

**CRITERION FOUR:** *The Community College of Aurora can continue to accomplish its purposes and strengthen its educational effectiveness.*

## Chapter 8

### PLANNING AND EFFECTIVENESS

#### Strengths

The Community College of Aurora has the following strengths in the areas discussed in this chapter:

- The tested capability to respond to budget challenges through greater budget openness, conservative budgeting, and cautious enrollment and revenue projections.
- A focus on responding to new challenges with funding generated through the CCA Foundation and from government and foundation grants.
- More opportunities to fulfill the College mission at an expanded Lowry campus and the recently completed facilities at the CentreTech campus.
- Experienced and committed faculty and staff, including many adjunct faculty members drawn from community businesses and organizations.
- A growing service area, with major development areas (Buckley Air Force Base, Denver International Airport, the E-470 Corridor), large-scale redevelopment projects (Lowry, Fitzsimons and Stapleton) and increasing minority populations.
- Broader participation in College decision-making through a Cabinet Advisory Council, an expanded President's Cabinet and an expanded Instructional Leadership Team.
- Revised planning and decision-making processes that are more inclusive and open than in the past.
- A commitment to, and strategy for, increasing the use of assessment for planning and decision-making across the institution.
- Community support for the College, its students and its programs.

## Challenges

The self-study and the work of the self-study committees assigned to this criterion also found challenges for the future. The College is challenged to:

- Respond positively and creatively to declining state revenues and state financial support;
- More effectively meet the educational needs of underrepresented groups and of immigrants not eligible for resident tuition;
- Increase minority representation on program advisory committees, the College Advisory Council and the Foundation Board so that their membership is generally proportionate to the minority populations of the College's service area;
- Develop aggressive recruitment and retention strategies for minority faculty, staff and students;
- Develop and implement a system to evaluate the degree to which the College meets its strategic goals and use the evaluation results to modify subsequent strategic plans; and
- Increase the use of assessment data in the planning process.

## Issues for the Future

The self-study and the work of the self-study committees assigned to this criterion identified issues for the future. These issues include:

- Finding creative ways to use the space at CentreTech vacated by programs moved to Lowry;
- Seizing additional opportunities at the Lowry campus, building upon the initial successes;
- Continuing to solicit input from constituencies throughout the planning process and share planning documents (including unit plans) with all CCA faculty, staff and students.
- Distributing an annual planning cycle master calendar with plans, products, timelines and responsibilities.

## Introduction

This chapter focuses on the Community College of Aurora's ability to continue to accomplish its purposes and to strengthen its educational effectiveness. The chapter first summarizes the College's financial, physical and human resources to reach these goals. Next comes a discussion of the ability of the College governance structure and decision-making processes to respond to changing circumstances and new challenges. The chapter then analyzes CCA's processes for planning and for measuring institutional effectiveness. Finally, the chapter outlines how the College will integrate the self-study findings into the planning process in coming years and how the College will allocate resources to implement self-study recommendations.

## Resources to Accomplish Goals and Improve Education

### Financial Resources

CCA has the financial resources with which to meet goals and strengthen its teaching and learning. To maintain these resources, CCA has developed an open and conservative approach to budgeting and spending. A cautious approach to forecasting enrollment, combined with intensive enrollment management, supplements the budgeting and spending processes. Most important, the lessons learned in developing and implementing these approaches mean that the College has the tested capability to respond to future financial challenges. (*Resource Room document 8.1*)

The College changed its approach to budgeting in 2000-01. At the beginning of that fiscal year, the College had in place an aggressive revenue goal, expenses that were not in line with revenues, and debts in some auxiliary accounts. In spring of 2001, faced with enrollment short of projections and excess expenses, the President's Cabinet reduced the budget and eliminated programs and positions, saving \$1.2 million. In addition to staff reductions, the budget cuts included strategic changes such as moving the Workplace Solutions Center from the regular budget to being self-funded. The cabinet made these reductions openly and inclusively to the extent possible while protecting employees' privacy. During this period, for example, the president regularly informed the Cabinet Advisory Council and the College at large about the budget situation.

Given the 2000-01 experience, the cabinet constructed a much more conservative 2001-02 budget based on less ambitious enrollment projections. Consequently, the College ended 2001-02 with a year-end surplus, despite the state's rescinding funds.

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The 2002-03 budget year began with a nearly 5 percent state general fund budget reversion, effective July 1, 2002, followed within a month by an additional 5 percent reversion. Rather than simply taking across-the-board budget cuts, the cabinet worked openly with directors and cost-center managers to ensure that the College invested in the future even as it dealt with the immediate situation. Among these investments were improved facilities for biology, film and video technology, and equipment and transportation technology.

The College will continue to focus on new opportunities while meeting any future fiscal challenges. Among the sources of funding to meet these challenges will be the CCA Foundation and grants from government agencies and local foundations. Presently, for example, the College is addressing the needs of the community's immigrant population with monies from the city of Aurora and the Xcel Energy Foundation. (*Resource Room document 8.2*)

### **Physical Resources**

CCA has an exciting array of physical resources with which to meet goals and strengthen its teaching and learning. Not the least of these resources is additional space. During the past several years, the College has added to its CentreTech campus, expanded and improved its facilities at the Lowry campus, and reduced the use of rented satellite sites. In 1991, CCA occupied just over 89,000 square feet at the CentreTech campus. By 2002, the College occupied over 400,000 square feet, including 278,000 square feet at the Lowry campus. Equally important, the College has made major investments in technology and completed other physical improvements. The completion of a Lowry facilities plan in the fall of 2002 and the expected completion of an overall facilities master plan within the next few years will help the College make the most efficient use of its physical resources. (*Resource Room documents 8.3 and 8.4*)

The College opened the Student Centre at CentreTech in 2000. The 26,500-square-foot facility houses student activities and provides much-improved space for the College's educational support programs, including the Instructional Resource Center and the Learning Resource Center. In 2001, the 8,000-square-foot addition to the Fine Arts Building gave CCA's theater and other fine arts programs a performance venue, as well as additional classrooms and offices. The College has improved CentreTech in other ways, such as new carpeting for the Classroom Building, to ensure that these facilities remain appealing and comfortable for students. With laboratory sciences, computer information systems and other classes moving to Lowry, CentreTech has space for new and creative uses, including space on the third floor of the Classroom Building.

The College expanded its facilities significantly at Lowry in 2001, taking on both a tremendous opportunity and the challenge of doing so with limited resources. Because the System paid some costs at Lowry, CCA acquired the additional space at reduced cost. Moving many programs to a three-building complex across from the residence hall created a more

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campus-like atmosphere and greatly increased the instructional space. Among the facilities in the new 150,000-square-foot complex is a CCA Foundation-funded Cisco networking lab and extensive new facilities for the growing film and video technology program. The College's science programs benefited from moving to remodeled labs in the new complex.

The residence hall at Lowry represents an example of the calculated risk-taking and investment in new opportunities that will serve CCA well in the years ahead. In a short period in 2001, the College converted the former officer quarters into the only community college residence hall in the Aurora/Denver metropolitan area. The number of students living in the hall doubled from 2001 to 2002. Similarly, changes related to the Lowry expansion have helped the College to become fiscally and administratively more efficient. For example, some classes taught at relatively expensive rented space in area high schools have moved to Lowry. CCA kept classes at just one school, Grandview High School, which serves a growing area far to the south of the campus in the Cherry Creek School District. New space at Lowry also allowed the College to leave leased facilities off campus and move the equipment and transportation technology program to Lowry.

Since the last self-study, CCA has greatly advanced its use of technology, preparing the College well for the future. For example, the College has 25 computer labs (including Cisco-certified labs) with approximately 700 PCs.

### **Human Resources**

CCA has the human resources with which to meet goals and strengthen its teaching and learning. The College has numerous faculty and staff members whose long service with the College testifies not only to their commitment, but also to the experience they bring to their work with students. Like many institutions, the College in the next decade will have many of its most experienced employees retire. Fortunately, over the past few years, new faculty and staff members with a variety of experiences and backgrounds have joined the College.

The College benefits from the talents of many adjunct faculty members who work in area companies such as Raytheon and TRW. Strong and creative partnerships with business, industry and community groups help the College find these highly qualified personnel. In several programs, such as equipment and transportation technology, emergency medical provider and insurance, local company partners supply faculty to teach specialized courses.

The College has also benefited from the availability of many talented people attracted to Colorado's Front Range. High-quality graduate education, an outdoor-oriented lifestyle and, until recently, numerous employment opportunities for families and spouses, have contributed to CCA's success in developing its human resources. Likewise, many military personnel have retired in the Aurora area, providing the College another source of qualified faculty and staff.

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At the same time, attracting and retaining talented candidates from underrepresented groups continue to challenge CCA. Because of its limited resources, the College often has difficulty competing with wealthier institutions and the private sector. To help meet the challenge, the College has charged committees reviewing job applicants to consider diversity as they seek the best candidate. The director of human resources attends all job interviews, emphasizing the College's commitment to diversity. (*Resource Room document 8.5*)

The College has made progress in increasing the numbers of regular faculty, though recent budgetary concerns have impeded that progress. Nevertheless, CCA is committed to increasing the ratio of regular to adjunct faculty, while also valuing the advantages of a large cadre of adjuncts who provide specialized expertise, broad experience and budget flexibility.

The College has also made a long-term commitment to increasing salary scales while carefully ensuring the institution's long-term budget stability. Current state budgetary constraints have delayed plans for salary analysis and implementation, but the College's commitment to increasing salaries remains.

## **Responding to Changing Circumstances and Challenges**

The Colorado Commission on Higher Education (CCHE) and the State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education (SBCCOE) monitor the College's activities, finances, programs and facilities. These boards set policy, allocate funding, approve programs and generally provide citizen oversight to Colorado public higher education. In addition, the SBCCOE appoints CCA's College Advisory Council to advise the president on the changing educational needs of the College's service area. (*More information is in the GIRs*)

Within this service area, CCA faces a particularly complex set of changing circumstances, continuing challenges and great opportunities. Many of these relate to Aurora's evolution and growth and include the following:

- the increasing ethnic diversity of north Aurora with a large, often-undocumented Mexican immigrant population;
- the conversion of nearby Fitzsimons Army Medical Center into the country's newest and most comprehensive educational medical center;
- the creation of the nation's largest urban redevelopment project on the site of the former Stapleton Airport, just north of the Lowry campus, as well as the continued redevelopment of Lowry;
- a service area encompassing two large school districts, one (Aurora) serving students from 82 language backgrounds and with schools under state mandate to improve and the other (Cherry Creek) more affluent but increasingly diverse; and

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- the rapid development around Denver International Airport northeast of the College, along the new E-470 toll way corridor to the east and southeast of the city and adjacent to Buckley Air Force Base near the College's CentreTech campus.

Over the last several years, the College has developed the flexible and inclusive institutional governance necessary to respond to these and other changes, challenges and opportunities. CCA's recently revised mission statement, goals and values guide this approach to governance, while specific structural changes assist in its implementation. For example, to make the College's decision-making more inclusive, the president created the Cabinet Advisory Council in 2001 with representation from a broad range of units and from both the Lowry and the CentreTech campuses. The advisory council's range of expertise and variety of perspectives strengthen CCA's ability to find solutions to new challenges, adapt to changing circumstances and seize new opportunities. *(Resource Room document 8.6)*

In a more recent change, the College's executive decision-making group, the President's Cabinet, expanded to include the three academic deans, strengthening the cabinet's capacity to address and improve educational effectiveness. The president also regularly convenes ad hoc all-college meetings, solicits e-mail suggestions from the CCA community, and meets frequently with individuals to discuss issues, formulate strategies and consider decisions. *(Resource Room document 8.7)*

Within the College's three units, leadership teams or committees regularly meet to make many decisions that affect their units. One of these teams, the Instructional Leadership Team, broadened its representation in the fall of 2002 by adding all 14 program chairpersons to its membership. In addition, within this unit, the vice president for instruction holds monthly meetings with faculty members and uses e-mail to solicit ideas and encourage faculty participation in decision-making. Faculty Council is another important vehicle for broad-based faculty input into College decision-making. Open to all faculty members, the council has representatives on the Cabinet Advisory Council and on the Instructional Leadership Team. *(Resource Room document 8.8)*

Also important to the College's ability to make decisions and allocate resources in coming years is the wealth of ideas and suggestions from the community. The College Advisory Council meets monthly to advise the president about perspectives from citizens, business, education, state legislators and local government. Program advisory committees provide program-specific information. To ensure that the council and committee suggestions represent the diversity of the community, the College is challenged to expand their Hispanic and other minority membership. *(Resource Room documents 8.9)*

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Finally, the College is not meeting challenges and seizing opportunities in isolation. Founded by Aurora residents who labored so the community could have a college of its own, CCA actively collaborates with a great many organizations to devise new programs and improve existing ones. For example, the Medical Center of Aurora, the Aurora Fire Department and Rural/Metro Ambulance collaborate with the College in the emergency medical provider program.

These partnerships generate positive relationships with the community that can help the College continue to meet its purposes. The depth of this goodwill can be seen in the high regard with which the community holds CCA and its programs. For example, 97 percent of respondents to the College's most recent (April 2000) Community Leadership Survey agreed, "CCA provides the programs and services the community desires and contributes to its economic well-being."

As it examined the College's ability to respond to changing circumstances, the self-study committee on decision-making concluded that the College has a solid decision-making process. It cited the 2000 Community Leadership Survey results to show that the College does a good job of involving both internal and external constituencies in decision-making. However, the committee also found areas where the College could continue to improve decision-making. (*Resource Room documents 8.10*)

These areas include:

- creating a better understanding throughout the College about who is responsible for what decisions;
- making decisions in a timely manner and at the lowest-possible level;
- communicating decisions to everyone required to implement them; and
- informing people about the status of delayed or pending decisions.

## **College Plans and Ongoing Planning Processes**

Over the past two years, CCA's planning processes have changed considerably. College planning now involves a wider representation of constituencies, focuses more on connecting planning at various levels of the institution, and is developing better ways to measure how well CCA is meeting its goals and fulfilling its plans.

The College bases its planning upon priorities established by its governance board, the State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education. In addition, planning takes into account the priorities and standards of the Colorado Commission on Higher Education and the state of Colorado's Quality Indicator System. (*Resource Room document 8.11*)

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CCA involves internal and external constituents in the development of the College's strategic plan (its strategic goals). Throughout the development of the plan, divisions, employee groups, students, citizen advisory groups and other constituents provide ideas and comments. The president begins the development process with visits to College employees to hear their thoughts about accomplishments, needed changes and opportunities and challenges. The president also meets with student groups, the board of the CCA Foundation, and the College Advisory Council to evaluate the College's strengths and weaknesses, assess community needs, review resources and brainstorm potential partnerships and relationships. *(Resource Room document 8.12)*

As the planning process proceeds, the president and cabinet assess progress on reaching existing strategic goals and decide what goals to carry over and what goals to change. To help them measure this progress, CCA's Office of Institutional Research conducts a variety of surveys. *(Resource Room documents 8.13 and 8.14)*

These surveys include:

- Vocational Graduates Survey
- Survey of Currently Enrolled Students
- Faculty Survey
- Staff Survey
- Student Evaluation of Instruction

Other information used for planning also includes the Quality Indicator System reports and the credit enrollment profiles, developed by the Office of Institutional Research. *(Resource Room documents 8.15 and 8.16)*

As the instructional programs further implement their assessment plans, the College will use data from these efforts in the planning process. The gathering and use of assessment data remains a challenge, however.

Using the constituent input and the survey data, the president, the Cabinet, and the Cabinet Advisory Council develop a draft strategic plan and circulate it widely for review. Academic departments, for example, send the draft plan to adjunct faculty members for their comment. Final responsibility for modifying the plan rests with the Cabinet following discussion with the Cabinet Advisory Council. Once the plan is complete, the College distributes it to CCA employees and groups, as well as to selected external constituencies.

The College planning process remains flexible, giving the College the capability to respond to changing circumstances. For example, in the summer of 2002, many faculty members attended two "summer summits" to discuss concerns first voiced more informally within instruction. At the summits, faculty generated and honed ideas about how to empower faculty and involve them more in decision-making, improve various

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instruction-related conditions and communication and increase student success. A College retreat, also in the summer of 2002, brought together College leaders from all three units to discuss ideas and possibilities, many related to the evaluation and performance of College personnel. (*Resource Room document 8.17*)

In an effort to improve the planning process, the College has focused on planning and plans that connect across the institution. Once the institutional strategic plan is complete, each major unit (administrative services, student services and enrollment management and instruction) develops its own annual plan, focusing on the College goals most appropriate for the unit. The unit plans also include any unit-specific goals not covered in the strategic plan. The units use information from college surveys to measure previous years' goal achievement and to develop new or modified plans. For example, the instructional unit uses information from the faculty survey and the survey of currently enrolled students and the student service unit makes extensive use of data from the survey of currently enrolled students. (*Resource Room documents 8.18*)

To complete the Collegewide planning process, individual employees develop annual work plans that address elements of their respective unit plans as well as job-specific goals. These individual work plans ultimately reflect the College strategic plan. This well-interconnected process is relatively new in its implementation, and work remains. (*Resource Room documents 8.19*)

The College planning process also involves the development of specific plans required by SBCCOE. Copies of these plans are available in the Office of the President and on the CCA Web site. (*Resource Room document 8.20*)

The self-study committee assigned to examining CCA's strategic planning concluded that the planning process has improved greatly over the last two years. The committee observed a shift away from senior-management planning to a more inclusive process and concluded that this has been a dramatic, positive change. The committee recommended that the shift continue with more emphasis on communicating planning outcomes to all who participate in the process and publicizing the degree to which the College and its units have achieved planning document goals. The committee noted that confusing and overlapping titles, variations in terminology, and a wide range of formats sometimes interfere with communication about planning. The committee recommended that the College develop common titles, standardized terminology and common formats and structures for planning documents and reports.

Finally, the committee noted that the cycle for developing and assessing the strategic plan, while improving, has not yet been clearly delineated with an annual timeline, specific products and clear-cut responsibilities. The College needs to develop, publish and disseminate such a document.

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## Measuring Institutional Effectiveness

Until 2000, CCA used a one-page scorecard to measure institutional effectiveness. The cabinet used the scorecard information to evaluate performance and set goals, as well as to report performance to groups such as the College Advisory Council. However, the College dropped the use of the scorecard because what it measured was not connected to a strategic plan. To replace the scorecard, the College is developing an annual report that analyzes how well the institution is meeting each strategic goal and related objectives. (*Resource Room documents 8.21*)

As a first step in developing this report, the director of communication prepared a document in the fall of 2002 giving examples of the progress the College has made in meeting its strategic goals. The president also described this progress at the 2002 convocation. CCA's major challenges for the future are to expand this initial version of the annual report, adding detailed measurement and rigorous analysis of goal achievement, and then to use the report each year in the modification of the strategic plan.

Two goals in the 2002-05 strategic plan testify to the importance the College places on how it collects and uses data to measure institutional effectiveness and assist in decision-making:

- to more thoroughly integrate the use of information and technology into the decision-making processes, and
- to develop a systematic, integrated planning process that is data-based and outcomes-oriented.

Beginning in the fall of 2002, a team that included the three vice presidents and the directors of communications and grants began to design a matrix of decision-making and institutional effectiveness. The design included consideration of the following:

- The essential decisions related to institutional effectiveness and institutional planning for which College faculty and staff need accurate, up-to-date information.
- Data the College is now collecting related to these essential decisions, additional data the College needs to collect, and data the College no longer needs to collect.
- How the College can best analyze data to provide accessible, user-friendly information needed for planning, budgeting and other decision-making.
- The persons responsible for collecting, analyzing, distributing and maintaining data, including new or revised responsibilities.



- How the College can better use technology to collect and analyze data and distribute the resulting information quickly and accurately to all faculty and staff who need it.
- Training and other human factors the College will need in order to implement the strategic goals and related initiatives.

### **Quality Indicator System**

During the 1999-00 school year, the Colorado Legislature enacted legislation called the Quality Indicator System (QIS), which the Colorado Commission on Higher Education manages. This annual report card-type evaluation requires that each public higher education institution in Colorado assess its effectiveness using both standard statewide criteria and criteria of its own choosing. QIS gives the public a snapshot of the performance of the state's public colleges and universities. The indicators used in QIS are now part of CCA's planning and evaluation cycle. QIS currently mandates reports on the following performance indicators:

- three-year graduation rate;
- freshmen retention and persistence rates for all students and for minority students;
- undergraduate class/section size;
- faculty instructional workload; and
- percent of technical graduates employed or continuing their education.

The QIS also allows each college to submit two reports of its choosing. CCA reports the following:

- the number of minority students enrolled as compared with the service area's minority population; and
- the number of students and companies served by the College's Workplace Solutions Center and the number of students served in customized training programs.

CCA has done very well in the QIS evaluation. The results of the QIS report published in the fall of 2001 put CCA first among Colorado's community colleges and second among all the state's public colleges and universities. (*Resource Room documents 8.22*)



## **Assessment of Student Academic Achievement**

*Chapter 6 describes the College's progress and plans.*

## **Integration of the Self-Study Findings Into CCA's Planning Process**

The College's planning process regularly integrates information and recommendations from throughout the College and from external sources, including the annual State Board and Colorado Commission on Higher Education priorities. In a similar way, the College will integrate the self-study findings into the 2003 planning process. The wide participation in the self-study process by CCA faculty and staff and their knowledge of the study and its findings will greatly aid this integration.

## **College Resources Allocated to Implement Self-Study**

The College will allocate resources to implement the self-study through the prioritization and budgeting process described earlier. The College mission, goals and values play an important part in this process. Virtually all those who participate in the budgeting process have participated in the self-study, with the cabinet playing a central role in both efforts.

