



**Academic
Quality Improvement
Program**

The Higher Learning Commission **NCA**

Seward County Community College Conversation Day Report

**Committing to Conversation
Acting on What Matters**

January 2006

Dedicated to

SCCC Employees

Who are REALLY, REALLY Clean!

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

On January 5, 2006, Seward County Community College hosted an all-inclusive Conversation Day for its employees. Nearly 200 employees gathered to hold four conversations to build collective agreement on what are the highest priorities for action now to make a difference in Seward CCC's future:

- ◆ **Conversation One: What do we agree matters most?**
- ◆ **Conversation Two: What do we agree are our strengths--the aspects about Seward CCC that shine vibrantly and make us who we are?**
- ◆ **Conversation Three: Among all the possibilities, what matters most to do now to make the greatest difference to Seward CCC, its employees, its students, and its communities?**
- ◆ **Conversation Four: What are the Immediate Action Items that we should "just do"?**

The spirit, care, hope, and commitment of Seward employees was evident throughout the day.

RESULTS OF THE DAY

As a result of the four conversations, Seward County Community College employees identified:

- ◆ Common aspects that enable employees to do their peak, most effective work,
- ◆ Processes that matter most for focus in the immediate future.
- ◆ Principles that if developed more fully could make Seward County Community College an even higher performance organization.
- ◆ Evident strengths of the college in general.
- ◆ Effective, strong processes that are working well right now.
- ◆ Recent changes that have benefited students.
- ◆ Evident strengths in collaboration.
- ◆ Evident strengths of faculty, staff, and administrators.
- ◆ Thirty recommendations for making a significant difference in the near future.
- ◆ Over 100 potential "Nikes" or quick-fix issues to address to improve college operations.

OBSERVATIONS

The facilitators for Seward CCC's Conversation Day, Sue Darby of Hutchinson Community College and Lynn Priddy of The Higher Learning Commission of NCA were privileged to be part of the college's creation of its future. Both noted the spirit, engagement, pride, and commitment of all staff in the work of the institution and in students and their learning. In addition, the team and leadership coordinating the Vital Focus process and the Conversation Day have set a standard

that is rarely match for organization, creativity, effectiveness, efficiency...**and as laughed about by all groups...cleanliness.**

Ultimately, the purpose of this report is to assist Seward County Community College in the ongoing process of participating in the Academic Quality Improvement Project (AQIP), most specifically the creation of a Strategy for Action and the selection of three-four Action Projects to bring to the Strategy Forum. The long-range goal, of course, is re-accreditation of Seward County Community College through AQIP.

The comments and observations recorded here are part of the peer-review process central to AQIP, and most importantly, they are intended to complement the interpretation and analysis by SCCC itself. Peer review provides an outsider's perspective on the current climate at SCCC, but nothing is as important as the views and opinions of those closest to the situation—the leadership, the steering committee and the stakeholders at SCCC. The combination of the *Constellation Survey*, along with Campus Conversation Day data and peer input from facilitators, is central to quality improvement through AQIP.

Seward County Community College has a variety of strengths, and those strengths were readily identified by Campus Conversation Day. Some of the following strengths seemed most apparent:

- ◆ Seward County Community College employees stand together with a strong sense of people and an ability to work as a community, bonding together to thrive despite difficult transitions and events.
- ◆ Seward County CC has a great team in place to follow through and implement the key items that emerged from Conversation Day and the AQIP process in general. Conversation Day was well-organized, creative and effective, an indication of the institution's readiness for AQIP;
- ◆ Seward County CC has a very clear mission to provide students the education and the environment necessary to succeed;
- ◆ Seward County CC has an action-oriented culture that recognizes the rapidity of change and that has addressed change in the form of new technologies and new opportunities for students;
- ◆ Seward County CC employees demonstrate pride in being an institution that is student-centered and an institution ready to lead the way with new approaches, such as AQIP.
- ◆ Seward County CC employees have a strong sense of purpose in serving the students in the immediate vicinity—and beyond.
- ◆ Seward County CC employees ARE REALLY, REALLY CLEAN!!!

SCCC is a forward-looking institution with evidence of success, particularly with students. SCCC has, over the past year, held regular in-service meetings to determine those possible projects that the institution might pursue and successfully gathered a large percentage of employees at Campus Conversation Day.

QUESTIONS

The facilitators also posed several questions to spark conversation as SCCC creates its future:

- ◆ How are your students needs, interests, abilities changing? How will you understand and respond to them?
- ◆ What would you do--what could Seward CCC do to increase involvement, agility, and collaboration?
- ◆ What information and ways of communicating would enhance involvement and communication?
- ◆ How might the goals of the strategic plan be translated into reality? What is the vision for Seward CCC in the future?
- ◆ Do the different ratings among groups reflect important differences in perception or simply " calibration " differences?
- ◆ Is data, evaluation of your work & comparison of Seward CCC with other institutions...important? How important is actual student learning data?

NEXT STEPS

Over the course of the next several months, Seward County Community College has committed to prioritizing the recommendations forwarded during Conversation Day (using data from about the organization and from other constituents), to building an environment that reflects those cultural aspects that matter most to employees doing their best work, to recognizing and building on strengths, and to prioritizing and addressing the Immediate Action Items ideas for operational excellence.

CONVERSATION ONE

What Matters Most to SCCC Employees, Making it Possible for Them to Do Their Best Work?

BACKGROUND

During the first conversation of the day, Seward County Community College employees discussed their times of peak, most effective work at Seward County Community College. To define what needs to be present to make effective, meaningful work possible at Amarillo, the employees answered these questions:

- ◆ What do we collectively agree are those aspects of work that make it possible to work most effectively?
- ◆ What process matters most for, would benefit most from focus right now?
- ◆ What Principle of High Performance (way of thinking and working together) is most important to develop more of in Amarillo's culture right now?

COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT

Compiled below are the collective responses of the employees attending Conversation Day.

People

Having individual opportunities to excel
(freedom/trust/support)

Trust/freedom

Freedom to try things and do our jobs

Support and trust AT ALL LEVELS (local; state;
national; in house; newspapers)

Campus-wide Involvement

Pride for facilities, students, colleagues, community,
Board of Trustees, leadership

Personal commitment

Institutional support

Positive Board support

Support

Professional environment

Recognition/appreciation from students and peers

Recognition and support for what we do

Freedom to explore new ideas and methods to
create positive change

Flexibility - not being micro-managed and flexible
work schedule

Flexibility within our position

We are ALLOWED to do our jobs, not micro-
managed

Cooperation and support from top to bottom

Caring

Family atmosphere

The support that is received from all levels at the
college

Job satisfaction

Fellow workers-good relationships

Recognition for job well done

Equality: sense of belonging; being treated with
respect and fairness

The people that we work with on a daily basis;
making everyday a new experience/pleasant

Enjoying your job

Supervisors that allow personal expression in job

Pride in work (worth and value)

People: those you work with and those you serve
(students)

Support and feeling appreciated by supervisors,
peers and students and acknowledgement by the
community

Teamwork

Working as a team

The institutional teamwork (Board, administration, faculty & staff including cafeteria) which includes "Personal Touch"

Team environment & Teamwork

Good working relationships among/between departments/administration/all employees

Communication

Knowledge of the structure

Awareness of reasons for deadlines in departments & the chair reaction that occurs when deadlines are not met

Communication with students (they don't know deadlines and they don't know what kind of financial aid they have)

Communication within institution

Communication

Good communication

Campus communication

Communication with community, current and former students

Communication

Effective communication

Student Success

Caring about students

Seeing students' success

Support of students

Job satisfaction: student accomplishments, working equipment & software.

Opportunity to see the progress and growth students make and the ability to develop close relationships with students

Student involvement

Students willing to learn

Student's emphasis on opportunities

Student success

Strong relationships with students

Being able to provide opportunities for students to learn/grow

Technology

Cutting-edge technology

Our advancements in technology

Distance education technology support

Professional Development

Professional/staff development for specific areas

Time: for daily work and prep; for exploring and developing technology and teaching strategies

Professional development

Opportunities for faculty and staff to develop professionally

Cosmetics

Diversification

The beginning of each semester is very exciting, like a new beginning with new students coming in

Perseverance

Maintenance Equipment and resources

Need full-time advising staff

Up-to-date quality equipment/facilities

Resources

Fiscal Stability-Physical Plant

Increase Enrollment

Improved enrollment

Community support

The community support of SCCC (not just financial, but physical and spiritual support)

Making impact on students, colleagues and the community

Table 1: Conversation Conclusions: What Processes Matter Most for Focus Now?

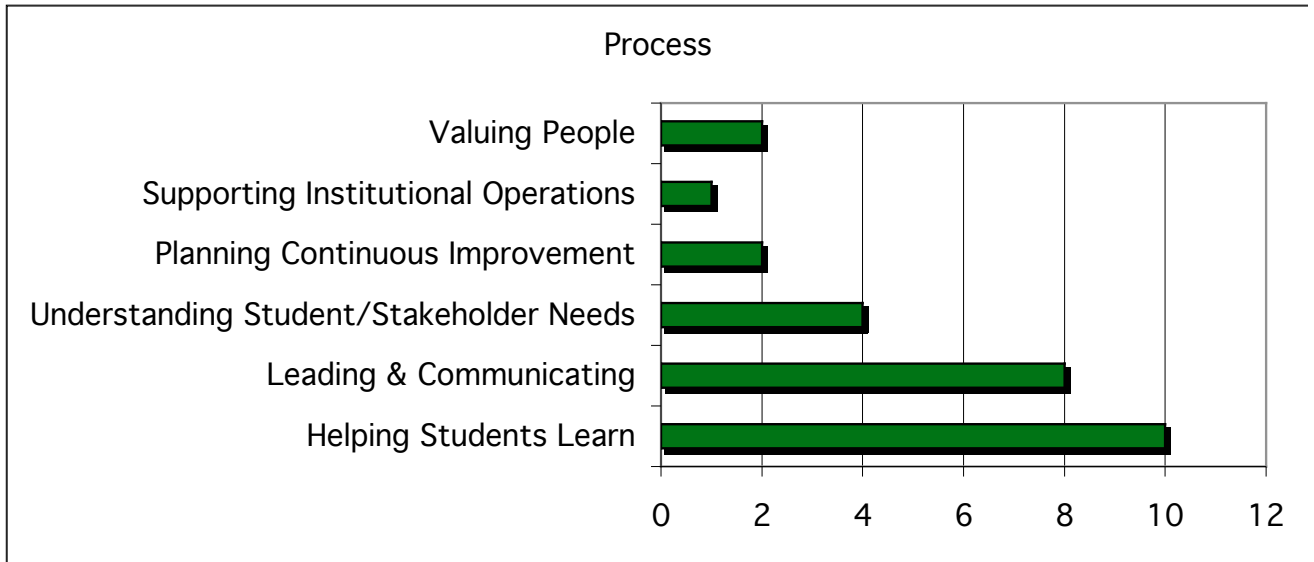
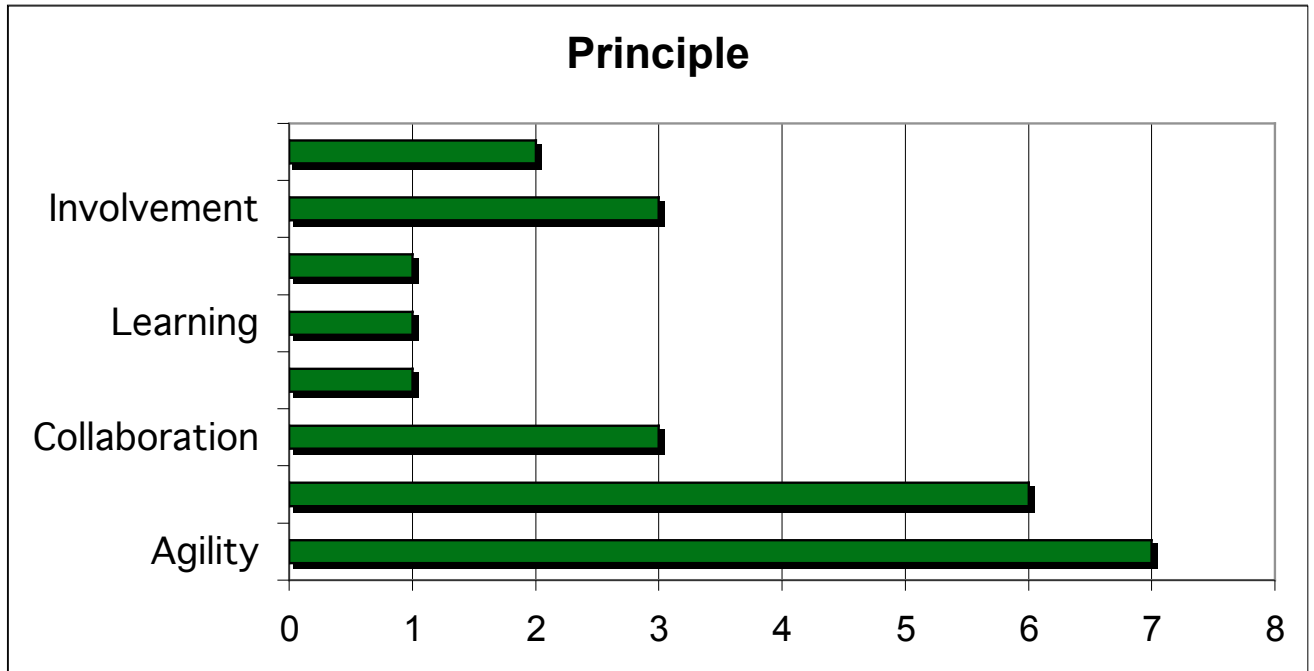


Table 2: Conversation Conclusions: What Aspects of Culture Matter Most to Develop Now?



NEXT STEPS AND COMMITMENTS

As Seward County Community College defines a manageable number of top priorities for both strategic and operational work, the teams and leaders designing the action plans and implementation strategies might consider the questions below.

- ◆ How might Seward CCC CC implement its strategic and operational action projects in such a way as to create a working environment that embodies the priorities employees identified in Conversation One--What Matters Most to Working at Our Peak?
- ◆ What one or two things might be done college-wide to promote and support the culture that will enhance Seward CCC CC's ability to implement its priorities?
- ◆ Can the action projects Seward CCC CC takes into the AQIP process be created so that they model the values and principles that came out of Conversation One?

CONVERSATION TWO

What do Employees Agree are the Greatest Strengths of SCCC?

BACKGROUND

During the second conversation of the day, Seward County Community College employees discussed the current, obvious strengths Seward County Community College. To define these strengths, the employees answered these questions:

- ◆ What are two noticeable strengths at Seward County Community College?
- ◆ What process is working well right now?
- ◆ What recent change has made an improvement for students and their learning?
- ◆ Where is collaboration thriving?
- ◆ What do we value most about--what are the noticeable strengths of our faculty? Classified staff? Administrators?

COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT

One of the most striking aspects of Seward County Community College's *CI* data was the relative agreement between statements rated as most important and those being done well. Seven out of 10 statements rated highest were the same for both, indicating that the campus community clearly recognizes and values the same things. There was generally very good agreement across the different groups of people, and most of the AQIP Process criteria and Performance Principles were rated within a relatively narrow range of scores.

The areas that emerged as higher were those that focused on Seward County Community College's mission to educate and serve the student population. Indeed, students and student needs emerged consistently throughout both the *CI* and the dialogue generated during Campus Conversation Day. The SCCC community obviously recognizes its important obligation to students, so in that respect Seward County Community College is ideally positioned to take advantage of the action-oriented approach central to the AQIP model.

SCCC would do well to regularly circulate and analyze the long list of strengths that were identified during Conversation 2 and to celebrate the evident accomplishments and the clear excitement of new leadership and new beginnings.

NEXT STEPS AND COMMITMENTS

As Seward County Community College defines a manageable number of top priorities for both strategic and operational work, the teams and leaders designing the action plans and implementation strategies might consider the questions below.

- ◆ How might Seward CCC CC not only build upon, but enhance and use its strengths in ways that become known internally and externally?
- ◆ How will Seward CCC CC continue to measure its strengths and to communicate them to employees, students, the community, and other constituents?
- ◆ How will Seward CCC CC recognize its employees and the college for its strengths?
- ◆ Would students, employers, and the community identify these and/or other strengths of the Seward CCC CC? Are they real strengths and are they known to those outside the college?

CONVERSATION THREE

What do Employees Agree that, If Accomplished, Would Make a Significant Difference at Seward County Community College?

BACKGROUND

During the third conversation of the day, Seward County Community College employees identified collective priorities for action, top priority ideas for making a significant difference at Amarillo in the near future. To define these ideas, the employees answered these questions:

- ◆ What matters most to do now at Seward County Community College to make a significant difference at the college and to your work?
- ◆ What ideas, innovations, or recommendations should be top priority for commitment of resources?

COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT

Each table of employees discussed and collectively agreed on one idea for making a significant difference at Seward County Community College in the immediate future. The following 30 proposals below represent a summary compilation of the process group recommendations that emerged from these conversations.

NEXT STEPS AND COMMITMENTS

As Seward County Community College defines a manageable number of top priorities for both strategic and operational work, the teams and leaders designing the action plans and implementation strategies might consider the questions below.

- ◆ How will Seward County Community College use data from other constituents (students, employers, community, state government, etc.) as part of the prioritization process of the recommended ideas for making a difference?
- ◆ How will Seward County Community College use data on the college (budget, cost per FTE, retention, enrollment, effectiveness indicators) as part of the prioritization process?
- ◆ How will Seward County Community College integrate the top priorities that emerge in the continuing discussions into the strategic plan? The operational plan? The budget and resource allocation processes? The work load of employees?
- ◆ How will Seward County Community College organize to implement, measure, track, and celebrate progress in achieving the projects that eventually emerge as top priority?
- ◆ How might accomplishment of these ideas be used to develop broad-based leadership across and collective responsibility for the college?

Provocative Propositions

PROPOSAL 1: Communicate Existence of School to Potential Students

We propose: that there is a large segment of local and general area population that is unaware of the existence and/or function of our school.

Because: there has been limited cooperation on the part of major employers and other influential businesses to inform the community about the Colvin Center.

PROPOSAL 2: Enhance College Website

We propose: *certain revisions concerning design & external efficiency be considered.*

Because: *a revised website would increase potential for greater enrollment and interest.*

PROPOSAL 3: Progressive, Proactive Marketing Strategies

We propose: *the college commit human and financial resources for progressive and aggressive marketing strategies.*

Because: *we have concluded that we are not targeting stop-outs, non traditionals, Hispanics, etc*

PROPOSAL 4: Focus More on Facility Safety and Security

We propose: *in order to uphold the community perception of 24/7 security and our integrity, the college needs to increase safety and security personnel and equipment.*

Because: *the feeling of safety and security will enhance the learning environment by calming fears and anxieties.*

PROPOSAL 5: Bringing Under prepared Students Up To Level

We propose: *more support for developmental classes, mandatory placement, all staff bilingual (give the Colvin Center more support and an equal opportunity for their students to reach their goals).*

Because: *we need to serve our population.*

PROPOSAL 6: Re-design Developmental Program

We propose: *a re-design of our developmental program based on extensive research of current scholarship and practice in the nation.*

Because: *our community deserves a well-educated populace.*

PROPOSAL 7: Seward Online Development

We propose: *the formation ,implementation, and coordination of aspects which pertain to Seward Online. Faculty incentives and support and governing policies need to be in place to ensure success.*

Because: *SCCC needs to implement strategies to ensure our marketability and recruitment methods which will assist students with various backgrounds and allows the institution to remain viable and competitive in the higher education arena.*

PROPOSAL 8: Two-year Class Sequence

We propose: *that each division develops a divisional class/time schedule to take to the instructional level for development for a master schedule.*

Because: *this would alleviate conflicts (time) in student class schedules.*

PROPOSAL 9: Build More Classroom Space

We propose: *an increase in classroom space throughout our system.*

Because: *it would benefit our students, faculty and community partners*

PROPOSAL 10: Increase Enrollment and Retention

We propose: *that we survey students to see why they chose SCCC or why not, survey the community to see what course/programs they want, try accelerated programs, implement soccer, and have a calling system for recruitment (faculty and students).*

Because: *if enrollment continues to decrease, non of the other issues matter because there will be severe budget cuts. Enrollment and retention should be the number one priority.*

PROPOSAL 11: Policy Making Process

We propose: *that policy making includes representatives from those areas directly affected to help eliminate misinformation provided to employees, community, and students.*

Because: *policy affects us all and for some to be informed of such changes and others not creates a lack of communication and individuals feel uninformed.*

PROPOSAL 12: Multipurpose Building

We propose: *the construction of a multipurpose facility to encompass needs, humanities needs (theater/music/art) and student needs in relation to student activities.*

Because: *opportunity to increase enrollment, improve quality of education , offer more community involvement, and help to cultivate community ties.*

PROPOSAL 13: Empower Full Time Employees with Information Before Administration Decisions are Made (Board Policy)

We propose: *that the administration systematically validate their decision making process with direct face-to-face communication with all full-time employees before the Board makes a policy.*

Because: *we have concluded that the employee morale has been damaged by recent decisions.*

PROPOSAL 14: Advisors (Certification)

We propose: *certified advisors*

Because: *we find students do not understand their educational needs and objectives in order to graduate.*

PROPOSAL 15: Student Transitions

We propose: *that SCCC students be provided with more in depth advising methods to better prepare them for their future jobs.*

Because: *our times are changing so fast that students must be prepared to meet and accept any new changes in their daily lives.*

PROPOSAL 16: Commit to Professional Advising and Counseling Services

We propose: *the hiring of more professional counselors and student advisors to lessen faculty responsibility. We also propose to increase student success by better placement of students in the proper course.*

Because: *we need to ease the burden on faculty and transfer the academic advising to a full time professional.*

PROPOSAL 17: Technology

We propose: *to provide team teaching techniques, electronic technology, and online courseware to our students to facilitate success.*

Because: *we will be a leader in Kansas Community Colleges.*

PROPOSAL 18: Curriculum Coordination (Tough Love)

We propose: *a complete re-thinking, refocusing, and restructuring (as necessary) to achieve consistency and coordination between developmental, college and transfer programs.*

Because: *student success depends on preparedness and consistent emphasis of standards across the curriculum.*

PROPOSAL 19: Website Upgrade (Virtual Tours)

We propose: *contract out to a professional web-designer to design/build a website that is practical but also has flare and can help attract new students.*

Because:

PROPOSAL 20: Develop a Comprehensive Recruiting Plan

We propose: *that we establish a comprehensive recruitment community that will address the changing cultural, economic and social environment of all potential students.*

Because: *students are the backbone of the institution. We need to address the current declining enrollment while our demographics continue to change.*

PROPOSAL 21: Environment

We propose: *that the college establishes a process for fair hiring, professional development and resource allocation for a safe work environment across campus.*

Because: *it addresses issues that make employees feel valued.*

PROPOSAL 22: Consistency in Hiring Practices, Professional Development & Resource Allocation to Provide the Best Working (no title given)

We propose: *that the faculty and administration of SCCC collaborate with business leaders to develop courses to meet the needs of the workforce of the communities that we serve and to encourage collaboration between departments within the college community to develop team teaching classes and a seamless transition from non-credit classes to credit classes to enhance learning for all students.*

Because: *the workforce is ill prepared for the modern job market; education is fragmented between various academic disciplines; not all students are prepared for more academic classes.*

PROPOSAL 23: Data Warehouse

We propose: *the development of a data warehouse (building) where snapshots of data are captured at strategic times of the year.*

Because: *decisions are made based on the data we collect; therefore that data must be timely, accurate, and relevant to provide the longitudinal data SCCC needs to keep as agile, flexible, and aware of changes occurring at our institution.*

PROPOSAL 24: Expansion Project (Tech Building, Humanities, Gym)

We propose: *an expansion project that would include a tech building, humanities upgrade, and an additional gym.*

Because: *we need additional space for classrooms, offices, storage, shared community training facilities, future technological advances.*

PROPOSAL 25: Reward for Longevity

We propose: *that salaries be improved so that we are not merely a stepping stone at SCCC.*

Because: *students & faculty morale will be up & longevity will be retained.*

PROPOSAL 26: Increase Hispanic Student Enrollment & Student Success Rate

We propose: *to increase enrollment efforts (part-time, non-tradition, and Hispanic recruiters) and strengthen/make relationships with stakeholders in Hispanic community*

Because: *if we don't, we will stagnate and die.*

PROPOSAL 27: To Analyze the Changing Demographics to Better Understand Traditional/Non-Traditional Students Today

We propose: *that we need to analyze the two groups separately to see how to market and recruit our traditional and non-traditional student in order to increase student retention and success.*

Because: *enrollment will continue to drop unless we understand the prospective student and his or her needs.*

PROPOSAL 28: Academic Recognition

We propose: *that students get not only athletic recognition but also get academic recognition.*

Because: *we are an educational institution.*

PROPOSAL 29: Demonstrate the Value of the Individual

We propose: *salaries be made equitable, increased opportunities for job-related staff development and more opportunities for dialogue between faculty/staff and administration to complete the communication loop.*

Because: *we value people & want to invest in the future of SCCC.*

PROPOSAL 30: Measuring Effectiveness

We propose: *that the college develop a budget for an institutional research committee/team to provide adequate and accurate data to assist with reporting processes. This team would provide accurate data in an effective and efficient manner.*

Because: *this would be the primary function of this team; thus providing data in an effective and efficient manner.*

AQIP Categories and Principles of High Performance

AQIP CATEGORIES

Helping Students Learn is the priority of any institutional analysis. It focuses on the teaching-learning process within a formal instructional context, yet also addresses how your entire institution contributes to helping students learn and overall student development.

Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives addresses the processes that contribute to the achievement of your institution's major objectives, that complement student learning, and that fulfill other portions of your mission.

Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs examines how your institution works actively to understand student and other stakeholder needs.

Valuing People explores your commitment to the development of your faculty, staff, and administrators since the efforts of all are required for institutional success.

Leading and Communicating addresses how your institution's leadership and communication structures, networks, and processes guide your institution in setting directions, making decisions, seeking future opportunities, and building and sustaining a learning environment.

Supporting Institutional Operations addresses the variety of your institutional support processes that help to provide an environment in which learning can thrive.

Measuring Effectiveness examines how your institution collects, analyzes, and uses information to manage itself and to drive performance improvement.

Planning Continuous Improvement examines your institution's planning processes and how your strategies and action plans are helping you achieve your mission and vision.

Building Collaborative Relationships examines your institution's relationships and partnerships--current and potential--to analyze how they contribute to the institution's accomplishing its mission.

HIGH PERFORMANCE PRINCIPLES

Focus: A mission & vision driven by students' and other stakeholders' needs.

Involvement: Broad-based faculty, staff, and administrative engagement and participation.

Leadership: Leaders and leadership systems that support a quality culture.

Learning: A learning-centered environment.

People: Respect for and willingness to invest in people (faculty, staff, administration).

Collaboration: Collaboration and a shared institutional focus.

Agility: Ability, flexibility, and responsiveness to changing needs and conditions.

Foresight: Planning for innovation and improvement.

Information: Fact-based evidence-gathering and thinking to support analysis and decision-making.

Integrity: Integrity and responsible institutional citizenship