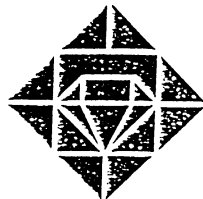


ESTRELLA MOUNTAIN
COMMUNITY COLLEGE
C·E·N·T·E·R



January 23, 1997

"Your Success is Our Success"

Cecilia L. Lopez, Associate Director
Commission on Institutions of Higher Education
North Central Association of Colleges and Schools
30 North LaSalle St., Suite 2400
Chicago, Illinois 60602-2504

Dear Dr. Lopez:

I acknowledge receipt of the Report of a Visit to Maricopa Community College-Estrella Mountain Community College Center. This letter also serves as a formal written response to the evaluation team's report and recommendations.

The team report was reviewed earlier in draft form for matters of fact. The final report is a thorough review of the team's visit to Estrella Mountain to evaluate our ability to meet the initial accreditation criteria.

We find the report to be very well written, insightful, highly complimentary, and useful for the purposes of institutional improvement and planning. The team chairperson and team members are to be commended for their professional contribution to the development of this new community college.

We acknowledge the identification of institutional strengths and concerns and the insights offered by the team's advice and suggestions. We have developed responses to the three institutional concerns and are prepared to submit a progress report by the established date. These responses are included in a separate document attached to this letter.

The accreditation process has afforded Estrella Mountain the challenge of an institutional self study and peer evaluation. Our college determined that it met the Commission's Requirements and Criteria and found that the self study process helped clarify our plans for improvement and enhancement. We are pleased that the peer review has confirmed this and has resulted in a favorable recommendation to grant initial accreditation.

On behalf of the college family and its many constituents, we thank you, Dr. Smith, and the team members for supporting Estrella Mountain.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Homero Lopez, Ph.D.
President

COPY

cc: Vicky R. Smith, Evaluation Team Chairperson
Evaluation Team
Review Committee Members

Responses to Concerns in the Evaluation Team Report

Estrella Mountain Community College Center

Concern #1

Because of the unique technological learning environment of the College, the hours of operation of the Information Commons do not seem adequate to meet the students' need for access to these technological resources.

The college agrees that expansion of hours of operation of the Information Commons will increase students access to technological resources. A locally-developed survey instrument will be administered to students (Spring 1997) to determine the scope of this expansion.

Currently the Information Commons is accessible for 67.5 hours per week from 7:30 am to 9 pm, Monday through Thursday and until 5 pm on Friday; and 8 am to noon on Saturday. Based on the results of this survey, hours of operation will be expanded appropriately.

The college is exploring student needs for information access in areas beyond just building hours of operation. For example, the Noel Levitz Student Satisfaction Survey, a nationally standardized instrument is being used to identify students' needs and to improve college services (administration dates include December, 1996 and February, 1997). The survey instrument has been modified locally to include three questions specific to the concept of access to information.

The college also has committed to a comprehensive and systematic program to identify students' needs, to obtain student feedback for continuous improvement, and to continue to develop access to information as indicated in the Institutional Self Study Report (Chapter X, Institutional Challenges: Growth and Development, page 249, Organizational Culture and Climate and Strategies for Information Technologies, page 250). This will result in an on-going approach to address the whole gamut of students' needs.

The team's concern over student access to information is very understandable particularly given the rich technological environment combined with so many first generation students. The future of information needs and access will need to increase dramatically as the college grows. The college is well positioned to meet these future demands as indicated throughout the NCA Team Report.

Concern #2

The Student Academic Achievement Plan does not fully articulate a comprehensive assessment of student academic achievement across all areas of the curriculum.

The college understands the NCA Team's concern with student academic achievement and will submit a progress report by December 1, 1998.

The team complimented Estrella Mountain's faculty for their exemplary commitment to student learning and assessment. The team noted that the college is developing an appropriate assessment model and will eventually have a comprehensive plan for student academic achievement in place.

The team reported, however, that the college is still in the development and early implementation stages of assessment. Therefore, the college's plans for institutional effectiveness and student academic achievement need further development in order to provide a comprehensive program for the total curriculum.

The team found that Estrella Mountain had not yet implemented broad program assessment of student academic achievement across all degrees and other programs of study. To address this, the college will review a number of its purposes that are directly related to student learning besides general education for inclusion in the plan.

The college will clarify the relationship between the Student Academic Achievement Plan and the Plan for Institutional Effectiveness. In so doing, faculty and staff will:

- Redefine abilities to include behavioral, measurable terms
- Expand the link between course competencies and the student abilities
- Comprehensively assess all educational purposes for program improvement
- Develop and implement a formal program assessment process which is linked to the College's assessment plans.

The preceding components will be incorporated into the Plan for Institutional Effectiveness and Student Academic Achievement Plan to develop an articulated and comprehensive institutional assessment effort. At full implementation, all college disciplines and programs will be involved in assessing student academic achievement. This work will be submitted to NCA in a progress report by December 1, 1998.

Concern #3

Although student development is a major emphasis of the College that permeates the institution, this aspect is not specifically reflected in the stated purposes of the Colleges.

The college agrees that student development is a major emphasis that permeates the institution and recognizes that it is not specifically reflected in the stated purposes of the college.

The college will utilize its formal planning structures to address this concern. Specifically, the issue of whether "student development" should be included as a stated college purpose will be considered. Changes to the college mission and purposes, however, must be officially approved by the Governing Board of the Maricopa Community College District.

Discussions regarding student development and the college purpose statements have been ongoing throughout the college's planning stages and particularly during the institutional self study. Given the college's active planning environment, the student development matter has a context for further institutional review.