



COMMUNITY COLLEGE
of AURORA

SELF STUDY 2003

The Higher Learning Commission
of the
North Central Association

Organizational Self Study

For continued accreditation
with the The Higher Learning Commission of the
North Central Association of Colleges and Schools



COMMUNITY COLLEGE
of AURORA

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Profile of the College

The Community College of Aurora (CCA/College) is an open-door, two-year institution that offers associate degrees and certificates for students whose goals include transferring to a four-year institution, preparing for entry or advancement in the workplace, or meeting individual career or educational objectives. *(The College Catalog is Resource Room document 1.1)*

The College is one of 13 community colleges within the Colorado Community College System (CCCS), which is governed by the State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education (SBCCOE or State Board). The governor appoints the State Board's nine voting members with the approval of the state Senate. The State Board appoints the college presidents, who report to the CCCS president. *(Resource Room documents 1.2 and 1.3)*

Located in Aurora, Colorado's third-largest city, CCA serves more than 425,000 residents and more than 10,000 businesses in a 350-square-mile service area that spans portions of three counties (Arapahoe, Adams and Denver). The service area includes the city of Aurora and eastern portions of the city of Denver. *(Resource Room document 1.4)*

Within CCA's service area are large residential and commercial areas, as well as Buckley Air Force Base and Denver International Airport. Three major urban redevelopment projects are within or border the service area: the former Lowry Air Force Base, the former Stapleton Airport, and Fitzsimons Army Medical Center's conversion into the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center and Bioscience Park. This complex mixture provides the College with challenges and opportunities for reaching new populations and for creating new programs. *(Resource Room document 1.5)*



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CCA offers a variety of programs to serve the Aurora-Denver area. The College's Associate of Arts (AA) and Associate of Science (AS) degrees prepare students for junior standing in four-year institutions, while the Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degree prepares students for career entry in 11 different areas. The College also offers an Associate of General Studies (AGS) degree, 20 certificate programs, and a joint AAS degree with four area vocational schools. *(The College Catalog is Resource Room document 1.1)*

CCA seeks to meet students' needs through a varied schedule that includes traditional day and evening courses, online courses, hybrid courses that combine on-site and off-site instruction, and a weekend college. *(The Schedule of Classes is Resource Room document 1.6)*

The College offers courses and a full range of services at two main campuses. The CentreTech campus is in north central Aurora, and the Lowry campus is 4 miles to the west of CentreTech, in the Lowry Redevelopment Area on the Aurora-Denver border. The College also offers courses at the Aurora Small Business Development Center in north Aurora and at Grandview High School in south Aurora. *(See map in Schedule of Classes, Resource Room document 1.6)*

The College serves an increasingly diverse student body. In the spring semester of 2002, CCA enrolled 5,034 students, 73 percent of them part-time and more than 37 percent ethnic minorities. The average student age was just under 30, and nearly 19 percent were older than 39. *(Resource Room document 1.7)*

Profile of the Community

Over the last several decades, Aurora has grown from a modest Denver suburb into a full-fledged city with its own identity. Nearly all of Aurora's growth has come since World War II. In 1950, the city's population was 11,000. By 1980, the population had grown to nearly 160,000, and in 2001, the city government estimated the population had reached 285,000. *(Resource Room document 1.8)*

For CCA, the important story of Aurora's growth in recent years is not only its expanding population, but also its increasing diversity. Between 1990 and 2000, the majority of the city's 54,000 new residents were Hispanic, African American or Asian. In fact, during this decade Aurora's Hispanic population nearly tripled in size, increasing from 7 percent to 20 percent of the city's population. Overall, by the year 2000, minority groups comprised more than 31 percent of the city's population. Reflecting this diversity, the 2000 census found that 25 percent of the city's population spoke a language other than English at home. The city's increasing diversity presents the College with the opportunities and challenges discussed throughout this self-study report. *(Resource Room document 1.8)*

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History of the College

The Colorado Legislature established the statewide system of community colleges and a board to govern them in 1967. One of the colleges, the Community College of Denver (CCD), opened in 1968. In 1972, CCD established the Aurora Outreach Program, which became the Aurora Education Center (AEC). The AEC operated under its own executive director in a building provided by the city of Aurora.

In 1982, the governing board for community colleges and the Colorado Commission on Higher Education approved a master plan for the Community College of Aurora. At the same time, the city set aside 21 acres for the College near a proposed new city center. In 1983, the state Legislature passed the bill permitting the conversion of the AEC to an independent college. (*Senate Bill 170 is Resource Room document 1.9*)

CCA opened at a time when community college growth had leveled off and costs were rising. A thrift-minded Legislature required that the College find economies of operation; consequently, CCA made minimal initial investments and avoided duplication of programs, services and facilities. Some features of the College to result from this mandate are as follows:

- use of the Aurora Public Library (APL) as CCA's main library;
- a high ratio of adjunct faculty members to regular faculty members;
- a campus leased by the CCA Foundation (beginning in 1991); and
- classes meeting at many locations throughout the service area.

CCA continues to use the Aurora Public Library as its library. APL's Central Library, about half a mile from the CentreTech campus, houses most of the College's library material. CCA users also have in-person and electronic access to the entire APL collection, including its college-level materials. The growth of electronic resources, including Web access from campus or home to the APL and to the College's Instructional Resource Center databases, has made the library arrangement more convenient and accessible. (*Resource Room document 1.10*)

Adjunct instructors have always taught a large proportion of CCA classes, and they continue to do so. These instructors bring to the classroom expertise from business, industry and the community. In January of 1986, CCA had seven full-time faculty members, all of whom had release time for administrative responsibilities. Since the completion of CCA's last self-study, the College has increased the number of full-time faculty members from 17 (16.5 FTE) in the spring of 1993 to 33 (29.25 FTE) in the fall of 2002. Reflecting, in part, the quality and contribution of the adjunct faculty, College constituencies have consistently given high ratings to CCA's instruction and to the relevancy of its educational programs. (*Resource Room document 1.11*)

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The Legislature originally designated the College to be a “college without walls,” and until 1991, CCA operated solely in leased facilities. However, in recent years the College has become a dual-campus institution with two full-service campuses, CentreTech and Lowry, both in Aurora.

CCA opened the three-building CentreTech campus in 1991 on land leased by the Community College of Aurora Foundation from the city of Aurora. In the last five years, the College has built a fourth building, the Student Centre, at CentreTech and added a theater and offices to the Fine Arts Building (previously the Forum). Since 2001, the College has discontinued several satellite locations and moved their classes and some CentreTech classes to Lowry. *(Campus maps are Resource Room document 1.12; see also maps in Schedule of Classes, Resource Room document 1.6)*

In 1994, the Air Force shut down its operations at Lowry Air Force Base. The Colorado Community College System (then known as the Colorado Community College and Occupational Education System) took over the northeast corner of the base for use as an education campus. CCA’s former president played an instrumental role in helping the System acquire the 156-acre parcel from the Air Force.

The System originally intended to create a cooperative facility on the Lowry higher education parcel, involving many community colleges as well as four-year colleges and universities. The campus, which was to focus on high technology education and practical skill development, was given the acronym HEAT (Higher Education and Advanced Technology) Center, but is now referred to as Lowry.

Initially the College occupied three buildings at Lowry, where it offered a variety of programs and courses. In 2001, the System changed its plan for Lowry, and CCA greatly expanded its presence there. The College opened a student residence hall, moved most computer courses and many business courses to Lowry, developed a full set of student services, and consolidated existing programs and science labs into a more campus-like setting. The Lowry campus offers many advantages, including space for programs to expand and a location that is an easy 15-minute drive from the CentreTech campus.

The College has developed some of its own occupational programs but has articulated with many existing occupational programs at the Aurora Public School District’s T.H. Pickens Technical Center and other area vocational schools. T.H. Pickens is located about a half mile east of CCA’s CentreTech campus. *(Resource Room document 1.13)*



Accreditation History of the College

In 1983, when the Community College of Denver's (CCD) Aurora Education Center became the Community College of Aurora, CCD was fully accredited by the North Central Association. CCD agreed to oversee the development of educational programs and services at CCA while NCA processed CCA's application for candidacy status.

In February 1984, CCA filed an institutional self-study report with NCA; in March of that year, a three-member evaluation team visited the College. The Higher Learning Commission granted CCA candidacy status in August 1984. An NCA evaluation team made a second visit in April 1986 after CCA's submission of another self-study report. The Commission granted the College continuation of candidacy status in August of the same year.

In consultation with NCA staff, the College determined that it was ready to request accreditation status. CCA filed an institutional self-study report in March 1988, and the evaluation team visited in April. The Commission granted initial accreditation (membership) for five years. In 1993, the College filed a self-study report in February, and an evaluation team visited in March. The Commission granted accreditation for 10 years.

Effective August 8, 1997, CCA's Statement of Affiliation Status was changed to authorize a full-service degree site in Aurora/Denver at the Higher Education and Advanced Technology (HEAT) Center. This change was made after a visit on April 28-29, 1997, that focused on the College's program offerings at the HEAT site at Lowry.

At its meeting of March 5, 1999, the Commission voted to extend CCA's accreditation to include distance delivery of associate degree programs. At its meeting on April 26, 2000, the Commission validated the decision by the Institutional Actions Council of the North Central Association to extend CCA's accreditation to include distance delivery programs coordinated through Colorado Community Colleges Online. (*Resource Room document 1.14*)

Early in 2002, CCA began a comprehensive, collegewide self-study process to prepare for the HLC site visit scheduled April 14 to 16, 2003.



Purpose of the Self-Study

The self-study provides information and analysis to help the College measure itself in relation to the criteria for continued accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (HLC/NCA). The study also provides information about the effectiveness and efficiency of CCA's programs and services, reinforces institutional self-analysis and planning and strengthens the College's sense of community.

The College's self-study report addresses several audiences. The primary audience includes CCA faculty and staff members, administrators and major constituency groups. They will use the report to identify the College's strengths and challenges and to improve programs and services. The report will also prepare the Commission's Consultant-Evaluator Team for its visit to the College. Finally, the report provides information about the College to students and to the public.

The Self-Study Process

In the summer of 2000, CCA's president appointed the vice president for research, development, and information services (now a faculty member) as the self-study coordinator to organize, coordinate and facilitate the College's study. The coordinator developed a self-study plan and timeline and in February 2001 conducted two all-college informational meetings. In August of 2001, the president appointed the director of grants as self-study co-coordinator.

An important goal for CCA's self-study was to involve a wide range of College faculty and staff. To achieve this goal, the coordinators used responses from surveys collected at the all-college meetings to assign both faculty and staff members to all committees. In September 2001, the President's Cabinet reviewed the committee assignments and selected the committee chairpersons. The chairpersons became the Self-Study Steering Committee. During the same period, the self-study coordinators developed questions and job descriptions for each committee based on the HLC/NCA evaluative criteria and oriented committee members and chairpersons. The committees used these questions to guide their study of their assigned area. (*Resource Room document 1.15*)

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Thirteen committees conducted the self-study. These included:

General Committees

1. Introduction and the General Institutional Requirements
2. Steering Committee (chairpersons of other committees)

Criterion One Committees

3. Mission, Purposes and Decision-Making
4. Freedom of Inquiry and Excellence in Teaching and Learning

Criterion Two Committees

5. Governance and Administration
6. Human Resources
7. Physical Resources
8. Financial Resources

Criterion Three Committees

9. Instruction
10. Student Services and Enrollment Management

Criterion Four Committee

11. Strategic Planning Process

Criterion Five Committees

12. Integrity in Institutional Practices
13. Integrity in Institutional Relationships

(Resource Room document 1.16)

The committees met regularly from October 2001 through April 2002 to gather and evaluate information. In February and March 2002, they submitted preliminary reports to the coordinators. The coordinators reviewed the responses, responded with written comments, and met with the chairpersons to discuss additions to the reports. The committees revised their responses and sent them to the coordinators in late April and early May 2002. As they compiled their reports, the committees generally used data from the five years 1996-97 to 2000-01. When available, data for 2001-02 were added. *(Committee Reports are in the bookcase in Resource Room document 1.17)*

Preparation of the Report

The self-study coordinators had primary responsibility for writing the College's report, using as their source material the responses the self-study committees supplied to them. The committee responses provided the basic information and evaluation for each chapter, as well as specific suggestions about institutional strengths and challenges. As they compiled the report, the coordinators also gathered additional information from College documents and personnel.

The self-study report consists of 11 chapters. These include an introduction to the College and responses to concerns identified by the 1993 NCA evaluation team, the General Institutional Requirements, and information and evidence that CCA meets the five criteria for accreditation. Additional information will be available in the resource room and elsewhere at the College, as indicated in the document.



Significant Developments Since the Last Comprehensive Evaluation

Since the last self-study in 1993:

- The College has had major changes in leadership. President Linda Bowman assumed office in the fall of 2000. In 2001, the College hired a new vice president for administrative services, Wes Geary, and a new vice president for student services and enrollment management, Greg Goode. Norine Domenico, who served first as vice president for institutional research and development and then as vice president for instruction, retired in December of 2002. Soon after taking office, the president created a Cabinet Advisory Council that includes faculty, staff and students who advise the Cabinet and share information among College units. In July 2002, the three academic deans became members of the Cabinet. (See Chapter 4)
- The student population has become ethnically more diverse and slightly younger. Over the last few years, the College's service area, particularly north Aurora, has had a great influx of Hispanic immigrants. The African-American and Asian populations of Aurora have also grown significantly since the last visit, and the Aurora Public Schools now enroll students of families who speak 82 different languages. The College has begun to address these changes with additional English as a Second Language courses and community outreach to diverse communities. CCA continues to recognize and celebrate the many cultures represented at the institution. The College has students from 84 countries. (See Chapter 9)

Note: The College would appreciate receiving advice from the visiting team on how to complement what it is already doing to serve this growing minority population, particularly the Hispanic community.

- The College has greatly expanded its presence at the Lowry campus and enrollment there has already exceeded projections. The shift to Lowry provided needed space and enabled the College to reduce the number of satellite locations, thereby improving administrative oversight and reducing costs. Furthermore, the shift has enabled CCA to develop a second campus-like setting for students. As part of the most recent changes at Lowry, the College assumed responsibility for the film and video technology program from Red Rocks Community College (RRCC) in 2001. The program operates in collaboration with the University of Colorado at Denver and has a significant enrollment. (See Chapter 11)

Over the last few years, the College's service area, particularly north Aurora, has had a great influx of Hispanic immigrants. The African-American and Asian populations of Aurora have also grown significantly since the last visit, and the Aurora Public Schools now enroll students of families who speak 82 different languages.

- The College has initiated more flexible scheduling, a weekend college, Internet courses, and a series of hybrid courses that combine classroom and off-site instruction. (See Chapter 5)
- The College's institutional culture has begun to change. The organization shows more openness, greater flexibility and higher levels of participation. (See Chapter 9)
- The College has renewed its emphasis on planning. To support this emphasis, the College has adopted a new mission statement and a new set of values. In addition to completing an institutional strategic plan, the College has developed a plan for the Lowry campus. The planning process reaches individual employees through work plans they develop and co-workers' assessments of how well their performance demonstrates College values. (See Chapter 8)
- The College has emphasized increased enrollment and the development of new programs, particularly occupational programs. Enrollment peaked in the fall of 1994 and then declined about 10 percent over the next three years before resuming growth. In the fall of 2001, enrollment surpassed the 1994 peak. To emphasize the importance of enrollment growth and retention, the College changed the title – and responsibilities – of the vice president of student, faculty and staff services to vice president for student services and enrollment management. Since 2001, an enrollment management task force has met regularly under the vice president's leadership. (See Chapter 7)
- The College has progressed with assessment of student learning. CCA's efforts have emphasized integrating the skills students need for employment and further education (lifelong skills) across the curriculum. (See Chapter 6)
- The College is awarding significantly more occupational degrees and certificates and fewer transfer degrees. Between 1997-98 and 2001-02, the number of students earning AA and AS degrees declined from 183 to 153 (16 percent), while the number earning AAS degrees increased from 52 to 92 (77 percent). Overall, the number of degrees earned rose only slightly (4 percent), while the number of certificates awarded grew dramatically from 26 to 323. (See Chapter 5)
- The College has expanded its use of technology with computer access for students, faculty and staff, and has increased use of the World Wide Web for external and internal communication and for student research. The thriving online instruction program is the second largest among Colorado community colleges. (See Chapter 5)

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- The College has made significant investments to strengthen campus community and student life. Since the last visit, CCA has built a student center on the CentreTech campus. The center houses student office and meeting areas, faculty offices, the Learning Resource Center and the Instructional Resource Center. To support increased student activities, the College now has a director for student life. The College has also opened a residence hall at Lowry and provides activities there for students. *(See Chapter 7)*
- Under the leadership of the new vice president for administration, the College has achieved greater financial stability, even at a time of declining state resources. The College has used a more conservative fiscal approach to budgeting. For the fiscal year that ended June 30, 2002, the College had a modest budget surplus, anticipating further reductions in state funding. *(See Chapters 4 and 8)*
- The College has continued to be a major partner in economic development in the Aurora community. The College's Workplace Solutions Center provides training for numerous businesses and industries. The Small Business Management Program offers on-site instruction for business owners and operators. The Center for Workforce Development works with people who want to change or improve job skills in order to secure employment. *(See Chapter 9)*
- The College has continued to build strong, positive relationships with various governmental and educational districts and institutions. These include the city of Aurora, the Aurora Public Schools and the Cherry Creek Schools. *(See Chapter 9)*
- The College has developed a process for credentialing faculty members to assure continued professional development and high quality instructional programs. The faculty development program assists faculty to meet the credentialing requirements. *(See Chapter 4)*

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Responses to the Concerns Expressed in the 1993 Team Evaluation Report

Following its visit to CCA in March 1993, the evaluation team expressed five concerns. Its report stated, “The Team recognizes that three of the following concerns (1, 2 and 3) cannot be corrected by the Community College of Aurora as such; however, the institution must continue its efforts to influence decisions made at the state level and continue to seek to overcome state funding shortfalls through such things as aggressive grant activity.”

- 1. Decisions that are made at the state level in Colorado do not always serve the needs of the Community College of Aurora. Recent decisions have adversely affected funding policies and practices and may affect the ability of the College to continue to respond to enrollment growth through the expansion of programs and quality services; these decisions often render long-range planning null and void.*
- 2. The uncertainty of state funding, namely the state’s inability or unwillingness to fund growth in an appropriate manner, is a serious concern and is likely to negatively impact the ability of the College to continue the expansion of programs and quality of services.*
- 3. Amendment One, which recently established a taxing and spending limitation, is also likely to limit the state resources available to the College.*

As the 1993 team report recommends, the College has continued to make positive efforts to influence funding decisions at the state level. A strong network of community college presidents, in which CCA’s president plays an active role, serves on State Board committees and works with the System president in the allocation of funding. The community colleges also have good relationships with state legislators. The results of these efforts include the expansion of the Lowry campus and the construction of the new Student Centre and the addition to the Fine Arts Building.

The College has also followed the team’s 1993 suggestion to seek other sources of funding, particularly funding for new initiatives. The CCA Foundation has taken the lead in developing a strategy to support student scholarships, recognize teaching excellence and serve underrepresented populations. Government and foundation grants have also funded new college initiatives. For example, a National Science Foundation grant to CCA’s biotechnology program supports the college’s outreach to area high schools. Similarly, a grant from the Dewitt-Wallace Foundation has funded the college’s initiatives with north Aurora middle schools.

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To date, Amendment One has not limited resources available to the College. However, Colorado, like many other states, has experienced a decline in state revenue in the last year. CCA has moved aggressively to address the related budget tightening while continuing to build new programs and take advantage of new opportunities. For example, the College has adopted a more conservative budgeting philosophy and has begun to use more cautious enrollment and revenue projections. (See *Chapter 8*)

The transformation of the Lowry Campus since the summer of 2001 exemplifies the College's success in expanding quality programs and seizing new opportunities, irrespective of state-level fiscal issues. Lowry includes new certificate programs, reconfigured science labs and classroom buildings, a residence hall, a Cisco networking lab, and improved facilities for the film and video technology program. (See *Chapter 11*)

The Team also expressed the following concerns:

4. Utilization of space in the new [CentreTech] campus facilities has been maximized.

Space is no longer a major concern for CCA. Since the last team visit, CCA has built a Student Centre, added to the Fine Arts Building at the CentreTech campus, and expanded its presence at the Lowry campus. The College has adequate space to conduct its programs and to achieve its purposes, now and into the future.

5. The team has a concern that the advantageous position the College is in with regard to their full-time/part-time faculty staffing will be compromised by moving toward more traditional staffing patterns.

With the growth of the CentreTech campus and the acquisition of the Lowry campus, many regular faculty members are performing administrative duties, as well as teaching classes on both campuses. Therefore, the need for regular faculty has increased. The College, as it balances flexibility with program stability, continues to have a higher ratio of adjunct to regular faculty than do other community colleges in Colorado. The ratio of credit hours taught by regular faculty to the number of credit hours taught by adjunct faculty in the spring of 1993 was 1:9.3. In the fall of 2002, the ratio was 1:5.8. The College has hired a limited number of additional regular faculty members who can chair or coordinate programs and departments. In spring 1993, the College had 17 regular faculty members (16.5 FTE); in spring of 2002, it had 33 (29.25 FTE). (*Resource Room document 1.18*)

