initiative. Additionally, no evidence was provided to show that the College conducted the annual EMP reviews or any progress made on the 2005 strategies. Interviews across constituency groups found inconsistency in perception and comprehension of the EMP review processes and results. (Standards I.B.1; I.B.2; I.B.3; I.B.4; I.B.6)

The self-study suggested that the College is improving the linkage between individual planning activities, requiring departments and divisions to establish annual goals and objectives that are directly connected to the College's strategic goals and objectives. This appears to be a very recent requirement, since the College's strategic goals and objectives were only presented in draft form, and the example research request for data to support the writing of Standard II.A (Self-Evaluation Evidence I.B.20) does not appear to have been fulfilled yet. As such, there is no clear evidence of an ongoing and systematic cycle of evaluation and integrated planning nor is there a clear link between the assessment of progress toward achieving institution-set goals and the resource allocation process for the college. In a March 2010 Follow-Up Report, the college stated that it was implementing TracDat to serve as 'a database that documents planning and assessment efforts, and generates reports.' The 2014 Self-Evaluation Report makes no mention of TracDat, and

The review of the College website and other planning documents did not reveal any documentation of the system. (Standards I.B.2; I.B.3; I.B.4; I.B.6)

The College provided a flow chart entitled Merritt College Integrated Planning & Budgeting Process dated November 17, 2010. The flow chart indicates that inputs to the planning process include Comprehensive Instructional Program Reviews (CIPR) Annual Program Updates (APU), and feedback from constituency groups. Although it is not clear from the information presented whether CIPRs undergo an evidence-based allocation process, the flow chart shows that the inputs are reviewed by managers, the College Educational Master Planning Committee (CEMPC), and the various college governance committees, culminating in a review by the College Council. The College Council makes a recommendation to the President. It then appears that the President takes college budget recommendations to the District Planning and Budgeting Council, ultimately going to the Chancellor and Board of Trustees for approval. It is not at all clear how college-wide plans access the resource allocation process at the college, should any remaining funds exist after personnel salaries and benefits are deducted from the total college allocation. The Team was not provided clear evidence showing that the steps outlined in the planning flow chart are followed on a regular basis. Based on interviews conducted during the visit, it was determined that the College provides a budgetary list of prioritized requests to the District planning committees (e.g. technology, facilities). The list is then integrated with the lists from the other colleges in the District and prioritized by the appropriate district planning groups. Based on a comprehensive review of written evidence and interviews, it appears that the college implements a process for the prioritization of budget allocation. However, the College was not able to provide adequate and convincing evidence that it has completed a full cycle of planning and has “closed the loop” by evaluating and re-evaluating its planning processes, ensuring that planning is integrated with resource allocation, is systematic, evidence-based, and has led to institutional improvements. (Standards I.B.3; I.B.6)

Merritt College has established, in writing, a regular cycle of activities that includes CIPRs, APUs, assessment of student learning outcomes (SLOs), program learning outcomes (PLOs) and service area outcomes (SAOs); review and/or updating of the EMP, collection of external environmental data, and meta-research assessment. The EMP established a three-year comprehensive CIPR cycle with mandatory APUs. The evidence provided supports the statement that the CIPR process is broad-based and provides ample opportunity for input by appropriate constituent groups. No evidence was provided to demonstrate that the College has fully completed a systematic and comprehensive assessment of all instructional and non-instructional programs. Limited examples of any of these reviews were provided in the Self-Evaluation Report. During the visit, the College provided electronic and physical copies of the CIPRs, APUs, and access to the Taskstream SLO data repository. Though the evidence provided during the visit brought clarity to the process, it did not suggest a level of proficiency throughout the college. A review of the physical and electronic documents provided during the site visit found that 17 of 44 comprehensive CIPRs were completed in 2009-2010 and 39 of 44 CIPRs were completed in 2012-2013. A similar assessment was conducted on APUs and found that 48 percent was completed in 2013-2014 and 98 percent was completed in 2014-2015. Therefore, the review of instructional program review sequence over three years found

that 20 instructional programs or 45 percent completed the three-year review cycle. Non-instructional APUs were completed during the three-year review cycle, but there was no evidence provided to demonstrate that Comprehensive Non-Instructional Program Reviews (CNIPRs) were completed. (Standards I.B.1; I.B.3; I.B.4; I.B.6; I.B.7)

The 2014 Self-Evaluation Report states that ‘a number of governance and administrative bodies regularly assess SLOs and institutional processes in a continuous effort to maximize the College’s effectiveness and efficacy as a learning institution.’ The 2010 College Council Committees and By-Laws are cited as evidence. A careful review of this document showed no references to ‘student learning,’ ‘student learning outcomes,’ ‘learning’ or ‘effectiveness’ in any of the descriptions or charges of the committees or councils. References to meeting minutes as evidence for self-reflective dialogue could not be validated. Although some evidence for ongoing, collegial, self-reflective dialogue about continuous improvement of student learning and institutional processes was found in a Title III Grant presentation, evidence that this dialogue is widespread and ongoing is not conclusive.

A review of evidence made available to the Team before and during the visit does not validate a systematic assessment of learning outcomes to ensure continuous institutional quality improvement. (Standards I.B.1; I.B.3)

The evidence provided regarding student learning outcomes (SLOs) partially supports the statement that “The College regularly assesses SLO and institutional processes.” The SLO information found in Taskstream (The College’s electronic repository for SLO, PLO and SAO data collection and reporting) revealed limited participation across all courses and programs and does not reflect continuous assessment. Interviews conducted during the visit indicated a limited understanding of timeframes for outcome assessment and data reporting periods. A review of the course SLO assessment in Taskstream showed 142 of 405 courses were assessed with 134 plans for improvement in 2011-2012, 148 of 407 courses were assessed with 155 plans for improvement in 2012-2013, 138 of 407 courses were assessed with 137 plans for improvement in 2013-2014, and 115 of 407 courses were assessed with 115 plans for improvement in 2014-2015. A comparison with the 2012, 2013 and 2014 ACCJC Annual College Reports reflected much higher numbers in SLO assessment and participation rates. Therefore, the review of evidence found inconsistencies between the 2014 self-study, the findings of SLO assessments in Taskstream, and the 2012, 2013 and 2014 ACCJC Annual Reports. (Standards I.B.1; I.B.3; I.B.5; I.B.6)

A similar assessment was conducted in Taskstream as means to review the Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) assessed annually. The findings indicated five of 28 programs were assessed with five plans for improvement in 2011-2012, 11 of 28 programs were assessed with 12 plans for improvement in 2012-2013, 3 of 28 programs were assessed with two plans for improvement in 2013-2014, and three of 28 programs were assessed with 3 plans for improvement in 2014-2015. Thus, nearly 20 percent of the PLOs have been assessed on average for the past four years. A comparison with the 2012, 2013 and 2014 ACCJC Annual College Reports reflected much higher numbers in PLO assessment and participation rates. Therefore, the review of evidence found

inconsistencies between the 2014 self-evaluation, the findings of PLO assessments in Taskstream, and the 2012, 2013 and 2014 ACCJC Annual Reports. (Standards I.B.1; I.B.3; I.B.5; I.B.6)

An additional assessment was conducted in Taskstream as means to review the Service Area Outcomes (SAOs) assessed annually. The findings indicated six of 22 areas were assessed with six plans for improvement in 2011-2012, six of 22 areas were assessed with five plans for improvement in 2012-2013, five of 22 areas were assessed with five plans for improvement in 2013-2014, and 13 of 22 areas were assessed with 14 plans for improvement in 2014-2015. A comparison with the 2012, 2013 and 2014 ACCJC Annual College Reports reflected much higher numbers in SAO assessment and participation rates. Therefore, the review of evidence found inconsistencies between the 2014 self-study, the findings of SAO assessments in Taskstream, and the 2012, 2013 and 2014 ACCJC Annual Reports. (Standards I.B.1; I.B.3; I.B.5; I.B.6)

The Self-Evaluation Report suggests that Merritt College communicates information about assessment results via the Peralta CCD Fact Book, the State Chancellor's Office Scorecard, IPEDS, and regular reports to the state of California. Interviews were conducted with the college constituencies and district research group and found that limited research support was provided to the college. The College noted, and the Team confirmed, that the College does not have college-based planning and research staff to directly support the College's planning activities and college-specific research needs. There are currently four District-based research staff that support the District and the four PCCD colleges. In its Self-Evaluation Report and during interviews, the College identified an urgent need for a college-based institutional researcher. The College President indicated that plans are underway to hire a researcher, to be funded with categorical funds.

It was suggested by the District researcher that the District's business intelligence (BI) tool was not being effectively used, as there was a limit to who could access the data. However, the data that is being collected locally by the campus are disseminated at flex day presentations, strategic planning events, and with the CEMPC evaluation of CIPRs and APUs. No documented evidence was provided to reflect dialogue regarding the above. As well, there was no documented evidence showing the utilization of the data reports in institutional planning. Interviews with key individuals on campus indicated that dialogue regarding data and institutional improvement occurs, but the College has not adequately or intentionally documented these dialogues. Reflection from the leaders suggested that the College would document these dialogs in the future. (Standards I.B.2; I.B.3; I.B.4; I.B.5; I.B.6)

As evidenced in its 2014 Annual Report to ACCJC, the College had indicated to have institution-set standards for successful student course completion (69 percent), student completion of degrees and certificates, per year (500), and number of students who transfer each year to a 4-year institution (300). The findings from the report suggest that the standards that have been identified by the college reflect goals as opposed to performance thresholds. This finding was affirmed through multiple interviews, which indicated that no formal process has occurred to establish baseline performance metrics.

In a draft document entitled Merritt College FY 14-17 Strategic Goals and Objectives dated July 18 and August 12, 2014, the College appears to be establishing measurable goals for student engagement and success; however, the Team did not find a final version of the document. Likewise, the Team did not find institution-set standards for student achievement. (Standards I.B.1-6)

Conclusion

A review of evidence presented in the 2014 Self-Evaluation Report, augmented by interviews on-campus, indicates that the college has not yet established measurable institution-set standards for improving effectiveness consistent with the College Mission. Although there is some dialogue about continuous improvement of student learning and institutional processes, the Team concludes that such dialogue is not widespread or ongoing. The College relies on the Educational Master Plan to serve as a foundational document for institutional goals, and relies on College Council Committees to promote broad dialogue. Analysis of the charge and responsibilities of the committees did not support this function and no evidence of meeting minutes was provided to indicate that dialogue is occurring. The EMP expires in 2015 with no evidence of regular updates. The College states that an update is in progress but no evidence was provided to verify that. (Standards I.B.1; I.B.2; I.B.3; I.B.6)

The ACCJC annual reports indicate that the College has established and assesses institution-set standards. However, based on further investigation there has been no formal process completed and recorded to establish a threshold for student success and achievement. (Standards I.B.1-6)

The review of learning and service outcomes data across courses, programs and service areas found inconsistency between the 2014 self-evaluation, the 2013 and 2014 ACCJC annual reports, and data entered into the outcome repository Taskstream. (Standards I.B.1; I.B.3)

A review of evidence presented in the report and corroborated by on-campus interviews shows that Merritt College assesses progress toward achieving its stated goals through the CIPR process, which is currently incomplete. Evidence of an ongoing and systematic evaluation of integrated planning and resource allocation, implementation and re-evaluation based on quantitative and qualitative data was not presented. (Standards I.B.2; I.B.3; I.B.5; I.B.6)

The review of evidence found that Comprehensive Non-Instructional Program Reviews (CNIPRs) have not been completed. This was affirmed by multiple interviews across constituencies, including those from Student and Administrative Services. Additional information from the District interviews indicated that the District was working on the template for the CNIPR process; completion is anticipated in summer 2015. (Standards I.B.1; I.B.3; I.B.6)

Additionally, the mission and college-wide plans are not directly incorporated into the program review process, nor is it clear that the college has autonomy to allocate resources

in support of these planning efforts. A review of the evidence indicates that the College has not conducted regular evaluations of its planning and resource allocation processes. As such, the College has not assessed the effectiveness of its CIPR, APU, planning and resource allocation processes. (Standards I.B.4; I.B.6; I.B.7)

The 2014 Self-Evaluation Report states that the college is currently evaluating its governance process including program review. No evidence was provided to demonstrate that the college has developed a systematic means to evaluate these processes nor that these processes have ever been assessed for their effectiveness in leading to improvement in programs and services. (Standards I.B.4; I.B.5; I.B.6; I.B.7)

The College does not meet the Standard.

Recommendations

College Recommendation 3: In order to meet the Standards, the Team recommends that the College implement systematic and evidence-based integrated planning processes that show clear linkages among planning, program review, Student Learning Outcome (SLO) assessment, and resource allocation; delineate the roles of faculty, staff, administrators, and students participating in the planning process; and “close the loop” through ongoing evaluation of the processes and the impact on student learning and achievement. The Team further recommends the college put in place institutional structures that sustain and stabilize the planning processes. (I.B.1-6; II.A.2.a; II.B.3.c; II.B.4; II.C.2; III.A.6; III.B.2.b; III.C.2; III.D.4; IV.A.2.a-b)

College Recommendation 4: In order to meet the Standards, the Team recommends that the college accelerate the completion of comprehensive program reviews and Annual Program Updates (APUs) for all instruction, student services, learning resources, and administrative services; ensure that the process is systematic, integrated into college (I.B, I.B.1, I.B.3, I.B.4, I.B.6, II.A, II.A.2, II.A.2.a, II.A.2.e, II.A.2.f, II.A.6.b, II.B, II.B.3.c, II.B.4, II.C, II.C.2, III.A.6, IV.B.2.b, III.C.2, III.D.4, IV.A.2.a-b)

College Recommendation 5: In order to meet Standards, the Team recommends that the College establish institution-set standards for student achievement and systematically assesses the institution’s progress in meeting or exceeding these standards. (I.B.; I.B.1-6; II.A; II.A.1.c; II.A.2.a,b,f,g,h; II.A.5; II.A.6)

College Recommendation 6: In order to meet the Standards, the Team recommends that the College accelerate the identification and documentation of student learning outcomes for all courses programs, certificates, and degrees; assess student attainment of those outcomes to ensure that all of its instructional courses and programs are of high quality and to make improvements. (I.B.1; I.B.3; I.B.5; I.B.6; IIA.1; IIA.2; IIA.2a; IIA.2b; IIA.2c; IIA.2e; IIA.2f)

Standard II – Student Learning Programs and Services

Standard IIA – Instructional Programs

General Observations

Merritt College offers degree and certificate programs that are aligned with its mission. The College currently offers 22 Associate in Arts (AA), 11 Associate in Science (AS) degrees and four Associate Degrees for Transfer, as well as certificates of achievement and proficiency in a variety of disciplines, including career technical educational fields. The College offers the majority of its courses at the main campus in the Oakland Hills and has a small educational center in Fruitvale. Courses in English as a Second Language (ESL) are offered at the Fruitvale center. The location of the Fruitvale center allows the college to serve the surrounding community, including the large immigrant population. The college awards college-level credit upon successful completion of course and program requirements that lead to degrees and certificates.

The College offers instruction in face-to-face, hybrid, and completely on-line modes. The College expressed to the Visiting Team a strong commitment to increase its Distance Education (DE) offerings and offers a 17-unit Certificate of Proficiency in Online Teaching in an effort to provide faculty with professional development opportunities to ensure student success and completion in courses taught using the online modality. However, while enrollment in DE classes has increased over the past few years, the College does not track the retention and completion rates of DE and non-DE students.

Merritt College's Landscape Horticulture program is one of the largest programs in California. With 5,000 square feet dedicated to a Lath house and another 5,000 square feet dedicated to computerized green houses and a small library. The program provides students and the community with the opportunity to learn about the different disciplines of horticulture. The College offers three AS degrees, and one AA degree in different areas of Landscape Horticulture. Students can also earn eight different Certificates of Achievement in the program.

The college catalog provides students with catalog rights and includes clear and accurate information about courses and programs, policies and procedures that are useful relevant to their success. Unfortunately, the Team found that students do not have access to previous catalog versions via any online link through the main College website. In addition, while the college website is a useful online tool for students, the college does not make public the California Community Colleges Student Success Scorecard.

Finally, Merritt College utilizes their Curriculum and Instructional Council (CIC), in collaboration with the Council of Instructional Planning and Development at the Peralta District, to ensure that all of its instructional programs and policies meet the mission of the College and uphold its integrity. The College follows an established and rigorous process for curriculum review of new and revised courses and programs.

Findings and Evidence

Merritt College offers high-quality instructional programs in recognized and emerging fields of study that culminate in identified student learning outcomes that lead to degrees, certificates, employment, or transfer to other higher education institutions or programs consistent with its mission. However, instructional programs are not systematically assessed in order to assure currency, improve teaching and learning strategies, and achieve stated student learning outcomes. The provisions of this standard are broadly applicable to all instructional activities offered in the name of the institution. Based on the program descriptions found on the college website and evidence found in Merritt College's Self Evaluation, including interviews with the Vice President of Instruction, and full-time and part-time faculty who teach in the Landscape Horticulture and Allied Health programs, the College identifies and seeks to meet the varied educational needs of its students. For example, the Landscape Horticulture program is an excellent model of an instructional program that serves students and the community by tailoring elements of the program to help students gain employment once they earn a degree or certificate. However, the institution does not make significant use of internal and external data, across all instructional programs, to identify comprehensive student learning needs. As evidenced in CIC minutes and Comprehensive Instructional Program Reviews (CIPR) and Annual Planning Updates (APUs), the College does not use institutional and labor market research data it receives from the District or collects to identify student learning needs that may lead to the creation of new programmatic offerings. (Standard II.A.I, II.A.1.a)

The College offers instruction in face-to-face, hybrid and completely on-line (distance learning) modes. These delivery systems and modes of instruction are compatible with needs of the student population as evidenced by several Instructional Program Review documents. In compliance with 34 C.F.R, Section 602.3, the College has a policy that defines “regular and substantive interaction” for all Distance Education courses. During an interview with the College’s Distance Education Coordinator, the Team verified that faculty must complete and submit to the Curriculum and Instruction Council an addendum that describes how faculty will use the DE delivery mode. This addendum must be submitted prior to final approval of courses to be taught in DE mode. This addendum indicates how faculty intends to conduct regular and effective contact via on-line instruction. However, upon further review of evidence to support claims made in the College’s Self-Evaluation about the ongoing assessment of face-to-face, hybrid, and online courses, the Team found that the College did not conduct ongoing and systemic assessment of student learning outcomes for courses, programs, certificates and degrees. While interviews conducted with the Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Coordinator and members of the Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Committee (SLOAC) were helpful in increasing the Team’s understanding about the current state of SLO assessment at the College, there was not sufficient evidence to show that the College is using evidence collected on student learning to improve college effectiveness. (Standard II.A.1.b, II.A.1.c, II.A.2.d, II.A.2.e, II.A.2.f)

The College offers 20 programs in Career and Technical areas of study. Completion of the courses for any one of the 20 programs will lead to Certificate of Achievement and

Associate degree options. Faculty develop career and technical education programs in consultation with members of CTE Advisory Committees. The Team found that CTE programs at Merritt College are designed to prepare students to meet State and national requirements as program requirements are approved by the college Curriculum and Instruction Council, the District-level Council of Instructional Planning and Development (CIPD), the Board of Trustees, the State Chancellor's office, and the Bay Area Community College Consortium (BACCC). The college has two programs that have external licensure examinations for certification: Nursing and Radiologic Science. The NCLEX-RN test results indicate a pass rate of 95 percent, which is above the state mean, while the Radiologic Science program has averaged an 89.6% pass rate. (Standard II.A.2.b, II.A.5)

However, evidence presented in the College's Self-Evaluation Report does not support the assertion that both course and program learning outcomes have been systematically assessed on a three-year cycle. The November 2014 Merritt College Student Learning Outcomes & Assessment Committee Report showed that only 51.2 percent (191/373) SLOs had been assessed. The Report did not address PLOs or ILOs. In addition, while several members of the SLOAC, College Council, College Educational Master Planning Committee, and the College Budget Committee reported that routine dialogue about learning outcomes assessment is conducted at the department level during department meetings, the College did not provide evidence of meeting minutes or other documents to support their claim. Nevertheless, the Student Learning Outcome Assessment Committee provided evidence related to the use of Task Stream software to document SLO descriptions and assessments. The evidence supported claims made by the SLOAC that a systematic and sustainable process whereby SLOs are developed, assessed, reviewed, and improved on a regular three-year cycle has been developed. (Standard II.A.1.c, II.A.2.e/f)

Merritt College is committed to offering quality instructional courses and programs that include transfer, basic skills, continuing and community education, credit, and non-credit using face-to-face and online modalities. The college has a process in place to assure the quality and improvements of its instructional courses and programs. (Lori, how can this be when the Team found evidence that the College does not conduct regular program reviews and does not use assessment results to improve courses and programs? The narrative in this whole section of the Report should be consistent – the College does not demonstrate commitment or action.)) The first process is the review of all courses through the college's Curriculum and Instructional Council (CIC). The CIC, with representation of members from across the college, including administrators, and a classified Curriculum Specialist, ensures that all programs and courses are in compliance with State Regulations (Title 5 of the California Code of Regulations and the California State Education Code). The course outlines are reviewed by the CIC to verify that hours of instruction, course objectives, and content meet standards in alignment with other institutions of education (both 2 year and 4 year for purposes of articulation). Team members verified the college uses CurricuNet to store course outlines and facilitate the review process. Team members also found that the college ensures that it awards credit according to the Carnegie Unit. The College is in compliance with commonly accepted practices for hours of instruction and content. (Standard II.A.2, II.A.3)

Faculty at Merritt College play a central role in establishing quality instructional courses and programs. Faculty with discipline expertise develop courses and course-level student learning outcomes (SLOs) at the course and program-level for certificates and degrees. In consultation with faculty, Department Chairs, Deans, and CIC, the College uses an established process to review and approve the course and programs in conjunction with the course and program-level outcomes. Discipline faculty review and update course outlines of record, including SLOs, on a three-year cycle. Courses, which are not taught or offered during a five-year period, are considered “inactive.” In order to delete these courses from the course inventory, the CIC chair initiates discussion with Department Chairs to determine whether they need to be made inactive and deleted from the course inventory in CurricuNet. New courses are initiated by discipline faculty and also reviewed by the CIC. The District level Council on Instruction, Planning, and Development (CIPD) meets to discuss quality and consistency in course offerings and identify potential competition of course or program offerings in the District. Any conflicts identified at the District level are negotiated. The Team confirmed that the Course Outlines of Record reflect the appropriate units for each course and what students need to accomplish in order to meet learning outcomes and objectives. The college awards credit according to the Carnegie unit and are in alignment with Title V, California Code of Regulations, Section 55002. Per the college catalog, all students who earn an AA or AS degree must successfully complete a general education course pattern of at least 18 units. (Standards II.A.3, II.A.3.a/b/c)

The Team randomly selected courses in CurricuNet for review and found that the College is in compliance with commonly accepted practices for hours of instruction and content. The Team also confirmed with the Curriculum and Instructional Council Chair that Council members review curriculum in order to ensure course rigor and compliance with established standards as stated in the college’s Program and Course Approval Manual for Faculty and Administrators. Based on review of programs and syllabi, the College does not award credit on clock hours. The College is in compliance with 34 C.F.R. Section 602.

Some evidence reviewed by the Team supported the claim that the College awards certificates based on student achievement of program SLOs and course requirements. The college awards degrees based on student achievement of institutional SLOs, including the major requirements plus general education requirements. The Team confirmed that requirements for degrees and certificates are listed in the general catalog; however, the Team discovered that not all program learning outcomes are included in the current catalog, though the Curriculum Specialist indicated that all program learning outcomes will be included in the college catalog for 2015-2017. The Team also learned that a number of inactive courses remain active in the College’s course management system (CurricuNet) rather than being removed. (Standard II.A.2.i)

Merritt College has begun to explore the process of using research to identify student learning needs and to assess progress towards achieving the identified learning outcomes. In identifying and seeking to meet the varied educational needs of its students, the College reported that it relies upon a variety of systematic, data-driven processes and procedures to assist in meeting the educational needs of its students. Related to these

processes and procedures included, but were not limited to Comprehensive Instructional Program Reviews (CIPRs), Annual Program Updates (APUs), faculty evaluations, as well as staff and student surveys. The Team found, through interviews with members of CIC that the College has processes in place to further explore the process of using research to assess progress towards achieving learning outcomes. The Team also found that delivery systems and modes of instruction are compatible with curriculum objectives as listed in the Course Outline of Record (COR) and meet the needs of the student population. Programs such as Learning Communities or Puente or even Hybrid instruction enable the instructors to utilize instructional methodologies that are varied and responsive to the diverse learning styles of students in these programs. Through interviews with members of the CIC, the Team confirmed that faculty are encouraged to utilize varied teaching methodologies in order to meet course learning outcomes and objectives. (Standards II.A.2.a, II.A.2.d.)

Merritt College has implemented initiatives to achieve its goals in addressing student needs, which include the development of linked courses (Learning Communities) that pair English course content with other disciplines, as well as the development and delivery of hybrid courses. Unfortunately, in this case, the Team did not find evidence to support whether students' varied educational needs have been met as a result of these enterprises. Due to a lack of available evidence, the Team was unable to confirm whether student achievement results were higher in the learning community/hybrid courses than in traditional stand-alone courses. Data related to the assessment of SLOs for linked/hybrid courses was not available for the Team to review prior to and during the site visit. A review of the College's catalog and schedule of classes indicate that the College offers a variety of Ethnic Studies courses. The courses include African American Studies, Asian American Studies, Mexican and Latin-American Studies, Native American Studies, as well as a full-range of ESL and developmental courses. Despite the evidence of the attentiveness to student needs in some programs, the College did not provide evidence to support their assertions that they conduct ongoing and systematic assessment of student progress towards the achievement of SLOs or PLOs. Except for the Landscape Horticulture program, the College did not provide evidence of CTE Advisory Group agendas or minutes. (Standards II.A.2.a, II.A.2.b)

Merritt College reported that high-quality instruction is ensured through effective faculty recruitment efforts, along with adherence to a rigorous probationary and post-tenure evaluation process. The Team reviewed position announcements for full-time tenure track faculty, which showed that position announcements support the recruitment of qualified faculty members. Team members verified that curriculum is reviewed on a three-year cycle and Course Outlines of Record include appropriate, breadth, depth and rigor for all college level courses. The approved 2014-2015 *Faculty Handbook* identifies criteria to evaluate effective teaching and learning. The College also provides two three-unit courses in online teaching strategies for all faculty who teach online. The Team confirmed that the college is committed to nurturing the diverse needs of its students. In interviews with the Professional Development Committee, the Team confirmed that the college actively supports faculty and staff development activities related to various strategies that enhance teaching and learning at Merritt College. (Standards II.A.2.d, II.A.2.c)

Through interviews with faculty and administrators, the Team found that the College's overall Program Review process for instructional programs lacks cyclic consistency and the necessary assessments required to foster continuous improvements in student learning. While evidence exists that Instructional Program Review is being conducted, in some courses and programs, an on-going systematic review of the relevance, appropriateness, achievement of student learning outcomes (SLOs), currency, and future needs and plans is not occurring throughout the college. Merritt College provided limited evidence that engagement in ongoing, systematic evaluation and integrated planning to ensure the currency and measurement of student learning outcomes is taking place. In addition, interviews with faculty and staff indicate that dialogue is occurring about the processes; however, the College does not engage in these processes consistently. While student learning outcomes (SLOs) have been developed at the course, program, and institutional levels and are included in the Instructional Program Review process, in some areas, the College has just begun to identify, measure, and collect information on several Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs) which they discussed at their Flex day in fall 2014. Interviews with SLOAC committee members and lack of complete documentation and evidence in their Annual Program Updates (APUs) indicate that the college needs to document their dialogues and discussions about how programs can be improved based on assessment results. While the Chair of the SLOAC shared progress on completed course level assessments with Department Chairs, the assessment results need to be made available to other constituents across the campus. (Standards II.A.2.f, II.A.2.e) The Team found that Merritt College does use departmental and program examinations to measure student learning in several programs at the college. The college catalog identifies programs and departments where students can complete certain classes through Credit by Exam. The College also uses COMPASS as its validated testing instrument to assess student preparedness in Mathematics, English as a Second Language, and English. (Standard II.A.2.g)

The College's general education student learning outcomes are synonymous with their six institutional learning outcomes (ILOs) in the areas of communication, critical thinking, quantitative reasoning, cultural awareness, civic engagement and ethics and information literacy. Based on degree program requirements, as found in the general catalog, and interviews with the Curriculum and Instructional Council Chair (CIC), students are required to achieve institutional student learning outcomes to earn a degree and achieve program student learning outcomes for a certificate. For students who complete the Merritt College general education pattern, there is an additional requirement for information literacy and either an American Cultures or Ethnic Studies course. These additional GE requirements are in alignment with the College's core values and institutional learning outcomes. (Standards II.A.3, II.A.3.a/b/c)

Based on a review of documents, including the Program and Course Approval Handbook, and an interview with the CIC chair, the Team verified that the Curriculum Committee, which consists of faculty and administrator representation from across the campus, approves GE courses. The Team found that the Curriculum Committee reviews Course Outlines of Record in light of the GE criteria and ensures that courses, which are approved in the GE areas, meet the appropriate criteria based on Student Learning

Outcomes, objectives, topics and scope and methods of instruction and evaluation. (Standards II.A.3, II.A.3.a/b/c)

Based on a review of the catalog, and other documents related to the monitoring and development of the curriculum, the College has basic core GE requirements related to oral and written communication skills, scientific reasoning, quantitative reasoning, and critical thinking. The Team confirmed that students, who fulfill General Education requirements through meeting the specific Merritt College GE requirements, would complete an additional information literacy requirement and an American Cultures or Ethnic Studies course requirement. (Standards II.A.3, II.A.3.a/b/c)

The Team found that the College has a review process in place to ensure that course outcomes and objectives meet the general education criteria and learning outcomes in order to be included in the college's general education pattern. The Team also verified that all programs offered at the college include a major or concentrate in at least one area of focused study or interdisciplinary core, and students are required to follow the requirements of this area as outlined in the college catalog. Merritt College offers Associate in Arts and Associate in Science degrees that have an established disciplinary core with a minimum of 18 units in a major or area of emphasis. The College's career technical education programs also meet employment and licensure certifications. Based on a team interview with the Vice President of Instruction and members of CIC, the Team confirmed that the college relies on and follows its processes stated in the PCCD Program and Course Approval Handbook, and the Manual for Faculty and Administrators as to how certificate and degree programs (both transfer and career technical) are developed. The Team reviewed documents that explained how the college is using its Curriculum and Instruction Council plus the District-level Council of Instructional Planning and Development as part of its course and program development review and approval process. (Standard II.A.4)

The Team verified that the College Catalog is published in print and online and contains detailed information on educational programs, courses and transfer credit policies, including IGETC and CSUGE. The College Catalog also includes a description of degrees and certificates in terms of purpose, content, course requirements. However, only four of the programs had program level student learning outcomes included. Based on interviews with faculty from the Landscape Horticulture, the Team found that faculty are expected to include student learning outcomes on their syllabi as a recommended practice. Through examination of a random sample of course syllabi found did have course SLOs listed. Additionally, through a sampling of conversations with students, the Team did verify that students are receiving a course syllabus in each class and that learning outcomes are evident and consistent with those found on the approved Course Outline of Record in CurricuNet. (II.A.6, II.A.6.a)

As discovered through discussions with the CIC members and Academic Senate President, the college cites program elimination as rarely occurring. The college has a Program Deactivation/Discontinuance policy in place, which was agreed upon by the Academic Senate and Administration, and approved by College Council in December 2012. This process ensures that stakeholders from across the college participate in

deliberations about program discontinuance; the policy also sets criteria that rely on the use of qualitative and quantitative data to guide findings. In addition, the policy includes a timeline for decision-making about program discontinuance to minimize any disruption to students who may need to complete program requirements. (Standard II.A.6.b)

The Team verified with CIC members that changes in a program require Curriculum Committee approval. As cited in the catalog, the College allows students to retain catalog rights that were in effect at time of original enrollment. The College produces a catalog bi-annually, and a schedule of classes up to three times per year. The Team verified that these documents are available in print as well as online. The Team found that these publications are clear and well designed to provide students with information on the colleges programs and courses. The College also communicates key information through electronic mail and printed mediums via the President's Office. The Team verified that Board policies include information about Associate Degrees for Transfer. On the other hand, while the Team found that the college appeared to review institutional policies, procedures, and publications to assure integrity in all representations about its mission, programs, and services, there was a lack of evidence to determine with what regularity this information is reviewed so that the College Mission is central to the review of process to develop these important documents. (Standards II.A.6.b, II.A.6.c)

Merritt College endeavors to ensure academic integrity and responsibility through a variety of policies developed by the Board of Trustees, including Board Policy 4230 *Grading and Academic Record Symbols* and Board Policy 4030 on *Academic Freedom*, which was most recently updated in December 2012. Academic Freedom is described in the District's Collective Bargaining Agreement with faculty. The Team verified that policies are published in print and posted on the web via the District website. Academic dishonesty, as it relates to plagiarism, is addressed in the college catalog under Student Code of Conduct. Faculty are encouraged to cite and explain Academic Freedom, along with the Student Code of Conduct and consequences of plagiarism in their syllabi by following the Merritt College Standardized Course Syllabus Template. The Team verified through a review of sample course syllabi, the college catalog, and the class schedule, that these policies are clearly articulated. (Standard II.A., II.A.7.a)

As noted above, academic dishonesty as it relates to plagiarism is addressed in the College Catalog under the category of Student Code of Conduct. The College's Self-Evaluation states that this information is also published in the Student Handbook. However, when the Team interviewed the Vice President of Student Services, he indicated that the updated Student Handbook has not yet been completed. The Team also found that the college has a code of conduct for staff, faculty, Board members and administrators as delineated in Board Policy 2715 *Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice*, Board Policy 5500 *Student Standards of Conduct*, Board Policy 7380 *Ethics, Civility, and Mutual Respect*. These policies were all reviewed and approved by the board in fall 2012 and early 2013 respectively. Policies are found on the District's website via a link on the college's website. (Standard II.A.7.b, II.A.7.c)

Standard II.A.8 is not applicable. The College does not offer curricula in foreign locations to students other than U.S. nationals. (Standard II.A.8)

Conclusion

Merritt College provides instructional programs in recognized and emerging fields of study. The College uses face-to-face, hybrid and completely online delivery systems. The College is committed to serving a diverse student and community population, and interviews with community members indicate that the College is held in high regard. Faculty members of the Curriculum and Instruction Council, College Educational Master Planning Committee, College Council, Merritt Technology Committee and SLOAC expressed their passion for dialogue about student learning. Many classified staff members also expressed their long-standing commitment to the College based on their affiliation as former students or graduates of Merritt College. Several staff members completed requirements for transfer, and eventually earned four-year degrees, then returned to the college to serve students and the community. Team members heard these testimonies at both of the College forums. The Team noticed a strong commitment of faculty and staff to ensure student access to the College's programs, degrees, certificates and courses.

Although the Team found the faculty and staff to be strongly committed to ensuring student access to and completion of the College's programs, degrees, and certificates, the Team could not verify that the college meets several areas of Standard II.A. The Team's thorough review of Merritt's Self-Evaluation Report found a lack of sufficient evidence to support their claims that they met all areas of Standard II. While the Team found some evidence that SLO's for courses, programs, certificates, and degrees were identified, review and assessment of student achievement of the outcomes, and use of the assessment results to make improvements was not consistent or cyclical throughout the campus. In addition, the College could provide evidence that program reviews are conducted for all programs on a regular schedule. Evidence that the College assures the quality and improvement of *all* instructional courses and programs offered was not located for *all* instructional courses and programs (Standard II.A.1.c, II.A.2)

Therefore, the College does not meet this standard.

Recommendations

See College Recommendations 3, 4, and 5

College Recommendation 6: In order to meet the Standards, the Team recommends that the College accelerate the identification and documentation of student learning outcomes for all courses, programs certificates, and degrees; assess student attainment of those outcomes to ensure that all of its instructional courses and programs are of high quality and to make improvements. (1.B.1, 1.B.3, 1.B.5, 1.B.6, IIA.2, IIA,2a, II.A.2b, IIA.2c, IIA.2e, IIA.2f)

Standard II – Student Learning Programs and Services

Standard IIB-Student Support Services

General Observations

Merritt Community College offers an extensive range of student support services, including admissions; academic counseling and advising; assessment services; associated students government; student activities; student clubs and organizations; athletics; children's center; Cooperative Agencies Resources for Education (CARE); Learning Opportunity Program; Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS); Disability Services Program (DSP); Financial Aid; Financial Opportunity Center (FOC); Health Center; MerrittWorks (CalWORKs); Orientation; Puente; Transfer Center; and Veterans Center. Most of the aforementioned programs are open to all students providing general support while a number of the programs, e.g., DSP and EOPS, are open to students that meet specific regulations.

Findings and Evidence

PCCD Board Policy 5052 clearly outlines the guidelines for admission, stating the college shall be fully open to enrollment and participation by any person, which is also reflected in the College's mission statement. The College states that outreach and recruitment to high school students, distance education learners, transfer-bound students and those retooling for the job market are made available through the Merritt College website and onsite presentations. Based on an interview with the vice president of student services and the evidence provided in the Self-Evaluation Report, the Team found that Merritt College does not address outreach in the typical sense of visiting high schools and community events off campus. (Standard II.B.)

Merritt College states that it conducts self-evaluations in the form of comprehensive program reviews every three years to meet the needs of an evolving student population within student support services. The College states that the self-evaluation process is conducted by assessing Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) and other qualitative research. While SLOs do exist in all student support areas, assessment of the SLOs is limited to Counseling, CalWORKs, Assessment, and Disabled Student Programs and Services (DSPS) in the form of an Annual Program Updates (APUs). There is no evidence at this time to support the claim that comprehensive program reviews or annual program updates (APU) exist in all student services areas. Based on the results of a survey administered to day and night students in 2013, as well as interviews with the Financial Aid supervisor and Merritt College Library (MCL) faculty and staff, services in Financial Aid, Counseling, Admissions and Records, Bookstore, Library, and Learning Center were improved. Hours were increased to allow students more access to the service areas and workshops were implemented to address financial aid concerns. Interviews with the Associated Students of Merritt College (ASMC), PUENTE Club, and random students around campus indicated that Merritt College students' experiences are adequately supported, regardless of location. However, the Team found that international students who are enrolled at the college appear to lack student support services on campus; in fact, students are required to visit the District office for visa services since the

International Student Program is coordinated and centralized at the District. (Standard II. B.1)

To address an increasing online student population, Merritt College instituted additional online services to provide student support services regardless of location. Admissions and Records offer in-person and online registration. EOPS students are able to check their EOPS status online and make appointments to see their EOPS counselor. E-Counseling allows online students the option to email a counselor for guidance regarding questions or concerns. E-Counseling service allows for only basic education counseling and advising. Students are able to use this service to clear pre-requisites. Distance education students are able to consult with a counselor when they are unable to meet face-to-face. The e-Counselor does not conduct degree audits or create student education plans. The Financial Aid office increased access for distance education students that have applied for financial aid, allowing students to check their status through their college portal. Financial Aid also offers additional student support services via email and over the phone. DSPS provides distance education students access to Kurzweil screen reading software either by CD or downloading the software onto the student's computer. DSPS counselors provide extensive services to students online, primarily via email and telephone.

Merritt College's Self-Evaluation Report referred to a Fruitvale Education Center, an educational center that offers classes off-site with limited student support services. An interview with the interim division dean revealed that the Fruitvale location is not a really a "Center," since it offers a very limited number of ESL classes, typically four per semester. Due to its limited course offering, the College has changed the name to Merritt College@Fruitvale.

Based on the College's Self-Evaluation Report and interviews conducted during the visit, the College is reportedly in the process of hiring two additional counselors to increase the level of counseling support for students. The positions have not been advertised to date.

Merritt College publishes and makes available to students a college catalog that contains current and accurate information about college programs, services, policies, and procedures. The current catalog covers the 2013-2015 academic years. The catalog is offered to students as hard copy for \$5.00 and it is available online free of charge. (Standard IIB.2) The college catalog contains required general information such as the College's name, location, telephone number, mission, course, programs, degree offering, academic calendar, program length, academic freedom statement, financial aid information, learning resources, names, and degrees of administrators and faculty as well as the names of governing board members. (IIB.2.a) Major policies affecting students can also be found in the catalog, including academic regulations, nondiscrimination, acceptance of transfer credit, grievance and complaint procedures, sexual harassment policies, refund policies and fees. (Standard II.B.2.c) While the Team found that the Merritt College catalog is comprehensive and informative, it does not inform students of the locations or publications where additional policies may be found. (Standard II.B.2.d)

Merritt College administered the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfactory Inventory in both 2009 and 2013 to research and identify the learning support needs of students, with the goal of providing the appropriate services and programs. Nearly 500 students completed the survey. The results indicated that students had positive feedback regarding the campus, however, students did have concerns. The concerns expressed by the students were accessibility to the library, quantity of library resources, timeliness of financial aid, and course registration process. Based on the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfactory Inventory feedback, the College extended the hours of the library. The College's Self-Evaluation Report indicated that the College would hire a fulltime researcher in 2015-2016 to assist with program and institutional effectiveness. The College stated that they are currently in the process of going out for the new position. (Standard II.B.3)

The College states that it assures equitable access to all of its students by providing appropriate, comprehensive, and reliable services to students regardless of location. The College recently implemented an Ambassadors program to assist students in accessing student support services. Based on student interviews conducted during the visit, the ASMC, PUENTE and random students spoke highly of the Ambassador's program. From their perspective, the program plays a critical role in helping new students gain a better understanding of the services available to them at the college. Merritt College @ Fruitvale offers English and Spanish counseling, as well as assistance with registration. Merritt College @ Fruitvale relies heavily on online services to meet their student support service needs. A student survey template was provided in English and Spanish, however, the results were not provided. Merritt College provides a wide-range of student support services and is increasing efforts to reach out to the Fruitvale location and distance education students to create a supportive learning environment. The Team encourages the college to continue its efforts aimed at increasing online student support services for all students. (II.B.3.a)

Merritt College provides an environment that encourages personal and civic responsibility with the leadership of Associated Students of Merritt College (ASMC), which represents all students. There are 12 clubs on campus representing many interests. The clubs sponsors events, activities, scholarships, and diverse programs. There are a host of cultural activities that ASMC supports, such as Chinese New Year, Cinco de Mayo, Black History Month, and Women's History Month. It appears that ASMC is cultural engaged with the community they serve. (Standard II.B.3.b and d.)

The College offers counseling/academic advising in the following areas: General Counseling, DSPS, EOPS/CARE Counseling, CalWORKs, Transfer Center, and the First Year Experience. Annual programs reviews were provided as evidence of a program evaluation for Counseling, CalWORKs, and Assessment. The College evaluates the counseling/academic advising program to support student development and success, as well as to prepare faculty and other personnel responsible for advising. The Team found that while Counseling does in fact systematically complete annual program reviews, a comprehensive review was not found. (Standard II.B.3.c) The Team did not find evidence of comprehensive program reviews for all student services areas.

The College is commended for excelling in designing and maintaining appropriate programs, practices, and services that support and enhance student understanding and appreciation of diversity. ASMC leaders on campus offer a wide variety of multicultural events that positively influence students, faculty, and staff. In the month of February, the ASMC and African American Studies offered a series of programs in honor of Black History month. In addition, ASMC sponsors events throughout the year to commemorate the contributions of individuals who have made significant contributions in advancing diversity, or simply to celebrate various cultural traditions, for example: Bobby Seale, Day of the Dead, Women's History month, and Malcolm X. There appears to be a strong social justice movement deeply rooted in the history of Merritt College. The College further enhances student understanding with PUENTE Club, Centro Latino, Asian Cultural Club, and Black Student Union. In addition, Merritt College requires an ethnic diversity course for a graduation requirement. Cultural activities take place campus-wide throughout the year. (Standard II.B.3.d)

Merritt College assesses students for placement in English, English as a Second Language and mathematics using Compass, which was approved by the Chancellors' Office. The College states that all approved assessments must be validated by the Chancellor's Office with ample evidence of objectivity and absent of bias. However, the ESL writing expired July 1, 2012. The ESL placement is now on a probation approval by the Chancellor's office granted through 3/1/16.

PCCD Education Service's Office of Institutional Research presented English Test Validity Data results on February 12, 2012. The presentations, which are included as evidence, confirmed the validity of the assessment instruments. Assessed results were slightly different from non-assessed pre-requisite method. Students assessed into English 1 perform slightly better than non-assessed students.

The Math Test Validity Data confirmed that the assessment is valid, meaning it measure what it has intended to measure. The analysis supported Compass validity, finding, on average, as grades increase, so do compass scores. When test scores improve, staff found that the predicated chance of success increases. Staff also found that students who take Compass perform better than those who do not take Compass in higher subtest and worse in the lowest subtest for both grade and course success. (Standard II.B.3.e)

Merritt College has policies in place for the safe keeping of records with three classification, Class 1, Class 2, and Class 3. Class 1 records must be kept permanently, such as annual reports, official actions, employee records, and student records. Class 2 records are optional which, by law, are not required to be kept permanently. Class 2 records are disposable, however, they must be kept at for least three years. Currently, student files are stored in the District Admissions and Records storage room in downtown Oakland in a cement block room with fire doors. There is a system in place to organize the records. The student records are alphabetized by semester, campus, and instructor. This includes, but is not limited to, drop forms, census, attendance, grade rosters, and incomplete forms and record correction forms. As part of the record keeping process, these records are scanned and archived using the Electronic Content Management system. (Standard II.B.3.f)

Data Protection Services back up electronic student files digitally every night in PeopleSoft in the form of a cloud. Financial Aid student data files are kept in IBM Mainframe and are processed on tape nightly. The tapes are processed and stored off campus the next day. A private data storage company in Livermore California stores all records prior to 2000. Merritt College publishes and follows established policies for the release of student records. (Standard II.B.3.f)

While the college asserts in its self-evaluation that it has evaluated student support services to assure adequacy in meeting identified student needs, evidence was not provided for all areas within student support services to validate this claim. The College does not systematically assess student support services SLO in all areas. (Standard II.B.4)

Conclusion

Merritt College admits diverse students who are able to benefit from the college mission. The College provides a wide-range of student support services making efforts to reach out to the Fruitvale location and distance education students to create a supportive learning environment. Efforts to increase online services should continue. Overall, students believe that they are getting their student support services needs met through in person and online services.

The College has evidence that it surveyed students using the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfactory Inventory and analyzed the data, consequently making changes to better meet student needs. Office hours for specific student support programs were changed to provide greater access for students. The Financial Aid office responded to identified student needs by offering additional workshops, so that students could gain a better understanding of loan default. It appears that the College identified student issues and has begun correcting the issues in student support services. Interviews with students confirmed this effort based on their experiences. (Standard II.B.1; BII. II.B.3.a)

Merritt College should be proud of the environment that the College has created in encouraging personal and civic responsibility with ASMC. The diverse activities created by ASMC and others on campus have led to a spirit of inclusivity. The College is to be commended for excelling in designing and maintaining appropriate programs, practices, and services that support and enhance students' understanding and appreciation of diversity, as validated by many interviews with students. (Standard II.B.3.d, II.B.3.b/d.)

Merritt College asserts that self-evaluations are conducted in the form of comprehensive program reviews every three years to meet the need of an evolving student population within student support services. While the College provides numerous surveys as evidence that student learning support needs are addressed, there is a lack of evidence of analysis of SLOs in a systematic way in all areas within student support services which would lead to institutional improvement. Annual program reviews were found in Counseling, Assessment, MerrittWorks, and DSPS. (II.B.4)

The Team found that while there are some notable achievements in this section, in particular the commendation related to diversity, the College does not meet this Standard overall.

Recommendations

See College Recommendations 3, 4, and 5

Standard II – Student Learning Programs and Services
Standard IIC – Library and Learning Support Services

General Observations

Merritt College provides library and learning support services to students. The mission of the Merritt College Library (MCL) is to ‘support the institutional goals and objectives of the College by providing access to relevant information resources and technologies as well as information literacy instruction to the diverse College community.’ For much of the past five years, the MCL and learning center were housed in temporary facilities while the second and third floors of the ‘L’ Building were being remodeled. Two full-time and six part-time librarians and three full-time and one part-time library technicians currently staff the MCL.

Findings and Evidence

The institution supports the quality of its instructional programs by providing MCL and other learning support services. The MCL offers instructional lectures in response to requests from classroom faculty to support student learning. The Learning Center provides a variety of learning support services including tutoring, open computer labs, study skills and success workshops and open entry/open exit supplemental instruction courses in Learning Resources and English are all in a face-to-face format on the Merritt College campus. The quantity of the collection and learning resource in the MCL was not increased for five years while the library was in the swing space due to limited storage. Given the level of administrative support for the MCL, increases in funding and services are anticipated to better serve students. (Standard II.C.1)

Relying on appropriate expertise of faculty, including librarians and learning support staff, the Self-Evaluation Report states that recommendations from both faculty and staff led to the provision of 19 computers in the reference area. Faculty and staff both stated involvement in the decision making process of the new computers and maintaining other educational equipment and materials to support student learning. In general, interviews with MCL faculty and staff, as well as Learning Center faculty and staff confirm their involvement in the decision making process in their areas. (Standard II.C.1.a)

The College provides ongoing instruction for users of the MCL and other learning support services so that students are able to develop skills in information competency. In addition, the MCL provides instructional lectures upon request from faculty. The Learning Center offers LRNRE 501 for students, which is a drop-in tutoring to improve competency. The Learning Center is staffed by both instructional faculty, classified staff, and 22 trained peer tutors. Additionally, faculty members serve their office hours in the Learning Center, which leads to a greater amount of student support. Beginning in spring 2015, MCL is offering a new course in research skills (LIS 85). (Standard II.C.1.b)

Merritt College provides students and personnel responsible for learning programs and services adequate access to the MCL and other support services, regardless of their location. The MCL and Learning Center are open Monday through Friday and closed on

weekends. The hours of these student support services were increased due to a survey conducted in 2014, which showed the need for greater access to MCL and Learning Center during evening hours. Additional staff support for the MCL is a long-standing request on unit plans, along with expanding collections, and funding. Based on interviews with the dean of the area, faculty, and staff, a high level of support from current administration is noticeable; however, the request for a librarian did not get funded. Therefore, MCL had to rely on additional adjuncts. Interviews also revealed that funding has increased slightly. The Learning Center relied heavily on a grant that recently expired, causing some concern regarding the Learning Center's continued capacity to serve students. Equity funds were identified for the Learning Center to offset the expiration of the grant funds. (Standard II.C.1.c)

The MCL has web based resources allowing remote access. MCL uses Web Pac, an online union book catalog, full text journal database, and other online scholarly material.

While recent off-campus access to library resources via WebPac Pro and the Peralta CCD Collaborative Library Catalog has improved access for distance education students, Learning Center services are only available on campus. Based on an interview with faculty and staff, there is dialogue to increase online services in the Learning Center, which the Team recommends. (Standard II.C.1.c)

The College provides effective maintenance and security for library and learning support using Innovative Interface Millennium allowing staff to utilize barcodes for collections. Security gates in the remodeled MCL also add to the level of security for the library resources. The District implemented an authentication process for all students, faculty, and staff, which improved cyber security. (Standard II.C.1.d)

Access to library resources in the California State University and University of California system is available, but the College does not rely on these external resources for essential library services and resources. (Standard II.C.1.e)

The College asserts that it evaluates student learning programs and services to assure adequacy in meeting identified student needs. While annual program reviews exist, comprehensive program reviews were not available to support this claim for the MCL. The College does not systematically assess student learning programs and services within a comprehensive three year program review. The Team reviewed evidence for Program Reviews for both MCL and the Learning Center. The Learning Center had a Program Review that was old. MCL's program review was not dated or signed, as such the Team is unable to confirm if this document has been validated. (Standard II.C.2)

Conclusion

MCL and Learning Center support services appear to be adequate to support the quality of the instructional programs at the College. Because there are no longer space issues with the remodel and move, the faculty, staff, and administrator in the area are confident that there will be additional resources to meet the needs of students. Additional staff support for the MCL is a long-standing request, and, along with expanding collections,

and funding, is recognized by the College as a serious need as identified in an actionable improvement plan. (II.C.1)

Faculty and staff involvement in the selection of library support materials and equipment is clear from the interviews. Faculty and staff involvement in the Learning Center appear to be robust when selecting educational equipment and materials to support student learning. (II.C.1.a)

The library and learning center provide adequate maintenance and security for resources and services provided. Although Merritt College does rely on a collaborative agreement between all of the Colleges in the Peralta Community College District for shared library resources, no formal agreement exists and since the District owns all library resources, no agreement is needed. Access to library resources in the California State University and University of California system is available, but the College does not rely on these external resources for essential library services and resources. (II.C.1.d) (II.C.1.e)

The Team reviewed evidence for program reviews for both the MCL and the Learning Center. The MCL Program Review was not dated or signed, as such the Team could not conclude if this document has been validated. Examples of the evaluation of library services include blank templates of assessments and surveys as well as a recently completed assessment of a student survey of library use (2014). None of these surveys or assessments appear to address student use of online library resources. There is no evidence of ongoing evaluations of the library outside of the program review process. A review of the 2012 Program Review and the 2013 Annual Program Update (APU) for the learning center shows the use of both quantitative and qualitative assessments.

The College does not meet this standard.

Recommendations

See College Recommendations 3 and 4

Standard III – Resources
Standard IIIA - Human Resources

General Observations

Merritt College is one of four colleges within the Peralta Community College District (PCCD). Prioritization and budgeting for hiring new faculty and staff is made at the District level for all colleges. The District human resources department performs the primary duties for recruitment of all district employees. The District and the College have established policies and procedures relevant to employee recruitment, selection and evaluation. The District and College have policies and practices in place to assure that qualified personnel are hired to support learning programs and to improve institutional effectiveness.

For the past few years, the adequacy of personnel to support college programs, services, and mission has been in question. The staffing level at the College has decreased significantly, due in large part to drastic reductions in funding from the state and other funding sources, as well as the exceptionally high turnover of personnel in key administrative positions. Recent staff hiring, including the recent appointments of two vice presidents, has improved the human resources situation at the college and has provided some stability and improved morale overall. Nonetheless, vacancies and turnover in college staffing persist. The general sense expressed by students and college personnel is that the faculty and staff are highly qualified and passionate about teaching and serving students. They are deeply committed to the college and its mission.

The College relies upon the District Human Resources Department to initiate all performance evaluations. The College is currently assessing the effectiveness of its processes and procedures for evaluating personnel systematically and at stated intervals. Deficiencies remain in the currency and thoroughness of human resources practices and procedures.

Findings and Evidence

The College satisfactorily demonstrates the processes by which it employs qualified faculty, classified staff, and managers. These processes comply with Administrative Procedures and Board Policies 7100, 7120, 7250 7260, 7310, and 7380 as well as general guidelines set forth by the state and statewide Academic Senate. All criteria, qualifications, and procedures for recruiting are outlined in the District's Human Resources policy manual, and other operating procedures. These processes and procedures are followed appropriately. The cited documents herein are available to the public through the college and district websites. The District continues to utilize publically posted job descriptions and job announcements (both web-based and in hardcopy format) for all open positions. For staff and administrative positions, these announcements are based on defined job descriptions inclusive of qualifications, and a list of representative duties to be performed. Human Resources (HR) staff verifies that applicants' meet the required minimum qualifications during the initial screening stage of the hiring process, before any offer of employment is made to a candidate. The Team

reviewed faculty job announcements and interviewed a cross-section of employees who routinely serve on hiring committees. Though the College has provided no documented evidence that experience in creating and assessing SLOs, for the purpose of improving student learning, is a *desired skill* for any faculty candidate, it is a strong factor by committee members in their evaluation of any applicant's qualifications. The criteria, qualifications, and procedures for selection of personnel are clear and publicly available and faculty has a significant role in the selection of new faculty. Bargaining unit agreements and HR policy ensure that faculty members serve on all hiring committees and provide a significant role in selection of all new faculty members. Faculty expertise in Distance Education (DE) instruction is aligned with faculty qualifications in each discipline. (Standard IIIA.1.a)

According to the College's Self-Evaluation Report, the departments and programs are required to submit an Annual Program Review Update (APU) and a Comprehensive Program Review (CPR), in accordance with established timelines. These program review documents are supposed to function as the basis for resource requests and budgetary allocations. The Team found by reviewing documents and interviewing constituents that the APU process is currently being followed, however, the College is unable to provide documentation of a completed Comprehensive Non-Instructional Program Review (CNIPR) in the Human Resources area. The Team noted that there does not seem to be a clearly identified integrated planning process between the College and the District for allocating funds to support resource allocation and prioritization decisions. The College's prioritization list is used to inform the District's annual budgetary process included in the Planning and Budgeting Integration Model (PBIM). (III.A.6)

Written criteria have been established for evaluating all personnel, including performance of assigned duties and participation in institutional responsibilities and other activities appropriate to their expertise. Evaluation procedures and timelines for full-time (FT) faculty, part-time (PT) faculty and classified staff are well documented in each group's bargaining unit contracts. Evaluation processes for administrative personnel are outlined in the College's Management Performance Evaluation Handbook. The evaluation processes are designed to focus on assessing effectiveness of personnel and encourage personal improvement. Administrators are evaluated on an established cycle, pursuant to the management evaluation procedures. For all District employees of all classifications, the District Human Resources Department coordinates each evaluation. Though the employee evaluation process is well documented, the College was unable to provide quantitative evidence to demonstrate that employee performance evaluations were being completed on a timely basis. Results from a variety of college personnel indicate that performance evaluations were not being completed in a timely manner. The 2009 Visiting Team's recommendation concerning timely employee evaluations continues to be problematic for this college.

The Team reviewed bargaining unit contracts for faculty and staff, the Administrator's Evaluation manual, and considered results from interviews with members of the College; and concluded that faculty and staff are evaluated on their effectiveness in producing and assessing student learning outcomes, as a component of their evaluation. (Standard III.A.1.c)

Written codes of professional ethics and conduct for employees are clearly in evidence in Board Policy 7380 and Administrative Procedure 7380. Documented Ethics Codes are in evidence for faculty, staff and students. Students are made aware of the Student Code of Ethics during the application process to attend Merritt College. Students are provided a copy of the Student Code of Conduct upon submitting their application to attend PCCD and are asked to verify they understand its contents. Additionally, the Student Code of Conduct is included in the college catalog and publically available on the District and college website. (Standard III.A.1.d)

In its Self-Evaluation Report, the College notes that in 2014, staffing levels of faculty (FT and PT) were sufficient to support programs and services. However, numerous college personnel expressed concern that there is not sufficient full-time faculty or classified staff to serve on screening committees, tenure review committees, and other operational and participatory governance committees. (III.A.2) Evidence does not demonstrate a clear link between the assessment of progress toward achieving institution-set goals and the resource allocation process for the college. The College was unable to provide evidence that their efforts, as outlined in the PCCD 2012 Follow-up Report to ACCJC, produced the desired outcomes in addressing the shortage in staffing. (Standard III.A.2)

The College follows the State Chancellor's guidelines for considering requests for equivalencies for all subject-matter positions. The College only accepts degrees from institutions that are accredited by recognized United States accrediting agencies, or foreign country degrees that have been evaluated by established reviewing organizations. Selection committees for administrators have representatives from the different college constituencies. Committees for hiring new classified staff members typically include the supervisor of the area doing the hiring, a faculty member, and one to two classified employees. Based on a review of documents and interviews with college personnel, the Team believes that the college systematically and on stated intervals, reviews and revises personnel policies and procedures in support of stated college goals and mission. Board policies and college policies and practices ensure consistent administration of all personnel procedures. (Standard III.A.3)

Upon reviewing college documents and results of interviews with staff, and key committee minutes, the Team concluded that the College demonstrates a strong understanding and commitment regarding issues of equality and diversity, and assesses its record in equity and diversity on a timely schedule. Ongoing Flex presentations and staff development activities that focus on issues of equality and diversity demonstrate the College's commitment to providing and maintaining an atmosphere in support for issues of equality and diversity.

College policies include a published Equal Employment Policy. As well, bargaining unit agreements include criteria for fair employment practices and procedures and require that the college follow these policies and procedures. (Standard III.A.3.a)

Personnel and payroll records are kept in fireproof cabinets located in secure areas accessible by authorized employees only. The District and the College maintain processes and procedures to ensure that all electronic databases are backed up and maintained in

secure off-site location(s). In accordance with law, a published policy allowing employees to view their employee files is established and followed, and requests are handled in a timely manner. (Standard III.A.3.b)

The College currently has in place a process that provides diversity training for all personnel who serve on hiring committees. A component of this training pertains to the diversity for its workforce as well as district policies and procedures in promoting a fair and diverse workplace. The Team reviewed documents and interviewed students, faculty, staff and administrators and found that the District and the College publish policies and supporting documents regarding equity and diversity, which is available to the general public through the College and District websites. The College provides diversity and equity awareness activities for staff and students throughout the academic year. Evidence of this training was consistently included in the Flex schedules. (Standard III.A.4, III.A.4.a)

To monitor its record in employment equity and diversity, the College ensures that open positions are posted to diversity recruitment sites. Over the past six years, the College has made a concerted effort in ensuring that the employee demographics were more in line with student demographics. Review of the employee demographic data shows the current employee/student body representation ratio to be relatively balanced. This is a commendable achievement. (Standard III.A.4.b)

Relying on multiple sources (i. e., College's Self-Evaluation Report, various committee minutes, and interviews with a variety of stakeholders), the Team is confident that employees of the college are treated with integrity. Board policies, administrative procedures, and collective bargaining agreements document procedures for resolving contractual issues, such as grievances, in a fair and equitable manner. The Student Grievance process is published on the college website as well as in a variety of college documents. In conversations with faculty, staff, and administrators, it was repeatedly noted that the college leadership structure and campus culture are productive, open, and honest. Personnel were enthusiastic about their employment at the college, suggesting that they are treated with integrity and respect. (Standard III.A.4.c)

The Team found that the College provides personnel with opportunities for continued professional development. In the past, these opportunities occurred principally through Flex Day activities, which are held at the beginning of each primary semester. While faculty training is the most robust, the Professional Development Committee continues to coordinate training opportunities at the District level with those at the college level. Classified staff members are eligible for a college-funded stipend of \$800 annually to support the participation of any classified member to professional development workshops offered by third-party vendors off campus. According to various classified staff employees at the college, a great number of staff members have used this stipend annually. Professional development activities are offered in a variety of modalities to support the diverse needs of faculty and staff, and to allow for participation across all campus locations. Professional development activities at the college have become a means by which the College is developing learning outcomes and assessments related to improvement of student learning. (Standard III.A.5, III.A.5.a, III.A.5.b)

The number of classified and full-time contract faculty has decreased since the last accreditation cycle of assessment. Due to 2008 state budget reductions, the College, in their Self Evaluation states that they continue to evaluate the replacement of every vacant position, making strategic new hiring decisions based on student demand and operational effectiveness. As noted above in Standard III.A.2, the College was not able to provide evidence that assessment of this process was being consistently evaluated.

The APU data is used, in part, to identify human resources priorities. In the current budget environment, the human resources planning process from the college level seems to be disconnected from the prioritization and budgeting processes at the District level. The College prioritization needs are incorporated into the District's planning and budgeting process for the coming year. The final decision allowing personnel needs to be met are determined at the District level with input from the College President. When positions are allocated, the District Human Resources Department coordinates the on-boarding processes for any new hires. (Standard III.A.6)

Conclusions

Evidence supports the College's assertion that the Annual Program Update (APU) process is broad-based and provides ample opportunity for input by appropriate constituent groups pertaining to resource needs of a program. However, the College's process for prioritizing those needs is not routinely followed. There is no evidence that the College has autonomy to allocate resources in support of planning efforts. A review of the evidence indicates that the College has not conducted regular evaluations of its planning and resource allocation processes. (III.A.6)

Performance evaluations of College personnel are not completed on a regular and timely basis.

Through a clear and publicly stated district-wide commitment to equity and diversity, supported by the District Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Plan, the College Mission and core values, and the activities of institutional committees, the College demonstrates a clear commitment to creating an equitable, diverse and inclusive environment for employees and students. The College has an active professional development program, and most employees participate in professional development activities. Employee personnel records are appropriately secured, and the College follows policies and contractual requirements for allowing employees to review their personnel files. Professional development programs and activities are consistent with the college's mission and supportive of teaching and learning for the entire college community.

The College's achievement in the area of diversity is commendable. However, the Team also noted ongoing deficiencies in meeting AACJC standards in relation to the timely and systematic completion of personnel performance evaluations, which is reflected as a shared responsibility between the District and the College in PCCD's functional map. The District and the College are encouraged to work together in solving this ongoing problem; a deficiency that was also identified in the 2009 accreditation report.

At the time of the visit, the Team also found that the college has not yet implemented comprehensive program reviews of administrative services and, as a result, the planning process is not yet fully implemented nor integrated. The College is urged to implement a systematic and evidence-based integrated planning process in human resources and to have an ongoing evaluation process for continuous quality improvement.

Finally, in response to ongoing concerns regarding the adequacy of faculty, administrators, and staff, the Team urges the College to implement a process for assessing and determining the staffing level and configuration it needs to support the College's mission, plans, and students.

The College does not meet this standard.

Recommendations

See College Recommendation 3 and 4

College Recommendation 7: In order to meet the Standard, the Team recommends that the College work with the District Human Resources Department and follow its policy to systematically complete all personnel evaluations. (III.A.1.b)

College Recommendation 8: In order to meet the Standard, the Team recommends that the College assess and determine the adequate number of qualified faculty and staff to support the College's mission. (III.A.2)

District Recommendation 4: In order to meet the Standards, the District should clearly identify the structures, roles, responsibilities and document the processes used to integrate human, facilities, technology planning, and fiscal planning in support of student learning and achievement and regularly evaluate the process in order to fairly allocate resources to support the planning priorities. (III.A.6, III.B.2, III.C.2, III.D.4, IV.B.3.g)

District Recommendation 5: In order to meet the Standards, the Team recommends that the District ensure retention of key leadership positions and that adequate staffing capacity is available to address the demands of three critical areas reflected in the accreditation standards: institutional effectiveness and leadership, institutional research, and financial accountability and management. (III.A.2, III.A.6)

Standard III – Resources
Standard IIB - Physical Resources

General Observations

Merritt College’s facilities have evolved since the College’s inception in 1971. The initial seven buildings were supplemented with additional buildings, classrooms and athletics facilities. Forethought and planning of the initial buildings took into consideration the needs of students and staff with disabilities and other mobility issues. A series of tunnels were incorporated into the design that allows for easy access from building to building eliminating the many exterior stairways, which would present a significant mobility issue for people with special needs. The *Fruitvale Center* was opened in the 1980s to offer non-credit citizenship classes and ESL courses. The District passed Measure A in 2006, providing much-needed bond money totaling \$390 million for capital construction and remodeling of existing buildings. The general appearance and accessibility of the buildings at the campus were appropriate and maintained in good working order. Regular evaluation of facilities is conducted by both internal means and external entities. All facility inspections completed by district personnel are documented through the Annual Program Update (APU) process that culminates in the scheduled maintenance priority list for each year. Results of all facility inspections are evaluated and assessed by the District’s Office of General Services and the College’s Safety Committee, in accordance with established policy.

Findings and Evidence

A review of facilities-related documents showed that information about physical resources was derived from multiple sources (e.g. in-person observation, program review updates, reports written by outside agencies following inspections, internal and external surveys) into higher levels of aggregation performed by overarching committees, administration, and senates with each group adding additional sources of data (e.g. capacity/use, enrollment, FTES, longevity, number/type of repair issues associated with equipment/facility, access). The College’s Educational Master Plan and Facilities Master Plan include identified physical needs, goals. As well, data is included in the documents.

The District-level Risk Management Director is charged with coordinating repairs for all facility concerns related to safety district-wide. College needs are integrated with district goals and needs and incorporated into that District’s annual as well as longitudinal planning and budgeting processes. A district Facilities Master Plan includes the overall longitudinal planning process in support of both the District vision as well as the College Educational Master Plan (EMP). Despite the District’s Facilities Master Plan, the College was unable to provide evidence of its implementation at the college level. (III.B, III.B.1, III.B.1.a, III.B.2.a)

The Team’s review of documented processes and results of interviews with a variety of college constituents suggests that the current procedure for reporting and tracking incidents of disrepair or safety concerns to physical resources is well defined or publicized. When repair or safety issues are identified by staff members, they send an

email to the campus Business Office. A Work Order is created and entered manually by the Business Office staff into the Mainstar database, the centralized maintenance software application. The work order is then transmitted as a work order request to the Department of General Services (DGS). The DGS employees review the request, prioritize all requests for the District, and assign the work for completion. Requests are reviewed on a daily basis to ensure completion in a timely manner, and safety requests are prioritized to ensure immediate attention. When immediate action is required to repair damage or broken facilities, groundskeepers and custodial staff based at the college evaluate the situation and take immediate action to effect repairs resolving any safety thread. (Standard III.B.1.b)

The District's Department of General Services utilizes the Annual Program Updates (APUs) as the primary tool for evaluating the effectiveness of facilities and equipment in terms of meeting the needs of college programs and services. Regular reviews assure that the physical environments most conducive to student success are maintained and constructed. Inspection reports of the facilities are required on a regular and consistent basis and completed by designated employees. (Standard III.B.2, III.B.2.b)

The College's APU process includes information pertaining to facility needs. Requests are prioritized at the college-level. The college priority list is forwarded to the President for input and evaluation. Prioritization lists from all four colleges provide the basis for the District's resource management and budgeting processes. A defined prioritization system for identifying physical resource needs is documented with evidence of use, as are the planning and prioritization structures for repairs, replacement, and/or purchase of new equipment. (Standards III.B.2.a, III.B.2.b)

The College evaluates its facilities and equipment on an annual basis. This is done through long-term capital outlay planning and the application of the District's Five-Year Scheduled Maintenance Plan. Facilities development and maintenance require the collegial effort of several District and College participatory decision-making bodies. Load/staff ratio forecasts are incorporated in the Facilities Master Plan in anticipation of future needs. Maintenance and other associated costs are incorporated as an element of the planning and design process for renovation and development of new facilities. Cost effectiveness and sustainability, and environmental impact are also criteria used in the design process. Facilities are well maintained, regardless of age. The updated and approved Facilities Master Plan, addressed remodeling and landscaping of the older facilities and denotes a pathway for longitudinal capital expenditures and planning in preparation for the anticipated costs for any anticipated needs in order to facilitate student growth. Funds provided by Measure-A Bonds and General Fund allocations are provided for new construction and upgrades to existing facilities. (Standards III.B.1, III.B.1.a, III.B.1.b, III.B.2, III.B.2.a, III.B.2.b)

Conclusions

The College physical resources, including facilities, equipment, land, and other assets are designed to support the teaching and learning activities of student and employees while

minimizing challenges to maintenance and repair. Physical resource planning and assessment is integrated with institutional planning at the college-level.

The College provides a safe and sufficient physical environment that supports and enhances the quality of its academic and support services. The College systematically plans and evaluates its facilities and equipment on a regular basis.

In examining the District and college planning documents for facilities, the Team did not find a comprehensive total cost of ownership planning process for facilities, which includes critical deferred maintenance and preventive maintenance needs at the college in order to assure safe and sufficient physical resources for students, faculty and staff.

The College does not meet this standard.

Recommendations

District Recommendation 3: In order to meet the Standards, the Team recommends that District General Services (DGS) work with college personnel to implement a plan to address total cost of ownership for new facilities and equipment, including undertaking critical deferred maintenance and preventive maintenance needs at the college in order to assure safe and sufficient physical resources for students, faculty and staff (III.B.1, III.B.1.a, III.B.2.a).

See District Recommendation 4

Standard III-Resources

Standard III C - Technology Resources

General Observations

Responsibility for the development and maintenance of the college Information Technology (IT) equipment and networks are divided between the District and the College, with primary responsibilities addressed by District employees. The administrative duties for oversight of all district technology infrastructure is assigned to the Associate Vice Chancellor of IT. Merritt College maintains its own network. The College's 2013 Technology Master Plan, which contains both strategic goals and objectives, expresses an information technology vision for the College. The College engages constituents at all levels in discussions about technology needs and planning for ways to meet these needs in light of the strategic goals and objectives. The College also uses Service Area Outcomes (SAOs) to assess its technology support and service.

PCCD utilizes PeopleSoft suite applications district-wide to support the District and colleges' information technology services. Various PeopleSoft suites are utilized by academic affairs, business affairs, and student services as the primary software application. The College uses Moodle as its Learning Management System (LMS) for all Distance Education (DE) classes. Based on student surveys and documents provided by the College, this LMS appears to meet the needs of the students and faculty and provides an environment that supports the stated SLOs for each class. Technical support for students and faculty is provided through the IT department employees, at both the District and College levels as well as online support by all application providers. Additional Moodle guides and manuals are available online to assist those who wish to be "self-served" relative to LMS processes available for classes delivered through distance education. The technology support provided by the District and the College technology groups was well organized and efficient. Planning for future technology needs is ongoing while responsiveness to immediate needs are being addressed.

Findings and Evidence

The Team reviewed minutes from the committees responsible for funding, maintaining, and evaluating technology resources district-wide and held interviews with the Coordinator of Information Technology, Distance Education Coordinator, and members of the Information Technology department. The interviews confirmed that the College uses integrated and systematic planning to determine the level of technology services, professional support, facilities, hardware, and software needed to enhance institutional effectiveness. Annual Program Update (APU) is used for all program areas, which include a section specifically asking for information on technology services, including faculty's assessment of current technology services and expected future needs. Information from the APUs and other sources, including services using technology, are included in institutional and district-level planning through the defined processes. The college Technology Plan provides for anticipated equipment replacement and growth of the college needs to support operations and student learning. Evaluation of technology

use is performed through analysis of survey results, usage tracking data, and the program review process (III.C.1, III.C.1.a, III.C.1.c, III.C.1.d, III.C.2.)

The Team reviewed the District's Educational Master Plan, Information Technology Strategy report (2012), the College's Technology Master Plan (2013), Minutes of the Technology Committee, Flex schedules, and results from interviews with the Distance Education Coordinator. The Team concluded that ample evidence exists to demonstrate that the College provides appropriate and effective training to students, faculty, and staff pertaining to technology and software. Online training for commonly used technology software, including Moodle, PeopleSoft, Passport and Taskstream are available on-demand through the College website and through I.T. staff at the College and District. Trainings for use of technology in support of pedagogy and other college activities are scheduled during in-service workshops, fall and spring professional development FLEX presentations, and at other times during the academic year (III.C.1.b.).

Additionally, training is provided to students for commonly used software and applications such as Moodle and Passport. There are plans for the DE Committee to identify and expand training for online services for employees and students. Professional development and training needs are determined through college-wide surveys as well as through the Program Review process. Recognition of human resource needs to support technology progress and use is documented and incorporated into the College's Technology Master Plan. A revolving plan for replacement and upgrade of technology is in place and regularly assessed and revised to provide cutting-edge technology to students and staff where possible. (III.A.5, III.A.5.a, III.A.5.b, III.A.6, III.C.1, III.C.1.a, III.C.1.c, III.C.1.b).

Interviews with members of the Technology Master Plan Committee, the Technology Coordinator, and the Distance Education Coordinator confirmed the availability and utility of technology support, as well as the effectiveness of the college's IT programs and services. (III.C.1.d)

The Team reviewed the PCCD Information Technology Strategy Plan (2012-15), the Technology Master Plan (2013), the Educational Master Plan, the Five-year Facilities/Construction Plan, the Technology Plan and Refresh Schedule, the Bond reports, and Minutes from the District's Budget Committee meetings, as well as results from interviews with college administration and I.T. staff. This comprehensive review of evidence confirmed that technology planning is integrated with institutional planning. Following College APUs and analysis of technology requests by the Technology Committee, these requests are prioritized with a standard rubric by the Budget Committee, which integrates technology priorities with the request in other resource areas. (III.C.2)

Conclusion

The College's technology planning processes are well documented. There is an effective technology infrastructure at the District and College. Bond funds, in combination with general fund resources, have been made available to build an array of technical support

for academic programs and college operations. The District and College assures that any technology support it provides is designed to meet the needs of college operations, learning and teaching. The services and support provided by the Information Technology department contribute to the effectiveness of the college by ensuring that facilities, hardware, and software are successfully planned and implemented to support student learning. The College and the District provide training in the effective application of its information technology to both personnel and students. The College systematically contributes to the District's overall technology plans in support of the acquisition, maintenance and upgrades/replacement of technology infrastructure and equipment, effectively meeting the needs of the institution.

Planning for computer resources appears to be data-informed and ongoing based Annual Program Update (APU) and other sources of information. It is integrated into the college and district planning processes in terms of prioritization and resource allocation. The Team noted, however, that the technology planning processes have not been evaluated. As well, while APUs have been conducted and used as basis for planning, comprehensive program reviews have not been conducted. The College needs to evaluate and continue to refine its planning process utilizing comprehensive program reviews, including assessment of identified administrative area outcomes. It was not clear to the Team whether or not Service Area Outcomes (SAOs) have been identified or assessed, and how SAO assessments have been used for continuous quality improvements.

The College does not meet this standard.

Recommendations

See College Recommendations 3 and 4

See District Recommendation 4

Standard III – Resources
Standard IIID – Financial Resources

General Observations

According to its Education Master Plan, Facilities Master Plan, and strategic goals and objectives, the College Mission, vision, core values, goals, and strategic initiatives drive Merritt College’s planning, budget, and expenditures.

The guidelines and processes for financial planning and budget development are articulated, defined, and communicated to all constituencies, thus providing opportunities for participation. Financial planning is integrated with and supports planning at the college level on a limited basis. The linkage of resource allocations to budgeting does not occur at the College level; rather, it occurs at the District level.

Findings and Evidence

The College has an overall budget of \$17.4 million from the unrestricted general fund. A review of college planning documents shows that the College’s mission and goals provide guidance for financial planning. To fulfill the College Mission, budgeting and financial planning processes are reflected in the College’s Education Master Plan, Facilities Master Plan, and strategic goals and objectives of the college. The District Board of Trustees provides direction through board policies and administrative procedures. The governing board policies include a budget calendar and directives that include assumptions and principles of fiscal stability as approved annually by the Board of Trustees. (Standard IIID)

A review of the College budget committee minutes verifies that financial planning supports institutional planning. The District operates through the Planning and Budgeting Integrated Model (PBIM) that consists of three district-level committees: Technology, Budget, & Facilities. Program reviews serve as the basis for the college prioritization process. The prioritization list is assessed and approved through the College Council and then is presented to the College President who reviews the Prioritization List with her Executive Council for discussion and modification to items based on College Mission and present needs. The President elevates the College Prioritization List to the District- level for resource allocation each year. (Standard IIID 1.a)

The financial resources development and allocation process at the College begins with the District’s Budget Allocation Model (BAM). The District office has primary responsibility for ensuring compliance with applicable statutes, regulatory compliance, and essential support functions, and responsibility to provide support to the colleges as they pursue their service mission. The BAM follows the State of California’s funding model established in Senate Bill 361 and was the product of the 2010-2011 Planning and Budget Council (PBC). The Planning and Budgeting Integration Model (PBIM) structure and planning processes have reportedly been evaluated annually since its inception. Results of self-assessments/surveys, as well as additional input from constituencies, have resulted in the changes to the annual planning and budgeting process as documented in

the PBIM meeting minutes. (Standard IIID.1.b) After the Team reviewed all pertinent college documents, results of interviews with a variety of college personnel, and statements made in the College's Self-Evaluation Report, the Team concluded that the College was not able to provide evidence of a completed cycle of assessment and evaluation. (Standard IIID 1.b)

The District 2014-15 final budget incorporates Merritt College's allocations. The District considers both short and long term interest of the College's plans for long-term liabilities and obligations. In order to complete these plans, the District utilizes various tools such as multi-year projections, population demographic trends, fund balance projections, and cash flow analysis. Existing and potential liabilities are identified and considered as they relate to the payment of long-term liabilities and obligations in the budget-development process. A review of the 2013-2014 District Budget shows amounts set aside for College obligations for employee benefits, retiree benefits, and capital leases.

The District issued an OPEB bonds in 2005 to fund lifetime health benefits. From the 2014 audit report, there still remain several outstanding audit recommendations that need to be addressed. While a great deal of progress has been made on the planning for the OPEB liability it continues to be a focus in the audit findings. There are two liabilities: the UAAL and the bond repayment. They have negotiated away the increase in future benefits which has resulted in a reduction of the UAAL from \$174 million to \$154 million and has added a set aside for the OPEB liability. The Retirement Board has done a good job in restructuring the debt as well as realigning the investment policy and increasing performance. The fund has a balance of \$218 million. Because of the positive return on invested bond proceeds, the UAAL is actually fully funded and would show as such in the actuarial analysis if the funds were deposited into an irrevocable trust. There are plans to do so but nothing is formalized. The passage of a parcel tax is assisting in making sure the core academic programs continue and has assisted the college in meeting its educational goals but it is not a permanent increase. In addition two capital bonds were passed to improve the facilities. Measure E is complete and Measure A is continuing. This is a District-level concern (IIID.1.c:IIID.2.d).

The debt service restriction will provide the District with budgetary relief of approximately \$29 million and the OPEB charge has created an ongoing and dedicated revenue stream. Significant progress has been made on the OPEB liability. The method that the District chose to alleviate the OPEB liability was creative in its investment strategy and the tranches and CARS might have been fine except for the economic downturn. The investments did not keep pace with the debt service and so with balloon type payments and variable interest payments on the horizon the District did one refinancing and five SWAP agreements. The Retirement Board, made up of three Trustees and two District employees, adjusted the investments and the Revocable Trust has recovered and now has a market value of \$218 million. The pay-as-you-go amount is approximate \$10.8 M and has been determined by an actuary. The study is done every two years and in March 2015 a draft report was issued from TotalComp outlining all of the required calculations to comply with accounting standards (IIID.3.c: IIID.3.d).

The District provided a cash flow projection for a portion of the two bond measures approved by local voters--- Measure A and Measure B. Measure A was a \$390 million General Obligation Bond designated for capital improvements, including construction and renovation, and instructional equipment. Measure B provides the District with an annual parcel tax on all parcels located within the District’s boundaries of \$48 per parcel, per year for eight years. The funding’s designated use is for maintaining core academic programs, such as Math, Science, and English; training students for careers; and preparing students to transfer to four-year colleges and universities. (Standard IIID.1.c)

Financial planning for the college is coordinated by the College Budget Committee (CBC) and the College Council (CC), and at the District level by the Planning and Budget Council (PBCP). The committees are comprised of members from various college constituencies, and these committees define participatory governance relative to the budget. Meetings are published online; agendas, minutes, and informational handouts are distributed electronically as well as posted on the website. All staff members (i. e., classified, management, and faculty) receive invitations to present their ideas during the meetings. The College self-identified an improvement plan, stating “Merritt College and the Enrollment Management Task Force will develop and enhance target programs for high risk students; and early outreach to local high schools, academic and career pathways, and adult education that will align with the District Budget Allocation Model and State FTES apportionment funding”. Evidence shows that the College currently does not have enrollment management policy or process . With regard to advocacy for additional funding in the budget allocation model and State apportionment funding, the College may continue to optimize the use of Student Success and Support Program (SSSP) funding and additional Perkins funds. These funds may assist in developing target programs for high-risk students, academic and career pathways and adult education. (Standard III.D.1.d)

Policies govern approval processes for internal audits and fiscal management. PeopleSoft/PROMT software system integrates data from Student Services, Human Resources, Payroll, Finance, and Financial Aid modules. This system is used to record and update transactions continually and thus provides accurate up-to-date accounting information. It is used to record journal entries, accounts payable, accounts receivable, revenues, payroll, grants, purchase requisitions as well as budget information. To ensure financial integrity, the PeopleSoft/PROMT system has built-in mechanisms such as user IDs and passwords that allow system access at the appropriate security level. The purchasing and procurement system has controls that preclude charges to accounts that have insufficient funds. (Standard III.D.2)

The College and District assure financial integrity of the institution and responsible use of resources through Board policies and administrative procedures that ensure fiscal controls. The annual audit report includes audits of OPEB funds, capital outlay bonds, and the Measure B Parcel Tax are presented to the Board of Trustees and placed on the District website. Audit findings are supported by recommendations from the external auditor and are responded to in the form of an action plan. The PeopleSoft/PROMT system and monthly financial reports are available via the District website. (Standard IIID.2.a)

All financial documents such as the budget reports and independent audit reports reflect information about the use of financial resources to support student learning programs and services. The District financial audits are publicly available and reported and reviewed at regularly scheduled Board meetings, participatory governance meetings, and staff and management meetings. When audit findings are identified, the College and the District need to make timely and appropriate action to implement corrective actions to address the identified deficiency. Significant deficiencies were noted in multiple year external Audit reports for the College in connection to Financial Aid: (1) Auditors were not able to determine date of return to Title IV; (2) Failure to return funds to Title IV and no process in place to identify dropped students (FY 2013/2014 Audit Report p.85); (3) COD disbursements were more than 30 days past the reported date (FY 2013/2014 Audit Report, p.83); (4) Not reconciling SAS and Loan details to financial records (FY 2013/2014 Audit Report, p.86); and (5) Auditors were not able to determine date of return to Title IV (FY 2013/2014 Audit Report, p. 102). The above are multi-year findings dating back to 2008.

The District has hired an internal auditor who has created a corrective action matrix listing all of the audit findings with timelines for resolution of the findings. The College and the District have made significant progress in addressing the audit findings. Evidence provided during the visit and prior to the finalization of this report, after the visit, indicate that the District and the colleges have developed oversight committees, identified internal audit, management accountability as well as procedures to address #1, #2, #3, and #5. One document identified overpayment to students, however, the document does not show if and when funds were returned to Title IV. The evidence provided for #4 reflects the College has resolved this audit finding and may no longer be providing Direct Loans. The 2014 Corrective Action Matrix provided subsequent to the visit indicates that procedures are in the implementation stage. While these procedures are in progress, there is no evidence since the last Audit report of 2014 or the last Department of Education Program Review that the College and District have fully resolved all of the audit findings. (Standard III.D.2.b)

The District Team found that the District and the Colleges have made great strides in advancing the fiscal planning and budgeting processes as well as reducing the number of audit findings. The colleges and the District are working to resolve the issues related to the Financial Audit finding and the Department of Education Program Review. The revised Peralta District Financial Aid Policies and Procedures Manual includes procedures to transmit payments for Common Origination and Disbursement report, a return of Title IV section, and the Direct Loan and Pell Reconciliation process to address Audit Findings.

Also to address audit findings, the District has confirmed receipts from the National Student Clearinghouse showing they have submitted enrollment files for each of the colleges. In addition, the District workgroup have been meeting and taking minutes with regards to collaborating and making progress to automate the PeopleSoft system to meet the federal requirements of enrollment reporting.

While the State's depressed economy in the past few years has put a strain on the budget and cash flows, the College and the District have been fiscally conservative in their forecasts to ensure adequate cash flow. The College's cash flow is closely monitored throughout the year. An annual cash flow analysis is conducted each year with advice from the District's financial advisor. The analysis is used to determine if Tax Revenue Anticipation Notes (TRANS) short-term borrowing will be needed. No TRANS were sought or needed during the 2013-14 and none are anticipated for the 2014-2015 fiscal year. With the implementation of PeopleSoft/PROMT system, end users have access to the system to make real time online financial queries, check on the status of the budget, including the total amount spent and remaining available balances. Financial information is disseminated in a timely manner and readily available throughout the institution as well as the public. (Standard III.D.2.c)

The College adheres to Board Policies and Administrative Procedures approved by PCCD Board of Trustees. To ensure clarity and transparency, the College has developed its own Business and Administrative Services Manual based on the approved board policies and procedures. The business manual is reviewed and updated regularly to align with Districts standards. Integrity of funds is ensured through the PeopleSoft accounting system. The financial aid departments at each college use the system to process and administer financial aid. All state and federal funds that are awarded and disbursed are reported to state and federal systems within the required timeline. The college internal control systems that deal with operations are implemented through the Business and Administrative Services division. The District employs an internal auditor to ensure the integrity of the District accounting system and to ensure that all funds are used in accordance with the intended purpose of the funding sources. Each internal audit report is used to improve operations, increase efficiencies, and to promote effectiveness. As required by Board Policy 6400 Audits, the District undergoes annual audits on its financial records including financial statements, internal control procedures, and compliance with state and federal requirements. The June 30, 2013 year-end audit was completed in a timely manner. The annual audits included a review of institutional investments and assets, financial aid and grants, all auxiliary, capital outlay, capital bond funds, parcel tax, and foundation funds. Debt repayment obligations are reviewed on an ongoing basis and planned and budgeted for as part of the College's annual budget development process. All debts are accounted for and reported within the District's annual financial statements and audited as part of the annual audit report. (Standards III.D.2.d, III.D.2.e)

The College has board policies and administrative procedures that deal with finance to ensure sound financial practices and financial stability. The District and the College have sufficient cash flow and reserves to maintain stability, strategies for appropriate risk management, and development of contingency plans to meet financial emergencies and unforeseen occurrences. The District ending fund balance provides for a reserve for economic uncertainty at a minimum of the five percent level recommended by the Board of Governors plus a contingency reserve for unforeseen occurrences. In 2010-2011 the District set aside 7.79 percent reserve, 2011-2012 8.80 percent, 2012-2013 11.20 percent, and in 2013-14 12.36 percent. In 2013-14, Merritt College's actual ending balance was \$539,365, a 3.18 percent savings from its budget. (Standard III.D.3, III.D.3.a)

The College uses the PeopleSoft/PROMT system that integrates data from Student Services, Human Resources, Payroll, Finance, and Financial Aid modules. All transactions in the system are subject to electronic approval queues with the final review by the College Business Manager. For all grant funded expenditures, all requisitions are closely monitored to ensure that they meet the criteria and guidelines set forth by the grantors. All other sources of funds received by the College for a specific purpose are transmitted to the District for proper accounting in the PROMT system. To ensure oversight of finances including financial aid, grants, externally funded programs, bond funds, contractual relationships, and foundations and investments, the institution has an annual external audit prepared in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles. (Standard III.D.3.b)

Beginning fiscal year 2010-11, the District implemented an OPEB charge to supplement funds available in the OPEB Trust to pay for the cost of current employees' future benefits. As of June 2014 the actual balance held in the District's OPEB Special Revenue Fund is \$10.3 million. The District has developed a plan that would result in approximately \$150 million of deposits to the OPEB Trust over the course of a 25-year period. The transfers to the OPEB post-retirement fund are made with every payroll. However, the District needs to accelerate the implementation of its current plan to resolve the 2014 audit recommendations to fund OPEB liabilities, including the associated debt service. (Standards III.D.3.c, III.D.3.d)

On an annual basis, the institution assesses and allocates resources for the repayment of locally incurred debt instruments. As part of the annual budget development process, all debt obligations are recognized and sufficient resources are allocated for the payment of the upcoming fiscal year's debt obligation. The College did not need to issue TRANS, which is a reflection of the District's improved cash balances, due in large part to the passage of the local parcel tax and reduction in statewide deferrals. The District has maintained sufficient ending fund balance reserves of over 10 percent for the past two consecutive years. (Standard III.D.3.e)

For the last three years the College's student loan default rates were under 30 percent, which is within federal guidelines. The District Financial Aid office is also working with third party vendors such as Great Lakes and Nelnet to acquire reports of students who are delinquent in loan repayment and are at risk of default. If default rates were to exceed the 30 percent threshold, a collaborative effort by the institutional leadership will form a default prevention committee that will create a comprehensive plan for the College, including strategies for implementing the plan to reduce the default rate. (Standard III.D.3.f)

Contracts with external entities follow an established set of Governing Board policies and administrative procedures aimed at insuring consistency with the mission and goals of the institution. Internal controls have been put in place to ensure compliance with the Board policies and procedures, dictating which contract needs Board approval and which senior administrators can approve. All contracts for the College go through District Risk Services, District General Counsel, and Board approval. Only the Board President, as designated by Board action, is authorized to sign contracts (Standard III.D.3.g)

After the Team reviewed all College documents, results of interviews with a variety of college personnel, and the review of statements made in the college Self-Evaluation Report, the Team concluded that all departments have not yet conducted comprehensive program reviews and planning activities, which includes assessment of identified administrative service area outcomes, goal setting, and identification of areas for improvement. As well, an overall evaluation of the College's integrated planning process has not yet been conducted. (Standard III.D.3.h, III.D.4)

Conclusion

The College has policies and procedures regarding budget controls and development of the budget. The Team recommends that the College address and resolve comprehensively and in a timely manner the ongoing deficiencies identified in the 2013 and 2014 external audit findings; that the District accelerate the implementation of current plan to resolve the 2014 audit recommendations to fund its OPEB liabilities, including the associated debt service. In addition, the Team recommends that the College implement a systematic and evidence-based integrated planning process that show clear linkages between planning and resource allocations and to go through ongoing evaluation in order to promote continuous improve institutional effectiveness.

The College does not meet the Standard.

Recommendations

See College Recommendations 3 and 4

District Recommendation 1: In order to meet the Standard, the Team recommends that the District follow the 2014 audit recommendations and develop an action plan to fund its Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB) liabilities, including the associated debt service. (III.D.1.c, III.D.3.c, III.D.1.c)

District Recommendation 2: In order to meet the Standard, the Team recommends that the District resolve comprehensively and in a timely manner the ongoing deficiencies identified in the 2013 and 2014 external audit findings (III.D.2.b, III.D.1.h, ER 18).

District Recommendation 4: In order to meet the Standards, the District should clearly identify the structures, roles, responsibilities and document the processes used to integrate human, facilities, technology planning, and fiscal planning in support of student learning and achievement and regularly evaluate the process in order to fairly allocate resources to support the planning priorities. (III.A.6, III.B.2, III.C.2, III.D.4, IV.B.3.g)

District Recommendation 8: In order to meet the Standards, the Team recommends that the District systematically evaluate the equitable distribution of resources and the sufficiency and effectiveness of district-provided services in supporting effective operations of the colleges. (IV.B.3.b, IV.B.3.c, III.D.1.a, III.D.1.b, III.D.1.h)

Standard IV – Leadership and Governance
Standard IVA – Decision-Making Roles and Processes

General Observations

Merritt College’s leadership structure includes the President, an Administrative Team, the Academic Senate, the Classified Senate, the Associated Students of Merritt College and the representatives of the collective bargaining units. All of these groups recognize that collaboration is central to participatory decision-making relative to student learning programs and services at the college.

The participatory decision-making process includes the establishment of institutional goals and the outcomes of the objectives necessary to reach the goals. At its annual Planning and Budgeting Integration Summit, the college sets the objectives and outcomes in alignment with the District-wide institutional outcomes. The Planning and Budgeting Integration Model (PBIM) provides the structure for the planning of student learning programs and services and allocating the resources to support them.

Merritt College uses participatory decision-making as its primary vehicle to encourage college wide input into operational and strategic planning processes. There are several governance committees that contribute. Those are the College Council, the College Educational Master Planning Committee (CEMPC), the College Budget Committee, the College Facilities Committee, and the Technology Committee. The College Council has the responsibility of assuring the strategic planning process is efficient and effective and with the input of the CEMPC, it has the authority to retool the plan as well as the assumptions built into the plan if the assessment of outcomes warrant.

Findings and Evidence

Institutional leaders have created components for empowerment, innovation, and institutional excellence for faculty and staff. However, the structure is “re-evolving” after being dormant for the recession years when much of the decision-making for Merritt College was done at the District level. It would be a stretch to say these values exist today in the institutional culture of the college. Faculty and staff are currently re-learning how to take the initiative to improve practices, programs, and services for which they are involved. In as much as the components are there, the linkages between the components remain unclear relative to faculty and staff innovations of improvement for significant institution-wide implications. It would be erroneous to conclude that systematic participative processes are ensuring effective discussion, planning and implementation. (IV.A.1)

The College has established a written policy for providing faculty, staff, administrators and students for participation in decision-making processes, but what is written remains in draft form and not fully implemented. Although the policies do specify the manner in which individuals bring forward ideas from their constituencies, at this time it is challenging for these groups to work together on appropriate planning and budget. The institution is trying to move to a point where it does rely on faculty, its academic senate,

and academic administrators for recommendations about student learning, programs and services, but the linkages between the various elements of the leadership and governance structure are not sufficiently cemented in place for this to occur consistently. (IV.4.A.2.a, IV.4.2.b, IV.A.3)

There is evidence to suggest the institution does advocate and demonstrate honesty and integrity in its relationships with external agencies. There are a number of student vocational programs requiring communication and certifications from licensing agencies. It has agreed to comply with all Accreditation Commission standards, policies, and guidelines at all times. The College meets all requirements for public disclosure on the college web site including the self-evaluation and other follow-up reports from team visits and prior substantive changes. The College has met its deadlines for responding to previous recommendations made by the Commission. (IV.A.4)

There is no evidence that the leadership and governance structure are uniformly evaluated across the college. There is some evidence that suggests that certain constituency groups evaluate their processes. For example, the Classified Senate has established goals and assess the extent to which those goals were reached at the end of the academic year. The Academic Senate similarly evaluates itself. However, many of the processes of the four college committees and the College Council have yet to be fully implemented or evaluated. (IV.A.5)

Conclusion

The College does not meet this standard. Although leadership and governance components for decision-making exist, those have not been placed into a formal structure so the linkages between the various components can be developed. There is a leadership and governance document that outlines a structure and processes, but at this time, it is in a draft form and not yet approved by the various college constituencies. There is no documentation of an assessment of the previous governance structure, or what has led to the need for change. Since this structure has yet to be fully implemented, it has not been evaluated. However, elements of the governance structure that are stalwarts of all California Community Colleges, such as the Classified Senate and the Academic Senate, do evaluate themselves. As the District tries to decentralize, those governance elements unique to the college are now slowly are now returning as but are not fully implemented and thus cannot yet be evaluated.

Recommendations

College Recommendation 9: In order to meet the Standard, the Team recommends the College establish and implements a written policy providing for faculty, staff, administrator, and student participation in decision-making processes which specifies the manner in which individuals bring forward ideas from their constituencies and work together on appropriate policy, planning, and implementation. (IV.A.2a, IV.A.2b, IV.A.

Standard IV – Leadership and Governance
Standard IVB Board and Administrative Organization

General Observations

The Governing Board oversees the Peralta Community College District made up of four colleges and the District services. The functional map delineates the roles and responsibilities of the Board of Trustees (BOT), the Chancellor, and the College Presidents. Board Policy delegates authority to the Chancellor to issue regulations and directives to district employees. The Chancellor is also charged with implementing district administrative procedures that ensure the quality, integrity, and effectiveness of student learning programs and services.

The Governing Board consists of seven elected members who represent geographical regions. Board member terms are staggered with biannual elections as prescribed by California Education Code. The Board also includes two non-voting student trustees. The BOT approves long-term academic programs and facilities, courses of instructional and educational programs, academic standards, operational and capital outlay budgets, and all grant requests and maintains a strategic partnership with the Peralta Foundation. The Board' purpose is to provide "accessible, high quality, educational programs and services to meet a variety of needs in the multi-cultural communities of Northern Alameda County.

Board Policy 2200, Board Duties and Responsibilities, defines the responsibilities of the Governing Board, which include representing the public interest; establishing policies that define the institutional mission and set prudent, ethical, and legal standards; assuring fiscal health and responsibility; monitoring institutional performance and educational quality; advocating for and protecting the District; delegating power and authority to the chancellor; hiring and evaluating the chancellor; respecting the authority of the chancellor; and delegating authority to the chancellor to issue regulations and directives. Several board policies are central to these responsibilities: BP 2431, Chancellor Selection; BP 2430, Delegation of Authority to the Chancellor; and BP 2435, Evaluation of the Chancellor.

Findings and Evidence

The institution has a governing board that is responsible for establishing policies to assure the quality, integrity, and effectiveness of the student learning programs and services and the financial stability of the institution. The governing board adheres to a clearly defined policy for selecting and evaluating the chief administrator of the college district. However, at the time of the visit, there are questions as to whether the governing board is following its policy for evaluating the chief administrator of the District. The governing board is an independent policy-making body that does reflect the public interest in its activities and decision. Once the board reaches a decision, it acts as whole. It advocates for and defends the District and protects it from undue influence or pressure. (IV.B.1, IV.B.1.a)

The governing board has established policies, which are consistent with the mission statement to ensure quality, integrity, and improvement of student learning programs and services and the resources to support them. However, it is unclear whether the governing board holds the chief administrator accountable for following those policies. Merritt College has set strategic goals and objectives for student success, however, these fall short of institutionally-set standards for student achievement and learning. The governing board does have ultimate responsibility for educational quality, legal matters, and financial integrity. Its actions are final and not subject to the actions of any other entity. There are Board bylaws and policies specific to the Board size, duties, responsibilities, structure, and operating procedures. (IV.B.1.b, IV.B.1.c, IV.B.1.d)

In 2011, The BOT converted all existing policies and procedures to the Community College League of California (CLCC) format and process. Given this fact, no Board Policy or procedure is older than 2011. Updating of policies and procedures is on-going in response to changes state legislation to the Educational Code or Title 5 regulations and as directed by the Chancellor. The District adopted the format for policies and procedures of the Community College League of California (CCLC) in 2011, and all policies and procedures were reapproved at that time. Since then, many policies and procedures have been reviewed and further updated; no policies or procedures are older than 2011. However, the team did not locate a schedule for the ongoing, regular review of board policies and administrative regulations (IV.B.1.e).

The Governing Board does not always act in a manner consistent with its own policies and bylaws. For example, there is some question whether the current performance evaluation of the District's chancellor is conducted according to board policy. As part of its annual evaluation in December, the Board reviews its performance in light of its code of ethics and standards of procedure. Through interviews, the District Team heard of recent Board activities that were inconsistent with board policy on the delegation of authority. (IV. B.1.e)

The governing board has a program for board development and new member orientation and it does have a mechanism for providing for continuity of board membership and staggered terms of office, however the program is not mandatory. New Board members do undergo a board orientation as does the newly elected Board President. Board members are encouraged to attend at least one professional workshop conducted by one of the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT). Some current Board members participate in CCLC governance education programs. The board held a Study Session on Board member duties and responsibilities in November of 2013. (IV.B.1.f)

Board policy states the board evaluates its performance annually during the months of November and December. However, this was not done during the academic years 2012-2013 and 2013-2014. Each board member completes and submits a self-evaluation to the Board President. The self-evaluations become the foundation for formal discussions during a workshop scheduled in conjunction with the December Board meeting. However, these discussions do not occur during a public session and it is unclear whether the results of the evaluation lead to goals for improvement. The governing board has a

code of ethics and a procedure for “Handling of Administrative Matters that was crafted to address ethics violations. (IV.B.1.g, IV.B.1.h)

The governing board is informed about and involved in the accreditation process. The Board receives regular reports on accreditation and topics related to student learning programs and services from the chancellor and the college presidents. All reports required by the ACCJC are placed on board agendas for review and approval. The board is upraised of strategies employed by Merritt College relative to strategies and processes being developed to address college recommendations made from the ACCJC to comply with the Standards. The District Team noted that college employees stated their belief that the Board was engaged with student success but felt that the Board could be more proactive (IV.B.1.j)

The governing board has the responsibility for selecting and evaluating the chancellor. However, there is some question whether the board delegates full responsibility and authority to the chancellor to implement and administer board policies without interference. For example, the following comment relative to this issue was made during one of the interviews. “...the culture here has been for the board to control the CEO and the Administration and exercise this control with the selection and hiring of personnel.” “The history of the Peralta Districts reflects meta-management.” (IV.B.1.j)

It remains unclear whether the President has primary responsibility for the quality of the institution she leads, as many governance functions at the college are centralized at the District. For example, Financial Aid, International Students, the District administers all Institutional Research. During the recession years after 2007, in an effort to reduce costs, many college functions were centralized. There has been a movement by the chancellor to decentralize more functions back to the college but he has encountered resistance from the board to do so. However, the college president leads an organizational structure, including an executive Team, which consists of the President, Vice President of Instruction, the Vice President of Student Services, and the Director of Business Services. The Team is charged with the implementation of board Policies, administrative procedures, and the California Education Code. With the support of the Administrative Team and the four participatory governance groups, the president determines the resources need and promotes those needs at the District Cabinet level. (IV.B.2, IV.B.2.a)

During the summer of 2014, the Administrative Team guided a comprehensive strategic planning session. Participants included representatives of the Academic Senate, Classified Senate, Associated Students, Administration, the Council of Department Chairs and Program Directors (CDCPD). The resulting strategic goals and objectives were forwarded to the CEMPC for review and prioritization. The process required in-depth research and analysis relative to the Annual Unit Plans (APU’s) submitted by the instruction departments and students programs. The goals and objectives were eventually forwarded to the College Council and then the president for approval and integrated into the resource allocation model. The president meets with the administrative team weekly and all administrators on a bi-weekly basis. All governance committees meet on a monthly basis. The college budget is developed, monitored and controlled by the president and the Director of Business and Administrative Services. All participatory

governance committees have the opportunity to contribute to the budget development and expenditure processes that relate directly to their areas. (IV.B.2.b, IV.B.2c, IV.b.2.d)

Community members are kept apprised of college activities. For example, residents and businesses are notified about ground-breaking and ribbon-cutting ceremonies. Residents living close to the campus are provided forums to have their concerns heard regarding impacts to the neighborhood resulting from college activities or expansion. The president is a member of the local Chamber of Commerce and service organizations such as the Rotary Club. The college web site allows for published institutional governance structures and functional mapping relative to the college and the District. During the comprehensive visit, banners were placed in front of the college welcoming the accreditation Visiting Team. Community members were present at the open forums. (IV.B.2.e)

Administrative Procedure 2430, Delegation of Authority to the Chancellor's Staff, delineates the delegation of authority from the chancellor to the presidents and the vice chancellors. The Chancellor's Cabinet meets weekly and consists of the college presidents, vice chancellors, associate vice chancellors, general counsel, and the executive director of public information. The cabinet provides coordination and ongoing support for the effective operation of the colleges. The Self Evaluation Report includes a Function Map for the District and colleges that specifies each of the accreditation standards as a primary, secondary, or shared function for the District and for the colleges. Through interviews, the District team found that the District did not adhere consistently to the delineation of responsibilities. The team recommends that the District clearly delineate and communicate the operational responsibilities and functions of the District from those of the colleges and consistently adhere to this delineation in practice (IV.B.3, IV.B.3.a).

Despite the District's functional mapping documents, in practice there is not a clear delineation of the operational responsibilities and functions of the District and those of the college. As previously mentioned, there are many critical functions at the college level that have been centralized to the District. In addition, district personnel before utilization at the college, including program review templates, must review college planning templates. There seems to be some confusion at the college level on what the District provides and what the college should be doing on its own. It is not unusual for board members to contact administrative staff at the college independent of the chancellor. (IV.B.3.a)

It remains unclear whether district services regularly and systematically assess the services it provides to the colleges in support of their mission, or if those assessments are data driven. There was no evidence provided that the District seeks input from the colleges it serves to assess its effectiveness. Further, there was no evidence provided to substantiate whether the District assesses itself for its own mission and functions. It is possible these assessments are taking place, but they are not well-documented and there is no indication whether or not the results led to any improvements in district services. (IV.3.b)

The District Visiting Team noted that, in 2013, a survey was done to measure satisfaction with District services. Almost 300 employees submitted responses, and the results were posted on a website. The four district-level participatory governance committees gather for a summit at the beginning of each year to review topics and issues that need to be addressed by the District. Each of the committees then sets its annual goals, following the District's strategic planning goals and objectives. At the end of the year, the committees participate in a survey of their members, with the results provided at the fall semester summit. The 2014 review of the committees resulted in improvements: committee composition, enhanced definitions of roles and processes, additional expectations for accountability, and alignment with District strategic goals and objectives. The review, however, does not include the documentation and evaluation of the processes that integrate the human, facilities, and fiscal planning that allocates resources to support the College priorities. A function map was developed for the ISE to delineate the responsibilities of the District and colleges. The team did not find evidence of an evaluation of the effectiveness of the delineation of District roles and responsibilities as they support the colleges. Through interviews at the colleges, the team heard concerns about the District not consistently adhering to the delineation of responsibilities. The team recommends that the District regularly evaluate the effectiveness of the delineation of District roles and responsibilities to assure their effectiveness in supporting the colleges (IV.B.3.g).

The current resource allocation model was implemented in July of 2011. The District elected to use the SB 361 model to provide each college with what they would earn from the state if they were independent. The model includes three fundamental revenue drivers: base allocation, credit FTES, and non-credit FTES. The base allocation takes into consideration economies of scale and the proportional size of each college. Apportionment funding represents more than 70 percent of the District's unrestrictive revenue. The Chancellor is charged with management of the District's budget. The Deputy Chancellor is responsible for the management of the total budget, budget controls and the accounting programs with the District. The District contracts for an annual external financial audit. The results of the audit are presented to the District Planning and Budget Council, the Chancellor's Cabinet, and the governing board. The District maintains a 15 percent reserve for economic uncertainties.

The budget allocation model assesses the college for shared services such as Human Resources. However, the college presidents have limited control on what those assessed costs will be. In addition, the BAM does not take into account the seniority of the faculty. In the case of Merritt College, 92 percent of the general fund allocation is committed to salaries. Not all of the colleges have the large number of senior faculty. In addition, the BAM does not take into account the location of Merritt College, compared to the locations of the other colleges in the District. For example, Merritt College is located in the foothills of Oakland where property values are very high. (IV.B.3.c, IV.B.3.d, IV.B.3.e, IV.B.3.f)

Each year a survey is forwarded to members of the PBIM committees for input on the perceived effectiveness of the decision-making structures and processes to assure their integrity and effectiveness is assisting the college in meeting its educational goals. The

survey instrument and the results are posted to the District web site placed on the agenda for review at the annual summit. There is little evidence to suggest that actual improvements were made to the processes as a result of the evaluation efforts and no evidence that the improvements had the anticipated impact. (IV.B.3.g)

Conclusion

The College does not meet this standard. There is ambiguity in the structures, roles, responsibilities the District uses to integrate human, facilities, technology planning, and fiscal planning in support of student learning, and achievement at the college. Although there is some evidence of the tools used to evaluate the processes in place, improvements and their impacts are not documented. It remains unclear whether the District regularly evaluates the equitable distribution of resources and the sufficiency and effectiveness of district-provided services in support of the college.

Recommendations

See District Recommendations 4

District Recommendation 6: In order to meet the Standard, the Team recommends that the District clearly delineate and communicate the operational responsibilities and functions of the District from those of the colleges and consistently adheres to this delineation in practice; and regularly assesses and evaluates district role delineation and governance and decision-making structures and processes to assure their integrity and effectiveness in assisting the colleges in meeting educational goals. (IV.B.3)

District Recommendation 7: In order to meet the Standards, the Team recommends the Governing Board adhere to its appropriate role. The Board must allow the chancellor to take full responsibility and authority for the areas assigned to district oversight. (IV.B.1, IV.B.1.a, IV.B.1.e, IV.B.1.j)

District Recommendation 8: In order to meet the Standards, the Team recommends that the District systematically evaluate the equitable distribution of resources and the sufficiency and effectiveness of district-provided services in supporting effective operations of the colleges. (IV.B.3.b, IV.B.3.c, III.D.1.a, III.D.1.b, III.D.1.h)

Checklist for Evaluating Compliance with Federal Regulations and Commission Policies

(in addition to what is specifically evaluated within the language of Accreditation Standards)

NOTE: This checklist will become part of the external evaluation team report. It is also an appendix in the team training materials.

The team should place a check mark next to each item when it has been evaluated. For each category, the team should also complete the conclusion check-off and insert appropriate narrative to alert any concerns or noncompliance areas.

Public Notification of an Evaluation Visit and Third Party Comment

The institution has made an appropriate and timely effort to solicit third party comment in advance of a comprehensive evaluation visit.

The institution cooperates with the evaluation team in any necessary follow-up related to the third party comment.

The institution demonstrates compliance with the Commission *Policy on Rights and Responsibilities of the Commission and Member Institutions* as to third party comment.

Regulation citation: 602.23(b).

Conclusion Check-Off (mark one):

The team has reviewed the elements of this component and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements.

The team has reviewed the elements of this component and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements, but that follow-up is recommended.

The team has reviewed the elements of this component and found the institution does not meet the Commission's requirements.

Narrative:

The College posted the visit on their website and solicited third party comments ahead of the scheduled visit. The dates of the open forums were also posted and, as a result, the two forums were well attended by both internal and external community members. The College meets this federal regulation and Commission Policy.

Standards and Performance with Respect to Student Achievement

The institution has defined elements of student achievement performance across the

institution, and has identified the expected measure of performance within each defined element. Course completion is included as one of these elements of student achievement. Other elements of student achievement performance for measurement have been determined as appropriate to the institution's mission.

The institution has defined elements of student achievement performance within each

instructional program, and has identified the expected measure of performance within each defined element. The defined elements include, but are not limited to, job placement rates for program completers, and for programs in fields where licensure is required, the licensure examination passage rates for program completers.

The institution-set standards for programs and across the institution are relevant to guide self-evaluation and institutional improvement; the defined elements and expected performance levels are appropriate within higher education; the results are reported regularly across the campus; and the definition of elements and results are used in program-level and institution-wide planning to evaluate how well the institution fulfills its mission, to determine needed changes, to allocating resources, and to make improvements.

The institution analyzes its performance as to the institution-set standards and as to

student achievement, and takes appropriate measures in areas where its performance is not at the expected level.

Regulation citations: 602.16(a)(1)(i); 602.17(f); 602.19 (a-e).

Conclusion Check-Off (mark one):

The team has reviewed the elements of this component and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements.

The team has reviewed the elements of this component and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements, but that follow-up is recommended.

The team has reviewed the elements of this component and found the institution does not meet the Commission's requirements.

Narrative:

Merritt College's 2014 Annual Report to AACJC indicated that the College has set institution-set standards that include: 69 percent for successful course completion, student completion of degrees and certificates per year (500), and the number of students who transfer per year (300). The team found that the above are college goals relative to the District's strategic initiatives, as opposed to performance thresholds. This finding was affirmed through multiple interviews, which indicated that no formal process has occurred to establish baseline performance metrics. In a draft document entitled Merritt College FY 14-17 Strategic Goals and Objectives dated July 18 and

August 12, 2014, the College appears to be establishing measurable goals for student engagement and success. However, the Team did not find a final version of the document. Likewise, the Team did not find institution-set standards for student achievement. (I.B.1-6) (Merritt College Report, pp.34-35)

In the final report, the Merritt College Visiting Team wrote the following recommendation:

College Recommendation 5: In order to meet the Standards, the Team recommends that the College establish institution-set standards for student achievement and systematically assess the institution's progress in meeting or exceeding these standards. (I.B; I.B.1-6; II.A; II.A.1.c; II.A.2.a, b, f, g, h; II.A.5; II.A.6)

Credits, Program Length, and Tuition

- Credit hour assignments and degree program lengths are within the range of good practice in higher education (in policy and procedure).
- The assignment of credit hours and degree program lengths is verified by the institution, and is reliable and accurate across classroom based courses, laboratory classes, distance education classes, and for courses that involve clinical practice (if applicable to the institution).
- Tuition is consistent across degree programs (or there is a rational basis for any program-specific tuition).
- Any clock hour conversions to credit hours adhere to the Department of Education's conversion formula, both in policy and procedure, and in practice.
- The institution demonstrates compliance with the Commission *Policy on Institutional Degrees and Credits*.

Regulation citations: 600.2 (definition of credit hour); 602.16(a)(1)(viii); 602.24(e), (f); 668.2; 668.9.

Conclusion Check-Off (mark one):

- The team has reviewed the elements of this component and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements.
- The team has reviewed the elements of this component and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements, but that follow-up is recommended.
- The team has reviewed the elements of this component and found the institution does not meet the Commission's requirements.

Narrative:

As noted on the Team Report, the College meets the Commission Policy on Institutional Degrees and Credits/Policy on Award of Credit. The College awards credit according to the Carnegie unit in alignment with Title V, CA Code of Regulations 55002. The College is in compliance with commonly accepted practices for hours of instruction and content. The Curriculum Instructional Council review curriculum in order to ensure course rigor and compliance with established standards. Based on the review of programs and syllabi the College does not award credit on clock hours (Merritt Team Report, pp. 27, 39, 40)

Transfer Policies

- Transfer policies are appropriately disclosed to students and to the public.
- Policies contain information about the criteria the institution uses to accept credits for transfer.
- The institution complies with the Commission *Policy on Transfer of Credit*.

Regulation citations: 602.16(a)(1)(viii); 602.17(a)(3); 602.24(e); 668.43(a)(ii).

Conclusion Check-Off (mark one):

- The team has reviewed the elements of this component and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements.
- The team has reviewed the elements of this component and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements, but that follow-up is recommended.
- The team has reviewed the elements of this component and found the institution does not meet the Commission's requirements.

Narrative:

Transfer policies are outlined in the college catalog, both hard copy and electronic as well as the class schedule. The college catalog also contained required general information that includes programs, degree offerings, academic regulations, acceptance of transfer credit, refund policies, fees, and many more. (Merritt Report, p. 47)

Distance Education and Correspondence Education

- The institution has policies and procedures for defining and classifying a course as offered by distance education or correspondence education, in alignment with USDE definitions.
- There is an accurate and consistent application of the policies and procedures for determining if a course is offered by distance education (with regular and substantive interaction with the instructor, initiated by the instructor, and online activities are included as part of a student's grade) or correspondence education (online activities are primarily "paperwork related," including reading posted materials, posting homework and completing examinations, and interaction with the instructor is initiated by the student as needed).
- The institution has appropriate means and consistently applies those means for verifying the identity of a student who participates in a distance education or correspondence education course or program, and for ensuring that student information is protected.
- The technology infrastructure is sufficient to maintain and sustain the distance education and correspondence education offerings.
- The institution demonstrates compliance with the Commission *Policy on Distance Education and Correspondence Education*.

Regulation citations: 602.16(a)(1)(iv), (vi); 602.17(g); 668.38.

Conclusion Check-Off (mark one):

- The team has reviewed the elements of this component and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements.
- The team has reviewed the elements of this component and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements, but that follow-up is recommended.
- The team has reviewed the elements of this component and found the institution does not meet the Commission's requirements.

Narrative:

The Visiting Team confirmed that Merritt College meets the Commission Policy on Distance and Correspondence Education. Distance Education (DE) classes are the same in content, rigor, and quality as site-based classes. The College required that all courses proposed for DE delivery be separately reviewed and approved by the Curriculum and Instructional Council before being forwarded for multiple levels of approval at the District and regional approvals in the case of Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs. The College requires "regular and effective" contact between faculty and students. The District offered a variety of processes to ensure that a registered student is the same student who participates in and completes the program and receives academic credit. (Merritt Report, p. 25)

The College uses Moodle as its Learning Management System (LMS) for all DE classes.

Based on student surveys and documents provided by the College, this LMS appears to meet the needs of the students and faculty and provides an environment that supports the stated SLO for each class. Technical support for students and faculty is provided through the IT employees, at both the District and College levels as well as online support for all application providers. Additional Moodle guides and manuals are available online to those who wish to be “self-served” relative to LMS processes available for classes delivered through DE. The technology support provided by the District and College technology groups was well organized and efficient. (Merritt Report, p. 64)

Student Complaints

- The institution has clear policies and procedures for handling student complaints, and the current policies and procedures are accessible to students in the college catalog and online.
- The student complaint files for the previous six years (since the last comprehensive evaluation) are available; the files demonstrate accurate implementation of the complaint policies and procedures.
- The team analysis of the student complaint files identifies any issues that may be indicative of the institution's noncompliance with any Accreditation Standards.
- The institution posts on its website the names of associations, agencies and governmental bodies that accredit, approve, or license the institution and any of its programs, and provides contact information for filing complaints with such entities.
- The institution demonstrates compliance with the *Commission Policy on Representation of Accredited Status* and the *Policy on Student and Public Complaints Against Institutions*.

Regulation citations: 602.16(a)(1)(ix); 668.43.

Conclusion Check-Off (mark one):

- The team has reviewed the elements of this component and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements.
- The team has reviewed the elements of this component and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements, but that follow-up is recommended.
- The team has reviewed the elements of this component and found the institution does not meet the Commission's requirements.

Narrative:

The College meets the Commission Policy on Representation of Accredited Status. AACJC accreditation status is referenced appropriately in the college catalog, schedule of classes, and the college website. All accredited programs, licensure requirements, and state certifications are identified and advertised appropriately. (Merritt Report, p. 27)

The college catalog (hard copy and online) provides information about policies and procedures for handling student complaints (Merritt Report, pp. 27-27, p. 47).

Complaint procedures are clearly written for students, both online and in the catalog. Historical record of complaints dating back to 2011 was provided. The College made available one complaint involving a Student Grievance Hearing. There were no others. The College followed the process. The Vice President of Student Services indicated that when he came on board eight months ago, he has implemented the complaint

procedures as outlined. It appears, however, that due to the high turnover in leadership, some of then previous complaints or grievance processes may not have been archived. Merritt College does not have a six year history of complaints; however, the complaints provided did not show evidence of a trend of student complaints or grievance issues. The College posts ACCJC contact information on the website, directing students where complaints may be filed. The College does not have a history of student complaints via AACJC.

The College meets this federal regulation and Commission Policy.

Institutional Disclosure and Advertising and Recruitment Materials

- The institution provides accurate, timely (current), and appropriately detailed information to students and the public about its programs, locations, and policies.
- The institution complies with the Commission *Policy on Institutional Advertising, Student Recruitment, and Representation of Accredited Status*.
- The institution provides required information concerning its accredited status as described above in the section on Student Complaints.

Regulation citations: 602.16(a)(1)(vii); 668.6.

Conclusion Check-Off (mark one):

- The team has reviewed the elements of this component and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements.
- The team has reviewed the elements of this component and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements, but that follow-up is recommended.
- The team has reviewed the elements of this component and found the institution does not meet the Commission's requirements.

Narrative:

The College meets the Commission Policy on Institutional Advertising, Student Recruitment, and Representation of Accredited Status. Various college publications such as the college catalog (which is published in hard copy and available via the website) and class schedule provides general information, including grievance and complaint procedures, sexual harassment policies, academic regulations, and others (Merritt Report p. 47,)

The College uses the catalog and class schedules to advertise classes and programs, and to recruit students, These publications include regulatory and enrollment information and are updated electronically to ensure accuracy. AACJC accreditation status is referenced appropriately in the catalog and class schedule (Merritt Report, p. 27)

Title IV Compliance

- The institution has presented evidence on the required components of the Title IV Program, including findings from any audits and program or other review activities by the USDE.
- The institution has addressed any issues raised by the USDE as to financial responsibility requirements, program record-keeping, etc. If issues were not timely addressed, the institution demonstrates it has the fiscal and administrative capacity to timely address issues in the future and to retain compliance with Title IV program requirements.
- The institution's student loan default rates are within the acceptable range defined by the USDE. Remedial efforts have been undertaken when default rates near or meet a level outside the acceptable range.
- Contractual relationships of the institution to offer or receive educational, library, and support services meet the Accreditation Standards and have been approved by the Commission through substantive change if required.
- N/A__ The institution demonstrates compliance with the *Commission Policy on Contractual Relationships with Non-Regionally Accredited Organizations* and the *Policy on Institutional Compliance with Title IV*.

Regulation citations: 602.16(a)(1)(v); 602.16(a)(1)(x); 602.19(b); 668.5; 668.15; 668.16; 668.71 et seq.

Conclusion Check-Off:

- The team has reviewed the elements of this component and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements.
- The team has reviewed the elements of this component and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements, but that follow-up is recommended.
- The team has reviewed the elements of this component and found the institution does not meet the Commission's requirements.

Narrative:

The College does not have contractual relationships with any non-regionally accredited organizations. (Merritt Report, p. 28)

For the last three years, the College's default rates has been under 30 percent which is within federal guidelines. (Merritt Report, p. 72)

All financial documents such as the budget reports and independent audit reports reflect information about the use of financial resources to support student learning programs and services. The District financial audits are publicly available and reported and reviewed at regularly scheduled Board meetings, participatory governance meetings, and staff and management meetings. When audit findings are identified, the College and the

District need to make timely and appropriate action to implement corrective actions to address the identified deficiency. Significant deficiencies were noted in multiple year external Audit reports for the College in connection to Financial Aid: (1) Auditors were not able to determine date of return to Title IV; (2) Failure to return funds to Title IV and no process in place to identify dropped students (FY 2013/2014 Audit Report p.85); (3) COD disbursements were more than 30 days past the reported date (FY 2013/2014 Audit Report, p.83); (4) Not reconciling SAS and Loan details to financial records (FY 2013/2014 Audit Report, p.86); and (5) Auditors were not able to determine date of return to Title IV (FY 2013/2014 Audit Report, p. 102). The above are multi-year findings dating back to 2008.

The District has hired an internal auditor who has created a corrective action matrix listing all of the audit findings with timelines for resolution of the findings. The College and the District have made significant progress in addressing the audit findings. Evidence provided during the visit and prior to the finalization of this report, after the visit, indicate that the District and the colleges have developed oversight committees, identified internal audit, management accountability as well as procedures to address #1, #2, #3, and #5. One document identified overpayment to students, however, the document does not show if and when funds were returned to Title IV. The evidence provided for #4 reflects the College has resolved this audit finding and may no longer be providing Direct Loans. The 2014 Corrective Action Matrix provided subsequent to the visit indicates that procedures are in the implementation stage. While these procedures are in progress, there is no evidence since the last Audit report of 2014 or the last Department of Education Program Review that the College and District have fully resolved all of the audit findings. (Standard III.D.2.b)

The District Team found that the District and the Colleges have made great strides in advancing the fiscal planning and budgeting processes as well as reducing the number of audit findings. The colleges and the District are working to resolve the issues related to the Financial Audit finding and the Department of Education Program Review. The revised Peralta District Financial Aid Policies and Procedures Manual includes procedures to transmit payments for Common Origination and Disbursement report, a return of Title IV section, and the Direct Loan and Pell Reconciliation process to address Audit Findings.

Also to address audit findings, the District has confirmed receipts from the National Student Clearinghouse showing they have submitted enrollment files for each of the colleges. In addition, the District workgroup have been meeting and taking minutes with regards to collaborating and making progress to automate the PeopleSoft system to meet the federal requirements of enrollment reporting. (Merritt Report, p.70)