EVALUATION REPORT

Merritt College
12500 College Drive
Oakland, CA 94619

A confidential report prepared for
The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges
Western Association of Schools and Colleges

This report represents the findings of the evaluation team that visited Merritt
College on March 9-12, 2009

Mr. Michael Claire, Chair

Merritt College
Comprehensive Evaluation Visit Team Roster
Monday, March 9-Thursday, March 12, 2009

Mr. Michael Claire (CHAIR)
President
College of San Mateo

Dr. Mitjl Capet
Assistant Superintendent/VP of Instruction
College of the Canyons

Dr. Janet Fulks
Professor
Bakersfield College

Ms. Ramona Kincaid
Director, University Center & Academic Support
Kauai Community College

Dr. Richard Mahon
Associate Professor, Humanities
Riverside City College

Ms. Virginia Moran
Executive Dean of Institutional Effectiveness
Victor Valley College

Dr. Monte Perez
President
Moreno Valley Campus RCCD

Ms. Reagan Romali
Vice President, Business Services
Riverside CCD

Dr. Susan Estes (Assistant)
Vice President of Instruction
College of San Mateo

SUMMARY OF EVALUATION REPORT

INSTITUTION: Merritt College

DATES OF VISIT: March 9, 2009 to March 12, 2009

TEAM CHAIR: Mr. Michael Claire

An eight-member accreditation team visited Merritt College from March 9, 2009, to March 12, 2009, for the purpose of evaluating how well the institution is achieving its stated purposes, analyzing how well the college is meeting the Commission standards, providing recommendations for quality assurance and institutional improvement, and submitting recommendations to the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) regarding the status of the college.

In preparation for the visit, team members attended an all-day training session on February 4, 2009, conducted by the ACCJC, and studied Commission materials prepared for visiting teams. Team members read carefully the college's self study report, including the recommendations from the 2003 visiting team, and assessed the evidence provided by the college.

Prior to the visit team members completed written evaluations of the self study report and began identifying areas for further investigation. On the day before the formal beginning of the visit, the team members spent the afternoon discussing their views of the written materials provided by the college, reviewing evidence provided by the college and the October 2003, October 2004, and October 2005 Progress Reports; the March 2006 Focused Midterm Report, and the March 2007 and March 2008 Progress Reports completed by the college, and other materials submitted to the Commission since its last comprehensive visit.

During the visit, the team met with over 70 faculty, staff, administrators, members of the Board of Trustees, and students. The team chair met with the college president and various senior administrators. In addition, team members visited a sampling of classes and visited the Fruitvale Education Center at the Unity Council site in Oakland. The team also attended two open meetings to allow for comment from any member of the campus or local community.

The team felt that the self study report was complete. However, team members found that some sections of the self study were out of date and that Merritt College had progressed further than what was documented in the self study in certain areas. College staff members were very accommodating to team members and available for interviews and follow-up conversations. The college was well prepared and ready for the team's visit.

Major Findings and Recommendations of the March 2009 Visiting Team

Commendations:
The team commends Merritt College for

1) creating a climate of civility and trust and for its thorough and inclusive governance processes. The Curriculum, SLO assessment, and College Educational Master Plan committees have modeled best practices in their development and implementation.

2) demonstrating significant progress in establishing the Fruitvale Education Center, a site serving a significant need in the community, particularly for non-native speakers.

3) maintaining a lively and comfortable physical campus environment featuring interesting displays of student and faculty work, and a high level of campus cleanliness that reflects attention to detail and regular maintenance, which enhances the student learning environment.

4) creating entrepreneurial solutions to meet educational priorities as evidenced by recent grant awards and the development of business and community partnerships.

Recommendations:

Recommendation 1: *Mission Statement*
In order to increase effectiveness, the team recommends that the college ensure that its governance and decision-making processes relative to review of its mission include clear documentation of procedures and an accurate record of deliberations, decisions, actions, and impacts on college operations. Furthermore, the college must clearly communicate to the campus community any such revisions made to its mission and the impacts of those changes to college operations (I.A.3., IV.A.2.).

Recommendation 2: *Program Review*
The team recommends that the college further refine its program review, planning, and resource allocation processes so that they are more clearly 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 (I.B.3, I.B.6, I.B.7).

Recommendation 3: *Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment*
The college should develop an action plan to accelerate progress on the use of student learning outcomes and assessment to improve institutional effectiveness. Specifically, the college should expedite the completion of student learning outcomes for all programs, degrees, certificates, and courses. Furthermore, the college should accelerate the identification of assessment strategies for student learning outcomes, implement the assessment strategies, and use the results of the assessment for continuous quality improvement (II.A.1.a, c, 2.a,b,c,e,f,h,i, A.3, A.6, Eligibility Requirement 10).

Recommendation 4: *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 (III.A.1b).

Recommendation 5: *Human Resource Planning*
In order to increase effectiveness, the team recommends that the college examine more closely the relationship between the adequacy of full-time faculty in core academic areas and the ability of the college to offer a comprehensive curriculum and to develop and assess student learning outcomes at the course, program, and institutional levels (III.A.2b).

Recommendation 6: *Management Systems*
The team recommends that the district immediately resolve the functional issues associated with the implementation of the districtwide-adopted software management systems for student, human resources, and financial aid administration (III.C.1a, III.C.1.c, III.C.1.d, IV.B.3.b).

Recommendation 7: *Financial Resources and Technology*
The team recommends that the district take immediate corrective action to implement all appropriate controls and necessary MIS system modifications to achieve access to a fully integrated computer information management system, including modules for student, financial aid, human resources, and finance, in order to assure financial integrity and accountability. All corrective action and system testing should be completed within two years and the governing board should receive regular implementation progress reports until project completion (III.D.1a, III.D.1b, III.D.2.a).

Recommendation 8: *Board and District Administration*
The team recommends that district assess the overall effectiveness of its service to the college and provide clear delineation of functional responsibilities and develop clear processes for decision making (IV.B.1, IV.B.3.a, b, c, f, g).

ACCREDITATION EVALUATION REPORT

MERRITT COLLEGE
March 9-12, 2009

Introduction

Merritt College is one of four colleges in the Peralta Community College District which serve Alameda County. The other district colleges are Laney, College of Alameda, and Berkeley City College. The team also visited the Fruitvale Education Center located at the Unity Council site in Oakland, which offers courses in ESL. The offerings at the Fruitvale Center do not constitute 50 percent of any program at the current time.

The college, founded in 1953, is located in the East Oakland hills on a 125-acre site that offers a spectacular view of the entire San Francisco Bay Area. The campus consists of 11 buildings. The Peralta Community College District passed a facilities bond, and Merritt College has completed an Educational Master Plan that establishes priorities for facilities construction and renovation.

Merritt College served approximately 7,400 students in the fall 2007 semester. The demographics of the college reveal it is a multicultural institution that mirrors its service area population with the exception of Hispanics, which are underrepresented in the college as compared to Oakland's population. Approximately 51 percent of students are under the age of 30. The gender composition of the student body is weighted towards female students who comprise about 70% of the student population. Almost 85% of students are classified as part-time students, and 62% of students have established a specific educational goal.

The college offers an array of both transfer and occupational-vocational programs that meet students' educational goals. These programs are supported by well-designed student services programs that assist students to be successful.

Evaluation of Institutional Responses to Previous Recommendations

College Recommendations:

The College engage in a deliberate, focused and concerted effort to identify the most effective ways it can assure that its institutional research and evaluation processes, policies and practices are developed and implemented within a timely and efficient manner. (3A.1, 3A.2, 3A.3, 3A.4)

In 2005 the college hired a full-time Research and Planning Officer, responsible for conducting institutional research. The college has made significant progress with respect to this recommendation and has demonstrated that it is using data in its planning processes. However, the team still has several concerns. First, the team did not find any evidence that the college reviews its planning cycle including institutional and other research efforts in a systematic manner. The team is also concerned that the quantitative and qualitative data relied on for unit plans do not appear to be used in a way that addresses matters of quality assurance of the college's programs and services. Finally, interviews with the college's research and planning officer and the chief instructional officer reveal concerns about accessibility of data the college receives from the district. This recommendation is not fully met.

The College evaluate its current policies, procedures and practices for all levels of institutional planning in order to streamline its planning processes and assure a broad-based understanding of and participation in those processes. (3B.1, 3B.2, 3B.3 and 10B.1, 10B.5, 10B.6, 10B.9)

The college has reorganized governance structures and committees in an attempt to streamline and link many of these processes. The Integrated Planning Committee has evolved into the College Educational Master Plan Committee (CEMPC), which is designed to address many aspects of this issue. After extensive interviews with faculty, staff, and administrators, as well as a thorough examination of committee charges, minutes, and actions, it was evident that Merritt College has met this recommendation. While the college needs to propose a specific timeline for evaluation of the process in the future, the current process shows commendable success.

The College take the necessary steps to assure that all plans, programs, services, and courses contain clear outcome measures that will be used to evaluate the achievement of the institutional mission, goals, and objectives and communicate those achievements to the public. (3C.1, 3C.2, 3C.3)

Merritt College responded to this recommendation in the October 2003 and March 2004 progress reports, as well as the 2006 focused midterm report. The college has established institution-level learning outcomes. To date, the majority of instructional programs have

developed program level outcomes and are moving to establish course-level outcomes as well as assessment mechanisms. Furthermore, student learning outcomes have been established for nearly all student service programs. This recommendation is met.

The College should develop and implement a plan for Student Services that focuses on broad participation of Student Services faculty, staff, and students; utilizing the Program Review Process; and ensuring that the plan is integrated into the college's Educational Plan.

Student Services conducts program reviews and these reviews are integrated in the college educational master plan. The student services council meets twice a month and has broad participation from faculty, staff, and students. The college has met this recommendation.

The College should implement a plan to ensure that current information is available to students and faculty by providing consistent, stable funding from the beginning of each fiscal year for library materials, both periodicals and books. Outdated print materials need replacing to properly serve the instructional programs.

Though not a line item budget, the Library has received funding for the last several fiscal years. In 2007 the Library was allocated $100,000 from the facilities bond fund. Merritt College's revised program review and planning system will help to ensure that Library needs are considered as part of the college's budget allocation process. The college has met this recommendation.

The College must comply with the District's policies and procedures by implementing timely and systematic evaluation of all administrators, faculty and staff.

Evaluation of tenured and adjunct faculty does not appear to have occurred on a regular and consistent basis. A plan has been put into place to provide release time for department chairs, so they may make these evaluations current. Furthermore, the college provided evidence that there are plans in place to address tenured and adjunct faculty evaluations and these plans have been submitted to the Vice Chancellor of Educational Services. Team members expressed concern that the schedule to complete adjunct faculty evaluations needed to be accelerated. This recommendation is not yet fully met.

The College establish selection, evaluation and retention practices that reduce the level of administrative turn over in order to ensure the College's stability, to preserve the College's collective memory and to promote continuity of programs and initiatives. (7A.1)

Weekly meetings, mentoring, and training have been instituted to address administrative retention. Review of administrative hires at Merritt College indicates stability and a reduction to only two remaining interim positions. These interim positions are currently in the process of being filled. It is evident that improvement in hiring and evaluation practices have contributed to a more stable and sustainable administrative leadership. The college has met this recommendation.

The College develop, publish, and institute clearly-defined institutional guidelines and processes for financial planning, budget development, and facilities priorities that are driven by inclusive planning processes in support of the educational objectives of the College and are linked to other institutional planning efforts and include realistic assessments of resource availability and expenditure requirements. (3B.1, 8.5, 9A.2, 9A.3, and 9A.5)

Merritt College has met this recommendation with energy, creativity, and cultural changes. However the team is concerned about the efforts at the district level, something Merritt College is unable to correct. Financial planning and budgeting are very clear at the college level but are not transparent at the district level and confusing.

The College continue to refine and publish its current governing bodies in relation to decision making processes in all aspects of the college decisions inclusive of the budgetary decisions. (10B.5, 10B.6, 10B.9, 10B.10)

The college has invested a lot of energy in revising its governance structures. Merritt College has created a shared governance manual and a consultation guideline that provides support and integrity to decision-making processes. There remain concerns about effective communication within constituent groups; however, the survey documenting these concerns represents old information and the current college climate appears to have changed significantly. Careful monitoring of communication efforts in the future and continued evaluation to document improvement are essential. This recommendation has been met.

The College must ensure adequate and stable administrative support in all areas of the college operations and functions and adhere to district policy in hiring, evaluation, and termination of administrative officers.

The team confirmed that the college has followed district policy in hiring, evaluation, and termination of administrative officers. This recommendation has been met.

District Recommendations:

The Peralta Community College District provide a detailed and concrete plan that clearly identifies the steps, timelines and measureable action that are being undertaken by the District to fund long-term liabilities posed by health care benefits.

This recommendation has been met. A bond offering of $150 million was initiated in 2005 to fund the costs of retiree health benefits. District funds held in custodial accounts have been realigned to provide additional safety and security of district funds.

The Peralta Community College District develop a district-wide plan and implementation process that are strategic and systematically integrate the educational, financial, physical, and human resources of the District. All planning processes should be inclusive of the four colleges and communities served by the district. The plan should include identified institutional outcomes with criteria for evaluation on a periodic basis. It is recommended that the district-wide plan integrate the educational master plans and program reviews of the colleges. The team also recommends that the chancellor ensure that the plan and the on-going planning processes are communicated throughout the District. (3.B.1, 3.B.3, 3.C.1, 3.C.3 and 10.C.1, 10.C.6)

This recommendation has been met. The district has developed a comprehensive, integrated strategic planning process which was modeled after Merritt College's planning process. The progress report from the 2008 visiting team found: "considerable work towards resolving this recommendation and commends the district and the colleges for their enthusiasm and cooperative spirit in addressing this topic." The district and the colleges have made further progress on this recommendation since the 2008 progress report by completing and integrating educational master plans.

The Board of Trustees immediate appoint an interim chancellor, and begin the process of recruiting a permanent chancellor. The team further recommends that the Board of Trustees direct the new chancellor to make stability of both the colleges and the district administrative personnel a high priority. (10.C.1, 10.C.2)

This recommendation has been met. The Board of Trustees has appointed a permanent chancellor.

The Board of Trustees adhere to it appropriate functions and policy orientation, and relies upon the district chancellor for recommendations affecting the organization as well as the hiring, retention, and termination of all categories of district and college staff. The team further recommends that the Board of Trustees ensure that the District is continuously led by a chancellor as its chief executive officer. Finally, the team recommends that the Board of Trustees clearly identify and widely disseminate the roles and responsibilities assigned to the district administration and those assigned to the college administration so that the appropriate responsibility and authority are specified and related accountability standards are established. (10A.3, 10A.4, 10C.1, 10C.2, 10C.3)

The team found evidence that the Board of Trustees relies upon the district chancellor for recommendations affecting the organization as well as the hiring, retention, and termination of personnel. Furthermore, it is clear the the district has been led by the chancellor as its chief executive officer. However, there still appears to be significant confusion regarding roles and responsibilities of district administration and those assigned to the college administration. This recommendation has been partially met.

Eligibility Requirements

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS FOR ACCREDITATION

1. Authority
Merritt College is authorized to operate as an educational institution and award degrees by the (1) Accrediting Commission of Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC), (2) the California State Chancellor's Office, and (3) the locally elected Board of Trustees of the Peralta Community College District.

2. Mission
The team confirmed that Merritt College completed a review of its mission statement. The Board of Trustees approved the current Merritt College mission statement in 2004. This statement is communicated to the public through print materials as well as the college's website.

3. Governing Board
A seven-member board elected by voters governs the Peralta Community College District. Two student trustees are selected through a district-wide student body election. The function of the board is to establish policies, rules and regulations consistent with the goals and operation of the District and the colleges.

4. Chief Executive Officer
The college president serves as the chief executive officer responsible for oversight of college programs and for the administration and operation of the college. The college president reports the Peralta District Chancellor. The Board of Trustees appoints the president and conducts performance evaluations. The college's current president assumed his duties on July 1, 2007.

5. Administrative Capacity
The college has a sufficient number of administrators to provide the programs and services defined by the college's mission statement. All administrators are selected using district guidelines and are qualified by education and experience to perform their assigned duties.

6. Operational Status
The college enrolls approximately 7,000 full-and part-time students in a variety of educational programs and services including a range of transfer, skill development, and vocational curricula. Offerings and programs change regularly to reflect the needs of the students attaining their educational goals at Merritt College.

7. Degrees
Merritt College offers 38 degree programs. Students also earn certificates. Certificate and degree opportunities are clearly identified in the college catalog.

8. Educational Programs
Merritt College degree and certificate programs are consistent with the college mission and based on recognized higher education fields of study. They are sufficient in content and length, and maintain appropriate levels of rigor.

9. Academic Credit
Merritt College awards academic credit in a manner conventional for community colleges and consistent with generally accepted good practice and state regulations.

10. Student Learning and Achievement
Merritt College defines and publishes program educational objectives in course outlines, in the College Catalog, in occupational brochures, and in instructional planning documents that are regularly reviewed and updated. Some programs have completed a full assessment cycle. The team believes that Merritt College meets the current expectation level of the accreditation standard.

11. General Education
Merritt College includes general education requirements in its degree programs, and writing and computational skills are reflected in these requirements. The quality and rigor of Merritt College's general education requirements are consistent with the academic standards appropriate to higher education, providing a breadth of knowledge, demanding critical thinking within the disciplines, and promoting intellectual inquiry.

12. Academic Freedom
District Policy supports academic freedom. Merritt College publishes this policy in its catalog.

13. Faculty
The college has a substantial core of qualified and experienced full and part-time faculty to support all of its educational programs. A statement of faculty professional responsibility is described in the Faculty Handbook.

14. Student Services
Merritt College provides a range of student services consistent with its student population and its mission statement.

15. Admissions
The college maintains an open admissions policy consistent with its mission.

16. Information and Leaning Resources
The team found the Library and learning resources to be of adequate size and scope to support the college's instructional programs.

17. Financial Resources
The college and district demonstrate an adequate funding base and financial reserves to support student learning programs and services.

18. Financial Accountability
The District undergoes an annual external audit that is conducted by an independent auditor. The independent auditor has issued a qualified opinion for the 2008 audit report.

19. Institutional Planning and Evaluation
The college's Educational Master Plan guides overall institutional planning and development. The team has confirmed that Merritt College has an ongoing and systematic cycle of evaluation, integrated planning, and resource allocation.

20. Public Information
The Merritt College catalog and website provide constituents with accurate and current information.

21. Relations with the Accrediting Commission
The Board of Trustees provides assurance in its policies and actions, and in its validation of this self-study that the college adheres to the eligibility requirements and accreditation standards and policies of the Commission.

Accreditation Themes

Institutional Commitments
Merritt College is committed to high quality education congruent with its mission. The college's mission statement reflects the institution's commitment to student learning and to improving the quality of life in the community that is served by the college. College plans and goals are aligned with the college's mission. Furthermore, the college has established a solid framework and infrastructure to support the identification and assessment of student learning outcomes. Based upon the team's interviews with a wide variety of college personnel, the college's commitment to student success and learning is clear.

Evaluation, Planning and Improvement
The college has developed an integrated planning process that incorporates a cycle of evaluation, planning, implementation, and assessment of the results. Merritt College has demonstrated its commitment to continuous quality improvement by using data about its performance to plan and take action on key strategic initiatives. In addition, the college has identified student learning outcomes for its programs, degrees, and certificates, and many programs are prepared to assess outcomes. Student learning outcomes and assessment is embedded in the college's program review process, which is a key planning function. The college's integrated planning process allows stakeholders to develop college priorities and fund those priorities within the constraints of the college's financial resources.

Student Learning Outcomes
The college has placed a great emphasis on the identification of student learning outcomes at the institutional and program level since the 2003 accreditation visit. The college has created an SLO committee and has provided release time to a faculty coordinator. Merritt College has also expended considerable effort in providing professional development opportunities and training to assist faculty in the development of student learning outcomes and the design and execution of assessment instruments.

The college has a well-defined process and has created a robust infrastructure to support the development of student learning outcomes and assessment for both instruction and student support services. Based upon interviews and a review of other evidence, it is clear that faculty are involved and engaged in this process. The team feels that the college has met the current expectations of the standard. However, the team is concerned that Merritt College must move expeditiously to ensure that the college meets the expectations of the Commission concerning student learning outcomes and assessment by 2012.

Organization:
The college has well defined governance and organizational processes that provide for the identification and assessment of student learning. The team confirmed that the faculty have a primary role in defining student learning outcomes and assessment through the academic senate. However, it is clear that the administration supports this process, and the team found that the entire college has worked collaboratively to develop student learning outcomes. Institution-level student learning outcomes have been defined and student learning outcomes and assessment is embedded in the program review process.

Dialogue:
The team was genuinely impressed with the level of civility, mutual respect, and collegiality at the college. Those who choose to participate in dialog about institutional quality and improvement have found the process to be inclusive. The college now has a full-time researcher who provides information about the college's programs and services. The team is concerned about the currency of the data that the college uses for decision making. In addition, the team has concerns about the richness of data at the program review level. Nonetheless, it is clear that the college is linking decision making to data analysis and that processes are in place to facilitate dialog among campus stakeholders.

Institutional Integrity:
The team found the college's self study to be an honest reflection of the college. In fact, team members found that the college had progressed beyond what was reported in the self study in some instances. The team also found Merritt College personnel, starting with the college president, were honest and forthright in their assessment of the college. The college has responded to prior accreditation recommendations in a vigorous manner. Various polices, both at the college as well as the district level, help to assure that the students and personnel are treated in a fair and equitable manner. The team found that Merritt College's publications and online materials were clear, appropriate, and accurate.

STANDARD I
Institutional Mission and Effectiveness

Standard I.A: Mission

General Observations:
The current Merritt College mission statement is:

The mission of Merritt College is to enhance the quality of life in the communities we serve by helping students to attain knowledge, master skills, develop the appreciation, attitudes and values needed to succeed and participate responsibly in a democratic society.

To accomplish its mission the College provides open access to excellent instructional programs and comprehensive support services in a culturally rich, caring and supportive learning environment.

The most recent review of the mission statement was conducted in 2003. A 4-step process was specified and described as involving a college wide dialogue involving all college constituencies. The mission statement was approved by college governance groups and the governing board in 2004. College Council represents the overarching governance group for the college. The mission statement is evaluated as necessary by College Council.

Findings and Evidence
The college's mission statement clearly defines its purposes, its students served and its commitment to student learning. The mission statement is published in the college catalog and student handbook, and appears in printed form around the campus. The college monitors alignment of its programs and services with its mission using an annual program review and planning process. A review of the college's comprehensive offerings described in the catalog indicates the college's programs and services are consistent with the purpose stated in the mission and are relevant to student needs (I.A.1, I.A.3).

The team was not able to verify that campus dialogue relative to reviewing the mission occurred in 2003 through College Council, the main entity through which collaborative governance and decision making occurs. The team verified through a review of the College Council minutes that a discussion occurred in May 2008 and that a taskforce was established to refine the mission statement. College Council reaffirmed the college mission statement in March 2009 The mission statement was not submitted to the Board for approval since the intent of College Council was only to rephrase portions of the statement for clarity (I.A.2).

It was not clear from the description and the evidence cited in the self study how the mission is central to institutional planning and decision making. The team verified from the college's educational master plan that the link from the mission to planning exists in the "strategic directions" identified through college governance processes in 2005. Each strategic direction is defined in terms of how it supports the college mission; then each annual unit plan must establish goals that are justified in terms of the strategic directions. More detailed information about the college's systematic evaluation and planning process is described under Standard I.B (IA.4).

Conclusions
Standard I.A is partially met. The college's programs and services are aligned to its mission and the college mission is operationally linked to its annual program review and unit planning process through goal setting aligned with its strategic directions. The college's mission statement is published. In order to fully comply with this standard, the college must ensure its mission review process relies on existing governance and decision-making structures. Those processes should be accurately documented, clearly communicated to the campus community, and formalized by board approval. While the college's governance structures have improved since the 2003 recommendation specifically directing the college to do so (Recommendation 11), the team could not readily find evidence that the college's mission statement was revised following the process described in its self study.

<u>Recommendation 1</u>

Mission Statement
In order to increase effectiveness, the team recommends that the college ensure that its governance and decision-making processes relative to review of its mission include clear documentation of procedures and an accurate record of deliberations, decisions, actions, and impacts on college operations. Furthermore, the college must clearly communicate to the campus community any such revision made to its mission and the impact of those changes to college operations (I.A.3., IV.A.2.).

Standard IB: Improving Institutional Effectiveness

<u>General Observations</u>
The college has created the necessary planning and evaluation infrastructure to produce, support, measure, and improve student learning. The college relies upon program review, unit plans, and the educational master plan as a means of facilitating dialog regarding institutional effectiveness and improvement. The college relies on governance structures which allow for broad-based participation and input by appropriate constituencies. Planning processes are integrated and are driven by data analysis. However, the team is concerned about the accessibility of data at the college level as well as the currency of data. The team is also concerned that the quantitative and qualitative data relied on for

program review and unit plans do not appear to be used in a way that addresses matters of quality assurance of the college's programs and services. Finally, the team could not find evidence that the college uses ongoing and systematic evaluation of its planning efforts to refine key processes and to improve student learning.

Findings and Evidence

The evidence of college dialogue, evaluation, and planning focused on improving student learning includes a list of various research projects, planning activities, and successful grant proposal development from 2005 through 2008. Additionally cited as evidence of the college's conscious effort to improve student learning are the material commitments made to supporting student learning outcomes assessment: the creation of the Student Outcomes and Assessment Committee, a 0.5 coordinator (chair of the committee), funding for training, and stipends for in-house trainers to work with college programs on learning outcomes assessment.

The team found evidence of focused discussions about student achievement data via the Equity for All/ Scorecard project of 2005-2006 administered by the University of Southern California. These discussions are documented in College Council minutes. A task force was appointed and charged with reporting back "development and accomplishments" relative to that project. That ad hoc committee compiled a list of 8 lessons learned and presented the information to College Council on February 20, 2008, at which time an additional follow up/action was assigned to "assess, identify, organize and submit all recommendations to the Council for action." The team found additional evidence that clearly documents that the college took subsequent action on the findings including adding student equity to the college's strategic direction and equity data indicators to program review (I.B.1).

The team also found evidence of systematic evaluation of college programs and services utilizing qualitative and quantitative data that drive annual plans. Documents provided show a history of program review implementation since 2000. The college made major changes to its planning framework in 2005, which has resulted in the following planning activities: the creation of annual unit plans, a report on progress for student learning outcomes, identification of resource needs, the setting of critical goals, and implementation plans (I.B.1, I.B.2).

Unit plans are reviewed by the College Educational Master Planning Committee (CEMPC). CEMPC is the college's governance entity comprised of faculty, classified staff, and administrators, charged with ensuring alignment of annual plans with the educational master plan. The team found evidence that the college's program review and planning processes have changed over time with the intent of improving the process; however, it is not clear to the team what criteria or processes were used to determine what changes were needed.

In short, the college has demonstrated a clear track record of refining its program review and planning processes that relies on governance structures to ensure broad-based participation in that effort, sets goals aimed at improvement and that are aligned with its mission, and allocates its resources accordingly (IB.2, IB.3, IB.4).

Notwithstanding the proficient program review processes in place, the team has several concerns about the use of data and analysis relative to the college's planning efforts. These concerns lie are at the heart of a sustainable program review and planning and should be addressed.

First, the team did not find any evidence that the college reviews its planning cycle, including institutional and other research efforts, in a systematic manner (IB.6).

Second, the team is concerned that the quantitative and qualitative data relied on for unit plans do not appear to be used in a way that addresses matters of quality assurance of the college's programs and services. It may be that the format used to organize the data does not lend itself to analysis of quality, given much of the quantitative data relate to productivity.   The only student data included are program success and retention rates; the indicator labeled "Progress on Student Learning Outcomes" is the percentage of learning outcomes completed (written, not assessed) and is not an indicator of actual student learning. A review of 12 planning documents from 2008-2009 consistently found few analytical linkages between the data and the plan. That is, resource requests were made without reference to the data and no direction is given to justify the requests in the context of the data. Furthermore, the action plans linking program review to the mission-critical strategic directions were not consistently found. According to the research and planning officer, there is no systematic strategy used to complete the unit plans—each chair, dean or director completes the template as s/he chooses (IB.5, IB.7).

Third, the team is concerned about the currency of the research relied upon to evaluate and plan improvements. The Equity for All/Scorecard Project was deployed in 2005-2006, utilizing student data from 1999-2004, and culminating in an integrated improvement strategy in 2008. Interviews with the college's research and planning officer and the chief instructional officer reveal concerns about accessibility of data the college receives from the district.

While the college program review and planning process has a long history marked by efforts to improve that process over time, integration with district efforts is new. According to the district website, the District-Wide Educational Master Planning Committee (DWEMPC) is the district counterpart to CEMPC. CEMPCs are based at each college in the district; their charge is to review and implement processes developed through DWEMPC or other district-wide collaborative bodies. CEMPC develops college educational planning documents, while DWEMPC provides a framework for collaboration through common planning assumptions, tools, and criteria. DWEMPC also provides a forum for communication, conflict resolution, consensus building, and integrated solutions for all colleges across the district. In addition to creating an

integrated planning process, DWEMPC is to provide recommendations "…based on educational principles and evidence."

The team found that few references were made to the district planning process in the college's self study. Evidence of district efforts to integrate its program review and planning efforts with the college were provided by district office personnel, who explained that current refinements were relatively new. The complex process map representing the integrated districtwide planning process provided by the strategic planning manager is difficult to understand, in part due to the many entities involved once the college priorities are established, and is unclear regarding the decision-making authority for each of those entities.

Conclusions

This standard is partially met. The college has made significant progress since the 2003 accreditation visit to improve its planning processes and its assessment of institutional effectiveness. Planning processes have been designed to ensure broad input from college constituencies. In addition, the college has demonstrated that it has taken action based upon assessment results. While the college has made improvements to its program review and planning processes over the years, mechanisms should exist to ensure that evaluation of those processes are conducted in a systematic way, and in a manner that ensures plans actually lead to improvements in programs and services. Finally, the team is concerned that that the quantitative and qualitative data relied on for unit plans do not appear to be used in a way that addresses matters of quality assurance of the college's programs and services.

Recommendation 2

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 (I.B.3, I.B.6, I.B.7).

Standard II
Student Learning Programs and Services

Standard IIA: Instructional Programs

<u>General Observations:</u>
Merritt College is a comprehensive community college that offers a wide range of courses, programs, degrees, and certificates to meet the needs of students and the community. The college's offerings are consistent with the college mission and are delivered in modalities to meet the diverse learning needs of students. Since the last accreditation visit, the college has focused on the development of student learning outcomes at the institution and program level. Also, most programs are now developing student learning outcomes at the course level. A few programs have identified assessment strategies and have used the results of assessment in their planning processes. While the college has made substantial progress in developing student learning outcomes and assessment strategies, the team is concerned about the college's ability to meet the Commission's expectations of this standard by 2012.

Faculty have a central role in curriculum design, identification of student learning outcomes, course evaluation, and establishment of programs. The college uses program review and unit plans to provide for a systematic review of program relevance and quality. The team has reviewed the college's planning systems and has found that institutional plans are integrated and are tied to program review and unit plans. As a result, the college has the necessary planning infrastructure to ensure that the measurement and analysis of student learning outcomes are an important component of college planning processes.

Merritt College has established general education requirements that address the major areas of knowledge and competencies as outlined in Standard II. Furthermore, the college requires that all degrees, whether academic or vocational, include general education requirements and that degree programs include focused study in at least one area of inquiry or in an established core.

The team reviewed various college and district publications and found that the college provided clear, accurate, timely information regarding academic requirements as well as other policies relevant to students. The team also reviewed board polices and other documents and confirmed that the college has sufficient processes and policies in place to assure the academic integrity of the teaching-learning process.

Findings and Evidence

The college offers a curriculum that meets the needs of students who plan to transfer, students who desire a degree or certificate in an occupational field, students who are seeking skill upgrade, students who have developmental education needs, and students who are interested in lifelong learning opportunities. Furthermore, Merritt College has used its research and planning processes to identify gaps between its offerings and community needs. For example, Merritt College has made a significant effort to recruit and serve the Hispanic population by expanding the Fruitvale Educational Center and has also started a Latino/Hispanic Center on the main campus. Through its program review and educational master plan process, Merritt College has also identified emerging occupations in areas such as microscopy and has expanded programs in high demand areas such as nursing. Merritt College has sought grant funding and has also developed partnerships to help finance the of costs these programs (II.A,II.A.1a).

Merritt College uses a variety of delivery modalities to meet the diverse needs and learning styles of its student population. In addition to lecture and laboratory courses, the college offers a growing number of online courses, holds courses at offsite locations, and provides individualized instruction and support through its learning center. The team confirmed that the Distance Education Committee and the Curriculum Instruction Committee have worked during the 2007-08 academic year to create policy, training, and a course approval process to ensure best practices for their distance education offerings. The team encourages the college to review their distance education policies and verify that the distance education plan and policies address ACCJC policies on distance learning as Merritt College expands its distance education program and further refines its distance education plan (II.A.1b).

The college has placed a great emphasis on the identification of student learning outcomes at the institutional and program level since the 2003 accreditation visit. The college has created an SLO committee and has provided release time to a faculty coordinator. Merritt College has also expended considerable effort in providing professional development opportunities and training to assist faculty in the development of student learning outcomes and the design and execution of assessment instruments. Merritt College has identified the following phases with respect to student learning outcomes and assessment:

- Phase I: Develop program learning outcomes, create program maps, write course outcomes for stand alone courses. Merritt College reports that 11 programs are at currently at Phase I.

- Phase II: Align program outcomes with courses, write course outcomes. The college reports that 12 programs are currently at Phase II.

- Phase III: Develop plans and tools for assessment, gather evidence of student learning. Merritt College reports that 3 programs are currently at Phase III

- Phase IV: Discuss and analyze evidence/data to identify student needs and issues, make adjustments to inform curriculum and instruction, advance students to next steps. The team was able to confirm that at least one program is at Phase IV.

Merritt College has a well-defined process and has created a robust infrastructure to support the development of student learning outcomes and assessment. Based upon interviews and a review of other evidence, it is clear that faculty are involved and engaged in this process. The team feels that the college has met the current expectations of the standard. However, the team is concerned that Merritt College must move expeditiously to ensure that the college meets the expectations of the Commission concerning student learning outcomes and assessment by 2012 (II.A.1c).

Faculty have a central role in the development of curriculum and programs, the identification of student learning outcomes, course evaluation, and the establishment of programs. The college offers a number of career and technical programs, and the team was able verify that the college engages external advisory committees for most occupational programs. Merritt College offers high quality instruction as evidenced by high student satisfaction levels on the latest student needs survey. Furthermore, the college has a well-defined curriculum and program development process, which helps to ensure quality curriculum (II.A.2a, II.A.2b, II.A.2.c).

Merritt College uses a variety of delivery modes and pedagogical techniques to address the diverse needs of its students. In addition, the college uses planning mechanisms such as program review and unit plans to review the relevance and appropriateness of courses and programs. The college has embedded student learning outcomes and assessment into its planning processes to assure continuous quality improvement (II.A.2d, II.A.2e, II.A.2f, II.A.2.g).

Merritt College awards credit upon the successful completion of a course. Merritt College is currently engaged in the process of identifying course-level student learning outcomes for every course. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that students will be expected to achieve course-level student learning outcomes at an acceptable level of proficiency in order to complete the course successfully. In addition, most departments have developed program, certificate, and degree outcomes and have aligned courses with these outcomes (II.A.2.h, II.A.2.i)

The college has developed institution-level student learning outcomes, many of which could be considered outcomes of its general education curriculum. However, the team could not find evidence of a general education philosophy in the College Catalog. The team encourages the college to develop and publish a general education philosophy. The team verified that all academic and vocational programs required the completion of general education courses. General education offerings encompass five major areas: the natural sciences, social and behavioral sciences, humanities, language and rationality, and ethnic studies. The team reviewed the College Catalog and schedule and verified that the college offers a sufficient number of general education courses to assure a broad range of alternatives for students. Merritt College's associate degree requirements require

successful completion of courses in oral and written communication, information and computer literacy, scientific and quantitative reasoning, and critical thinking. Finally, Merritt College's associate degree general education requirements help students appreciate and understand ethics, civic responsibility, respect for cultural diversity, and historical and aesthetic sensitivity, consistent with the mission and core values of the college (II.A.3, II.A.3a, II.A.3b, II.A.3c).

All degree programs include focused study in at least one established area or disciplinary core. Merritt College offers 28 degrees in general education fields and 20 degrees in career and technical fields. Many vocational and occupational certificates and degrees must meet standards for external licensure. With the exception of the Radiologic Science Program, the team could not verify licensure pass rates for every applicable programs (II.A.4, II.A.5).

The college's certificates and degrees are listed in the 2007-2009 catalog and include the discipline course requirements, information about general education courses, and transfer policies. The team examined a representative sample of course syllabi and was able to confirm that most syllabi specified learning objectives consistent with those in the institution's official course outline. When programs are eliminated or change, they are reviewed by the articulation officer and the Office of Instruction, and changes are approved by the Curriculum Committee. The catalog is updated for course eliminations, changes to degree requirements and general education transfer patterns. The team could not find evidence of any recent program closures and thus was not able to review processes associated with program termination. The college represents itself to students, the public, and college personnel through the college catalog, schedule, and website. The catalog is updated every two years, and an annual update is published on a yearly basis (II.A.6, II.A.6.a, II.A.6.b, II.A.6.c).

The team examined the college catalog and was able to verify that the college publicizes the Peralta Community College District's statement on academic freedom and policies concerning student academic honesty and consequences for dishonesty. The team was also able to confirm that the Peralta Community College District has published a Code of Ethics for all employees. Finally, the team reviewed the contract between the District and the Peralta Federation of Teachers. Included as part of the evaluation criteria is a set of expectations that require faculty to provide diverse perspectives and to encourage critical thinking (II.A.7, II.A.7a, II.A.7b, II.A.7c).

Conclusions:
The college meets this standard. Merritt College offers a comprehensive curriculum that meets the needs of the community and that is consistent with the college mission. The college has created a planning infrastructure that ensures the systematic evaluation of student learning outcomes as well as a systematic assessment of instructional programs to ensure continuous quality improvement. While the college meets this standard, the team is concerned about the college's ability to fully meet the expectations of the standard concerning student learning outcomes and assessment by 2012.

Recommendation 3

Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment
The college should develop an action plan to accelerate progress on the use of student learning outcomes and assessment to improve institutional effectiveness. Specifically, the college should expedite the completion of student learning outcomes for all programs, degrees, certificates, and courses. Furthermore the college should accelerate the identification of assessment strategies for student learning outcomes, implement the assessment strategies, and use the results of the assessment for continuous quality improvement (II.A.1.a, c, 2.a.b.c.e.f.h.i.A.3, A.6, Eligibility Requirement 10).

Standard IIB: Student Support Services

General Observations:
Merritt College offers a comprehensive program of student support services to enhance student access, student progress, and student learning and success. The college has developed a variety of mechanisms and plans to assure the quality of student support services and to ensure that student support services are aligned with student needs. Furthermore, the college has participated in the Equity for All Scorecard Project, administered by the University of Southern California. The college has taken action on many of the findings of the Equity for All Scorecard project including establishing the Fruitvale Education Center. This site is serving a significant need in the community, particularly for non-native speakers.

The college publishes an official catalog that provides accurate information regarding the college, college policies, and requirements.   The college makes services accessible to all students and has taken extra care to provide outreach to the Hispanic community, which is underrepresented as compared to the City of Oakland.

During the visit the team noted that the college had taken extra care to create a vibrant campus environment that encourages personal and civic responsibility. The team was impressed by the numerous exhibitions positioned throughout the campus, which covered a wide range of academic, cultural, and historical subjects.

Finally, the team found that the college has made significant progress in identifying and assessing student learning outcomes for student support services. Assessment of student learning outcomes is a component of the program review process, which assures continuous quality improvement in student support services.

Findings and Evidence:
The college offers an array of student support services typical of most community colleges to meet the needs of students. In addition, the college has developed student support programs that are designed to support the needs of certain populations including

the Latino Student Center, the Fruitvale Center, and Veterans Affairs. Finally, Merritt College offers childcare services that are integrated with the college's Early Childhood Education Program.

The college prepares a variety of plans to assure the quality of student support services and to demonstrate that services support learning regardless of location or delivery. The college provided the following plans as evidence to support this assertion: the Matriculation Plan, the Transfer Center Plan, the Student Services Education Plan, student support services survey findings, and various plans for programs that receive categorical funding. Furthermore, students support services departments conduct program reviews and these reviews are integrated in the college educational master plan. The Student Services Council meets twice per month and has broad participation from faculty, staff, and students (IIB.1).

Merritt College provides a clear, accurate catalog with current information concerning all required areas. The catalog is updated annually to reflect changes in requirements, curricular offerings, and major policies affecting students. The catalog is readily available to students for purchase. Copies are also available in Admissions and Records, the Counseling Center, and the Library (IIB.2).

The college determines its student support service needs through a variety of mechanisms including program review and student support services plans such as the Matriculation Plan, the Transfer Center Plan, and the Student Services Education Plan. The college also participated in the Equity for All Scorecard Project. Furthermore, the college president has created three task forces under the leadership of senior level administrators to address the issues of student access, retention, and resource development as a result of the Equity for All Scorecard Project. In addition, the college has made a significant effort to provide outreach, support, and instructional services to the community's Hispanic population via the Fruitvale Unity Council Learning Site (IIB3, IIB3.a).

The college continues its legacy of providing a platform for personal and civic awareness and responsibility. The Associated Students of Merritt College is an active organization with a full complement of officers. In addition, the college has 23 active clubs. During the visit, team members took notice of the college's efforts to stimulate the academic environment and to amplify cultural awareness. Finally, the college provides ample opportunities for students to become involved in a variety of community volunteer efforts (IIB3.b).

The college provides professional training and development opportunities to counseling faculty through district and college-sponsored events. In addition, weekly counselor meetings are held and meeting minutes are accessible through the Merritt College Counselor website, which provides counselors with updated information. The team found that the college offers comprehensive counseling services. However, the team is concerned that 44% of students surveyed were not satisfied or were uncertain regarding counseling services. The team suggests that the college investigate the causes for these survey results (IIB3.c).

The college has demonstrated its commitment to enhance student understanding and appreciation for diversity in a variety of ways. For example, the college has participated in the Equity for All Scorecard Project. The goal of this project is to identify and remove access barriers for underrepresented groups. The college has responded to the findings of this report by enhancing services at the Fruitvale Education Center. In addition, the college maintains a Black Panther archive and also offers a rich ethnic studies program. Finally, the Associated Students of Merritt College sponsor student clubs that also support and facilitate diversity (IIB3.d).

The college has adopted a process to validate their placement instruments. At the time of the visit this process has been completed and all assessment instruments have been evaluated (IIB3.e).

The institution maintains student records permanently, securely, and confidentially with provision for secure back up of all files, regardless of the form in which the files are maintained. The institution publishes and follows established policies for release of records. The team noted that the college is working on providing a means of secure back-up of all files. The team encourages the college to expedite this process (II.B.3f).

Student Support Services has created a *Student Learning Outcomes in Student Services* document that states: "By establishing Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) at the Student Support Services level, we aspire to assess student achievement of those outcomes and use results to make improvements in our student support programs and services." Student Support Services programs have been divided into 5 categories for the purpose of identifying and assessing student learning outcomes. All clusters have identified student learning outcomes, two clusters have identified assessment tools, and two clusters have identified assessment tools and have assessed student learning outcomes. The Student Support Services learning outcomes and assessment results are embedded into program review, thus assuring that the college is using student achievement of learning outcomes in planning and evaluation processes for Student Support Services (II.B, II.B.4).

Conclusions:
The college meets this standard. Like other California public community colleges the college has an open enrollment policy and admits diverse students who can benefit from its programs. Merritt College has made significant progress in the design and the delivery of its student services programs. The team did hear from students regarding frustrations with the financial aid program. However, the team feels that the college responded as best it could, given that this was a technical failure at the district level. It is clear that the college's student support programs have implemented student learning outcomes and assessment as well as other evaluation mechanism as the basis for continuous improvement is student support services.

Recommendations
None.

Commendations

The team commends Merritt College for its significant progress in establishing the Fruitvale Education Center . This site is serving a significant need in the community, particularly for non-native speakers.

The team commends Merritt College for creating a lively and comfortable physical campus environment. The team found many interesting displays of student and faculty work and a high level of campus cleanliness. It is apparent that attention to detail and regular maintenance enhances the student learning environment.

Standard IIC: Library and Learning Support Services

General Observations:

The college provides instructional support through the Library and learning support services. Both the Library and the Learning Support Center will experience a significant physical upgrade and will share space according to the college's Educational Master Plan and Facilities Master Plan. The college has provided consistent funding for the Library for collection development. Furthermore, bond funds have been committed for ongoing collection development over the next several years. The Library makes use of typical online resources; however, access to these resources appears somewhat restricted. Library and learning support services use unit plans which are based on both faculty and student input.

Findings and Evidence:

The college librarians are assigned subject areas to maintain by adding or removing volumes. Librarians solicit input from faculty for collection development. Aside from the general collection, the Library hosts 30 periodical databases, 100 print periodicals, and the Black Panther Special Collection. These collections are supplemented by the other Peralta college collections and Netlibrary. In addition, there is an agreement to honor other Peralta Colleges' library cards, but there is no intra-library loan. The equipment in the Library includes wireless access, three photocopiers, a microfilm scanner/printer, and computers that are used to access the online catalog system. The Library also has a rather remarkable collection of valuable artifacts on display for students in the exhibit area.

Recently the Library worked with other Peralta District libraries to acquire funding through the District's bond measure. The Library received $100,000 from Measure A bond funds (IIC1, IIC1.a).

The Learning Center employs a director, who also serves as the Title III grant coordinator. The Learning Center also employs a full-time tutor coordinator, a computer lab specialist and teaching faculty that are assigned to the center for a semester. In addition, more than 20 peer advisors provide tutoring, tech support, and receptionist

responsibilities. Tutors are trained by the instructors and tutoring covers a wide range of subjects. The tutors serve about 2,200 students per semester.

Students, faculty, and staff have access to the Open Computer Lab and to an Electronic Classroom. The Learning Center offers pass/no pass courses in Study Skills, Diagnostic Learning, and Improving Cognitive Skills (II.C.1, II.C.1a).

The Library provides support for information competency through Library instruction for humanities and social science areas and also provides reference services. About 350 students per year are served through these sessions. The number of students served is rather low compared to the college's total student population. Instruction is also offered one-on-one at the reference desk. The Library's website provides access to remote resources and information guides. The staff has not yet developed student learning outcomes for the Library. In addition, the Learning Center offers an open computer lab, a smart classroom with computers, and a tutoring area. One staff member is devoted to computer lab support (II.C.1b).

The Library provides access to services through its physical site and through its website. Access to journal databases and electronic books is available 24/7 through the website. However, students are required to come to the Library to verify their student status before access to information is granted. Furthermore, distance learning students are required to come to campus for access to this resource. The team encourages the Library to review its policies regarding access to online library resources. There are no specific services for distance learning students other than what is already available for on-campus students. Learning Center services are provided for students who are physically present on campus (II.C.1c).

The Library and Learning Center are secured by electronic access controls and functional security gates (II.C.1d)

The Merritt College Library participates in the Community College League consortium for database purchasing. Examples of consortium purchases include CQ Researcher, EBSCO Premier, Encyclopedia Britannica, Expanded Academic, and Literature Resource Center. Merritt College has also purchased Horizon Online (online catalog) using a district agreement. All of the libraries in the Peralta District honor each other's library cards and faculty can obtain borrowing privileges at Doe Library on the UC Berkeley campus (IIC.1.e).

The Library creates an annual unit plan that is integrated into the educational master plan. The unit plan represents immediate goals and needs while the educational master plan is a collection of all college goals and needs. The unit plan is based on data accumulated the previous year. The latest plan for the Library includes campus enrollment data and specific library data for the general collection and the reserve collection, use of the online catalog computers, number of printer copies, number of periodical subscriptions and periodical inquiries, and numbers pertaining to book additions and withdrawals. In the previous year's plan the data fields were not populated, but the action plans were the

same as those for 2007. Whether or not the data is there, the same action plan persists which may indicate a lack of analysis or training on the use of data. The Library's action plans do not appear in the Educational Master Plan for 2008-09.

The Library also evaluates its services through the use of a faculty self-study survey (2007-08), National Center for Education Statistics, an Internal Self-Study of the Library, a Campus Survey, and CCL Annual Data Survey (not implemented for past 3 years).

Learning Center staff use student surveys, tutor evaluations, and workshop evaluations to ensure that student needs are being met. They also garner information from faculty and staff participation in college committees. The unit planning process is used to prioritize needs for resources. However, the team was not able to assess the extent to which this data is used in planning (II.C.2).

Conclusions:
This standard is met. The college has responded to the recommendations of the 2003 accreditation team in full. Though not a line item budget, the Library has received funding for the last several fiscal years. Merritt College's revised program review and planning system will help to ensure that library needs are considered as part of the college's budget allocation process. The Library provides courses and services to patrons that support the development of information competency skills and also provides sufficient access to resources. Both the Library and the Learning Center engage in systematic analysis and planning as a means of assuring continuous improvement. Finally, the college has relied upon established planning processes to allocate bond resources to the Library as well as the Learning Center to fund facility and equipment improvements and to support collection acquisition.

Standard III
Resources

Standard III.A: Human Resources

General Observations:
Merritt College has a dedicated, qualified staff that is collegial and supportive of student learning. The team conducted many interviews and was impressed with the climate of civility, trust, and shared dedication to student success. Using district processes, the college employs longstanding hiring practices that lead to a qualified staff. Evaluation processes are delineated in collective bargaining agreements, and evaluation procedures exist for non-represented employees.

The college relies on district personnel policies and established hiring processes that are equitably applied. The college and the district have a robust development program, and human resource planning is integrated into the college's planning processes.

Findings and Evidence:
Criteria, qualifications, and procedures for the selection of personnel are clearly and publicly stated in job announcements and the job descriptions directly related to institutional mission and goals. Criteria for selection of faculty include knowledge of the subject matter or service to be performed, effective teaching, scholarly activities, and potential to contribute to the mission of the institution.

The personnel folders of a sample selection of personnel were examined and found to be complete with official copies of applicable college transcripts. Human resources personnel assured us that degrees were checked against an official book to ensure the degrees were achieved from an accredited institution. However, there was no official indication in the personnel file that that process had occurred. It is suggested that Human Resources document evidential proof that the applicant's degree has been granted from an accredited institution (IIIA.1, IIIA.1.a).

Evaluation of tenured and adjunct faculty does not appear to have occurred on a regular and consistent basis. A plan has been put into place to provide release time for department chairs to bring these evaluations current. The study cites that there are over 200 part-time faculty in each division, and only 35% have been evaluated. This leaves approximately 150 to be evaluated. The study states that department chairs are expected to evaluate three adjunct faculty per semester. At the current rate the evaluations will take several years to complete (IIIA.1.b).

The team could not find evidence that student learning outcomes and assessment are a formal component of the evaluation of faculty. However, the college is aware of this accreditation requirement. Furthermore, the identification and assessment of student learning outcomes is embedded in the college's program review and unit plans (IIIA.1.c).

Peralta Community College District Board Policy 5.15 provides evidence that the institution upholds a written code of ethics for all personnel (IIIA.1.d).

The team evaluated whether the college maintains a sufficient number of qualified faculty with full-time responsibility to the institution as well as staff and administrators with appropriate preparation and experience to provide support. While the self study stated that this standard was met, there was significant disagreement among campus constituent groups to this effect.

According to a faculty survey, two-thirds of all faculty believed there was an insufficient number of full-time faculty. Team members expressed concern that there were a number of core academic departments that had a single full-time faculty member, and in some cases, no full-time faculty members. The absence of full-time faculty in several disciplines has had a negative impact on the development of student learning outcomes, in that disciplines with full-time faculty have shown significantly higher progress towards this goal (IIIA.2)

The self study asserts that the institution has established and adheres to written policies ensuring fairness in all employment practices. The team has reviewed district policies and has concluded that such policies exist. The accreditation team requested access to personnel files to examine them and found that the district provides adequate security over these files (III.A.3a, IIIA3.b).

The college and district collect data on their employee and student populations to determine the ethnic mix and compare that with the mix of their service area. This process ensures that gaps in the ethnic makeup of college personnel versus the service area population are identified. There appears to be good discussion in this area, and the college has focused on outreach, advertising, and marketing to reach a diverse audience of potential employees. Finally, 86 percent of faculty surveyed agreed that the institution seeks diversity in hiring staff. There are a number of district policies in place to assure integrity in the treatment of personnel. The college has made substantial progress in addressing administrative turnover since the 2003 accreditation visit (III.A.4, III.A.4a, III.A.4b, III.A.4.c).

The employee relations function appears to be doing an excellent job of creating newsletters that are distributed to employees to help them with a variety of topics including dealing with stress, understanding their union contract, health tips, tips for dealing with managers and co-workers more effectively, and other issues.

A Manager's College exists for managers to gain training, and a classified academy is currently in the planning stages, according to the human resources manager. An administrative handbook as well as a manager's handbook and classified handbook exist and appear to be good tools to guide behavior and expectations. While participants provide feedback on specific workshops, the team did not find evidence that professional development programs were regularly evaluated in a holistic, comprehensive manner. The team encourages the institution to develop a formal evaluation process for professional development programs (III.A.5, III.A.5a, III.A.5.b).

The college conducts program reviews and prepares unit plans as a means to integrate human resource planning with institutional planning. Furthermore, the team verified that there is a process in place that allows a college-level prioritization with respect to human resource needs. The confusion occurs when those priorities get to the district level. Members of the college community expressed frustration that district personnel override college priorities with little or no explanation as to the rationale of the decision. (IIIA.6).

Conclusions:
This standard is partially met. The college employs qualified personnel to support student learning programs and services. The college follows district policies and procedures with respect to hiring personnel and equitably administers personnel policies. The institution has a robust professional development program. However, the effectiveness of the professional development program is not routinely evaluated. While the college has developed a plan for completing employee evaluations, the team feels that the proposed completion schedule must be accelerated. The team is also concerned

about the adequacy of full-time faculty members in core academic areas given the comprehensive nature of Merritt College's mission. Also related to this observation is the team's concern regarding the college's ability to identify and develop student learning outcomes and assessment strategies in programs with few or no full-time faculty.

Recommendation 4

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 (III.A.1b).

Recommendation 5

Human Resource Planning
In order to increase effectiveness, the team recommends that the college examine more closely the relationship between the adequacy of full-time faculty in core academic areas and the ability of the college to offer a comprehensive curriculum and to develop and assess student learning outcomes at the course, program, and institutional levels (IV.A.2b).

III.B: Physical Resources

Observations:
The team found the campus to be a clean, well-maintained facility. The team was genuinely impressed with the vibrancy of the campus and the condition of the facilities. Furthermore, bond funds are providing renovations and new buildings where needs have been identified through the Educational Master Plan and Facilities Master Plan. In addition, the college has invested funds to improve its Fruitvale Education Center facility thereby demonstrating its commitment to providing safe and sufficient facilities regardless of location.

Findings and Evidence:
The team found Merritt College to offer a safe, tranquil environment with sufficient physical resources to support its programs and services. In addition, a team member visited the Fruitvale Education Center and found the site to be in good condition with adequate physical resources. Merritt College has sought outside funding through grants and partnerships to fund equipment and other resources for programs with high capital costs such as microscopy and nursing. Merritt College is to be commended for its entrepreneurial approach to funding in high cost programs.

The independent auditors most recent audit report cites the district for the lack of a disaster recovery plan. However, upon interviewing facilities and risk management personnel, evidence of such a plan was given and the plan appears sufficient. The team

suggests that the college provide disaster plan training for its personnel (III.B, III.B.1, III.B.1a, III.B.1.b).

The district recently completed its Educational Master Plan (EMP) and its Facilities Master Plan. District facilities personnel refer to the EMP in all discussions and clearly use it to frame their decision making. Upon review of these two documents, it appears that there is a strong linkage between the college's educational needs and the Facilities Master Plan. The Facilities Master Plan addresses total cost of ownership (III.B, III.B.2, III.B.2a, III.B.2.b).

Conclusions:
This standard is met. The college has linked its Educational Master Plan to it Facilities Master Plan. Total Cost of Ownership is addressed in the Facilities Master Plan. The campus is well-maintained and physical resources are adequate to support student learning.

Recommendations:
None.

Commendations:
The team commends Merritt College for its lively and comfortable physical campus environment. The team found many interesting displays of student and faculty work, and a high level of campus cleanliness. It is apparent that attention to detail and regular maintenance is a priority, which enhances the student learning environment.

The team commends Merritt College for creating entrepreneurial solutions to meet educational priorities as evidenced by recent grant awards and the development of business and community partnerships.

III.C: Technology Resources

General Observations:
Merritt College uses technology in a variety of ways to support student learning and to deliver services to students. The college's Technology Plan provides the overall framework for strategic decisions on the use of technology. The Technology Plan is integrated with the college's Educational Master Plan, unit plans, and program review. The Technology Committee prepares and updates the Technology Plan and has broad representation from the campus constituencies. The college uses unit plans and program review to identify and prioritize technology needs. The district is responsible for providing enterprise-level systems to support college operations. The district changed its software platform recently, and the transition has not gone smoothly. The team is concerned about disruptions to student learning and services as a result of this transition.

Findings and Evidence:
The Technology Committee addresses issues associated with the use of technology to support learning. The committee consists of representatives from all campus groups including faculty, classified staff, students, and college administrators. The Technology Committee seeks to clarify campus policies and procedures with regard to technology-mediated learning. The Technology Committee is a recommending body to College Council. The Technology Plan is integrated with unit planning, program review, and the Education Master Plan (III.C, III.C.1).

The college has two Information Technology (IT) positions to support college technology and infrastructure needs. The IT staff also provide individual assistance and/or training, equipment control, upgrading, security, AV support (special events), and distance learning support. The staff also evaluates technology solutions and makes recommendations for technology or software directly to the academic programs or units such as the Library or Learning Center. The Coordinator tracks inventory of all campus equipment and provides that data to the Technology Committee for analysis. The Coordinator is a permanent member of the Technology Committee and the Facilities Committee (IIIC.1.a).

Computer training for students is delivered in the classroom, in student services for registration and enrollment, in the Library for research and information literacy, and in the Learning Resource Center labs for basic skills and specific subjects. Training for the faculty and staff is mainly held at the Faculty and Staff Training Center. Training for students with disabilities is provided in the Disabled Students Programs and Services (DSPS) lab. Some training is delivered by IT staff at the point of use and some larger training sessions are handled by the District. The lack of comprehensive ongoing training, including adequate space and personnel, has been an indentified problem area for the college. A self study recommendation from several campus constituents urges the college to move more quickly toward the creation of the Teaching and Learning Center (IIIC.1.b).

Planning procedures for technology resources are designed to establish clarity and transparency. Technology requests come from the "bottom up" through unit plans and program review, and those requests are integrated with other institutional planning processes including the Educational Master Plan. The Technology Plan, which serves as a guiding document for campus technology issues, provides a forum for discussion and recommendations for college standards. The Technology Plan addresses the following areas: institutional success, spending and funding, information technology and college infrastructure, inventory of equipment, hardware and software purchasing and distribution, security, web resources, and training (IIIC.2).

The Peralta Community College District analyzes needs and develops and implements systems to support research and operational systems. The district has implemented a PeopleSoft software product for college and district operational systems. The rollout of the new software has not been a smooth process and has disrupted services to students.

There is a perception that there was a lack of input into the selection and implementation process by campus personnel (III.C.1).

Conclusions:
This standard is met. Technology resources are adequate to support student learning programs and services and to improve institutional effectiveness. Furthermore, the team found a strong relationship between the Educational Master Plan, program review, unit plans, and the Technology Plan. However, the team is very concerned about the lack of effectiveness of districtwide operational systems. Conversion to the new enterprise system has not proceeded well, and the team heard numerous complaints from college personnel and from students about disruption in critical services.

Recommendation 6:

Management Systems
The team recommends that the district immediately resolve the functional issues associated with the implementation of the districtwide-adopted software management systems for student, human resources, and financial aid administration (III.C.1a, III.C.1.c, III.C.1.d, IV.B.3b).

Standard III.D: Financial Resources

General Observations:
Merritt College has implemented significant changes to its planning and governance systems since the 2003 accreditation visit. The team found evidence that the college budget process is linked to its mission, strategic directions, and educational master plan and that the college uses an integrated planning process. However, the college community is not fully aware of these processes, nor has the college developed a formal assessment mechanism regarding the effectiveness of its financial planning system.

The team is concerned regarding the efficacy of district financial systems. The team heard complaints from college personnel about a variety of issues including data integrity, systems failures, and the timeliness of critical budget information.

Findings and Evidence:
Each year instructional and student services units submit unit plans that articulate planning and resource requests at the division and department level. The unit planning process requires divisions and departments to develop goals and financial requests so that the goals and requests reflect the college mission and the college's strategic priorities. The majority of college funds are expended to support the ongoing operations of the college. Discretionary funds are identified through salary savings. The team agrees with the college's self study that this is an unrealistic means of budgeting. The team encourages the college to accelerate its work to correct this problem. Nonetheless, the team found that financial planning is integrated with institutional planning.

The College Council prioritizes unit plan requests in accordance with mission strategic priorities and funds those requests with available funds. Both short-range and long-range financial planning is reflected in the program planning and resource request process. Furthermore, the Facilities Master Plan includes an analysis of the total cost of ownership for capital improvements and equipment acquisitions. Finally, the district has developed a process to identify under-performing programs which could result in an additional investment of resources or a recommendation to deactivate the program due to limited student demand (III.D, III.D.1a, III.D.1b, III.D.1.c).

While the team found that financial planning was integrated with institutional planning, a majority of respondents on a faculty survey disagreed with this assertion. The team encourages the college to develop and document a clear process regarding budget development and resource allocation and to educate the campus constituencies regarding this matter (III.D.1d).

The team heard persistent complaints from college personnel about the inaccuracies in budget reports. The team examined various budget reports and is concerned that the financial data provided to the college is not timely. For example, a district representative claimed that all payroll data had been posted to the PeopleSoft system through December, 2008. However, upon examination of budget reports from that system dated March 4, 2009, less than 10% of salaries of Merritt College were expensed for the year. The team is also concerned that the district does not appear to be aware of, or disagrees with the fact that it received a qualified opinion from the independent auditor for the last fiscal year. The 2008 audit report cites internal control issues and significant problems with the implementation of the PeopleSoft software. Interviews with financial personnel revealed that they disagreed with the auditor on many instances and believed the items cited by the auditor were incorrect. Finally, the team received complaints from students and college personnel regarding the failure of the financial aid system last fall (III.D.2a, III.D.2b, III.D.2.d).

Like all California community college districts, the Peralta Community College District is experiencing a cash flow problem due to the state budget crisis. However, the district maintains a healthy reserve, which will help to absorb cash flow shortfalls in the near term. The district has appropriate mechanisms in place for risk management (III.D.2c).

Merritt College administers auxiliary and grant funds in accordance with applicable federal and state laws as well as provisions stated in grant agreements. Auxiliary operations are audited by an independent auditor on an annual basis. The business officer has formed close relationships with the District Budget and Finance Services office to facilitate the management of college funds (III.D.2e).

Contracts can only be executed by authorized officers of the district according to board policy. At the college level, the business officer reviews all contracts before submitting the contract to the district. The college reports that there has been inconsistent adherence

to this requirement due to lack of understanding by college personnel. However, the business officer has conducted training sessions and is enforcing district policy (III.D.2f).

The team could not find evidence that there is a systematic review of financial management processes. At the college level, however, the team found that the business office has been proactive in making necessary changes within its span of control. The district relies primarily on the findings of the external auditor to make improvements in the financial management system (III.D.2g).

Like other college planning processes, Merritt College has not yet implemented evaluation mechanisms to assess effective use of financial resources (III.D.3).

Conclusions:

This standard is partially met. The college relies on its mission and goals as the foundation for financial planning and reflects a realistic assessment of financial resource availability. Both long-term and short-term plans assure financial stability since the college operates within budget constraints. The team is concerned about the district's financial management system. The team heard persistent complaints from college personnel regarding the integrity of data, and the district received a qualified audit opinion. Finally, the college has not yet implemented a process to systematically assess the effective use of financial resources.

Recommendation 7:

Financial Resources and Technology
The team recommends that the district take immediate corrective action to implement all appropriate controls and necessary MIS system modifications to achieve access to a fully integrated computer information management system, including modules for student, financial aid, human resources, and finance, in order to assure financial integrity and accountability. All corrective action and system testing should be completed within two years, and the governing board should receive regular implementation progress reports until project completion (III.D.1s, III.D.1b, III.D.2.a).

Standard IV
Leadership and Governance

Standard IV.A: Decision Making Roles and Responsibilities

General Observations:
Standard IV.A establishes expectations for the institution with respect to effective leadership and governance. The written portion of the self study lacked adequate evidence to demonstrate fulfillment of this standard. The college needs to invest time in documenting and archiving evidence that reflects the exceptional efforts they have accomplished. This lack of substantive evidence in the self study document required the team to make the case for the college in many circumstances. However, after numerous interviews and review of evidence and online materials the conclusion is that Standard IV.A has been met.

Examples of evidence include written policies regarding the college and district governance processes, board policies and bylaws, minutes of governance bodies such as the Academic Senate and the Board of Trustees, and a district/college function mapping document. The team feels that the Curriculum, SLO/assessment, and College Educational Master Planning (CEMPC) committees have modeled best practices in their development and implementation.

Findings and Evidence:
Recent revision of Merritt College governance processes in response to the 2003 accreditation warning resulted in new processes, governance cultures and environmental changes that have empowered the college constituents. Although these processes are only developmental in their implementation and have not been evaluated, Merritt College has created a systematic, participative process. Those involved in the process report high levels of productive dialogue and decision making. The College Educational Master Planning Committee (CEMPC) does seem to stimulate innovation, creativity, and data-driven decision making and planning. Those not involved on the committees and processes have reported a continuing dissatisfaction with communication and understanding of the decision-making processes. This should be addressed through continued communication. It is essential that CEMPC work become visible so that people feel informed and empowered by the openness of the process. Clearly, the various groups are invited to the table for discussion and decision making and committee policy and membership, supports broad participation. The general report from college constituents is that this new process is working well and has improved use of data and college planning based upon the unit plan process over the last months of development and implementation.

However, the process becomes less clear as the recommendations go to the district level with the District-wide Educational Master Plan Committee (DWEMPC). There are no apparent guidelines concerning processes and recommendations for this committee to the

district. This unfortunately contributes to an overall general feeling that at the district level and particularly at the Office of the Chancellor, the good work is lost or enters a black hole with unknown consequences and effects at the top levels. There is no feedback from the district concerning what decisions are made and why they are made. The effect of the committee work and recommendations are not known by some of the most vested participants. This lack of transparency must be corrected as soon as possible (IV.A, IVA.1).

Merritt College governance bodies are well defined, clearly involve participation opportunities for all constituents, and have clear charges that are exemplified on the Merritt College Shared Governance page. The college provided evidence of data analysis and action as evidenced by the president's letter to the college on September 19, 2007 explaining the three college initiatives and the teams addressing these issues. Subsequent meetings and reports provide continued evidence of campus-wide involvement (January 2008, January 2009). The college stated, "Although this collaboration among different entities at Merritt College works well, nearly all constituents report a breakdown when it comes to communication." The faculty and staff survey data indicate lack of clarity concerning knowledge about participation in governance process. The team suggests that as the well-considered governance processes become more established. It is important that the college community resurvey college constituents in order to monitor the need for communication and clarification of participation in and effectiveness of governance processes (IV2).

Students and staff are assured participation on every governance committee by documented membership. However, both students and classified staff need to be further encouraged and mentored in their involvement. It is important that managers encourage staff involvement and consider the workload and schedules as they encourage important staff involvement that will yield substantial opportunities to provide input. The associated students have positions on all the committees but occasionally find it difficult to make all the committee meetings. The college community should evaluate and consider opportunities to both encourage and value informed student input.

The college has sponsored retreats and developed strategies for professional development that encourages inclusivity. Maturing processes for unit plans (program review), SLOs and governance committees, such as CEMPC, have engaged and empowered college constituents. The results are effective discussions and planning that represent robust conversations and negotiation. Faculty and administrators have a substantive and clearly defined role in institutional governance and exercise a substantial voice in institutional policies, planning, and budget that relate to their areas of responsibility and expertise. Students and staff also have established mechanisms or organizations for providing input (IV.2, IV.2.a).

Merritt College provided evidence the college relies on faculty, its academic senate, and other appropriate structures for recommendations about student learning programs and services. The college relies on the Curriculum and Instructional Council (CIC), Council of Department Chairs and Program Directors (CDCPD), Student Services Committee

(SSC), and Faculty Senate for recommendations about curriculum, education plans, and other student learning programs and services. The Peralta Board Policy Manual (Policy 2.23) clearly indicates the role of faculty in student learning programs and services. The college has met this standard in both principle and practice (IV2.b).

Merritt College has well-defined governance structures, processes, and practices. However, there are difficulties with district practices and policies, or lack thereof, and these must be worked out to continue the effective practices and continue their sustainability. There have been instances where Merritt College has identified problems and then found that the district office has adopted their solution, deciding to apply it district-wide. The result has been that implementation at Merritt College has been delayed in district-wide discussions or lost in a now greater budget issue.

The January/February 2008 self study survey provided evidence of communication problems at the college level. Merritt College has indicated the urgency to improve communication on campus. The "Culture of Communication" was named one of four strategic directions in 2006-2007 and declared an institutional priority as indicated on the college's website. The standard is met but rests on a fragile foundation of newly instituted processes that require care and clarity to continue towards a successful future (IV.3).

Merritt College has evidenced serious and dedicated response to the accreditation recommendations, not only in the numerous reports they have submitted, but also in the evident implementation and documentation of policy evaluation and improvement. Difficulty in relationships with external agencies as a result of district office functions is a serious issue that must be corrected at through district office management improvements. The college believed that the "inability of the District Office of Finance to provide financial data" hindered the submission of an Associate Degree Nursing Program grant in a timely manner and that was an issue with an external agency (IV.A.4).

There is no evidence in the report, or in the interviews, that the college has considered and planned to evaluate the new processes and policies. In reality the evaluation processes, if widespread, could serve to disseminate and communicate college activities in a way that build confidence and integrity. Discussions with faculty, staff, and administrators made it clear that the leaders had ideas and criteria for evaluating processes but need to take time to consider and document expectations and goals in a way that will enable evaluation and ensure integrity (IVA.5).

Conclusions:
This standard is met. The college has made significant progress since the 2003 accreditation visit. Merritt College has established well defined governance structures and the college relies on contributions of leadership from all constituencies in its planning and decision making efforts. The college has established a clear path for decision-making and has defined the roles of each constituency group. However, in order to improve communication, the college must pay greater attention to documenting and communicating processes, as well as the decisions that are made. This is a joint responsibility of all college constituencies.

Recommendations:
None

Commendations:
The team commends Merritt College for creating a climate of civility and trust and for its thorough and inclusive governance processes. The Curriculum, SLO assessment, and College Educational Master Plan committees have modeled best practice in their development and implementation.

Standard IVB: Board and Administrative Organization

General Observations:
Merritt College operates as one of four colleges within the Peralta Community College District. The district is governed by a seven-member Board of Trustees. In addition, two student trustees serve on the board. The board is responsible for establishing policies that assure quality, integrity, and effectiveness of student learning programs and fiscal stability. The board employs and evaluates a district chancellor who is responsible for implementing the policies established by the board. The board has created numerous policies concerning the role and the conduct of the board, including a code of ethics. The board also evaluates itself on an annual basis. However, the team did not have access to the evaluation results.

The chancellor delegates authority to the Merritt College President for college-level administrative matters. The president maintains a collegial planning and decision-making process, controls the budget, and is actively involved in the community The college provided the team with a functional map that delineates the district roles and responsibilities versus college roles and responsibilities. Upon further investigation, the team found that there is much confusion regarding this delineation of roles and responsibilities. The team is also concerned about the effectiveness of district services.

Findings and Evidence:
Merritt College is one of four colleges within the Peralta Community College District The district is governed by a seven-member board, which is independent of any other organization. Each board member is elected from a specific region. However, board members represent the interests of all Alameda County residents. Two student trustees are elected by the student bodies of the four colleges. The team examined Board Policies and confirmed that the Board is responsible for hiring and evaluating the district chancellor and the college presidents (IVB.1, IVB.1j).

Board agenda and minutes indicate that the governing board is an independent policy-making body that reflects the public interest. Furthermore board policy states: "Each member of the board works to base decisions upon all available facts in each situation, vote their honest conviction, and abide by the final majority decision of the board." In

addition, the team was able to confirm that the board publishes its bylaws, policies, structure, and operating procedures, as well as agendas and minutes (IVB.1a, IVB.1d).

The governing board establishes policies and uses CCLC and other college policy models as a reference when updating Peralta Board Policies. The board has established a Board Policy Review Committee that has been assigned the task of reviewing and writing board policy. However, the team is concerned that progress toward updating board policies has been less than satisfactory. The team's examination of the evidence revealed that a majority of the policies are very old and others have no dates indicated. Examples of policies that should be updated to align with Title 5 changes and other currently important issues include board policy on grades (last reviewed 1991), student grievance policies that were 15 years old, prerequisite policies that were 10 years old, and course limitation policies that were last reviewed in 1994. Although receiving multiple recommendations from the accreditation visits on program review and budgeting, the last board policy on this issue was reviewed in 2000 before the recommendations were made and this has not been revisited, thus adding to a lack of clarity and completion of what has been a rigorous process at the college level. The accounting policies, last reviewed in 1975, and the audit policies, not reviewed since 1988, are areas in need of input and updating. The Board Policy Review Committee, with the assistance of the general counsel, began the task of reviewing and updating all board policies in 2006 and has been regularly forwarding policy revisions to the full board for review and approval. The team believes the board should complete its review and update of Board Policies in an expeditious manner (IVB.1b, IVB1.e).

Various policies in the Board Policy Manual address the Board's ultimate responsibility for educational quality, legal matters, and financial integrity. The team is concerned about fiscal integrity given that the district has received a qualified opinion in its most recent audit report (IVB.1.c).

Board policy 1.06 encourages the board members to participate in training and educational opportunities. There is no evidence as to the outcome of this policy.
The board also holds an annual retreat. Interviews indicated that the board self-evaluated its performance. The self study indicates the presence of a self-assessment instrument. However this policy is not available in the online board policy and the assessment of performance is not clearly defined, implemented, or assessed in a manner that the public or the visiting team could access. Finally, the team was able to confirm that the board has a code of ethics (IVB.1.f, IVB.1g, IVB.1.h).

The Board of Trustees has been informed and involved in the accreditation process through regular reports by the chancellor and by the college presidents. Various reports have been provided to the board accreditation-related matters such as integrated strategic planning, educational master planning, resource allocation, and student learning outcomes (IVB.1.i).

The college president has primary responsibility for the quality of the institution that he leads. There are policies in place which clearly delineate the role and the authority of the college president. The team found evidence through interviews with the chancellor, the president, and staff at the college and district that the chancellor gives full authority to the president to operate the college including the control of budget and expenditures.

The president has worked with constituencies on a variety of innovative initiatives and has also received college support for his strategic areas of focus. The president has made significant efforts to maintain a high level of collegiality and ongoing institutional dialog (IVB.2.a, IVB.2.b).

The college president's role and responsibilities are defined in Board Policy 2.10 including the implementation of statutes, regulations, and District policies. The president has many years of community college experience and is knowledgeable about the myriad of laws and regulations applicable to California Community Colleges (IVB.2.c).

The president is involved in a number of community organizations such as the Oakland Rotary Club and is a member of the Black, Latino, Chinese, and Oakland Chamber of Commerce organizations. The president has also made an effort to reach out to Oakland high school principals, public and private universities, faith-based organizations, and city government representatives (IVB.2.e).

The college provided a functional map that delineates the operational responsibilities and functions of the district from those of the college. However, the team found that expectations, communications, clearly defined roles of authority, and operational responsibilities remain unclear among district and campus faculty, managers, and staff.

The team found that there was confusion among district staff about their respective roles. Furthermore, when college staff were interviewed, different answers to the same questions were prevalent. Expectations of the district were not clearly understood by college faculty and staff, nor were expectations clearly understood by district staff among themselves. Different answers related to strategic planning, the budget allocation model, technology enhancements, and marketing were identified among the team members. While these processes may be well-documented, it would appear that they are not well-understood and/or are interpreted in different ways (IVB.3, IVB.3 a.).

Numerous college personnel expressed frustration with the unevenness of district services as well as general confusion regarding policies and practices. In some cases college personnel found district services to be quite good, in other cases college personnel did not find the services helpful. In particular, the team heard complaints about the district purchasing system from a large cross section of the college personnel. College personnel were in a quandary about purchasing requests, approved program review purchases, and other operational approvals that were never responded to by the district. Numerous examples were given where an approved college purchase request was never filled by the district or the purchase was delayed a year or longer.

The previous accreditation recommendation related to the "fiscal computer infrastructure" has not been adequately addressed. The team is concerned about inefficiencies and ineffectiveness of technology decisions and implementation plans that have hindered support for administrative, instructional, student services, and college operations. The district has not been able to find long-range and viable solutions to their technology challenges (IVB.3b).

The district has a well-defined budget allocation process. This process appears to be fair and logical and related to the strategic goals of the district as well as college priorities. While the district has a functional budgeting system, the team is concerned about financial accounting controls given the recent qualified opinion from the independent auditor (IVB3.c, IVB3.d).

Based upon interviews with the chancellor and the college president, the team feels that the chancellor has a genuine intent to give full responsibility and authority to the college president. At the same time, the team is concerned about the district's role in altering or not acting on decisions that have been agreed to at the college level. The team heard numerous complaints from college personnel regarding this issue (IVB3.e).

The team found evidence via interviews and Board Policy that the district acts as an effective liaison between the colleges and the Board of Trustees. Recently, the board has begun a series of "listening sessions" at each college. Although this action puts the board in direct contact with college personnel, these sessions have been positively received by college personnel. The team did not find evidence that the district/system regularly evaluates role delineation, governance, and decision making-structures and processes. This is noted as a planning agenda item in the self study (IVB.3f, IVB.3g).

Conclusions
This standard is partially met. The district has responded to a number of accreditation recommendations over the last several years. While progress has been made, the team has concerns. First, the team is concerned that there continues to be confusion regarding the role of the college versus the role of the district. The team found that expectations, communication, clearly defined roles of authority, and operational responsibilities remain unclear among district and campus personnel. Second, the team is concerned about the efficacy of key district support functions. The quality of district services to the college is uneven is a common feeling among college personnel.

The team believes that Merritt College faculty, staff, and administrators have done an excellent job of addressing the campus governance and leadership issues cited in the previous visit.

The college's progress juxtaposed against the progress of the district however leaves the team with some hesitation as to how well the district has addressed previous recommendations in meeting Standard IV. B. The difficulties cited above need to be addressed in order for students to be well served.

Recommendation 8:

Board and District Administration
The team recommends that district assess the overall effectiveness of its service to the college and provide clear delineation of functional responsibilities and develop clear processes for decision making (IVB.1, IV.B.3.a, b, c, f, g).