

Report to the
Faculty, Administration, Trustees, Students
of
Three Rivers Community College
Norwich, Connecticut
by
An Evaluation Team representing the
Commission on Institutions of Higher Education
of the
New England Association of Schools & Colleges

Prepared after study of the
Institution's Self-Evaluation Focused Report
and an Evaluation Visit
to the Campus from October 27-30, 2002

Submitted by:
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INTRODUCTION

The New England Association of Schools & Colleges visiting team conducted the site visit at Three Rivers Community College on October 27-30, 2002. The purpose of the visit was to validate the institution's self-study document in an effort to collaboratively exchange ideas, information, and any concerns that may have been articulated in the document.

Upon completion of the visit, the team set forth a list of institutional strengths and areas upon which the College should concentrate to address any outstanding issues. The team determined that the College did an excellent job in preparing the self-study document in a reflective, self-analytical manner. The team found that the standards were all thoroughly reviewed with what appeared to be accurate assessments of the current conditions of the college and reasonable projections for the college to move forward.

It is our hope that the self-study document will serve the college well into the future as a basis for on-going review of practices and procedures and for guidance when establishing strategic goals and objectives for the institution.

It is in the spirit of collegiality that the members of the visiting team offer this report to the institution as it embarks on what are to be challenging years for public higher education. In spite of the fiscal challenges created by lower levels of state support, the team found the campus responding well to the present challenges. Enrollment is increasing, program development is ongoing, faculty and staff are committed to student success, and the campus is operating effectively within a cost-cutting environment. This speaks to the quality of the people who dedicate their efforts to the College and to the good work that was witnessed on the visit.

There remains, however, one great issue facing the College – a prompt decision relative to location, construction, and renovation plans for the proposed consolidated campus.

The visiting team submits this report to the college and the Commission in an effort to assist the institution in fulfilling its promise to the citizens and businesses of Southeast Connecticut.

*Standard One***MISSION & PURPOSE**

As a comprehensive community college, the mission speaks about a college offering a broad selection of credit and non-credit courses; programs that transfer to the four year college; and opportunities for employment and lifelong learning, with a focus on workforce development and student success in an environment that utilizes technology for the enhancement of learning and student services. It is clear that the mission of the college is understood by the college community and that faculty and staff are committed to its fulfillment.

The College's mission statement provides the direction for decision-making and resource allocation at the college. The College through its planning and assessment dedicates its resources to the primary purposes stated in the mission.

Standard Two

PLANNING & EVALUATION

Three Rivers Community College (TRCC) is one of the twelve public community colleges in the Connecticut state system of public higher education. Approximately ten years ago (1992) when the last NEASC self-study was being completed, a legislative decision was passed that anticipated merging Thames Valley State Technical College and Mohegan Community College. The resulting merged institution has since been known as Three Rivers Community College. The new entity, TRCC, is still housed at the same physical locations as the two original campuses from which it was merged.

While the actual physical facilities of TRCC will be discussed in more detail under Standard VIII, Physical Resources, it is difficult to address the contextual issues of Planning without addressing the challenges this institution has faced in expanding its physical facilities in a manner that supports its strategic vision and mission.

In summary, planning for consolidation of the two campuses has been ongoing since 1992. The entire ten-year saga has been captured in a document titled *“Three Rivers Community College.... A Very Long Road to New Facilities - A History.”* A brief summary of the “planning”, “un-planning”, and “re-planning” that has occurred over the last ten years reads as follows:

- 1992 State legislature mandated merger between the two colleges
- 1993 TRCC received approval to develop a comprehensive master plan to consolidate the two facilities
- 1994 Master planning was completed and recommended development of Mohegan campus to house new facility
- 1995 State legislature recommended that TRCC consider vacated state hospital as an alternative to the Mohegan campus
- 1996 State stakeholders decided on appropriateness of state hospital as the most desirable site
- 1997 TRCC received official commitment to pursue development/renovation of state hospital in conjunction with pursuing two-three other appropriate clients for that site
- 1998 City of Norwich withdrew its support for TRCC’s move to hospital site
- 1999 State sought support and proposals for including TRCC’s move to hospital site
- 2000 City of Norwich officials lobbied to move TRCC to downtown Norwich
- 2001 Current plans include building and expanding on the current site of the Mohegan campus.

Planning in this context takes on phenomenal challenges that far exceed the normal challenges associated with planning and evaluation. Putting the physical plant issues aside, the College has demonstrated a steady commitment to the planning and evaluation functions over the years. The College has participated in the statewide effort to convert to the Banner administrative software system. This statewide investment in the same software has yielded some return-on-investments via its efficiencies relative to data collection and generation. Until recently, TRCC shared an Institutional Research Officer with two other colleges.

In the initial period following the last ten-year accreditation, the College was relatively autonomous under the Chancellor. Planning was more of an internal exercise, and institutional goals were somewhat self-determined. This local effort was hampered somewhat by the challenges of merging the cultures of the two distinct institutions. With the arrival of a new Chancellor several years later, the Central System Office became more involved with institutional planning. The Chancellor in consultation with the College Presidents created a set of goals for each institution under the umbrella concept of “academic models.” Campus Presidents were asked to develop a best-practices approach to one of the “academic models” with the anticipation that the research findings from each campus would be shared system wide. The newest Chancellor has modified this approach somewhat, but the local campus believes that the last two system-wide approaches to planning and evaluation have had enough common elements to support some continuity in the planning efforts. TRCC currently has a well developed strategic plan referred to as *Three Rivers Community College System and College Goals: 2003-2005*. Multiple campus interactions confirm the notion that the Central System Goals provide a viable opportunity for TRCC to identify its strategic goals within the umbrella of the System’s Goals. This compatible congruence permits the College to focus on one clear set of Strategic Goals, thus enhancing the clarity of vision and direction for campus constituents.

The College’s current Strategic Plan is concise and clear, and appears to be a document that the College community refers to in institutional decision-making. The Plan begins with a listing of planning assumptions and guiding principles. Each of TRCC’s individual strategic goals is tied to the statewide system priorities. In addition, baseline measures (status of each goal as July 2002) are provided for each goal. Current short- and long-term goals within each strategic goal are written in measurable terms, creating a base platform for assessing outcomes at the end of this planning cycle.

The College’s Information Technology Advisory Committee (ITAC) serves as the College’s Strategic Planning Committee. This Committee has broad representation from across the campus. ITAC members generate goals based on broad campus input and deliberation. The Plan is forwarded to the President and Cabinet, and to the College’s Governance Council. Guided by comments and feedback from the campus community, the Plan is massaged and reshaped. At the President’s annual retreat, Cabinet members work with the President to finalize the Plan. Each member of the Cabinet assumes responsibility for overseeing the goals that fall within his/her primary area of responsibility.

A newly hired Director of Institutional Research has adapted a system – referred to as the *Balance Score Card (BSC)*– that provides for integrating key elements of implementing a strategic plan. The *BSC* concentrates on resource development and allocation, learning and growth perspectives, and internal/external processes that are essential ingredients of achieving institutional effectiveness. The single page diagram showing the interfacing of all of these elements also has the additional benefit of letting everyone on campus know that each person’s contributions can help make a difference!

TRCC relies on data generation and assessment through a centralized IR function as well as diffused institutional research carried on within departments. For example, the Academic Program Review Process as well as Student Services efforts to survey students generate measures of institutional effectiveness. The recent hiring of a new IR Director that is only shared with one other college has provided more resources and time for the IR function to take the lead on generating data. The College hopes to bring the current IR Director on full-time, enabling him to focus his entire efforts on the research needs of TRCC. This on-going and available resource will be essential for the College to pursue its aggressive agenda for establishing Learning Communities as an organizing theme and as a basis for measuring learning outcomes. For example, the Academic Division Steering Committee has revamped the Program Review Process to include measures to assess learning outcomes. Faculty and professional staff will benefit from the guidance and support of professionals trained in institutional research and assessment.

Finally, the College appears to have some excellent systems in place for connecting the budgeting cycle and resource allocation to strategic goals. The College has made enormous gains in providing resources and settings to support teaching and learning. It appears that College personnel have triumphed over adversity, using the on-going delays regarding a decision on a permanent facility as a catalyst to focus on what is within their power to change, namely short-term goals and improvements. The delay has also fostered a sense of “creative solutions” among College personnel. In summary, it appears that the College has used its strategic plans and visions as “optimal models”, and as resources became available, they were easily able to allocate and direct resources towards the end goals.

SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS:

A very positive “can do” campus spirit has prevailed in spite of the ten-year delay in decision on location of permanent campus

A sustained and improved process/product of strategic planning and evaluation exists.

There is broad-based opportunity for campus input, modification, and review of the strategic plan.

There are multiple opportunities for departments and service areas to develop goals to support campus-wide strategic planning.

There have been excellent achievements and accomplishments in light of challenges of merging two very distinctive campus cultures, campus facility challenges, and recent fiscal shortfalls.

There exists a sensitivity to the usefulness of data in making decisions.

There is congruence of TRCC strategic planning within the guiding umbrella of priorities of Connecticut system of higher education.

An increasing commitment to resources and processes supports measures of institutional effectiveness

There is an increased commitment to campus-wide data collection initiatives and the ongoing sharing of the findings.

There is strong evidence of excellent cross-departmental cooperation (financial, technology, academics, etc) in implementing institutional strategic goals.

CHALLENGES:

Securing final funding and approval to move forward on creation of permanent a campus large enough to support the College as a whole remains the greatest challenge for the campus. (Note: This College through its pursuit of excellence has established itself as a key contributor to workforce development within Southeast Connecticut. Current evidence suggests that it could significantly increase its enrollment with more space. It's time to support TRCC!)

*Standard Three***ORGANIZATION & GOVERNANCE**

The College was formed in 1992 by a merger of Mohegan Community College and Thames Valley Technical College. There has been a ten year struggle to merge the two disparate cultures and to consolidate the College on a single campus. The Evaluation Team found that the College is making good progress towards both of these goals.

The Board of Trustees for Community Colleges and its appointed Chancellor oversee the system and appoint each college's president. The College has an effective working relationship with the Board of Trustees.

Dr. Grace Jones was appointed President in June 2001. Although there have been a number of recent changes in the leadership, there was no evidence that this has hindered the forward progress of the College. The college leadership is a strong team that is well respected by the faculty, students, staff, community, and Board of Trustees. President Jones has outlined her vision for a "Learning Community", and the Evaluation Team observed a strong commitment, at every level of the organization, to students and learning. The department chairs are dedicated and hard working. They provide overall leadership for the department, evaluate faculty, and serve on the Curriculum Committee.

In 1997 the College added a Joint Governance Council to integrate the separate divisional structures. The Governance Council is composed of representatives from faculty, student services, non-teaching staff, continuing education, and students. The Governance Council has become an effective policy making body for the institution and has helped to unite the divisions (Academic, Administrative Services, Student Services, and Information Technology) and the two campuses. The chairperson is elected and recommendations are made to the President.

Each of the divisions has regular meetings. A student liaison is assigned to each division to act as a conduit for student concerns. The Academic Division recently formed a Steering and Planning subcommittee to improve the effectiveness of the Academic Division meetings.

This is the first year of a single Student Government representing both campuses. The Student Government alternates its meetings between the two campuses. The new Student Government President has done an excellent job of recruiting students to serve on the various governance committees.

In June 2001 "A Survey Report on the Effectiveness of Organizational Governance" was issued. 46 people were surveyed (26 full-time faculty, 7 adjuncts, 6 administrators, and 7 professional and support staff). The survey indicates that the College has a strong and effective organizational and governance structure, but it also indicates that the two-campus system leads to some perceptions of inequity.

The visiting team believes that the College has an organizational and governance structure that is committed to creating an environment that is conducive to teaching and learning. The College is making good progress in merging the cultures of the two former institutions and is hopefully in the final stages of obtaining the resources to consolidate all its activities on one campus.

SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS:

There is a commitment to students and learning at every level of the organization.

During the past five years, there have been significant changes in the governance structures that have increased their effectiveness, inclusiveness, and level of participation.

The leadership of the College is strong and well respected by all constituencies.

CHALLENGES:

Although the College has been effective at addressing the problems created by the merger, there are still some perceptions that the resource allocation, organizational design, and governance structure are not equitable between the two campuses. This reinforces the need to locate the College on a single campus as soon as possible.

*Standard Four***PROGRAMS & INSTRUCTION**

Three Rivers Community College offers a wide range of Associate Degree and Certificate programs to meet the needs of the local communities it serves. The degree programs include General Studies, Liberal Arts and Sciences, Business, Criminal Justice, Early Childhood Education, Allied Health, Engineering and Technology. There are nineteen Certificate programs and a variety of developmental reading, writing, mathematics, and ESL courses for those students who are under-prepared. The college has been quite successful in reaching its goal of offering affordable and accessible educational opportunities in an environment that stimulates learning.

The College has developed learning objectives for all programs and individual courses, and they are listed in the college catalog and course syllabi. In addition, outcome measures have been developed and assessed in many areas, such as business, early childhood education, nursing, and the technical programs. There is regular review and analysis of existing programs to promote "best practices" and to plan for needed additional curricula and possible reductions. An example would be the recent combining of Travel and Tourism with Food Service Management to form a "Hospitality Management" degree to better serve the needs of the region. The General Studies and Arts and Science courses need to be assessed for learning outcomes to confirm that students have acquired institutional goals for learning by the time they graduate.

Despite the ongoing problem of having two separate campuses and two unions, the faculty at Three Rivers is enthusiastic about student learning and is involved with college governance. Ideas for new programs and courses usually originate with departments and then must be approved by the College Curriculum Committee, which includes representatives of each academic department, the Department of Continuing Education, and other constituencies. Then the proposals must be accepted by the Academic Dean, the President, and in some cases the Board of Trustees and the Connecticut Department of Higher Education. There is clearly good communication in the process, standardized procedures to ensure consistency with college resources and student needs, and concern that the courses or programs are appropriate for the College's academic mission. However, there is frustration among the technical faculty at the Thames Campus because of deferred maintenance and only limited updating of equipment until the new buildings are constructed.

The College offers a number of credit and noncredit courses off-campus through the Continuing Education Department to meet the academic, business, and cultural needs of the larger community. The variety of courses at different locations and times are monitored closely to ensure academic standards are maintained and full-time faculty are involved. Off-campus resources, such as the use of public libraries and on-line tutoring, support students in these situations. However, the Continuing Education Department needs some assistance with admitting, registering, and maintaining records of students in noncredit courses.

The institution has clearly defined procedures for the academic aspects of all credit courses. Policies for evaluating prior learning, admitting and retaining students, and evaluating student progress are listed and regularly updated in college publications such as the College catalog. All the faculty are presently involved with advising students, and they are provided with a detailed Faculty Manual, Advisor Manual, and workshops to help them with this task. The developmental courses have been recently evaluated and updated: for example, the ESL courses have been expanded to meet the needs of the non-English

speaking community; developmental English courses have been added; and a "First Year Experience" course to help student adjustment has been evaluated in conjunction with developmental courses and found to increase retention. There is concern about the lack of student success in the developmental math courses, and it might be helpful to consider offering a laboratory section for these courses.

It is apparent that the faculty is encouraged to use innovative teaching methods and to promote service learning opportunities for students in the community. Distance and web-based learning are actively practiced by faculty members. There are presently twelve distance learning courses available, and many faculty are attending workshops to increase this number. In general, the professional development of both full-time and adjunct faculty is a priority, through projects, programs, and discipline-based conferences and organizations. Additionally, there are opportunities for faculty members to take sabbaticals to develop instructional technology or improve their professional growth.

Since Three Rivers Community College has an open enrollment policy, a battery of tests is required of entering students to ensure that they are adequately prepared for college level courses. The previously mentioned developmental courses in reading, writing, and math (not for graduation credit), and the First Year Experience course must be completed early in a student's enrollment.

SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS:

A conscientious and enthusiastic faculty who are dedicated to student learning.

The development of learning objectives is complete for all programs and courses, and the implementation of outcome measures in many areas, such as business, early childhood education, nursing, and the technical programs.

There is a regular review and analysis of existing programs and courses to promote "best practices" and to plan for futures additions and possible reductions.

There is high involvement of the faculty in developing and modifying courses, advising students, and participating in college committees and other college-wide activities.

Credit and noncredit courses and programs have been developed with the help of an Advisory Council to meet the needs of local businesses and industry at convenient locations.

There are well-articulated policies for admission, the acceptance of transfer credits, external exams (e.g. CLEP) and life experiences, and for the retention, suspension, and re-admission of students.

A comprehensive Faculty Handbook and a Faculty Advisor Manual are available to assist full-time and adjunct faculty.

The new Writing Center, the Tutoring and Academic Success Centers for students with special needs, the required First Year Experience Course, and revised developmental courses are all examples of programs that encourage student learning and retention.

Classroom research, innovative teaching methods, service learning, and new technology such as Smart Board classrooms at both campuses, and distance and web-based learning, are actively being developed by the new College Educational Technology Committee and utilized by most faculty.

CHALLENGES:

There is the continuing need for more full-time faculty, especially in areas such as ESL. With the influx of non-English speaking students in local communities.

There is also, the need to assess learning outcomes of the Liberal Arts and Sciences and General Studies courses.

Though the Acting Academic Dean has been very active and responsive to college needs, the selection of an Academic Dean would increase the opportunity to promote long-range instructional plans and policies.

The faculty, students, and administration on both campuses have been patient with the long delay in campus consolidation. However, the technical faculty have been frustrated due to the limited updating of equipment and deferred maintenance at the Thames campus.

The college may be better served if Continuing Education Department's registration process were handled by the central offices.

*Standard Five:*FACULTY

Three Rivers Community College has a faculty of 72 full-time and 181 part-time members as of the fall 2001. From 1997 to 2001 the number of faculty increased from 68 to 72 and those with tenure increased from 49 to 57. A total of 7 faculty members, 3 at the professor level have an earned doctorate. Of the remaining faculty members, 95 percent hold the master's degree and 20 percent of the faculty holds some form of professional license. There are 35 men and 37 women and their numbers are evenly distributed at various ranks. In 1997 there were 31,11,19 and 7 professors, associate professors and assistant professors and instructors respectively. By fall 2001, these numbers were 34, 14, 16 and 5. Additionally, 14 of the 34, 7 of the 13 and 10 of the 16 professors, associate professors and assistant professors are female. The Interim Chief Academic Officer and his predecessor indicate that the state cutbacks prevent the institution from additional hiring. At the same time, they state that the state strives for 65 percent of instruction to be done by full-time faculty. Currently, the system-wide average is 52 percent and the need for additional full-time faculty to meet the goal of 65 percent is a system priority.

The faculty at Three Rivers Community College is dedicated and firmly committed to providing a nurturing environment that enhances teaching and learning for a very diverse student body. This nurturing is self evident in the positively passionate reviews students provided when asked about the faculty. Teaching and advising are the primary responsibilities of the faculty. Workloads are consistent with the institution's mission and a full-time teaching load is 24 credits per year with a 20 percent additional responsibility. The faculty is allowed the option of an additional 3-credit course instead of performing their additional responsibilities. This allows the institution to staff with full-time faculty, courses that may ordinarily be taught by adjuncts. While it was not clear what percentage of the faculty engage in documented advising, the current advising system was created and continues to be administered by the faculty in collaboration with the student development division, and every student is assigned to an advisor.

Faculty engages in professional development by writing books, articles, and competing for grant funds. They also provide service to the college engaging in assessment activities, serving as student club advisors, and on governance committees that include the President's Cabinet.

There are two separate collective bargaining agreements that delineate full-time faculty employment and working conditions. In either contract, faculty may apply for tenure at the beginning of the member's sixth standard appointment. A third contract provides for the adjunct faculty contractual responsibilities and the institution's obligations.

In the self-study document, the college focused on four issues related to the faculty:

Faculty Separation: The physical separation of the two campuses and the differing union representation has impeded efforts to unify the faculty. Although the college strives for equity and has attained it with respect to teaching loads, there are still many substantive differences between the two contracts.

Full-time to Adjunct Faculty Ratio: Although the report suggests that the ratio of full-time to part-time instructors is such that it creates difficulties for program coordination and scheduling, it was evident from speaking with students that they could not discern the difference between courses and the instruction they received from part-time and full-time faculty.

Diversity: The College noted that it struggles to meet the challenge of recruiting a diverse faculty, especially in the technical areas, to match the changing demographics of the region. Nonetheless, diversity of cultural and ethnic background among the faculty exceeds that of the local labor pool.

Faculty Promotion: Three Rivers often has more faculty eligible for promotion than the allotted expenditures will cover. Since added compensation is a result of promotion and the department chair's evaluation is a factor in this decision, the chairs indicated some apprehension on their part when submitting evaluations.

SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS:

Students are positively passionate about the level of commitment, respect, and the value that faculty add to their lives.

Students were unaware when a part-time instructor taught a class. The College does an excellent job of orienting, training, and integrating adjunct faculty into the learning community. The college provides offices, phones, email and Internet access and myriad services to adjunct faculty.

Although the union issue remains unresolved 10 years after the merger, the faculty works collaboratively with administrators and staff to deal with the challenges posed by the physical separation and the different collective bargaining issues.

The college created and distributed a detailed faculty handbook that is also available on-line.

CHALLENGES:

The two union issue is yet to be resolved.

Small numbers of faculty in some programmatic areas results in students receiving most of their instruction from one or two individuals. This concern is shared by the administration and is monitored carefully.

The faculty handbook suggests that there are elections to serve on college committees. This did not appear to be consistent in all areas.

*Standard Six***STUDENT SERVICES**

The Student Development and Services Division has a mission of providing a welcoming and supportive environment designed to enhance every student's ability to achieve their highest potential. This mission is published and distributed annually in the Student Handbook.

The Division offers a variety of personal and academic support services and co-curricular activities designed to fulfill their mission. Equal services are available to day division students and to on-campus evening credit students. For example, every student is assigned an advisor and all college offices and services are available evenings as well. Using the web, high tech service for all students is being implemented this fall. In the spring of 2003, Student Services' space at the Mohegan campus will be renovated. Because of budgetary restrictions, staff have assumed additional responsibilities. As the institution's enrollment increases, additional staff would increase the effectiveness of programs and services.

Service to students has been enhanced by creating a full-time career services position. The Director of Career Services visits classes, and she has classes visit the Center in order to promote available services. The small space allocated to the Career Center and its location at the Thames campus have, however, reduced the number of students availing themselves of services, even though survey results indicate larger numbers are interested.

A part-time transfer counselor position has been increased to a full-time position. Articulation agreements have been signed with four-year institutions, and transfer credit is being evaluated on a more timely basis.

Traditional recruitment efforts beyond those with high schools include partnerships with middle schools, tech prep programs, and senior nights. The College hosts high school and middle school counselor breakfasts every other month. Within the institution's service area, the population is growing rapidly along the shoreline and in Colchester. Efforts to recruit more students from these two locations are increasing. New entrants to the College are younger and include an increased number of Asian and Haitian students, challenging the Division to offer responsive services.

Financial aid is available to qualified students from federal, state, and local sources, and almost 2.5 million dollars is distributed annually. Financial aid applications can be filed electronically using FAFSA Express, and the number applications increased by 20 percent this fall. Audits are conducted every two years.

A three-hour orientation program to the College is given for day and evening students, and group instruction that serve as a "mini" college success course is provided to students. Placement testing in English, Math, and Reading designed to increase the accurate initial course assignment is required of all students prior to class registration.

Although there is no permanent health care person on-campus, service is provided by volunteers, and EMT's are called on an emergency basis. College counselors deal with short-term crisis situations, and students are referred off campus for long term psychological counseling. Student interest in intercollegiate athletics has been increasing in the past few years, and women's basketball was added in

the 2000-2001 academic year. In 2001, a part-time athletic director was hired to further develop the program. However, because of budget problems, the program was suspended this fall with the exception of golf. A shared learning specialist and a Three Rivers Community College counselor provide services to disabled students.

In recent years, the number of student clubs has grown from nine to twenty-one, and an active student government exists that enhances student leadership opportunities. Student representatives serve on college governance committees, and a representative is assigned to each College Dean. Student government meetings alternate between the Thames and Mohegan campuses. Students may choose to commute between campuses on a daily basis to take the classes they need. The College lacks student meeting and casual gathering space in their current facilities.

Flexible on-campus daycare is provided to the students' children, three through five years old, although the service operates at a deficit. There is a need for services for children under three years of age, but this service is hindered by a lack of space and staff. Student volunteer and service learning opportunities are enhancing the education of students. A VISTA volunteer obtained through the Campus Compact assists in these efforts.

Three Rivers Community College evaluates services to students. In the fall of 2001, a student satisfaction survey developed in house was completed by a 10 percent headcount sample of the student body, and results are being used to improve services. The vast majority of students were satisfied or very satisfied with services.

Assessment of Prior Learning (APL) is a model program. Each semester, 60 students complete a portfolio course which allows them by its completion to submit materials for possible course and credit certification. Students on average are granted 30 credits for prior experiences.

The institution maintains and disposes of student records and protects student privacy rights in accordance with FERPA and Connecticut Department of Public Records administration policies. Student grievance and rights policies are published in the College catalog.

SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS:

Three Rivers Community College offers a variety of programs and services designed to allow each student to achieve their academic and personal potential.

The Student Service Division has an enthusiastic, student-centered staff that performs a wide variety of tasks and is responsive to student needs.

As part of the Learning Community model, collaboration with the Academic Affairs area of the College is increasing, and continued growth of these efforts is encouraged.

The services that are provided to evening students are excellent along with the web-based on-line services which are available to all students.

CHALLENGES:

Because of demographic and socioeconomic changes in the student body from the institution's service area, student services may need to reexamine its available services.

There is the need for additional staff and more space in order to better serve the increasingly complex needs of students.

The continued existence of two campuses at the College creates a number of issues for students.

*Standard Seven***LIBRARY & INFORMATION RESOURCES**

Information resources and services are provided by the Learning Resources Center (LRC) and the Information Technology Department. The missions and functions of these areas support the overall mission of supporting student learning and serving the community. The LRC has made strides in providing access to online research tools to the college community, both on and off-campus. A continued effort to improve collection development procedures and awareness of the LRC services and resources is underway. Three Rivers shares its information resources and in turn has access to materials not in its collection through various consortial and ILL arrangements. Classroom and course technology is well supported and promoted to the degree that budgetary and space limitations allow.

Both locations of the LRC are pleasant places to work and study. However, neither location is large enough to support the use and activity of the LRC's functions. In the LRC's, students, faculty, and staff have access to print, non-print and electronic resources appropriate to the colleges programs and services. Electronic resources are available on-campus and from remote locations from the Three Rivers LRC Website. There is an attempt to have a Librarian available to support research activities and provide instructional sessions, both general and specialized. This is not always possible because of limited staffing. The LRC also provides media resources and support within limited space and staffing.

The Information Technology Department maintains the hardware and software academic and administrative computing. The department provides access to hardware and software for faculty, staff and students to support academic and administrative needs. The Department provides connections to the campus network in classrooms and maintains and supports computer classrooms. In a few locations the Department has installed wireless equipment and connections to the network. Staff are available for training and troubleshooting.

The Library and Computer Labs are open when classes are in session and online access to the catalog and electronic resources are available 24/7. Three Rivers has made a commitment to academic support services and the use of educational technology, and in return, provides quality support and resources.

SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS:

Overall, there has been progress made in the areas of Library services. A permanent Director was named this summer and a search is underway for a full-time Reference/Library Instruction Librarian. These factors will contribute to the success of the Library in its service to students.

The Library is an attractive area where students, faculty, and staff have access to appropriate and relevant resources – print, non-print and electronic.

The Computer Labs and classrooms provide access to a wide variety of educational software and hardware.

There is strong support of classroom technology as evidenced by the installation and support of SmartBoards; the implementation of a course management system; computer and mediated classrooms; and wireless technology. Support is available for training and troubleshooting.

The Library has developed access to various electronic resources and Library services to off-site faculty, staff, and students. Increased awareness and knowledge in the use of these resources should be addressed in order to maximize the use of the online resources.

CHALLENGES:

The space constraints for the Learning Resource Center affect the services provided. With the planned consolidation into a new facility, these concerns should be addressed. Currently the LRC shares its limited space with the TASC; access to media and equipment are a source of concern; and space for students to study, both quiet and groups study is needed.

The Director's position is now filled and a search process is under way for a Reference Librarian. With the vacancies filled, many issues can be addressed, including Reference coverage by a Librarian, improved library instruction and awareness of services, and resources provided by the LRC. However, additional staffing needs may still exist. Extended hours of service and the need for expanded support of media equipment and resources should be explored.

The LRC and IT need to begin systematically reviewing programmatic outcomes. The Library survey was a start and the LRC has begun initiatives to address the areas of concern. Through grant activity, the IT area has begun assessment of Distance Learning and should continue to develop methods of assessing services and resources

As Three Rivers expands the concept of Learning Communities, the LRC and the IT areas should be in on the ground floor and an integral part of the development of Learning Communities.

*Standard Eight***PHYSICAL RESOURCES**

Three Rivers Community College offers the majority of its programs at two main campuses approximately four miles apart -- the Mohegan Campus, composed of 130,000 gross sq. ft., and the Thames Campus, which has 110,000 gross sq. ft.

The Mohegan Campus includes the main administrative offices, a full-service cafeteria, Learning Resource Center (with tutoring space), Writing Center, several “smart” computer classrooms, faculty offices, auditorium, and a small campus Bookstore (the Bookstore, managed by Follett, also has an online service capability). The Thames Campus has multiple classrooms and labs for technical programs; additional general computer classrooms; a computer classroom designed as flexible space to provide training in a variety of space configurations that is dedicated to Continuing Education programs; a smaller Learning Resource Center; and a smaller cafeteria without a kitchen. Both campuses have conference spaces, computer classrooms, and other areas extensively renovated by utilizing a combination of capital equipment funds and operational resources in a creative manner to best maximize the available space. Parking lots are maintained at each campus, but they appear to be overcrowded at the Mohegan Campus during peak periods. The offices and classrooms, while structurally old and constrained, appear efficient, effective, and are very well maintained. The use of exhibits, such as the Connecticut Women’s Hall of Fame exhibit, is informative and attractive. The Library space is filled with students and arranged purposefully, although it is also obvious that additional space is definitely needed. A renovation project to open up the Student Service support office space and make the area more student accessible is imminent. This is a good example of the College’s proactive planning and re-engineering of their existing space.

Significant investments in technology equipment and infrastructure have been made, primarily from State Capital and Technology Bond funds, supporting academic programs and online student services. Introduction of Smartboard equipment in many classrooms is another positive step, and the number of computer classrooms attest to the statewide support by capital funding and the College’s efficient use of resources. The network infrastructure is complete and some classrooms and spaces utilize wireless access. While requests for computer classrooms keep growing, equipment and infrastructure are put in place to support the operations.

The issue of campus consolidation/collocation surfaced as the major issue in all discussions, reviews of the documents, and tours during the visit. The document “Three Rivers Community College...A Very Long Road to New Facilities – A History” details the ten-year challenge to expand and consolidate the two campuses into new facilities. The Master Plan and feasibility studies appear to be complete for the renovation and new building commitment for the Mohegan campus. The project will include expansion to 190,000 assignable sq. ft. at the Mohegan Campus, providing a third more space over the current, combined campus space. This construction project will provide state of the art classroom and program space along with adequate parking for students. The design phase is expected to commence next year with hiring of the Architect. Then, hopefully, a two year construction timeframe will follow.

Although the current institutional facilities are managed and maintained to optimal levels, with great commitment and resourcefulness by college staff, the age of the existing facilities and the lack of classroom, office, and parking at the Mohegan Campus indicates that it is time for major consolidation and construction to begin. While acknowledging that there are circumstances completely out of control of

the College, the major concern is that further delays in building the new consolidated campus will limit a deserving, creative-minded institution from achieving its objectives. The College needs the consolidated campus in order to support its vision of a Learning Community.

SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS:

The periodic review of current space usage and reallocations of space is completed and prioritized in a collaborative manner at the Cabinet level in response to the strategic direction of “students first/Learning Community” and evolving teaching and learning approaches.

The use of bond funds for infrastructure, equipment, and space renovation, adaptation, and renewal demonstrate a proactive assessment of needs for present and future considerations, particularly in the IT areas.

A Master Plan for consolidated facilities, the hiring of an Architect, and majority of Bond funds are in place for the completion of new space.

The level of commitment of facilities staff in maintaining the facilities in excellent condition is commendable.

Processes are in place to assess and monitor the condition of facilities, including use of new statewide software for Deferred Maintenance.

A proactive approach is taken in areas requiring compliance or responses, such as EPA or OSHA. There are no compliance issues in Health and Safety areas.

CHALLENGES:

While the College staff try to make efficient decisions, the two campus operation does engender some duplication of services, such as LRC and Cafeteria, and inefficiencies in travel time and scheduling of meetings and classes. These issues should be resolved when consolidation into one campus is complete.

Due to budget reductions, staff shortages exist. This may impact the continued ability to maintain facilities in their current excellent condition. Also, staffing will have to be addressed with a new expanded facility. Continued need for training for maintenance staff will be key to support more sophisticated access to systems such as security programs, Health and Safety training, EPA, as well as opportunities for professional development for facilities staff.

*Standard Nine***FINANCIAL RESOURCES**

Three Rivers Community College fiscal resources are derived from a combination of State appropriations, tuition and fee revenue, capital funds, and grant funds. Enrollment-driven revenue appears to meet targets with enrollments showing an increase in Fall, 2002. There have been State budget reductions of almost 10 percent of total state funding since the 2001 legislative session, and all areas have experienced limited resources and managed with fewer staff. Although the College has been able to manage with the past reductions, additional reductions will have considerable impact. Nevertheless, the College is financially stable and reflects an organization understanding prudent financial management. Administrative staff and leadership see the fiscal area as a service to support the learning community, and they are supportive of the collaborative team approach to budget prioritization at Cabinet level. There is an excellent, experienced fiscal team, capable of utilizing computerized accounting systems and supporting the rest of the organization. There are some shared positions, such as Director of Institutional Research and Distance Education, in an effort to maximize resources.

Most importantly, in spite of the current economic constraints, the learning environment appears to truly drive the budget process and financial resource planning, takes place within this context.

SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS:

The budget process is driven by the institution's mission and priorities and supports the college strategic directions.

A dedicated bond funding stream utilized for IT infrastructure and equipment improvements has provided positive institutional change in the use of computer hardware and software in the classroom, including alternative instructional modalities.

Creative utilization of fiscal resources by an experienced collaborative managerial staff has provided good re-engineered and renovated spaces.

The utilization of systems, especially in the fiscal area, provides support for collaborative processes by providing access to budget information. Maximizing system capabilities has also provided efficiencies and improvements in areas such as Billing and Receivables, which assists revenue enhancement. Emphasis on IT training, both generic and advanced Banner, is also commendable.

Solid procedures are in place to complete timely audits and proactively approach fiscal compliance. The GASB 34/35 audit is in process and near completion for system-wide consolidation of financial statements.

The institution's current and future planning for resource streams relates directly to its strategic directions. The College is seeking to diversify and expand the resource mix by expanding external fundraising. The institutional advancement area and Foundation development are seen as important to future, particularly for a Capital campaign. The College is also taking advantage of State Matching program for promoting fundraising activities.

CHALLENGES:

There is a need for a new database to support of Development activities and institutional advancement. The College may need to investigate additional staffing for Advancement and Development activities, Grant-writing, GASB/audit preparation, and the statewide Peoplesoft HR/payroll project.

*Standard Ten***PUBLIC DISCLOSURE**

Three Rivers Community College produces various types of print publications, advertisements, promotional pieces and electronic media. These publications emerge from various sources within the College. The catalog, course schedules, and programmatic marketing pieces are produced by the Marketing and Recruitment Department in collaboration with the academic area and other departments. The website is published by a committee with a designated Webmaster as the primary developer. It appears that the College presents itself in an honest and accurate manner in various formats. The mission and other institutional statements appear in various and appropriate documents and media.

Marketing and Recruitment has a marketing plan which is scheduled to be updated. The catalog has recently gone from a one year publication cycle to two years with yearly supplements.

The catalog provides the most comprehensive review of information relating to the College's programs and services. The website parallels the catalog, but also offers additional information and links to departmental and program web pages. They contain appropriate academic information, lists of college staff with program and department affiliations, and the names of members of various college boards.

The college provides descriptions of its size and characteristics in various documents. It also indicates clearly and accurately the institution's accreditation status from various agencies in appropriate documents.

SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS:

The College's publications are attractive and appear to give accurate and relevant information. The Catalog and website are good examples of this effort.

Three Rivers' Website is attractive, easy-to-navigate, and useful tool for current and prospective students and visitors.

Procedures to develop publications are in place to ensure accuracy and currency of the information provided.

Program outcomes are stated in the college website and other documents.

CHALLENGES:

Within the program curriculum information, there is a need for clarification of the number of credits needed for some degrees, especially relating to pre-requisites.

Readily apparent options to college information for persons with disabilities should be investigated.

*Standard Eleven***INTEGRITY**

Three Rivers Community College has a number of policies and procedures that exemplify high ethical standards in its relationship with the internal and external communities. Examples include a policy on Racism and Acts of Intolerance, an Affirmative Action/Non-Discriminatory Policy and Plan, a Code of Ethics for Appointed Public Officials and State Employees, and a Student Grievance Policy.

The Connecticut Board of Governors of Higher Education and the Board of Trustees for the Connecticut Community-Technical Colleges grant the authority to Three Rivers Community College to award degrees. Internal policies and procedures ensure that all members of the college community are treated fairly.

Six collective bargaining agreements with various employee groups guarantee that standard promotion and evaluation procedures exist. Grievance procedures provide mechanisms to resolve disputes. However, the presence of two separate collective bargaining contracts for faculty at Three Rivers continues to present challenges to the College. Although a part-time handbook has previously existed, as a result of the self-study process, a full-time faculty and professional staff handbook has been produced.

The College's Affirmative Action Plan is submitted annually and accepted by the State's Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities. The Board of Trustees has also promulgated an affirmative action plan which is applicable to all employment practices and procedures.

Three Rivers Community College is committed to academic freedom and responsibility. This commitment is formalized in published policies, collective bargaining agreements, and actual procedures. Policies are clearly stated, well-publicized, and followed. Discussions related to issues are collegial and open.

SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS:

Various policies and procedures are regularly published and widely distributed.

An ethical culture exists within the institution.

The self-study report is well-organized, clearly written, and accurate.

CHALLENGES:

The existence of two distinct campuses and faculty contracts encourages the continuance of two cultures. Although in recent years, these issues appear to have diminished.

Since the Ethics Committee has not met in several years, assessing the effectiveness of various policies and procedures is difficult.

OVERALL SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS:

The College has established a record of excellent achievements and accomplishments in light of challenges of merging two very distinctive campus cultures, campus facility challenges, and recent fiscal shortfalls.

Three Rivers Community College staff and faculty have a very definite “can do” attitude; repeated examples surfaced of very creative, resilient, enthusiastic, and flexible responses to challenges encountered by the College.

Students were positively passionate about the contributions of Faculty and Staff to their learning.

The NEASC team recognizes that the President and the Cabinet members are a strong team, dedicated to implementing the College’s strategic vision of a Learning Community.

The planning process allows for decisions to be made with broad-based input regarding campus priorities; the College’s visions serve as “optimal models”, and when resources become available, they are appropriately allocated towards the end goals.

The College has created an excellent technology-rich environment to support teaching, learning, and student services.

In spite of the age of the existing facilities, the overall care, attention, and pride exhibited in the campus facilities speaks volumes to the level of institutional commitment to excellence.

The collaborative efforts of Academic Affairs and Student Development and Services have led to major improvements in the Advising system; continued collaboration is encouraged.

The College is responsive to students’ learning needs in the delivery of courses and services; e.g., on-line tutoring, developmental courses, access to electronic courses, web-based products and services, etc.

During the past five years, there have been significant changes in the governance structures that have increased its effectiveness, inclusiveness, and level of participation.

The foresight to link institutional advancement with strategic planning will provide the campus with alternate streams of revenue.

OVERALL SUMMARY OF CHALLENGES:

In fairness to the residents and businesses of Southeastern Connecticut, the state of Connecticut must proceed in the most expeditious manner to conclude the planning and site discussions and move to the construction and renovation of the new facility for Three Rivers Community College. The college and the region are poised to benefit from this consolidated facility. The indecision and delay has had an impact, not only on facilities use planning and program development, but on all aspects of the college’s growth and, most importantly, its promise.

Southeast Connecticut has a valued resource in the leadership, expertise, and commitment of the faculty, staff, and administration at Three Rivers Community College. Students, area businesses, and residents deserve progress on a decade-old promise. We encourage state officials and policy-makers to move the process to a quick and final resolution so that the advantages provided to other areas of the state can also be provided to the greater Norwich region.

Understanding the difficult economic times, the NEASC visiting team expresses its concerns that additional budget cuts could negatively impact the quality and availability of services to students and thereby negatively impact the economic health of the region.

Additional programming efforts and increased enrollments will demand that the College monitor the needs for staffing across the campus in order to support the quality of programming and responsiveness to students.

Building on existing successful assessment efforts, the College is encouraged to frame diffused institutional research efforts into a formal, regular, and comprehensive assessment plan.

In spite of recent progress, conflicting contract requirements still have the potential of creating perceived or real inequities in the work environment. The team encourages all stakeholders to look for creative strategies to move towards contractual congruence.

To avoid the duplication of effort, the College may wish to explore the feasibility of combining the records, registration, admissions, marketing, and publications efforts of day/evening, and continuing education offices. This effort would permit the Continuing Education staff some time to devote to increasing programming, enrolling more students, and increasing revenues.

To make better use of the Thames Valley campus during the daytime hours, the team recommends considering the scheduling of cluster courses that both supports the Learning Community concept while providing students with a block of courses scheduled at Thames Valley.

DISTANCE LEARNING

The visiting team took a limited look at the Distance Education Program at Three Rivers Community College. The program can be described as a small, but growing distance education program.

There exists a consortial relationship with the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium (CTDLC). This relationship allows Three Rivers Community College to share in and contribute to the combined resources of the consortium. It also helps the college reduce costs and provides greater capacity. This partnering relationship was reviewed by NEASC in 2001.

The oversight for the distance learning courses rests with the appropriate academic department, the Curriculum Committee, and the Academic Dean. Any degree or certificate program that can be completed by more than 50% through technologically mediated instruction must also be approved by the Connecticut Department of Higher Education. The College's EdTech committee has done a good job of scheduling forums on how to use the distance educational technology. All distance learning courses are integrated into the governance of the Academic Division.

There were a total of 29 courses offered over a full year at Three Rivers. These courses are primarily in the General Studies area, taught by part-time faculty. The College has relied primarily on the faculty to evaluate and improve their distance education courses. Planning for and the evaluation of Distance Education is expected to receive greater attention in the coming year as the program grows.

There are still questions that will need to be answered relative to the role of the system-wide initiative in this area. Fiscal challenges. Among others, will have to be addressed.

In the future, student services via the Web with products like Web for Students, Web Registration, Web for Faculty and Advisors need to be investigated.

Library resources and tech support for distance education is being provided for as needed. However, the future growth of the program will mean that additional funding will need to follow.

The current program enrolls a total of 138 students who are able to complete 60 credits in General Education.