

**Report to the
Faculty, Administration, Trustees, Students**

of

**Reading Area Community College
Reading, Pennsylvania 19603-1706**

By

**An Evaluation Team representing the
Middle States Commission on Higher Education**

**Prepared after study of the institution's Self-Study Report
And a visit to the campus on March 2-5, 2003**

The members of the team:

Dr. Sean A. Fanelli, Chair
President
Nassau Community College
One Education Drive
Garden City, NY 11530

Mr. Mick O'Leary
Director of the Library
Frederick Community College
7932 Opossumtown Pike
Frederick, MD 21702

Ms. Ruth E. Andes
Assistant Dean, Assessment & Special Projects
Genesee Community College
One College Road
Batavia, NY 14020

Mr. Richard E. Reese
Vice President of Administration/Treasurer
Finger Lakes Community College
4355 Lake Shore Drive
Canandaigua, NY 14424

Mr. Anthony S. Digenakis
Assistant Vice President for Educational Support
Delaware Technical and Community College
P.O. Box 897
Dover, DE 19903

Mr. Dawit Teklu
Director, Planning, Research & Institutional Assessment
Anne Arundel Community College
101 Schwartz
Arnold, MD 21012

Mr. Douglass P. Gray
Dean for Instructional Support Services
Chesapeake College - P.O. Box 8
1000 College Circle
Wye Mills, MD 21679-0008

Dr. Marilyn A. Zagora
Dean of Student Development & Marketing
Jamestown Community College
525 Falconer Street
P.O. Box 20
Jamestown, NY 14702-002

Ms. Patricia M. Kalata
Associate Professor of Liberal Arts
Burlington County College
Country Route 530
Pemberton, NJ 08068-1599

This report represents the view of the evaluation team as interpreted by the Chair; it goes directly to the institution before being considered by the Commission. It is a confidential document prepared as an educational service for the benefit of the institution. All comments in the report are made in good faith, in an effort to assist Reading Area Community College. This report is based solely on an educational evaluation of the institution and of the manner in which it appears to be carrying out its educational objectives.

AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

to

Reading Area Community College

March 2-5, 2003

Date when instruction began: 1971

Year of first graduating class: 1973

President: Dr. Richard A Kratz

Chief Academic Officer: Dr. Peter Battaglia

Chair of the Board of Trustees: Mr. James H. Yocum

Chapter 1. Introduction

Reading Area Community College (RACC) was founded in 1971 as a comprehensive community college to serve the residents of the City of Reading and Berks County, Pennsylvania. Initially the College was sponsored by the Reading School District but in 1991 sponsorship of the College moved to the Commissioners of Berks County.

While an initial survey conducted prior to its founding rejected the need for a community college in Berks County, it is now seen as playing “an extremely important and positive role in the community.” This changing view of the college is reflected in its fluctuating enrollments that peaked in the Fall 2002 term when the College experienced its highest enrollment of 3,776 students.

Over the years there has been a change in the composition of the residents of the College’s service area that is reflected in its changing student population. With increased enrollment and a changing service-area economy from manufacturing to technical, additional fiscal and space resources will be necessary to meet the growing need for low-cost, high-quality higher education. The current physical plant includes four main buildings. Plans for a technology center and theater are currently on hold. An agreement to build the Reading Police Academy on campus has been rescinded by the City of Reading.

The economy of the service area has declined, causing a strain on the finances of the sponsor and, in turn, a leveling in sponsor support for the operating budget. This has had a significant impact on the ability of the College to implement a number of activities that it perceives to be necessary to ensure a sound learning environment. The perceived lack of fiscal resources has diminished the College’s ability to provide the staff it deems necessary to more fully meet its mission. The technology infrastructure at RACC is a prime example where many advances have occurred with a continuing need to do more.

Despite this, the College continues to move forward in meeting the needs of the residents of its service area by providing high quality educational opportunities. At the same time, the College, as outlined in its Self-Study Report, recognizes that there is still much more to be done to achieve all of its goals. The critical need to implement comprehensive institutional and student-learning outcomes assessment processes is evident throughout the Self-Study.

While not required to do so, Reading Area Community College chose to use the 2002 *Characteristics of Excellence* in its self-study processes. The format of the Self-Study follows the fourteen standards contained in the 2002 *Characteristics* document. It is clear from the College’s Self-Study Report that the administration, faculty, staff and students of the college spent a great deal of time and energy in assessing the institution’s strengths and weaknesses. The report presents a forthright and insightful view of the College that can only help the institution better accomplish its mission in the future.

The team commends the College for these efforts.

Chapter 2. Philosophy, Mission, Goals

The mission of Reading Area Community College is appropriate for a comprehensive community college within the context of its role in the higher education community. The Mission reflects the educational opportunities that the College will provide to “primarily” the residents of Berks County. In 2000, the RACC Board of Trustees added the word “primarily” to recognize the College’s intent to attract international students to the College. It is noted, however, that this change has not found its way into some recent publications.

Since 1992, the Board of Trustees has amended the Mission Statement to include the awarding of the Associate Degree in General Studies (AGS) and diplomas in several employment specific fields.

Prompted by a survey of stakeholders, in 1998 the College Board of Trustees adopted a Vision Statement in order to better focus its planning activities. A key element in this statement is the intent to establish partnerships to advance economic development and cultural enrichment in the community served by the College. Arising out of the Vision Statement were objectives in the form of four initiatives intended to: provide high quality instruction and services; provide a supportive environment; develop human, physical and fiscal resources; and take a leadership role in establishing partnerships. The College’s Long Range Planning Council identifies annual objectives to overcome barriers to carrying out these initiatives.

Flowing from the Mission statement are institutional goals, which were first established in 1992. These are meant to define programs, activities and services necessary to the mission of the College.

It is clear that the Mission Statement, the Vision Statement, and the institutional goals and objectives that flow from them meet Standard 1: Mission, Goal, and Objectives of the *Characteristics of Excellence –2002*. The Mission and Vision Statements with their attendant goals and objectives are products of a collaborative effort.

Unfortunately, these goals and objectives may be less clear to new faculty and students since they do not appear in some College publications and may not be discussed with new faculty and students during orientation sessions. Not as evident in the goals and objectives, however, is the central purpose of the College – the student learning process. While student learning is recognized in the Institutional Core Competencies articulated in RACC’s Competency Based Education (CBE) modality, some faculty appear to be unaware of their responsibility to develop a linkage with the ongoing learning process in the classroom. This lack of linkage reflects a disconnect between a critical policy and its implementation.

The College is commended for its comprehensive Mission and Vision Statements and the objectives and goals that flow from them. These serve as an excellent road map for meeting the educational needs of its stakeholders at a level consistent with the Standards in the *Characteristics of Excellence –2002*.

In order to continue to meet this level of expectation of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, it is important that the College establish a timetable for the timely review of the Mission Statement, its Vision Statement, and the objectives and goals arising from them.

Suggestion: All members of the College community should be made aware of the objectives and goals of the Mission and Vision Statements to ensure effective linkages with all learning processes and institutional support operations.

Chapter 3. Planning and Resource Allocation

As stated in *Characteristics of Excellence*, planning should be grounded in institutional goals and objectives. Further, the plan should identify the means for carrying out the plan's goals and objectives. Viewed in this context, strategic planning is the roadmap to achieving institutional goals.

The institutional self-study document describes the planning structures and planning processes at Reading Area Community College. The chapter also talks about special planning projects that include a visioning process, facilities planning, and financial planning. The Self-Study coupled with the conversations with members of the LRPC clearly indicates that there is a genuine college commitment to strategic planning. Several components of a planning process are already in place; there is an 18 member Long Range Planning Council made up of faculty and administrators; and there is college support for planning.

One of the criteria specified by *Characteristics of Excellence* to test the adequacy and soundness of institutional planning is the level of participation by the different constituency groups. On the basis of both the self-study report and interviews with members of the RACC community, there is ample evidence that demonstrates the planning process is inclusive. It is also evident that the goals and objectives are clearly articulated and tied to the mission of the college.

While RACC has used the Long Range Planning Council to develop annual objectives and set institutional priorities, the role this group plays in monitoring goal achievement is not fully developed. The planning process does not identify goal implementers and specific time-lines for carrying out the goals. This weakness is rightly identified in the Self-Study Report. The coordination of the various plans with the college long-range plan is identified as another major challenge.

While the Self-Study enumerates the kinds of data collected through surveys and other means, it is not clear that the planning process meaningfully uses data collected to inform the plan and measure plan achievements as specified in the *Characteristics of Excellence*. Planning processes must use data to be relevant and effective. Data are required to be able to develop a comprehensive strategic plan and proactively respond to both external and internal factors that could have an impact on the college.

During the 1992 accreditation visit, the Evaluation Team recommended, "the college should continue its commitment to the strategic planning process and support this process with the implementation of operational planning activities at the departmental/office level." Further, it recommended that regular accountability reports should be shared with the Long Range Planning Council, the college President and the Board of Trustees. As suggested by the 2002 Self-Study and the conversations around campus, a significant amount of work still remains to be done in this area.

The *Characteristics of Excellence* states that, “an effective planning process includes a monitoring mechanism (outcomes assessment) to determine whether or not the purposes are achieved and objectives met.” As stated in the Self-Study Report, a regular cycle of reporting planning activities has not yet been established. The individuals interviewed also deem the current level of communication regarding planning efforts as inefficient. As the college revisits its strategic planning activities, it is highly recommended that it develop strategies for the assessment of its planning activities and a regular cycle of reporting to the college community.

Suggestion: Ensure that there is a clear linkage between the plans and objectives developed at the unit level and the institutional objectives that drive the long-range plan.

Suggestion: Improve the connection between planning and resource allocation as a way of strengthening the strategic planning capacities of RACC.

Suggestion: Develop accountability reports to the College President/LRPC that thoughtfully address the Strategic Plan’s goal accomplishments and key issues identified during the implementation process.

Recommendation: Develop a strategic planning process, based upon environmental scanning, with a mechanism for central monitoring and for ensuring accountability and plan implementation

Recommendation: Establish an institutional research function that develops, analyzes and disseminates timely information to the college community and acts as the central repository of official institutional data.

Chapter 4. Institutional Resources

The Reading Area Community College campus is situated on a ten-acre campus located within the Reading City limits overlooking the Schuylkill River. The campus consists of four major buildings totaling 220,000 square feet.

Berks Hall, opened in 1977, houses a number of functions including administration, the cafeteria, as well as a number of instructional classrooms and the early learning center. Penn Hall, purchased and renovated in 1989, houses the division of Health Professions and the Business Division.

The Reading Area Community College bookstore is located in the student union. Opened in 1996, the facility also provides office space for student activities and offices of the student government.

In 1992, the college successfully completed its first capital campaign. Exceeding the original goal of \$1,750,000, the college raised \$2,739,000 toward the construction of Yocum Library, which opened in March of 1996.

Completed in 1991, the institution’s master facilities plan includes plans for the construction of a technology and training center, and performance theater. Delayed by an absence of state matching funds for construction, the projects, originally scheduled to begin in 2001, are anticipated to break ground in 2003.

Although a disappointment at the time of the delay, and in spite of some continued uncertainty over the availability of future state support, the college is to be commended on its continuing and successful efforts to secure and set aside capital funds for future capital expenditures.

Both buildings and grounds appear to be well maintained; however, the Self-Study raises a concern over the absence of a formal plan to address deferred maintenance.

Campus parking appears to be adequate at this time. There is concern that parking on the current site identified for new facilities will become an issue when construction starts.

The team noted that the college's movable equipment inventory is aging. The opportunity to acquire equipment is more often connected to new capital facilities projects, with fewer opportunities to secure equipment support through the budget process.

In 1998, the Trustees approved a visioning statement acknowledging the growing demand for technology. Intended to provide guidance in the planning process, the statement recognized the need to invest in technology college-wide.

In recognition of historic concerns over the absence of a comprehensive approach to technology, a consultant was engaged to study technology functions across the campus. Consultant recommendations focused on 26 initiatives and a recommended timetable for implementation. In 2002, the trustees accepted the final report and charged the administration to develop a three-year technology plan based on the consultant's recommendations.

As a result, the college should be commended for a number of improvements in the area of technology, most notable of which was to raise the level of leadership for the technology function through the creation of a new Director of Technology reporting directly to the President of the college.

A second improvement includes the implementation of a new microcomputer leasing arrangement which, when fully implemented, will routinely upgrade computing equipment on a scheduled basis.

There is, however, concern that the instructional portion of the plan is in need of strengthening. Issues concerning the expectations of students in the area of information and computer literacy should be incorporated into the plan and used as a guide for technology enhancement.

Finances and financial accounting appear to be adequate for an institution the size of Reading Area Community College and an annual financial audit is completed annually.

The college should be commended for its innovation in securing state funding in support of its new equipment lease obligations.

The college is comfortably within its capacity to service its debt obligations, which are also within reason for an institution this size.

The budget process is broad based and collegial; however, the process would benefit greatly if the planning process discussed in the Self-Study were implemented and agreed upon before the budget process begins. Too, the Self-Study reports that the processes as well as the outcomes appear to be confusing and not understood by many faculty members.

There does not seem to be an apparent connection between planning and budgeting that may result in a failure to reallocate resources in a manner consistent with a strategic plan. There is recognition by the administration that the link between planning and budgeting functions must be strengthened. The College is undertaking measures to correct this weakness.

Suggestion: An inventory of maintenance should be compiled followed by the implementation of a deferred maintenance plan.

Suggestion: The College should prepare and disseminate a multi-year equipment replacement plan to appropriate unit managers.

Suggestion: The College should improve the budget process in order to promote its better understanding among faculty.

Chapter 5. Leadership and Governance

Reading Area Community College is under the administrative authority of two external governmental units, the State of Pennsylvania and the Commissioners of Berks County. The State Board of Education and the Pennsylvania Department of Education provide the policies and regulations governing community colleges.

The Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges under the aegis of the Pennsylvania Association of Colleges and Universities is a coordinating forum for statewide issues pertaining to community colleges including proposed legislation, regulations, and appropriations.

Berks County sponsors Reading Area Community College with all statutory authority granted it through State and local laws.

The RACC Board of Trustees is a fifteen member board appointed by the Berks County Commissioners. Board members are charged with the appointment of the President and possess the authority to enter into capital and operational contracts; to create governance and administrative policies; to accept gifts, grants and monies; and to expand financial resources. It is noted that the Board of Trustees Handbook requires the Board “to provide direction to and approve a strategic plan,” but there is no current strategic plan. This is discussed under planning.

The Board operates through five sub-committees. The Board meets monthly with agendas and minutes of meetings available in the library and in the President’s area. There are a number of avenues for communications between the Board and College constituencies. While there is no formal assessment of the Board, it appears to be functioning well and fully meets Standard 4: Leadership and Governance in the *Characteristics of Excellence – 2002*. It is a Board that functions with a high level of independence and expertise, thereby assuring the academic integrity of the

College. It approves policies developed within the governance structure and publishes these in a manner that allows all constituencies access to them. Board procedures at RACC permit the open discussion of policy formulation, allowing College constituencies to voice their views.

The Board has charged the administration, under the leadership of the President, to carry out the administration and operation of the College. Administration is treated as a separate standard, Standard 5: Administration, in the *Characteristics of Excellence*. (The College has chosen to combine Standards 4 and 5 in the same Chapter; these will be treated in a single chapter here as well.)

The administration is organized into four administrative areas: general administration, academic affairs, student services and business service, with a Vice President/Dean of Academic Affairs, a Vice President of Business Services/Treasurer, and a Dean of Students. Despite the administrative team at RACC being lean it has met added responsibilities in recent years.

The President, although recently appointed, knows the College well as a result of his immediate-past position as Vice President/Dean for Academic Affairs. He is both professionally trained and experienced to lead the institution. The immediate past President has laid an excellent foundation for the College's future advancement.

There are clear lines of organization and authority although the responsibility for the supervision and leadership in the area of technology still requires some definition. The recent hire of a Director of Information Technology should correct this need.

Since the 1992 RACC Self-Study Report, there have been several administrative reorganizations that have improved the effectiveness and efficiency of the administration. Continuing Education transferred to the area of Academic Affairs. A Dean of Students was appointed in 1994 and a new Vice President for Business Services was hired in 1996. In January 2003, the current President replaced the retiring President who served from 1986. A new Vice President was hired in 2002 to replace the former Vice President, now President. All of these changes have resulted in an administrative team that is appropriate to the goals, type, size, and complexity of the institution as outlined in Standard 5 of the *Characteristics of Excellence*.

The job descriptions for administrative positions should be updated to match the current responsibilities of these positions.

It is clear that a centralized unit for institutional research is essential to help both administrators and faculty in planning. This unit, when created, will provide the much-needed outcomes assessment data so critical to each of their positions.

The College Council is the locus for shared collegial governance at RACC. Its 15 member composition includes faculty, students, administrators and support staff, organized into five standing committees: Academic Affairs, Curriculum, Student Affairs, Teaching Learning Technology Roundtable (TLTR), and the Long Range Planning Council (LRPC). The College Council's by-laws ensure input from all members of the College community and, most importantly, ensure the primacy of the teaching-learning process.

The Council appears to be a highly effective shared-governance enterprise by virtue of the activities of its committees and the large number of proposals it has processed through the system. The annual reports of the Council reflect the attainment of many of its goals. The annual goals set by the Council each year are published after the budget is issued creating a disconnect between the goals and budget. The Council, like so many other units in the College, lacks a formal assessment mechanism.

Suggestion: Assessment procedures for the Board of Trustees, the Administration and the College Council should be developed based upon institutional and unit-level planning and the attainment of performance-based goals.

Chapter 6. Integrity

The college prominently displays its Mission Statement, a Vision, and an Institutional Philosophy which serve to guide the college. In addition, published materials also include a list of institutional goals which are clear and concise as they attempt to present the college's commitment to education and service to the community. The team noted, however, an absence of a formalized mechanism through which institutional data are used to assess whether or not the college is fulfilling its commitments.

Similarly, one of the college's primary educational initiatives dating back to 1987 included development of core competencies that identified skills targeted for student outcomes. Although considerable progress has been made in converting college courses to a competency-based format, measures for assessing student mastery of stated competencies across the college have not yet been achieved. Although these competencies have not yet appeared in published college materials, there are plans to do so. The very presence of such competencies creates expectations of accountability and the need for the college to know with certainty if it is fulfilling its stated goals.

The college should be commended for developing its first Vision Statement in 1998, which, among other declarations, envisions a society that continues to experience rapid technological change. Such recognition is evident in the current and anticipated level of investment in the area of technology which should serve as an important underpinning of the college's commitment to providing the necessary tools in furtherance of its mission.

Chapter 7. Institutional Assessment

Institutional assessment must be an integral component of each major area within the college. All aspects of institutional assessment must ultimately flow from the mission of the college. However, collecting information is only the beginning phase. As noted in *Characteristics of Excellence*, "outcomes assessment should be linked to an institution's ongoing planning and resource allocation process" (p. 21). A comprehensive plan must have a unifying approach that is utilized by each unit within the college, from student affairs to the business area to the academic enterprise and beyond. Comprehensive institutional assessment touches each component of the college and provides not

only the data for decision making but also sets that data within a context that establishes a firm foundation for planning and budgeting at all levels of the institution.

The College has been very clear, both in the Self-Study and in meetings with staff members, that comprehensive institutional assessment is not occurring at Reading Area Community College (RACC) at this time. For example, there is no strategic plan. The Long Range Planning Council as noted in the Self-Study "...reviews and discusses objectives annually, typically in the spring term" (p.12). This is planning for the short-term as opposed to true strategic planning that communicates a vision and direction for the future, typically for three to five years at a minimum. Planning has also followed rather than led the budgetary process. It is only recently that the administrative staff members have identified institutional objectives for 2003-2004 that are designed to drive the budget process. As noted in the Recommendations from the Periodic Review Report readers in 1998, "The College should continue its commitment to the strategic planning process and support this process with the implementation of the operational planning activities at the departmental/office level." This remains an ongoing concern.

In response to a requirement stemming from the 1998 Periodic Review Report that RACC create an outcomes assessment plan, the Long Range Planning Council developed a framework for assessment entitled, *Assessing Institutional Effectiveness*. The framework used the Mission statement as the starting point and then defined outcomes, indicated performance standards, identified data sources, and provided an updated status report. This same framework was used for the 2002 Status Report on Institutional Effectiveness. The reports rely heavily upon indicators of effectiveness such as student GPAs, results of graduate surveys, pass rates in general education courses and on licensure examinations, as well as satisfaction surveys. While these are useful and need to be included, they do not alone constitute comprehensive institutional assessment. For example, pass rates need to be augmented with data that confirm the acquisition of the skills and abilities that have been identified and benchmarked within courses and programs. The framework needs to be expanded to include this level of analysis in all areas of College functioning.

The academic staff has prepared an Academic Affairs Area Master Plan that will guide that unit through 2006-2007; however, it was not done within the context of a strategic plan, making it less effective. In short, an institutional assessment plan must take into account the many areas of the College, and must unify outcomes into an integrated whole that speaks to the vision of the institution over the coming years.

Overall, a commitment to institutional assessment, including assessment of student learning outcomes, has not become part of the fabric of the College. A 'culture of assessment' that transcends all levels of the institution has not emerged. Without such a broad-based approach, the College will be unable to meet the Fundamental Elements of Institutional Assessment identified in the *Characteristics of Excellence*.

Such an undertaking cannot be assigned as a task among many other tasks; it is a full-time responsibility in its own right. Managing the assessment initiative is a long-term, intensive undertaking that must also be accompanied by appropriate resource allocation.

Suggestion: Establish a unit with specific responsibility for the implementation of a comprehensive assessment plan.

Recommendation: Develop and implement a comprehensive assessment plan that coordinates with unit-level activities.

Chapter 8. Student Admissions

The *Characteristics of Excellence* calls for colleges “to admit students whose interests, goals and abilities are congruent with its mission.” RACC has worked to deliver on its open access, comprehensive mission by recruiting and admitting students with a wide-range of career goals who can benefit from RACC’s diverse programs. Policies and systems are in place to admit students to all college programs, to assess credit for various prior learning experiences, and to place students in courses for which they have a reasonable chance of success. There is recognition of the importance of continual review and refinement of these systems especially in certain areas, such as placement of students in LEP courses, and a desire to improve those systems where warranted.

Those developing recruitment publications strive to present information on RACC programs and services in an accurate, balanced and comprehensive manner. Further, the staff understands and embraces their responsibility to help prospective students make appropriate decisions about college choice, and recognizes that the ultimate measure of their success will be the success of the students they serve.

To this end, the college recognizes that more deliberate and widely understood enrollment planning will enhance its ability to deliver on its mission; the college’s intent to develop an integrated enrollment management plan will greatly support this end. This plan, when developed in the context of a larger college-wide strategic plan, should provide an opportunity to clarify goals related to both recruitment and retention, and to describe the roles of all members of the college community in supporting student enrollments.

One important foundation for this plan will be data that create a baseline against which the success of future activities can be measured. While such data are available in some areas, such as retention and graduation rates, there are many other sources of useful data that can help to form this foundation. Plans are being developed to collect and utilize additional data that will inform future efforts to attract and retain students. Such data should greatly assist in the development of a cohesive and realistic plan for enrollment management.

Recommendation: Establish a comprehensive, integrated enrollment management plan, including recruitment and retention based upon the College Strategic Plan.

Chapter 9. Student Services

The relevant *Characteristic of Excellence* for student support services references the provision of student support services “reasonably necessary to enable each student to achieve the institution’s goals for students,” and there is ample evidence that RACC is effective in meeting this standard. Student satisfaction surveys indicate positive ratings of student services, and conversations with

individual students suggest that they believe RACC is committed to providing personalized attention targeted to their needs. A review of the range of services provided by the college reveals a conscious effort to address the myriad needs presented by the diverse student population, from personal counseling, to job placement services, to specialized services for students with disabilities. Further, the staff demonstrates a very high level of commitment to student growth and development and a keen understanding of the manner in which their services and programs contribute to the overall success of students.

The student services staff is characterized by a deep dedication to providing the personalized attention that contributes to student success, yet there is also recognition that the use of technology can greatly enhance the effective and efficient delivery of student services. While there is ready recognition that the use of technology in student services should be increased, there has been notable progress recently in infusing technology into such services. These efforts include an ongoing document imaging project in the records and financial aid area, providing student access to the course schedule on-line in the Center for Counseling and Academic Development (CCAD), and projects which are underway to provide web-based registration and access to the admissions application on-line. There is recognition that the applications of technology to student services are likely to increase in the future and an acknowledgement that such integration needs to have high priority. These efforts within student services will be enhanced by the adoption of a college-wide technology plan which will put these and other planned technology projects within student services into a cohesive and systematic organizational context.

The area of academic advisement was given special attention in the Self-Study as a function which requires additional review and enhancement. The college correctly identifies advisement as a pivotal component of student services that greatly impacts student success and should proceed with plans to enhance the technology available to support this function as well as to review and enhance the systems in place for delivering advising services.

A number of areas in student services have seen their workloads affected by the recent increases in student enrollment. In addition, the development of more deliberate enrollment planning and the integration of more technology into student services functions raises the question of whether staffing in student services is adequate to meet emerging needs. The college should undertake a careful review of staffing in this area, with special focus on the role of these areas in addressing organizational goals and priorities, and should determine whether human resources have been appropriately allocated to support achievement of those goals.

As noted in the Self-Study, there is a recognition that the student services area can benefit from the development of systems which will measure more effectively the outcomes of the programs and services provided to students. The collection of baseline data will provide a foundation for more refined measurement of the impact of these services on student success, and will assist the college in its future planning.

It is evident that those in student services understand the relevance of the student learning model to the provision of student services and are actively seeking to approach their programs from this perspective, within current constraints. The desire of those in student services to consider greater implementation of the student learning model is laudable and will be supported by several of the

initiatives noted above and identified in the Self-Study. The targeted use of technology to improve efficiency and service delivery, a review of staff support, and, in particular, efforts to more effectively measure the outcomes of the programs and services implemented through student services will contribute significantly to helping an already strong and dedicated staff hone their programs and services to an even greater level of effectiveness in the future.

Suggestion: Staffing models and levels for student services areas should be reviewed with consideration of enrollment increases, evolving student needs, and the impact of increased use of technology on student service delivery.

Recommendation: Given the critical importance of an effective advising system to retention and student success, the college should review the systems, technological support and staffing model used to provide this service.

Recommendation: Student services functions should develop and implement additional data collection systems that will position these areas to conduct ongoing assessment of the impact of these services on the recruitment, retention and success of students.

Chapter 10. Faculty

Standard 10 of the *Characteristics of Excellence* indicates that faculty bears the main responsibility for all aspects of the student success.

Quoting the Self-Study: “RACC employs a cadre of qualified, experienced full time faculty to teach credit courses, develop and maintain programs and to assess student learning.” Fifty-six full-time faculty members make up the college’s core of teaching professionals. Two hundred and twenty-one part-time faculty complement the full-time faculty grouping delivering instruction.

The Self-Study and on-site interviews revealed the following strengths of the faculty at RACC.

- Full-time and the majority of part-time faculty are properly credentialed and well qualified to teach in their assigned areas.
- Faculty members continue to respond to the educational needs of the community, as indicated by the development of twenty-two new programs during the past ten years.
- The faculty demonstrates a willingness to serve on a number of non-governance committees.
- The number of full-time and many part-time faculty members are involved in professional development activities.
- The faculty is adequately represented in the college council.

The College is to be commended for following the 1992 MSA evaluation recommendation to increase the number of full-time faculty professionals and to increase the amount of time dedicated to non-teaching duties.

The Self-Study raises the point that despite best efforts, results have remained elusive in recruiting full-time faculty from among under-represented populations. The team concurs that RACC should clarify the goals regarding diversity among its faculty and proceed with a plan to reach beyond the local community, to actively recruit qualified, full-time faculty with diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The lack of travel funds for non-local applicants could be a barrier to creating this diversity. Additionally, the Self-Study indicates that the college lacks accurate records regarding faculty records and evaluations. Discussions with the faculty revealed that when the evaluation process was used, follow-up meetings with the appropriate administrators did not occur, thus negating the evaluation outcomes.

The reliance on adjunct faculty is addressed in the *Characteristics of Excellence*, Standard 10. The standard specifies that “the greater the dependence on such employees, the greater the institutional responsibilities to provide orientations, oversight, professional development,” to part-time faculty.

While the number of adjunct faculty varies among the College’s departments, the overall reliance on part-time faculty is substantial. Adjunct faculty lack appropriate resources, such as office space and e-mail. Evaluation for full-time faculty also seems to be haphazard.

Suggestion: The team agrees with the Self-Study recommendation that RACC needs to quickly develop and implement “complete and comparable” personnel records for full and part-time faculty.

Suggestion: There is no systematic evaluation and orientation system. The Self-Study offers recommendations to address these issues. The team urges the College to proceed with their implementation.

Suggestion: RACC needs to adopt and implement an annual evaluation system that promotes sound teaching/learning and can be used as a keystone in the College’s outcomes assessment policies.

Suggestion: A plan should be implemented to provide computer access and email addresses to all full time and part time faculty and professional staff.

Suggestion: The College must develop and implement a college-wide systematic faculty evaluation process.

Recommendation: The College should actively pursue the hiring of new, full-time faculty who represent diversity.

Chapter 11. Educational Offerings & Library

Educational Offerings - Reading Area Community College offers a wide range of programs and different types of degrees ranging from transfer degrees to certifications in several areas. The college has a wide array of terminal degrees designed to serve several markets, including child care, office technology, health services and the newest program, nanoscience to prepare technicians for the nanotechnology fields.

RACC has seen an increase in the number of students pursuing transfer programs. To this end, the college has formed agreements with several local institutions, including Penn State and the state four year colleges. A counselor is assigned to work with students to insure that they fulfill acceptable transfer requirements. There are five different ways for students to transfer: Dual Admissions, Core to Core, Program to Program, SHEE/Academic Passport/PATS and Course Equivalencies. The acceptance of transfer credits by receiving colleges shows that RACC is providing “educational offerings that display academic content, rigor, and coherence that are appropriate to its higher education mission” as indicated in Standard 11 of *Characteristics of Excellence*. Furthermore, the institution, while aware of transfer requirements, is also judging “courses, programs, and other learning experiences on their learning outcomes and the existence of valid evaluation measures” (p.9, *Characteristics of Excellence*).

All students in the associate programs are required to complete at least nineteen hours of general education courses with particular courses recommended for different majors. The college has formulated competency-based education, including core, program and course competencies so that all instructors of a course are expected to adhere to the same course guidelines. The college has come a long way in a short time with many program reviews in the process of completion since the Fall 2002 term. Full time faculty in the Business, Health Professions, Humanities, Mathematics and Science, Social Sciences Divisions have reviewed and updated program requirements and sequences. The college has created a review schedule to assure that all programs be reviewed every five years. Currently, the program reviews that have been completed have been forwarded to the Vice President of Academic Affairs and will eventually be forwarded to the Board of Trustees for their approval. In so doing, RACC is moving towards identifying “student learning goals and objectives, including knowledge and skills, for its educational offerings.”(Standard 11, *Characteristics of Excellence*).

RACC has developed institutional core competencies in order to insure that “the institution’s curricula are designed so that students acquire and demonstrate college-level proficiency in general education and essential skills, including oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and reasoning, technological competency and information literacy.” (*Standard 12, Characteristics of Excellence*) These are designed “to promote the development of life skills.” (Standards of Excellence, p. 32) However, RACC is still confronted by how to measure the acquisition of the core competencies. As a beginning in the process, faculty members have been asked to indicate how their courses address the core competencies. The General Education core curriculum may need to be reviewed and revised by the faculty.

The process for the development, approval and review of new courses is becoming more standardized and more widely disseminated. This procedure should enhance the review of courses and programs that the college is undergoing.

Suggestion: Faculty should review and revise, on a regular basis, the core curriculum.

Suggestion: The institution needs to consider expanding the workforce in both the faculty area and support areas.

Recommendation: Since RACC has made a commitment to the core competencies, the institution now has to formulate assessment methods for all of the core competencies and continue to set up assessment of courses and programs

Library -The RACC Library participates effectively in the academic pursuits of students and serves well in other roles for the college. Its chief strength is an able and committed staff that has leveraged limited material and human resources into a strong program of library services. The Library occupies an attractive, modern facility that is close to classroom buildings and parking. The Library's public identity is represented by an easily used and highly functional Web site, a well developed set of policies, and numerous informational and instructional publications.

Although planning had previously been neglected, the Library now has a five-year plan, which is part of the recently completed *Academic Affairs Area Master Plan*. The plan presents a detailed schedule for improving Library resources and operations. It also accords closely with the *Self Study*, and with expectations regarding libraries and information literacy from the 2002 *Characteristics of Excellence*. The only issues not addressed in the plan concern space usage and allocation. If recent trends in enrollment growth continue, it may become advisable to examine whether spaces for student work and study are sufficient.

RACC students can draw upon diverse content resources, including local print collections, Web-based digital resources, and neighbor libraries. The latter two resources have been developed through state and county partnerships. Through the Pennsylvania Community College Library Consortium, RACC is able to license several Web-based reference and research databases, at considerable savings over single institution prices. These databases are available to RACC students offsite; not only is this a major convenience, it helps reduce demand upon the Library's small stock of public computers.

RACC students have ready access to nearby public and other academic libraries in the county through the Advanced Library Information Network (ALIN.) ALIN operates a joint library catalog, through which students can identify materials at RACC and at 26 other libraries. Access to the materials themselves is available through quick turnaround courier delivery, or by direct borrowing using a common library card.

Both of these resources are particularly important to RACC because of serious weaknesses in the library's book collection. As a result of an extended period of under funding, the book collection contains an excessive amount of obsolete items and certain subjects are underdeveloped.

Library staff provides substantial reference and instructional services to students. They answer a high volume of reference questions and conduct an extensive program of instructional presentations, which are integrated into courses and coordinated with faculty. The principal service shortcoming is limited reference coverage. The Library is open 77 hours weekly, including evenings, Saturdays, and Sundays, which is admirable. However, a professional reference librarian is available only during slightly less than half that time; otherwise service is provided by paraprofessionals.

Library staff participates in college activities through membership in curriculum development, planning, and other forums. Particularly promising are joint initiatives with faculty to develop information literacy programming and to integrate it throughout the curriculum, which are in concert with information literacy expectations in the 2002 *Characteristics of Excellence*. The Library also administers testing for televised courses and for make-up tests for all courses.

The Library and its services appear to be favorably regarded by students and faculty, based upon one college-wide student survey and a very small sampling of faculty opinion. Although the Library received excellent evaluations on these two occasions, there has been no formal and systematic assessment program. The five-year plan, however, does call for a complete set of assessment measures, in agreement with an important theme in the 2002 *Characteristics of Excellence*.

Suggestion: For reasons of security and operational consistency, the college should examine the value of transferring the testing activity to a formally administered testing setting.

Suggestion: Library funding should be reviewed to ensure its ability to support Library services appropriate to the college's mission, particularly with respect to local collections and reference service.

Suggestion: College-wide efforts should be initiated to develop information literacy programming which should be integrated throughout the curriculum.

Recommendation: RACC should develop and conduct a systematic, thorough, and continuing assessment program for Library resources, services, and operations.

Chapter 12. Related Educational Activities

RACC offers programs and courses designed to assist students in a variety of areas. There are certificate and diploma programs to enable individuals to gain employment in skilled positions. There are several levels of developmental courses in writing, reading, mathematics and English as a Second Language. The college has embarked on distance learning efforts and dual enrollment offerings at area high schools to accommodate the needs of community members. Clearly, the college is providing “institutional programs or activities that are characterized by particular content, focus, location, mode of delivery or sponsorship. (*standard 13, Characteristics of Excellence*) Dual Enrollment courses are taught at six local high schools. These courses are taught by the high school faculty using the syllabi of the college course and are given as Advanced Placement courses at the various high schools.

In an attempt to provide training requested by the community, the college offers programs in fields that are identified as needing trained employees. To conserve the college's resources, some of these are located in alternate locations. For example, Machine Tool Technology is housed at the Reading-Muhlenberg Vocational Technology School. The subject specific courses in the Culinary Arts program are offered at local restaurants with a coordinator making weekly site visits to confer with the students and the site mentors. Certificate programs can often be applied towards an associate degree at a later date. Advisory councils are in place for certificate programs but these councils meet infrequently, often only once a year. The job market for low enrolled programs should be surveyed in order to determine which occupational programs should be maintained.

Reading Area Community College has created a tiered system of developmental courses. The few full time faculty members teaching in the basic skills courses are proud of the rigor in the basic courses and believe that the requirements for the top level of these courses is equal to that of traditional freshmen courses. Those full time faculty teaching these courses are aware of the problems in the cut points for the reading and writing courses. The COMPASS test used for placement is a multiple choice test, so students lacking writing but possessing grammar skills may be placed in a higher level course. There are four LEP courses offered, three in writing and one in speaking and listening. Student self identify as needing English language instruction so students needing this form of remediation often end up in the various developmental reading and writing courses instead of courses for students with limited English. There is no tracking in place for students who test into the various levels of developmental education.

At present, the college is offering only telecourses, but with the expansion of its technology capacities, it is beginning to look at offering other forms of distance learning.

Suggestion: Dual Enrollment courses in the high schools should be reevaluated to insure that these courses satisfy the same requirements as the on-campus courses.

Suggestion: The College needs to investigate the lack of coordinated leadership overseeing the various developmental courses.

Suggestion: There should be an examination of the current practice of granting up to six hours of credit for developmental courses that do not transfer.

Suggestion: Utilizing an environmental scan, RACC is encouraged to carefully examine distance-learning options.

Recommendation: RACC should undertake an organized study of the placement process for developmental courses, the retention rate of developmental students in the developmental program and in the college at large as well as the sequence of courses, including the placement of and support services for students in LEP. RACC also needs to identify staffing needs in the developmental programs.

Chapter 13. Continuing Education

Standard 13 outlined in the *Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education* specifies that: “the integrity and credibility of an institution’s educational program rest directly on its acceptance of responsibility for all activities conducted in its name or under its sponsorship.”

The Self-Study for RACC states the non-credit and other continuing educational programs derive from its mission statement and are part of its philosophy and a significant factor for its success.

Twenty-five thousand students who enroll in continuing education programs constitute approximately 40% of RACC’s FTE’s in 2000-2001.

Programs offered within the continuing education division include: Adult Basic Education (ABE), General Education Development (GED), English as a Second Language (ESL), Family Literacy, Professional and Occupational Therapy and vocational/recreational programs.

The Continuing Education Division has forged a number of bi and multi-lateral partnerships with other educational providers, state agencies and local industries. These partnerships have resulted in many successful programs that benefit thousands of area residents with diverse educational needs each year.

Moreover, these programs have contributed as much as 40% of the college’s total tuition revenues in recent years.

The team wishes to recognize that these activities were initiated and managed by a small but extremely dedicated group of professionals. The Self-Study points out that despite the sizable increases in program offerings and enrollments, the allocated human resources to the continuing education division have remained well below a level required to ensure adequate performance.

The team concurs with the self study recommendation that proper allocation of financial, human and physical resources should be planned and allocated to the division in order to continue the fine services it provides.

The team also wishes to concur with the Self-Study Report that RACC planners and administration provide access to computers and e-mail to all of full-time and part-time employees.

The Self-Study attributes the different modes of program development and assessment from those used for credit courses and programs to the specificity and quick response required by these programs. The team notes the concern that course and program evaluation are varied even within the Continuing Education Division and vary widely from the credit offerings. The team strongly agrees with the recommendation that RACC develop and utilize standardized evaluation for all programs offerings.

Finally, the team wishes to invoke Standard 7 of the *Characteristics of Excellence* relating to Institutional Assessment and particularly the assessment of student learning. The Self-Study indicates that course and program assessment efforts vary widely within continuing education and between continuing and credit course offerings. *Characteristics of Excellence* encourages institutions to develop formal assessment efforts in order to ensure that the courses and programs improve the teaching/learning environment and ultimately improve student learning. The team agrees that RACC needs to address its own recommendation to develop and integrate a formal assessment plan that is a part of the college's formative institutional assessment effort.

Suggestion: Within the context of a college-wide strategic plan, Reading Area Community College should improve the space, personnel, and materials resources allotted to continuing education.

Suggestion: The College should prepare and implement an appropriate evaluation system for continuing-education faculty.

Chapter 14. Technology and its Use

Reading Area Community College identified a special emphasis on technology as part of its Self-Study. In the Self-Study, the college discussed numerous problems with its technological infrastructure, its support for technology, and its training in the use of technology. The institution, together with a consultant, has developed a detailed study that provides a blueprint for its use of technology. It is extremely encouraging to see that the college has addressed many of the issues, identified in both the Technology Study and the institutional Self-Study. Extensive progress has been accomplished in a short period of time on such concerns as outmoded hardware and software, financial support for technology, and overall coordination and support for information technology. Progress under the new Director of Information Technology has been extraordinary and numerous initiatives have been started which will improve the use of technology at RACC for faculty, staff and students. There remain, however, some significant concerns for Reading as the institution moves forward into the 21st century.

The Self-Study identified several issues related to computer hardware. These included concerns about standardization of application and operating system software, hardware capacity for email access, lifecycle replacement, and support for multiple operating systems. The recent lease of 200 Dell computers has made a significant improvement in the college's status in reference to these concerns. Additionally, network equipment has been recently upgraded through leasing and purchases. The leasing program will allow the college to maintain current machines for most uses. Funding for a leasing program makes it easy for the institution to plan budget outlays as well as maintain current technology. The college should examine ways to maintain a life cycle replacement strategy for other areas of the technology infrastructure in addition to the desktop computers and network servers.

RACC faces several major challenges in the near future. These include necessary upgrades to the email system, the telephone system, and a major upgrade or replacement to its existing administrative computing system. The college's current email system is outdated. Planning is underway to replace the GroupWise program with a Microsoft Exchange/Outlook mail system. It is

essential for this change to be implemented as soon as possible. Email is a necessity, not a luxury. Additionally, planning is underway to purchase a new telephone system to upgrade the capacity and enhance service. The college's administrative software/hardware system will not be supported after 2007. It is imperative that the institution moves forward quickly with plans to purchase and implement a new system. The college plans to select a new system by the fall of 2003 with installation completed by July of 2005. This promises to provide greater capacity for online services to students. As noted in the Self-Study, the current system does not provide online access to application, advising services, registration, and bill payment. The College has purchased a web module that is currently being installed. This will allow for online services to students including online registration. The college web page is an asset for communication and for marketing. The institution should include its URL in all appropriate college publications.

The college has made some efforts towards the installation of technology for instructional purposes, including a multimedia auditorium, smart classrooms and other instructional technology. While the current number of smart classrooms is relatively small (6 smart classrooms, 62 total classrooms), it will soon be appropriate for all classrooms to be upgraded. Classroom/labs providing computer instruction should receive priority for presentation technology. It should be noted that computer hardware alone does not provide a complete learning environment. Consideration should be made for furniture upgrades to improve ergonomics and provide for ADA accessibility in the computer classroom/labs.

The expansion of the college into distance learning, new technology enhanced instruction and other instruction driven uses of technology such as the installation of smart classrooms, creation of a WAN supporting other sites, and email for students must be matched by a concern for staffing. While some inexpensive investments in support software for helpdesk use and for lab management will save the institution time and effort in provision of support services, the college's technology staff should be enhanced for continued technological growth. In addition to staffing, there should be an expanded emphasis on training for faculty and staff in both basic technology skills and the uses of technology in the instructional process. Advanced training should also be funded for technology staff. The continued development of the core technology competencies and outcome measures for students may help the institution identify necessary technology skills for faculty. The team supports the plans for the creation of a new Teaching/Learning Center and the identification of a leadership position for the use of instructional technology at the college. Appropriate training may help to increase use of underutilized technology resources such as the CAPE Room, and ensure full utilization of future investments in instructional technology.

As the college embarks on investigations into new technologies for educational use, the planning must be implemented concurrently with improvements of the information technology infrastructure. For example, the implementation of streaming audio and video and other high quality of service, bandwidth intensive uses of the Internet for instructional use will be difficult to implement without concurrent improvement of the college's Internet connection. The implementation of student email accounts will have a significant impact for support and administration, in addition to the cost of the hardware and software.

Many of the college's technology needs have been identified in the RACC Strategic Technology Planning Study completed in April 2002. It is commendable that the institution has moved forward

on the initiatives identified, and the team believes that the plan should be used as the basis for a continuing effort at technology planning. Planning should be ongoing and grow from an understanding of the instructional mission of the institution. The development of annual goals and objectives should be driven by strategic technology planning for both educational and information technology needs. The technology planning and decision-making processes of the college, however, seem to be hindered by a convoluted structure of inter-related technology committees. It is likely, as the institution moves forward with the adoption of the Technology Study initiatives, that efficiencies and coordination of the approval processes and procedures can be implemented. Efforts should continue to include all appropriate input in the technology decision-making process.

RACC has made significant improvements in its technology in a very short period of time. The team commends these efforts and hopes that the college will continue to move forward.

Suggestion: Continue to implement the initiatives suggested in the Technology Study.

Suggestion: As recommended in the Technology Study, RACC should move forward immediately with plans to select and implement a new administrative software system. The planning should include analysis of administrative processes and policies necessary for effective use of the new system.

Suggestion: The institution should expedite its efforts to improve the communications infrastructure of the institution including email services, the telephone system, and the college web site.

Chapter 15. Assessment of Student Learning

A comprehensive plan for the assessment of student learning at the course, program, and institutional level is a core requirement for meeting the accreditation standards identified in *Characteristics of Excellence*. In the Self Study Report, the Executive Summary states, “For years, emphasis has been placed on enrollment, recruitment, and service rather than on excellence in teaching and learning, and the systems, processes, and standards necessary to ensure student learning have not been established.” (xvi). RACC is to be commended for the forthright manner in which these issues have been addressed in the Self-Study. The College acknowledges the need for a comprehensive assessment plan, especially in the area of student learning outcomes. As noted in *Characteristics of Excellence*, “institutions must articulate statements of expected student learning at the institutional, program, and individual course levels... (p. 50). This is the crucial element of a comprehensive assessment of student learning outcomes that must be addressed at RACC. There are many components of a plan already in place, but these components have not been integrated and augmented to produce a holistic approach.

Several years ago the College adopted a Competency Based Education (CBE) system whereby, each course identified the competencies that a student should possess after successful completion of the course. This has been accomplished in all courses at the College. However, work has just begun on taking this information to the next level in assessment: the specification of how the competencies would be documented and the designation of appropriate benchmarks that would effectively measure student-learning outcomes. Some faculty members, most notably in the allied

health/sciences area, have done so and thus a potential model does exist. This initial effort has been supplemented by the identification of Core Competencies that all students should have attained by graduation. Outcomes have been identified for each of the Core Competencies. All faculty will be asked in the Institutional Section of the Course Syllabus to indicate which of the listed outcomes in each Core Competency are addressed in the particular course. This is another significant step in moving to a comprehensive assessment of student learning outcomes but, again, the methods of documenting those outcomes need a comprehensive and integrated approach.

The area of program review and specifically, the identification of program outcomes and the measurement of those outcomes is an area needing significant attention. There is, however, an ambitious agenda for re-establishing a cycle of program review. It is important to develop program outcomes and to assess whether those outcomes have been attained as part of program review. Here again progress is being made with the example of the business programs and the humanities programs currently before the Curriculum Committee, where program goals have been articulated.

Faculty and administrative staff all indicate knowledge of the weaknesses in assessment at the institution, and all support a stronger assessment initiative. Faculty professional development has been limited in supporting assessment so that while faculty are willing to employ assessment strategies in regard to student learning outcomes, many are unclear about useful approaches to this fundamental element of assessment, especially at the level of documentation of those outcomes.

The College faces difficulty in supporting assessment initiatives without adequate staff in assessment and institutional research. Data collection has been sporadic and insular at the College. There are also major gaps in the data that limit the ability to complete the full cycle of assessment: collection, analysis, publication, and application to resolve identified problem areas, and then re-assessment. Moreover, in order to implement a comprehensive assessment plan there needs to be a culture of assessment at the institution. This means shifting the focus from teaching to learning. Such a redefinition can only be realized by a concerted effort at all levels of the institution. It is also crucial that people, especially faculty, be trained through professional development to understand how to implement assessment activities, in particular how to measure outcomes, how to establish and report on benchmark attainment, and how to present material in multiple modalities so that student learning is further facilitated at the course, program and institutional levels.

In summary, the College has a foundation for moving forward with the assessment of student learning. A shift in the culture of the institution cannot be accomplished without a commitment at all levels of the institution. That commitment must include the personnel and the resource allocation that would permit a comprehensive assessment plan that fully documents student learning to be an ongoing element of institutional life at Reading Area Community College.

The lack of a comprehensive college-wide plan for the assessment of student learning outcomes was identified in the 1992 Self-Study Report, the 1998 Periodic Review Report (PRR), the 2000 Follow-Up Report to the PRR, and in the 2002 Self-Study Report.

Recommendation: Develop and implement a comprehensive college-wide plan for the assessment of student learning outcomes at the course, program, and institutional level.

Summary Conclusion

The Reading Area Community College Mission and Vision Statements and the objectives and goals that arise from them are responsive to the stakeholders that the College serves.

With limited fiscal resources available to it, the need for a comprehensive Strategic Plan becomes more critical. This planning process must be based upon an environmental scan. Its development should include all constituencies in the College community. The basis for measuring the successful attainment of the goals and objectives of the plan requires institutional and student outcomes assessment, neither of which is clearly evident at Reading Area Community College.

The College has a physical plant that supports its Mission. New buildings are planned, but State support for these buildings has yet to materialize. While both buildings and grounds are well maintained there is no plan for preventive maintenance and for much-needed capital equipment. The Board of Trustees, recognizing the need for upgrading technology on the campus, commissioned a study to determine those needs.

After several years of increased support from Berks County and the State, these two partners are now unable to provide increased levels of support. The College has been relying upon reserve funds to meet increased personnel and capital equipment needs, especially in the area of technology for administration and instruction. A technology fee has helped to alleviate the technology deficit at the College. Budgeting at RACC does not appear to be connected to planning.

The Board of Trustees at Reading Area Community College is actively and appropriately involved in the affairs of the College. They have charged the recently appointed President with the administration of the College. He is competent, talented and experienced, as was his predecessor, who laid a strong foundation for the future of the College. The administrative team is committed to implementing the mission of the College. Its members are appropriately prepared to do so. Their duties are sometimes bifurcated by a multitude of disparate tasks. The College has always prided itself on having a lean administration and staff, but the complex needs of the institution and a changing student population warrant consideration to add additional personnel in the administrative area. The administrative team must be given the necessary tools to lead the institution, not the least of which is an assessment process driven by strategic planning.

Shared governance is evident at RACC in the form of the College Council which provides an invaluable service to the College through an effective committee structure. The work of the committees should be an integral part of the much needed College-wide strategic plan and institutional and student-learning outcomes assessments which arise from that plan.

The College has demonstrated its integrity in many ways and in particular in the instructional area by adopting a competency based format to assess student learning. Unfortunately, this process has yet to be fully implemented in some areas and not at all in others.

Institutional assessment is not occurring at RACC. The College has engaged in a number of disconnected planning activities but has yet to draw them together in a more effective and

meaningful way. There is a need for an institutional assessment process based upon a college-wide strategic plan. While a commendable Academic Affairs Area Master Plan has been drafted it was prepared outside of the existing planning processes. Planning by “ad hococracy” does not serve the College well. As the College moves toward Institutional Assessment, it must tie such assessment directly to the central purpose of the institution, student learning.

Clearly the student population at the College is changing. Students are coming with different academic and personal needs. Ultimate student success can only be possible if there is an effective recruitment and enrollment management plan in place with an assessment component.

Student needs must be served with a competent staff and necessary technology. Progress in providing additional technology for student services has occurred but more must be done. The same holds true for the increased staffing needs. There is a need for additional data collection in order to effectively implement the assessment of the recruitment, retention and success of students.

The faculty at RACC provides quality instruction. The limited number of full-time faculty in some discipline areas, however, thwarts the ability of the College to have more diverse course offerings. The faculty itself lacks diversity and is heavily weighed with adjunct faculty. While the faculty is qualified, there are disparities between full-time faculty and adjunct faculty including methods of evaluation. Attention must be given to the evaluation of faculty in general as a part of institutional assessment in conjunction with student-learning assessment.

Reading Area Community College offers a wide range of programs. Some, however, have very low enrollments. While core competencies have been developed in some areas they are yet to be adopted college-wide. This lack of uniformity will inhibit an effective student-learning assessment process. Existing courses and programs should be reviewed regularly.

The Library plays an effective role in the student-learning process at RACC. It provides a wide variety of services in different modalities. It suffers from a lack of resources in its collection and in necessary staff. The latter is best illustrated by the lack of a professional reference librarian in the evening. The Library, as a structure, is attractive and a valuable asset to the College. The Library staff is clearly an integral part of the learning process at RACC. The Library should be a critical part of the institutional assessment process.

RACC offers a wide variety of educational modalities to its students. The traditional classroom approach to teaching is the principal mode but two methods are gaining wider use. Distance learning courses at RACC have used videotapes as the prime method of delivering instruction. Web enhanced and internet courses are being considered but will not work well until the technology infrastructure necessary for their successful implementation is in place. Attention must be paid to the dual enrollment courses to ensure that they meet the same quality standards as on-campus courses.

As a larger number of students with developmental education needs come to the campus, more care and attention has to be given to a comprehensive and unified approach to delivery of developmental education services. There appears to be a lack of coordinated leadership in this area. Granting

college credit for developmental courses warrants review, taking into account their transferability. There is little or no assessment of the developmental education program at RACC.

The Continuing Education Program is a distinct asset for RACC and, for that reason, it is surprising that it is not fully understood or appreciated by all segments of the College community. The revenue it generates helps the fiscal picture of the College in very positive ways. The ability of this unit to function so well with such a small staff is commendable, but continued understaffing will be detrimental to the program. Like so many other units in the College, there is little evidence of assessment within the context of a strategic plan.

The RACC Self-Study paints a bleak picture of the state of technology in the administration and the instructional area. The Technology Study, despite its lack of a strong educational component, bodes well for the College. Since the publishing of the Study, a Director of Institutional Technology has been hired and significant improvements have been made. The leasing of 200 computers, and the intent to lease more in the immediate future, signal a rising tide for positive change. But more has to be done to fully implement the study. Attention must be paid to upgrading the administrative software package. The communications infrastructure needs upgrading as well. Training for use of technology in the classroom must also occur.

While the central purpose of the institution is student learning, little or no effective student-learning assessment has occurred despite a recommendation made by the Commission on Higher Education in response to RACC's 1998 Periodic Review Report. The processes outlined by the College in the requested Follow-up study have not been successfully implemented. Competency Based Education exists but has yet to be fully implemented. CBE is a critical aspect of the student-learning assessment process. The College can wait no longer to engage in this essential enterprise. Not to do so lessens the level of instructional quality for RACC students.

Reading Area Community College has a dedicated Board of Trustees, a talented and innovative administration, a professional and committed faculty, and a very hard-working staff. The collective results of their efforts provide a learning environment that benefits the students that the College serves. The College is meeting its mission in a commendable manner as a result of the synergy that exists among these constituencies.

Persons Interviewed

Dr. Richard A Kratz, President

Dr. Gust Zogas, President Emeritus

Dr. Peter Battaglia, Chief Academic Officer

Dr. John DeVere, Associate Dean of Academic Affairs

Mr. Theodore Bassano, Vice President of Business Services/Treasurer

Mr. Douglas Davis, Director of Information Technology

Mr. Scott Heffelfinger, Director of Human Resources

Dr. John Mahon, Director of Institutional Planning/Assistant to the President

Ms. Kay Haring, Director of Institutional Advancement

Ms. Diane Adams, Dean of Student Services

Mr. James H. Yocum, Chair of the Board of Trustees

Members of the Board of Trustees

Dr. Karen Jacobson, Steering Committee Chair

Members of the Steering Committee

Mr. David Leight, College Council Chair

Mr. Kenneth Dearstyne, Controller

Mr. Jack Keegan, Director of Facilities/Security

Mr. Anna Hehn, Coordinator of Assessment

Ms. Lucille Mock, Computing Services Manager

Ms. Carol Alspach, Coordinator of Special Programs

Ms. Mary Ellen Heckman, Director of Library Services

Dr. Helen Peemoeller, Division Chair, Humanities

Ms. Kim Stahler, Instruction/Reference Librarian

Ms. Mary Lou Kline, Chair, Business Division

Dr. Pieter Miller, Assistant Dean for Continuing Education

Ms. Elaine Moyer, Coordinator, ABE/GED/ESL programs

Dr. Larry Stucki, Chairman, Social Sciences/ Human Services

Dr. Amelia Rodriguez, Chairperson, Division of Health Professions

Mr. Barry Reber, Chairperson, Science and Mathematics, Chair, Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

Ms. Karen Coleman, Chair, Faculty Forum and Faculty Forum Members

Ms. Jane Joering, Professor, Division of Health Professions and member of the Curriculum Committee

Mr. David Richards, Website Manager

Ms. Carol Alspach, Coordinator Special Programs

Ms. Cindy Seaman, Faculty/ Social Sciences Division

Mr. Arthur Brooks, Network Manager

Ms. Cathy Faller, Computer Lab Manager

Ms. Inez Whipple, Faculty

Ms. TommaLee Furst, Coordinator, Tutorial Services/Learning Specialist

Mr. Fred Indenbaum, Director of Center for Counseling and Academic Development

Mr. Joseph Kornoski, Coordinator of Student Activities

Ms. Holly Lutz, Student Records Manager

Ms. Maria Mitchell, Director of Career Services

Ms. Patricia Parks, Temporary Director of Admissions

Mr. Benjamin Rosenberger, Director of Financial Aid/Registrar

Ms. Sandra Sorrels, Coordinator, Talent Search

Ms. Barbara Stoner, Training Resource Coordinator, CareerLink

Ms. Cynthia Thornburg, Coordinator, Graphic Arts

Group of Student Leaders

An adjunct in English (very positive about teaching at RACC)

A student in the Educational Technology program (very positive, and said that her son who is also a student is equally as positive in the new pilot program)

A student in the Business program (felt the school could be more organized, especially in the area of student advisement)

A student in the Teacher/Education Transfer program (stated that courses are not challenging enough, especially for a transfer program)

A student lab assistant in the Math/Science computer lab (engineering major transferring to Penn State – could not say enough positive about the faculty and his experience at RACC)

Documents Reviewed

1. *The Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education -2002*
2. *2002 Self-Study Report for Reaccreditation by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools – Reading Area Community College*
3. 2001 Self-Study Design
4. 1992 Evaluation Team Report and Commission Letter
5. 1998 Periodic Review Report and Commission Letter
6. 2000 RACC PRR Follow-up Report on Outcomes Assessment
7. 2000 Commission response to PRR Follow-up Report
8. Board of Trustees By-Laws

9. Board of Trustees Handbook
10. List of Current Board Members and Dates of Service
11. RACC FY03 Budget
12. College Council Annual Reports, 1994-2001
13. Reading Area Community College 2002-2003 Budget
14. 2002-2003 Student Handbook
15. 2002-2003 Student Calendar
16. *Reading Area Community Student Catalog* 2001-2003
17. 1991 Master Plan for Reading Area Community College
18. Academic Affairs Area Master Plan
19. Faculty Handbook
20. Faculty Library Usage Survey
21. Pennsylvania Community College Libraries Statistics Comparison
22. Strategic Technology Planning Study
23. Yocum Library Collection Development Policy
24. Yocum Library Web Site
25. Yocum Library Guidelines
26. Yocum Library Statistics
27. Continuing education subcommittee report
28. Full time, part time and adjunct faculty surveys
29. Several course outlines
30. Articulation Agreements
31. CBE Manual
32. Institutional Effectiveness Status Report 2002/Summer 2002
33. Academic Program Review Schedule
34. Academic Affairs Area Master Plan
35. Report of the Institutional Assessment Subcommittee
36. Course Outlines (samples from interviewees)
37. Course Report Guidelines (Nursing Program)
38. Staffing Survey
39. Survey of full-time and regular part-time staff
40. Survey of full-time faculty
41. Survey of Adjunct faculty Student Satisfaction Survey
42. Application packet, viewbook
43. Financial Aid Policies Manual
44. Advising Manual
45. Unit Level planning survey
46. List of Administrative Staff
47. Minutes of Long Range Planning Council
48. LRPC membership
49. RACC's Visioning Process