

NEASC Institutional Progress Report August 8, 2006

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This report includes a discussion of the college's updated mission statement, new general education requirements, the development of clear governance and communication systems, the implementation of strategic planning processes, and plans for faculty assessment, hiring and achieving diversity goals.

Institutional Overview

The Community College of Rhode Island, from its modest beginning with 325 students in 1964 to its four comprehensive campuses statewide with an enrollment of more than 15,000 students, has grown to be the largest community college in New England. For over 40 years, the college's challenge has been to provide academic transfer programs, career-oriented training, and student support services of the highest caliber.

CCRI offers programs in academic and vocational-technical areas as well as a full complement of programs and services for full- and part-time students, for recent high school graduates, and for older adult learners.

The student body at the Community College of Rhode Island enjoys considerable diversity in ages, cultures, and experiences. Sixty-two percent are women, 70 percent are part-time, 14 percent are from an ethnic minority group, and 60 percent are 25 years of age or older. Many graduating students transfer to four-year colleges and universities. Others complete career-oriented programs which can lead to immediate employment in technical fields.

CCRI's faculty totals approximately 300 full-time members.

The Community College of Rhode Island grants the Associate in Arts (A.A.), the Associate in Science (A.S.), the Associate in Applied Science (A.A.S.), the Associate in Applied Science in Technical Studies (A.A.S.-T.S.) and the Associate in Fine Arts (A.F.A.) degrees. A number of one-year certificates are also awarded.

CCRI opens its facilities for community use, sponsors programs on issues of public concern, and offers workshops and seminars for small businesses, for government agencies, and for individuals seeking to improve their skills or enhance their lives.

The most significant recent development at CCRI has been the appointment in the spring of 2006 of Ray M. DiPasquale as the new president, the college's fourth in its forty-two year history.

Subject of this Report

In October of 2004, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges wrote then-President Thomas Sepe a report enumerating five areas of concern and requesting an update on the college's progress in addressing these areas (Appendix A). The report that follows specifically examines each of these areas and details the steps that have been taken 1) to clarify and develop the college's mission statement, 2) to ensure that all academic programs give students a substantial and coherent introduction to the broad areas of human knowledge, 3) to strengthen its governance and communication, 4) to improve its strategic planning processes, and 5) to make clear its plans for maintaining excellence in faculty recruitment and hiring, as well as for achieving diversity goals.

1) The Mission Statement

Beginning in December of 2004 with a president-appointed committee of 17 members, CCRI has sought to revise its mission statement to articulate its vision and offer a clear sense of direction as a comprehensive community college. In the time since, the faculty, students, and staff who comprise the committee have met 21 times as well as sought the views of the college community through surveys and public forums. Minutes of the committee's meetings, as well as the data gathered, are available on the college web site at www.ccri.edu/mission.

In April of 2006, the Mission Initiative Committee was reconvened by President DiPasquale to draft a revised statement. Two faculty members were added to the committee, and by the end of that month a newly crafted draft of the mission statement was presented to the Accreditation Review Committee established by the president to oversee progress in meeting NEASC standards and concerns. The Review Committee gave approval to sharing a draft of the statement with the college community and requesting its feedback. Based on the 20 responses the Mission Initiative Committee received, further revisions to the document were made.

On June 1st, President DiPasquale released the working mission statement to the college community and the Rhode Island Office of Higher Education. Nancy Carriuolo, Deputy Commissioner and Chief Academic Officer from OHE offered ideas for further refinement of the statement, and this input was discussed and reviewed in a meeting of the committee with Dr. Carriuolo. The committee and the president approved the statement for release to the college as an information-only document, and it was distributed to department chairs, deans, and administrative staff at a presidential retreat on July 19th, receiving a spontaneous round of applause after being read. On July 25, 2006 the statement was once again shared with the college community through Pipeline, the official electronic communication tool.

One of the central charges of the Mission Initiative Committee was to meet the challenge set forth by the NEASC visiting team in its 2004 evaluation:

"A new mission statement for CCRI should be crisp, clear and definitive, brief enough to be memorable, yet pointed enough to encompass the expanded mission of the contemporary community college."

The mission statement reads as follows:

The Community College of Rhode Island is the state's only public comprehensive associate degree-granting institution. We provide affordable open access to higher education at locations throughout the state. Our primary mission is to offer recent high school graduates and returning adults the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for intellectual, professional, and personal growth through an array of academic, career, and lifelong learning programs. We meet the wide-ranging educational needs of our diverse student population, building on our rich tradition of excellence in teaching and our dedication to all students with the ability and motivation to succeed. We set high academic standards necessary for transfer and career success, champion diversity, respond to community needs, and contribute to our state's economic development and the region's workforce.

On August 4, 2006, committee co-chairs presented the mission statement to the Academic and Student Affairs Committee of the Office of Higher Education, where it was then approved unanimously. In a final step, the statement will be presented to the Rhode Island Board of Governors for Higher Education for their approval on August 21, 2006.

It is President DiPasquale's intention to adopt a formal plan for revisiting the statement every three to five years as part the college's overall strategic planning process.

2) General Education Requirements and CCRI's Definition of an Educated Person

The General Education Committee was tasked with defining and making operational throughout all college programs how best to graduate an educated person, how to implement that definition on a course-by-course basis, and how to articulate and measure the success of that outcome for the students.

Beginning in the spring of 2005, the General Education Committee undertook a three-phase plan. In the first phase, the committee was charged with defining the general education skills and competencies a CCRI graduate should possess. The process for examining this question included an online survey with a discussion board and a series of campus-wide focus groups. In addition, the committee undertook a review of peer institutions' general education statements.

In phase two, during the fall of 2005, the committee gathered input to identify what course offerings were available for students to obtain a preliminary list of identified core skills and competencies. As part of this inventory, department-based discussions were followed by reports to the General Education Committee. A review of peer institutions' general education programs was pursued to identify a variety of other approaches.

In phase three, during the spring of 2006, the committee articulated, presented, and sought approval for a general education common core curriculum across all programs that specified the required number of courses within each discipline to support CCRI's definition of an educated person.

During these three phases, the philosophy, content, skill sets, and wording of a proposed definition of an educated person was refined, discussed, and evaluated, seeking input from the entire college community. In April and May of 2006, department chairs offered their views.

As of August 2, 2006, CCRI's proposed definition of an educated person reads as follows:

CCRI Definition of an Educated Person: Six Abilities

The faculty and staff of the Community College of Rhode Island have established six critical abilities that define the learning outcomes of a CCRI graduate. These six abilities can be applied in many contexts and are critical skills that must be developed not only at CCRI, but over the course of a lifetime. These core abilities guide students, faculty and staff in establishing educational goals and assessing learning within and across the primary domains of knowledge: arts and humanities, science and mathematics, and the social sciences.

Communication: Use diverse methods and strategies appropriate to audience and purpose. Listen, read, write and speak effectively using text, graphics, media, and data.

Analysis: Think clearly, critically and creatively within and across the primary domains of knowledge. Integrate experience, reason and information as a foundation for judgment.

Problem Solving: Identify problems, access needed information, and develop successful strategies to solve diverse problems. Implement those strategies and evaluate their effectiveness.

Awareness of Social Responsibility: Evaluate ethical dimensions of decisions and the consequences of social actions

Teamwork: Work effectively to accomplish tasks in groups. Weigh alternative points of view. Work collaboratively to reach conclusions and to set an appropriate course of action.

Cultural Perspectives: Demonstrate an understanding of global cultural and historical contexts and their impact on contemporary issues.

The next challenge the committee faced was, as the NEASC Evaluation team advised, “to operationalize” this definition within the curriculum and assess it in terms of student learning within courses, programs, and as a degree completion requirement. In addition, the college needed to meet the NEASC standard of having a minimum of 20 semester hours in an associate degree’s program in general education courses that is distributed across the three primary domains of knowledge: arts and humanities, social sciences, and sciences including mathematics.

Finally, these required courses should support and develop the skills promised in CCRI’s Graduate Outcomes statement:

CCRI Graduate Student Outcomes Statement

CCRI seeks to encourage the development of personal qualities of integrity, individual responsibility, and reliability in its students. In accordance with its mission to produce an educated workforce, the college has identified the following as essential:

- I. **Fundamentals Competencies**
 - a. clear and correct expression in both written and spoken English
 - b. ability to recognize, understand, and adjust to changes in life and work
 - c. problem-solving and analytical skills
 - d. information access skills
- II. **Understanding of National and International Influences On Life and Work**
 - a. awareness of the historical, cultural and economic influences of their life and work
 - b. appreciation of the roles of the arts, humanities, sciences and technology in their lives
- III. **Occupational Competence**
 - a. understanding of each individual’s role and contribution within the organization
 - b. pride in quality performance\effective communication skills
 - c. ability to function as a member or a leader of a team in the workplace and larger community
 - d. appropriate professional skills

In the spring of 2006, the department chairs voted to propose the following General Education Core courses:

RECOMMENDED GENERAL EDUCATION CORE – REVISED

***Minimum 20 Credits – NEASC Standards**

1 Course	Writing	(3)
1 Course	Arts & Humanities	(3)
2 Courses	Social Sciences	(6)
2 Courses	Mathematics/Science	(6-10)
1 Course	General Education Elective (Dependent on Program Recommendation)	(3/4)
		<hr/> 21-26 total <hr/>

There is continuing discussion and review on whether mathematics should be a separate domain from science, but there is otherwise general agreement on the wisdom of this course distribution as a means to achieve an educated person. In addition, the administration is reviewing all 60 associate degree programs CCRI offers in order to ensure that these core general education requirements will be a required part of all of them.

3) Governance

In 2004, the NEASC visiting team registered concern that governance and communication needed fundamental improvement and increased transparency. It summarized its view as follows: “Concerned that the college’s governance system is more ad hoc than formalized, the team encourages CCRI to construct a coherent governance system, that is advisory to the president, that gives all major constituencies a voice in the policy and decision making processes of the College.”

In the spring of 2005, a governance committee was appointed that reflected faculty and staff in all areas of the college, and it has since met 15 times, including on an accelerated basis after the arrival of President DiPasquale. A draft of a governance model, based on input from the college community as well as best practices at peer institutions will be completed for presentation to the president by August 30, 2006. In addition to crafting a detailed written document “containing all major necessary policies for operation of a comprehensive community college,” another challenge for a multi-campus college of CCRI’s size is to ensure “a mechanism for periodic assessment of the effectiveness of the system of governance,” and especially to make certain that it “involves the participation of all appropriate constituencies and includes regular communication among them.”

The committee, which has a web site at <http://www.ccri.edu/governance/index.shtml> - a site which includes its minutes – is successfully pursuing its tasks of conducting outreach activities to employees and students to gain an understanding of institutional interests and needs that would be best served by a governance model; of reviewing a representative sample of governance models of peer institutions and other institutions identified as having "best practices;" of reviewing, updating, and analyzing CCRI's existing committee structure relative to current and projected needs; and of producing a report describing the organization, functions, membership, and basic operational procedures of an organic and flexible governance model that meets the above objectives and characteristics.

This governance model will also be reviewed in light of its ability to facilitate the successful accomplishment of CCRI's stated mission.

4) Planning Process

A primary focus of the new administration is to "continue a strategic planning process that systematically ensures that college priorities are pursued through action steps, designated responsibilities, and links with the institution's budgeting system." In addition, the planning process needs to be systematic, broad-based, interrelated, and include a mechanism of regular self-evaluation in order to determine the effectiveness of planning and evaluation activities in an ongoing way. The bedrock of this planning involves the collection and use of data to inform decision-making, evaluate institutional effectiveness, and improve student success.

A Budget and Resource Committee has been established and charged with reviewing all aspects of the college budget. There have been during the summer of 2006 special retreats of academic and administrative units to develop a strategic planning process that will set the stage for implementing the revised mission statement and establishing institutional priorities consistent with it. A focused strategic planning process will begin in September of 2006 following the anticipated approval by the Rhode Island Board of Governors of the Community College of Rhode Island's new mission statement, one that will be based on the college's history, mission, goals and objectives, as well as community needs and careful data analysis.

At the heart of the strategic planning will be demonstrable student learning and measurable student success. President DiPasquale has identified four core questions this strategic planning must address. 1) What kinds of students will we teach? 2) What will our students learn? 3) What resources will we need to realize our aspirations, and how will these resources be provided? 4) How will we measure success?

5) Faculty Assessment and Hiring Process

In its letter of October 2004, the NEASC Commission on Institutions of Higher Education requested a progress report on 1) a recruitment and hiring process that will improve faculty diversity, and 2) an update on ensuring that the evaluation process for both full-time and part-time faculty is equitable, broad-based, consistent, and focuses on assessing teaching effectiveness.

First, to enhance recruitment, the college broadened the applicant pool by advertising in local and regional historically minority newspapers; it reviewed the Affirmative Action policy with each search committee; it sent out special inquiries on employment to local and regional minority organizations to encourage individuals in the organizations to apply for positions at CCRI. There are also plans pending for an on-campus diversity recruitment fair. As a result of these efforts, there has been an increased number of qualified minority applicants as well as an increased number of hires which reflect that diversity. Of 75 positions recently filled, 13 were filled by minority candidates and 53 were filled by women.

Second, the contractually mandated Faculty Evaluation Review Committee and its two subcommittees on Peer Evaluation and Course Evaluation met bi-monthly since their founding in 2004, examined best practices at peer institutions, and reviewed common instruments for student and peer evaluation to meet NEASC standards and to support discipline-specific needs. In the fall of 2005 and the spring of 2006, the committee began piloting the use of these college-wide Course Evaluation instruments through four departments: allied health, biology, human services, and psychology. Working closely with a CCRI faculty member who is a tests and measurements expert, the Evaluation Review Committee is currently analyzing the results of the pilot sample. It was determined in the fall that some test items may not be sufficiently discriminatory, and the spring administration of the instrument was used to gather more data for analysis of this issue. There are plans to pilot and examine a Peer Evaluation instrument in the fall of 2006 and expand its data collection in the spring of 2007. The aim is to develop and as promptly as possible implement a common set of procedures and instruments for peer and course evaluations for all faculty (Appendix B).

The heart of CCRI's educational task is to promote student success through a robust and effective program of learning, as well as to help students develop a set of skills that can enable them to flourish in an increasingly globalized and information-based economy. This NEASC Progress Report comes at a key time in the college's history as it moves forward under new leadership to address policy challenges and to take advantage of exciting opportunities in the school's continued pursuit of educational excellence. The process of reflection, examination, and action depicted in this report has helped CCRI focus anew on the fundamental question of how to create the very best conditions to enable our students to succeed in the 21st Century.