

Lee Lambert: Pima Community College is headed in the right direction

- By Lee Lambert Special to the Arizona Daily Star, Oct 12, 2016

On Sept. 26 and 27, seven members of a Peer Review Team from the Higher Learning Commission engaged in more than 50 meetings with more than 250 faculty, staff, students, board and community members, on four Pima Community College campuses. During this visit, the college was asked to provide evidence that it has put in place systems that demonstrated effectiveness and sustainability in 11 key areas outlined in our “Notice Report” submitted to the HLC in June. The college made a strong case to be removed from our current sanction of “Notice,” a status that means the HLC sees the college at risk of falling out of compliance with accrediting standards.

It was significant for other reasons as well. It was a turning point where PCC demonstrated, without equivocation, that it is actively addressing problems and concerns, some of which date back a decade or more, and is fearlessly taking on problems as part of our new culture of continuous improvement.

Last month was not about revisiting the past, however. It was about putting PCC on secure footing with HLC standards and strengthening the college for the vital work of supporting our community.

Accreditation reviews usually happen every 10 years, but can happen more often if accreditors find areas of concern. The recent “focused visit” was to find evidence of effectiveness in 11 specific areas, including things like implementation of the 2014-17 Strategic Plan and ensuring that proper metrics are being used to address progress in student retention, persistence and completion.

Some of the areas, such as assessing student learning outcomes, were the reason the college was placed on probation in 2013. That sanction was reduced in March to “Notice.” Others, including, ensuring syllabi have proper and specific learning goals, and

ensuring consistency in review of dual learning courses and dual learning faculty training, were additional findings from a previous focused visit.

The good news is Pima Community College has addressed these issues.

The problems we faced were not created overnight and will not be resolved overnight, but PCC faculty, staff and administration have worked tirelessly over the last three years to move the college in the right direction.

It is important to note that Pima continues to be fully accredited. Credits for qualifying courses transfer to our state and other universities. Students who meet the requirements and are enrolled in qualifying programs of study may be eligible for federal aid.

Our community should be proud of the hard work of this college. We also should remember why this visit was important, not just for PCC, but for the region. As a leading educator for so-called “middle skills,” in demand by manufacturers and other technology and technical employers, PCC not only helps prepare our residents for high-growth, high-wage jobs but also fills critical skills gaps for our workforce. Further, our transfer programs give students a solid and affordable foundation toward a baccalaureate degree.

This is where PCC matters.

Proud to be an open-admissions college, we also have developed a laser-focus on student success. We have broadened our economic development role to include customized training for incumbent workers, career and educational pathways, and built key workforce partnerships.

Yet, in many ways, we are just getting started. PCC has set its sights on being a premier community college. It is what our diverse population of students, employers and region need and deserve.

We are grateful to our employees and community members who participated in the review team’s visit and to members of the community for ongoing support. We look forward to engaging you as we continue the good, hard work ahead.

Lee Lambert is chancellor of Pima Community College.

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