

Introduction to Leeward Community College's Self Study: A Themes Approach

During the summer of 2004, those who were involved with coordinating Leeward Community College's application for reaffirmation of accreditation made the decision to take a "themes approach" to its self study. The shock of being placed on Warning by the Accrediting Commission in January 2004, and the subsequent implementation of changes since then, were factors in this decision. Although the College had already begun the process of developing policies and plans for improvement in response to recommendations from the self study in 2000, the pace at which these changes were implemented led to the Commission's characterizing some of our efforts as "planning to plan." There was a growing urgency among campus leaders that the College increase its level of effort and rate at which it moved away from past practices. There was genuine concern whether the campus effort over the past six years, and especially since 2004, was sufficient in meeting current standards of good practice.

The attendance by four campus leaders to the AAHE Conference in Glendale, California, in September 2004, and the subsequent ACCJC-sponsored workshop at Honolulu Community College in the same month, reaffirmed this group's decision to organize by themes, rather than by standards. Although more challenging, those who attended the workshops felt that a true self study, one that would look at the College's efforts and results, would give us substantive information as the basis for improvement of student learning and institutional effectiveness.

The task of producing the self study was not without its difficulties, especially due to the evidence-based emphasis of each part of the standards. The College's constituency was asked not only to read and internalize the standards, but also to research sources of evidence and to re-shape them through the lens of the themes, so that the standards were responded to appropriately. Throughout the process, faculty, staff, and administrators have voiced difficulty with this theme-based approach: it was too "slippery"; the Visiting Team would not be prepared to respond to it; we, as accreditation co-coordinators, were asking too much. At some points along the way, the College's Accreditation Team members also voiced the same concerns.

The self study that sits before you illustrates the effort of more than ninety College members. It is a deeper, richer self study because of the themes approach, as it has forced the College to consider its mission and effectiveness, student learning outcomes, resources, and leadership, from multiple perspectives. Some sections of a standard are approached from all six themes, with different lens from which to approach the standard.

Mission, for example, is approached from *Institutional Commitments*' and *Student Learning Outcomes*' perspectives on the College's purpose of supporting student learning. *Evaluation, Planning, and Improvement* and *Organization* focus on the College's review of its mission to reflect student needs and achievement, and the structures in place to insure currency of the mission. *Dialogue* chronicles the College's engagement by faculty, staff, and students in discussions that are central to this revision. Finally, *Integrity* considers the honesty and truthfulness of the mission and the College's attempts to publish this information.

We invite you to read through the themes, using the "crosswalks" on the following pages to guide you through the document. To use the traditional "Standards Approach" crosswalk, one will have to move across the themes in the following order (see the guide provided): Commitment (C); Evaluation, Planning, and Improvement (E); Student Learning Outcomes (S); Organization (O); Dialogue (D); and Integrity (I) in response to Standard I.A.1., and proceed in this manner through the remainder of the document. Doing this may sound redundant, but not all standards are addressed by each theme, and enough of a difference exists in each theme's approach to give the reader an in-depth insight from several perspectives as to how each standard is met and what needs to be improved.

The second, less conventional "Themes Approach" would be to read through the theme, noting how the perspective and response to the standard changes, depending on the lens through which one is looking. Each theme provides the reader with an in-depth examination of some, but not all, of the critical areas of the standards. To obtain comprehensive coverage requires reading all six themes.

We hope that regardless of the option you choose, you will find that the College has made an honest and truthful attempt to learn about itself, what it does well, and what it needs to do better. Through the self-study effort, we have determined where we are now with our mission, student learning, programs, policies and processes, and our treatment of all who are part of Leeward Community College. It is a good first step in designing changes for improvement.