PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE REPORT
FOR THE CITY COLLEGE OF SAN FRANCISCO

Prepared and Submitted September 20, 2012 by the
Academic Senate for California Community Colleges
Community College League of California

Background

This report is in response to a request for technical assistance for City College of San Francisco (CCSF) by interim Chancellor Pamila Fisher and Academic Senate President Karen Saginor.

The visit was conducted on August 23-24, 2012, by Scott Lay, President and CEO of the Community College League of California, and Michelle Pilati, President of the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges.

The purpose of the visit was to assist the board, administration, faculty, and staff in improving communication and developing a common understanding of participating effectively in district and college governance in order to improve the campus climate and best serve students.

The visit followed up on specific findings of the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC), which placed the college on “show cause” status at its June 2012 meeting. ACCJC included as two of fourteen recommendations:

Recommendation 12. Leadership Governance and Decision-Making
To fully meet Standard IV Leadership and Governance, the team recommends that the district engage the services of an external organization to provide a series of workshops for all college constituencies, including the members of the governing board, the chancellor, faculty, staff, students and every administrator, in order to clarify and understand their defined roles of responsibility and delineated authority in institutional governance and decision making (IV.A, IV.B).

Recommendation 13: Governance Structures
To fully meet Standard IV.A Decision-making Roles and Processes, the team recommends that college leaders from all constituencies evaluate and improve the college’s governance structure and consequent processes used to inform decision making for the improvement of programs, practices and services. The college must ensure that the (decision making) process does not create undue barriers to the implementation of institutional decisions, plans and initiatives (IV.A.1, IV.A.3).

The team’s observations and recommendations were made following a governance presentation for the entire college community and separate meetings with Faculty, Classified Staff,
Managers/Supervisors/Confidential, and the President and Administrators. The recommendations should not be viewed as a set of prescriptive solutions, but rather as catalysts for further discussion and improvements in governance at the college.

**Context**

In commenting on the current situation at CCSF, it is imperative to place the college in the proper context. As a college serving a large, diverse, and politically engaged community, the pressures on the college to meet the needs of its varied populations are great. The college has strived to not only serve its varied populations, but to actively infiltrate the community by establishing an unprecedented number of locations of varied sizes throughout the city. While laudable, the college is not funded – no college is funded – to provide such extensive community outreach.

The political will of the community, an ethos that San Francisco is unique, and the highly political nature of the governing board appear to have been a driving force on the college and its expansion into communities throughout the city. The college has tailored locations and programs to meet specific populations in a manner that is not likely to be sustainable nor consistent with the mission of the community college in a post-Proposition 13 environment when few financial decisions are made locally. Before Proposition 13, if a district wanted to go “above and beyond,” as CCSF admirably has, it could impose a tax rate that aligned funding with expenses. This overarching context will create a challenge as the college strives to respond to the recommendations of the Accrediting Commission and the Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team. Responding to those reports will require changes in policy and practice, and an effective college governance system will be essential to tackle the numerous difficult decisions to be made.

CCSF has an extensive system of participatory governance that goes far beyond that required by Education Code (70901 et seq.), implementing regulations (5 CCR 53200 et seq.) and ACCJC standards. CCSF has an “Office of Shared Governance” established in 1994. At the time of our visit, the office was staffed by a full-time coordinator. To our knowledge, CCSF is unique in the amount of resources dedicated to implementing a participatory governance system.

The governance system is split in three areas—Collegial Governance System, College Advisory Governance System, and Budget and Planning System. The Collegial Governance System has subject matter responsibility in those areas deemed “academic and professional matters” under Title 5.

According to documents presented to us during the visit, there are over forty committees and subcommittees, ranging from a “Planning and Budgeting Council” to “Publications Advisory.”

**Observations**

On the first day of the visit, a special board meeting was called so as to permit more than a quorum of board members to attend a presentation on participatory governance. Unfortunately, only two board members were present for the full presentation. The relatively broad participation of faculty, staff, administrators, and student leaders in the technical assistance visit, however,
demonstrated recognition of the problems facing the college, although the significant financial threats made it difficult to have isolated discussions about effective governance.

Throughout the meetings with the three groups, several issues were raised numerous times and by more than one group. These issues, we believe, have a great impact on the current climate and affect the ability of all constituencies to work together. In addition, specific groups voiced concerns not shared by others, highlighting the need to address constituent-specific concerns in order for the campus community to work together effectively.

The influence of external entities on decision-making was mentioned by all groups. Influential factions both outside the college and within it were noted as operating behind the scenes. In addition, groups or individuals within the college who are not happy with a recommendation might be bullied to not speak out or might take it upon themselves to effect change by directly lobbying board members. It was particularly disappointing that the feeling of bullying is most held by new faculty and staff, and it was evident in the sessions that many individuals did not feel comfortable speaking up.

Participatory governance needs to result in ownership of decisions by all constituencies – decisions that are not later reversed or modified in response to an outspoken individual or an influential advocacy group. The board needs to rely upon and trust the professionals who have been hired to run the college. Recommendations to the board that are the product of established processes should be given due consideration and should normally be accepted.

Some representatives expressed their belief that the quantity of committees and the consequential frequent overlap in jurisdiction ensured that few decisions could actually be made. This further significantly reduces the role of elected constituency leaders, who are directly involved with far fewer subject areas than in comparable districts. Too many ideas “go to committee to die,” offered some critics of the system.

The group that felt the most marginalized and unable to do their jobs effectively was the administrators. It appears that historically management has not been empowered to do their jobs, has too often been subjugated to committees outside the area of academic and professional matters, and has been unduly micromanaged by the governing board. The governing board needs to trust, empower, and hold accountable the chancellor who, in turn, needs to trust, empower, and protect his or her employees.

An example was given in which faculty felt the board pursued changes to the faculty hiring process to promote diversity, without giving the Academic Senate the time to engage on an issue that was subject to the board policy providing for primary reliance on the Senate. While the requirement to rely primarily does not cede all decision-making to the Academic Senate, a reasonable opportunity to deliberate on the issue is generally expected.

In addition to the governing board exerting undue influence on decision-making that is truly internal to the workings of the college and not normally subject to board scrutiny, there was a sense that existing policies, practices, and procedures often created a barrier to making things happen. Just as the college has gone to extremes to serve its community, it appears that there are
extremes with respect to ensuring full participation in decision-making, resulting in a lack of decisions and/or unreasonable time to make decisions. The 2009 Shared Governance handbook cites that over 400 members of college constituent groups participated in the governance system.

As noted, the college has expanded throughout the city and the various constituent groups appear protective of the various physical locations that have been established. Even referencing what the college community calls a “campus” by the Education Code term “center” drew scorn by those that work at these locations. There are deep areas of mistrust and fear, built up over time and punctuated by the current significant financial distress of the college.

Finally, our meeting with the student government leaders showed open tension among the separately elected student governments for each of the “campuses.” Each group has its own bylaws, but feel that the Ocean Campus student government unfairly receives disproportionate student government revenue. The practice of referring to the college as the “Ocean Campus” reflected the belief that each of the “campuses” should be viewed as equals, despite extreme disparities in size and function. It is difficult to discern how students can be effectively represented throughout the district with the existing separate student governments and infrequent and apparently ineffective meetings of representatives across the district. The culture reflected in the structure of the student senate is consistent with the culture of the college as a whole; disparate voices are given relatively comparable standing despite vast differences in size and authority.

**Recommendations**

To better align City College of San Francisco’s governance process with the intent of AB 1725, accreditation standards and best practices, the Technical Assistance Team recommends:

1) The quantity of committees should be significantly reduced and the subject matters should be consolidated. For better coordination of planning and operations, the functions of the College Advisory Council and Planning and Budget Council may warrant consolidation.

2) The coordination of the participatory governance process should be an administrative function and the focus should be on the effective and efficient collection of perspectives by parties affected by college decisions.

3) The governing board, with the assistance of senior administrative staff, should communicate when it intends to discuss or deliberate on “academic and professional matters” and provide a reasonable opportunity for the Academic Senate to formulate a recommendation on which the board is required to rely primarily.

4) There should be biennial presentations on participating effectively in college governance, with the attendance of all governing board members, as well as administrative, faculty, staff, and student leaders. Opportunities to foster collegiality outside of committee meetings should be encouraged, and an annual retreat for senior constituency leaders should be considered.
5) The student government should evaluate whether its separate student governments for each campus structure most effectively allows students to participate in governance.

6) The district should hold annual reviews of its governance process to ensure the effective implementation of these recommendations and consider a subsequent visit of the Technical Assistance Team.

Conclusion

The Technical Assistance Team appreciates the full and thorough involvement of everyone who participated in the visit and who candidly shared their concerns and solutions about the participatory governance structure and practice at City College of San Francisco. We sincerely hope the recommendations will be helpful. While the number of recommendations is few in number, their scope is broad and they speak to the foundation of participatory governance necessary to function well as a district.

The changes that are necessary are significant, and we understand that a more effective governance process that can meet the challenges faced by community colleges today may require a culture shift. City College of San Francisco has significant fiscal and academic decisions ahead, and we believe that through a more efficient and effective governance system, it will strengthen, not reduce, the ability of faculty, staff and students to be involved in the decisions that have a significant effect on them.

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