PRIORITY 1

Foster a culture of academic excellence by systematically strengthening the educational program and the quality of teaching that lead directly to greater student success.

STRATEGIES

1.1 Develop and implement a new educational master plan that focuses on enhancing the academic enterprise of the core campus.

1.2 Develop new programs that are responsive to student, industry, and four-year institution needs.

1.3 Develop, implement, and communicate a comprehensive matrix of sequential courses to satisfy transfer requirements.

1.4 Investigate the key factors associated with excellence in teaching and learning; identify a philosophy, implement an approach, and deploy a series of "best practices."

1.5 Advance the use of technology in instruction with a specific focus on improved student learning outcomes.

INTENDED OUTCOMES

• Students will be able to choose among a large number of high quality academic programs.

• Faculty members will have the means and motivation to enhance their teaching skills and positively impact student learning.

• Faculty members will be increasingly competent in the use of various technologies to advance the rate of student learning; students will be increasingly competent in the use of technology to access information and advance their own knowledge development.

• Business and industry will seek out our students because of the competencies they acquire at Los Angeles City College.

• Four-year institutions (and articulated programs) will seek out our students because the skills they acquire at Los Angeles City College guarantee their success at higher learning.

VITAL SIGNS

• Degree to which faculty, staff, and administrators believe the college is making progress in achieving a culture of academic excellence *(Campus Climate Survey)*.

• Percentage of students who choose to attend this college because of specific academic programs *(Student Survey)*.

• Number of new academic courses and programs offered (Curriculum Review Committee).

• Percentage of students that find "class teaching styles" to be an obstacle in reaching their educational goals *(Student Survey)*.

• Number of degrees and certificates awarded (Partnership for Excellence).

• Number of transfers to UC and CSU institutions (Partnership for Excellence).

• Percentage of faculty members who are satisfied with the "Access to adequate training about computers and technology necessary to do my job" *(Campus Climate Survey)*.

Traditionally, the topic of quality or excellence in higher education has often been seen as a transcendent phenomenon—that is, "we know it when we see it." Our first priority recognizes that such an attitude is no longer acceptable to society in general and to our many stakeholders. We don't have excellence in education just because we say we do. Instead, we must view quality or excellence as something that results from a series of actions that we take in our organizations. In a town meeting, one administrator said it well: "Educational excellence should be our focus, but we need to acknowledge that there is a whole bunch that goes into that. Saying it won't make it happen."

We also know that the idea of "educational excellence" has two dimensions: the academic program and individual instruction. This has been confirmed by our student survey data that show "specific education program(s)" and "reputation for good teaching" are key reasons that a student enrolls at Los Angeles City College.

The emphasis on academic programs is critical. But, again, "Saying it won't make it happen." Our institution has many excellent programs. Some, such as the Theatre Academy, Child Development, and City of Angels, are highly visible with strong reputations; others, such as Math, are bringing in major grants to develop new curricula and purchase leading-edge equipment; and still others, such as Dental Technology, have developed critical partnerships with prestigious four-year institutions and/or with industry. However, a staff member observed, "We have some wonderful programs, but they are isolated rather than integrated." So, our task is clear: to strengthen systematically the academic programs. We will need to do a better job of developing courses that combine theory and practice. They also need to link in a cohesive way such that graduates have the competencies necessary to compete in the marketplace or as they further their education.

Improving teaching—the individual act of instruction—is also a priority for us. The Little Hoover Commission's (an independent state oversight agency) recent report, "Open Doors and Open Minds: Improving Access and Quality in California's Community Colleges," concluded, "insufficient attention is given to the quality of teaching." We agree. As one faculty member said, "At the end of the day, the critical thing is when faculty members and students interact."

Each teacher must be able to set high expectations and articulate clear outcomes that engage students in active learning through a range of teaching methods. Faculty members are engaging students this way on our campus. "I had a French professor here that I will never forget in my life," said one student. "Instead of lecturing to us for a full class, she would tell us wonderful stories about French writers. A certain day she would speak about and read from a French poet who was born that day. She was unique." Should this be a unique anecdote? No it should not. Again, the issue is developing a methodology for systematically strengthening teaching . . . and learning. As one faculty member commented, "There is little institution-wide commitment to improving teaching. It is fragmented and isolated. There is no cohesive philosophy or expectation that drives improvement." As part of a broad intellectual revitalization effort, we need to celebrate good teaching; we need to commit to educating our educators; we need to embrace a method for doing what we say we will do in our vision statement . . . "educate minds."

Finally, we cannot ignore the role of technology. In the college's previous plan (1995-2001), we stated that "creating an electronic campus" was a key goal. We have accomplished that goal. Every member of the college community has access to a computer and the Internet. We have a state-of-the-art telephone system, e-mail, and a wide array of software in 36 computer labs. Indeed, more than 80% of our students "agree" or "strongly agree" with the statement, "Computers are available for use on campus when I need them" (LACC Student Survey, 2000). Now the challenge—both nationally and on our campus—has shifted. According to *Campus Computing 2001*, a national survey of computing and information technology in American higher education, "Assisting faculty efforts to integrate IT into instruction" is the single most important IT issue. Still, we need to be clear in our intentions. We do not aspire to be one of the "most wired" campuses in the country. Our priority is more in line with that of Yolanda Moses, the American Association for Higher Education's president. She recently put technology in what we believe is the appropriate context by asking the following question: "What is it that I want students to know, and how can technology be used to enhance that goal?"

> " At the end of the day, the critical thing is when faculty members and students interact. " — *FACULTY MEMBER*

PRIORITY 2

Maintain and enhance a safe, aesthetically pleasing campus environment that encourages involvement, nurtures community, and leads to student success.

STRATEGIES

2.1 Create a new facilities master plan that directs improvements over the next ten years.

2.2 Develop a series of plans: capital improvement plan, hazardous substance removal plan, ADA compliance plan, safety plan, and emergency plan.

2.3 Create opportunities for increased social interaction, especially food service, events, and college-wide gathering places.

2.4 Provide a cleaner work environment, especially in rest room areas.

INTENDED OUTCOMES

• Students and faculty members will spend more time on campus because they find it to be a secure and appealing place to eat, socialize, and exchange ideas.

• Community members will value Los Angeles City College both as an educational asset and as a safe, inviting place to visit for a wide range of events.

• Faculty, staff and students will develop a greater sense of community through more meaningful interactions.

VITAL SIGNS

• Degree to which faculty, staff, and administrators believe the college is making progress in achieving a safe, aesthetically pleasing campus environment that encourages involvement, community, and student success (*Campus Climate Survey*).

• Percentage of students who spend "no time" on campus outside of class/lab time (*Student Survey*).

• Percentage of students who are satisfied with campus facilities *(Student Survey).*

An oasis is first and foremost a place—a place that revives and provides sustenance. It is a refuge that is inviting. Our 48-acre campus dates back to the 1920s with many buildings having been built in the 1960s and 1970s and the most modern building having been constructed in 1981. The 15 years between then and the mid-1990s were not kind. With a huge backlog of capital construction at the state level and a trickle of scheduled maintenance dollars coming to the campus, the buildings and their surroundings slowly, inexorably deteriorated. The result was there for all of us—students, faculty, staff, and visitors—to see: cracked sidewalks, dingy classrooms, leaky roofs, and peeling paint. It was a tired-looking campus.

Through a consistent, committed effort on the part of many, the campus environment in the intervening years has yielded grudging but steady change. For example, while issues related to the physical environment such as "the cleanliness of your work environment" and "LACC's physical resources (e.g., facilities, equipment)" were least satisfying to the respondents in our *2001 Campus Climate Survey*, they were also the areas that showed the greatest overall improvement from the 1999 survey. Still, more work needs to be done.

" The real reason that the campus environment is so important is because it says something about whether we care. If you are striving for excellence it shows the pride that you have in your place of work." — *FACULTY MEM-*

The physical environment provoked a great deal of conversation in our town meetings. Our faculty, staff, and students expressed an array of concerns that focused on the incongruity between what we want to become and what we are now. "Appearance-wise, this place is anything but a sanctuary or a safe haven," observed a faculty member. Such observations included specific concerns over graffiti, trash, lighting, and the perimeter of the campus. "Appearances" are also a problem because they lead people to make inferences about the campus beyond simply that "we don't care." All of the college's crime statistics reinforce the notion that Los Angeles City College is a remarkably safe place, yet many people do not feel safe and secure here. Perception is their reality.

Another critical dimension of this priority involves not so much the facilities themselves but the effect that particular facilities can have on a community. Facilities can help us "celebrate community" by providing the space for us to socialize. Students in our town meetings talked about "places to hang out" while the faculty and staff used terms like "crystallization points." The bottom line, as one staff member pointed out, is, "We don't have very good mechanisms in place to come together and feel as though we are part of a larger whole." She went on to state, sadly, "For most people, there is no LACC. There are classes, sure, and there are offices and departments, but there is no sense of community."

Why is this sense of community so important to us? It actually goes beyond any sort of "feel good" reason. We understand that many of our students are not traditional college students. They are older. They have jobs and families. Still, we know that the research on learning is unequivocal: students who are actively involved in out-of-class activities gain more from their college experience than those who are not so involved. When asked the question, "Outside of class/lab time, how many hours a week do you spend on campus?," more than one-third of our students answer, "none" *(Student Survey, 2000)*. Six in ten "rarely or never" attend campus events (sports, music, theatre) or otherwise participate in student services, and an equal percentage "rarely or never" meet with instructors outside of class to discuss matters. A student wryly said, "If you want to hang out, you have to go across the street to Jack-in-the-Box."

It also needs to be stressed that this lack of community is not just a student problem. A faculty member said, "There is this us-versus-them mentality here. We need to become part of something larger than ourselves." Creating such an environment requires places where people –students, faculty, staff, students, community members—can meet and share ideas. Certainly an institution that is among the most diverse colleges in the country should create the space required to facilitate the social integration of diverse groups. Unfortunately, our campus does not bring us together. It either keeps us apart or unintentionally encourages us to hurry along to our next destination. That is not who we want to be or what we intend to become. That is not an oasis.

According to one staff member, "This campus needs a center where people can come together. If you have a place where people can get out of their context and are able to interact with others, you have the ability to create a sense of community." We now have reason to believe we can convert our intentions into reality. With the passage of Proposition A in April of 2001, the college has an initial down payment of $147 million to revitalize the infrastructure of the campus over the next eight years. It is an investment of both dollars and hope that we must convert into a new, dynamic learning environment for our community. It can be our legacy to a future generation of students.