



2007 Self Study Report

For continued accreditation with
the Higher Learning Commission
of the North Central Association
of Colleges and Schools





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John Stryker, Assistant Professor of Computer Technologies and Information Systems
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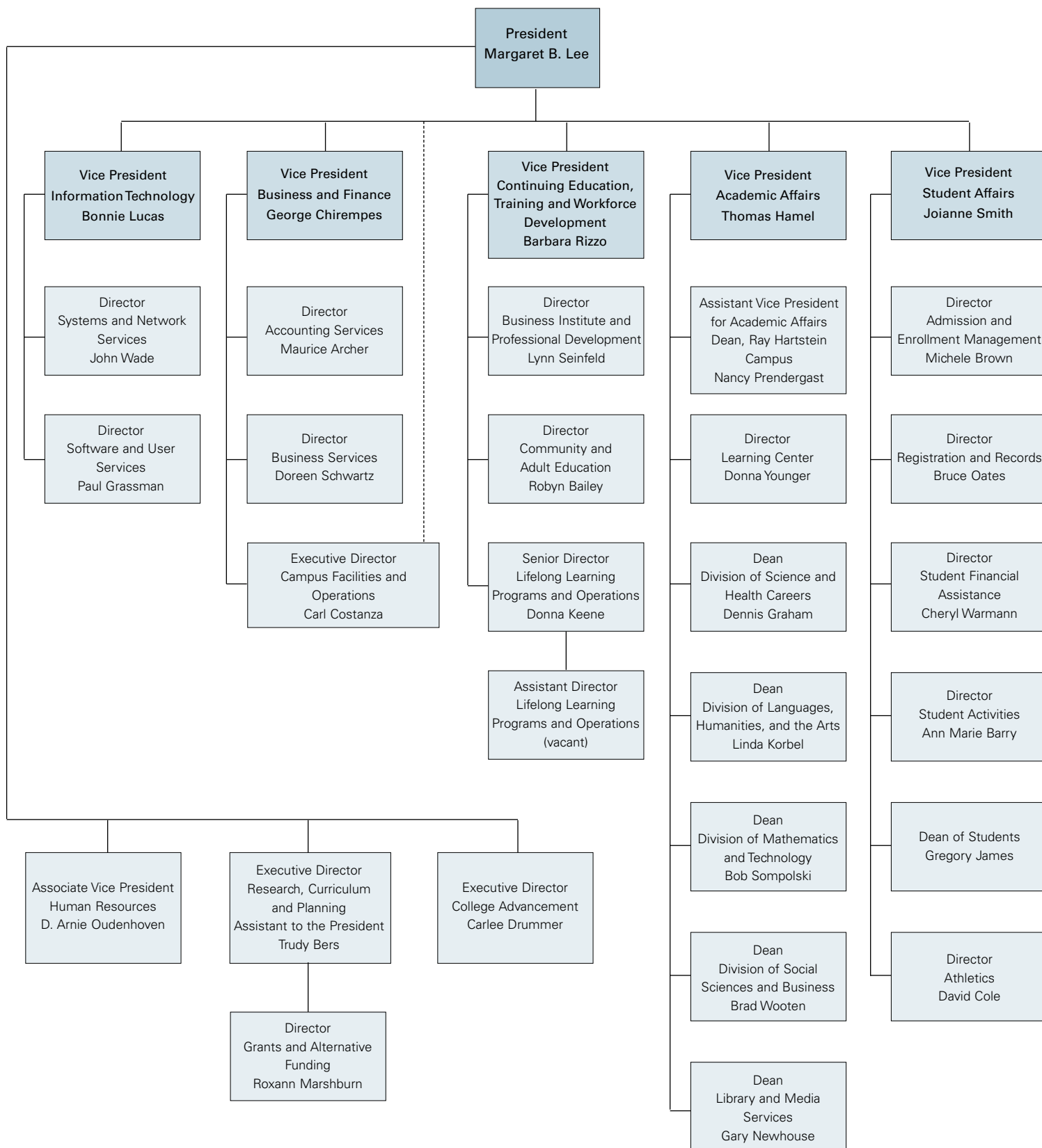
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Kevin West, Senior Administrative Assistant, Office of Registration and Records

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Organizational Chart



Introduction





Learning Matters

Self Study Report for Oakton Community College

It is a pleasure to share with you Oakton's self study, a comprehensive examination of how the College embodies our mission, vision, and values in practices and policies; engages in critical self-assessment of those practices and policies; and continues to improve efforts to be an exemplary community of learners.

Purpose of the Self Study

Oakton's self study serves a dual purpose. In part, the self study fulfills the Higher Learning Commission's (HLC) requirements for reaccreditation, showing how Oakton meets the five criteria for reaccreditation established by the HLC, and providing the visiting team with the comprehensive view of the College necessary for their evaluation in October 2007. Accreditation is essential; without it, students are not eligible for federal financial assistance; the credibility and portability of degrees, certificates, and transfer credits are compromised; and public regard for the College is diminished. The seriousness of its public purpose informed our approach to the self study. Another purpose of this intensive two-year research effort is to think carefully and critically about who we are and who we want to be as a public community college. The study presents an analysis of our strengths and resources, openly acknowledges areas for improvement, and recommends actions for moving Oakton into the future with a clear understanding of our capacity for sustaining excellence and meeting new challenges.

Recognition of Oakton's Excellence

Oakton is a leader among the nation's community colleges, evidenced by numerous awards and honors bestowed on individual members of the College community and by institution-wide recognitions received. We are especially proud of our selection by the *New York Times* as one of the nation's elite community colleges (April 22, 2007). The *Times* commends our writing-intensive Great Books curriculum; our new Global Studies Program; our undergraduate research experiences; our National Science Foundation grants to improve learning in science, math, engineering, and technology; and our Museum Studies program and the Koehline Museum of Art. Other honors include the BP Leader Award for habitat conservation, Innovation Awards from the Illinois Council of Community College Administrators, Certificates of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting from The Government Finance Officers Association (received annually since 1991 for the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report), and numerous Paragon Awards for outstanding achievements in communications from the National Council for Marketing and Public Relations, an affiliate Council of the American Association of Community Colleges.

Confident that Oakton is an excellent institution, we also realize that sustaining excellence requires constant vigilance and the courage to reflect on the quality of our programs and services, as well as make difficult decisions when necessary. We present this self study as part of a continuing process of building for the future on our past achievements.

Self Study Process

These two broad goals, fulfilling the requirements for reaccreditation and reflecting on the College's strengths and challenges, formed the basis for the self study. As we engaged in a comprehensive and sustained analysis of the College, we decided to involve a broad spectrum of people by developing a system for regular communication with the entire College and devising ways to involve everyone in the process of offering feedback.

Having a faculty-led self study has been a tradition at Oakton since our first provisional accreditation in 1972, and Oakton's self study began in Spring 2005 with the appointment of Thomas Bowen, Associate Professor of Philosophy, and Mary Johannesen-Schmidt, Assistant Professor of Psychology, as cochairs of the Self Study Steering Committee. Midway through the process, Professor Johannesen-Schmidt resigned her position as cochair for personal reasons, and Kathleen Carot, Associate Professor of Speech, Theater and Humanities and former cochair of the Criterion One Subcommittee, assumed her role as cochair. She, too, was relatively new to Oakton. By selecting relatively new faculty to head the self study, we recognized the

importance of being future-focused. During Spring and Summer 2005, the cochairs and Trudy Bers, Executive Director of Research, Curriculum and Strategic Planning, mapped out a tentative structure and timeline for completing the project. We formed a Steering Committee and subcommittees for each of the five HLC criteria. The Steering Committee included the self study cochairs and cochair of the Criterion subcommittees, as well as the Editor; Resource Room Coordinator; Executive Director of Institutional Research, Curriculum and Strategic Planning; representatives from the adjunct faculty and staff unions; and a student representative.

The President invited all employees of the College to express interest in serving on the Criterion subcommittees and then appointed subcommittee members, ensuring diverse representation on each from faculty, staff, and administrators; experienced and newer employees; experts regarding the particular criterion; and, when possible, representatives from each campus (Des Plaines and Skokie). The team adopted “Learning Matters” as the title of the self study to highlight the centrality of learning to both the College’s mission and the subject of the study itself.

The Self Study Steering Committee began meeting regularly in Fall 2005 to study the HLC’s Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality (PEAQ) criteria and core components, new since the College’s last self study in 1997. The self study then evolved through a four-phase process. In the first phase, Fall 2005, the Criterion subcommittees and Steering Committee interpreted their respective criteria in terms of Oakton’s mission, values, and history as a public community college, developing questions for reflection on the College in light of the criteria. The Steering Committee then discussed the Criterion subcommittee reports and determined the data and resources necessary for answering their questions.

During the second phase in Spring 2006, Criterion subcommittees compiled the data and analyses necessary for constructing the working papers for each Criterion. By the end of this period, each Criterion subcommittee submitted a basic outline of its working paper, while the Steering Committee continued to learn about the new criteria by examining self studies from other colleges and universities. For the third phase, Fall 2006, Criterion subcommittees prepared detailed working papers with evidence and analyses demonstrating how Oakton met the criteria. The Steering Committee discussed each working paper and suggested revisions to the subcommittees; the subcommittees then redrafted their working papers, taking into account the Steering Committee’s observations. These second drafts formed the basis for the cochairs and editor to begin crafting the self study report.

Finally, in the fourth phase, Spring 2007, the cochairs of the Steering Committee collected the final working papers submitted by the Criterion subcommittees and developed them into the first drafts of the present report. The cochairs distributed these drafts to the College in late Spring, allowing time for incorporation of comments from the community into the final version of the report.

Throughout, members of the Steering Committee remained in communication with the College community about the self study. During the first phases of the process, the Steering Committee cochairs made a series of presentations—to the Board of Trustees, faculty groups and committees (Divisions, departments, the Council of Chairs and Coordinators), staff groups, and the Board of Student Affairs (BSA)—outlining the HLC process, criteria for reaccreditation and Oakton’s plan for preparing the self study. They informed the community about the reaccreditation process as an opportunity to reflect on the College and build our future in constructive ways; let internal constituents know what to expect from the Steering Committee and the Criterion subcommittees; and elicited feedback by encouraging community participation in surveys and responses to subcommittee requests for information. A Web site and series of newsletters kept the College abreast of ongoing developments.

As the study progressed, Oakton decided to integrate our self-examination with the development of a new strategic plan, using the HLC’s Vital Focus process, and we discuss Vital



Focus, as well as several outcomes, later in this Introduction and the self study. Here we note that this integration of strategic planning, self study, and Vital Focus engaged many Oakton employees and students in identifying and addressing significant concerns at the College. The final self study report and our *Change Matters: 2008-2012 Strategic Plan* are complementary documents that resulted from candid and sometimes difficult discussions across the institution. By confronting serious issues, however, the College has become stronger internally and better positioned to move forward into the future.

Oakton in 2007: A Profile of the College

Oakton Community College, Illinois District 535, serves the 465,000 residents of Evanston, Northfield, Maine, New Trier, and Niles Townships, located in the near north and northwest suburbs of Chicago. Approximately 43,000 students enroll in Oakton's credit and noncredit courses each year, including both courses approved by the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) and personal interest courses that do not require state approval. Of the enrolled students, 15,400 take Oakton credit courses annually, with Fall term enrollments of just under 10,000. Many other individuals connect with Oakton by attending an array of special programs, athletic competitions, and cultural events, or by participating in activities sponsored by outside groups that lease Oakton's facilities. In total, Oakton touches the lives of more than 65,000 people each year.

District Demographics. The College is located in a well-developed geographical area that is home to 13 municipalities and numerous other local government agencies, including park districts, libraries, 29 elementary and high school districts, and five townships. No other agency encompasses the same geography as Oakton. Thus no political or natural way exists for community residents to view Oakton as a body with boundaries contiguous to other agencies with which they are familiar.

Oakton's financial base is diverse, with more than 25,000 businesses and nonprofit agencies across a wide spectrum of industries; there is no single industry on which employment in the district depends. With more than 400,000 jobs, the district has substantial numbers of employees in service, financial, health care, and related occupations. Recent studies point to a significant increase in health care jobs and a continuing decline in manufacturing-related positions. Unemployment remains low, below 5 percent.

A stable, primarily well-educated and upper middle class population resides in the district. The most recent census figures from 2000 show a median household income of \$72,000, considerably larger than the median income in the rest of Illinois (\$46,600) or the United States (\$42,000). The following statistics detail the district's population in terms of education, race and ethnicity, and income levels:

- 49 percent of residents age 25 or older hold a bachelor's degree or higher, twice the national average.
- 79 percent of residents are white (including white Hispanic), 10 percent are Asian, 5 percent are African American, and 10 percent are Hispanic of any race.
- 24 percent of district residents are foreign-born.
- 29 percent of district residents live in a household in which English is not the native language, and several high schools have documented that more than 50 different languages are spoken by their students.
- The median income for the district is \$72,000, though median income varies considerably in the poorest and richest townships in our district. For example, Evanston Township has a median income of \$55,000, and New Trier Township has a median income of \$122,000.

Considering Oakton's future role as the community's college, it is important to note that, as the population gets younger, it becomes increasingly diverse. A 2005 breakdown of the district's

K-12 population indicates 67 percent white, 15 percent Asian, 9 percent Hispanic, 8 percent African American, and 1 percent multiracial. This same study reveals that 15 percent of K-12 students are eligible for free or reduced price lunches, an indicator of poverty. However, in wealthy areas such as Northbrook, Kenilworth, and Park Ridge, almost no students are eligible, while in the poorest communities the rate is 35-40 percent. There is also considerable variance in the percentage of recent immigrants among townships; in one, 29 percent of residents are foreign-born, and in another only 10 percent are foreign-born. These data hide even greater diversity within the district; for example, many residents are from Eastern Europe but are counted, accurately, as white. The diversity within Oakton's district requires the College to develop a wide range of academic programs and services to meet constituents' needs, as we describe later in the study.

Student Demographics. Statistics from Fall 2006 indicate that Oakton serves a diverse student population:

- 54 percent were female.
- 49 percent were less than 23 years old, 10 percent were ages 23 to 34, 26 percent were 35 to 39, and 15 percent were 40 or older.
- 49 percent of Oakton students were white, 18 percent were Asian, 8 percent were Hispanic, 5 percent were African American, and the remaining 20 percent were either multiracial or preferred not to indicate their race/ethnicity.

These students enroll at Oakton for a variety of purposes. Forty percent are in transfer programs, a third are in career and technical education (CTE) programs, and the rest are undecided. However, students are not always clear about the distinction between transfer and CTE programs, particularly in fields such as business. For example, a student who wants to earn a baccalaureate degree in marketing may indicate a marketing major at Oakton, though our marketing program falls into the CTE domain, and the A.A.S. does not transfer to baccalaureate colleges of business.

The Campuses. Oakton offers the majority of programs and services at one of our two comprehensive campuses. The Des Plaines campus is located on 170 acres of land between the Des Plaines River and a county forest preserve on the far western edge of the district. The Skokie, or Ray Hartstein Campus, named in honor of the College's founding Board chairman, is on 21 acres near downtown Skokie, in the eastern part of the district.



Each of the two comprehensive campuses has a unique identity. The Des Plaines campus sits in the middle of a forest preserve, surrounded by natural beauty. The Skokie campus is on a main thoroughfare surrounded by condominiums, single family homes, and small businesses; it has a new 59,000-square-foot addition. While the two campuses share strengths and challenges, each also has faced unique issues in recent years. Des Plaines, often considered the "main" campus, houses most College employees, and 75 percent of students in credit programs attend classes there. Employees at the Skokie campus feel a sense of community and mutual support that many believe grow out of its smaller size and occasional sense of being in the shadow of Des Plaines. The Skokie campus, particularly with the new addition, has the most capacity for enrollment growth; building enrollments and determining the appropriate and optimal use of this campus are challenges facing Oakton that we discuss later in the self study.

While an identifying concept for Oakton over the years was "one college, two campuses," recent developments require us to think in terms of "one college, *four* campuses," an issue addressed in *Change Matters*. One of these additional "campuses" is electronic, the distance

learning and asynchronous courses now offered online, discussed extensively in Criteria Two and Three. The College's other new campus is represented by the Continuing Education, Training and Workforce Development programs delivered through two primary units, the Alliance for Lifelong Learning and the Business Institute. Oakton, historically an Illinois leader in adult and continuing education, has a noncredit program that serves at least 36,000 people annually, 26,000 in noncredit courses and workshops and at least 10,000 more in community service offerings. Through a unique partnership with all but one of the local high school districts and other community groups, the Alliance currently offers courses at more than 200 locations, our fourth campus "in your neighborhood."

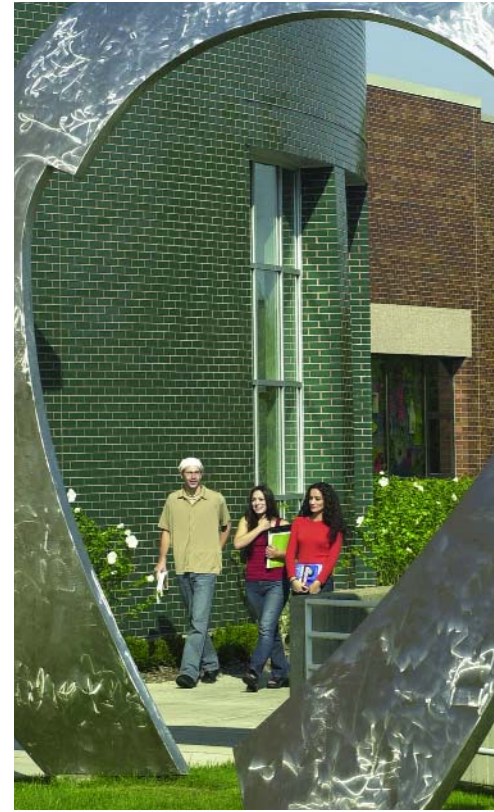
Programs and Services. Dedication to quality and innovation characterizes the entire scope of Oakton's credit course offerings and programs. The College's 21 baccalaureate departments offer associate degrees in liberal arts (A.A.), science (A.S.), engineering (A.S.E.), art or music (A.F.A.), and education (A.A.T.). In addition, more than 100 certificates are available through 36 career programs. Oakton participates in the Illinois Articulation Initiative (IAI), an agreement among Illinois public and private colleges and universities to identify freshman and sophomore level courses in a number of majors and honor a general education core curriculum. To facilitate ease of transfer for interested students, Oakton has negotiated articulation, 2+2, and dual admission agreements with 23 four-year institutions.

Employees. Oakton's many programs and services are developed and maintained by a dedicated and increasingly diverse workforce comprised of 493 full-time employees, including 31 administrators, 154 full-time faculty, 310 staff and classified staff, and other personnel. The College also employs more than 550 part-time faculty teaching credit courses and 123 part-time staff. The Alliance employs several hundred additional part-time instructors. After ongoing efforts to increase the diversity of our employees, the College's workforce, not including Alliance instructors, is now 7 percent African American, 5 percent Hispanic, 8 percent Asian, and 80 percent white. Gender equity has long been a hallmark of Oakton's workforce, and currently 63 percent of all employees and 56 percent of administrators and managers are women.

A Brief History of the College and Accreditation

Oakton was established by a referendum conducted in 1969 and opened to students in Fall 1970. Initially, the College was located in several converted factory buildings, but, after an extensive search, in the mid-1970s Oakton acquired 170 acres of land between the Des Plaines River and a county forest preserve on the far western edge of the district. A new campus was built and occupied in 1980; two major additions have been built since then. Also in 1980, the College leased, and subsequently purchased, Niles East High School in Skokie, in the eastern part of the district. The old high school was demolished and a new facility was opened in 1995; the abovementioned addition to the Skokie campus opened in 2005.

The College received provisional accreditation from the North Central Association of Colleges and Universities in 1972. The first North Central accreditation visit took place in Fall 1975; at that time, the team recommended initial accreditation for five years. In Spring 1981, the second visit took place, with accreditation recommended for seven years. The 1987 team subsequently recommended accreditation for the maximum period of 10 years. In 1997 the College conducted a special emphasis self study, combining a standard self study with a special emphasis study of technology at Oakton. The 1997 site visit team also recommended a full 10-year accreditation, with no focus visits required, though Oakton was asked to submit reports on strategic planning, assessment, and general education in certificates of substantial length. The HLC staff accepted the reports submitted in May 1999 and stated in a September 3, 1999, report that "No further reports are required."



Change Since our Last Site Visit

To a great extent, Oakton's story over the past 10 years can be summed up in one word: change. Because of various complex internal and external factors, Oakton is not the same institution that it was in 1997. As the self study process evolved, our institution's response to change emerged as a major theme. While "Learning Matters" was our motto at the beginning of the self study, midway through, "Change Matters" emerged as a second, complementary motif. We realized the College needed to acknowledge the stress induced by substantial changes and, in line with our mission, embrace change as an ongoing dynamic that needs managing if we are to sustain existing strengths and build a stronger future. Below we consider several changes the institution has experienced in the last 10 years. We discuss challenges associated with these changes and our responses to them throughout the self study.



Employee Turnover. Probably the most significant change at Oakton during the past 10 years is in the workforce. Throughout most of our history, Oakton experienced remarkable retention among faculty, staff, and administration. As a result, the institutional culture of the first 25 years was characterized by long-time friendships that flourished across the institution, collegial relationships among employee groups, and an informal but collaborative and mission-driven leadership and decision-making style.

Indeed, in their 1997 Report, the HLC Visiting Team noted that "[o]ne of the strengths of Oakton is the shared governance of the institution. Demonstrated through both policy and by anecdotal example, faculty is involved in the day-to-day operations of the organization. Because of this involvement, faculty is pleased with the relationship established with the administration." They also observed that "there appears to be positive communication between administrators and classified staff, and representatives from the classified staff association reported a high level of job satisfaction."

By the late 1990s, a majority of the College's full-time employees had been at the institution since the beginning and were nearing retirement age. At the same time, the state permitted colleges to create incentives to encourage early retirements among veteran employees. Many Oakton employees opted to take advantage of the College's incentives, and in 1998 the first wave of retirements began. Over the next seven years, the College lost many long-time staff, more than half the full-time faculty, and almost all administrators, many of whom were founding members of the College and who had, in large part, created our institutional culture. The College anticipated the challenges such personnel changes presented and noted in the 1997 self study that "the full-time faculty is aging (gracefully, of course). Now, for the first time in the history of the College, faculty members are beginning to retire in noticeable numbers," and, "[w]hile the College looks forward to the infusion of new blood and new ideas, the loss of so many colleagues who have filled important leadership roles is a matter of concern." During the early years of this transition, Oakton took steps to integrate new faculty and administrators into the institution and pass on Oakton's heritage. A new faculty orientation seminar was instituted in the late 1990s, as well as a series of brown bag lunches between faculty and administrators.

Although Oakton prepared for the changes brought about by employee turnover, unanticipated challenges emerged. Many in the College community assumed that new employees would make Oakton their home and settle in for long careers, maintaining the stability enjoyed

for the first 25 years. However, the College did not experience the same level of retention with several administrative hires, making turnover a continuing challenge in some areas. Building relationships is at the heart of many issues related to communication and collaboration discussed later in this document.

Changing Student Body. In addition to changes in personnel, changes in the student population have also stretched College resources. Oakton has many students for whom English is a second language; generation 1.5 students who, though fluent in spoken English, need remedial assistance in writing; students who are underprepared in composition, reading, and, especially, mathematics; students whose religious practices require an adjustment of schedules and classroom practices; and growing numbers of students with disabilities and psychosocial issues that demand special help, new forms of pedagogy, and different classroom management styles. The diversity of this changing student body poses new challenges for Oakton, even as it enriches the College.

Changing Economic Environment. A third area of change has been funding. One significant development, beginning in 2004, was a change in the state funding formula for credit hour grants. Among the recommendations of the Illinois Community College System Funding Study Task Force was a proposal to change how credit hours were funded throughout the state. In addition to keeping the previous categories of “reimbursable” and “non-reimbursable,” two crossing categories of “unrestricted” and “restricted” were added. Restricted credit hours are those for which the funding source for the costs of the class/credit hours is based on restricted purpose (grant) dollars as opposed to unrestricted (College) dollars. Classes formerly funded at the 50 percent or greater level by restricted funds became ineligible for credit hour grant funding. At Oakton, this new funding rule affected primarily adult basic and secondary education classes, GED classes, and similar programs. This change resulted in a loss of 29,791 total credit hours, or 13 percent of credit hours, for a net loss of \$442,000 in FY04. Other reductions in state funding, including the loss of advanced technology grants, together with the local property tax cap, have had a significant negative impact on the College’s revenues.

Enrollments. Oakton is in a geographical area with virtually no population growth or room for residential expansion, flat K-12 enrollments, numerous providers of credit and noncredit courses and continuing education, a highly educated population, and high schools and parents who have high aspirations for their students to attend four-year institutions. In addition, the implosion of the technology industry in the early years of this century and resulting decline in computer and related jobs have substantially reduced demand for courses in computer technology, a field once thought to have unlimited growth potential. The combination of these factors has made it difficult for Oakton to increase enrollments. The 59,000-square-foot Art, Science, and Technology Pavilion at the Skokie campus is not yet fully utilized, and building enrollments in Skokie while sustaining them in Des Plaines has been a source of concern for Oakton, especially since revenues from both state reimbursements and tuition and fees are based on enrollment.

Distance Learning. Oakton has experienced substantial growth in distance learning, particularly online courses. The College now has more than 700 enrollments in online courses, and a number of Summer 2007 online courses filled to capacity almost immediately after registration opened. This expansion has taken place largely through faculty interest in teaching online courses rather than through a College-wide, comprehensive discussion of issues associated with distance education, including how much growth to support, criteria for selecting online course offerings and faculty to teach them, and whether to offer entire degrees online. We recognize the need to develop a comprehensive plan for our electronic campus.



Change Matters

Our 1998 *Vision, Mission and Values* statement acknowledged that we were a changing community and that education must always be for the future. As noted above, our last self study report from 1997 anticipated changes for Oakton in the years ahead, especially the increasing number of retirements of long-time faculty and administrators and the hiring of new, younger faculty. While Oakton has been engaged in negotiating the challenges associated with rapid institutional, economic, and environmental changes, in the early phase of the self study several areas of concern emerged: collaboration among faculty, staff, and administrators; communication across departments; and questions about the strategic plan, specifically a sense that the plan did not offer sufficient guidance for establishing priorities or articulate measurable objectives for gauging progress in accomplishing College goals.

The College has begun to address these concerns. In Fall 2005, the President called for proposals suggesting new strategic initiatives and directions for the College. She then conducted a series of town hall meetings to listen to employees' concerns and discuss issues related to planning, and her actions were successful, insofar as difficult issues were openly addressed, and new initiatives emerged.

In February 2006, the cochairs of the Self Study Steering Committee, the Executive Director of Institutional Research, Curriculum and Strategic Planning, and the acting Vice President for Academic Affairs attended the HLC workshop on Vital Focus. While Vital Focus was originally designed to work with the HLC's Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP), the group talked with HLC representatives about adapting Vital Focus as a vehicle to engage Oakton employees in a new strategic planning effort by fostering College-wide discussion of planning issues. They then submitted a proposal to the President, who endorsed the move forward and accelerated the timetable for the College's next strategic plan so that Oakton could work on the new plan in conjunction with the self study. The Board of Trustees approved a

budget for Vital Focus in April 2006. By committing to an intensive project involving substantial resources, as well as closing the College for regular business to host an all-employee conversation, the Board and the President signaled Oakton's readiness to confront challenges and maintain our core values as we began consciously orienting the College toward the future.

Vital Focus is a rich process designed to engage all employees and student representatives in structured conversations about what matters most at the College, how the institution is performing, and what projects can best advance the College in meeting its goals. Full descriptions of the process and its two major elements, the Constellation Survey and Conversation Day, are available from the Commission, as well as in the Resource Room. The Constellation Survey replaced an institutionally-developed employee survey that had originally been planned as part of the self study. Oakton enhanced the Vital Focus process by involving students in five conversations featuring the same general questions discussed by employees at Conversation Day. Vital Focus, and especially Conversation Day, served as critical instruments for the self study, not only for institutional learning, but also for maintaining and strengthening the shared sense of mission and values that sustains our College community. In short, Vital Focus reinvigorated a sense of connectedness between employees and between employees and the institution.

Furthering the work of the self study, the basic goal of Vital Focus for Oakton was to initiate a new strategic planning process and produce a new strategic plan by Spring 2007. The Vital Focus committees, guided by principles of openness, collaboration, and accountability, included representatives from full- and part-time faculty, staff, administrators, and, for the 2012 Team, students. Using Share, the College's internal shared document file, the 2012 Team disseminated numerous documents related to strategic planning to all employees, including draft goals and objectives. The ultimate outcome of the process—Oakton's new strategic plan—was collaboratively developed and included measurable goals and objectives for accountability, as well as a detailed implementation process that identified leaders for each objective and assigned either existing or new committees and task forces with the primary responsibility for meeting goals.

Three committees were established to carry out the work of Vital Focus: a Vital Focus Planning Committee, the 2012 Team, and the Quick Fix Team. The Vital Focus Planning Committee organized Conversation Day and encouraged participation in both the Constellation Survey and Conversation Day. The 2012 Team, appointed by the President, developed the College's new strategic plan and implementation process, informed by data from Vital Focus and other discussion and planning activities. This Team, cochaired by the president of the faculty senate and the Vice President for Academic Affairs, included representatives from the full- and part-time faculty, staff, students, and administration. The third committee was the Quick Fix Team, also appointed by the President. This Team, cochaired by the Director of Facilities and a classified staff member, reviewed quick fix ideas generated at Conversation Day and determined which ones to implement.

The work of the 2012 Team was predicated on four principles: to be inclusive of the entire community, to communicate clearly and frequently, to use data to inform decisions, and to formulate new goals and measurable objectives. The Team sought feedback on its proposals by posting draft documents, convening town meetings, and presenting at faculty division meetings; community feedback was instrumental in shaping the final strategic plan. The presence of the President and Vice Presidents on the 2012 Team enabled College leaders from various divisions and offices to work together on the next strategic plan and its implementation. Even more important, the open process demonstrated that the College took seriously concerns expressed earlier about inadequate collaboration, communication, and inclusiveness and could change its way of doing business to embrace these crucial attributes.



Response to Concerns of the 1997 Visiting Team

Concerns raised by the 1997 visiting team prompted College action and resolution:

Concern 1:

The Board policy manual needs to be updated and streamlined to separate procedures for policy.

Response:

The revision and separation of policies and procedures has been completed. Because of compliance requirements and changes in contracts, the College continues to systematically review and revise policies, which are then sent to the Board of Trustees for approval. Revisions in procedures are conducted and completed by the appropriate units at the College.

Concern 2:

There is a lack of any consistent general education requirements in one-year certificate degree programs. All degree programs must include general education.

Response:

At the time of the last visit, the HLC expected all certificates of one year or more to include general education. The College submitted a report to the Commission in May 1999, indicating the importance of general education in all programs requiring 45 or more credit hours. The Commission accepted this report and, based on a September 3, 1999, staff analysis, affirmed the concern had been addressed. Oakton currently incorporates general education into all degree programs; in transfer curricula the general education requirement conforms to the Illinois Articulation Initiative general education core component; and, in career and technical education programs, a minimum of 18 credits is required in general education.

Concern 3:

The diversity of the College's employees does not match the rich diversity of its student body. Efforts should continue to recruit qualified ethnic and minority staff and faculty.

Response:

In response to this concern and consistent with our statement of *Vision, Mission and Values*, Oakton has a public and comprehensive Affirmative Action Plan that undergirds our Diversity Initiative. The plan, developed by the Office of Human Resources, lays out a set of policies and procedures designed to attract a more diverse pool of job applicants for positions at the College while ensuring "affirmative steps to improve minority representation." The Associate Vice President for Human Resources serves as the College's Affirmative Action Officer. The College's ultimate goal is, as the 1997 visiting team recommended, to recruit a workforce that reflects the rich diversity of our student population. We discuss the activities, programs, workshops, and seminars developed to further this project in Criterion One. As a result of these efforts, the current percentage of underrepresented groups among all employees at the College is 20 percent, a significant increase from 1995 when only 11 percent of our workforce came from these groups. Work remains to be done, and we are making special efforts to increase the percentage of Asians, Hispanics, and African Americans in our workforce. While Asians and Hispanics are the fastest growing segments of the population in both our district and in our student body, African Americans, particularly in Evanston, are also underserved. We will continue efforts to increase percentages from all underrepresented groups in all employee categories to create more role models for students.

Concern 4:

While the College has in place most components of an excellent Student Outcomes Assessment Plan, the criteria and methodology for measuring learning outcomes need to be fully documented and updated. In addition, while there is evidence that implementation of the Student Outcomes Assessment has been in place in some areas of the College, documentation of those processes and results needs to occur in a systematic way throughout all programs.

Response:

The College has made substantial progress in addressing this concern. As noted in Criterion Three, a faculty coordinator with 12 credits of alternate time now has major responsibility for leading the assessment initiative. She is working with a Student Academic Assessment Team (SAAT) that provides advice and support to her and that is beginning to champion assessment across the College. An annual calendar for assessment, including dates by which plans for assessment and subsequent results and reports of changes made to address weaknesses, is in place. Online forms for submitting both assessment plans and results were launched in 2006. A variety of approaches has been used to assess student learning outcomes for general education objectives. Course syllabi are required to specify learning objectives (outcomes students are expected to demonstrate after successful completion of the course). Career and technical education programs are revising and more clearly stating program-level learning objectives. Although work remains to be completed with a few, nearly all departments participate in assessment. The College's commitment to assessment is reflected in *Change Matters*, the 2008-2012 strategic plan, with this objective: "We will...advance the culture of assessment as integral to the transformation of the teaching-learning process." To this end, in FY08 a separate budget to support assessment will be created, with an additional \$25,000 beyond operating funds made available.

Concern 5:

While a strategic planning process involving both internal and external established groups has recently begun and some planning has occurred, a current written strategic plan for the College does not exist.

Response:

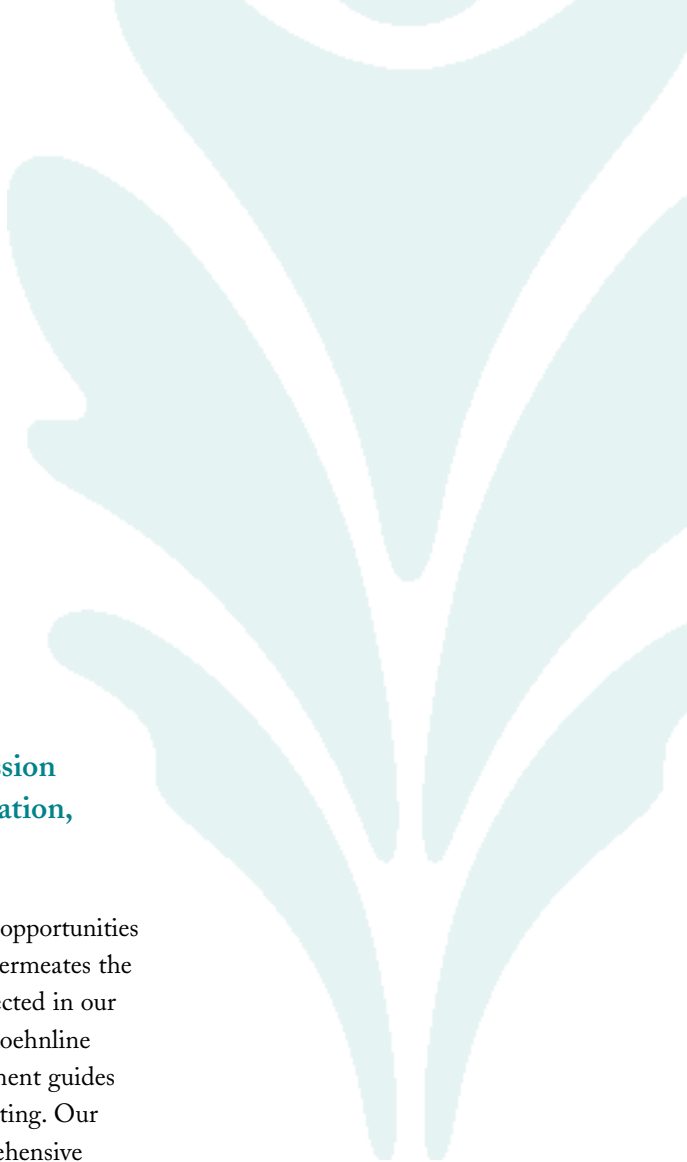
Oakton developed a three-year strategic plan shortly after the last reaccreditation visit and has maintained a focus on strategic planning since that time. The College has written strategic plans for 1999-2002, 2003-2008, and, most recently, 2008-2012. Criterion Two provides ample evidence that Oakton has not only addressed the concerns raised in the 1997 site visit report regarding the absence of a written strategic plan, but also has made the process by which we create our plan part of our institutional culture.

Organization of Self Study Report

We have organized Oakton's self study report around the Higher Learning Commission's five criteria for accreditation and the core components within them, with each Criterion considered in a separate chapter. Criterion chapters are followed by a chapter that contains conclusions and a request for continued accreditation, a chapter on federal compliance, and a glossary.

Criterion One:
Mission and Integrity





Oakton operates with integrity to ensure the fulfillment of our mission through structures and processes that involve the board, administration, faculty, staff and students.

The mission of Oakton Community College is to provide high quality learning opportunities for students and service to our community. The mission motivates our work and permeates the conversations heard in our boardroom, meeting rooms, offices, and hallways. Reflected in our classrooms, libraries, learning centers, gymnasium, Business Conference Center, Koehnline Museum of Art, and Performing Arts Center, the *Vision, Mission and Values* statement guides hiring, policy, and programming decisions, as well as strategic planning and budgeting. Our mission is carried out with consistency and dedication at the College's two comprehensive campuses, at numerous satellite locations, and in our distance learning courses.

In Criterion One we consider how this deeply embedded commitment permeates our institution's culture, how the Oakton community recognizes and understands our mission documents, and how our strategic, operational, and administrative processes support the mission. In Core Component A, we analyze Oakton's mission documents and evaluate how successfully they articulate our mission. In Core Component B, we address concerns regarding diversity raised by the visiting team after our 1997 reaccreditation through an evaluation of our mission documents, institutional structures, and operational processes. In Core Component C, we examine how well students and other stakeholders believe we live up to our mission. In Core Component D, we note challenges Oakton has encountered with respect to governance and discuss how we have responded to these challenges. Finally, in Core Component E, we focus on our integrity as an institution, providing evidence that Oakton acts responsibly and ethically in relation to students and other constituencies.

Core Component 1A: Oakton's mission documents are clear and articulate publicly the organization's commitments.

Oakton's formal mission documents include our *Vision, Mission and Values* (VMV), our statement of *Educational Programs and Services*, and our strategic plans. This section first examines how well our *Vision, Mission and Values* and *Educational Programs and Services* statements articulate Oakton's core mission and educational philosophy and then illustrates the wide availability of our mission documents. In Criterion Two we evaluate how strategic planning processes express our mission.

Vision, Mission and Values

Oakton's original mission statement, developed in 1969 when the College was founded, affirmed a commitment "to serve the post-secondary educational needs of our residents." In 1998, we began revising our mission document by drafting a new strategic plan. The President hosted a planning retreat, attended by 60 people representing all employee groups and students. Retreat participants identified key trends of major significance for the College and developed a list of possible core values to inform the creation of a new mission and values statement. Subsequently, two ad hoc committees drafted the *1999-2002 Strategic Plan* and the new mission and values statement. After consulting with campus groups and colleagues from across the state, the mission and values committee presented the current document to the College community. The Board of Trustees formally ratified Oakton's *Vision, Mission and Values* on October 20, 1998, and reaffirmed them on October 15, 2002 (see Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1

Vision, Mission and Values

We are the community's college.
We are dedicated, first, to excellence in teaching and learning.
We challenge our students to experience the hard work and satisfaction of learning that leads to intellectual growth, and we support them academically, emotionally, and socially.
We encourage them to entertain and question ideas, think critically, solve problems, and engage with other cultures, with one another and with us.
We expect our students to assume responsibility for their own learning, to exercise leadership and to apply ethical principles in their academic, work, and personal lives.
We demand from ourselves and our students tolerance, fairness, responsibility, compassion, and integrity.

We are a community of learners.
We provide education and training for and throughout a lifetime.
We seek to improve and expand the services we offer in support of the people in the communities we serve.
We promote a caring community of staff and faculty members, students, administrators, and trustees who, in keeping with our values, work together to fulfill our mission.

We are a changing community.
We recognize that change is inevitable and that education must be for the future.
We respond to change informed by our values and our responsibility to our students and our communities.
We challenge our students to be capable global citizens, guided by knowledge and ethical principles, who will shape the future.

Ratified by the Board of Trustees, October 20, 1998

We are the Community's College

Oakton's core mission is expressed in the recognition of our role as the community's college, and we commit ourselves to providing programs and services that help members of our community pursue their educational endeavors and goals. Oakton's *Statement of Educational Programs and Services* depicts our educational offerings (see Figure 1.2).

Table 1.1 shows credit hours taught in all Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) approved courses for FY06 (Summer 2005 through Spring 2006), including credits taught in both Oakton and Alliance for Lifelong Learning courses. The data demonstrate the range of offerings at the College and the dominance of baccalaureate transfer disciplines as measured by credits taken.

Table 1.1

Classification of course	Credit Hours for ICCB approved Courses FY06			
	Oakton	Alliance	Credit Hours	Pct. Credit Hours
Baccalaureate/transfer	126,942	0	126,942	53%
Occupational/technical	35,754	0	35,754	15%
Remedial education	17,591	933	18,524	8%
Vocational skills	128	19,548	19,676	8%
Adult Basic Education	0	8,003	8,003	3%
Adult Secondary Education	0	3,546	3,546	1%
English as a Second Language	1,876	27,040	28,916	12%
Total	182,291	59,070	241,361	100%

With respect to students “we are dedicated, first, to excellence in teaching and learning.” This dedication is built on a student-centered concept of education, where we encourage students to learn through critical examination of material, engagement with other cultures, and collaboration with professors and other students. Further, we expect students to take an active role in their own education by assuming responsibility for learning, as well as exercising leadership at Oakton and in local, national, and global communities. The College also recognizes the importance of providing sufficient support for students academically, emotionally, and socially, a commitment we examine in Criterion Three. Finally, our core values of tolerance, fairness, responsibility, compassion, and integrity are integral to a civil society.

We are a Community of Learners

In a community of learners, education takes place both within traditional classrooms and in co- and extracurricular programming, and we commit ourselves to providing “education and training for and throughout a lifetime.” This commitment extends to both employees and external constituencies, as demonstrated in Criteria Three and Five. Oakton's Alliance for Lifelong Learning, discussed in Criterion Five, is our primary vehicle for service to external communities but is by no means the only one. Several other offices and programs, including College Advancement, Career Services, the Performing Arts Center, and the Koehnline Museum of Art offer extensive outreach to the communities we serve.

Throughout this self study we examine our commitments to student learning and to external constituencies. However, no discussion of Oakton's institutional culture would be complete without mentioning how we live our mission as “a caring community of staff and faculty members, students, administrators, and trustees.” Oakton employees know that in times of personal or familial crisis there is no better place to work. This sense of community extended to coworkers

Figure 1.2

Statement of Educational Programs and Services

In accordance with the Illinois Community College Act, Oakton provides, at minimum, the following educational programs and services:

- Baccalaureate and general education for students planning to transfer to four-year colleges and/or to earn an associate degree in liberal arts, science, engineering, or fine arts.
- Occupational education to provide students with career training suitable for obtaining employment or enhancing occupational skills.
- General or developmental studies for students requiring additional preparation before they can begin college-level education.
- Continuing education for residents, employers, and employees, and employees of the community desiring classes without having to enroll in formal college-level courses.
- Public service activities to meet specialized needs of the community; such activities may include workshops, seminars, and customized employee training programs offered on or off campus.
- Student services, such as counseling and advisement, testing and tutoring.



is also reflected in how we care for students and those in need, and in the ways students reach out to others. A wealth of anecdotal evidence supports this, such as the hundreds of fundraising efforts through book, food, and clothing drives sponsored by students and employees, as well as the meal deliveries and visiting schedules that arise spontaneously whenever a colleague is seriously ill or in need. Here we examine several initiatives demonstrating the mission of service to others that characterizes Oakton.

The Oakton Educational Foundation administers several initiatives that have emerged spontaneously from the Oakton community. For instance, in recent years, Oakton experienced the sudden deaths of two highly esteemed faculty members. Responding to these losses, colleagues

formed the Dr. Mark Walter and Dr. J. Dawn Mercedes Memorial Scholarship Funds, two among nine new scholarship endowments created during 2005. Two other funds honor long-time nursing instructors: the newly established Barbara Steffey Memorial Scholarship, established by family and friends; and the Marilou Wasseluk Scholarship Fund, sponsored by Oakton's Student Nursing Association. Another initiative, Fund 35, was founded by a long-time employee in honor of her 35 years of service to the College. This Fund, targeted specifically to Oakton employees in need, has already provided valuable assistance to employees and their families facing illness, loss of their homes, and other catastrophic circumstances.

The values of compassion and responsibility that connect members of our community also inform our responses to the needs of others. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Oakton mobilized to assist the victims by organizing several fundraisers, including a concert supporting colleges in the New Orleans area and a student art and photography sale. Oakton's coordinator of student activities also drove a truck loaded with supplies collected at the College to Jackson, Mississippi. In Spring 2006, many students took a personal role in aiding the victims when members of Oakton's Students for Social Justice club and the Honors Program traveled to Mississippi and New Orleans to help rebuild after the storm. Another group of students again traveled to New Orleans over their spring break in 2007. These activities, as well as the Board of Student Affairs' decisions to create a scholarship and book fund for Oakton students and to support care for their children in Oakton's Early Child Development Centers, exemplify students' generosity and connectedness to others.

We are a Changing Community

A distinctive feature of Oakton's mission is our affirmation that "change is inevitable and education must be for the future." Oakton examines our resources and capacities, learns from internal and external constituents, and develops plans for the future built on the core traditions and values that define our institution. We acknowledge the importance of equipping students with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to live and work in a diverse, technological, and global society that is continually changing. In Criteria Two, Three, and Four we detail how Oakton focuses on the future and prepares students to negotiate the challenges of a global society.

Communicating our *Vision, Mission and Values*

We communicate our *VMV* in many ways. The statement is prominently placed in numerous public documents, including the College catalog and Web site, the Educational Foundation's *Annual Report*, the President's *Annual Report to the Community*, the Board of Trustees' monthly agenda book, strategic plans, the Oakton class schedule, the *Student Handbook*, the Affirmative Action Plan, and annual budgets. We display enlarged, framed copies in College hallways, outside the President's office, and in other public spaces. Periodically the *VMV* is read aloud at Board of Trustees meetings.



Summary of Core Component 1A

Oakton's mission documents clearly express the College's commitment to provide excellent teaching and learning opportunities and service to both internal and external constituencies. Oakton's creation of a statement in which the mission, vision, and values are inextricably linked has resulted in a document as unique and complex as the institution it represents. While it may be difficult to extract a single, concise statement that directly communicates our mission, the language and content of the document characterize Oakton as a future-oriented, learning-centered, connected, and distinctive institution.

Core Component 1B:

In our mission documents, Oakton recognizes the diversity of learners, other constituencies, and the greater society we serve.

Oakton acknowledges the role played by diversity in maintaining a vital learning environment that educates students to live and work in a rapidly changing global society. We are aware of increasing diversity in the community we serve and its effects on our programs and services, as noted in the Introduction. We also understand that educational institutions contribute to ongoing discussions about diversity in local, national, and global communities through educational offerings and partnerships with community groups, and we strive to model approaches to diversity that build a welcoming environment and confront incidents of bias. Since our last accreditation, Oakton has consistently engaged in conversation about diversity in the institution and the broader society. In this section, we examine how well Oakton's mission documents, activities, and programs recognize and advance our commitment to diversity and show how we have addressed concerns raised by the previous visiting team regarding the diversity of our workforce.

Diversity and Our Mission

Oakton is committed to the value of diversity and appreciates that diversity makes the College a more interesting and progressive place to teach, learn, and work. Many programs and activities verify our commitment to diversity, and our Affirmative Action Plan, discussed below, explicitly compels Oakton to increase the number of persons of color in the College's workforce. The *VMV* statement expresses our understanding of the value of diversity in its commitment to "challenge our students to be capable global citizens, guided by knowledge and ethical principles, who will shape the future." One of Oakton's long-standing general education objectives is to develop students' abilities to "[w]ork and communicate effectively with people from a variety of backgrounds."

Oakton's last three strategic plans all address diversity. *Learning Together: 2003-2008*, requires us to recruit and retain "diverse employee and student groups" as we "recognize, embrace and build on the rich diversity of students and communities in Oakton's district, and continue to work to enhance the diversity of Oakton's employees" by offering "credit, noncredit and cocurricular courses and activities that reflect our community and that examine issues of diversity."

The current strategic plan, *Change Matters*, contains an even more pointed strategic goal on diversity: "Antibias college. We will continue to transform our College's practices, curricula and ways of engaging with one another in order to overcome racism and other forms of bias." Three objectives define major initiatives for the next five years: "Review and revise curricula to address issues of bias and cultural competence"; "Involve at least 80 percent of full- and part-time faculty, staff, administrators and student leaders in antibias training by 2012"; and "Expand outreach to underserved populations, and strengthen networking and support systems





The Oakton Educational Foundation Changes Lives

Judy Brown is a 60-year-old cancer patient on disability whose dream of a college degree is coming true thanks to the Educational Foundation. Years ago the demands of work forced her to put her education on the back burner, but she was always keenly aware of the limitations the lack of a college degree placed on her professional advancement. In the 1990s she discovered that Oakton offered evening college credit classes and began furthering her studies. However, in 2002 health issues caught up with her. Today, still coping with cancer and numerous surgeries, she is unemployed, and her disability requires her to use a walker. But thanks to continued scholarship support from the Foundation she is able to continue her studies in drawing and painting. Says Judy: "Oakton has enriched my life by allowing me to pursue my dream of becoming a portrait artist. I am starting over at the age of 60, thanks to Oakton and its outstanding professors."

for Oakton students and employees." Some employees and external constituents expressed concern that the term "antibias" sends a message that the College is a racist institution. The 2012 Team thus spent more time deliberating about the wording of this goal than any other, finally deciding the language was important and would acknowledge the College's place in a society that practices systemic institutional racism. The Board of Trustees accepted the Team's recommendation when it approved *Change Matters*.

Next Step

The antibias language used in *Change Matters* stemmed primarily from Oakton's Next Step committee, an ad hoc group currently addressing issues of race and diversity at the College. Next Step emerged from an earlier organization of faculty, staff, and administrators that began meeting in 1999 to discuss gender, race, culture, and ethnicity in the College. That group, called ACCORD (Advocating a College Community of Respect for Diversity), sponsored dozens of events and programs to forward their social justice mission during succeeding years. ACCORD developed a visual representation of the College's commitment to "tolerance, fairness, responsibility, compassion, and integrity" that is displayed prominently in high traffic areas on both campuses.

Members of ACCORD were instrumental in forming Next Step, which focuses on racism as a systemic and institutional problem, as well as a matter of individual attitudes and behaviors. With the financial and ideological support of the College, Next Step has developed a three-stage project that recognizes education and training as the primary tools for combating racism. To begin this process, Oakton has engaged the services of Crossroads Ministry, a Chicago-based antiracist training organization that has been developing innovative programs for more than 20 years. All members of Next Step have completed a 2½-day training program facilitated by Crossroads, and, in Fall 2006, 75 faculty, staff, and administrators completed a four-hour introductory session designed to familiarize them with the project. In Spring 2007, 30 faculty, staff, and administrators completed the same 2½-day workshop attended earlier by Next Step members, and by Summer 2007 another group will have completed this training.

The Next Step perspective focuses primarily on racism, and some employees, including several who attended the introductory session or 2½-day workshop, perceive it as too narrow. However, Next Step's work has brought visibility and candor to discussions about bias and intolerance. As Oakton continues to address issues of bias, diversity, and racism, the College will enlist a variety of perspectives to inform discussions and shape future actions.

Oakton's Affirmative Action Plan and Hiring Processes

Oakton's Affirmative Action Plan directly addresses concerns raised by the 1997 visiting team about employee diversity. Prepared by the Office of Human Resources, it is the most comprehensive expression of the College's commitment to diversity. The Plan includes policies and procedures to enable Oakton to attract a more diverse pool of job applicants and to ensure "affirmative steps to improve minority representation." The Plan also sets target goals for hiring persons of color and women where they are underrepresented in Oakton's workforce. The Associate Vice President for Human Resources serves as the College's affirmative action and ethics officer. Under his leadership, the Office of Human Resources screens applicant pools to ensure persons of color are represented, and he works with screening committees when pools lack sufficient diversity to determine whether additional search activities are necessary before moving forward with interviews.

The Office of Human Resources organizes search committee training sessions about recruiting, screening, interviewing, and evaluating diverse candidates. More than 120 employees have participated in the last two years. In Fall 2006, a half-day workshop, *Hiring for Cultural Competency*, showed 60 participants practical methods and useful strategies related to the search process and helped them identify various dimensions of cultural competence, including what

role cultural competency plays in meeting institutional objectives. The College also schedules an array of professional development sessions that address issues of diversity, many through our Center for Professional Development. In 2005 the Center offered “Understanding Stereotypes” and “Diversity and the Communication Challenge,” followed in 2006 with day-long sessions on “Understanding Institutionalized Privilege” and “Building Culturally Competent Leadership.” Finally, the Board of Trustees seeks information about efforts to employ persons of color; the administration provides the Board with information about search processes and numbers of candidates screened and interviewed for all faculty and administrator appointments.

In 2006, 20 percent of the College’s workforce comprised persons from underrepresented groups (African Americans, Hispanics, and Asians). This figure remains below the percentage for Oakton’s student population (24 percent) and the district’s population (23 percent), but it represents a substantial increase from 1995, when only 11 percent of our workforce was from underrepresented groups. However, we must use caution in comparing 1995 and 2006 data because Human Resources began including data for part-time faculty when compiling statistics about diversity, and 21 percent of part-time faculty hired in 2005-2006 were from underrepresented groups.

Table 1.2, taken from a Fall 2006 Human Resources report on diversity to the Board of Trustees, compares percentages of underrepresented groups in Oakton’s present workforce with those of our district and Oakton’s student body, using EEOC categories. For clarity, we have rounded percentages to the nearest whole number.

Table 1.2

	College Workforce 2006	Student Population 2006	District Population 2000
Blacks	7%	5%	5%
Hispanics	5%	7%	6%
Asians/Pacific Islanders	8%	12%	12%

Oakton has made progress in increasing the percentage of persons of color among employees, but we are not satisfied and will continue building a diverse workforce to create more role models for students, enrich our learning environments, advance an institutional culture of respect and appreciation for diversity, and reaffirm our core values of tolerance, fairness, and integrity.

Other Diversity Efforts

Oakton has employed an adult and minority recruitment admission specialist in the Office of Admission and Enrollment Management and a minority transfer specialist in the Advising and Counseling Center to strengthen the College’s ability to recruit students of color and to



work with their parents. The Student Ambassador Program, funded as a 2006 strategic initiative, is another new diversity effort. The program recruits, trains, and hires approximately 12 current Oakton students of diverse backgrounds to assist in recruitment and student orientation activities. Oakton also cooperates with neighboring Harper College to provide special recruitment programs for the growing Latino population residing along the border between the two community college districts.

Oakton has sought to attract and embrace our increasingly diverse communities by publishing admissions brochures and advising publications in Spanish, Polish, and other languages. For instance, the College produced Spanish language brochures on transfer and career programs and a general overview of the College. The College also prepared bilingual brochures about successful workplace behavior; produced in English-Spanish, English-Polish, and English-Mandarin, the brochures were shared with high school faculty to distribute to their students. The Office of Student Financial Assistance regularly hosts a Financial Aid Workshop in Spanish and Polish and prints fliers for the workshops in those languages. In addition to Oakton’s production of documents in multiple languages, the Learning Center has compiled a list of more than 50 staff, faculty, and administrators who speak 42 different languages, including sign language; they assist other Oakton employees who need translators to work effectively with students.

The evidence provided above focuses primarily on racial and ethnic diversity, but Oakton recognizes other forms of diversity as well. For example, as described in Criterion Three, Oakton employs professional staff to work with students with disabilities. The College also extends health and other family benefits to domestic partners. During Ramadan, faculty remain sensitive to students who may have fasted during the day, and faculty are advised not to schedule major examinations on the Jewish holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

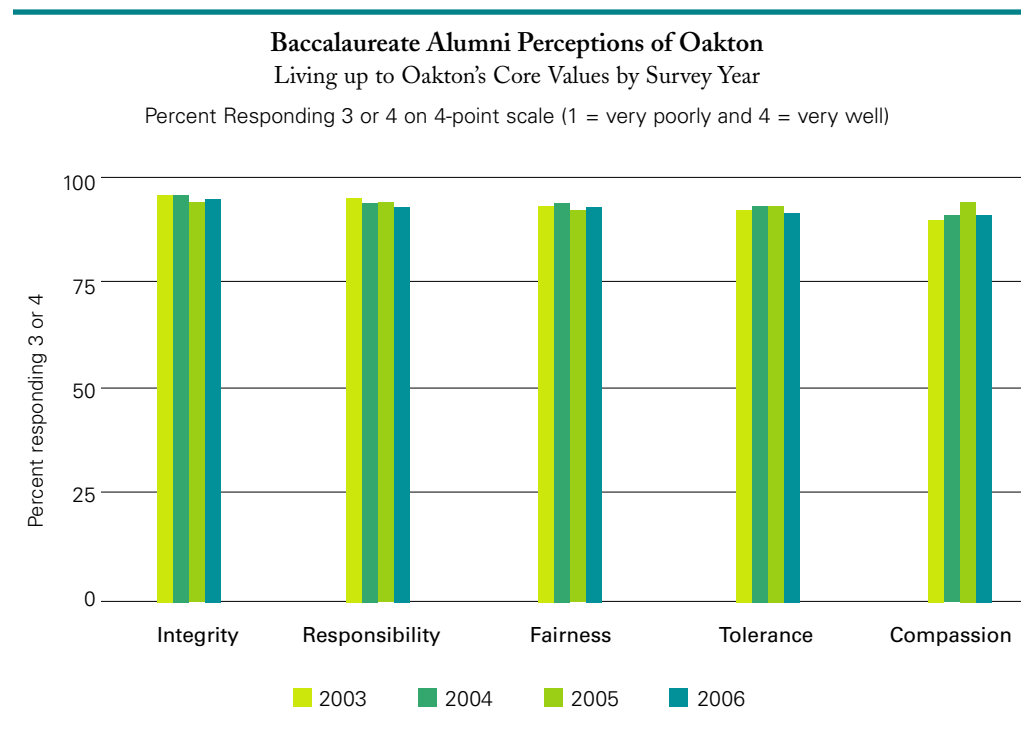
Summary of Core Component 1B

Oakton’s mission documents recognize the diversity of our community. The College supports initiatives to expand the percentage of students and employees from underrepresented groups and to make Oakton a welcoming environment. In Criteria Three, Four, and Five we highlight other vehicles for enhancing the understanding of diversity and helping diverse students to succeed, including a number of established academic programs like Honors, English as a Second Language (ESL), and TRiO, as well as new curricular concentrations such as the Global and Women’s Studies programs. Together, these efforts create a learning environment that enables us to “recognize, embrace and build on the rich diversity of students and communities in Oakton’s district, and continue to work to enhance the diversity of Oakton’s employees” (see *Learning Together: 2003–2008 Strategic Plan*).

Core Component 1C: Understanding and support for the mission pervade the College.

Oakton has ample evidence that understanding and support of the central focus of Oakton’s mission—excellence in teaching and learning—pervade the institution and that employees live up to the College’s five core values of tolerance, fairness, responsibility, compassion, and integrity.

Figure 1.3



The Evidence

Each year the Office of Institutional Research asks that respondents to the Baccalaureate Alumni Survey rate the extent to which Oakton faculty, administrators, and staff live up to the College’s core values. Figure 1.3 depicts remarkable consistency in alumni responses; over the last four years, on average more than 90 percent gave ratings of 3 or 4, with 4 equal to “very well.”

Current students share this view. Figure 1.4 depicts perceptions of students enrolled in the last four fall terms who had previous experience at Oakton, and on average more than 90 percent said employees were living up to Oakton’s core values.

In both the Baccalaureate Alumni and Current Student Surveys conducted in 2005 and 2006, respondents were asked about how familiar they were with Oakton’s vision, mission, and values and how well the College lived up to its mission. The survey asked students and alumni to rate their familiarity with each of 10 assertions from the *VMV* statement, and judge how accurately each assertion describes the College. They used a 5-point scale, with 5 equal to the highest level of familiarity and accuracy. Mean scores for familiarity were 3.5 for alumni and 3.4 for current students. Ratings for accuracy were higher. Alumni gave an average of 4.2, and current students an average of 3.9. This evidence indicates both alumni and current students believe Oakton fulfills its mission, vision, and values.

Evidence from Vital Focus demonstrates that employees also recognize and practice the College’s mission. Constellation Survey results show that Oakton personnel across employee groups regard service to students as the driving mission for the organization. In their analysis of the Constellation Survey taken by 696 Oakton employees, HLC facilitators noted the following:

Respondents from Oakton Community College very obviously believe that the needs of students matter—a great deal...several of the top 10 responses mentioned “students” or “students needs first,” a testimony to the desire of virtually everyone at Oakton to put students first.

Facilitators also noted that “comments provided at the end of the survey support these same themes.” In fact, the most striking statistic drawn from Vital Focus comes from the “Facilitators

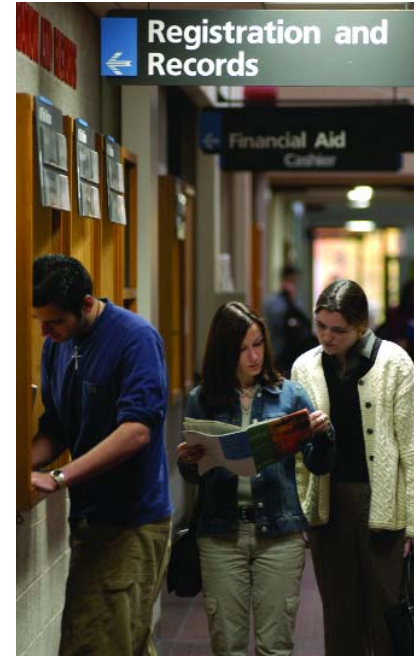
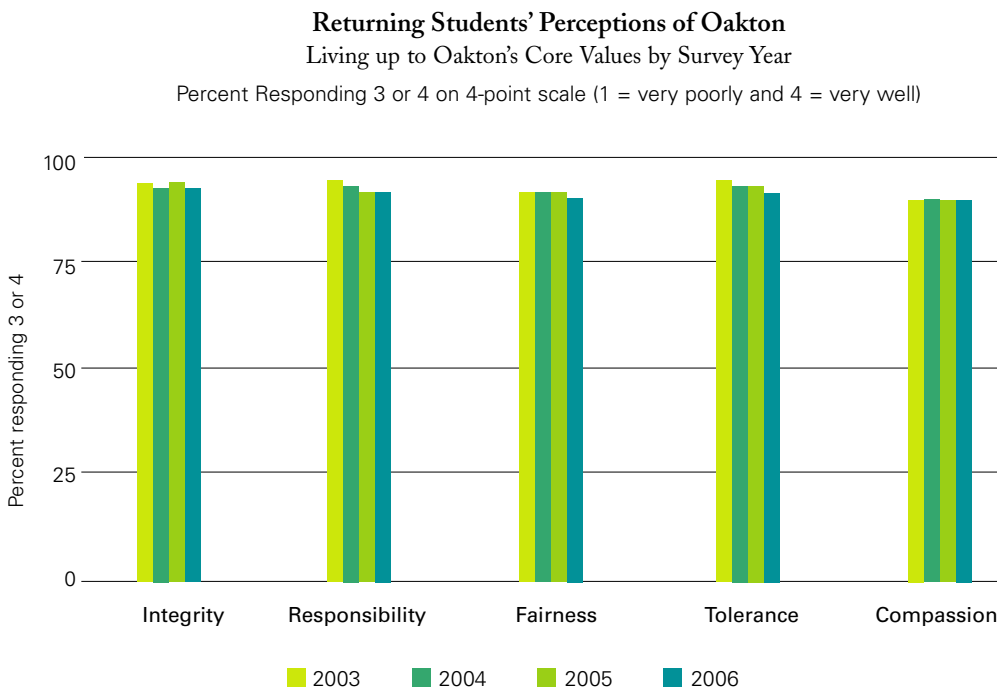


Figure 1.4



Observation Report,” written after Conversation Day, where facilitators’ quantitative analysis of Constellation comments revealed “84 percent of the respondents stat[ing] that they believe that Oakton Community College is living its values well.” This same report observes that two of Oakton’s four process priorities are “helping students learn” and “understanding student and stakeholder needs.”

While Oakton’s mission shapes initiatives at the strategic level, it also reinforces work at the operational and programmatic levels. In their program reviews, each department is expected to explain how its work supports Oakton’s mission and strategic goals. Individual programs and service areas are also encouraged to create their own mission documents within the framework of the College’s mission. For example, the Student Activities Office, Koehnline Museum of Art, Performing Arts Department, Learning Center, Information Technology, Center for Professional Development, and Advising and Counseling Center all have their own mission statements. A number of academic departments are also developing mission statements that express goals and commitments for their areas but also reflect the wider College mission.



Summary of Core Component 1C

In conclusion, evidence shows that students and employees both understand Oakton’s mission and values and believe the College’s policies and practices reflect them. While some debate persists about combining the vision, mission, and values into a single document that does not readily distinguish among them, the fundamental tenets embodied in this document serve Oakton well.

Core Component 1D:

Oakton’s governance and administrative structures promote effective leadership and support collaborative processes that enable Oakton to fulfill its mission.

Oakton’s governance and administrative structures are based on a number of councils and committees. The ultimate governing body is the elected Board of Trustees that meets 11 times a year in public to discuss, evaluate, and establish policies; to approve the College budget and specific expenditures of more than \$10,000; and to hire and evaluate the President. Meetings are cablecast to the community. The Board includes a student trustee, elected by the student body, who participates in both public and executive sessions and casts an advisory vote on every Board motion. Elected leaders of the faculty and staff unions have seats at the table for each monthly Board meeting, and the general public, students, administrators, faculty, and staff are invited and afforded formal opportunities to contribute to the discussion.

Internal Organization

President and President’s Council. The President holds ultimate authority for supervising the work of the College. Her primary advisory body and the group that makes decisions requiring collective approval of the vice presidents is the President’s Council, which includes all administrators who report directly to the President. In addition to serving as an advisory group to the President, it has a coordinating role for the various divisions of the institution and functions as a sounding board for vice presidents as they make decisions within their respective areas. Because of extensive retirements and turnover among administrators, only two current members of the President’s Council were employed by Oakton during the last reaccreditation process, and, at that time, neither were members of the Council. However, though one interim president served briefly during the early 1990s, in its 37-year history Oakton has had only

three Presidents. The current President has served in her role more than 10 years and has been with the College for more than 20. Having stability in such an important office provides a sense of continuity with College traditions and histories as Oakton moves through this period of transition.

Council of Deans. The Council of Deans carries out academic policies, develops guidelines and practices for administering academic units, plans joint division meetings, ensures consistency across departments in the implementation of faculty contracts, and makes recommendations to the President's Council on matters that necessitate President's Council discussion or decisions. Members include the four Academic (Division) Deans, the Dean of Library and Media Services, the Dean of Students, the Director of the Business Institute and Professional Education, the Director of the Learning Center, and the Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs/Dean of the Skokie campus. The Council distributes agenda for and minutes of its bimonthly meetings via e-mail to all administrators, chairs, union leaders, and selected division and academic affairs classified staff. Agendas and minutes are archived in a Council of Deans folder on Share, the College's internal shared document file. Also affected by numerous retirements, the Council of Deans, with the exception of the senior Divisional Dean, a long-time faculty member appointed as Dean seven years ago, are all recent employees whose average length of service is three years.

Academic Divisions. Oakton's academic departments and career and technical education (CTE) programs are organized into four divisions, with each including both transfer and CTE departments. Headed by a dean, the divisions are the organizational homes for full- and part-time faculty. Each division office includes administrative staff who provide assistance to faculty and often serve as the first points of contact for students seeking information or trying to locate instructors. Though the four divisions are located in Des Plaines, a Faculty Support Office in Skokie provides similar services to faculty and students at that campus. Division meetings are scheduled monthly during the academic year; convened by the dean, meetings' agenda have included presentations of best teaching practices, mini-workshops on assessment, budget briefings, and updates on important College issues.

Council of Chairs and Coordinators. The Council of Chairs and Coordinators (COCAC) includes all department chairs and coordinators. This group meets monthly to discuss best practices and address issues of concern. Department chairs have no formal supervisory or decision-making authority over their full-time faculty colleagues, all of whom report to divisional deans. Chairs interview and recommend part-time faculty for hire, assign their classes, and supervise and evaluate them. Chairs also oversee department class schedules, ensure textbooks are ordered, convene and chair departmental meetings, and lead course and curriculum development, assessment, and budgeting for their departments. Both individually and as a collective through COCAC, chairs play a critical role at the College, communicating faculty perspectives to administrators and, in turn, communicating administrative perspectives to faculty. In the last five to six years, the COCAC has emerged as a significant advisory body at the College; it has articulated concerns related to departmental management and collaborated with administrators to create effective solutions. For example, COCAC representatives worked with IT and the Director of Registration and Records to identify and create enrollment and other reports chairs and coordinators needed.

Each year the Council of Deans and Office of Research prepare a notebook of information to assist chairs and coordinators in performing their administrative work. The notebook is available in the Resource Room; it includes a detailed information packet, also available online at www.oakton.edu/hlc/chairinfo.

Full-time Faculty – OCCFA and the Faculty Senate. Oakton's Faculty Senate represents the interests of faculty in matters of academic policies and procedures. The Oakton Community College Faculty Association (OCCFA), an affiliate of the Illinois Education

Blending Work and Fun: Encouraging Participation in Vital Focus

To ensure the success of Vital Focus, President Lee and the Vital Focus Planning

Committee encouraged all Oakton employees to participate in the Constellation Survey and Conversation Day. They created incentives that were effective and fun, evident from the nearly 700 responses to the survey and more than 500 Conversation Day attendees. Those who completed the survey received the humorous sticker "I'm Constellated" to wear on campus. Additional incentives included a raffle for a variety of Oakton prizes, including certificates at the bookstore and Performing Arts Center, and the President's pledge to donate \$1 to Fund 35 for every completed Constellation Survey. On Conversation Day charter buses transported employees to the venue, and participants enjoyed a variety of toys at their tables along with lots of good food, healthy and not.



Association (IEA), represents their interests in matters of compensation, working conditions, and employment. Traditionally the leadership of both bodies has been the same, leading to occasional confusion about whether an issue falls within the Senate's or OCCFA's domain. For the most part, however, the College is accustomed to and comfortable with the dual roles assumed by faculty leaders. Here we focus on the Faculty Senate, and we discuss OCCFA more thoroughly in the section on collective bargaining below.

The Faculty Senate operates primarily in an advisory capacity. Each academic division elects three senators, with Senate officers elected from the full-time faculty at large. Through regular meetings and a network of committees, the Senate represents faculty interests to administration and the larger College community. Senate leaders have made clear their desire to ensure that all College-wide committees, especially those dealing with faculty-related interests, involve faculty and take faculty views into consideration. A recent Memorandum of Understanding on Shared Governance, discussed below, has addressed this concern, though the agreement is too new to be evaluated.

Full- and occasionally part-time faculty are included on most standing committees and on all of those that affect faculty interests. Faculty comprise nearly the entire membership on committees that deal exclusively with faculty issues, such as the Sabbatical and Lane Change Committees. Others, such as the Insurance Committee, consider issues affecting multiple College constituencies and include members of the staff and administration. In addition to



standing committees, administrators appoint faculty to ad hoc committees that serve a specific need or goal of the College; the Special Events Task Force discussed in Criterion Four is one example.

Part-time and Adjunct Faculty. Oakton has three groups of part-time faculty: adjunct faculty, who teach a minimum number of Oakton credits or meet other criteria for inclusion in the Adjunct Faculty Association (AFA) bargaining unit; part-time faculty, who teach fewer Oakton credits and do not meet the other criteria for bargaining unit inclusion; and Alliance for Lifelong Learning faculty, who teach noncredit courses part-time. Technically the Adjunct Faculty Association

represents only faculty who meet the stipulated adjunct criteria, and the negotiated contract applies only to them. However, the Board of Trustees extends virtually the same benefits, including rates of pay, to all Oakton part-time faculty who teach credit courses. Consequently, when we speak of part-time faculty in this self study, we refer to the entire body of faculty who teach credit courses for Oakton on a part-time basis. The Alliance hires its own instructors, who do not receive these contractual benefits and do not participate to the same extent in the life of the College.

Various approaches serve to integrate part-time faculty into departments, including listservs, newsletters, and incentives to attend department and College-wide meetings. Several departments involve part-time faculty in curriculum development and cocurricular programming. For example, in English, part-time faculty helped to develop Oakton's Chicago Writers Series and to coordinate and judge the Skyway Writers Competition. Part-time faculty also serve on a number of College committees and task forces, including the 2012 Team, Curriculum Committee, Research and Development Committee, Educational Policies and Procedures Task Force (EPP), and HLC Self Study Steering Committee. Oakton compensates part-time faculty for attending meetings. To encourage involvement in Vital Focus, the College invited all part-time faculty to Conversation Day and compensated them for their attendance.

College-wide Committees. Numerous committees contribute to the life of the College. In 2004-2005 a College-wide Educational Policies and Procedures Task Force (EPP) comprised

of staff, faculty, and administrators worked together to amend College policies and procedures affecting registration, stipulation and enforcement of course prerequisites, standards of academic progress for students, course descriptions, and fees. The Task Force tackled controversial issues such as eliminating late registration. This project, regarded as successful by almost everyone involved, was completed in just one year. It resulted in a series of concrete recommendations to the President's Council, which approved all but a handful, and demonstrated the value

of bringing together stakeholders with interests in and knowledge about the specific topic under consideration. EPP stands as a model committee for Oakton; its report and associated documents are online at www.oakton.edu/hlc/epptaskforce and in the Resource Room.

The Curriculum Committee also plays a significant role at the College. A Faculty Senate Committee composed of representatives from the divisions and nonvoting administrative, staff, and part-time representatives, this committee responds to and must approve recommendations for new and revised courses and curricula. The Committee also occasionally adjudicates disputes between departments regarding who should teach particular subjects and courses.

Staff. Professional and classified staff carry out much of the work of the College. A number have graduate degrees and credentials comparable to those of faculty. Most staff members are represented by the Classified Staff Association, an affiliate of the Illinois Federation of Teachers. Public safety personnel form a separate labor group, represented by the Fraternal Order of Police, and a number of staff members are in exempt positions not included in collective bargaining units. Staff are included on many College-wide committees: the Insurance Committee, where they hold one third of the seats in equal representation with faculty and administrators; the EPP Task Force; the Special Events Task Force; the HLC Steering Committee and Criterion subcommittees; the committee to revise student orientation; Foundations of Excellence® committees; the Vital Focus Planning Committee; the Quick Fix Team; and the 2012 Team. The College made extraordinary efforts to facilitate staff participation in Conversation Day, to the extent of hiring temporary workers so second- and third-shift employees could attend.



As noted above, Oakton's public safety officers provide a range of on-campus assistance to employees, students, and guests, serving as ambassadors for the College while ensuring security. Public safety officers are sworn police officers; they are assisted by cadets. Oakton's Public Safety department maintains close connections with municipal police departments in Des Plaines and Skokie, as well as the Cook County officials responsible for the Des Plaines campus forest preserve.

As described above, Oakton's staff participate in many college committees. While committee meetings provide a formal vehicle for staff involvement, most staff members do not seek committee membership. This is not, however, due to lack of interest. Across the College there are uneven opportunities for staff to give input or discuss departmental or College-wide issues with their supervisors, as some supervisors hold regular meetings or engage their staff informally, while others do not. Constellation Survey and Conversation Day data revealed that staff are not consistently treated with respect by administrators and faculty. These perceptions were emphasized forcefully in conversations with HLC Criterion subcommittees. Some staff, including those with long tenure at Oakton, indicated that supervisors and upper management do not seek their input on issues affecting them on a day-to-day basis, despite their being in the best position to provide important information for effective decision-making. Staff also noted that some faculty fail to treat staff as colleagues.

Collective Bargaining

Oakton's full-time faculty, adjunct faculty, staff, and public safety personnel engage in the work of the College under collective bargaining agreements. Adjunct faculty, classified staff, and public safety personnel, through their Associations, bargain with administrators representing the Board of Trustees. Board members do not sit at the table. These negotiations use traditional "adversarial" approaches to bargaining. While negotiations over recent years occasionally have been contentious, contracts have been settled without labor actions, and Oakton has never had a strike. The Adjunct Faculty Association and Board went to mediation



before settling the most recent contract in Fall 2006; both groups agreed there was value in seeking external assistance to resolve differences. Staff and adjunct satisfaction with pay and working conditions is generally high, and Oakton compensates personnel at or near the highest rates in the state.

Constellation Survey results indicate that some staff perceive there is insufficient recognition or reward for extra effort and initiative, and there are few consequences for employees who do not pull their own weight. This may be an inevitable byproduct of the collective bargaining environment, but it also suggests that the College could work to develop more ways to recognize employees who "go the extra mile."

The Board engages in "mutual interest" (or "win-win") collective bargaining with the Oakton Community College Faculty Association (OCCFA) that represents the full-time faculty. Board members do not directly participate, except at opening and closing sessions. The mutual interest approach

to negotiation, intended to minimize the conflict and adversarial environment that sometimes characterizes traditional bargaining, worked well at Oakton in the past, but the most recent contract negotiations in 2005 were contentious. Although faculty satisfaction with pay and benefits is generally high, issues of planning, policy, and shared governance proved less tractable. In the end, faculty and administration agreed on two contractual memoranda of understanding (MOU).

The first MOU addressed support for chairs and coordinators, many of whom believe they lack adequate staff and technical support to effectively carry out their responsibilities. Chairs and administrators on the MOU committee have made progress in several areas, notably in clarifying staff support for departments' special events and enhancing training for chairs through the newly established Chair Academy. The first Academy, held in Summer 2006, was a chairs and coordinators "Boot Camp" that presented information on human resources issues, scheduling, curriculum development, and budget management. This year's Academy will focus on using Dreamweaver 8 software to build and enhance department Web sites. The MOU committee is continuing to meet to address the issue of identifying and training division staff to acquire the specific knowledge and technical skills required for effective chair/coordinator support in the areas of Web site and database maintenance and updating.

The second MOU focused on shared governance. This MOU emerged from faculty concerns that they had not been able to give administrators adequate input to inform decisions, and, as a result, some decisions were not as appropriate or effective as they might have been. A corollary concern was that decisions and the rationales for them were not always communicated clearly or on a timely basis. Seven faculty and five administrators formed a joint Shared Governance Committee that worked throughout the 2006-2007 academic year and reached agreement on four major points:

- A concise and mutually understood definition of shared governance

- A “Decision-Making Template” outlining a process that enables constituencies affected by a decision to have input both while information is being gathered and before the decision is finalized
- Revised faculty hiring guidelines that give faculty greater involvement in allocating unfilled faculty lines to departments and making hiring decisions
- Agreement to continue a faculty Shared Governance Committee that will address specific concerns to appropriate administrators, as needed.

The College is proud of the progress made by the joint Committee over the past year but recognizes additional work remains, especially with respect to expanding the involvement of staff and part-time faculty in decision making.

Communications and Decision-making

The progress made on shared governance reflects the College’s willingness to address communication and decision-making issues that emerged in the aftermath of personnel and other changes discussed in the Introduction and elsewhere in this document. Results of the Constellation Survey revealed how important these issues are to Oakton employees. Among the 87 survey statements about College performance, we rated the statement “Oakton analyzes the effectiveness of its decision-making processes” as the third weakest area of the College, and “The faculty and staff feel they are in partnership with administrators” as the weakest. Concerns have been expressed about adequate employee involvement and communication regarding the hiring of some administrators, the leadership at the Skokie campus, and the President’s Council. Until recently, the Council was the only permanent decision-making body meeting regularly with the President. In the past, the Council included the President and her three Vice Presidents, all of whom were long-time employees with deep roots in the College community and all of whom, with the exception of the President, are now retired. The Council now includes eight administrators who report directly to the President. Most of these individuals joined Oakton since the last accreditation visit, some within the last five years, and they are not well known to many of the College’s employees, many of whom are relative newcomers themselves.

The Council generally meets weekly, and, except for several meetings each semester when the heads of the unions are invited to attend, conducts its meetings in privacy without providing minutes or executive summaries of meetings to the College community. This practice may contribute to the perception of some that the Council is an exclusive, “top-down” body that is not fully connected to or informed about what is happening within the institution. While employees recognize it is appropriate for the President to meet with her top administrators to conduct the affairs of the College, and that sometimes personnel and other sensitive issues dictate privacy, they want the Council to conduct its business more openly.

These tensions are seemingly at odds with data that portrays Oakton as a premier community college with employees who are passionate about their work and deeply committed to students, to each other, and to the institution. Much of the discontent is perhaps the byproduct of an institution undergoing major transition. Before retirements remade the personnel landscape of the College, Oakton was a more intimate institution staffed with employees at all levels who had worked together for years and were able to reach decisions on an informal basis. The new Oakton has many employees who have not had time to forge the relationships necessary to maintain this dynamic. Ongoing personnel changes and turnover in administrative positions have further challenged employees’ ability to create these relationships. In addition, Oakton now is a more complex, diverse institution, and the informal decision-making processes and governance structures that worked in the past are no longer adequate.

Recent initiatives demonstrate the College’s seriousness in addressing communication and

The Quick Fix Team: Collaboration in Action

A “quick fix” is “an idea for an improvement at Oakton that could be implemented quickly and easily.” In the aftermath of our Vital Focus Constellation Day, a Quick-Fix Team, cochaired by a staff member and an administrator, and comprising full- and part-time faculty, administrators, and staff, reviewed 589 suggestions. All but 13 ideas were posted verbatim on the College’s internal network. After executing many of these fixes, the Team sponsored a mini-grant project, seeking employee ideas for activities that would improve communication. One of the suggested initiatives was OSCAR Night (Oakton Staff Converse and Relax), an evening in June 2007 when all Oakton employees were invited to a potluck dinner at a colleague’s home and a viewing of *The Nephew*, a film starring Pierce Brosnan and dealing with issues of race. This activity helped renew connections among Oakton employees through a unique learning opportunity.



decision-making concerns. They include progress on shared governance, discussed above; Town Hall meetings hosted by the President to discuss the future of the Skokie campus; the EPP Task Force and its success in involving stakeholders in its work; the Special Events Task Force, which emulated EPP by involving stakeholders; and the 2012 Team, whose work is discussed in other sections of this study. The two task forces and 2012 Team were successful because of how they conducted their work. Each group gathered information from a variety of constituencies, developed and disseminated tentative recommendations, solicited feedback through multiple approaches, and revised their recommendations to take this input into account. Significantly, for final decisions both the decisions and the rationales for them were clearly communicated. Together these initiatives have given employees renewed confidence that collaboration and communication are again at the forefront of Oakton's decision-making processes.

Summary of Core Component 1D

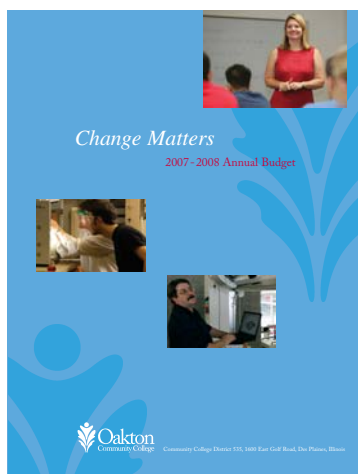
Evidence presented above affirms that Oakton's governance and administrative structures promote effective leadership and support collaborative processes that enable the College to fulfill its mission. Many concerns about governance and administrative structures can be attributed to unprecedented turnover among employees and the increased complexity of the institution. Because employees share a passionate commitment to the College and the constituencies served, and want to make Oakton the best institution possible, we care deeply about involvement, and we know that Oakton still possesses the powerful sense of connectedness and caring discussed earlier in this Criterion. Finally, the College has demonstrated the willingness and ability to reshape decision-making processes and improve communication to address concerns.

Core Component 1E: Oakton upholds and protects its integrity.

Oakton consistently affirms and adheres to the highest standards of integrity and ethical practices. In this section we present evidence to validate this assertion.

Reporting to State Agencies. Oakton complies with policies, rules, regulations, and reporting requirements of the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB), the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE), and all other relevant agencies. In compliance with ICCB requirements, each year the College conducts program reviews of instructional, instructional support, and student service departments, using a five-year rotation cycle. Going beyond ICCB requirements, the College has, since 1993, extended program review to include all segments of the College, including noninstructional departments (see Oakton's Program Review Manual, www.oakton.edu/hlc/progreview). Oakton prepares an annual performance report for the ICCB as well; this report shows how Oakton contributes to Illinois performance goals for higher education. ICCB also requires annual Underrepresented Groups and Resource Allocation and Management Plan (RAMP) Reports, and numerous submissions of student unit record, employee, and financial data. In 2003 the ICCB conducted a Recognition Visit for Oakton, a routine, periodic audit. The agency found Oakton to be in compliance with most regulations, and the College quickly corrected procedures identified as problematic.

Annual Budget and Financial Reports. The Office of Budget and Finance publishes detailed financial information in the annual budget and the comprehensive annual fiscal report, both available online (see www.oakton.edu/hlc/annualbudget and www.oakton.edu/hlc/finreport). A line-item budget is also available both in print and online for employees, who have direct electronic access to current account information.



Oakton's Vice President for Business and Finance also serves as Treasurer of the Board of Trustees. The Treasurer, as custodian of all College funds, has authority to invest these funds within the guidance of state statutes and Board of Trustees policies. He provides monthly financial reports, as well as quarterly reports on investments to the Board. In addition to the comprehensive Annual Report, the Office of Business and Finance also prepares an Annual Financial Budget and a Federal A-133 Single Audit Grants Report. Oakton's accounting policies conform to principles and practices accepted in the United States applicable to colleges and universities, as well as those prescribed by the ICCB.

Affirmative Action Plan. The role of Oakton's Affirmative Action Plan in increasing diversity among employees has been discussed above. The Plan documents the College's commitment to equal employment opportunities and compliance with all nondiscrimination policies and regulations.

Other Reporting Practices. In conjunction with the Office of Business and Finance, the Office of Grants and Alternative Funding, and the administrative unit responsible for the project, Oakton administered 27 federal, state, and private source grants worth \$2.5 million during 2006. Both financial and program reports are submitted accurately and on time to funding agencies. The Office of Student Financial Assistance complies with numerous federal, state, and institutional regulations, and the Office of Public Safety submits an annual report on crime statistics in compliance with the Clery Act. The College is a member of the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA), and the Athletic Program abides by all its rules and regulations. Because of the depth and breadth of our workforce development and continuing education programs, the College also complies with a number of regulatory bodies for Health Career and Education credentialing and files reports with the ICCB and the Secretary of State. In keeping with a new Illinois requirement, every Oakton full- and part-time employee, including student employees and part-time faculty, completed an Illinois online ethics test in Fall 2006. This test, now scheduled as an annual requirement, is under challenge by groups who believe the rationale for imposing it—that community colleges are state agencies and, therefore, college employees are state employees—is faulty. In May the Illinois General Assembly passed legislation affirming that community colleges are units of local government and, therefore, not subject to the ethics test mandate. As of June 10, the governor had not acted on this legislation. Finally, the Board of Trustees must approve all purchases exceeding \$10,000 and long ago established an institutional policy that the Board must approve the hiring of any new employee related to a current employee.

Students and Integrity. Oakton also complies with both externally mandated and institutional policies that demonstrate integrity with respect to how the College interacts with students and what the College expects from them. To ensure students' right to privacy, the College complies with the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act* (FERPA) and the *Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act*. Oakton's support services and accommodations comply with Section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973* and the *Americans with Disabilities Act*. The *Student Handbook*, available at www.oakton.edu/hlc/studenthndbk and in hard copy, contains several important policies, including the Student Academic Integrity Policy (which includes the Code of Academic Conduct), the Code of Student Conduct, the Nondiscrimination Policy, and the Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault Policies. The Office of Student Affairs is responsible for compiling student complaints, and the Vice President for Student Affairs has final authority regarding resolution of these complaints.



Oakton is especially proud of the College's expectations that students will understand and adhere to ethical standards of behavior. Before 2001, the College had only a formal process for handling allegations of academic misconduct. This discouraged faculty from lodging complaints because they did not want to trigger the complicated procedure. In response, Oakton revised the Student Academic Integrity Policy to incorporate a more flexible, informal process. In 2006, the statement on academic integrity included on all course syllabi was revised to improve readability and clarity, and the College conducted an extensive internal campaign to ensure the policy was understood and followed by faculty and students. In Spring 2006, 38 informal complaints were resolved by individual faculty members, and 13 formal complaints requiring action by a dean were resolved using the academic integrity policy. The importance of ethical conduct among students will be reinforced by a session on best practices for creating assignments and classroom environments that promote integrity, to be sponsored during the Fall 2007 Orientation Week by members of the Academic Conduct Committee.

Oakton's commitment to student integrity and ethics is a hallmark of the institution. In 1993, Mary Olson, then Vice President for Student Affairs, attended a conference at the University of Pennsylvania about academic integrity. Most attendees were from selective four-year institutions, some with honor codes. Her participation broadened the understanding of colleagues from four-year institutions about community college students and the challenges of helping them recognize and adopt appropriate ethical, academically honest behaviors. Olson went on to become a board member and subsequently board president of the Center for Academic Integrity at Duke University. Bill Taylor, now Professor Emeritus of Political Science at Oakton, wrote an open letter to students still recognized as a model of a faculty member's acceptance of the responsibility for integrity. A copy of his letter is in the Resource Room.

Grievance Procedures. Grievance procedures for faculty and staff are codified in collective bargaining agreements. Oakton prefers to resolve problems through informal approaches, and faculty and staff may include representatives of their respective bargaining units to assist in the informal resolution of a grievance. Absent informal resolution, grievances move through stipulated stages to possible settlement by an arbitrator from the American Arbitration Association. Full-time faculty grievances are rare, and there have been none in the past two years. The Adjunct Faculty Association had not filed grievances for at least eight years, until 2006-2007, when three grievances were filed; the administration and AFA representatives recognized that some issues are best resolved through a formal process.

Labor relations with both the Classified Staff Association (OCCSA) and the Fraternal Order of Police historically have been solid and remain so. OCCSA and the administration both expressed pleasure at the professional conduct exhibited by both sides during prolonged contract negotiations. The commitment by both groups to resolve disagreements at the lowest possible level has served the College well, as evidenced by the virtual absence of formal grievances over the past five years; most disagreements have been resolved this way, or through effective use of meetings with OCCSA representatives and administrators. Continuity of leadership in both union and HR personnel has contributed to strong relationships.

Summary of Core Component 1E

Oakton upholds and protects its integrity through ethical accounting and reporting practices, policies and procedures that provide due process for students and employees, and an exceptional commitment to academic integrity.

Conclusion to Criterion One:

This Criterion highlights some of Oakton's greatest strengths: an unwavering commitment to serve students and provide them with high quality learning opportunities; a willingness to acknowledge and address bias through new strategic goals and objectives supported by College funding for antibias programs; substantial effort and progress in diversifying Oakton's workforce; courage to acknowledge and work to resolve concerns about communication and decision making; and a strong adherence to ethical behavior and integrity. Oakton's mission documents have provided the framework throughout this self-reflection. In Criterion Two, we evaluate the planning processes used in support of our mission, and in subsequent criteria, we look in detail at specific programs, services, and initiatives that bring Oakton's mission to life.

Strengths:


- Oakton's students and employees understand and support the basic tenets of the College's *Vision, Mission and Values*.
- Oakton has used the reaccreditation process to foster critical self-reflection and to address concerns, especially concerns about planning, communication, and decision making.
- Oakton is proud of its progress in addressing diversity through employee recruitment and hiring practices, antibias initiatives, and commitment to building a welcoming environment for students, employees, and community members of color.

Challenges and Possible Solutions:

- Oakton's *Vision, Mission and Values* was created in 1998, prior to the extensive retirements that reconfigured the institution's workforce. While the *VMV* accurately characterizes Oakton, it lacks a concise, extractable statement that can be readily communicated and remembered. Many at the College want a simpler statement that clearly distinguishes among Oakton's vision, mission, and values. The self study process and our examination of fundamental College documents suggest it may be time to revisit the *Vision, Mission and Values* statement. We are confident the basic tenets remain sound and serve the institution well, and want to ensure that the mission, vision, and values document can continue to be readily understood and embraced by the College community.
- The College acknowledges that communication and collaborative decision making among administration, faculty, and staff can be improved. The new strategic objective in *Change Matters* commits the College to initiating "practices [that] increase collaborative decision-making, improve communication, better engage part-time faculty, and encourage respect among employees." We will continue to work on developing these practices and building them into our internal business processes.

Criterion Two:
Preparing for the Future





Oakton’s allocation of resources and processes for evaluation and planning demonstrate its capacity to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its education, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

With the recent history of major institutional and environmental changes at Oakton, questions relating to “preparing for the future” are particularly significant. As discussed in the Introduction and Criterion One, Oakton has been adapting to substantial changes that generated intense institutional learning and self-examination. This is consistent with the College’s view of itself as a “changing community” and a “community of learners,” as well as our recognition in the *Vision Mission and Values* statement that “change is inevitable and that education must be for the future.” Oakton’s response to change has in many ways reinforced a collective institutional commitment to the College’s basic mission and values, even as this period of transition has taxed our community and institutional structures, and some points of stress relate to issues centered on planning and preparing for the future.

In Core Component 2A, we examine Oakton’s capacity to understand the changing environment affecting the College, to identify major areas of opportunity for advancement and growth, and to evaluate how information is used to inform planning. In Core Component 2B, we analyze Oakton’s resource base for supporting and improving educational programs. In Core Component 2C, we consider evaluation and assessment processes and the evidence about institutional effectiveness derived from them, as well as how this evidence is used for continuous improvement. Finally, in Core Component 2D we examine the correlation between strategic planning and our mission.

Core Component 2A:

Oakton realistically prepares for a future shaped by multiple societal and economic trends.

Planning realistically and productively for the future requires knowledge of the multiple societal and economic trends shaping that future, the flexibility to adapt to rapid changes in those trends, and a sense of mission and purpose that permit the College to shape its future and not merely react to external pressure and changes. This section focuses specifically on how Oakton performs environmental scans and uses resulting data and information. There are several limitations on environmental scanning in Oakton's district. First, Oakton's district includes five townships in north and northwest Cook County. Until CCbenefits, a research company that supplies economic and labor market data to community colleges, disaggregated Cook County data to the township and community level, Oakton was unable to compile reliable data about the district. Data about occupations and industries is now available but gives little useful guidance to the College, as much important data is available at the county level only; since Chicago dominates Cook County, relying on county data to consider trends relevant to Oakton's future can be misleading. Second, CCbenefits' data show that Oakton's district has thousands of small employers across a range of industries. While these businesses bring stability and variety to the local economy, no dominant employers or industries are key influencers of labor market needs. Finally, two external research consultants hired by the College, Scientific Verdicts and the Aslanian Group, confirmed that many employers are unsure of or unwilling to share specific information about anticipated employment needs, except in occupations where substantial shortages exist, such as nursing.

Office of Institutional Research

The Office of Institutional Research, Curriculum and Strategic Planning (OIR) is the College's primary internal resource for information about social and economic trends. The Office conducts three annual surveys—the Current Student, Baccalaureate Alumni, and Career Program Follow-up—as well as a host of periodic and ad hoc surveys. Conducted each fall, the Current Student Survey draws from a random sample of courses and weights responses to ensure appropriate representation from full- and part-time students. The Baccalaureate Alumni Survey, conducted each summer, is addressed to alumni who earned a degree or a minimum of 30 credits in a transfer program and have been away from Oakton for one or three years. The Career Program Survey is actually a series of surveys tailored to programs scheduled for program review in the next year. All three surveys explore student perceptions of, and engagement with, Oakton, as well as interest in current and new programs and services. The OIR works with faculty, administrators, and staff to develop survey items and, in the case of Career Program Surveys, the population of former students to survey.

The OIR also periodically conducts a variety of special surveys concentrating on a particular topic of interest to the College. For example, a survey of currently enrolled students conducted in Spring 2005 asked about their interest in taking courses by discipline, campus, times, and days. The survey also inquired about interest in Performing Arts Center programming and sought students' suggestions for improving the quality of our courses, programs, and services.

In 2002, and again in 2007, the OIR conducted a community survey to gather data about residents' interest in courses and programs and their perceptions of the College. Given a list of possible new programs, 2007 respondents indicated most interest in business, health careers, exercise training, sign language/interpreting, and environmental sciences. For a number of these fields, interest in noncredit offerings was as strong as or stronger than interest in credit offerings. The vast majority of survey respondents (72%) were age 40 or older, so responses do not represent all community residents likely to enroll at Oakton.

Oakton administered the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) in 2003 and 2006, and developed an Oakton Faculty Survey of Student Engagement before CCSSE's launch of a similar instrument. In 2005, Oakton participated in the Foundations of Excellence® project; as part of this effort, students and selected faculty and staff completed surveys regarding students' first-year experiences at the College. Oakton has also participated twice in The Kansas Study, using only the portion of the study that looks at faculty workloads; however, the College determined that uncertainties about comparing data across participating institutions and the labor-intensive work involved in the project offset the value of information provided.

The OIR has conducted a number of novel research studies. For example, in 2003, 200 students in nine classes and 50 staff were given disposable cameras and asked to take photographs that best represented what was "good" and "not so good" about the College and that best characterized Oakton students and employees. Representative photos were then taken back to participating students and staff, and subsequent discussions elicited their perceptions about the meanings of the photos. Results showed that students much appreciated the high quality and aesthetics of the campus, saw cost and convenience as the key reasons for attending Oakton, and did not place a high value on other people at the College as reasons for enrolling or persisting. Staff participants placed higher importance on people, especially staff at the Skokie campus. Both groups took photos of campus art to exemplify what is good about the College. Implications for future practice include continuing to support building maintenance, display art, and communicate the College's modest cost and convenience to potential students.

Finally, the OIR tracks enrollment and demand for specific courses, providing information guiding College decisions. For example, enrollment growth in prerequisite and corequisite courses for health career programs, along with employee recommendations for repurposing underused instructional spaces, prompted the College to create new biology and chemistry labs at the Skokie campus.

Through this impressive array of instruments, the OIR provides a wealth of data related to institutional effectiveness, but ultimately other parts of the College must interpret and act on that information. The data and information generated by the OIR are available through the Office of Institutional Research Web site and the monthly publication of "In the Abstract," a single-page briefing about research and its relevance to the College. Data from OIR reports guides planning at Oakton, as information provided to academic departments by the OIR aids their assessment of current and future needs and potential for growth and indicates whether their curricula meet the needs of current and potential students and the wider community. An annotated list of studies conducted by the OIR is available in the Resource Room and on OIR's Web site at www.oakton.edu/hlc/research.

External Research Companies

Oakton also uses external research companies to conduct targeted projects regarding societal and economic trends. In 2005 and 2006, ScientificVerdicts interviewed 95 employers regarding their needs and expectations for employees in general business, office support, information technology, and laboratory technician positions. Information gathered through these studies led to two new certificate programs, Applied Business and Customer Service, and the production of bilingual brochures about workplace behavior and etiquette.

In Spring 2007, Oakton contracted with the Aslanian Group to conduct a study of community and employer demand for credit, noncredit, and customized training programs. The Group also assessed Oakton's market share in delivering these programs and explored effective ways to communicate with external groups, as well as discover perceptions of the College. Reporting findings in June 2007, the Aslanian Group noted that Oakton has a large market share in both the credit and noncredit areas and is perceived positively by individuals who have had direct experiences with the College. However, Oakton is not visible to individuals who have had no direct involvement with the institution. Results of the Aslanian Group study became available



Preparing for a Global Future: The President's Trip to India

Oakton's long-held interest in global education assumed a new dimension in March 2007 when President Lee embarked on a trip to India. Dr. Lee was one of only six higher education administrators, and the only community college president, invited to join a delegation led by Ambassador Karen Hughes, the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs. The trip was a follow-up to her January 2006 participation in the United States University Presidents Summit on International Education hosted by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings. Dr. Lee's experiences during her week-long visit to New Delhi and Mumbai deepened her understanding of the value of global education and the need to invest in the learning and teaching of critical languages. Her prominent role promoting global education on the national and international stages provides further evidence of the College's leadership on this crucial issue.

just as this self study was completed, and the College anticipates using these results to shape important curricular, budgeting, and marketing decisions. The Aslanian Group report and reports from Scientific Verdicts are available in the Resource Room.

Advisory Committees and Community Networking

Advisory Committees are another source of information on economic and societal trends, helping programs shape their curricula and courses. For example, the Early Childhood Education Advisory Committee guided the program to develop a paid practicum option for students and is currently exploring the training needs of family home care providers. Given the role advisory committees play in ensuring career programs are current and responsive to emerging trends, it is important that committee members represent the range of businesses in their industries and are themselves current in their fields. Some have expressed concern that not all advisory committees are as representative or helpful as they could be; in response, Oakton will review existing advisory committees and reconfigure the membership where needed.

Oakton also encourages College employees to prepare for the future by engaging with colleagues in professional organizations and other colleges. In 2005, Oakton's English as a Second Language (ESL) coordinator convened a meeting of the ESL program heads of all suburban community colleges in the Chicago area to share information and ideas. At the first meeting, program coordinators from each college exchanged information about their districts' demographics and their programs' structures and pedagogy, relating this local information to national trends in the field. This group continues to meet regularly, discussing a different issue at each meeting. Oakton's ESL program uses information gathered through this local group to examine and revise its placement instruments, concrete evidence of the value this involvement brings to the College.

The College also collaborates in other ways with local educators and professionals to learn more about district needs. The President's Circle is a periodic breakfast meeting bringing together local school district superintendents, business CEOs, and local government officials to discuss district needs. Business executives participating in the College's internship program come to campus both to celebrate with their students and exchange information about their industries. College administrators are active members of local Chambers of Commerce and serve on numerous boards, including the Workforce Board of Northern Cook County, North Cook Intermediate Service Center (NCISC), and Northeastern Illinois Public Safety Training Academy (NIPSTA). NCISC is a professional training and development organization for educators in the northwestern suburbs of Chicago. NIPSTA illustrates the

rich resources in Oakton's district. A unique intergovernmental cooperative, the agency provides education and training for public works, police and fire departments, EMTs, and industry.

Oakton is an affiliate member of the North Suburban Education Region for Vocational Education (NSERVE), a consortium of the five public high school districts in Oakton's service area, and Oakton representatives attend all NSERVE meetings, where conversations keep Oakton informed about trends and issues at the high school level. NSERVE's role in dual credit courses and collaborative high school-Oakton programming is discussed in Criterion Five.

The Research and Development Committee

One outcome from the Educational Policies and Procedures (EPP) Task Force discussed in Criterion One was the formation of a Research and Development Committee (R and D) charged to explore potential new curricula and services, using data and information from research conducted by and for Oakton. The impetus for creating the R and D Committee came



from the Task Force's realization that curriculum development at Oakton occurred primarily from revising or adding to existing programs, rather than by searching for curriculum opportunities in new fields where the College had no faculty expertise. The R and D Committee's charge was, in part, to seek out these new fields and research their potential for Oakton.

In Spring 2007, the R and D Committee issued its first recommendations, identifying health care fields as a continuing growth opportunity. Coincidentally, the College, working with Kushan LLC, developed new programs in massage therapy and aseptic pharmaceutical preparations that will be offered in Fall 2007 for the first time. The R and D Committee has determined that in 2007-2008 one of its primary objectives will be to develop recommendations for a process and criteria for discontinuing programs that no longer draw adequate enrollments or meet community and employer needs. The College currently does not have an approach for doing so, but recognizes that part of implementing new initiatives involves terminating activities that are no longer viable. Oakton hopes that the R and D Committee will spark new programs that would not arise through conventional channels, but it is too early to determine whether the Committee's promise will be realized. More information on the R and D Committee is available in the Resource Room.

Preparing for the Future

Oakton's strategic plans over the last decade have moved the College forward, although the 2003-2008 plan, *Learning Together*, was concentrated as much on sustaining existing programs as on moving into the future. In this section we focus on the most recent strategic plan, *Change Matters*; in Core Component 2D we step back to visit earlier plans.

As discussed in the Introduction, *Change Matters* emerged from a multiyear process that ultimately engaged the entire College community in discussions about Oakton's future. The 2012 Team, responsible for taking the results of those conversations and constructing a coherent and comprehensive strategic plan, involved collaboration among full- and part-time faculty, staff, administration, and student representatives. The process leading to *Change Matters* reflects and reinvigorates Oakton's tradition of open communication, and the boldness of the goals and objectives expresses an innovative spirit in pursuing institutional excellence.

The objectives under the goal of "Academic Excellence" reflect significant realities. The objective of advancing the culture of assessment as integral to improving teaching, learning, and student success is in part a response to the increased emphasis by various governmental agencies and accrediting bodies on more accountability and measurement of student learning. That student success is of utmost importance to Oakton and that many Oakton students are underprepared for college-level work is reflected in the objective to "improve the success and persistence of all students, especially underprepared students."

We also address increased student needs for support services and changing patterns of attendance in the "WISE student services" and "One College: Four Campuses" strategic goals. The objectives listed under these goals all focus on easing the transition from high school to college and preparing students to succeed at Oakton. They also attend to the numerous ways that students and community members access programs and services. Finally, the strategic goals "Innovative Learning for Local and Global Citizenship," "Antibias College," and "Green College" demonstrate understanding of our need to live and work in an increasingly interconnected world.

With implementation of *Change Matters* just beginning, there are as yet no measurable outcomes. While Core Component 2D details previous plans and examines outcomes, the above discussion of *Change Matters* shows how Oakton has acknowledged and responded to significant changes in both internal and external environments as we affirm the basic values that have defined us as an institution.

Summary of Core Component 2A

Oakton possesses substantial resources and has a history of compiling data and information to inform planning for the future. The College takes into account changes in the social and economic contexts of local, national, and global environments while honoring our mission, vision, and values, as reflected in the content and processes of *Change Matters*, the most recent strategic plan.

Core Component 2B:

Oakton's resource base supports its educational programs and its plans for maintaining and strengthening their quality in the future.

Oakton is fortunate to have an exceptionally strong resource base, including faculty, staff, administrators, and other employees; revenues and reserve funds; the student body; facilities and grounds; technology; government agencies; the local community, including residents and businesses; and other colleges. In this section, we examine Oakton's financial, physical, technological, and personnel resources and demonstrate that they permit the College to maintain and strengthen the quality of existing programs and services, as well as develop new ones.

Human Resources

Employees are Oakton's greatest resource. The College employs 31 administrators, 154 full- and more than 550 part-time faculty, and 310 full- and 123 part-time staff. An additional 400 volunteers and 500 instructors deliver noncredit instruction through the Alliance for Lifelong Learning.

Administrators are the key decision-making personnel at Oakton and are well-compensated in comparison to our peer colleges (see ICCB Fiscal Year 2006 Salary Report). Most concerns raised by and about administrators relate to the amount of turnover in administrative positions during the last five to six years. As of 2007, 25 percent of administrators had been at Oakton, or in their current position, for less than three years. Indeed, some administrative positions have seen rapid turnover; for example, there have been four deans of Division IV (Social Sciences and Business) over the last five years, including two incumbents who held the position on an acting basis pending searches for permanent appointees. Such changes often involve difficulties, as incoming personnel learn about and adapt to the existing institutional culture, while current employees learn the leadership styles of new administrators.

Oakton's administrative staff of 31 is small for an institution of its size. Though Oakton has taken pride in being able to operate with this size administrative group, the College is realizing that there may be disadvantages to relying on so few individuals. Administrative tasks are often assigned to faculty, especially chairs and coordinators, who would be of greater service to the institution by concentrating on teaching and curricular matters. Thus, it may be time for Oakton to explore creating additional administrative positions, particularly in areas that would enable faculty to renew their focus on teaching and learning.

Oakton's full- and part-time faculty are strongly supported by the institution in terms of compensation, professional development opportunities, and support services. In FY06, Oakton's full-time faculty average salary was \$76,453, well above the state average of \$60,299 and the third highest in both our ICCB peer group and the state. Part-time faculty were compensated at an average rate of \$820 per credit hour, also well above the state average of \$532, and the highest average in the state for community colleges. As with administrators, faculty turnover has contributed to some of the stress experienced within the College, as new instructors learn about the institution and bring new ideas and questions to teaching, course and curriculum development, and committee service. Turnover among part-time faculty varies by department.

Each year approximately 20 percent of part-time faculty are new to Oakton, and another 20 percent have been at the College for a decade or more.

Oakton strongly supports professional development for employees, offering a wide range of professional development programs and activities through the Center for Professional Development, Human Resources, and other departments. Employees, including part-time faculty, are eligible for tuition waivers for any Oakton credit-bearing course. Full-time faculty, staff, and administrators are eligible for tuition reimbursement for credit-bearing courses at other colleges and universities and may also use professional travel funds for seminars and conferences.

Results from the Constellation Survey on the four items that deal with support and investment in employees show employees perceive that Oakton places importance on, and performs well in, trusting them to do their work effectively, promoting excellence in teaching, enabling them to get training and professional development necessary for their work, and ensuring the people hired by the College possess the necessary credentials, skills, and values.

Concerns related to personnel, aside from the questions concerning administrator evaluation treated in the next section of this chapter, fall into three categories: the ratio of full- to part-time faculty, the assignment of open faculty positions to departments, and the diversity of employees. The complex issues regarding diversity were discussed in Criterion One; here we focus on the full-time/part-time ratio and the assignment of open positions.

Oakton realizes that issues surrounding the full-time/part-time ratio are complex and pervasive throughout higher education. At Oakton, full-time faculty teach approximately 45 percent of credits, including courses taught as overload. This is not an unusual division between full- and part-time faculty, especially in metropolitan areas where part-time faculty are widely available. However, the College needs to address several important issues associated with part-time faculty. First, acknowledging this may not be the same for all departments, Oakton has not developed principles and guidelines to determine a reasonable balance between full- and part-time faculty. Second, the College must ensure that part-time faculty enjoy the same respect and level of input as other faculty and employees. Third, relatively few part-time faculty engage in the life of the College. Oakton requires and compensates new part-time faculty to attend orientation seminars, and contractual provisions mandate that the College provide compensation for committee service and funds for professional development. This is strong evidence of the College's seriousness about including part-time faculty in the life of the institution. *Change Matters* affirms the importance of these concerns by asserting the College will seek ways to "better engage part-time faculty and encourage respect among employees."

The large number of new full-time faculty hires over the last six years has revealed challenges regarding the assignment of open positions to departments. Oakton has a relatively well-defined process for determining whether an open position should remain with its current department or be reassigned, with requests moving from chairs and coordinators to division deans to the Vice President for Academic Affairs and, for student development faculty positions, to the Vice President for Student Affairs. However, rationales for decisions have not always been transmitted clearly to departments seeking new hires, causing frustration among faculty whose areas are affected.

To address these concerns, in 2006 the new Vice President for Academic Affairs met with chairs and deans whose requested positions were not approved to give rationales for the decisions. Further, the Vice President and deans, in collaboration with the Council of Chairs and Coordinators and the Office of Institutional Research, began developing a set of data (e.g., course enrollments, net revenue, numbers of sections taught by full- and part-time faculty, and headcount of full- and part-time faculty in a department) to bring more information and clarity to decisions about position assignments. These new measures are intended to reduce frustration and increase understanding about these assignments, though the College realizes not everyone will be satisfied or agree with them.

Oakton's staff bring exceptional commitment and expertise to the College. Many have

master's degrees, teach Oakton courses on a part-time basis, and serve on committees addressing subjects as varied as employee insurance rates and coverage, new student orientation programs, approving special events underwritten by the College, and shaping new student, HR, and financial systems. All new staff participate in orientation sessions sponsored by the Human Resources Department, which also convenes informal sessions to help new staff become familiar with the College. For example, periodically a coffee for new staff is scheduled, and administrators meet with them on an informal basis to answer questions about the institution. Low staff turnover is an indicator of staff satisfaction with the College, as are results from the Constellation Survey.

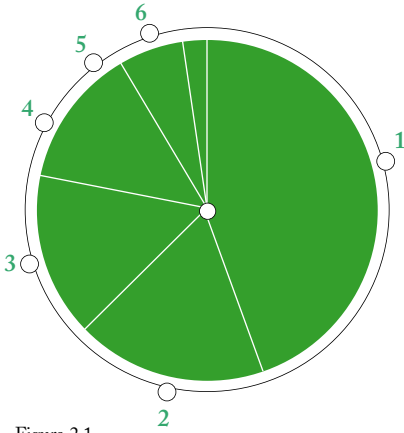


Figure 2.1

Revenue by Source

1. Local property taxes 48%
2. Tuition and fees 17%
3. Sales, services and auxiliary revenues 14%
4. State government 13%
5. Federal government 6%
6. Other 2%

Financial Resources and Budgeting

Oakton's strong financial resources are due in part to careful and effective financial planning and management by the Office of Business and Finance and a history of exemplary financial stewardship at the College. Financial resources are more than adequate for maintaining and strengthening the quality of existing programs and services, and for developing new ones, but they are not unlimited.

Oakton's budget is organized into nine funds. The total College budget for FY06-07 was \$87.6 million (see Oakton's Annual Budget at www.oakton.edu/bic/annualbudget). Approximately \$19.6 million of this total is restricted in use, and \$5.6 million has been dedicated to remodeling, infrastructure improvements, and the completion of the Art, Science, and Technology Pavilion at the Skokie campus. The remaining funds, approximately \$62.4 million, support the College's core mission of teaching and learning.

As of June 30, 2006, Oakton had strong reserves of \$41.8 million in unrestricted net assets. Of these assets, \$12 million resides in the auxiliary fund, leaving approximately \$29.8 million that could be used for special projects. In the next five years the College anticipates using approximately \$11.8 million for infrastructure repair and upgrades at the Des Plaines campus, and another \$4-5 million for strategic initiatives that directly support *Change Matters* goals and objectives. At the end of the five-year period, the span of the new strategic plan, Oakton will have approximately \$14 million left, or approximately 20 percent of the expenses in the projected FY12 operating budget. This size reserve is considered appropriate by industry standards. Interest earned on the reserve and other funds that can be invested is used in the operating and other fund budgets each year to support projected expenses. From FY02 to FY06, Oakton realized significant growth in net assets, from \$109 million to \$126 million.

The strength of the College's financial position is underscored by the lack of debt. It has long been the College's practice to operate without the obligations of debt and debt service. The College anticipates no short- or long-term needs that would require issuance of bonds, despite some necessary capital improvements and renovations at the Des Plaines Campus. The entire cost of the Pavilion (\$11.1 million) was fully funded out of existing College funds (\$4.1 million) and state capital investments (\$7 million). Remarkably this is the first time the state provided money for capital projects or new construction at Oakton since ground was broken for the original Des Plaines Campus in the late 1970s. While the College has received some infrastructure maintenance funds from the state, such funds have not been part of the budget in the recent past. Apart from the allocation received for the newest addition, the Skokie campus and additions to the Des Plaines Campus were wholly financed by the College.

Oakton's revenue comes from five primary sources: local property taxes (48%); student tuition and fees (17%); state government (13%); sales, services, and auxiliary revenues (14%); and the federal government (6%). Figure 2.1 depicts total FY06 revenue by source.

Property taxes have continued to account for the largest part of Oakton's total revenue. Oakton is located in an affluent district with some new construction and upgrades; the most recent estimated assessed value of taxable property was \$21.2 billion for the 2005 tax year. The College anticipates receiving a total of \$33.3 million in property taxes across all funds for

FY07. Oakton's 2003 tax levy rate of 17.85 cents per \$100 of equalized assessed valuation compares favorably to an average rate of 25.21 cents for local peers and an average rate of 24.98 cents for all Illinois community colleges (see ICCB Data and Characteristics, July 2005, Table IV-11). Typical homeowners paid just 2.32 percent of their property tax bill to Oakton in tax year 2005.

Oakton's district is not expected to experience the population and tax base growth that its peer institutions anticipate. The recent passage of the Property Tax Extension Limitation Law (PTELL) is also anticipated to lower the amount of revenue that can be realized through property taxes in the coming years, as PTELL limits the increase in property tax extensions to five percent, or the percent increase in the national Consumer Price Index (CPI) for the prior year, whichever is less. PTELL further requires that property tax calculations be based on the prior year's Equalized Assessed Valuation. The general effect of PTELL is to limit revenue growth from property taxes to the rate of inflation plus an allowance for new property; however, taxpayers are still allowed to grant additional tax revenue growth to a taxing district through referenda, though such referenda in recent years have met with mixed success.

Table 2.1 provides total revenue data for four fiscal years, showing the amount accounted for by each source.

Data in Table 2.1 show a \$4 million increase in local tax revenue over the four-year period, a shifting amount from ICCB grants, relatively flat federal revenue, and an increase of approximately \$2.5 million from student tuition and fees. The dramatic swings in the "all other state revenue" category are due to the one-time adjustment to the state contribution to pension funds in the State University Retirement System.

Most state revenue, other than support for capital projects, comes through apportionment (reimbursement) grants based on midterm credit hour enrollments. The state establishes funding categories for courses and uses different reimbursement amounts for each category. Currently, courses classified as "occupational" garner an additional reimbursement of \$5.28 per credit hour. Significantly, there is a two-year lag between the generation of credits and subsequent apportionment reimbursement by the state, so credits generated in FY08 will not be reimbursed until FY10. Further, the reimbursement rates per credit hour change annually. The most recent reimbursement rates per credit hour are depicted in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2

Illinois Credit Hour Apportionment Rates by Funding Category	
Funding category	Rate
Baccalaureate	\$19.06
Business	\$23.62
Technical	\$59.36
Health	\$91.58
Remedial	\$15.78
Adult Basic and Secondary Education	\$56.23

Table 2.1

Revenue Sources, Fiscal Years 2003 – 2006				
	FY03	FY04	FY05	FY06
Local taxes	\$28,090,528	\$29,935,535	\$30,841,267	\$32,094,614
All other local revenue*	442,824	527,078	470,299	538,750
ICCB grants	7,320,907	5,955,155	7,145,234	6,687,510
All other state revenue**	6,261,714	25,945,977	4,524,573	2,994,504
Federal revenue	3,214,188	3,451,589	3,675,322	3,661,958
Student tuition and fees	14,247,279	15,344,151	16,158,466	16,740,596
All other revenue***	11,006,041	10,690,322	11,417,675	10,574,094
Total	\$70,583,481	\$91,849,807	\$74,232,836	\$73,292,026

Data derived from ICCB Uniform Financial Statement #1.

*For example, foundation local government and corporate grants.

**For example, State Board of Education grants, Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) financial aid funds, Illinois public library grants, state contributions to SURS on behalf of employees.

***For example, interest income, dividends, miscellaneous.

Table 2.4

FY08 In-District Tuition at Neighboring Community Colleges	
College	Tuition per credit hour
Du Page	\$103
Elgin	\$91
South Suburban	\$87
Harper	\$85
Oakton	\$82
Prairie State	\$78
College of Lake County	\$76
Moraine Valley	\$67
Joliet	\$62
Morton	\$61
Triton	\$56
Peer Group Average	\$77

Table 2.3 shows the number of credit hours on which state apportionment was based for the past four fiscal years. The difference between credit hours reported here and those reported in Table 1.1 is that Table 1.1 data reflect total enrollments, whereas Table 2.3 data reflect midterm enrollments eligible for state apportionment, always a smaller number than total enrollments. Data include credits generated by both Oakton and the Alliance for Lifelong Learning; revenues produced through Alliance enrollments flow directly to the Alliance, designated as an auxiliary operation. The relatively flat pattern is not expected to change in the coming years, given that Oakton’s district is relatively well developed, with little room for new housing, low population growth, easy availability of alternative sources of higher education both in and near the district, and growth of online and distance education from numerous providers. However, many faculty and administrators believe Oakton has not completely tapped the existing potential of the district. A more concerted marketing effort, significant outreach to growing minority communities, and increasing responsiveness to the community could, they believe, foster growth in student credit hours.

Table 2.3

Apportionment Credit Hours				
	FY03	FY04	FY05	FY06
Credit Hours	194,838	184,383	181,990	185,575

Student tuition and fees accounted for 17 percent of FY06 revenue. Over the past five years, tuition has risen from \$58 in FY04 to \$82 per credit hour in FY08, an increase of 41 percent. The Board reluctantly agreed to recent tuition increases, though Oakton’s tuition is comparable to tuition charged by neighboring community colleges, as indicated in Table 2.4.

Tuition is only one part of the story regarding student costs. Fees can add significantly to the amount students must pay, as can the cost of books and supplies. To acknowledge this, *Change Matters* includes the objective to “implement innovations, practices and procedures to contain costs of tuition, textbooks and instructional materials.” An ad hoc committee will be created to explore the future use of textbooks and instructional materials in light of concerns about rising costs and emerging media options.

Oakton continues to work conscientiously to minimize tuition and fee increases. The Board is particularly concerned about containing tuition. Financial assistance programs generally cover tuition, as do employer tuition reimbursement plans, but fees not universally applied to all students, with course fees as the prime example, are typically not covered through financial assistance. Thus, if the College has to increase fees while containing tuition, financial aid recipients may actually be disadvantaged. The Board ordinarily approves tuition over a two to three year period to provide greater certainty for students and for improved budgetary planning.

All tuition increases are discussed with the Board of Student Affairs (BSA), and all are controversial. The BSA, however, has recognized the reasons behind tuition increases and their importance in ensuring the high quality of Oakton’s programs and services. In an act of incredible generosity, the BSA helped offset the impact of recent tuition increases by funding need-based tuition, fee, and textbook scholarships. Since 2005, the BSA has continued to operate and expand them, awarding \$100,000 in tuition and fee scholarships each year. In 2006, the textbook fund was likewise well endowed, with funding of \$37,500. The establishment of these types of assistance for students by students is indicative of the caring and connected community we want to foster.

The Oakton Community College Educational Foundation is another important source of revenue for scholarships and special projects. As dwindling public funding erodes support for student financial assistance, academic programs, and capital improvements, the College must rely on private resources to maintain its level of excellence. Established as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit charitable organization in 1977, the Foundation has benefited thousands of students, faculty, and staff by supporting compelling College initiatives not met by public funds. From providing hundreds of scholarships to enhancing the learning and working environment with vital programs

and equipment, the Foundation makes a significant difference in the quality of life at Oakton. As of March 31, 2007, the Foundation had net assets of \$10.1 million, with \$2.7 million of this balance unrestricted. From July 1, 2001, to March 31, 2007, the Foundation's assets grew from \$5.8 million to \$10.1 million, a 74 percent increase.

Oakton recently restructured the Grants and Foundation support offices to strengthen external fundraising efforts. Before 2005, a single Director of Resource Development administered both the Grants Office and Educational Foundation. In 2005, the Foundation was assigned to the Executive Director of College Advancement. A new Director of Grants and Alternative Funding position was created to focus exclusively on seeking grants and developing and responding to new opportunities for generating revenues.

In 2006, Oakton accepted 27 federal, state, and private source grants totaling \$2.5 million. A \$50,000 Workforce Investment Act pilot grant, later increased to \$180,000, provided the necessary funds for establishing two new certificate programs, one in Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) and one in Transportation, Warehousing and Logistics management. Using the grant funds and capitalizing on similar contributions from Stratum Global and William Frick and Company, as well as a significant cash gift from a loyal donor, Oakton was able to construct the necessary RFID labs and now houses the only such lab at a community

Table 2.5

Educational Foundation Contributions					
Category	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Student Scholarships, including emergency and book funds	\$74,969	\$59,490	\$72,423	\$105,917	\$275,441
Technology	1,123	8,280	2,303	2,988	19,982
Instructional Programs	32,299	60,849	124,709	36,620	3,277
Campus Improvements, including renovation of Performing Arts Center	692,889	9,683	3,209	38,342	5,258
Cultural Events	1,601	3,371	22,809	13,500	22,408
Faculty/Staff Enhancements	2,000	0	2,000	2,900	1,000
Other	0	0	47,543	17,792	35,999
Total	\$804,881	\$140,673	\$274,996	\$208,059	\$363,365

college. Another significant grant, the National Science Foundation's Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Talent Expansion Program (STEP), supports students interested in careers in the sciences, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Oakton was one of the first community colleges to receive funding from the National Science Foundation in the early 1990s, when the NSF realized that many K-12 science and math teachers took their first college-level science classes at community colleges. Table 2.6 lists significant grants and amounts of money received for the past five years.

In addition to seeking new sources of funding to compensate for reductions in traditional revenue streams, the College has continued to explore new cost containment and cost reduction initiatives. Every organizational and institutional membership is reviewed on an annual basis, and many nonrenewals have resulted in savings of \$10,000 to \$15,000 annually. The consolidation of credit and noncredit class schedule publications reduced printing and mailing costs over the past 10 years from 30,000 to 18,000 pieces of mail, resulting in a savings of \$22,000. Online access to and reduced demand for catalogs has enabled Oakton to print fewer catalogs while still making catalog information available through the Web. The College has also begun purchasing electrical power from sources other than Commonwealth Edison, resulting in

significant savings of \$765,000 for electrical service during the 18-month period beginning January 1, 2007. Oakton recognizes that becoming a green college requires a careful balance between taking cost saving measures and purchasing the sometimes more expensive products that sustain the environment. These cost reduction measures and consistent attentiveness to financial stewardship, along with modest tuition and fee increases and successful grant seeking, will help maintain the strength of Oakton's financial resources.

Oakton's budgeting process allows for the identification of potential problems and mid-course adjustments. Significant monitoring data are available to administration and staff through the financial management system and monthly budget reports. The Budget Office within the department of Business and Finance manages the budget process. The process allows for employee involvement at all levels, although not all departments engage their staff. Budget requests fall into five categories—personnel, remodeling, equipment and capital, balance of budget, and strategic initiatives—and must align with strategic goals and objectives currently in place (for FY07, see the *Learning Together 2003-2008 Strategic Plan*). Each request must be submitted through the appropriate Vice President, except for remodeling requests, which are also reviewed by the Executive Director of Campus Operations and Facilities. The Vice President for Business and Finance is responsible for preparing the budget, which is then reviewed by the President's Council. The Board must approve a balanced budget no later than August for the fiscal year.

Oakton makes both the budget and information about the overall financial resources of the College widely available on the College's Web page and in print, and the budgeting process permits input from employees at all levels. However, some concerns exist about processes for allocation of resources. For example, in the Constellation Survey both the budgeting process and the allocation of resources appeared in the top 10 list of "things that are important but not done well" at Oakton. An analysis of concerns suggests they center on a perceived lack of communication about rationales for budget decisions, suggesting the College needs to strengthen communications regarding the budgeting process. At the same time, employees recognize that the allocation of financial resources in any large organization can be contentious and that unpopular decisions must be made.

Table 2.6

Significant Grants				
Funding Agency	Grant Name	Year Awarded	Grant Length	Amount
National Science Foundation	STEM Talent Expansion Program (STEP)	2006	5 years	\$999,988
	Undergraduate Research Collaboration	2006	5 years	\$270,000
	STEM Talent Expansion Program (STEP) - Pilot	2002	3 years	\$249,992
Department of Education – TRIO Program	Student Support Services	Last renewed: 2005	4 years	\$1,114,972
Illinois Dept. of Commerce and Economic Opportunity	Employer Training and Investment Program	2005	18 months	\$212,194
Illinois Secretary of State	Family Literacy Grant	annual	1 year	Average: \$74,000
Illinois Community College Board	WIA Initiative -Transportation, Warehousing and Logistics	2005	1 year	\$ 52,250
	Healthcare Program Innovation Pilot Grant	2004	1 year	\$ 63,600
British Petroleum	BP Leader Award	2004	1 year	\$30,000

Physical Resources

Oakton's Des Plaines and Skokie campuses are modern, well maintained, well equipped and attractive. *Change Matters* also recognizes that Oakton's physical campuses include the many community sites where courses are delivered. The Alliance has long maintained offices in high school buildings to oversee its noncredit offerings scheduled in these facilities. The College has recently embarked on several new partnerships to extend courses into exciting locations. One such partnership involves the Workforce Board of Northern Cook County, through which the College has begun offering a variety of credit and noncredit courses at the Westfield Old Orchard Shopping Mall. Another partnership is with the Northeastern Illinois Public Safety Training Academy (NIPSTA) in Glenview.

In 2006, Oakton dedicated the Art, Science, and Technology Pavilion at the Skokie campus. This 59,000-square-foot addition houses the College's programs in architecture and construction management, art and graphic design, computer networking and systems, computer technology and information systems, electronics, engineering, and manufacturing. The construction of the Pavilion reflects Oakton's commitment to environmental responsibility. Using a \$75,000 grant from the Illinois Clean Energy Fuel Foundation, a number of energy efficient features were incorporated into the design, including building materials that reduce heat transfer, architectural features that make use of daylight illumination, occupancy sensors for lighting and thermostat set point control, HVAC systems incorporating heat recovery designs, low flow technologies to reduce water consumption, and sustainable materials such as bamboo flooring.

Initially envisioned over a decade ago, the Pavilion was intended to accommodate an expansion of technology courses and enrollments associated with the rise in computer-related jobs during the 1990s. However, as work on the project progressed, the so-called "Dot.com boom" went bust, and enrollments in technology and computer-related courses declined significantly. At the same time, enrollments rose in health-related courses, particularly biology and chemistry, and, as described in Core Component 2A, the College created new biology and chemistry labs at the Skokie campus to accommodate increased enrollment demand. The College is concerned about lower than expected enrollments at the Skokie campus; *Change Matters* contains the specific objective to increase enrollments at the Skokie campus by 20 percent over the next three to four years.

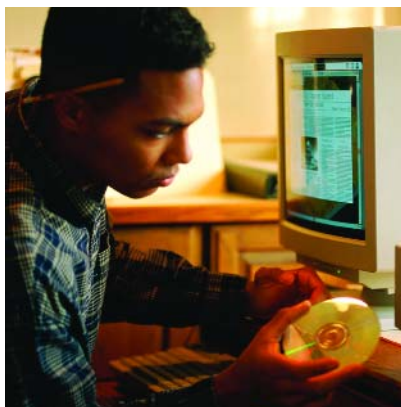
The College recently hired Facility Information Consultants to review the condition of the 30-year-old Des Plaines campus, make recommendations for infrastructure maintenance, and estimate future facility improvement costs. The report recommended \$13.3 million in improvements; however, since some of this work has already been budgeted and the College may not accept all recommendations, Oakton anticipates spending only \$11.8 million over the next five years.

The College community takes great pride in the way facilities and grounds are maintained and serviced to ensure effective use and visual appeal. On the Constellation Survey employees gave high ratings to both the importance and performance of maintaining facilities and equipment. Visitors to campus and clients who rent spaces admire their high quality and beauty, and participants in the photography research project described above also expressed strong appreciation for the quality and maintenance of the College's buildings and grounds.

Technology Resources

Oakton has excellent technology resources, with 52 computer labs, wireless accessibility in the cafeteria and library, a regular (now five-year) replacement cycle that provides staff and students with up-to-date equipment, and an outstanding Help Desk staff. Audiovisual equipment is readily available, and staff are exemplary and responsive. The College places a high priority on maintaining and expanding technology resources. The Constellation Survey statement "Technology is up to date and well supported" drew a performance rating of 7.3 and a performance rating of 6.2, both very high scores on a 9-point scale.





The Office of Information Technology (IT) serves both academic and administrative units of the College. IT's comprehensive charge enables the Office to standardize solutions campus wide and make optimal overall decisions about technology. The Office is committed to developing a rich and robust computing environment that promotes accessibility and service for students, faculty, and staff. Administratively, the IT department has a User Services section that provides instructional support services, Web services, and Help Desk or general services, as well as an Administrative Services section that oversees Oakton's student system and financial/HR/payroll system. In Criterion Three we examine how well our technology resources support the learning environment and student needs.

Oakton has continuously increased Web-supported and online education capabilities over the last six years. Staff members who support distance education are specialists in online and other forms of distance learning and provide strong support for students and faculty. Online course offerings have increased, with 95 courses offered online, though not every one is scheduled each semester. In 2001, 174 students (unduplicated count) enrolled in online courses; by 2006 that number had grown by 320 percent to 731 students (unduplicated count). Usually several sections of an online course reach their maximum enrollment of 20 shortly after registration opens. A number of certificates can now be completed through online courses, including the Computer Technology Certificate, Microsoft Office Specialist Core (MOS) Certificate, and HIT Medical Transcription Certificate. With recent work done to develop an online or hybrid form of Speech 103, it will soon be possible for students to complete all of their general education requirements through distance learning opportunities.

The numbers of courses offered and students enrolled in distance learning have grown dramatically at Oakton, and the College has generously supported faculty who teach distance learning courses through intellectual property agreements, professional development, and staff assistance. However, Oakton has not held College-wide conversations about whether to offer entire degrees through distance learning, how to determine what courses to offer through distance learning, or how many different faculty should be supported for the same distance learning course. To address these issues, *Change Matters* includes a strategic objective that commits Oakton to developing an appropriate comprehensive distance learning plan that covers online and media-based courses, as well as credit and noncredit offerings. The College would appreciate consultative guidance from the HLC visiting team to help shape the development of a comprehensive distance learning plan for Oakton.

During the 2006 academic year, under the guidance of IT, Oakton implemented the Banner SCT Student Information System. The Banner software offers an integrated, Web-enabled environment that provides improved services to students, faculty, and staff. The Banner software replaced Oakton's in-house legacy system, OakSTAR. OakSTAR served Oakton for seven years (1999-2006), but its operating environment and architecture were inconsistent with current technology standards and practices.

Oakton has operated fully on the Banner Student System since Summer 2006 for student registration, payment, grade recordkeeping, and reporting. Speaking to the strength of our Information Technology resources, Oakton implemented the Banner Student System on time, on budget, and quietly. The Banner Student System includes self-service functionality for students and faculty that enables students, faculty, and staff to access and update their own information any time, any place, on any net, and with any browser. Prospective students can apply for admission, and current students can register and pay for classes. Because these transactions take place in real time, the information is then immediately available to aid faculty in updating schedules, advising and grading students, and managing instructional activities. In addition, Oakton has implemented the Luminis Web portal (MyOakton) that integrates and supports a wide variety of Web-based systems and provides a single sign-on for all services, customized to meet the specific needs of students, faculty, and staff. This includes single sign-on to the Banner system, online and Web-enhanced courses via WebCT, student and employee e-mail, and other

systems. This Web portal is also integrated with the College's directory services to create a single digital identity for students and employees to access resources both on and off campus.

Oakton's current Financial, HR, and Payroll systems run on a platform called JSchool. These systems support purchasing, accounts payable, budgeting, and general ledger activities, as well as HR and payroll processes. The company that owned the JSchool licenses experienced financial reversals and cut back on staff and support to the product. As a result, the current platform for the Finance/HR/Payroll systems is no longer safely supported by a third party vendor. When Banner was purchased, the College knew other modules would be examined after implementation of the student system because Banner is an enterprise system with a full suite of applications. The overall automated system integration has real benefits, and Banner is a national product with a strong base and support structure.

After successfully installing the student system, IT began the project planning for the financial and HR/payroll portions of Banner. Administrators and staff from across the College have been working on this since last June. Effective FY08 (July 1, 2007), the College will move from the JSchool software onto the Banner Finance module. And, effective with the new calendar year (January 1, 2008), Oakton will move from the JSchool software onto the Banner HR/Payroll module. This brings welcome changes, as these modules have the same Banner self-service features as the student system, so, for instance, employees will be able to use Banner to check their available sick or vacation time online. However, this is a very large project for the involved offices. Less visible than the student system project because it does not directly affect 10,000 students, the Finance/HR/Payroll project is complex and time consuming, especially for IT, Budget and Finance, and Human Resources staff.

Oakton's Web site, www.oakton.edu, forms an important link to students and external constituents. Currently College Advancement and Information Technology share responsibility and authority for the Web site. This has led to some confusion about who makes and implements specific decisions regarding content and access. Further, as expectations regarding Web access, visibility, and utility have grown over the years, disagreements concerning the design of the Web site have emerged. Some of these disagreements resulted from increasing demand for aid in creating and maintaining Web sites. Staffing limitations have made it difficult for some areas, including academic departments, to create effective Web pages, particularly if staff members within the area lack appropriate technical skills or design capabilities. The Council of Deans and Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) committee on Chair Support have both been working for some years to identify a process by which new Web pages can be created and existing pages updated and maintained. The Aslanian Group research project described earlier found that the Web has become a primary source of information about the College; the Group advised Oakton that its Web site is of critical importance in attracting students, employers, and the community to the College.

Two distinct philosophies have emerged regarding the purpose of the Web site and the nature of good design. One perception is that the Web site's primary purpose is for marketing the College and our programs and activities. Another is that the Web site functions primarily to enable transactions such as applications, registration, payment of bills, and receiving and submitting course materials, especially for online and hybrid courses. Each approach implies different priorities for work on the Web site, even when there is agreement that ideally both sets of needs should be accommodated.

Oakton has made progress in addressing these issues, though work continues. One recent development was a request for proposals from outside consultants to examine the backlog of Web page creation and updates. A second development is the Board's approval of an additional full-time staff position to support Web page development and maintenance. Since one of the College's strategic goals, "One College: Four Campuses," specifically identifies an electronic campus, building and sustaining a strong Web presence and functionality remains important.

Summary of Core Component 2B

Evidence in this section demonstrates that Oakton has strong human, financial, physical, and technology resources that constitute a solid basis for supporting, improving, and expanding the quality of educational programs and services.

Core Component 2C:

Oakton's ongoing evaluation and assessment processes provide reliable evidence of institutional effectiveness that clearly informs strategies for continuous improvement.

Oakton uses a number of approaches and tools to assess, evaluate, and improve institutional effectiveness. Here we focus on employees and the organization as a whole, and in Criterion Three we examine assessments of teaching and student learning.

Program Review

Oakton has had a comprehensive program review process in place since 1987-1988. While Oakton's program review responds to Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) program review mandates, it is also more extensive. For example, the ICCB only requires program reviews from instructional, academic support, and student service programs, but Oakton involves all departments, instructional and noninstructional, on a five-year cycle. This acknowledges that all departments contribute to the primary mission of providing a strong teaching and learning environment. A detailed *Program Review Manual* gives specific information about the content of reviews and processes for conducting them (see www.oakton.edu/hlc/progreview).

All program reviews must include an introduction containing descriptive information about the program: the process used for program review; the methods used for connecting with and supporting the College's mission and strategic goals, as well as major changes (internal and external) affecting the program; the need for the program in relation to Oakton's mission; the costs and revenues of the program; an assessment of the program's quality; and future-oriented recommendations. The final report must be approved by the Institutional Program Review Committee (IPRC). A summary of the report, including recommendations, is sent to the President's Council, Faculty Senate, and Classified Staff Association.

By including representatives from administration, staff, and faculty across the College, the IPRC brings an institutional perspective to both the process and each department's report. The Committee works with departments to ensure they present evidence to support assertions of quality, acknowledge issues and challenges, and think reflectively about the present status and future of the program. The IPRC may make observations and recommendations regarding a program or service to that particular department or unit. Though it may suggest improvements or identify areas of strength or concern the department has not recognized, it does not make specific recommendations about program continuation.

Program Review offers the opportunity for in-depth analysis and evaluation of every academic, student support, and administrative unit, but it has yet to fulfill its promise. While the "learning and recommendations" section of each report went to the President and Vice Presidents, there was no formal feedback from the administrative leaders to their respective units. Thus, those doing program reviews were unsure about whether their reports had meaning or consequence, and some viewed the process as a time consuming but otherwise wasted enterprise. To strengthen the value of program review as a tool for ensuring institutional effectiveness, in 2005-2006 Vice Presidents began meeting with their respective deans, administrators, chairs, and managers who had just completed the program review process to discuss observations and recommendations generated by their reviews. This step closed the feedback loop to ensure that

information, analyses, and suggestions for improvement generated by the process reached appropriate administrators, who could then work with their departments to improve the quality of programs and services.

Semester Highlights

Program reviews provide evidence about how effectively units of the College operate and how they connect with Oakton's mission and strategic goals and objectives. Another tool for assessing institutional performance is "Semester Highlights," semester reports on achievements that support Oakton's strategic goals and objectives. "Semester Highlights" serves as a useful compilation of activities and evidence of the range of activities Oakton undertakes.

Data and Reports

The Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) gathers and disseminates a great deal of data about Illinois community colleges. Among the ICCB's services to colleges is the distribution of performance indicator data provided annually that permits institutions to measure changes in their own performance over time and to compare their performances with those of peer institutions. This data is the basis for several state reports, including the annual Illinois Board of Higher Education Performance Report. In this report, colleges assess their performances on a variety of measures, such as the number of individuals served, courses/workshops provided through Business and Industry Centers, degree completions by race/ethnicity and gender, and unit costs of instruction (see IBHE Performance Reports in the Resource Room). Currently few Oakton employees are familiar with these performance indicators or examine Oakton's data. As the College engages more employees in decision-making processes, expanding the number of employees who have knowledge about Oakton's performance will enable more people to make decisions informed by data.

In addition to state data, Oakton has the capacity for extracting and analyzing data about student characteristics, enrollments, academic performance, and persistence. Ad hoc queries of student data performed by the Office of Research provide a powerful tool for examining a range of institutional effectiveness measures. For example, OIR recently identified students who successfully completed three Great Books courses, entitling them to be named Great Books Scholars. This demonstrates that the new initiative is beginning to achieve one of its goals: to have students enroll in multiple Great Books courses. Data compiled for the Foundations of Excellence® project showed that student performance in high-enrollment courses varied by race/ethnicity. This data will inform new initiatives to improve student success, one of the *Change Matters* objectives.

Employee Evaluation

Employee evaluations form another means of assessing and evaluating institutional effectiveness. Here we discuss staff and administrator evaluations, and in Criterion Three we focus on the evaluation of full- and part-time faculty.

Classified staff are evaluated by their supervisors, using a Classified Staff Performance Evaluation form. The form consists primarily of closed-ended items with room for comments and calls for consultation and sign-off by the employee and supervisor. The Classified Staff Association and Public Safety Officers' contracts contain provisions that guarantee due process for employees dissatisfied with their evaluations. Both contracts provide for annual step increases rather than merit pay. While Oakton expects each staff member to be evaluated



Learning from the Community through Innovative Projects

The Office of Research spearheaded a novel research project in 2006 to elicit information about perceptions of the College held by area residents and employers. By wearing their name badges for one week both on and off campus, Oakton employees implicitly invited community members to make comments and ask questions about the College. Volunteers kept logs listing comments received and characteristics of those who made them. Comments and questions from the 68 community members who talked to employees touched on a variety of topics. Those who did have some experience with Oakton, whether directly themselves or through family or friends, gave positive comments. The project provided interesting qualitative data and facilitated conversations about the College between employees and people in our community.



annually, conversations with supervisors and HR staff indicate evaluations are not consistently implemented across the institution with respect to either frequency or completeness. In the context of an institutional culture that values employees and invests in professional development, inconsistent implementation may prevent staff from receiving the valuable feedback that fosters improvement.

Staff evaluations are particularly important when changes in job function or responsibilities occur. If there are significant changes in an individual's job functions or responsibilities, the staff member may request a job reclassification, as indicated in the classified staff contract. Through the reclassification process, the Human Resources department reconsiders an employee's job description, duties, classification, and salary. An administrator can also recommend changes in his or her department or office organization and an individual's job functions. If changes are needed, the administrator writes a reorganization plan, presents the plan to the appropriate Vice President, and works with HR on implementation. For office reorganization, the Classified Staff Association leadership is also consulted.

Administrators are also evaluated annually by their supervisors, who use a standard performance evaluation template that includes six criteria: fulfills essential functions of the job, collegiality/interpersonal skills, area initiatives, professional development, staff development, and leadership. It also contains performance evaluations (satisfactory or nonapplicable) on five optional criteria: special initiatives, student service, community service, institutional promotion, and linkage partnerships. Most of the template is devoted to a narrative evaluation. Administrators are encouraged to have in-person evaluation meetings with their supervisors to complement written evaluations.

Oakton has no formal mechanism or process to gather evaluation input from individuals who report to or work with the staff or administrator being evaluated. Given the turnover in administrative personnel and changes in institutional culture discussed in the Introduction, this has become a source of some concern. Many believe a supervisor, whether staff or administrator, should be evaluated, not only by the individual to whom he or she reports, but also by those who report to him or her. While Oakton has no tradition of administrative review by staff or faculty, it may be advisable to consider enabling staff and faculty to have input into the evaluation of administrators. Responding to this concern, in Spring 2007 administrators agreed to revise the process for their evaluation and began piloting a 360-degree evaluation that allows both peers and employees who report directly to an administrator to have input into his or her assessment. The initial 360-degree evaluation has just recently been completed, and the administration is planning to expand the pilot next year.

Summary of Core Component 2C

In conclusion, Oakton's institutional assessment and evaluation processes have not been highly formalized in the past; responsibility for interpreting and acting on data has been spread throughout various levels of the organization. Such diffusion makes it difficult to connect these processes and relate them to the overall assessment of institutional effectiveness. The lack of measurable objectives in previous strategic plans contributed to the difficulty of using quantitative indicators to gauge performance in meeting strategic goals and objectives. However, Oakton is establishing more purposeful approaches for assessing effectiveness. For example, the requirement that vice presidents meet with administrators and faculty to discuss their program reviews should strengthen the connections between appraising departments' performances, budgeting, and planning.

Core Component 2D:

All levels of planning align with Oakton's mission, thereby enhancing its capacity to fulfill that mission.

Criterion One demonstrated the degree to which Oakton's mission is understood and supported by the College community. The alignment of planning with mission fosters a common understanding of that mission and how resources should be directed to fulfill it. We have already discussed several explicit connections between Oakton's mission and planning. For example, budget requests are justified in terms of the mission and strategic plan; program reviews ask all departments to articulate how they support the mission; and "Semester Highlights" explicitly report how departmental activities link with the strategic plan. As noted earlier, concerns have emerged about the absence of measurable objectives in Oakton's previous strategic plans and the resulting difficulty in gauging the institution's effectiveness in realizing these plans. The rest of this section examines how the new strategic planning process initiated in 2006-2007 addresses these concerns.

Strategic Plans: 1999-2008

Over the past decade Oakton has developed three strategic plans using three different methods. The planning effort for *Strategic Plan 1999-2002*, led by the President and Board of Trustees, involved a series of discussions with Oakton's employees and external constituencies in a variety of formats. The resulting plan comprised eight broad goals intended to establish direction for the next four years. To allow for maximum flexibility on the part of individual departments, each department was expected to develop objectives aligning with the goals and College mission.

The next plan, *Learning Together 2003-2008*, was developed by a committee composed of faculty, staff, students, and administrators. The committee gathered information and ideas from the Oakton community and external constituents and prepared a plan with eight broad strategic goals and more specific objectives, though the objectives included few measurable outcomes. Departments and programs were expected to organize their activities and budgets in line with the objectives. Both plans, especially the second one, were oriented primarily to sustaining and maintaining Oakton's excellence. As we note below, the new plan, focusing on change, takes a bolder stance.

The absence of measurable objectives in both former plans was largely a reaction to what had been viewed as overly prescriptive and detailed multiyear objectives required in the 1980s and early 1990s, when all departments were expected to submit detailed objectives for each of the next three years. The objectives were compiled but rarely used for decision making, allocating resources, or gauging effectiveness. Viewed as time consuming to produce but irrelevant to actual work, such objectives fell into disfavor, and employees embraced a strategic planning approach that focused on articulating goals and broad objectives, leaving implementation to the discretion of individual departments.

Over the life of the two strategic plans immediately preceding *Change Matters*, Oakton succeeded in meeting many goals and objectives. For example, the 1999-2002 plan stated that the College would "develop and implement a new, comprehensive personal and professional development program that will provide educational and training opportunities to all employees through their careers." As we discuss in Criterion Four, Oakton has been remarkably successful in providing professional development opportunities for employees. Both plans also included goals related to developing technology resources and to increasing workforce diversity. Evidence provided elsewhere in this report demonstrates that Oakton has greatly enhanced the use of technology for teaching and learning at the College; likewise, Criterion One highlights how Oakton has addressed issues of diversity.

Change Matters: 2008-2012

By 2005, as a result of personnel changes and an external environment that demanded more accountability and measurement of accomplishments, some voiced concerns about Oakton's strategic plan and planning processes, with the self study process serving as catalyst and vehicle for their expression. These concerns relate to three areas: collaboration among faculty, staff, and administrators; communication among various levels of the College community; and measurement of progress in accomplishing well-understood goals and objectives. The issues involving communication and collaboration cannot be fully addressed through strategic planning alone, and Criterion One includes a discussion of other responses. However, it was clear that implementing a new planning process that involved the whole community and resulted in measurable goals and objectives, ultimately giving clarity to what members of the College wanted to achieve together, was a critical step in dealing with these issues. The extent of concern motivated a new round of strategic planning before the 2003-2008 plan had completed its cycle and led to Oakton's decision to use the Higher Learning Commission's Vital Focus process as the approach to rethinking Oakton's planning process and the next strategic plan. The College knew that using Vital Focus for strategic planning was a departure from its central purpose of moving an institution to AQIP. Nonetheless, the Vital Focus tools provided a unique way to engage the entire College community in planning for the future.

Change Matters, the new strategic plan, emerged from College-wide conversations about current capacities, challenges, and priorities for Oakton today and in the future as the College realizes its mission. This discussion began in town hall meetings organized by the President to discuss planning at Oakton and continued through discussions with Board members, students, and external constituents. In many ways the Vital Focus process and Conversation Day marked the culmination of this process by bringing together all employees of the College for a day-long workshop on "what matters most." The "Learning Matters" 2012 Strategic Planning Team (2012 Team) had the task of taking the material generated through these multiple sources and developing the new strategic plan. The work of the 2012 Team and the resulting plan, *Change Matters*, has been discussed in the Introduction. A detailed description of the work of the 2012 Team is available in the Resource Room.

The resulting strategic plan, *Change Matters: 2008-2012*, articulates an ambitious five-year agenda for change that will require the concerted efforts of many individuals and a substantial amount of resources. All of the goals are clearly linked to the College's *Vision, Mission and Values*. The strategic goals of "Academic Excellence," "Innovative Learning for Local and Global Citizenship," "Anti-bias College," and "Green College" reflect a core commitment to excellence in teaching and learning; core values of tolerance, fairness, responsibility, compassion, and integrity; and the relation between educational quality, student learning, and the diverse, complex, global, and technological society that we inhabit. The "WISE Student Services," "One College: Four Campuses," and "Reinvented Physical Space and Infrastructure" goals embody a commitment to helping students become successful learners and acknowledge the multiple locations and types of delivery systems that support educational programs and services. The "Model Work Environment" goal promotes a connected and caring community and responds directly to the concerns raised about collaboration and communication discussed above. Finally, the "Financial Stewardship" goal commits Oakton to maintaining the affordability of programs and services for students, along with the strength of the institution's financial resources. Thus, Oakton's mission and values serve as a common ground and foundation for the future-oriented vision articulated in *Change Matters*.

Oakton is justly proud of the new strategic plan and the accomplishments of the past year. Equally important, and a distinct change from past practice, is that the College also has a blueprint for implementing it. After *Change Matters* was ratified by the Board of Trustees, the 2012 Team constructed a comprehensive implementation process that includes the following steps:

- Identifying a lead person for each goal or objective and the departments, committees, and/or

task forces responsible for working on them

- Establishing new cross-institutional task forces and committees to address goals and objectives for which existing groups are either inappropriate or nonexistent
- Creating a mechanism—the e-mail 2012@oakton.edu—through which employees and students can propose new projects and activities that move Oakton forward
- Defining the ongoing role of the 2012 Team as a representative body with general oversight and reporting responsibilities in matters related to implementation of the strategic plan
- Clarifying processes and criteria for Strategic Initiatives: projects that both directly advance a strategic goal or objective and require financial support outside the normal operating budget.

The new implementation process encourages the alignment of mission with planning; establishes a representative committee purposefully oriented towards the future of the College; provides clear lines of input and communication to connect constituents across various levels of the institution; and, finally, establishes reporting mechanisms to ensure that outcomes are measured and results used to gauge the effectiveness of our efforts.

Summary of Core Component 2D

Oakton has consistently worked to align planning with mission throughout the organization. *Change Matters*, the new strategic plan, is aligned with the mission. Moreover, concerns related to strategic planning raised early in the self study have been addressed by both *Change Matters* and its implementation process.

Conclusion to Criterion Two:

Recognizing the inevitability of change and preparing for the future are central to Oakton's mission. Through transitions in employees, shifting student demographics, and a tightening economic environment, over the last decade we have learned together how change matters. Oakton's future-oriented culture is grounded in the shared *Vision, Mission and Values*; methods for environmental scanning that provide the basis for realistic planning; an honest assessment of our capacity for maintaining and strengthening programs and services; and, finally, a community of learners who share a commitment to acting "boldly, with courage, creativity, and agility, to shape our future in a changing global society."

Strengths:

- Oakton has a strong resource base. The College's human, financial, physical, and technological resources provide a solid foundation that enables us to sustain excellence, improve quality, and meet new needs. Employees, with their commitment to students, the institution, and one another, constitute the strongest resource.
- Comprehensive, ongoing research provides the necessary data and information for making appropriate planning and operational decisions for the College and for evaluating institutional effectiveness and progress toward meeting goals and objectives.
- The *Change Matters: 2008-2012 Strategic Plan* and the new implementation process are a significant achievement for Oakton. The operations of the 2012 Team represent an important example of decision making built on open communication and mutual respect.

Challenges and Possible Solutions:

- The dramatic growth in distance learning offerings confronts Oakton with a series of challenging questions. The College must develop a comprehensive distance learning plan that grows out of a College wide conversation about the impact and meaning of distance learning, as well as how Oakton delivers programs and services. *Change Matters* commits us to "updating and enhancing our plan for distance education and hybrid classes, ensuring that student success is comparable to students in classroom-based courses." Oakton seeks consultative advice from the HLC visiting team about developing this plan.

Criterion Three:
Student Learning and Effective Teaching



Oakton provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission.

Oakton has always considered teaching and learning to be the foundational elements that drive the work of the school. The first point in the *Vision, Mission and Values* statement underscores this: “We are dedicated, first, to excellence in teaching and learning.” In this Criterion, we first review Oakton’s assessment process before describing, in Core Component 3A, the learning objectives that facilitate assessment activities at course, program, and institutional levels; the ways that we conduct assessments; and results of several assessment initiatives. In Core Components 3B and 3C, we recognize effective teaching as the basis for student learning and show how Oakton’s strong, interconnected learning environments support and value this essential task. Finally, in Core Component 3D, we discuss the principal resources available to students and faculty in pursuit of high quality learning and effective teaching.

Overview of Assessment in Credit Courses and Programs

Oakton has persisted in improving assessment activities to make them relevant for effective teaching and learning. However, results have been inconsistent and not always effectively used to inform course and program-level improvements. To address these concerns, two years ago the College embarked on a revised approach to assessing learning outcomes that allows us to use assessment for improving student learning and providing greater accountability. The initiative is comprehensive, as it engages all academic program areas—transfer, career, remedial, and adult and continuing education programs—and is based on clearly identified learning objectives at course, program, and institutional levels. Through *Change Matters*, Oakton affirmed a strong commitment to assessment as crucial to maintaining academic excellence, stating that the College will “[a]dvance the culture of assessment as integral to improving teaching, learning, and student success.”

To make possible a greater understanding of assessment at Oakton, we first present some background information. Following the last HLC accreditation visit in 1997, Oakton appointed a Student Academic Assessment Team (SAAT) that now serves as the principal oversight body for Oakton’s assessment initiative. The team was initially cochaired by the President of the Faculty Senate and the Vice President for Academic Affairs, and, to ensure representation from all academic divisions and relevant offices, was composed of members of the Institutional Program Review Committee; the Advising, Teaching, and Learning Committee; the Curriculum Committee; and the Higher Learning Commission Steering Committee, as well as faculty and staff.

For several years SAAT guided departments in course- and program-level assessment. Team members designed and distributed a “grid” for each department and program to complete that depicted plans for and results of course- and program-level assessments and, for appropriate departments, general education assessments. In addition, SAAT sponsored brown bag lunches for faculty to brainstorm and discuss assessment plans. The first activities involved assessing student learning outcomes at five levels: individual classroom, course, program, general education, and institutional.

In addition to developing internal workshops and meetings to promote assessment, the College has supported faculty and staff attendance at regional and national assessment conferences, including the AAHE Assessment Conference, the Indiana University-Purdue University Assessment Conference, the 2006 Student Affairs Assessment Conference at Penn State University, and the Annual Assessment Fair for Community Colleges, held each spring at an Illinois community college. The College also has brought experts such as Tom Angelo to campus to present workshops on assessment, and continued this trend at the end of Spring 2007 by sponsoring a day-long workshop with Institute for Educational Initiatives Fellow Barbara Walvoord.

Despite these efforts, assessment has continued to be unevenly conducted. Though all departments participated to a degree in assessment, understanding about how to do assessment and use results was uneven. Many faculty embraced classroom assessment, not realizing that, while classroom assessment can be of great value in improving instruction within their individual courses, results did not provide the institution with information about learning outcomes across multiple sections of the same course or at program and institutional levels.

By the early 2000s, Oakton experienced difficulty in sustaining initial efforts on assessment, in part because of retirements among assessment leaders and a new initiative on retention that absorbed a good deal of energy over a two to three year period. Work on assessment became inconsistent, despite the College's offering alternate time or stipends to a series of faculty chairs. In 2005-2006, Oakton reworked assessment structures and processes with the assistance of Gayle Fink, a consultant whose assessment work at the Community College of Baltimore County drew national accolades.

Oakton's revised assessment approach now includes a number of improvements:

- Creation of a faculty assessment coordinator position with 12 credits of alternate time
- Revision of the SAAT charge to serve as an advisory committee to the coordinator
- Recruitment of new SAAT members for three-year terms
- Development of online assessment reports for both plans and results
- Schedule of regular meetings

A key revision of Oakton's assessment process was the creation in 2006-2007 of a faculty assessment coordinator position with 12 credits of alternate time. A call for faculty to express interest in the position was sent in Spring 2006; coincidentally, the president of the Faculty Senate was selected as coordinator. This change affirmed the placement of responsibility for assessment within the faculty ranks. The chief responsibilities of the coordinator include the following:

- Provide overall faculty leadership for assessing student learning outcomes
- Assist the Vice President for Academic Affairs with developing and managing a Learning Outcomes Assessment budget (before FY08 the College did not have a separate budget for assessment)
- Work with departments to plan, implement, and use results of annual assessments of learning, especially departments scheduled for program review in the next academic year or those experiencing difficulties in planning and implementing assessments
- Offer information and leadership for assessment workshops and conferences and act as liaison to the external assessment community

In the new assessment process, the paper grid originally designed by SAAT has been replaced by an online form that gives chairs and coordinators a more focused approach to developing and reporting assessment activities. The new form also helps to clarify that departments, especially those teaching general education courses, are encouraged to assess student outcomes for general education objectives, as well as outcomes related to specific courses being assessed. Some faculty are not yet comfortable with the online form, and the coordinator will help them become more proficient in using it.

All of Oakton's departments must complete an annual assessment of student learning outcomes at the course level, and career programs must also complete assessments at the program level (see below). Departments that teach general education courses, as well as others whose coursework incorporates general education objectives, are also encouraged to assess both general education and discipline-specific learning outcomes. Department chairs and coordinators work with their faculty to identify courses and learning outcomes to be assessed, design assessment activities, carry out assessments, and report results and recommended follow-up actions. In the fall, departments submit assessment plans, and the assessment coordinator is available for consultation; most assessments take place in the spring semester, though that is not required. During summer, departments report their assessment results, including how results will be used. Student outcomes are compared to standards set by the department, and, if standards are not met, the department is asked to suggest a course of action to achieve the goal in future years. The extent to which departments understand how to use assessment results varies across departments, and work must continue to improve both understanding and actual use of results.

Until this year, the SAAT provided feedback on both plans and reports. The Team divided into subgroups, each focusing on a subset of departments. Unfortunately, teams were not consistent, either in how they evaluated plans and reports or in the amount of detailed feedback given to departments. This caused confusion among faculty, who perceived that some departments were praised and others criticized for similar assessment activities. Creation of the assessment coordinator role shifted primary responsibility for both reviewing plans and reports and providing feedback away from the SAAT, so the SAAT is beginning to work in an advisory capacity to the coordinator. This change should improve the consistency and quality of assistance and feedback for faculty doing assessments. Though it is too early to determine whether this intent is being met, initial responses from chairs and coordinators on this change have been positive.

Overview of Assessment in the Alliance for Lifelong Learning

In addition to participating in the College-wide program review process, the Alliance for Lifelong Learning (ALL) undertakes several comprehensive assessment activities, including the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC) Reaccreditation and self study. Program-level assessment also occurs as part of reviews the Alliance must complete to remain an approved provider of continuing education for the 20 professions it currently serves. Many of these professions require certification or licensure, and positive student outcomes from these activities demonstrate program-level success in continuing education. The Alliance also obtains indicators of student learning from course evaluations. In Fall 2006, for example, 322 participants evaluated 51 Alliance offerings. Additional feedback is gathered from employers who have sent employees to a noncredit course or workshop. These assessment activities have resulted in the expansion of basic ESL for corporate clients from six weeks to 10 weeks, which affected classes at a large district hospital and a district manufacturer, as well as the redesign of Business Writing, which now places greater emphasis on e-mail and professional workplace communication.

Though actual implementation of assessment has not always occurred as planned, Oakton has a history of providing support for a systematic and comprehensive process of assessing learning outcomes. Changes made in the SAAT and the creation of an assessment coordinator position illustrate how the College has responded to the need for greater intensity and consistency in helping faculty to implement assessments and use results.



Core Component 3A:

Oakton's goals for student learning outcomes are clearly stated for each educational program and make effective assessment possible.



Refining Generic Course Objectives: A Case Study

In Fall 2006, the chair of the biology department noted that generic learning objectives for several courses failed to convey the active learning taking place in biology classrooms. Department full-time faculty and staff were asked to review and either to approve or revise existing learning objectives and course outlines. Working together, they determined the currency of learning objectives, set comprehensible expectations for students, and established learning objectives and course outlines demonstrating the rigorous standards maintained by faculty teaching the same course. Faculty also crafted each learning objective to convey principles of active learning. Developing a consensus model, faculty voted on the newly formulated learning objectives and topics, and adjunct and career programs faculty supported by the biology department will provide input on future revisions. The setting of these objectives at a high cognitive and analytical level made student-based assessment of these objectives more attainable.

Oakton uses the term “learning objectives” to describe what we expect of students who successfully complete a course or program. Assessment at the institutional level concentrates on student success in achieving general education objectives. Oakton is attempting to practice a “closed loop” approach to assessment by assessing at all levels, employing a variety of methodologies to determine whether desired outcomes are achieved, and using these results to improve courses, programs, and services.

Course-level Assessment

Learning objectives for individual courses are identified on all of Oakton's generic course syllabi. Generic syllabi, developed by faculty, include a basic outline for each course that all instructors must follow. Each generic syllabus articulates the prerequisites, description, learning objectives, course content, assignments, readings, general grading standards, and course practices required in all sections of a course. These generic course syllabi are used to articulate courses for transfer because they speak “for the College.” All generic syllabi are available in the Academic Affairs office, and some can also be found through the College's Web site. To ensure consistency in noncredit classes, the Alliance has also developed generic syllabi with course-level objectives for all Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) approved courses. Samples of Alliance generic course syllabi are available in the Resource Room.

From an assessment perspective, the learning objectives section is the most significant part of generic syllabi for credit courses. These objectives define expected student learning outcomes, specifying the knowledge, skills, or attitudes expected of students who successfully complete the course, regardless of who is teaching it or what textbooks, assignments, pedagogy, and evaluation methods are used. In addition, faculty are encouraged to supplement generic objectives with their own learning goals to allow for individualized teaching approaches and classroom autonomy. Responding to the Foundations of Excellence® Survey in Fall 2005, 92 percent of faculty reported they are highly likely to supplement generic course objectives by developing their own specific learning goals, indicating that many bring a dimension of personal creativity to their courses.

Generic course-level objectives have become part of Oakton's assessment culture, and individual departments and faculty apply them almost universally. A random sampling of 36 generic course syllabi from transfer and career disciplines validated the presence of these objectives in 35 of 36 courses sampled. Most syllabi list three to seven objectives. Department chairs and coordinators are asked periodically to review course descriptions, generic syllabi, and course learning objectives; recently, the College implemented a revision of all program and course descriptions in response to recommendations from the Educational Policies and Procedures Task Force (EPP). These recommendations obliged every chair and coordinator to reexamine course descriptions during the 2005-2006 academic year and resulted in the revision of approximately 1,100 before the publication of the 2006-2007 catalog.

The following three examples of course-level assessments completed in 2004-2005 demonstrate the range of approaches used by departments to assess learning outcomes:

- An assessment of EGL 073/076: Academic Reading and Study Skills for the Non-Native Speaker and Academic Writing for the Non-Native Speaker III required students to perform both pre- and post-evaluations of five to six essay introductions to determine if they could successfully distinguish good from bad introductions. The target was to increase students' success rate by 25 percent between the pre- and post-evaluations. Results showed an average score of 3.6 on the pre-assessment, compared with the post-result of 4.3, indicating that more

- focus was warranted; results were shared with English as a Second Language (ESL) faculty.
- HUM 205: World Religions, a popular course that satisfies both humanities and contemporary global studies general education requirements, was assessed to determine whether students were learning content covering Islam. In 2005, faculty administered multiple choice quizzes on the appropriate content to see whether 80 percent of students received a passing grade. Results showed that 53 percent passed, but that scores declined 1.4 points compared to 2004 scores. To follow up, the department chair consulted with faculty, and a listserv was created for instructors to share pedagogical strategies and resources. The department will repeat the assessment to determine whether desired improvements occurred.
 - An assessment of ECE 258: Early Childhood Education Practicum II illustrates assessment in a career program. Students were required to develop and implement a two-week curriculum project to document changes in children's understanding of selected concepts, with the benchmark that 80 percent perform at 80 percent or better. Results showed that five of seven students performed at the A- or B-level. This assessment is now regularly integrated into both ECE practicum courses.

Program-level Assessment

Beyond assessing learning outcomes at the course level, Oakton has developed assessments at the program level. After consulting with staff from the Higher Learning Commission in 2005-2006, the College concluded that program-level assessments would be focused within CTE programs, as in transfer disciplines the College does not have "majors," or programs leading to an associate degree in an arts and sciences discipline. Students who wish to transfer to baccalaureate programs in arts and sciences, business, or other fields must take most major courses at the upper division level. Oakton's primary mission with respect to these areas of study is to offer general education and a small number of lower division courses in the discipline that may be transferable to the major, as well as other courses that transfer as electives. The exceptions are for associate degrees in transfer areas with highly specific curricula, primarily the Associate of Arts in Teaching (A.A.T.), the Associate in Fine Arts (A.F.A.), and the Associate of Science in Engineering (A.S.E.). Program-level assessment in the A.A.T. has not begun because the curricula are too new, and program-level assessment for the A.F.A. and A.S.E. degrees has not yet been addressed because few students pursue these curricula or complete degrees at Oakton, preferring to transfer prior to completion.

Oakton has mandated learning objectives for CTE programs (A.A.S. degrees and certificates) and expects departments to include them in brochures and other materials describing the programs. At this time, there is variance among career programs about the extent to which program-level learning objectives are clearly specified, as well as the extent to which program-level assessments are being implemented. The assessment coordinator is presenting workshops, creating templates and other tools, and holding individual conferences with career program chairs and coordinators to ensure that all career programs have clear program-level objectives. To date, 27 of 34 career programs have written objectives that reflect the clarity and conciseness expected.

In addition to internal program-level assessment, Oakton uses a variety of other resources to assess student learning. Some CTE programs, primarily health careers, have specialized accreditation; obtaining this accreditation includes demonstrating that students meet learning expectations of the profession. In some fields, external licensure or certification is required or encouraged for entry into the field. Results of some external examinations are available to the College—e.g., the Certified Public Accounting and NCLEX (registered nurse) examinations—but it is frustrating that the College is unable to obtain students' results for all such examinations. Career programs that incorporate licensure processes include the CPA and Certified Bookkeepers Exams for Accounting majors, the AHIMA Certified Coding Specialist exam for Health Information Technology students, the National Council Licensure Examinations for

Practical Nurses and Registered Nurses, the Illinois Nurse Assistant/Home Health Aide Competency Exam, the ICRC examination for Illinois Substance Abuse Counselors, other health careers licensure examinations, and the state of Illinois Real Estate Brokers License Exam. Pass rates on the Real Estate examinations are high, on average greater than 93 percent.

Each spring Oakton also conducts surveys of career program alumni, involving approximately 20 percent of career programs every year. The Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) requires that the College survey graduates from the prior year using a number of standard questions. The Office of Institutional Research works with program chairs and deans to customize Oakton's surveys in two ways that enhance their utility to the College, surveying a greater number of alumni than the state requires and asking additional program-specific questions. Survey results include student perceptions of their learning, an indirect measure of student learning outcomes.

Career program advisory committees, discussed more extensively in Criterion Two, also provide indirect evidence about student learning outcomes. Not only do committees help to shape course and curriculum learning objectives, members often provide Oakton students with internship and practicum opportunities. In these situations advisory committee members can observe and provide feedback to the College about students' knowledge and skills.

Institutional-level Assessment

Oakton's primary internal assessment of student learning outcomes at the institutional level involves measuring student success in meeting general education objectives. General education objectives are identified in the catalog and other materials (see Figure 3.1). Before 1999, Oakton had 34 general education objectives organized by discipline. A team of faculty and administrators then rewrote these to reduce redundancies across disciplinary areas and emphasize institutional, rather than discipline-based, learning objectives. The general education objectives delineate a range of skills that students can apply in different areas of their lives for continued formal and informal learning.

Figure 3.1

The Purpose of General Education Courses

The purpose of the General Education Courses at Oakton Community College is to develop the student as an educated person who can and will:

Engage in the process of inquiry and problem solving by:

- Defining problems
- Constructing hypotheses
- Gathering, analyzing, and interpreting data/information using a variety of resources and methods, including technology
- Explaining how information fits within a historical context
- Differentiating between fact and opinion
- Comparing and evaluating alternative solutions
- Communicating findings effectively in writing and speech

Work and communicate effectively with people from a variety of backgrounds, individually and in teams

Apply ethical principles to local, national, and global issues

Recognize skills necessary to build and maintain effective human relationships

(Oakton Community College Catalog, 2006-07)

Oakton employs a variety of means to assess students' achievement of general education objectives, including course-level assessments in general education courses and, indirectly, through student and faculty self reports of achievements and through mapping the extent to which general education objectives are addressed in general education courses. Also, a locally developed institutional initiative involving several approaches was implemented to assess general education outcomes over seven years from 1999-2005, and again in 2007. During the first four years of the project, faculty devised prompts in the form of narrative or graphic documents to address selected general education objectives, with each prompt accompanied by a series of questions for students. In an attempt to find students who had likely taken general education courses, classes selected for this assessment project had large numbers of students who had completed 30 or more college credits. During 2003 and 2004, instead of using specially created prompts, actual classroom work was evaluated in real time. In 2005, two faculty members developed a writing assignment to assess the objective of comparing and evaluating alternative solutions to a problem. In 2007, the College used The Standardized Assessment of Information

Table 3.1

Summary Results: Seven Years of General Education Assessment								
General Education Objective	Year of Assessment	Total Students Evaluated	High Pass		Low Pass		No Pass	
			n	%	n	%	n	%
Compare/evaluate alternative solutions to a problem	2005	206	45	22%	73	35%	88	43%
Communicate effectively in... speech ¹	2004	97	68	70%	23	24%	6	6%
Communicate effectively in... speech ¹	2003	65	42	65%	22	34%	1	2%
Work and communicate effectively with people... in teams ¹	2003	205	119	58%	60	29%	26	13%
Construct hypotheses (prompt A)	2002	294	41	14%	130	44%	123	42%
Construct hypotheses (prompt B)	2002	261	53	20%	116	44%	92	35%
Analyze and interpret data/information	2002	386	126	33%	168	44%	92	24%
Recognize skills necessary to build and maintain effective human relations	2002	356	38	11%	182	51%	136	38%
Effectively communicate ideas in writing	2002	367	87	24%	171	47%	109	30%
Effectively communicate ideas in writing	2001	437	34	8%	280	64%	123	28%
Explain how information fits within an historical context	2001	467	48	10%	241	52%	178	38%
Compare/evaluate alternative solutions to a problem	2001	422	106	25%	142	34%	174	41%
Identify problems	2001	437	44	10%	241	55%	152	35%
Apply ethical principles	2000	206	22	11%	135	66%	49	24%
Analyze and interpret data/information	2000	206	8	4%	151	73%	47	23%
Differentiate between fact and opinion ²	2000	237	198	84%	28	12%	11	5%
Effectively communicate ideas in writing	2000	208	15	7%	99	48%	94	45%
Humanities ³	1999	202	48	24%	84	42%	70	35%
Social Sciences ³	1999	234	33	14%	117	50%	84	36%
Mathematics ³	1999	197	29	15%	99	50%	69	35%
Communications ³	1999	232	14	6%	87	38%	131	56%

¹ The assessment of this objective was performed in the classroom in real time and was based on regular classroom assignments.

² The prompt used to assess this objective was in a multiple-choice format.

³ Prior to the adoption of the current general education objectives.



Literacy Skills (SAILS) to assess student learning outcomes for the general education objective of gathering, analyzing, and interpreting data and information. More than 500 students completed SAILS, 46 percent of whom said they had completed at least 30 credits at Oakton. Results of the SAILS project will be available in Fall 2007. Table 3.1 summarizes the results of the 1999–2005 general education assessments.

As the above table and discussion reveal, the College has been working to assess general education objectives through a variety of approaches. Remaining problems lie in a failure to adequately analyze results, as well as inconsistencies in carrying out the final two steps in the assessment loop: recommending course and program level improvements based on assessment data, and evaluating progress made after implementation of recommendations.

Summary of Core Component 3A

Much work remains to be done on Oakton's continuing efforts to develop a consistent and effective assessment program. The College must complete the project of developing clear and concise program-level objectives in career programs, and must also address the more intangible concern regarding the need for faculty to trust that assessment will significantly benefit the quality of teaching and learning within their classrooms and across the College.

Despite these challenges, Oakton has demonstrated willingness to take on the task of assessment and awareness of the benefits a comprehensive assessment initiative can foster. Over the past 10 years, the institution has begun to develop a culture that values assessment as a vehicle for improving and sustaining quality. The challenge now is to grow our assessment initiatives and realize the commitment made in the first goal in *Change Matters*: "We will... advance the culture of assessment as integral to the transformation of the teaching-learning process." The College would appreciate consultative guidance from the HLC visiting team to help us fulfill this objective.

Core Component 3B:

Oakton values and supports effective teaching.

Oakton recognizes teaching and learning as two equal components of academic excellence, affirming that there cannot be effective student learning without effective teaching. The College demonstrates support of this principle by exhibiting an exemplary record of support for excellence in teaching, evidenced in the Constellation Survey, where respondents agreed that "Oakton intentionally promotes excellence in teaching," "Oakton makes certain that employees get the training and professional development their work requires," and "Oakton's core values stress the centrality of learning."

Course and Curriculum Development

Faculty are strongly encouraged and supported in the development of curriculum, and new courses most often begin with faculty. In baccalaureate disciplines, the impetus for courses comes from expressions of student or faculty interest in a topic, addition of courses that meet Illinois Articulation Initiative general education core curriculum criteria, and recognition of advances and changes within a discipline. In CTE curricula, the impetus for new courses comes from advisory committees, development of new programs such as Radio Frequency Identification and Pharmacy Technology, and recognition of student, employer, and community interest in new topics within existing curricula.

All new courses added officially to the College's approved course file require a generic syllabus, as described above. Some departments adopt departmental assignments, texts, and grading criteria, while others permit more flexibility among faculty. Regardless, all faculty teaching

a new course must adhere to the generic course syllabus. The proposed course is then approved by the Divisional Dean, the Curriculum Committee, the Council of Deans, and the Vice President for Academic Affairs. This series of approvals attempts to minimize duplication of courses and enables faculty to receive feedback for fine-tuning the generic syllabus. New courses must then be submitted to the Illinois Community College Board for approval. At the same time, syllabi for all college-level courses are sent to relevant transfer institutions to obtain information about course transferability. Each May, the College produces *Academic Briefing*, an annotated list of all course and curriculum additions, deletions, and revisions that occurred during the year. The *Academic Briefing*, sent to colleagues at transfer institutions and distributed within the College, is a convenient resource for documenting changes that also helps to ensure accurate advising (see www.oakton.edu/bhc/acadbrief07).

Curriculum Committee. The Curriculum Committee, a faculty senate committee composed of 11 faculty members and four nonvoting members representing administrators and staff, provides oversight for curriculum development at the College. The Curriculum Committee considers courses and curricula but does not initiate new courses and programs or identify problem areas. Each year the Committee reviews and approves approximately 30 to 45 new courses and 40 to 60 course revisions, as well as new certificate and associate degree curricula. Agenda and minutes of the Curriculum Committee are available on Share, the College's internal shared document file.

Special Topics Courses. Oakton often uses special topics classes, numbered as "290," to test the viability of new offerings. Using the 290 designation for a course allows faculty to obtain feedback from students and peers to improve the course and to determine the feasibility of making it permanent, with its own course prefix, number, title, and generic syllabus. A topics course can be offered up to three times before a decision must be made about making it permanent. During Fall 2006 and Spring 2007, the College offered 29 topics courses, including Literature of New Orleans (EGL 290), Current Trends in Orthopedic Rehab (PTA 290), VoIP Telecommunications Fundamentals (CNS 290), and History of the Byzantine Empire (HIS 290).

Learning Communities. Oakton faculty also develop and enhance curricula through interdisciplinary teaching in a variety of ways. One of these is learning communities, previously known as tandem courses, in which several courses from different disciplines are combined and team-taught in new and interesting ways. Such offerings have been in existence since the College's founding, with tandems in the early 1970s in areas such as Focus Chicago and Green Turnip. Green Turnip, described as a "survival program which initiates you into the basic elements of our liberal arts tradition and provides an introductory application of analytical skills to help establish an ongoing study," paired art and philosophy. More recent examples of learning communities offered at the College combined PHL 106: Ethics with SSC 201: Mankind in Global Society, HUM 142: Women and Creativity with ANT 202: Cultural Anthropology, and PSY 102: Psychology of Personal Growth with THE 103: Introduction to Acting. Oakton offers an average of three to four learning communities every semester, two through the Honors Program, but in other areas as well. Significantly, Oakton values such collaborative teaching and supports it with a well-designed approval process for learning communities through the Council of Deans and by allocating additional hours of load for these courses.

Interdisciplinary Concentrations. While learning communities are a tradition at the College, in recent years a new and equally exciting curricular trend has emerged: interdisciplinary concentrations and partnerships. Oakton has committed to this teaching approach in the recent strategic plan, stating that we will "[c]reate innovative interdisciplinary concentrations, especially within the baccalaureate areas, and create new career programs through partnering with outside partners and employers." Guidelines and processes for developing and offering concentrations were established in Spring 2007. Though not official degrees, concentrations still require internal approval through the College's regular course and curriculum approval

process. Concentrations focus on a subject within the liberal arts, social sciences, and sciences (not CTE), and they meet the following criteria:

- Do not duplicate in subject an existing associate degree (e.g., art, music, education, or engineering).
- Comprise a minimum of 15 credit hours of college-level coursework in courses that focus on the subject of the concentration. These courses may be general education and/or elective courses. Most concentrations will be composed of specific courses, not individual sections of courses, but in some cases a course section can be part of a concentration. For example, the Great Books concentration includes designated course sections taught using the Great Books approach, even where other sections of the same course are not part of Great Books.
- Comply with existing Oakton prerequisite and degree requirements, including general education, course placement, and admission requirements for the associate of arts degree.

Concentrations have been developed in Global Studies and Women's Studies, and exploratory work is underway for concentrations in Peace Studies and Environmental Studies. The College has also become an enthusiastic participant in the Great Books program, currently adopted in a number of literature, history, humanities, and philosophy sections. Though some faculty initially opposed Oakton's participation in Great Books because of its focus on the Western canon, most appreciate the smaller class sizes, shared inquiry teaching method, and flexibility in the program that allows for multicultural perspectives within Great Books classes. After considerable discussion, faculty have generally come to approve participation, and, since Oakton signed on in Spring 2005, the College has offered 72 Great Books classes, with four students receiving recognition as Great Books Scholars for completing at least three Great Books courses.

Professional Development

While supporting faculty in creating new curriculum, Oakton is strongly invested in promoting effective teaching and encourages teachers to develop their value in the classroom. During the hiring process, prospective faculty demonstrate their expertise by teaching a lesson during the interview. Innovative curriculum and teaching practices generated directly from faculty have long been a hallmark of Oakton's institutional culture, which has a history of support for initiatives such as the nationally recognized critical literacy program, and that trend continues today. One exciting vehicle to encourage professional development in recent years was "The Dream Team," an ad hoc initiative created in 1999. Through a series of meetings and discussions, faculty and academic administrators launched programs and events that have since become permanent parts of Oakton's institutional culture: Faculty-Administrator Retreats, the Farside (a meeting room reserved for small faculty meetings and discussion groups), Faculty Fellows, and an undergraduate research program, discussed in Criterion Four.

Faculty Leadership Initiative. A more recent effort, the Faculty Leadership Initiative, was developed to foster cohesion and collegiality among Oakton's faculty after the extensive personnel changes brought about by retirement and subsequent new hires. Faculty organized interdepartmental and interdivisional meetings where veteran and new faculty were encouraged to get to know one another and discuss best teaching practices. The College committed resources to this initiative, adjusting an already crowded official meeting schedule to enable meetings open to all full- and part-time faculty to be held twice a semester. This initiative continued for two years, until the self study and strategic planning took precedence, but during that time an average of 100 faculty attended meetings and discussed ways to create a more cohesive culture in the aftermath of change.

New Faculty Seminar. Another service designed to promote professional development is the New Faculty Seminar. As part of their base load, all new full-time faculty members are

required to participate in a 16-week orientation seminar facilitated by two tenured full-time faculty. Over the past five years, more than 50 faculty have attended this program that enables them to connect with colleagues and learn about the College by covering topics such as College policies, library resources, testing and grading, personality styles, academic integrity, and teaching techniques. As part of their orientation to the College, each new faculty member is assigned a full-time faculty mentor who serves as a personal resource. Short-term orientation sessions also provide help for new part-time faculty.

Faculty Development Seminars. Of the above opportunities, the professional development seminars offered through the Center for Professional Development (see Criterion Four) are especially noteworthy. The College offers two Faculty Development Seminars every semester, usually with 16 to 24 participants. Faculty Seminars were launched through Oakton's nationally-known Critical Literacy Project in the 1980s, when faculty and staff from multiple disciplines met weekly to study pedagogical theory, focusing on how students learn so that they might improve how they teach. The intensive seminar experience was analogous to a graduate course, with assignments, presentations, small group discussions, and presentations from internal and external experts on the topic. The basic design and interdisciplinary focus informing faculty seminars has remained intact since that time.

Faculty members may take any Faculty Development Seminar for a stipend or for lane advancement credit awarded following completion of a project relating to the seminar topic and the member's discipline. Seminars are created from suggested topics proposed on the Faculty Development Web site and also directly to the Faculty Development Subcommittee. Before Spring 2006, a Faculty Development Committee, composed of 12 representatives from all divisions and the library, was solely responsible for proposing seminar topics. The Faculty Development Web site, created in Spring 2006 with support from the Committee, now posts proposals from the entire College community, with electronic suggestions directly forwarded to the Faculty Development Coordinator's e-mail account. Information on all recent Faculty Development Seminars can be found in the Resource Room; most seminars, including offerings listed below, focus directly on improved pedagogies and classroom strategies:

- *Classroom Success*, intended primarily for first-year faculty who have completed the New Faculty Seminar and offered every other year;
- *Writing Across the Curriculum*, targeted to faculty interested in integrating writing into their courses as a way to stimulate critical thinking and provide variety in their teaching methods;
- *Teacher as Actor*, designed literally to improve classroom performance;
- *Integrating Chicago Into the Classroom*, aimed at faculty in a variety of disciplines who wish to expand the classroom setting by integrating Chicago's rich cultural, political, and academic life into their curriculum; and
- *Bytes of Technology*, offered every spring and focused on both technological developments for traditional classroom settings and online course development through WebCT. Faculty can take this in a modular format, selecting only elements of interest or need, rather than attending the full 16-week seminar.

Teaching Excellence Conference. A highlight of Fall Orientation Week is the Oakton Conference for Teaching Excellence, the brainchild of a math professor who envisioned an in-house conference to highlight examples of teaching excellence and promote research on teaching and learning by Oakton faculty. His proposal was supported by the Faculty Development Subcommittee and administration, and the first conference was held in August of 2002. It offered 25 sessions on a range of topics, including assessment, critical thinking, classroom and learning strategies, interdisciplinary teaching, teaching with technology, online teaching, and student support, and it won an award from the National Council of Instructional Administrators for innovative teaching in the 2002 Exemplary Initiatives Award Competition.



Since then, the conference is held annually during Fall Orientation. It features a keynote address delivered by a selected master teacher among the faculty, followed by concurrent sessions and poster presentations. Topics from past keynote addresses are *Teaching, Scholarship and Homeostasis*; *Sharpening Chisels, or What a Furniture Maker Taught Me About Teaching*; *Planting Academic Seeds*; *Click N' Clash: Conflict and Communication*; and *Writing Across the Curriculum*. Each year more than 100 faculty and staff attend, evidence of the continuing value of the Oakton Conference for Teaching Excellence.

Credit Coursework. In addition to on-campus options for professional development, faculty may take credit classes at other institutions and use the College's tuition reimbursement program if the courses are offered through a four-year college or university and are related to the relevant teaching discipline. As a result of the 2002 contract negotiations, the Deans' Council may award faculty with release time to "take rather than teach." For this program, faculty submit proposals during spring to request release time to take a course during the following year. Ten faculty members will have taken advantage of this opportunity through 2007-2008.



Faculty may also enroll in any courses offered at Oakton. Tuition is free, and all full-time faculty are eligible to have up to \$100 of registration and activity fees waived. Recently, Master Classes, created as special sections of a credit course open only to Oakton employees, offer credit toward lane advancement as an incentive for attendance.

Additional professional development opportunities include alternate time through the Faculty Fellows to engage in an approved project judged valuable to the institution, Educational Foundation grants, and sabbaticals.

Faculty Fellows. Faculty Fellows, a committee comprised of two representatives from each division and a chair selected by the committee, disperses a total of 24 lecture hour equivalents annually to full-time tenured faculty members for approved Faculty Fellows Projects. These Faculty Fellows

awards allow faculty time to develop and complete projects that renew and refresh teaching and learning; projects awarded alternate time lie outside the scope of regular professional activities. Faculty members are eligible to apply every three years, although preference is given to first time applicants. Since the program's inception in 2002, 37 projects involving 40 faculty have been funded. Projects are as varied as developing an information literacy course, involving calculus students in a research project on functional differential equations, implementing a new chemical inventory system for labs, and preparing a resource manual for faculty teaching social psychology.

Foundation Grants. Oakton's Education Foundation grants are another mechanism for faculty to secure funding for projects that match Oakton's strategic goals and enrich the teaching and learning environment. The Foundation solicits applications every spring and judges projects based on their benefit to the College experience, support of innovative instruction, and enrichment of students' experiences. With funding from the Educational Foundation, the Historical and Policy Studies Department sponsored educational workshops for Oakton faculty that promoted interdisciplinary learning and established a forum for faculty to present their research. A grant from the Foundation also enabled English department faculty to create the Chicago Writers' Series and invite noted Chicago writers to campus, including Stuart Dybek, Sharon Solwitz, and Billy Lombardo.

Sabbaticals. During their sixth year or after six consecutive years of teaching at Oakton (some leaves are exempt from the "consecutive" mandate), full-time faculty members may apply for a sabbatical. The faculty contract states that normally five sabbaticals are awarded each year. Applications, accepted in the spring semester, are judged by a Senate Committee composed of

two faculty representatives from each division, serving staggered two-year terms. The number of applications has varied dramatically in recent years. In Spring 2007, there were 10 applications, but only one in 2006 and two in 2005; likely the sharp increase resulted from newer faculty becoming eligible to apply. A list of faculty who received sabbaticals and brief descriptions of their projects are in the Resource Room.

Resources for research. In addition to more formal development activities, Oakton faculty have access to the most current research on teaching and learning through the Center for Professional Development Web site at www.oakton.edu/blc/cpd. The Center for Professional Development, discussed later in this Criterion and also in Criterion Four, is the primary provider of professional development activities for all Oakton employees. Access to research is password protected, and available topics include “Defining and Characterizing Teaching”; “Evaluation and Grading Issues”; “Improvement of Teaching and Assessment”; “Change, Renewal, and the Professoriate”; “Thoughts on the Future”; and “Technology and Related Issues.”

The Oakton library is another important resource for professional development. Faculty members can access current research on teaching and learning on the library’s Web page, using such search engines as ERIC (Educational Resource Information Center) and EBSCO host. Often full-text articles are available through these search engines; if not, faculty can request articles through the interlibrary loan system. The library also offers a service whereby faculty and staff can request tables of contents from journals to which the library subscribes. After reviewing the table of contents, they can indicate which articles they would like to receive. This service enables employees to remain current with literature in their fields without having to subscribe individually to numerous publications. Finally, Oakton makes available an annual \$250 professional materials allowance to full-time faculty and generous support for travel to professional conferences. Eligible part-time faculty also have access to \$125 per year to support conference and professional meeting attendance.

Faculty Evaluation and Credentials

Full-time tenured faculty are evaluated by their deans on a five-year cycle following a process described in Procedure P4113. The criteria for evaluation include three areas: professional effectiveness, institutional service, and professional development. This process includes class observations, review of student evaluations, assessment of instructional methods and materials, a written self-assessment by the faculty member, and a written assessment by the dean. The full-time faculty contract contains several provisions that permit addressing situations where a faculty member’s teaching is evaluated as deficient. Article VI, Section 7 provides for a remediation plan and timetable when a faculty member’s skills or subject knowledge are deficient; the contract language protects faculty from arbitrary decisions yet gives the College the authority to intervene appropriately.

All non-tenured full-time faculty, including those on one-year or one-semester appointments, are evaluated in a continuing process. The dean prepares two written evaluation summaries at the end of the first year and again by February 1 of the third year. In addition, each dean appraises the Vice President for Academic Affairs in writing regarding recommendations for nonreappointment, reappointment, and tenure. Tenure, if granted, occurs in the third year of employment. Recently, some full-time faculty members have not been granted tenure. In all but one case, peer faculty members and administration agreed not to grant tenure. The exception to this agreement occurred four years ago when a faculty member was evaluated highly by peers and poorly by administration. The faculty member initiated a grievance that was later dropped. Because of these experiences, Oakton has revised the faculty review process to provide earlier and better quality feedback to tenure candidates.

Part-time faculty members are evaluated by their department chairs. Student evaluations (administered in all sections taught by part-time faculty), occasional class observations, and reviews of instructor syllabi comprise the data for evaluation. Student complaints may also be

considered, though chairs and deans recognize the need to be judicious in interpreting the validity and reliability of these concerns. The frequency and intensity of evaluations varies across departments for a variety of reasons: sheer number of part-time faculty to be evaluated within a department, experience of part-time faculty, and competing projects for chairs' attention. The 2006-2009 Adjunct Faculty Contract also contains a new provision requiring each part-time faculty member to present evidence every five years demonstrating professional development and content currency relevant to his or her teaching assignment. The Vice President for Academic Affairs or his designee is responsible for reviewing this evidence to determine its acceptability for continued eligibility of the part-time faculty member for employment as an Oakton instructor. The provision is too new to permit assessing its utility, benefit, or burden.

Faculty members actively participate in professional organizations relevant to the disciplines they teach, both by inclination and because it is an expected component of their professional development at the College. Full-time faculty complete a Professional Advancement Credit (PAC) form each year detailing their outside professional activities and involvement in professional organizations. PAC units determine promotions in rank from instructor through professor, but are not used to determine placement or movement on the salary schedule. However, to be eligible for the F-lane, Oakton's highest faculty salary lane, faculty members must have completed significant educational and professional development activities. In 2006, 137 faculty completed PAC forms; they reported involvement in 273 professional organizations, an average of approximately two organizations per faculty member.

Nearly every Oakton faculty member has a master's degree or higher, with several exceptions in CTE programs such as automotive technology. Moreover, more than 25 percent of full-time faculty and 19 percent of part-time faculty have a terminal degree, defined as a doctorate, law degree, master of library science, or master of fine arts.

Recognition of Faculty. The College not only evaluates the quality of instruction, but also recognizes excellence among faculty. The Ray Hartstein Outstanding Faculty Award acknowledges outstanding teachers. This award is presented to one full-time and one part-time faculty member at the College's annual Fall Orientation Week brunch. Winners receive a plaque and a \$1,000 monetary award. Candidates are nominated by students during the prior spring semester. Each nominee is then invited to write a five-page essay describing his or her teaching philosophy and approach. A student committee reviews the essays and selects three full-time and three part-time faculty finalists, and those names are sent to the College Foundation. Each finalist makes a 10-minute presentation to representatives of the Foundation board, who then select the winners.

There are also more informal measures to recognize effective teaching. For example, the annual baccalaureate alumni survey contains an open-ended question asking former students to identify and describe any "especially outstanding person, course, or event they encountered at Oakton." Alumni generally mention one of their former teachers in response to this prompt. Typical comments are "Teachers at Oakton were awesome compared to other schools. They were more knowledgeable"; or, "I had many well-prepared courses and very good teachers." The Office of Research makes a point of sending a letter to faculty members each time they are mentioned by an alumnus, and providing copies for administrative supervisors.

Summary of Core Component 3B

The College is proud of the broad range of ways that Oakton demonstrates commitment to excellence in teaching. From the hiring of full-time faculty, who must present a teaching demonstration as part of their interview, through the tenure and post-tenure evaluation processes, classroom effectiveness is central for faculty success. The College invests money, time, personnel, and space to offer numerous professional development opportunities that enable faculty to improve teaching, learn new pedagogies, and remain current in their fields. Most Oakton faculty are dedicated professionals who regularly avail themselves of these oppor-



tunities; a few do not, and it is reflected in their practice. While Oakton has the tools to address documented teaching deficiencies through the faculty evaluation process and contractual provisions, actually doing so can prove difficult.

Core Component 3C: Oakton creates effective learning environments.

Oakton's *Vision, Mission and Values* statement provides insight into the College's vision of what constitutes an effective learning environment, asserting that the learning environment should be one where students "experience the value of hard work and [the] satisfaction of learning that leads to intellectual growth." The College further promises to "support [students] academically, emotionally, and socially." In this section we describe the environment envisioned as ideal for effective learning and give evidence of success in approaching that ideal to the fullest possible extent.

Assessment and Quality Assurance

As demonstrated in Criterion Two, Oakton applies a systematic and comprehensive approach to program review for all College programs and service areas because we believe that all departments and units in the College contribute to the teaching and learning environment. Therefore, all student service and learning resource areas are subject to regular evaluations designed to inform improvements. In 2006, for example, Advising and Counseling, Alternative Education, the Library, and the Koehline Museum were all part of the regular rotation of programs included in the review process. Oakton also complies with a number of state mandates related to assessment and quality assurance. Each year the College submits an Accountability/Program Review report to the Illinois Community College Board, a Performance Report to the Illinois Board of Higher Education, and an Underrepresented Groups Report to the Illinois Community College Board. Likewise, the Alliance submits additional reports required from adult education and family literacy fiscal agencies. Both the College and the Educational Foundation undergo annual audits that indicate consistently that the institution is in compliance with all generally accepted accounting standards and auditing requirements.

Multiple Learning Environments and Opportunities

The most traditional and still most typical learning environments at Oakton are classrooms. The College maintains the small class size characteristic of community colleges; the largest classes contain no more than 35 students, but many classes are smaller. Speech classes, for example, can have no more than 22 students, and many programs such as Honors, Great Books, and numerous career and technical areas have similar mandates. In fact, College facilities offer clear evidence of the commitment to small class sizes, as few rooms designated for instruction accommodate more than 35 students. Students and alumni continue to point to Oakton's smaller class size, and its effect on the quality of relationships they have with instructors, as one of Oakton's main advantages over four-year institutions. Data from FY04, the last year for which comparative data are available, show that 70 percent of Oakton's classes had 20 or fewer students, and only 30 percent had more than 20 students.

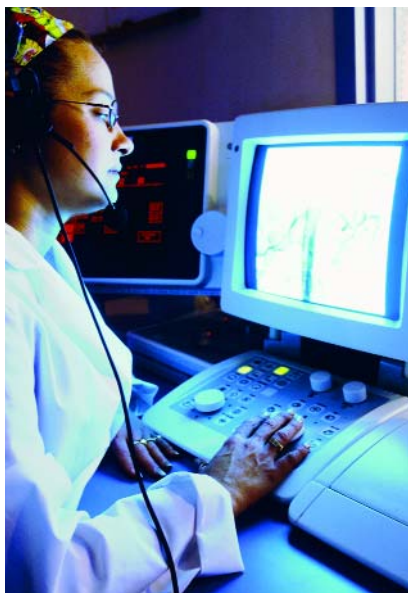
While supporting small class sizes, Oakton also encourages faculty-student interactions through office hour requirements. Full-time faculty are contractually obligated to hold office hours for students a minimum of five hours per week during a regularly scheduled time, and part-time faculty are required to hold one office hour per week for each three-credit course.

Technology innovations. In addition to maintaining an intimate learning environment, Oakton has also sought other ways to improve the educational setting. The institution is trying



Unique Learning Environments that Change Lives

Cheryl-Lynn May was in her 20s and a first-generation college student when she arrived at Oakton. Self-supporting and discouraged from thinking of higher education as a possibility in her life, she was seemingly without resources and undermined by self-doubt. But Oakton faculty and staff were quick to recognize her abilities. Cheryl-Lynn blossomed academically as a member of the Honors Program and TRiO and excelled in a leadership role. Oakton's Educational Foundation provided financial support with two scholarships. When it was time for her to transfer, Honors faculty nominated Cheryl for the prestigious Jack Kent Cooke Foundation Undergraduate Transfer Scholarship. Her selection as one of 38 students from among 676 nominees nationwide provided her with the opportunity to transfer to a top-level institution with all her educational expenses paid, plus a stipend for living. Today she is enrolled at Lake Forest College and well on her way to fulfilling her dream of becoming a college professor and art historian.



to create more discipline-specific classrooms, so that social science classrooms have the maps they need to illustrate principles covered in class, and music classrooms are equipped with audio equipment. Technology has also been used to improve all learning environments. Most instructional software is available throughout both campuses, with a few exceptions where specialized equipment or software applications are needed, such as in RFID or health information technology. Oakton is in the process of equipping each classroom on both campuses with computer technology; currently, all but a few classrooms have permanent installations of a computer and projector. This enables faculty to use the presentation software, Web pages and programs that render contemporary classrooms more dynamic and interactive. To facilitate cutting-edge teaching in mathematics and computer science, four classrooms have been equipped with Smart Boards. In addition, some instructors have championed the use of an eInstructions Classroom Performance System that allows students to use an infrared “clicker” to select multiple choice responses to questions. Their choices feed into a computer that allows real-time analysis of surveys during class, as well as impromptu quizzes to assess the class’s comprehension of a topic.

These classroom upgrades illustrate some of the many ways the College keeps current with new technologies to enhance learning. The Academic Computing Committee is responsible for developing recommendations associated with using technology to enhance the learning environment. This committee is comprised of two faculty members from each division (one transfer, one career), a library representative, information technology staff, and ex-officio administrative members. They meet six times during the school year to discuss current and future technology needs of the College and recommend improvements.

Technology support. Technology in the classroom and other learning environments is maintained by a network of support services housed primarily in the Department of Information Technology (IT). IT has responsibility for 52 computer labs located at both campuses and for all computers located in classrooms. In addition to open labs available for individual student use, many labs are intended for use by regularly scheduled classes that meet in those spaces or for instructors making single use reservations for special research or writing projects. A number of academic departments, including Art, Mathematics, Health Information Technology, Nursing, Architecture, and Modern Languages, also have special use computer labs that facilitate learning in those areas. Lab staff and trained student employees provide knowledgeable assistance and technical support to both employees and students using the labs.

In recent years a number of faculty have expressed concern about the difficulty of teaching courses in which students needed computers part of the time but also needed space for conventional lecture-discussions or small group activities. In response, Oakton committed FY08 funds to develop a prototype classroom at the Skokie campus that will accommodate these multiple teaching-learning needs. If effective, the College anticipates refurbishing additional classrooms in the future.

Instructional Media Services. Instructional Media Services (IMS) partners with IT to bring high quality technology to classrooms and other learning environments. IMS provides audiovisual and other technological support. In addition to installing and maintaining projectors and delivering videos, CDs, and other equipment to instructors in traditional classrooms, IMS supports students taking media-based courses and operates the distance learning classrooms that enable individuals at both campuses to meet via video without leaving their respective campuses.

Alternate delivery approaches. Oakton continues to expand the very concept of “classroom.” *Change Matters* notes this explicitly, with the “One College: Four Campuses” goal that cites Oakton’s electronic presence as one of the campuses. Media-based and online classes offer traditional class work in a nontraditional setting to students motivated to work independently on a schedule more conducive to their needs. In Spring 2006, Oakton had seven two-way video, 25 television-based, and 81 online sections for courses throughout the curriculum, and the recent purchase of eLuminate Live eLearning and Collaborative software enables interactive

virtual classrooms. As discussed in Criterion Two, online education remains the fastest growing segment of Oakton's academic offerings, with a more than 300 percent increase in enrollments between 2001 and 2005. The Office of Alternative Education is responsible for quality oversight for these classes; in their 2006 program review report they noted several initiatives to improve quality in online classes, including a course rubric developed by online faculty.

Also noted in Criterion Two, while Oakton has experienced dramatic growth in distance learning offerings, the College lacks a comprehensive distance learning plan. In *Change Matters* we have pledged to "[u]pdate and enhance our plan for distance educations and hybrid classes, and ensure student success is comparable to students in classroom-based courses." Developing this plan will be addressed over the next year.

Flexible learning formats. In addition to media-based and online courses, the College offers multiple learning formats to serve diverse student needs. The Weekend College accommodates students who want course work offered during regular semesters, but on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays. A Fast Track program was designed for highly motivated students above the age of 24 who wanted to acquire the same amount of knowledge as they would in a traditional format, but in a shorter period of time. The program existed for several years, but low enrollments and disproportionately high costs caused the College to end it in 2005. Subsequently the College has begun to develop a menu of accelerated learning options that allow students to create flexible course schedules best suited to their needs. A committee of six faculty members and the Director of the Learning Center are assessing current offerings for redesign, including courses that meet over shorter periods of time or use Web enhancements to offset reduced time in the classroom.

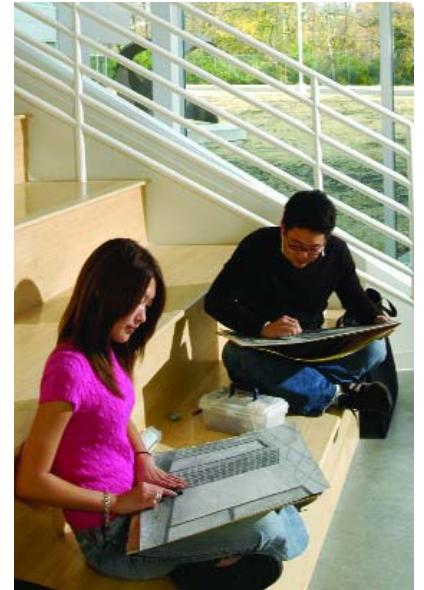
Another significant area of growth is interim sessions that afford ambitious students opportunities to complete a semester-length course in the three to four weeks between Spring and Summer and between Summer and Fall semesters. Offered for many years, interim classes between the Spring and Summer terms have now increased to the point where approximately 48 interim courses are scheduled, attracting more than 700 students. A number of these, particularly Field Study and Study Abroad courses, also require some class meetings before the end of the Spring semester. In 2007 Oakton will initiate interim classes between the Summer and Fall terms, and, beginning this year, will also schedule a Winterim session between the Fall and Spring semesters.

Learning on Location. The College offers many other learning options as well. Field Study and Study Abroad provide students with unique learning environments as they earn college credits. Health careers, Early Childhood Education, and the Substance Abuse Counseling programs feature internships and practicums that coordinate students' placement, training, and performance. In addition, the Alliance offers adult and continuing education courses at more than 200 locations; the most recent addition is a site at one of the largest shopping malls in the region, developed in partnership with the local Workforce Board.

Finally, anyone driving onto either of Oakton's campuses in Des Plaines and Skokie cannot help but notice the richness of the natural environment and the exceptional quality of the buildings. At the Des Plaines campus, the grounds serve as a dynamic learning space, with an outdoor classroom and acres of prairie and forest preserve used as "field trip" destinations by the sciences, social sciences, and the arts.

Looking to the future, the College has noted the increasingly diverse locations for offering courses, as evidenced by the "One College: Four Campuses" (Des Plaines, Skokie, electronic, neighborhood) strategic goal. The College has also acknowledged that many on-campus classrooms are inappropriately furnished to accommodate current teaching approaches such as small group work and two- to three-hour course sessions. As one Oakton leader noted, "It's difficult to spend two to three hours productively in a 30-minute chair." Thus, another new objective is to "[r]econfigure our classroom environments to better support teaching and learning and to improve comfort."

The College also supports unique learning opportunities targeted for special and diverse



populations through programs such as Honors, English as a Second Language (ESL), and TRiO.

Honors Program. The Honors Program, whose courses prepare students for transfer to competitive four-year institutions, enjoys a high profile on campus due in large part to its strong cocurricular focus and activities. Honors offers academics and services for students willing to take on a rigorous program of study, including the Honors learning communities, Honors courses, and Honors contracts for non-Honors courses, i.e. arrangements between an instructor and student outlining readings, projects, and meeting times outside of the regular class schedule. In FY06, 160 students participated in the Honors Program; 65 enrolled in one or more Honors seminars, 61 enrolled in a regular course and arranged an Honors contract, and 34 both enrolled in an Honors course and earned Honors credit through a contract arrangement. Honors Program faculty have also sought to make Oakton's values come to life by encouraging students to develop public forums on global issues in order to equip them with the skills to act as public intellectuals. In particular, students enrolled in an Honors Core Seminar that pairs PHL 106: Ethics with SSC 201: Mankind in a Global Society are required to develop public presentations or interventions as part of their coursework.

Honors students have presented public forums on the AIDS crisis and gathered donations of money and supplies to assist a clinic in Kenya. Others have presented forums on global poverty, sponsored a local Chicago station radio program on environmental degradation, and conducted public discussions on the ethical dimensions of a possible attack on Iran. One group developed a day-long teach-in on the background to the war in Iraq that they presented to over

1,000 students at Niles North High School in Spring 2003. These students were then invited to present at both the Illinois Community College Board Conference on Core Values and the National Collegiate Honors Council Conference. Their work demonstrates how our focus on learning and our connectedness to the broader community we serve manifests in our students in unique ways. Several students who had enrolled in the core seminar continued working on global justice issues by forming Oakton Students for Social Justice (S4SJ) in Fall 2003. S4SJ has since sponsored voter registration drives, fundraising efforts, and numerous public forums, speakers, and events; their work on the "fair trade coffee initiative" is discussed in Criterion Four.

TRiO. Another important learning environment is the Student

Support Services TRiO program, administered through the Learning Center. Participants in TRiO almost universally cite the difference the program has made in their experience at Oakton, largely because of its personalized focus. Funded by a \$1.1 million federal grant, TRiO offers a case-managed services approach to an average 215 eligible students, providing program participants with comprehensive academic and transfer advising, tutoring, and financial aid services, along with cultural opportunities. This program is noteworthy, not only because of its high marks from students, but also because it potentially models service improvement for a larger segment of the student population. Both TRiO and Honors are firmly anchored in the College and for many years have provided students with distinctive support for learning.

English as a Second Language (ESL). A third special learning opportunity is the credit English as a Second Language (ESL) program, whose mission is to prepare students for mainstream academic and work life in the United States. Credit ESL serves hundreds of students each year, most of whom are immigrants and many of whom are seeking a degree. English as a Second Language students whose skill levels are at the beginning to intermediate levels receive service through noncredit courses offered by the Alliance, discussed more fully in Criterion Five.

For credit students, tests in reading and writing determine appropriate course placements, and students are not permitted to register for English courses above their designated placement levels. Oakton offers 13 courses in the credit area that address four levels of reading and writing proficiency, two levels of speaking and listening, and two levels of grammar; considered devel-



opmental, these courses do not count toward a degree, certificate, or transfer. Faculty in the credit ESL program, all of them members of the English department, have substantial training in ESL or linguistics and bring experience in intercultural communication to the program.

From FY04 to FY07 enrollment declined from 1,976 to 1,509, but Oakton still serves large numbers of students in credit ESL courses. Looking to the future, the program directors are creating a Needs Assessment Team to revisit curriculum and update and modernize course design.

Student Support Services

Oakton provides a comprehensive array of student development services. Most are offered through Advising and Counseling Centers at both campuses that together see more than 15,000 students for individual appointments annually. The Centers offer academic advising, career advising, and personal counseling to all students, advising workshops for new students, transfer workshops for returning students, and special programs targeted to adult and minority students. Advising and Counseling personnel also work closely with Registration and Records to administer the College's Standards of Academic Progress policy (SOAP), a process for intervention with students experiencing academic difficulty (see Resource Room for more information about SOAP). In 2001, the Center was reorganized. With the retirement of five student development faculty over the past five to six years, the College reallocated funds to create 3½ permanent professional academic advising positions so that students would receive regular, consistent advising information from professional staff members. In 2002–2003, the Center's name was changed from Student Services to Advising and Counseling, with the name change based on results of a student survey that indicated the new name would more accurately represent the services provided.

The Advising and Counseling Center reorganization has allowed student development faculty to focus more on personal counseling, management of mental health emergencies, and consultation with faculty and staff who have concerns about a student. Much of the personal counseling provided by student development faculty takes place in their faculty offices, not the Advising and Counseling Center, and referrals are coordinated by a faculty member who serves as clinical coordinator. Student development faculty also offer workshops on topics such as stress, anxiety, and wellness.

Despite efforts made to strengthen services in this area, some challenges remain, as students continue to express concerns about advising. The 2006 CCSSE included a number of questions related to advising. On the question "How would you rate the overall quality of advising at your college?" 49 percent of Oakton respondents said "Excellent" or "Good," compared to 56 percent of respondents from other Illinois community colleges participating in the CCSSE. In a series of five focus groups conducted with more than 100 students in Fall 2006, academic advising was consistently noted as the number one thing "we need to do better." Students' comments focused on the inconsistency of quality; the need for more and better trained advisors, as well as better orientation and initial advisement; the lack of individualized planning; and the difficulty in meeting with advisors during peak periods. Similar feedback came from the Vital Focus Constellation Survey, where Advising was the only program-level area appearing on the list of areas employees think are important but currently are not done well.

There is also an ongoing philosophical disagreement between faculty and Advising and Counseling Center staff about the purpose of advising. Many faculty believe the main goal of advising in recent years has been to facilitate transfer, without taking into account students' individual academic and personal goals. Consequently, faculty perceive that students are often advised into taking the easiest course rather than the course best suited for their academic and personal development.

Advising personnel have been responsive to student and faculty concerns and have already instituted a number of steps to address challenges. These include creating a comprehensive questionnaire to solicit opinions from students and a series of meetings with faculty to commu-

nicate the goals and practices of the Advising and Counseling Centers. During Spring 2007, the Advising and Counseling Centers conducted two online surveys, one for students and another for faculty. The majority of the 226 student respondents were satisfied with the accuracy of information provided by advising and counseling staff (63%), the amount of time staff spent with them (59%), the staff's understanding of their problems or issues (56%), and staff sensitivity to their needs (55%). Ninety faculty members also completed the faculty survey, offering a variety of suggestions for how the Centers might improve services both for students and faculty.

Oakton has likewise affirmed the importance of advising in *Change Matters*. The WISE Student Services strategic goal, inspired by participation in the Foundations of Excellence® project, includes an explicit objective related to advising: we will “redesign student advising to improve effectiveness and student satisfaction by Fall 2009.” The College has also recognized that the physical spaces for housing key services affect how students use these services, as well



as how efficiently they can be delivered. Thus another objective under the WISE Student Services strategic goal is to “plan and construct one-stop student services centers” at both campuses. These centers will simplify students’ access to critical offices such as admission, registration, financial assistance, and advising and counseling, and they will also permit cross training of staff to improve service delivery, especially during peak periods.

Career Services

The Career Services Office works closely with Advising and Counseling; its focus is on assisting students and alumni in reaching career goals. The Office helps students and alumni decide on a career path, learn techniques for launching a successful job search, and locate job leads from Career Corner, Workforce Online (Illinois Department of Employment Security), and America’s Job Bank (U.S. Department of Labor). The Office recently developed a new Web site, “Gathering Career Information Online,” that links students to general information and salary sites, as well as relevant sites by major (see www.oakton.edu/blc/careersvcinfo). Career Services also acts as Human Resources for the College’s Student Employee Program and plays a significant role in offering career assistance to external constituents, as discussed in Criterion Five.

ASSIST Program

Oakton supports students with disabilities through the ASSIST Program. Each year approximately 675 students request services through ASSIST (Additional Support Services Instructional Support Services). ASSIST, part of the Learning Center, offers a supportive learning environment to disabled students. Required by law to provide services, and consistent with Oakton’s commitment to serve the residents of the district, in FY07 Oakton employed 1½ FTE ASSIST professionals and eight learning disability tutors to create individual tutoring opportunities for 60 disabled students per semester. Other tutors also work with special needs students. In addition to dealing directly with students, ASSIST staff also work with faculty and staff to help them adapt instruction and work with disabled students.

Oakton is pressed to respond to the growing number of students with disabilities at the College, a population that has more than doubled in the last few years. This growth is due in part to the excellent special education services afforded by K-12 schools in Oakton’s district. They serve as magnets for families with special needs children, who then expect Oakton to provide comparable services to their college-age students. Put simply, Oakton lacks the resources necessary for fully serving this increasing population. Recognizing the growing

number and needs of disabled students, the College will add a half-time staff position beginning in Fall 2007, while acknowledging that demands for services are likely to continue expanding.

Summary of Core Component 3C

Through multiple instructional delivery approaches, the use of technology, comprehensive student services, and program reviews for instructional and noninstructional programs alike, Oakton has demonstrated both the will and the means to sustain and improve effective learning environments.

Core Component 3D: Oakton's learning resources support student learning and effective teaching.

In addition to the numerous departments and programs at Oakton that provide effective learning environments, described above, the College has also developed physical spaces and other resources that support student learning and effective teaching.

The Learning Center

The Learning Center is the heart of Oakton's learning resource departments. In dedicated Learning Center spaces, it provides an array of academic support services at both campuses six days each week while classes are in session and four days per week in the summer. Academic support services offered through the Center include tutoring, both open lab and by appointment; self study materials and space for using them; workshops for study skills, test taking, and preparation for placement exams in reading and writing; English conversation groups for nonnative students; and accommodations for students with disabilities to ensure full access to course materials and activities.

The Learning Center employs approximately 80 tutors per semester, and 3,000 individual students come for 33,000 tutoring visits per year. Several learning specialists work with students on math, chemistry, physics, biology, English, modern languages, and study skills; three to five content tutors provide supplemental instruction in math, physics, and chemistry; and approximately 650 people attend free ESL and English workshops each semester. In addition to on-campus services, the Center has an online tutoring service, where students can e-mail questions and receive answers to them within 24 hours. A relatively new addition to the Learning Center is the Reading and Writing Lab, opened in Spring 2006 with the help of a \$5,000 Foundation grant. This facility is a dedicated learning environment where students can improve their reading and writing skills. In addition to spaces for private study or collaborative work with tutors and other students, the lab offers books on tape and instructional videos and DVDs. The Learning Center is accredited by the College Reading and Learning Association, which has reviewed Oakton's tutor training and evaluation processes and validated their quality.

The Testing Center, an important component of the Learning Center, has become increasingly significant in the online age. In addition to administering numerous placement exams and tests for students in traditional classes, the Testing Center is also the go-to place for students required to take proctored exams for online classes.

Student satisfaction with the Learning Center is high. Participants in student focus groups generally noted that tutoring services are excellent, though there were occasional comments about inconsistencies in tutor quality. Annual surveys conducted by the Center show a high degree of student satisfaction as well. A recent Office of Research study of students new to Oakton in Fall 2005 showed that tutoring helped to foster student success, as measured by grade point average, successful completion of courses, and persistence to the spring semester (see *In the Abstract*, November 2006).



The Learning Center Changes Lives

The student's Mathematics 250 instructor first brought her to the tutors in the Learning Center. She had a poor mathematics background and was attempting to solve problems without understanding the concepts. Even until the last week of the semester, she wasn't sure how she was going to do, although she reported that with her tutor's help she was finally able to get Bs on her quizzes. During her last tutoring session one day before her final, she suddenly cracked a smile and said that she finally understood what she's doing. She dropped off a thank you note to her tutor stating: "I really appreciate all your help with my struggles for this semester. Calculus was not an easy course. With your help I felt more confident and could see myself slowly improving. Thank you for being patient with me and helping me succeed with this course. I'm happy I had the chance to work with someone like you. This opportunity has helped me in many ways. This will guide me through my future easily and allow me to continue courses with more difficulty. Thank you again!"



Foundations of Excellence®

In 2005-2006, the Director of the Learning Center led the College's participation in what became a significant catalyst for reexamining how Oakton fosters student success: the Foundations of Excellence® project sponsored by the Policy Center on the First Year of College. Oakton was selected as one of 10 community colleges to participate in this project, which focused on assessing current practices and designing a specific plan for improving services to new students. In Fall 2005, 707 students completed the FoE® student survey, and 176 faculty and staff completed the FoE® faculty/staff survey to provide data on how Oakton supports first-year students. Much of the data from these surveys has been used to inform this self study. The project's WISE (Welcome, Inform, Support and Engage) Student Services plan, based on information gleaned from the FoE® surveys and other project activities, contained five recommendations:

- Create and implement an institutional philosophy regarding Oakton's commitment to new students and an organizational structure to support it.
- Revise orientation to emphasize its importance in supporting student success and to explicitly welcome, inform, support, and engage new students.
- Develop an integrated repository of information for use by students, faculty, and staff that will improve accurate and timely communication with new students.
- Incorporate elements of the first-year experience across the curriculum.
- Gather and use information regarding student academic progress to provide appropriate intervention and sources of support.

In addition to specific future projects, such as a pilot Common Reading Program, the WISE Student Services plan inspired one of the *Change Matters* goals. The three WISE objectives—creating a one-stop student services center, implementing required orientation for new students, and redesigning advising—all grew implicitly or explicitly out of the Foundations of Excellence® project. Copies of the final reports from the project are available in the Resource Room.

Learning Resources

The Library is another essential component of Oakton's learning resources support system. A primary resource for students and faculty that supports college curricula, the Library operates facilities at both campuses open to all Oakton employees and to district residents. The Oakton Library collection consists of more than 100,000 books and over 19,450 print and online full-text periodical titles to which the library subscribes. Interlibrary loan services give Oakton students access to seven million more books and thousands more periodicals available through the Library's partnership in the Council of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois (CARLI). Titles not held in the 65 CARLI member libraries can be obtained through the Library's membership in a national interlibrary loan network.

One unique feature of Oakton's library is the depth and breadth of its reference section and how it links reference services to student research projects. The reference desks are staffed exclusively by library services faculty who have strong ties to the College's larger academic community and understand its needs. Faculty from various disciplines often schedule classes in the fully computerized reference library classroom, where library faculty present workshops specifically tailored to particular research projects. Students can attend one of many general "Got Research" workshops presented at the library, schedule an individual or group research consultation with a librarian, or log on to the Library's online research guide that takes them step by step through the process of researching and citing a paper (see www.oakton.edu/blc/researchguide). The Library also provides comprehensive services to online students, and, with an Oakton library/student ID card, students working online can access almost all library services from their home or work computers.

The Learning Center and Library are the major bulwarks supporting students' learning, but the College has other resources as well. We have already noted the Language Lab as an example of cutting edge technology, but it also provides more traditional support on both campuses to students studying the 11 languages Oakton offers. The College maintains top quality labs that support work in science courses, including laboratories on both campuses equipped with cadavers for biology courses. Unique undergraduate research conducted in science laboratories under the STEM program is discussed in Criterion Four.



In addition to these more familiar laboratory settings, Oakton also has facilities for unusual hands-on learning. The Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) Lab, made possible through a corporate partnership with Stratum Global, introduces students to the world of supply chain management in a program unparalleled among community colleges.

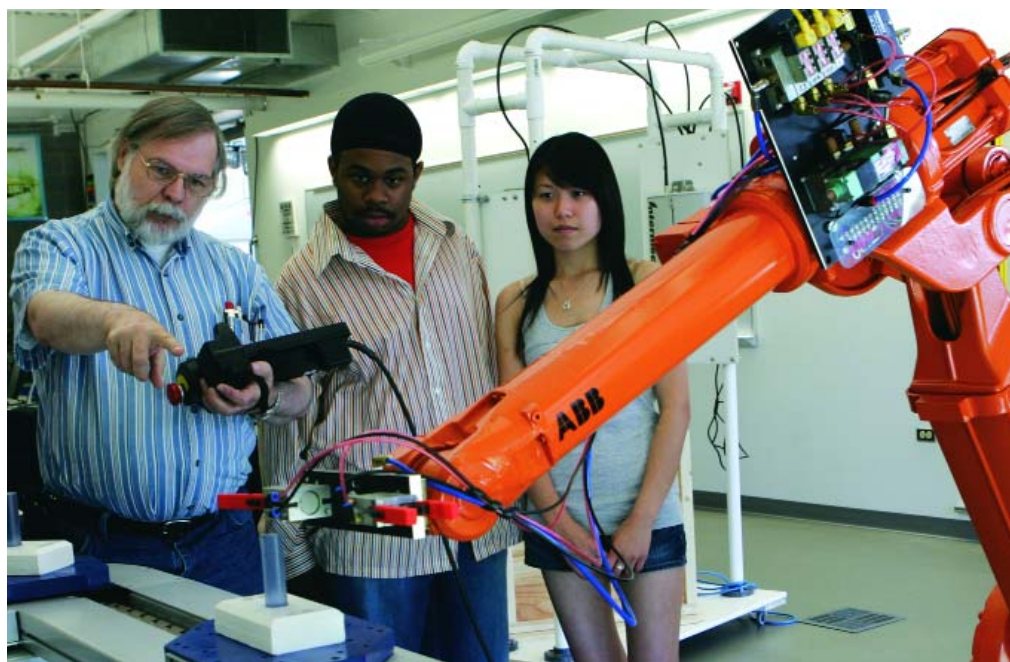
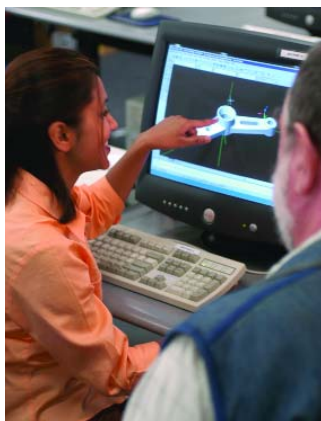
Through the Law Enforcement career program, Oakton is the first community college in the U.S. to offer a college-level forensics course that uses the Intergraph Video Analyst System, a video enhancement system equipped with NASA technology. And, Oakton is one of only a few community colleges that makes a human patient simulator available to students in Nursing Programs.

Finally, Oakton is proud of the Performing Arts Center (PAC) and Koehnline Museum. These facilities, discussed in Criteria Four and Five in terms of opportunities afforded to program participants and the general community, are becoming resources for a host of other academic programs, as they reinforce the connectedness of learning. For example, the PAC has been developing partnerships with other departments to create curricular links between featured productions, performances, and academic disciplines. In 2006, the Theater Program partnered with the Humanities and Philosophy Department in a production of *The Trojan Women*. Humanities instructors from a variety of classes required students to attend the production, and the Theater Department prepared special supplemental materials and a preperformance lecture.

The Koehnline Museum partners with the Art Department and with the Women's Studies



Program to sponsor shows supporting curricular offerings, and plans for future partnerships are currently in development. In addition to sponsoring a variety of external exhibitions and public receptions, the Koehnline Museum was recently highlighted in *The New York Times* for its exceptional permanent collection that includes works by Alexander Calder, Claes Oldenburg, and Salvador Dali, as well as Chicago-area artists. The Museum also regularly spotlights the creative achievements of the Oakton community: every year Oakton art students exhibit their talents in painting, drawing, ceramics, digital art, and photography in “OakArt”; likewise, works by Oakton’s Art Department faculty are featured in a yearly exhibition; and, in 2006, an exhibit of New Orleans photographs taken by Oakton students showcased scenes of the city prior to Hurricane Katrina. Finally, every March grade school children show their artwork through Studio 3, an exhibit at the Des Plaines campus, and the College has become the venue for exhibits of high school and college students’ art.



Access to Technology

Oakton supports students, staff, and faculty in using technology effectively via a number of departments, personnel, and offerings. While elsewhere we discuss how technology is incorporated into classrooms and other settings to foster effective learning environments, in this section we show how the College provides access to technology that enhances teaching and learning.

Both students and employees enjoy the high quality of Oakton’s technology support. For its most recent program review, IT asked respondents to the Current Student Survey about their satisfaction with numerous aspects of computer technology at Oakton. On a scale of one to five, the overall satisfaction was 4.1, and only four percent of respondents were “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied.”

Oakton has embraced the wireless age, enabling wireless access to the College’s network in a number of areas around both campuses. Students can bring notebook computers and access online resources during class or perhaps do research for a paper in the cafeteria. To make technology accessible at both campuses, a variety of computer labs and Internet cafés—29 at the Des Plaines campus and 23 at the Ray Hartstein Campus—house more than 1,100 PC and a small number of Macintosh computers. IT has homepages for faculty and staff (see www.oakton.edu/blc/it), as well as students (see www.oakton.edu/blc/itforstudents), with information on topics such as lab locations and software offerings, logon information for registering, e-mail, Banner, and network resources.

To support the array of computer labs, Internet cafés, and employees' computing needs, Oakton has virtual and actual IT Help Desks where faculty, staff, and students can call, e-mail, or walk in to get their questions answered. Since students are assigned unique Oakton user IDs and passwords upon registering for classes, they can access whatever work and course information they need, regardless of the Oakton computer or campus used, because all computers are connected to Oakton's Novell network, and labs offer free printing. In addition, students have access to a wide array of software, ranging from the Microsoft Office Suite, vocabulary/grammar/math enrichment, Web and graphic design, career identification, course-specific programs, and a variety of programming languages.

In Spring 2006, the College went live with Banner student information software, which gives students independent access to their academic information. Whereas students previously relied on Oakton personnel to print out unofficial transcripts or determine tuition balances, using Banner students now can access their own transcripts and financial histories and pay online. All students have a network account that connects them with numerous resources and enables them to access assistance both on and off campus.

The College established several special support services to assist with the conversion to Banner. For instance, a specific phone number and e-mail address assisted students, faculty, and staff with Banner-related questions. Training sessions facilitated by staff and administrators from Registration and Records, Advising and Counseling, and Information Technology, complete with handouts, offered faculty, staff, and students information on Banner's many capabilities (see www.oakton.edu/hlc/itbannertraining).

Growing dependence on the Web site to access information about Oakton is evidenced from the 2006 Baccalaureate alumni survey, as 56 percent of students last at Oakton in 2003 said they learned about Oakton from the Web site, whereas 71 percent of students last at the College in 2005 said this. Results from the Spring 2007 Aslanian Group study of community residents and employers corroborated this growing dependence on the Web for accessing information about the College. Respondents to the Fall 2006 Current Student Survey, asked to rate the ease of completing 10 tasks through use of Oakton's Web site on a scale of one ("Very Difficult to Use") to five ("Very Easy to Use"), gave high ratings for all tasks, with at least 65 percent responding that each service was "Easy" or "Very Easy" to use. Tasks included activities such as viewing class schedules, registering, and viewing grades.



Financial Support

The resources to assist students discussed in this Criterion are possible only because, as noted in Criterion Two, the College keeps the central mission of "excellence in teaching and learning" at the forefront of planning and budgeting. During the annual budget cycle, administrators are required to submit a rationale for new expenditures in staff, equipment, and facilities that links the request to student learning, and over the last decade a number of remodeling and renovation projects demonstrate this focus:

- In 1998, a \$3 million remodeling project for the Library, Learning Center, and Alliance for Lifelong Learning office increased functionality and access to these resources and improved the physical space used for testing and tutoring students. A \$100,000 renovation of the Career Services office improved student and community access to counseling and job placement services.
- In 1999, a \$350,000 remodeling of the Divisions of Language, Humanities and the Arts and Social Science and Business and an adjunct faculty office improved workspace area and functionality. A \$500,000 redevelopment of the Early Childhood Center at the Ray Hartstein Campus provided a new playground and overall enhancement of the existing site.



- In 2000, a \$2 million remodeling project and Performing Arts Center addition created new classrooms and rehearsal areas for students. The backstage scene shop, sound, and lighting for student productions were also improved. Support for this project came substantially from the Foundation; without this support it is doubtful the renovation would have been possible.
- The Art, Science, and Technology Pavilion at the Ray Hartstein Campus, a \$14 million construction project, began in 2001 and was completed in 2005. The 59,000-square-foot addition features 22 classrooms, five instructional computer labs, a multipurpose room with seating for 250, eight faculty and staff offices, and outdoor sculptures. The Pavilion now houses programs in architecture and construction management, art and graphic design, computer networking and systems, computer technology and information systems, electronics, engineering, and manufacturing, as well as the only community college Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) Lab in the country. Parking at the campus was expanded by 350 spaces as well.
- In 2005, a \$200,000 remodeling project in the Nursing labs created larger work areas, added a computer lab, and improved flexibility of the space for instruction.
- In 2006, \$1.2 million allocated to create new chemistry and anatomy labs at the Skokie campus increased the capacity in high demand science courses.



Grants from Oakton's Educational Foundation provide another resource to secure funding for projects that match Oakton's strategic goals and enrich the teaching and learning environment. Foundation grants support compelling College initiatives not eligible for public funding. Criteria for judging proposals include campus improvements that benefit the educational experience at Oakton; innovations that support the delivery of exemplary classroom instruction; activities for student enrichment; and faculty or staff enhancement projects that translate into superior educational experiences for students. Ideally projects proposed for funding should benefit a large number of students and encourage student learning. Recent Foundation

contributions to the College include the Book Lending Program, which provides funds to purchase textbooks for students facing financial challenges; a 3-D rapid prototyping printer for students enrolled in Computer Aided Design; technologically advanced photography equipment; a human patient simulator for the nursing program; an IR spectrophotometer and gas chromatograph for organic chemistry; digital upgrades to the Language Laboratories at both campuses; a tabletop model city for training local first responders (in conjunction with the Northeastern Illinois Public Safety Training Academy); and equipment and materials for the Reading Lab in the Learning Center.

Summary of Core Component 3D

Through established resources such as the Learning Center, Library, and visual and performing arts spaces, Oakton has a strong support system for academic programs and services that enhance student learning. Distinct strengths such as participation in national initiatives like the Foundations of Excellence®, access to technology, and the ability to fund special projects all contribute to Oakton's identity as a connected and learning-centered institution.

Conclusion to Criterion Three:

Self study research has provided extensive evidence that Oakton continues to fulfill its educational mission and has the resources and determination to continue improving student learning and teaching effectiveness. The research also demonstrates that the College has an extensive, if inconsistent, history with the assessment of student learning outcomes, and has recently strengthened efforts in this area with changes to the assessment initiative. We have outlined the first-rate faculty development opportunities the College provides to support high quality teaching and described varied and innovative learning environments and student service programs that enhance the learning of diverse student populations. While these Criterion components reveal isolated areas that call for improvement, we believe they also demonstrate that Oakton works consistently and effectively to offer distinctive learning opportunities for students.

Strengths:


- The College maintains strong programs and support for faculty development.
- The College's Libraries, Learning Center, and arts facilities offer excellent learning resources that serve students, employees, and the community.
- The faculty evaluation process has been strengthened through collaborative efforts of faculty and administration, particularly in the revision of Policy 4115 for full-time faculty and the inclusion of a requirement that adjunct faculty provide evidence of professional development and content currency every five years.
- The College has invested in technology for instruction and provides high quality equipment, software, and staff support.

Challenges and Possible Solutions:

- Work must continue to advance a culture of assessment. The College must increase understanding of how to assess learning outcomes and how to use results to improve learning and teaching, and must close the assessment feedback loop by ensuring that assessment takes place after changes are made in order to measure their effectiveness. Continued support for the faculty assessment coordinator, more involvement by academic leaders to ensure departments are conducting assessments, and a separate assessment budget are approaches for addressing this challenge. Oakton seeks consultative advice from the HLC visiting team about how we might meet this challenge and realize the strategic objective of developing a culture of assessment.
- Oakton must creatively respond to the growing number of students with disabilities, recognizing the costs of doing so are likely to place continued pressure on the College's budget. The addition of a half-time staff position to work with special needs students and the expansion of professional development to help faculty and staff work effectively with special needs students are approaches for addressing this challenge.
- The College has recognized the need for strengthening advising and orientation and has responded to the concerns of students, advising personnel, and other employees. We are re-envisioning the long-term direction of these areas by incorporating explicit objectives that address them into *Change Matters*.

Criterion Four:
Acquisition, Discovery, and Application
of Knowledge





Oakton promotes a life of learning for its faculty, administration, staff, and students by fostering and supporting inquiry, creativity, practice, and social responsibility in ways consistent with its mission.

Oakton's *Vision, Mission and Values (VMV)* statement identifies providing “education and training for and throughout a lifetime” as central to the College’s understanding of itself as a learning-centered institution. With respect to students, the *VMV* further outlines our primary dedication to teaching and learning excellence through a conception of education that incorporates key elements necessary for a life of learning:

- We challenge our students to experience the hard work and satisfaction of learning that leads to intellectual growth and we support them academically, emotionally, and socially;
- We encourage them to entertain and question ideas, think critically, solve problems, and engage with other cultures, with one another and with us;
- We expect our students to assume responsibility for their own learning, to exercise leadership and to apply ethical principles in their academic, work, and personal lives;
- We demand from ourselves and our students tolerance, fairness, responsibility, compassion, and integrity.



Valuing a life of learning for employees and students is also clearly articulated in each strategic plan adopted over the last decade. A central goal of the *1999-2002 Strategic Plan* involved implementing a “new, comprehensive personal and professional development program” offering “educational and training opportunities to all employees throughout their careers.” For its first goal, The *Learning Together 2003-2008 Strategic Plan* listed developing “academic programs and services of exemplary quality” that would “mak[e] learning the core focus for students and employees.” A critical objective under this goal was the maintenance of “an innovative and rich array of professional development and training programs for all employees.” That strategic plan also included a commitment to helping students learn and succeed in two ways: in the classroom by building and sustaining academic programs of exemplary quality and outside of the classroom by maintaining and enhancing student support services. Finally, *Change Matters* commits the College to requiring and supporting “professional development for all employees” as a core objective under the goal of developing a model work environment. *Change Matters* also includes objectives related to fostering a life of learning for students under the goals of “Academic Excellence,” “Innovative Learning for Local and Global Citizenship,” “WISE Student Services,” “Antibias College,” and “Green Campus.” Each of these goals contains objectives that support students in developing the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for lifelong learning.

Thus, fostering an environment of continuous learning and social responsibility remains a primary goal of the College. By taking seriously our social responsibility as the community’s college and working with an awareness of the changing and diverse nature of both local and global environments, Oakton provides employees and students a strong foundation for ethical engagement with the world. In this Criterion, we examine four primary ways that we have worked to accomplish this goal. In Core Component 4A, we discuss specific activities and programs related to professional development, scholarship, research, and academic achievement that demonstrate a commitment to a life of learning. In Core Component 4B, we examine general education, cocurricular, and extracurricular offerings to determine the degree to which they promote the acquisition of the breadth of knowledge and skills necessary for the exercise of socially responsible inquiry. In Core Component 4C, we consider how curricula prepare students to live and work in a global and diverse society. Finally, in Core Component 4D we analyze how the College supports the responsible application of knowledge discovered and learned at our institution.

Core Component 4A:

Oakton demonstrates, through the actions of its administrators, students, faculty, staff, and the Board that it values a life of learning.

Oakton has created an environment conducive to continual learning through practices that affirm its value: allocating resources for professional development for all Oakton employees; establishing the Center for Professional Development to organize professional and personal development opportunities; modeling a life of learning for students through both curricular and extracurricular programming; and recognizing the academic and professional achievements of members of the College community.

Support for Continuous Learning

Oakton recognizes that innovative teaching and effective learning require faculty, staff, and administrators who are actively engaged in a life of learning. Thus, Oakton offers financial resources to support research, scholarship, employee skill development, and job renewal through credit courses, workshops and seminars, conference travel costs, membership in professional associations, and sabbatical leaves. Full- and part-time faculty, staff, and administrators, as well as spouses and dependent children, are eligible to enroll tuition-free in any credit-bearing course at Oakton. Since 1999, the College has granted approximately \$1.5 million in tuition waivers, as shown in Table 4.1.

Along with sabbatical leaves, discussed in Criterion Three, Oakton affords opportunities for faculty and staff to remain current in their fields, pursue further degrees, or engage in research. Every other year, full-time faculty are eligible for up to three lecture hour equivalents (LHEs) of alternate time from teaching during one semester to enroll in either graduate-level courses in their disciplines or special certification training. Full-time staff and faculty are also eligible for tuition reimbursement for credit-bearing courses at other colleges and universities. Staff employees are reimbursed up to nine semester or 13 quarter hours (\$200/semester, \$134/quarter, \$15/fees per course) for tuition expenses per fiscal year, and faculty are reimbursed for tuition expenses (\$130/semester, \$85/quarter, \$30/total fees) up to \$1,170 per contract year. Both faculty and staff pursuing master or doctoral degrees are granted pay advancement upon completion of the degree; staff need prior approval of the degree for this to occur. Full-time staff and faculty are also eligible for professional travel funds, with staff reimbursed up to \$600 and faculty up to \$700 per fiscal year. Part-time faculty may also receive financial support for expenses associated with travel and attendance at professional meetings.

Faculty achieve lane advancement after completing an additional 15 credits of graduate level coursework. The College also has an innovative provision whereby full-time faculty can advance in the salary schedule for a variety of other professional development activities, including publishing, presenting at conferences, and completing a professional certification program approved by a recognized professional organization. Finally, full- and part-time faculty are paid a stipend equivalent to two lecture hour equivalents (LHEs) for participation in semester-long faculty seminars.

Administrators are likewise eligible for tuition reimbursement, professional travel funds, and costs of membership to participate in professional organizations. In FY03, half of Oakton's administrators had been in their current positions for approximately two years or less, and only 10 lived in Oakton's district. To enhance their understanding of the area, and to provide a team-building experience, an all-day "on the road" retreat took place in Spring 2003. The administrators traveled together by bus to five different sites in the district, meeting with key individuals at each location. The route purposefully included representative neighborhoods and commercial areas to enhance understanding of Oakton's immediate residential, retail, industrial, recreational, and educational environments. To leaven the day with both information and humor, retreat planners constructed a trivia quiz about the district, employed classroom

Table 4.1

Employee and Family Tuition Waivers – Fiscal Years 2000-2006

Fiscal Year	Amount
2000	\$108,877*
2001	\$153,202*
2002	\$226,892
2003	\$259,764
2004	\$250,939
2005	\$324,555
2006	\$289,586

**Figure does not include part-time faculty and part-time staff tuition waivers*

Table 4.2

Employee Participation in Professional Development Workshops and Seminars 1999 – 2006

Academic Year	Participants*
1998-1999	1,129
1999-2000	2,163
2000-2001	1,788
2001-2002	1,590
2002-2003	1,684
2003-2004	2,541
2004-2005	2,261
2005-2006	2,380

*Figures include duplicated head count

assessment techniques to determine what learning occurred, and encouraged all participants to begin brainstorming ideas about how to connect what was learned with current and future Oakton projects to better serve the community.

Members of the Board of Trustees also reflect the learning-centeredness of the College. Board members are encouraged to develop in their role by attending regional, state, and national conferences. The College also provides funding for Board members to join organizations such as the Association of Community College Trustees and the Illinois Community College Trustees Association, with travel to conferences and meetings reimbursed by the College. The Board learns about Oakton together each month through the report made at the beginning of each regular meeting and through the “Strategic Conversation” that has become part of every Board meeting. In addition, on Fridays (except during the months of July and winter break) Board members receive a packet containing items related to the Board agenda; news and information items of interest; a “Weekly Update” prepared by the President; and a special enclosure, “. . . about learning,” that covers issues in higher education from the local to the global. This ensures a common frame of reference and discourse for the Board in the learning that is so central to their work.

Center for Professional Development

As noted in Criterion Two, responses to the Constellation Survey demonstrate that Oakton employees believe the College both values and does well at training and professional development. A major component in support of employee learning within the last decade is the Center for Professional Development (CPD), established in 1998 and located physically in the Learning Center in Des Plaines. Created in part as a response to the 1997 HLC visiting team’s observations about how the College organized professional development at that time, the CPD brought coherence and coordination to what had previously been more decentralized programming. Currently, the CPD staff consists of a half-time manager, three part-time technology assistants, a part-time design specialist, and a part-time consultant for office technologies; though housed in their respective divisions, two faculty coordinators, one who concentrates on programs about teaching and learning and the other who focuses on technology, work in partnership with the CPD. A Professional Development Program Steering Committee meets once a semester to share information about training for members’ respective employee groups. The CPD budget, currently at \$250,000, is centralized under one administrator, the director of the Learning Center. Professional development opportunities coordinated by the CPD include the following:

- Fall and spring orientation
- New faculty orientation
- Faculty seminars
- Weekly technology and soft skills workshops, such as time management or conflict management
- Weekly e-mail listings of workshops sent to all College employees
- Leadership, workplace communication, and other specialized learning series
- Group and individual training

The CPD lab provides employees with access to scanners, digital card readers, laptops, digital cameras, CD burners, and a SmartBoard, among other resources. Working in partnership with Information Technology, Human Resources, the Library, and departments, the CPD offers a wide selection of learning opportunities (see “Professional Development Schedules” in the Resource Room). Many employees take advantage of these opportunities, as evident in Table 4.2.

Criterion Three examined professional development offerings geared toward faculty. In this section we focus on professional development for staff. The manager of the Center for

Professional Development chairs a Staff Development Committee that plans professional development activities. As a result of a staff professional development needs assessment survey conducted in 2002, new initiatives have enhanced the quality of opportunities made available to staff employees.

The CPD launched the STAFF (Staff Topics, Activities, Facts and Feedback) Newsletter, featuring topics to enrich personal and professional development. Staff Development Week, a series of activities offered each spring break, became theme-focused for greater direction and impact. In 2005, for instance, the Staff Week theme was “Connecting Present, Future, and Past Generations.” Topical sessions included “Generation Hip-Hop: Engaging Students from a Hip-Hop Perspective,” “Success in a Cross Generational Workplace,” and “Generational Differences in Student-Staff Interactions.” Staff members are afforded other development and network opportunities through the Northern Illinois Network (NIN) of Staff Developers, an affiliate consortium of the National Council for Staff, Program, and Organizational Development (NCSPOD), whose mission is to enhance job performance, personal growth, and social interaction among Northern Illinois community colleges’ staff employees. In 2004, Oakton hosted a NIN Staff Exchange attended by more than 80 employees from 14 Illinois community colleges that brought together a select group of classified staff members to share ideas and generate problem-solving techniques related to status and position. In turn, many Oakton employees have attended staff exchanges hosted at other NIN member institutions.

Each semester during the week before classes Oakton organizes a series of workshops and programs, open to all employees, with discussions of current books, effective teaching methods, and integration of technology into the classroom, among other topics (see “Orientation Week Schedules” in the Resource Room). Keynote speakers are often part of orientation week activities. In Fall 2005, more than 100 employees gathered for a workshop by Dr. Robert Kegan, “How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work: Seven Languages for Transformation.” Kegan, a professor of Adult Learning and Professional Development at the Harvard University Graduate School of Education, presented “seven languages” that help to overcome both internal and organizational resistance to change. On occasion, the content of keynote speeches sparks discussion for future workshops and programs, as the Fall 2006 orientation included a follow-up session to Kegan’s, allowing faculty and staff a more in-depth discussion of the material.

Modeling a Life of Learning

Preparing students for lifelong learning begins in the classroom. Criterion Three detailed many Oakton activities, programs, and services that support learning-centered environments, including those enabling faculty to expand and refine their pedagogy. To extend this dynamic beyond the classroom, it is also important for faculty, staff, and administrators to model, through pursuit of their own educational, research, and professional interests, a life of learning. The discussion of the CPD demonstrated one way that Oakton fosters an atmosphere of continuous learning and intellectual engagement. However, we also model lifelong learning for students through extra- and cocurricular offerings, lecture series, and special events.

Special Events and Academic Forums

Oakton hosts a number of special events, conferences, speakers, panels, and forums that bring together faculty, students, staff, administrators, and local community members. Many of these events are designed and organized by Oakton employees as part of their academic programs, institutional service, or commitment to social activism. Others are joint efforts between Oakton (or a specific Oakton program or group) and external organizations, businesses, or other educational institutions. These events connect Oakton with the larger community while creating important educational opportunities. They are an unambiguous example of Oakton’s focus on learning and connectedness to the surrounding community.

Student Athletes Shine

Many Oakton students have demonstrated strong potential in intercollegiate sports. Thirty-seven athletes have received All-American honors from the NJCAA, including three-time national champion Leszek Stoklosa (cross-country, track, and marathon) and women’s national marathon champion Ann Tuzson. After Oakton, many athletes transfer to four-year colleges and universities to compete in their respective sports. Significantly, Oakton athletes excel in the classroom, as well as on the field. The Illinois Skyway Collegiate Conference has honored 13 Oakton Community College students as Academic Athletes of the Year. To earn the award, students must have completed 48 credit hours with a 3.0 GPA or higher during their college career. In the past year, five sophomore players from Oakton’s volleyball team were named Academic Athletes of the Year: Lauren Bailey, Kimberly Dotseth, JoAnna Fugate, Kelly Leffert, and Siobhan Mischke. Three players from the men’s basketball team also were honored:



freshman Ryan Brown, sophomore Stephen Evans, and sophomore Bryan Piironen. From both the women’s

basketball and softball teams, Amanda Kasdorf and Reema Shadid were honored, along with sophomore women’s soccer player Bonnie Levy, sophomore baseball player David Paulus, and sophomore men’s soccer player Anthony Stavropoulos.

Recently the President appointed a Special Events Task Force (SETF) to recommend strategies for coordinating the increasing number of such events held at the College. The Task Force was controversial, in part because a number of faculty and staff were concerned that their events might be in jeopardy, and many more volunteered to be on the SETF than could be accommodated. In a novel approach to ensuring widespread involvement while keeping the committee at a manageable number, the Task Force convened a virtual consulting group of everyone who had expressed interest in being appointed to the Task Force. Using e-mail, the Task Force sent the consulting group drafts of their work and sought input. Before finalizing their report and recommendations, the Task Force also held a real-time meeting with the consulting group. The final report and recommendations reflect this widespread input and address areas of concern raised by the consultants. The President's Council prepared a response to the SETF recommendations that indicated which recommendations were accepted or, if changed or rejected, the rationale for these decisions. Like the Educational Policies and Procedures Task Force, the SETF successfully engaged the community in its work, communicated often, and, as a result, was able to deal effectively with a sensitive topic. The Resource Room contains the Task Force report and President's Council response.

The outcomes of the SETF included new procedures and guidelines to make more efficient use of resources and produce more effective events: clarifying the meaning of a special event for the institution, instituting an application process for holding events that emphasizes alignment

Table 4.3

Selected Annual Special Events at Oakton	
EVENT	ATTENDANCE
<p>Oakton Celebrates Cultures Week A week of activities to celebrate cultural diversity within the College and the community. Activities include foreign language films, ethnic foods, ethnic music and entertainment, and special presentations in many classes.</p>	3,135 across 90 programs
<p>Men's Day A day of speakers and workshops focused on men's issues. Both men and women are invited to participate.</p>	250
<p>Women's Day A day of speakers and workshops focused on women's issues. Both women and men are invited to participate.</p>	300
<p>Futures Unlimited A day of hands-on activities and small group sessions with role models for middle school girls to expand their horizons by thinking about science/math-based careers traditionally dominated by men.</p>	600
<p>Stay at Home Dad's Day A day of speakers and workshops focused on issues of stay-at-home dads. Organizers of this event have determined it is no longer of sufficient value for continuation and have voluntarily chosen to end it.</p>	100 from 25 states
<p>Media.COM A day focused on media careers and directed to high school students that always includes a major speaker well known to Chicago audiences.</p>	500
<p>DECA Conference DECA (Distributive Education Club of America). Oakton is the venue for two events, a fall leadership conference for officers and a spring regional competition for high schools.</p>	Fall 350-400 Spring 400-500
<p>ECE Conference ECE (Early Childhood Education) sponsors two annual events. In fall there is a Golden Corridor Association for the Education of Young children. In spring there is an annual Infant/Toddler Conference.</p>	Fall 400 Spring 400

with the mission and strategic plan, evaluating each event, and establishing an Events Management Team to coordinate event planning, as well as a Special Events Review Committee to review evaluations of events for possible improvement and continuation. Some of the special events held annually at Oakton include Cultures Week, Men's Day, Women's Day, Futures Unlimited, Stay-at-Home Dad's Day, Media.COM, DECA Conference, and ECE Conference. Table 4.3 provides a brief description of each, as well as an approximate number of attendees.

In addition to these special events, various segments of Oakton, including Honors and other special programs, academic departments, and student clubs sponsor many speakers and workshops open to the College at large and, in many cases, the public. For example, the Department of Historical and Policy Studies has developed a lecture series, "Voices from the Past and Present," that creates a forum for faculty to present their research and gives students an opportunity to participate in engaging intellectual and scholarly discussions. Below is a partial list of offerings from the last several years:

- "Philip the Arab: The First Christian Emperor of Rome"
- "An Investigation of Female Perpetrators of Genocide and Other Crimes during the Holocaust"
- "Color & Bondage: Teaching the Origins of Slavery and Race in Colonial America"
- "Transplanted or Uprooted? Teaching the Migration of New Immigrants to the United States"

Table 4.4 presents a representative sample of speakers and panels sponsored during the 2006-2007 academic year. Participating in these types of events and academic forums enables students and employees to discover and pursue their intellectual, personal, professional, or career interests outside the classroom. The availability of such events also creates and maintains a distinctive atmosphere of continuous learning throughout the College.

Student Life

Oakton recognizes that providing students with a broad range of knowledge and skills, as well as opportunities to engage in intellectual inquiry, extends beyond the established curriculum. Cocurricular and extracurricular learning are an essential part of students' development as lifelong learners. Thus, Oakton supports and encourages a wide range of such learning opportunities: student clubs, internships, field trips, study abroad, and scholarly lectures, as well as lectures on student and life success. Though a source of some controversy, Oakton's student newspaper, the *OCCurrence*, has fostered student development and achievement, winning numerous state and national awards for its reporting, style, and layout. Faculty often encourage their students to attend special events and programs hosted at Oakton or elsewhere by offering extra credit for attendance and participation or by bringing their classes to events.

Clubs and Extracurricular Activities. Oakton supports 41 student clubs and organizations coordinated through the Student Activities Office, ranging from those associated with specific academic disciplines (e.g., Engineering and Physics, Early Childhood Education, and Law Enforcement), to those associated with particular activities (e.g., Jam Club and the Ceramics Club), to those that support students' interests in international concerns (e.g., Amnesty International and Students for Social Justice). Many of these clubs hold special events for the entire Oakton community, featuring guest speakers or presenting panel discussions on local and global issues. For example, the Ecology Club offers seasonal tours, led by a knowledgeable staff member, of the Des Plaines campus' wooded areas to generate interest in the environment and Oakton's participation in prairie restoration projects. Indoors on "Student Street," the Muslim Student Association sponsors "Islamic Awareness Week" to disseminate information about Islam. In addition to these programs, the Student Activities Office supports and organizes a host of activities throughout the school year.

The College Program Board (CPB) coordinates extracurricular activities at Oakton by



planning social activities, educational events, and entertainment on campus in cooperation with other student groups and departments. With an annual budget of approximately \$60,000 from student activities fees, volunteer student members of the CPB decide what programs to support, which events will take place, and how to allocate their resources. During the planning process, students speak with talent agents, negotiate contracts, and book entertainers; they are also responsible for marketing the programs and providing all support for the events.

Student Government. Students also gain valuable experience by participating in Oakton's student government, the Board of Student Affairs (BSA). The BSA's mission is to represent the academic and social interests of the student body, while enhancing the college experience for all students. Working with other student organizations and campus offices, the BSA offers numerous opportunities for students to become actively involved in campus life. Five committees comprise the BSA: Elections, Student Life, Student Information, Budget, and Clubs and Organizations. The BSA recognizes student clubs and organizations, controls and distributes \$500,000 in student activities fees annually, and supports extracurricular learning experiences.

Athletics. A life of learning at Oakton continues outside of the classroom and on the field of athletic competition, as the College supports both intercollegiate and intramural athletic competition. The Oakton Raiders compete in the Illinois Skyway Collegiate Conference and are members of the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA). The Illinois Skyway Collegiate Conference offers a variety of sports throughout the year: golf, women's

Table 4.4

Examples of Speakers and Panels during the 2006-2007 Academic Year

SPONSORING GROUP	SPEAKER (PANEL) AND TOPIC
Student Development	"Cheryl's Dreaming Big," a dramatic interpretation of adults struggling with various mental and emotional disorders
Phi Theta Kappa	Four sessions on the 2006 Honors study topic of "Gold, Gods, and Glory: The Global Dynamics of Power"
Center for Professional Development	A Workshop on Racism and Anti-Racism
Oakton Educators for Social Responsibility	Viewing and discussion of film "Iraq for Sale"
Academic and Student Affairs	"Interfaith Dialogue on the Middle East Conflict," with presentation by Ron Miller and discussion facilitated by representatives from Hands of Peace
Honors et. al	"Alternatives to Wars in the Middle East," a panel discussion by two members of Combatants for Peace
English Department and Board of Student Affairs	Reading with author Stuart Dybek
Women's Studies and Honors	"Women and the Arts in Rural Morocco," a lecture and discussion with Cynthia Becker, Assistant Professor of Art History at Boston University
Department of Historical and Policy Studies	"Mazl Tov! The Old World Origins and the New World Renaissance of Klezmer"
Women's Studies	"Caring for Women with HIV: Global and Local Challenges," presented by Dr. Marge Cohen, Stroger Hospital physician and HIV researcher
Center for Professional Development	Workshop on Racism and Anti-Racism
Student Development	"Non-Violent Sexuality," by Bob Hall, from Campus Programs that Matter
Department of Humanities and Philosophy	"After Capitalism," public forum presented by David Schweickart, Professor of Philosophy at Loyola University
Department of Historical and Policy Studies	"GI Jews: How WWII Changed a Generation"

volleyball, men's and women's cross-country, soccer, and women's tennis in the fall; men's and women's basketball in the winter; and men's tennis, men's baseball, and women's softball in the spring. Oakton also offers men's and women's indoor/outdoor track and marathon as nonconference sports.

In 2006-2007, a volunteer group of 26 faculty, administrators, and staff served as mentors to 31 Oakton athletes, including 14 on the College's nationally ranked men's basketball team. Students and mentors developed their own approaches to the relationship project, varying the frequency, content, and type of interactions to meet respective needs. Enthusiasm and commitment was evident. For the first time, 100 percent of Oakton's men's basketball team maintained eligibility for the spring term. This program grew organically, and leaders are now recruiting additional employees to serve as mentors next year.

In addition to athletics, the cocurricular arm of the Skyway Collegiate Conference hosts a series of art and academic competitions throughout the year: the Art Competition, Jazz Festival, College Bowl Tournament, and Writers Festival. Any school participating in the Conference must participate in the athletic, art, and academic competitions. Oakton's decision to participate in the Conference shows that we value the connections between athletics and academics in students' lives.

For any commuter college, maintaining a lively, involved student life on campus remains a challenge. The largest gap in student participation in Oakton's campus life is based on age. According to responses from the 2001 Current Student Survey, 66 percent of younger students indicated that they socialized with other students on campus and 50 percent off campus, whereas only 29 percent of older students socialized with other students on campus and 29 percent off campus. Further, while a significant number of students do use Oakton's campuses for making friends (68%), socializing on campus (53%), and getting academic advising or counseling for course selection (53%), far fewer attend concerts or plays performed by Oakton music and theater students (6-9%), participate in a student club, activity, or government (9%), or attend events during International Cultures week (7%). Oakton will continue to engage employees and students in conversation about fostering community in ways that meet students' needs.

Recognition of Achievement and Excellence

Recognition of Students. The recognition of academic, creative, and professional achievement is an essential component in fostering and modeling the ideal of a learning-centered community. Student academic and cocurricular accomplishments are recognized through a variety of programs and events at the College. The commencement ceremony pays tribute to student graduates. At commencement, graduates who achieve certain cumulative grade point averages are honored, and other individualized events for students in specific programs, such as the Department of Nursing's pinning ceremony, also recognize student achievement. Students also earn recognition for excellence throughout their courses of study. At the completion of each semester, term honors are awarded to students who achieve meritorious grade point averages. Students who earn term honors receive an award letter from the Vice President for Student Affairs, and students demonstrating academic excellence may also choose to participate in Oakton's Honors Program and Phi Theta Kappa.

The College's annual Scholarship Recognition Dinner brings together scholarship recipients and the generous benefactors who fund the scholarships. The grade point average of scholarship recipients over the past five years is 3.3 on a 4.0 scale, and the number and value of scholarships have almost doubled since 2000: in 2000, 113 students received scholarships, totaling \$100,000; just five years later, 202 scholarships were awarded, worth \$213,000. Each year a former scholarship recipient and graduate of the College is invited to speak as part of the Scholarship Recognition Dinner program, and recipients repeatedly affirm the importance of receiving a scholarship and the importance of donors. While the primary purpose of the scholarship dinner is to acknowledge student accomplishments, the dinner also serves the equally





Mentoring Makes a Difference

Jerrod Tucker came to Oakton Community College from Chicago's West side, where he grew up in a single family home, supported by his mother and grandmother and educated in the Chicago Public Schools. He graduated from Prosser High School, where he was an All-City basketball player, and was recruited to play basketball for the Oakton Raiders. During his first semester, he struggled with both the academic requirements and social culture at the College. He persisted with the support of his coach and athletic department staff and was more successful the subsequent semester. During his second year, Jerrod participated in a pilot mentoring program, was appointed cocaptain of the team, and began to assume a significant leadership role, on and off the court. His success soon became evident when he earned 1st Team All-Conference, 2nd team All-Region, and Regional Tournament MVP – and honors status in the classroom. Jerrod will be continuing his education at Bellevue University in Nebraska where he received a full scholarship to play basketball and earn a degree in sports management.

valuable secondary function of acknowledging new scholarships awarded for the first time.

Students participating in cocurricular activities and programs likewise receive acknowledgment of their involvement at annual or biannual recognition banquets. Coordinated by the Student Activities Office, the annual Student Leadership Banquet held each spring awards students for both individual and collective acts of leadership. Hundreds of students from clubs and organizations, along with Oakton employees, join in a spirited event to celebrate outstanding extra- and cocurricular achievement. Various club and individual leadership awards are presented, and recipients see their names displayed on plaques outside the President's Office. Athletes are similarly recognized for individual contributions and team accomplishments at biannual athletic banquets, during which academic, leadership, and athletic awards are presented. Students are also eligible to compete for the numerous scholarships and contests available on an annual basis (see "Student Leadership Awards" in Resource Room).

Recognition of Employees. The Classified Staff Excellence Award is presented at the Annual Fall Brunch discussed in Criterion Three. Nominations by staff peers, faculty, and administrators are accepted for any staff personnel with at least one year of service. Criteria for the Staff Excellence Award include staff members' willingness to perform for the benefit of the College and their colleagues above and beyond job responsibilities, use of creativity and ingenuity in fulfilling work-related responsibilities and other undertakings, and high level of cooperation and unselfishness in dealing with others. The review committee, comprised of the last three recipients of the award, forwards the finalists' names to the Oakton Educational Foundation. The Foundation's Grants Committee interviews staff nominees as part of the selection process, which parallels the process used for faculty nominees.

In 2005, the Center for Professional Development developed the Lifelong Learner Award to recognize members of the Oakton community who demonstrate commitment to continuous learning, self-renewal, and professional development. A plaque and cash prize is presented to one faculty member and one staff member to recognize participation in formal and informal learning, both within the institution and external to it. Employees may nominate themselves or be nominated by an Oakton colleague. Staff and faculty nominees complete applications that are reviewed by the Staff Development Committee and the Faculty Subcommittee.

Several College publications also celebrate student and employee accomplishments. *Oakton Authors*, a bibliography of publications by past and present Oakton personnel, includes materials written before, during, or after the employees' tenure at the College. Begun by a now retired Oakton librarian, *Oakton Authors* has had two print editions and is available at the circulation desk of each campus library. The last edition of *Oakton Authors* highlighted the scholarship of 77 faculty, staff, and administrators that appeared in periodicals such as *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, *New Directions for Community Colleges*, *Community College Review*, and *Community & Junior College Libraries*. *Outlook*, an annual magazine showcasing Oakton's outstanding learning-centered environment, features stories about unique programs, as well as exemplary faculty, staff, and student achievements. Oakton also sponsors *Mosaic*, a biannual publication of original writing and line-art drawings by current and retired employees (see copies of *Oakton Authors*, *Outlook*, and *Mosaic* in the Resource Room).

Summary of Core Component 4A

In this core component we have examined the many ways Oakton fosters an organization characterized by active and continual learning. The focus on learning extends to all constituents—students, faculty, staff, administrators, trustees, and district community members—and the celebration of learning achievements remains a vital part of daily activities and annual rituals.

The establishment of the Center for Professional Development since the last accreditation visit demonstrates the College's ongoing support of employee learning and development.

Core Component 4B:

Oakton demonstrates that acquisition of a breadth of knowledge and skills and the exercise of intellectual inquiry are integral to its educational programs.

Oakton is dedicated to preparing students for a life of continuous learning; thus, educational offerings and practices emphasize developing the breadth of knowledge, skills for intellectual inquiry, and attitudes required for a future of continuing and productive learning. Oakton's Alliance for Lifelong Learning, discussed in Criterion Five, embodies this commitment for all residents of our district. In this section, we examine how Oakton prepares students for a life of learning through analysis of our general education curriculum, developmental courses, and distinctive curricula.

Acquisition of Knowledge and Skills through General Education and Student Engagement

Oakton's general education requirements are intended to "develop the student as an educated person" by fostering the knowledge and skills necessary for continuous learning and engagement with the world. The College's general education requirements are detailed in Criterion Three, Figure 3.1. All students who earn a degree, including transfer and applied associate degrees, take required general education courses from six areas: communications, mathematics, science, social and behavioral science, humanities/fine arts, and contemporary global studies. The first five areas are correlated with specific Illinois Articulation Initiative requirements, but the sixth, contemporary global studies, is an Oakton requirement. Of the 60 to 64 credits required for a degree, transfer degrees require 38 to 43 credit hours in general education, with degree programs in engineering and fine arts requiring slightly fewer. For the associate of applied science degrees in career fields, students are required to take 18 credits in general education. A full listing of requirements and courses can be found in the *Oakton Community College Catalog 2006-2007*, or online at www.oakton.edu/hlc/catalog0708.

In Criterion Three we demonstrated that Oakton uses a variety of methods for evaluating how students meet general education objectives and presented results of direct assessments of student learning. In this section we focus on results from additional assessment projects that rely on indirect indicators of learning.

In 2004, the SAAT (Student Academic Assessment Team) reviewed a matrix of general education objectives mapped to IAI-approved general education courses. The matrix, summarized in Table 4.5, showed which objectives were addressed across the general education areas. Out of 105 courses mapped, the analysis revealed that the skills and knowledge associated with intellectual inquiry were well represented across a wide range of courses. However, the objectives "working and communicating effectively with people from a variety of backgrounds, individually and in teams," "applying ethical principles to local, national, and global issues," and "recognizing skills necessary to build and maintain effective human relations" were not well represented explicitly in learning objectives or assignments depicted in the generic course syllabi.

In their analysis, the SAAT observed that interpretation of "general education competency" varied across departments and that some departments focused heavily on the specific content of their courses and not explicitly on College general education objectives. The SAAT also noted that simply giving an assignment such as a group project was not sufficient to demonstrate that students received actual instruction about and were evaluated for their competence at working in teams. In Criterion Three we discussed some of the challenges Oakton faces in assessing general education learning outcomes. Here we note that Oakton needs to more intentionally incorporate general education objectives within the learning objectives of courses that satisfy the general education requirements of the College, recognizing at the same time that not every course will address every objective.

Oakton has also assessed student learning indirectly through the use of multiple surveys, including participation in national surveys and projects. In one approach, Oakton examined student engagement using two surveys: the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) and the Oakton Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (OFSSE). These surveys provide data about institutional practices and student behaviors that research has shown to correlate significantly with student learning and retention.

Table 4.5:

Number of Courses in each General Education Category that Address each General Education Objective (2004)						
<i>General Education Area (Number in parenthesis is the number of IAI-approved courses in that area.)</i>						
GENERAL EDUCATION OBJECTIVE	Communications (3)	Math (9)	Science (16)	Social and Behavioral Science (34)	Humanities/ Fine Arts (43*)	Total (105)
Define problems	3	9	16	29	34	91
Construct hypotheses	3	7	16	15	38	79
Gather, analyze and interpret data	3	9	16	34	41	103
Explain how information fits w/in historical context	0	1	16	29	36	82
Differentiate between fact and opinion	3	2	16	24	37	82
Compare and evaluate different solutions	3	9	16	17	35	80
Communicate findings effectively in writing and speech	3	0	15	34	43	95
Work effectively with people from a variety of backgrounds	0	0	3	0	3	6
Apply ethical principles to local, national and global issues	0	0	3	0	11	14
Recognize skills necessary to build and maintain effective human relationships	0	0	1	10	0	11

**Includes three foreign language courses (202, 205, 210) not duplicated for each language.*

Table 4.6

Mean Scores for Student Engagement in Key Skills for Learning				
	1 = Never	2 = Sometimes	3 = Often	4 = Very often
SKILL	Oakton 2003	Oakton 2006	Illinois Consortium 2006	CCSSE Cohort 2006
Analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory	2.9	2.9	2.9	2.7
Synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences in new ways	2.8	2.7	2.7	2.7
Making judgments about the value or soundness of information, arguments, or methods	2.6	2.5	2.5	2.5
Applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations	2.7	2.6	2.6	2.6
Using information you have read or heard to perform a new skill	2.8	2.6	2.7	2.7

In 2003, results from the CCSSE showed Oakton had high performance relative to other participating community colleges in the area of academic challenge. For example, 51 percent of students responded they “often” or “very often” worked harder than they thought they could to meet an instructor’s standards or expectations. Table 4.6 presents Oakton data from the 2003 and 2006 CCSSE, as well as 2006 results from the Illinois Consortium (Illinois community colleges that used the CSSEE in 2006) and CCSSE Cohort (large schools) for academic skills central to intellectual inquiry. The data illustrate that Oakton is comparable to peer colleges in successfully engaging students, though scores have fallen slightly between 2003 and 2006 on four of the five indicators.

In 2006, Oakton compared student and faculty perceptions of student engagement from the CCSSE and the OFSSE. Both included a question about how much experiences at Oakton contribute to students’ knowledge, skills, and personal development in several areas. Five subtopics listed in Table 4.7 appeared on both surveys.

Table 4.7

**How much do you think students’ experiences/your experiences at Oakton have contributed to knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas?
From CCSSE and OFSSE, 2006.**

Percent responding very much or quite a bit

Knowledge, Skill, Personal Development	Faculty	Students
Thinking critically and analytically	77%	59%
Working effectively with others	69%	51%
Writing clearly and effectively	67%	54%
Speaking clearly and effectively	65%	50%
Solving numerical problems	46%	47%

The disparity between faculty and student perceptions of engagement, particularly with respect to critical and analytic thinking, presents a challenge. It is difficult to know precisely what accounts for the disparity. It may result from differing conceptions of what constitutes critical thinking, what best fosters analytic skills, or what counts as an effective measure of increasing skill.

Oakton affirms connectedness as crucial for maintaining and improving student success. The strategic goal of “Academic Excellence” in *Change Matters* commits Oakton to upholding the preeminence of academic excellence as the engine that drives College decision making through the objective of “increasing student engagement and connections with faculty, particularly as measured by CCSSE.” Table 4.8 presents the CCSSE benchmarks that will be used to measure progress in meeting this objective.

The annual Baccalaureate Alumni Survey and Current Student Survey represent additional approaches Oakton uses to gauge whether students have acquired the competencies and skills defined as central to the College’s general education goals. For the Baccalaureate Alumni Survey, Oakton surveys alumni who have enrolled in transfer programs and who have earned 30 or more credits or an associate degree at Oakton. In 2003, alumni were asked to rate a number of responses to this question: “Based on your experiences at Oakton, how would you rate the following statements as they apply to your new learning situations at work or school?” The following are the percentages of respondents who “agreed” or “strongly agreed”: 83 percent were able to realistically assess strengths and weaknesses; 80 percent were able to organize and plan; 82 percent were able to adapt study habits and learning strategies to new situations; and 89 percent were confident in learning new things. In 2005, current students reported they had participated in various learning activities: 63 percent experienced group projects; 60 percent

Table 4.8

CCSSE Benchmarks				
1 = Never 2 = Sometimes 3 = Often 4 = Very often				
BENCHMARK AND BENCHMARK ITEMS	2003 Oakton	2006 Oakton	2006 Illinois Consortium	2006 CCSSE Cohort
Active and collaborative learning	48.9	43.9	49.5	50.0
4a. Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions	2.9	2.8	2.9	2.9
4b. Made a class presentation	2.1	2.0	2.1	2.0
4f. Worked with other students on projects during class	2.5	2.3	2.5	2.5
4g. Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments	1.7	1.7	1.8	1.9
4h. Tutored or taught other students (paid or voluntary)	1.4	1.3	1.4	1.4
4i. Participated in a community-based project as a part of a regular course	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.3
4r. Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class (students, family members, co-workers, etc.)	2.6	2.3	2.5	2.6
Student-faculty interaction	51.7	48.5	51.0	50.0
4k. Used e-mail to communicate with an instructor	2.2	2.4	2.4	2.3
4l. Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor	2.5	2.4	2.5	2.5
4m. Talked about career plans with an instructor or advisor	1.9	1.8	2.0	2.0
4n. Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with instructors outside of class	1.8	1.7	1.7	1.7
4o. Received prompt feedback (written or oral) from instructors on your performance	2.9	2.6	2.7	2.6
4q. Worked with instructors on activities other than coursework	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.4

The Illinois Consortium includes the 11 Illinois community colleges that participated in the CCSSE in Spring 2006 (Blackhawk, College of DuPage, Danville Area, Harper, Illinois Central, Illinois Valley, Malcolm X, Oakton, Prairie State, South Suburban, and Triton). The CCSSE Cohort includes the 57 "large" colleges that participated in the CCSSE in Spring 2006 (Oakton is counted by CCSSE as a "large" college).

studied or discussed ethics or integrity in class; 54 percent studied or discussed diversity or multiculturalism in class; and 42 percent gave an oral presentation in a class other than speech or theater.

Further, a survey administered in 2000 to summer school students at Oakton measured the compatibility of Oakton courses with those at four-year institutions by asking participants to compare Oakton classes with those at their "home" institutions. In the following categories, students rated Oakton classes as "the same" or "more than" courses from their "home" institutions: 64 percent for difficulty in earning an A, 63 percent for overall rigor, 67 percent for amount of reading, and 59 percent for amount of writing.

Finally, we examine two other indirect indicators of Oakton's success in preparing students for the future. The first is the rate of first-time full-time students who have graduated, transferred to another college, or are still enrolled at Oakton at 150 percent of program time; the first-time full-time students comprise the Department of Education's Graduation Rate Survey (GRS) cohort required for federal reporting. Depicted in Table 4.9, data show that approximately 75 percent of Oakton's Fall entering cohorts achieve this measure of success.

Table 4.9

Percent of first-time, full-time cohort who have graduated, transferred to another college, or are still enrolled at Oakton at 150 percent of program time					
Cohort Fall	Cohort Fall	Cohort Fall	Cohort Fall	Cohort Fall	Cohort Fall
1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
66%	62%	67%	77%	75%	74%

The other indirect indicator is the rate of graduating students who have either found employment or transferred to a four-year college or university. Each year since 1999, Oakton has consistently seen more than 88 percent of graduates employed or enrolled in another institution of higher learning within a year of graduation, comparable with the state average (Table 4.10).

Table 4.10

Percentage of graduates employed or enrolled in university within one year of graduation (from IBHE Performance Report, 2006)							
Year	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Oakton	92%	89%	92%	93%	88%	96%	92%
State Average	94%	93%	92%	91%	89%	92%	90%

The above data suggest that, on the whole, Oakton does integrate the skills and knowledge necessary for successful intellectual inquiry into educational offerings. *Change Matters* commits the College to intensifying efforts to engage students, to expand and use student learning outcomes assessments for improving courses and curricula, and to create new programs responsive to employer needs and community interests. These commitments are future-oriented; they show that the College continues to make the acquisition of a breadth of knowledge and skills and the exercise of intellectual inquiry central characteristics of our educational offerings.

Developmental and High Enrollment Courses

Many Oakton students, like students at all community colleges, require developmental course work in English and mathematics. As evidenced by data for students first entering Oakton in Fall 2003 and Fall 2006 (Table 4.11), nearly two-thirds of students taking math placement tests require remedial math courses, and almost half of those taking English placement tests require remedial English. Placement test results are remarkably stable over time.

To meet the needs of underprepared students, Oakton offers multiple levels of remedial courses in reading, writing, and mathematics in multiple sections of these courses every semester. The following numbers show average annual enrollments in the last three years: remedial math, 2,600; MAT 120, 1,100; remedial English as a Second Language, 1,900; and remedial English (non-ESL), 1,300. Faculty teaching remedial math and English are members of the mathematics and English departments respectively, and they teach college-level courses in their disciplines as well. In each department faculty work together to ensure that remedial and college-level course objectives are aligned.

The College has examined the extent to which students proceed through mathematics and English composition courses based on their initial course placements. Using developmental climb, an approach developed by Linda Serra Hagedorn from the University of Florida, the College learned that, of students who first entered Oakton in Fall 2001, 13 percent who placed into the lowest levels of developmental math, 18 percent who placed into the highest level of

Table 4.11

Percentage of students placing into remedial/developmental courses in Math and English

	Fall 2003	Fall 2006
Math		
Remedial	63%	62%
MAT 120: Intermediate Algebra*	22%	24%
College-level	15%	14%
English Composition		
Remedial	43%	48%
College-level	57%	52%

*MAT 120 does not meet general education requirements for transfer degrees and is considered by some transfer institutions to be a remedial course.

developmental math, and 43 percent who placed into intermediate algebra eventually passed a college-level math course that would meet or exceed general education requirements. This compared to 64 percent of students whose initial math placement was in a course that would meet or exceed general education requirements. In English, 26 percent of students who initially placed into ESL developmental courses eventually passed English 101, while 30 percent of students who initially placed into developmental English composition eventually passed English 101. Of students whose initial placement was English 101, 63 percent passed.



Further, a 2005 study undertaken as part of the Foundations of Excellence® project revealed that, from Fall 2000 through Spring 2005, an average 69 percent of students in high enrollment courses—sometimes referred to as “gatekeeper” classes—passed these courses. However, disparities in pass rates existed among racial/ethnic groups, with average pass rates of 71 percent for Asians, 70 percent for Caucasians, 64 percent for Hispanics, and 61 percent for African Americans. While there are many reasons that students do not persist or succeed in college-level courses, the College is concerned about these data. In *Change Matters* we promise to “improve the success and persistence of all students, especially underprepared students.” Monitoring the changes in pass rates of groups in the gatekeeper courses will enable us to carry out this objective.

Innovative Courses and Curricula

We discussed a number of innovative curriculum approaches in Criterion Three, Core Components 3B and 3C, including learning communities, topics courses, and interdisciplinary concentrations. In this section we offer additional examples of innovative courses and curricula to demonstrate the creativity Oakton faculty bring to their work and the strength and variety of learning opportunities available to students.

Table 4.12

Career Program Surveys from 2002-2006*					
Satisfaction with Courses in Major and Outside of Major					
Characteristic of Oakton Courses in Major	Satisfaction with Courses in Major				
	Very Dissatisfied N	1	2	3	Very Satisfied 4
Content of courses in your program	1,428	>1%	5%	33%	61%
Lectures, lab experiences and group and individual projects	1403	1%	7%	38%	54%
Equipment, facilities and material	1,363	>1%	9%	35%	55%
Job preparation	1,226	4%	15%	37%	44%
Preparation for further education	1,235	2%	10%	39%	49%
Information on current employment opportunities and trends	1,076	11%	22%	32%	35%
Characteristic of Oakton Courses Outside of Major	Satisfaction with Courses Outside of Major				
	Very Dissatisfied N	1	2	3	Very Satisfied 4
Content of courses outside your program	528	>1%	10%	42%	49%
Lectures, lab experiences and group and individual projects	512	1%	12%	41%	46%
Equipment, facilities and material	511	1%	9%	41%	49%
Job preparation	399	7%	15%	41%	37%
Preparation for further education	452	3%	15%	38%	43%

*ACC, AHR, ARC, AUT, BNA, CAB, CIS, CNS, CMG, COT, ECE, ELT, FIR, FIS, FME, GRD, HFM, HIT, HSV, ITR, LAE, MEC, MFG, MGT, MKT, MLT, MTA, NUR, PBT, PHM, PTA, RES, WWW

Oakton's Humanities and Philosophy Department recently began offering special topics courses ("290s") open to both faculty and students that focus on professors' particular research interests. These courses are designed with two primary objectives: first, to provide faculty with a forum for presenting and pursuing their own research and scholarship to their colleagues and students; and second, to provide students with an opportunity to participate at an advanced level in the discussion of key topics in contemporary philosophy. Further, where possible, professors teaching these courses use texts written by scholars from Chicago area universities and then invite these scholars to discuss their work with course participants, as well as with the larger College community. The first special topics course, "Philosophical Perspectives on Race," was offered in Spring 2006; faculty and students read *The Racial Contract* by Charles Mills, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Illinois at Chicago, who then came to campus to discuss the book. In Spring 2007, the department offered a special topics course on Marxism and taught *After Capitalism* by David Schweickart, Professor of Philosophy at Loyola University Chicago, who also visited Oakton and discussed his research. Approximately 50 faculty, staff, and students attended Charles Mills' presentation, and 150 attended David Schweickart's.

For several semesters a member of the English department has assigned her English 102: Composition II students a research project related to issues relevant to the College. Students then present their findings to administrators and interested personnel. For example, one semester students researched college orientation programs. Among their findings was that, by making orientation voluntary rather than required, the College sends a message that orientation isn't important. An outcome of this work, along with research by the Foundations of Excellence® task force and a newer group focusing on orientation, is a strategic objective to require orientation for new students, including an online option, by Fall 2009. In 2007, students researched what factors enable college students to transfer efficiently and attain a bachelor's degree, as well as common obstacles that prevent students from attaining bachelor's degrees. Students designed and presented a seminar based on their findings.

A particularly strong example of an innovative curriculum emerges from the Science and Medical Lab Technology departments. Faculty and administrators developed a two-credit interdisciplinary course, Interdisciplinary Undergraduate Laboratory Research, offered as both biology and chemistry. Using the principles of inquiry-based learning, students learn science while doing science. Research topics have included *Susceptibility Testing on Staphylococcus epidermidis* and *Pseudomonas aeruginosa Biofilms in Cystic Fibrosis*. Several faculty members presented on their experiences for the National Association of Biology Teachers and the American Chemistry Society, and, in 2006, the group's efforts were rewarded with a National Science Foundation Undergraduate Research Collaborative Grant (URC). Partnering with the City Colleges of Chicago and five other institutions, Oakton received \$262,015 to be used over five years. In addition to the Oakton research course, the grant supports Oakton students' summer research experiences at four-year universities.

Summary of Core Component 4B

Learning objectives that stipulate what learning outcomes students should achieve in courses and programs, general education requirements in all degrees, and innovative teaching practices and course designs demonstrate that Oakton provides numerous avenues for students to acquire the breadth of knowledge and skills, as well as the attitude of creative inquiry, necessary for becoming lifelong learners. Moreover, as faculty, staff, and administrators accompany students on their intellectual journey, employees, too, continue to grow as learners. *Change Matters* stipulation of "Academic Excellence" as the first strategic goal emphasizes the importance Oakton places on sustaining and improving the quality of learning for everyone associated with the College.



Learning and Values in Action: Fair Trade Coffee

After learning about issues involving the global economy in their classes, a group of students from Students for Social Justice researched the Fair Trade Movement, published handouts, and sponsored public presentations in Spring 2003. Working with their club advisors and the Director of Student Activities, the students met with the President of the College, the Board of Trustees, and administrators from business and finance to discuss the possibility of using Fair Trade Coffee in the cafeteria and offices. Oakton's food service supplier, Sodexo, which had touted following principles of social responsibility in its proposal to the College, agreed to pilot the new coffee for one month. The pilot became reality in January 2004, when the cafeteria adopted Fair Trade Coffee. Four years later the Oakton community is still purchasing Fair Trade Coffee in the cafeterias. The students' work on this issue clearly exemplifies learning and values in action.

Core Component 4C:

Oakton assesses on a regular basis the usefulness of its curricula to prepare students to live and work in a global, diverse, and technological society.

Preparing students to be “capable global citizens, guided by knowledge and ethical principles, who will shape the future” is a central feature of Oakton's mission. Eighty-six percent of respondents to the 2006 Current Student Survey and 84 percent of respondents to the 2006 Baccalaureate Alumni Survey agreed that Oakton challenged them to become competent global citizens. Here we demonstrate how Oakton prepares students for participation in a global, diverse, technological world.

Career and Technical Education (CTE)

Oakton's CTE programs prepare students for careers in a variety of areas. The College uses a number of approaches to ensure programs are current and prepare students for a diverse, technological workplace, as well as to assess programs' utility and effectiveness.

Alumni perceptions. Oakton annually surveys alumni of CTE programs. Of the more than 1400 alumni surveyed over the last five years, the majority were working in the field for which Oakton had trained them, though many had obtained their jobs before completing an Oakton program. Almost all were working in Illinois. Alumni working either in other fields or not employed still expressed satisfaction with Oakton and had a variety of reasons for moving away from their Oakton major. These figures indicate that Oakton's programs support students who are employed or seeking employment.

Another measure of career program outcomes is student satisfaction. The data presented in Table 4.12 show that student satisfaction with their courses was high, generally at or above 90 percent, and most students felt well prepared for both their jobs and further education.

Licensing exams. The results of licensing tests also gauge the preparedness of career program students. Some of these results are reported annually to the Illinois Board of Higher Education. Pass rates from 2003 are indicative of other years (figures include multiple attempts): 100 percent Nursing-National Council Licensure Exam, 100 percent Medical Lab Technology, and 93 percent Physical Therapy Assistant. In 2004, 93 percent passed the Illinois Department of Public Health EMT-B licensing exam. Oakton recognizes the challenges inherent in accurately determining pass rates for many students who complete our programs and take various licensing exams. Since many agencies that administer these exams do not share data, the College must rely on students to report their pass rates.

Advisory committees. For career programs, advisory committees serve as a direct link between Oakton's offerings and the world of work, providing information that enables the College to assess the usefulness of curricula in preparing students for the future. Composed of business, industry, and not-for-profit organization representatives and members of other educational institutions, Oakton's advisory committees generally meet twice a year to discuss the state of the program, strengths, and areas of concern. A manual for advisory committee members was developed to codify their role and responsibilities; these include reviewing and approving recommended changes to the curriculum, from proposed new courses to revisions of degree and certificate requirements (see “Career Program Advisory Committee Manual” in the Resource Room). Evidence of their approval must accompany the department's proposals to the Curriculum Committee. Within the past three years, department chairs have been asked to review the composition of their advisory committees to ensure representation of key industry sectors and professional currency of members, and this work continues.

Workplace learning. Oakton provides students with a variety of workplace learning opportunities that enhance their preparation for living in a global, complex society. Described more fully in Criterion Five, these include the internship program and practicum and clinical courses.

Preparation for a Diverse and Global Society

Oakton has a history of preparing students for living and working in a diverse global society. This has been a distinctive part of our mission and operations. The American Council on International Intercultural Education (ACIIE), an affiliate council of the American Association of Community Colleges, was headquartered at Oakton Community College from 1993 until the organization merged with Community Colleges for International Development: An Association for Global Education on January 1, 2007. For that 14-year period, Oakton Dean and Professor Linda Korbel served as the organization's executive director. ACIIE offered annual conferences, teleconferences, a listserv, a newsletter, and a Web site to promote networking and to share information and expertise on global education, including student and faculty exchange, professional development programs, funding opportunities, international student recruitment, and cultural diversity.

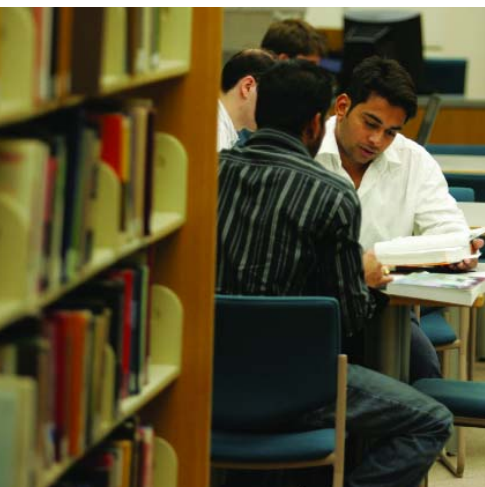
All Oakton students who earn associate degrees in either transfer or CTE curricula must successfully complete a contemporary global studies course. These courses, identified on page 76 of the 2007-2008 College catalog, are certified by a faculty Global Studies Committee as meeting Oakton's global studies requirement, and then approved through the regular course approval process described in Criterion Three, Core Component 3B. By requiring students to take a global studies course, Oakton affirms the importance of students' acquiring knowledge of our interconnected world.

Since the mid-1990s, one of Oakton's general education objectives is that students "work and communicate effectively with people from a variety of backgrounds, individually and in teams." Results from the 2003 and 2006 CCSSE presented in Table 4.13 show that Oakton has achieved some success in engaging students in discussions related to diversity.

Table 4.13

Mean Scores for Student Responses to Questions Related to Diversity					
1 = never 2 = sometimes 3 = often 4 = very often					
QUESTION	2003 Oakton	2006 Oakton	2006 Illinois Consortium	2006 CCSSE Cohort	
In your experiences at this college during the current school year, about how often have you had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than your own?	2.4	2.3	2.4	2.3	
In your experiences at this college during the current school year, about how often have you had serious conversations with students who differ from you in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions or personal values?	2.3	2.2	2.3	2.3	
How much does this college emphasize encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds?	2.5	2.5	2.4	2.4	
How much has your experience at this college contributed to your knowledge, skills and personal development in understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds?	2.4	2.4	2.3	2.3	

The issue of diversity presents challenges to any institution of higher education. Oakton is committed to engaging this challenge, as discussed in Criterion One and demonstrated in the "Antibias College" strategic goal of *Change Matters*. One objective associated with this goal requires departments and programs to assess their courses and curricula with respect to diversity



and institutional bias. This work builds on the College's previous efforts to expand courses and programs that reflect the diversity of both our community and the changing world in which students live, study, and work.

Over the past 10 years, a number of Oakton departments and programs have expanded course offerings to prepare students for living and working in a diverse society. For example, the English department developed literature courses such as Non-Western Literature in English, African-American Literature, Introduction to Native American Literature, Women in Literature, Gender Identity and Literature, and American Ethnic Literature. In Historical and Policy Studies and in Humanities and Philosophy, new courses have been developed on ancient and modern Western and non-Western worlds, including Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. Departments also use special topics "290" courses to offer specialized study of a specific world region, timely subject, or literary focus, with "History of South Africa and Apartheid," "Perspectives on Race," and "Contemporary Middle Eastern Literature." These courses allow faculty to teach in their areas of specialization and enable students to engage with contemporary issues informed by multiple perspectives. Further, the Emeritus program offers "Passport," a series of thought-provoking discussions about countries and issues in international relations, and "Passages," a potpourri of lectures designed for senior students over 60.

In addition to supporting diversity, Oakton offers curricular, cocurricular and extracurricular opportunities that promote both dialogue and action in support of social responsibility, a theme that characterizes a wide variety of initiatives at the College. In Criterion One we discussed ACCORD (Advocating a College Community of Respect for Diversity) and the formation of Next Step, a group of faculty, staff, and administrators organized to examine and combat institutional racism at Oakton. Another significant employee group is Oakton Educators for Social Responsibility (OESR); established in 2003, their mission is to "provide educational opportunities for critical thinking and dialogue about social justice." OESR sponsors speakers and forums on contemporary global issues, encourages dialogue among its members and the College community at large, and aids student activity in support of social justice. Starting with a core group from the Honors Students Organization, Oakton students have formed a parallel group, Students for Social Justice (S4SJ), and recently have participated in disaster relief initiatives in New Orleans, as well as social justice activities in Guatemala.

Any intellectual engagement with social justice issues is bound to be controversial, and a few comments on the Constellation Survey indicated concern that some political voices were becoming too dominant on campus. However, Oakton has a long-standing policy that permits representative spokespersons from any and all sides of an issue to present their position in an atmosphere of open and honest debate. No events have been cancelled, disallowed, or otherwise interfered with due to their political content. Though the College has experienced some internal controversy, the institution embraces dialogue, as students, employees, and the community all benefit from participating in discussions about difficult and controversial topics.

Extra- and cocurricular programming at Oakton offer other vehicles for promoting dialogue and action in support of social responsibility and helping students develop an understanding of the contemporary world. Several committees, events, and activities demonstrate the importance of social responsibility to College life. Oakton's annual Performing Arts Series has presented classic and emerging works that deal with homophobia, racism, and various social issues, and Oakton's Koehline Museum of Art regularly includes ethnic and multicultural art shows in its calendar of exhibitions. In 2004, Oakton was one of eight community colleges selected to participate in *By the People*, a PBS-sponsored day-long community discussion on the topic "How is U.S. Foreign Policy Affecting Your Life?" More than 300 students, faculty, staff, administrators, and community members participated in the general presentations and breakout sessions.

Global Studies Program

The Global Studies Program at Oakton strives to establish and grow global competencies in both faculty and students. Global competency exists when individuals can understand the interconnectedness of peoples and systems, have general knowledge of history and world events, accept and cope with the existence of differing cultural values and attitudes, and celebrate the richness and benefits of diversity. The Global Studies Program (formally the International Studies Program) focuses on three areas: study abroad possibilities for students; global professional development opportunities for faculty, administrators, and staff, both on campus and abroad; and global studies curricular and cocurricular offerings on campus.

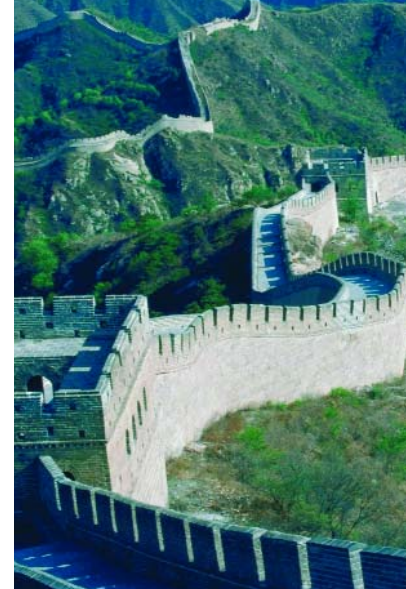
Oakton is an active member of the Illinois Consortium for International Studies and Programs (ICISP), and Oakton's Global Studies Coordinator currently serves as an executive board member of ICISP. ICISP is an organization of over 40 institutions in Illinois that provides short- and long-term study abroad opportunities to students. The principal exchange relationships are currently with Canterbury, England; Salzburg, Austria; Seville, Spain; Sydney, Australia; and San Jose, Costa Rica. Numerous short-term study abroad programs are also available. Oakton faculty members can develop their own short-term study abroad courses and open them to the entire consortium, which greatly increases the likelihood of attaining the minimum enrollment. During Summer 2007, Oakton faculty members offered two such courses: one, a course in China, included visits to ethnic minority enclaves; the other, a course in Puerto Rico, enabled students to study either Spanish or digital photography. In addition to study abroad, ICISP also offers professional development workshops for faculty; two-week exchanges for faculty, administrators, and staff to Switzerland, the Netherlands, Finland, and the UK; and a semester for faculty to teach abroad in Canterbury, England.

Women's Studies Program

In addition to Global Studies, Oakton has also initiated a Women's Studies concentration. The College has a history of women's programming, including an annual Women's Day, traditionally geared toward the interests of women in the community. Since 2000, Women's Day has more directly addressed the concerns and interests of students, with a stronger academic focus rooted in Oakton's curriculum. In 2006, the College committed to developing a Women's Studies concentration, with a program coordinator and annual academic program budget. The goals of Women's Studies are twofold: first, to sponsor programming that supports the concentration and connects with existing programs and courses offered at the College; and second, to develop curriculum that enables students to explore the discipline and fulfill both general education and concentration requirements. During 2006-2007, Women's Studies sponsored or cosponsored nine programs attended by approximately 1,000 people, including a Women's Art Show and a presentation by Dr. Mardge Cohen, a noted authority on women and the international AIDS epidemic. The Women's Studies working group focused on curriculum development, and in Fall 2007 Oakton will offer 10 Women's Studies classes. A variety of new Women's Studies courses in art, business, and other disciplines are in development, and program plans include a Festival of Women in the Arts for Fall 2007, as well as an academic conference scheduled for Spring 2009.

Center for Promoting Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (CP-STEM)

The CP-STEM is another example of Oakton's efforts to prepare students for living and working in a global, diverse, and technological world. In 2002, Oakton was awarded a grant of





\$250,000 by the National Science Foundation (NSF) for a project to increase student enrollment and success in Science, Technology, Engineering, or Mathematics (STEM). In the past four years (2002-2006), 982 high school students and 2,686 Oakton students were directly involved in the project. Two programs of the project, Peer Tutor Training (PTT) and Student-Industry-Teacher Simulations (SIT SIMs), were recognized by the Illinois Council of Community Administrators in 2003 and 2005, respectively.

In 2006, the College, with a five-year, nearly \$1 million grant from the NSF, established the Center for Promoting STEM (CP-STEM). CP-STEM, another distinctive learning-centered feature of Oakton, expresses the College's future orientation and connectedness with the external community. Built and expanded from the previously successful NSF project, CP-STEM offers 60 NSF-Oakton Fellowships and works with more than 200 students each semester. CP-STEM also offers multiple sections of courses designed to help students prepare for and complete science oriented programs, and ultimately increases the number of students who pursue studies for a degree in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics:

Term	Classes and Number of Sections			
Fall	MAT052: 1 section	COL101: 1 Section	EGL101: 2 Section	Study Sessions*: 10 Sections
Spring	MAT120: 1 Section		EGL102: 2 Sections	Study Sessions: 10 Sections
Summer	Study Sessions: 10 sections			

**Each section of Study Sessions will meet twice a week, one hour each.*

CP-STEM offers a large number of programs designed to fulfill the goals listed below:

- Encouraging and enhancing student success in STEM courses
- Developing STEM activities and programs in a supportive, rewarding environment
- Partnering with professional organizations, businesses, and high schools in an effort to promote and sustain STEM activities
- Studying and incorporating innovative STEM teaching techniques
- Contributing to the literature on teaching and learning through program assessment
- Distributing the successful results of CP-STEM activities

Two advisory committees work with CP-STEM: the Institutional Advisory Committee (IAC) and the Council of Industry and Academic Advisors (CIAA). Meeting twice a year and consisting of high school teachers working with Oakton faculty, staff, and administrators, IAC includes high school representatives, industry professionals and managers, university faculty members, and Oakton administrators and science chairs. Meeting annually, the CIAA advises on CP-STEM operations and focuses on strategic planning. Issues discussed include sustainability, industry connections, articulation between Oakton and universities, and outreach to high schools.

Technology

We documented Oakton's support for technology in Criterion Two, Core Component 2B, and will also discuss technology in Core Component 4D. Oakton makes technology available to students throughout both campuses, equips labs with state-of-the-art technology in emerging fields such as Radio Frequency Identification, updates equipment and software on a regular basis, offers more than 90 online courses and many additional courses that incorporate Web-based assignments, is furnishing a prototype classroom to accommodate both computer activities and lecture-discussions, and helps faculty and staff to acquire and use technological skills through an array of professional development programs and individualized staff assistance. Through such commitments, Oakton demonstrates it incorporates technology into teaching and learning to give students the technological skills and knowledge they need for success.

Summary of Core Component 4C

As demonstrated through programs and activities described in this section, Oakton regularly assesses and revises curricula and activities to verify that they prepare students to live and work in a global, diverse, and technological society. The support and participation of students and employees in activities that promote social responsibility also signify the value the College places on modeling behaviors essential for success in our constantly changing world.

Core Component 4D:

Oakton provides support to ensure that faculty, students, and staff acquire, discover, and apply knowledge responsibly.

The responsible and ethical acquisition of knowledge and its application is a central component of any life of learning. Oakton's *VMV* explicitly mentions the expectation for students "to exercise leadership and to apply ethical principles in their academic, work and personal lives." In this section we discuss how we monitor and enforce codes of academic conduct and ethical responsibility in the discovery and application of knowledge and promote this conception of responsible discovery and application in our programs, policies, procedures, activities, and oversight and support services.

Student Academic Integrity Policy

Students learn about academic integrity from a statement printed on every course syllabus. In 2005, the Academic Conduct Committee, consisting of administrators, faculty, and students, revised the Student Academic Integrity Policy to eliminate confusion about procedures. The new policy brought clarity by creating a revised statement for all syllabi, a flowchart to outline procedures, templates for filing complaints, and helpful tips for handling the stress of dealing with academic dishonesty. An Academic Conduct Committee memo sent to all faculty in Spring 2006 reflects the spirit of these revisions, stating, "When used consistently, Oakton's policy provides due process for students, treats students fairly by having similar consequences for similar offenses, and involves central management of academic integrity issues through the Office of Student Affairs."

While instructors teach students about academic honesty, they also learn together through opportunities such as in-house conferences and seminars. For example, a session presented at the 2006 Oakton Conference for Teaching Excellence discussed the use of technology in cheating and covered strategies and assignments that foster academic integrity. Also, for several years, a semester-long faculty development seminar on "Ethics in Higher Education" was offered to employees. This distinctive seminar covered various ethical and philosophical perspectives, such as rule-based and utilitarian approaches, and offered opportunities for participants to address conflicting value systems in the classroom and other learning environments.

Oakton staff also received extended training in ethics during 2001-2002, when faculty from several departments facilitated four workshops over the academic year to train Oakton's tutors on ethical theories, personal core values, cultural diversity issues, and dealing with cheating in college. Between 35 and 50 tutors participated in each session. In the Learning Center's *Tutoring Handbook* (2004), tutors are reminded to refrain from doing students' assignments, encouraged "never to proofread a paper or answer questions or problems which will contribute directly to the student's grade in a course," but rather to "[e]xplain to the student that working problems for which a grade is given would give him [or her] an unfair advantage over students who work the problems themselves."

Ethical Conduct for Instruction and Research

Oakton's policies and procedures outline ethical conduct for all instructional and research activities. Policies are described in the *Student Handbook* (2006), beginning with a "Statement of Principles" for the Student Academic Integrity Policy. An excerpt of this statement communicates positive characteristics central to integrity, as well as a shared commitment to academic honesty:

Common courtesy, mutual respect, reasoned discourse, intellectual candor, and openness to constructive criticism characterize the change and growth that result from academic endeavors at Oakton. Academic honesty is vital to these endeavors; it is essential to the life and meaning of any academic community. In the absence of acknowledged standards of honesty, faculty members, students and our community cannot have confidence in either the intellectual achievement and knowledge or the implicit promise of potential for continued growth that college education implies. All members of the Oakton community are responsible, therefore, for maintaining the College's standards of integrity. Students, faculty members and staff members share the responsibility and authority for making known acts of apparent academic dishonesty. (31)

The *College Catalog* and *Student Handbook* contain "The Code of Academic Conduct," which outlines violations, as well as sanctions that serve as incentives to maintain honesty. Violations are described as "activities (observed or reported) or materials whose character is deceitful and/or dishonest" (see page 55 of the 2007-2008 College catalog and page 32 of *Student Handbook*); they include abuse of academic materials, bribes, favors, threats, cheating, complicity in academic dishonesty, falsification and fabrication, falsification of records and official documents, personal misrepresentation and proxy, and plagiarism. Examples of sanctions, such as disciplinary probation, expulsion, and failure, are listed to show students the potential consequences of code violations. Copies of the catalog and *Student Handbook* are readily available on both campuses and on the Oakton Web site.

In addition to defining academic honesty, violations, and sanctions, Oakton provides effective oversight and support services to ensure the integrity of practice, research, and learning. The Academic Conduct Committee oversees policy and revisions on academic integrity policies and conveys to students the seriousness of policy violations through the following warning listed on every course syllabus: "If you are found to have violated the policy, the minimum penalty is failure on the assignment, and a disciplinary record will be established and kept on file in the office of the Vice President for Student Affairs for a period of three years."

Learning Center and Library

The Learning Center provides academic support to all students who want to understand their learning styles and improve their learning strategies and skills. In 2003, the Learning Center developed a document of guiding principles that stresses "learning as a process rather than focusing solely on its completion." The Center has linked its mission statement and principles to Oakton's *Vision, Mission and Values* statement, asserting that students must "assume responsibility for their own learning and apply ethical principles in their academic work" and stating "students are more successful when they become internally motivated, learn to monitor their progress, value the learning process, and seek additional resources in order to become self-sufficient" (see "Learning Center Program Review 2003-2004").

True to its principles, the Learning Center offers "academic support to all students who want to better understand how they learn and who want to develop, improve and refine their



learning skills. The primary goal is helping students help themselves.” Learning Center services are free for students, and the department aims to provide access to knowledge and uphold academic standards and integrity through a variety of means. With the help of professional and peer tutors, students gain understanding of concepts and processes necessary for mastery of regular coursework. To ensure that tutors are qualified, the Learning Center requires that each tutor is approved in writing by the department chair and one other faculty member in each content area covered by an individual tutor.

The Testing Center administers and monitors placement tests, make-up tests, proficiency tests, and Illinois and U.S. Constitution tests. Prominently placed signs notify students that they are being monitored. To preserve academic integrity, proctors have always closely monitored all test-takers, and security cameras, video recorders, and video monitors were added to both testing centers in 1997. Proctors submit written reports when they suspect integrity violations, and the videotape is available to be used at academic integrity hearings.

Depending on their level of academic preparation, students may require additional assistance on a common college-level assignment, the research paper. Because this type of assignment encourages critical thinking, exploration of multiple resources, and precise writing skills, students may be inclined to recycle and share old papers or purchase new ones. Recognizing the challenges inherent in writing the research paper, staff and faculty in the Learning Center and Library have developed multiple strategies to assist faculty in creating assignments and to help students in learning to complete such assignments. Information on the Learning Center Web site provides guidelines for students on “How to Rewrite Source Material” and “Plagiarism” (see www.oakton.edu/hlc/plagiarism). Students may also obtain this information from hard copies located in the Learning Center. The Oakton Library homepage contains a link to “24/7, A Research Guide” with advice about how to avoid plagiarism through research consultations, research-oriented workshops, and evaluation of resources (see www.oakton.edu/hlc/libraryresearch). The Library also assists instructors with advice on preventing plagiarism with links to Web sites from other colleges and universities and suggestions on creating alternative assignments to the research paper. Individual instructors have also made helpful material available on their Web sites. One faculty member, for example, developed a Web page that presents the ethics of crediting outside sources, definitions of plagiarism, and links to the Oakton Library homepage, as well as other sites for additional readings on research.

Responsible Use of Technology Resources

Oakton has also adopted policies to ensure ethical conduct with regard to the use of technology, with “The Policy for Responsible Use of Information Technology at Oakton Community College” prominently displayed on the Department of Information Technology homepage. All College personnel and students must adhere to this overarching principle:

College information technology facilities and resources are to be used for the College-related activities for which they are intended and authorized. College information technology facilities and resources are not to be used for commercial purposes or non-College related activities without written authorization from the College.

Responsible use includes publishing Web pages that correspond to “official college business in support of the College’s mission.” Guidelines further state that “Contents of Web pages must be consistent with Oakton’s policies and local, state and federal laws. This includes links to other pages or computers.” Those developing electronic publications must adhere to the same College policies and standards as print publications.

In 1999, a committee of faculty, staff, and administrators called the Go Online Support Team (GOST) was formed under the Center for Teaching and Learning to provide resources for faculty developing online and media-based courses. One accomplishment was their unveiling in 2002 of the *Faculty Handbook: Teaching and Learning Using Web-based Technologies at Oakton*,





which includes a section on Ethical Considerations.

Guidelines for copying print materials appear in several faculty handbooks. For example, “Fair Use” is defined as permission to copy for individual research and review and small portions of one-time classroom use (see *Faculty Handbook: Teaching and Learning Using Web-based Technologies at Oakton*). For additional questions and assistance, instructors work with the Dean of Library and Media Services or the publisher’s representative. Intellectual property rights are addressed in faculty contracts.

The Information Technology office provides students with clear guidelines for appropriate use of Oakton’s labs and computer services. These guidelines—posted online, in the computer labs, and in computer lab brochures—include a copyright statement:

Software and other digital media are protected by copyright law. Copying of software and other digital media is in violation of Federal Law and College policies. Suspect violations will be vigorously investigated and, if warranted, appropriate penalties applied. Specifically, users do not have the right to:

- Make copies of software for yourselves or others;
- Receive and use unauthorized copies of software;
- Make copies of copyrighted digital media for yourself or others;
- Receive and use unauthorized copies of digital media;
- Create file sharing areas for distribution of unauthorized software and other digital media.

These guidelines represent an important part of Oakton’s effort to foster appropriate ethical behavior in students using technology.

Research Guidelines

Compared with four-year institutions, Oakton has fewer faculty, students, and staff conducting research; however, Oakton recognizes the need for policies to ensure ethical research practice. Oakton’s Human Participants Research Board, established in 2002, was updated in Spring 2004 and renamed the Institutional Review Board (IRB). A stated intention of the IRB is “that college staff and students who may be affected by the research can be certain that the research is sound and does not violate board policy, College operating procedures, or federal regulations concerning protection of human participants.” The IRB includes four Oakton employees and one outside representative. All research requests must be reviewed by the IRB and the appropriate College Vice President or President.

To ensure ethical use of surveys and to protect participants, researchers must follow College procedures for administering surveys or otherwise eliciting student or employee involvement. Researchers must receive from participants signed consent letters that clearly relay the role of the researcher, as well as the purpose and duration of study, and specify whether responses are kept anonymous or confidential. If participants are videotaped or photographed, they must sign a release statement. Information on the Institutional Review Board is available online at www.oakton.edu/hlc/reviewbd.

Summary of Core Component 4D

Oakton is committed to responsible and ethical learning. Policies for academic integrity and a handbook for distance learning, revised within the last few years, demonstrate the College’s commitment to keeping these policies current and clear. Many opportunities exist for all constituents to learn about the responsible acquisition, discovery, and application of knowledge: students learn of the academic integrity policy in every class and from every syllabus, and faculty and staff learn together in professional development seminars and conferences. Educating students about ethical research practices and academic integrity is a responsibility shared across the College by the Library, the Learning Center, and all teaching faculty.

Conclusion to Criterion Four:

Fostering and modeling a life of learning for students that includes awareness and appreciation of our diverse global environment is a key element of our mission. Oakton promotes a life of learning, as evidenced by the creation and coordination of professional development for faculty, staff, and administrators; the extensive offerings and assessment of general education; and opportunities for trustee learning and participation in professional organizations. Multiple incentives, such as awards, alternate time, recognition events, and financial support exist to encourage continual learning. The College has also developed opportunities for learning about global and diversity issues in distinctive curricula, cocurricular activities, and professional development activities. Partnerships with the business community through advisory committees and internships in career programs have enabled Oakton to maintain a vital curriculum and to provide practical learning experiences for students. The *Change Matters: 2008–2012 Strategic Plan* maintains and extends these commitments into the future.

Strengths:

- The Center for Professional Development and the multiple services it provides for all employees to engage in professional and personal development is a critical means for supporting and encouraging a life of learning.
- The dedicated work of faculty, staff, and administrators in developing, organizing, and hosting the wealth of learning-centered extra- and co-curricular opportunities for students—forums, guest lectures, professional conferences, and workshops—enables and sustains continuous learning for the entire College community.
- Oakton’s willingness to experiment with innovative courses and academic concentrations such as Global Studies and Women’s Studies, as well as the commitment in *Change Matters* to support and facilitate the development of such concentrations, is an important component of Oakton’s distinctive and future-oriented curricula.

Challenges and Possible Solutions:

- Oakton has recognized the importance of student engagement in fostering student success, and the College has committed itself to strengthening engagement. *Change Matters* has identified improved CCSSE scores as an indicator of progress, but has not yet identified specific strategies to achieve this objective. Over the next year the College must consider and begin implementing activities that promote engagement both within and outside the classroom.
- Oakton is committed to the success of students. However, students requiring remedial preparation constitute a large and sometimes difficult population to serve. The College will need to devote resources and intensify efforts to meet its new objective of “improv[ing] the success and persistence of all students, especially underprepared students.”

Criterion Five:
Engagement and Service





As called for by its mission, Oakton identifies its constituencies and serves them in ways that both value.

Essential to Oakton’s mission and self-understanding is that we “seek to improve and expand the services we offer in support of the people in the communities we serve.” The people Oakton serves belong to one of two broad categories: internal constituents (students and employees of the College); and external constituents (residents, businesses, municipalities, other educational institutions, accrediting agencies, statewide and regional consortia, and national and international organizations). The Board of Trustees bridges internal and external constituencies, representing the public to the College and the College to the public. Criteria Three and Four evaluated how Oakton serves and assesses service to internal constituents. In this Criterion, we consider service to external constituents.

Oakton’s commitment to external constituencies is presented in the *Vision, Mission and Values* statement and also informs the last three strategic plans. The *1999–2002 Strategic Plan* required that we “reach out to the community, respond to the educational training needs of business and industry, and build mutually beneficial partnerships with those we serve.” The *Learning Together: 2003–2008 Strategic Plan* articulated two strategic goals oriented toward external constituents: “Entrepreneurship and Innovation” and “Community Partnerships and Workforce Development.” These goals required the College to continue to improve and try new methods of engagement with the communities we serve, particularly with respect to developing new partnerships and soliciting community input into development of new programs and services. Finally, in the *Change Matters: 2008–2012 Strategic Plan* the College has committed to “broaden connections with our external constituencies to ensure our programs and services are responsive to community needs” as an objective under the strategic goal of “Innovative Learning for Local and Global Citizenship.”

In this Criterion we document Oakton’s commitment to engage and work with external communities. In Core Component 5A, we examine mechanisms for learning about constituents’ needs and expectations, as well as processes for assessing our capacity to fulfill these needs. In Core Components 5B and 5C, we evaluate our commitment and capacity to respond to the community’s requirements and expectations. Finally, in Core Component 5D we consider how external constituents value our programs and services.

Core Component 5A:

Oakton learns from the constituencies it serves and analyzes its capacity to serve their needs and expectations.

Oakton recognizes the importance of connectedness with external constituents and has developed multiple avenues for learning what they need and expect from the College.

Engagement with External Groups

Advisory committees are central to engaging with external constituents. All career programs, the Business Institute, the Emeritus Program, and other areas of the College have advisory committees that maintain connections between College personnel and the communities we serve. These advisory committees consist of volunteers representing appropriate constituents; they meet regularly throughout the year to offer information about the changing needs of businesses, educational institutions, local government, and community residents. Members of advisory committees also connect the College with employers who provide internships and employment opportunities for students.

Oakton sponsors forums that bring together advisory committees in larger groups to exchange information and ideas about workforce and social trends. These events serve to both inform Oakton about emerging issues and offer professional development for advisory committee members. For instance, health career programs hold an annual appreciation luncheon for their program advisory committees that features a speaker and discussion on an issue of interest to the entire group. Topics during recent years have included “Confidentiality and Security of Patient Information in the Electronic Age” and “Communication and Cross-Cultural Perspectives.” Periodically Oakton hosts an appreciation dinner for all advisory committee members. While the purpose of this dinner is to show gratitude for their work, the occasion also gives the College an opportunity to share ideas, information, and concerns, as well as gather input essential for College plans and initiatives. Keynote speakers have included Tom Champoux from the Effectiveness Institute and Tom Achele, the American Airlines official largely responsible for arranging the logistics of American’s long distance flights from Chicago to India and China. A draft of *Change Matters* was discussed at the most recent appreciation dinner, held January 31, 2007, and feedback was reported to the 2012 Team before they finalized the plan.

Several advisory groups such as the President’s Circle, the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) Area Planning Council, the Literacy Advisory Committee, the Community Literacy Council, and the Alliance Executive and Governing Boards are also avenues for engagement with our constituencies. The President’s Circle includes leaders of business, government, and education who periodically meet to discuss important local and national developments; some meetings focus on specific topics and include only a subset of the entire group. In 2006, the President explored issues related to in-service training for K-12 teachers in science and math with local school district superintendents. Several members of Oakton’s mathematics department have since worked with teachers from in-district schools to provide training supported by a National Science Foundation grant in cooperation with the North Cook Intermediate Service Center. Conversations with representatives of local school districts have also led to preliminary discussions about possibilities of shared support for securing teachers in critical languages.

The ICCB mandates that providers of adult education programs participate in Area Planning Councils that share the same boundaries as community college districts. Oakton collaborates with directors of libraries and other community agencies, principals, superintendents, school counselors, and selected community representatives in developing a comprehensive

educational plan for the district. Our participation in the Area Planning Council facilitates coordinating adult education programs within the area and learning about new needs and expectations associated with continuing and adult education, as well as developing programs to meet constituents' needs.

The Literacy Advisory Committee and the Community Literacy Council promote Volunteers in Teaching Adults (VITA), noncredit English as a Second Language (ESL), and the Literacy Program to the community. These advisory committees connect Oakton with the community by helping to recruit new students and volunteers and supplying ESL and easy-to-read materials. The Literacy Advisory Committee meets bimonthly at a local library. Five libraries offer instructional space for literacy classes at no charge, and other local libraries help publicize these programs.

Oakton has many ties with local and state government officials and civic leaders. The Northwest Municipal Conference, a membership-supported association of 45 municipalities and five townships located in Cook, DuPage, Lake, Kane, and McHenry counties, is located at Oakton's Des Plaines campus. Proximity of Conference offices to the College facilitates frequent exchanges of information about common problems across the municipalities and how Oakton might help to solve them. The College regularly hosts meetings for Illinois legislators from the district, some of whom have served on College advisory committees. The mayor of Skokie, George Van Dusen, teaches political science at Oakton, and the College's newest Board member, Ann Tennes, is a Village of Skokie employee.

Oakton also learns about the needs of external constituencies from members of the Oakton Educational Foundation Board and the Workforce Board of Northern Cook County, both of which include local civic and business leaders, as well as from NSERVE, the local high school consortium discussed in Criterion Two. Finally, Oakton learns from college and university colleagues by meeting with representatives who come to campus to recruit transfer students, participating in statewide discipline and Illinois Articulation Association conferences, and visiting other institutions. These colleagues furnish Oakton with essential information about four-year institutions' requirements and expectations for transfer students.

Learning about the Community through Research

The Office of Institutional Research (OIR) is an important resource for information about current local, statewide, and national economic and educational trends. Criterion Two presents a detailed discussion of the OIR and its environmental scanning activities. These activities—including the Current Student Survey, Baccalaureate Alumni Survey, Career Program Alumni Survey, two Community Surveys conducted in Fall 2002 and Spring 2007, and a 2007 Alliance survey to ascertain program preferences of Evanston residents—enable the College to better understand the needs and expectations of external constituencies. Oakton has also engaged the services of outside research agencies. The studies conducted by Scientific Verdicts in 2005 and 2006 and the study conducted by the Aslanian Group in 2007 provided data about perceptions of the College and employer needs. Focus groups with community residents, African American and Hispanic high school students, and African American and Hispanic parents of high school students supplied information about how to best reach out to these constituencies to inform them about Oakton's resources and offerings. The OIR also uses quantitative data about district characteristics and employment to complement direct studies of external constituents. For example, through CCbenefits, a research company specializing in labor market and economic research, we obtained extensive data (described more fully in Criterion Two, Core Component 2A) about jobs and industries in Oakton's district. Report cards published annually by K-12 districts summarize data about demographic characteristics and academic achievements of their students; these data inform the College about changes in the population of traditional age students who may attend Oakton after high school.

Informal Research

In addition to formal modes of engagement with and research about external constituents, a number of informal or individual avenues exist for learning about the community. Many Oakton faculty, staff, and administrators are associated with local professional, community, and volunteer organizations. By participating in these groups, they learn about local and national developments of interest to Oakton while helping external constituents learn about the College. Virtually all College administrative offices, service areas, and programs regularly receive informal, nonsolicited feedback from both internal and external constituencies. This feedback is generally not tracked in any formal way, though the College might consider initiating a formal process to improve the use of perceptions gleaned through anecdotes. Other sources of information and feedback from external constituents include statements made during the public comment section of Board Meetings, letters to the editor in the student and local newspapers, and surveys and student discussions convened by the Board of Student Affairs. Finally, external agencies connected with specific occupations or industries approach the College seeking partnerships to create new programs. Recent examples include the initiation of onsite training for certified nurse assistants with the Presbyterian Home in Evanston and creation of health career programs in pharmacy technology, massage therapy, and aseptic pharmaceutical preparations with Kushan LLC, a company that identifies employment needs in the health care industry and partners with colleges to provide educational programs that can meet these needs.

Using What is Learned and Assessing Institutional Capacity to Respond

Criterion Two includes a description of processes used internally to assess Oakton's capacity to fulfill the mission and strategic plan. Program reviews are one vehicle for assessing Oakton's capacity for serving community needs, as reviews should include discussions of changes in the external environment affecting the program and consider areas of potential growth and development. The program reviews of career and technical education (CTE) programs, the Alliance, and the Business Institute are particularly relevant here, as these areas of the College are most directly concerned with responding to community needs for occupational education and training, customized training for business and industry, adult basic and secondary education, and personal enrichment. Partnerships with outside organizations such as Kushan LLC to develop and deliver new programs illustrate Oakton's recognition that the College does not have to carry the entire expense of responding to needs. This is a relatively new phenomenon for the College, one that holds substantial promise for permitting Oakton to be responsive while making efficient use of resources.

The analysis of data addressing community needs and responses to external constituencies has been relatively decentralized at Oakton. While little concern has been raised internally about this decentralized process, some College employees felt that there was insufficient communication *within* the College about new programs and services offered to the community, as well as information about our capacity to meet community needs. The perception of a lack of communication was demonstrated by the relatively low rating for performance (3.9 on a 9-point scale) generated by responses on the Constellation Survey about whether "Oakton's key partnerships with other institutions and organizations are well-known." One possible explanation for this finding is that employees, often immersed in their own programs and departments, are unaware of excellent work done by colleagues in other areas.

The recent formation of the Research and Development Committee (R and D), also discussed in Criterion Two, presents a partial response to this communication issue. Charged with collecting data and information to identify potential new programs and services, especially in fields not currently offered at the College, the R and D Committee offers both a vehicle for assessing our ability to respond to emerging needs in the community and a means for making

our services and programs known internally. The R and D Committee also anticipates a new role in 2007–2008, developing much-needed guidelines and processes for determining when a program should be discontinued. At present, Oakton has no well-understood criteria for making these decisions.

Summary of Core Component 5A

Oakton uses many approaches to learn from external constituencies, including connections with local organizations, advisory committees, discussion groups convened by the College, and research projects. The College uses information from these sources as it assesses our capacity to respond to the emerging needs, expectations, and desires of the communities we serve.

Core Component 5B:

Oakton has the capacity and commitment to engage with its identified constituencies and communities.

Oakton's commitment to engaging with constituents and the community is deeply rooted in the College's mission and strategic plan, as demonstrated in the introduction to this Criterion, as well as in Criteria One and Two. Here we focus on Oakton's ability to connect students, faculty, administrators, and staff with external communities in both curricular and cocurricular settings, as well as the resources in place to support these efforts. The network of connections we have developed and continue to develop with our local community is vast. Therefore, our analysis centers on several representative examples that illustrate how we engage with the community.

Service Learning Program

Oakton's Service Learning Program (SLP) demonstrates the College's commitment to community service and engagement. The SLP's mission is to enhance students' learning and growth by involving them in community service projects. Integrating community service into a course enables students to apply classroom knowledge to meeting actual community needs. Such active engagement broadens students' intellectual horizons, promotes their personal growth, and fosters civic responsibility, while reinforcing a sense of connectedness between Oakton and our external constituencies. Further, the SLP builds relationships between faculty, students, community organizations, businesses, and volunteer groups.

The SLP began in 1996 when two faculty members integrated a service project into one of their classes. The program evolved out of this class of 24 students, who collectively provided service in a handful of community agencies. From 1997 to 2000, the SLP was partly funded by a grant from the American Association of Community Colleges known as Broadening Horizons through Service Learning. During that period, participation in the SLP grew considerably. By the end of the grant, approximately 400 students, 22 faculty, and 125 agencies were involved. Gwen Nyden and Alan Rubin, the two faculty who led Oakton's SLP initiative, subsequently served as invited mentors for other colleges who wanted to initiate service learning. The number of Oakton students participating in service learning has remained relatively constant. The nursing program has adopted a community service requirement for graduation; faculty who teach COL 101: College Success regularly integrate service learning into their classes; and the new Women's Studies concentration has built a service learning requirement into the program. In addition to course-based service learning, some student clubs sponsor community service projects, and some students involved in those activities may receive class credit for their work. The Spanish Club, the Ecology Club, Students for Social Justice, Phi Theta Kappa, and Psi Beta (Psychology Honor Society) all have sponsored community service projects this year.

Connecting with the Community: John Crane

Oakton's partnership with John Crane, a local manufacturer of mechanical seals and support systems, began in 1970 when the company allowed the College to use the company's parking lot for overflow parking. Since then, the relationship between Oakton and John Crane has achieved a wonderful symbiosis. In 1991 the company contracted Oakton's Business Institute to design customized training in computer technology for employees. Impressed with the quality of the first program, John Crane has worked with the Institute to offer a variety of customized programs, and to date 720 employees have received training. The Director of Training for John Crane sits on the Business Institute's Advisory Board and assists the Institute in identifying industry trends. In 2001, the College's partnership with John Crane expanded when a new president took the helm of the company and offered more than 100 Oakton students internship experiences. Even more rewarding, 75 percent of these students have been hired by John Crane. In turn, the College has supported John Crane's efforts by providing the company with grant funding to offset salaries paid to students. John Crane has continued to support the College through donations to the Educational Foundation, and the current and former president from John Crane serve as Directors on the Foundation Board. Today the partnership between the College and John Crane continues to thrive.

Data from the 2006 Baccalaureate Alumni Survey indicated 16 percent of alumni in transfer programs had participated in a service learning project, and participants found the experience rewarding. Nearly half (49%) indicated that they learned a new skill during their service, 37 percent valued the service for the opportunities to meet new people, 37 percent valued the service for giving them a better understanding of material learned in the classroom, and 35 percent received valuable work experience. Because of the value of service learning for both students and the community, Oakton has identified expanding service learning opportunities as a strategic objective in *Change Matters*. As work on this objective proceeds, the College will need to consider whether faculty and staff time for leading and administering the program is sufficient.

Work-based Experience

Many of Oakton's academic programs, including all health career programs and the Substance Abuse Counseling Program, require significant time in clinical settings. Clinical experiences involve placement in approved community facilities, supervision by Oakton faculty and facility professionals, and fulfillment of explicit educational objectives. Formal contractual arrangements with clinical sites ensure mutual understanding about what is expected from Oakton and from the site and provide appropriate legal protections for both. These contracts are evidence of the integrity Oakton brings to clinical collaborations. As health care agencies reduce their own staffs and new programs are added by neighboring two- and four-year colleges, locating appropriate clinical sites has become more challenging, and Oakton faculty and staff must devote substantial time and energy to this task.

Other career and technical education (CTE) programs include required practicum or internship courses in degree and certificate curricula. Although most Oakton students transfer or meet their educational goals before completing a degree or certificate, practicum and internship courses afford students additional workplace learning options. Oakton's student employees also gain workplace experience through the College, and the Office of Career Services works with both student employees and their supervisors to make students' employment at Oakton a genuine learning experience, as well as a source of income.

In addition to the workplace experiences described above, students may participate in a formal internship coordinated by Oakton's internship program that began in 1999. The internship program is a partnership between the College and local businesses, offering students firsthand workplace learning opportunities to augment the classroom experience. An annual state grant of approximately \$30,000 enables the College to provide salary reimbursement to participating employers. A total of 323 students, working at more than 120 employers, have participated in the College's internship program. This engagement of Oakton students with community facilities and community business and industry reinforces the connectedness of Oakton to external communities.

The College recognizes that employers want potential employees to have workplace experience and students with internship experiences will be stronger candidates when they seek jobs, so we are committed to strengthening and building the program. At the same time, a number of issues have arisen with our internship program. Staffing has been inconsistent, with turnover that has made it difficult to sustain relationships with employers. Some employers do not understand the level of mentoring and coaching they are expected to give to interns, a situation that is difficult to address when an internship coordinator lacks strong ties with an employer. The College is continuing to clarify relationships between the internship coordinator and academic and CTE departments, as some rely on the internship coordinator to find placements for students while others do this on their own. Originally housed within the Academic Affairs office, three years ago the internship program was shifted to the Business Institute. In Summer 2007, the program was shifted back to Academic Affairs to permit stronger linkages with academic departments and CTE programs. While employer interest in hiring interns remains strong, more than 80 percent of Oakton students are already employed, and many of those not



employed have already retired. It is unlikely for a student to give up an existing job to take an internship, especially if the internship is unpaid or does not provide benefits. Thus, the College is in a situation where demand and supply for interns are not currently aligned. The College affirms the value of internships in theory and is committed to strengthening the program, but, given the nature of the student population, Oakton's internship program is likely to remain small.

Charitable Work of the College

Oakton students and employees, sometimes working with external constituencies, engage in a broad range of charitable work that also serves to demonstrate connectedness with and service to the external community. Examples include blood drives in response to Life Source calls for contributions in times of critical need and, at regular intervals, eyeglass collections (donated to Lens Crafters and Lions International for distribution in the U.S. and third world countries), multiple annual food and clothing drives, Toys for Tots, the Empty Bowls program to provide food for the needy, and projects to help victims of Hurricane Katrina. Oakton has also made our grounds and facilities available for external organizations sponsoring charitable events such as Heart Walks and Cancer Walks.

Performing Arts Center

The Performing Arts Center (PAC), an academic theater that also serves the community, is an essential part of Oakton's connectedness with our external constituents. The College facilities include a 285-seat Footlik Theater with a state-of-the-art stage lighting and sound system, as well as a flexible black box theater (Studio One). The schedule is chosen and produced by the Performing Arts Department faculty, who, together with two full-time technical staff, a production coordinator, and a large group of paid student employees, oversee all aspects of production. All PAC personnel report to the chair of the Performing Arts faculty. The PAC season consists of six to eight shows annually, cast with a blend of community, student, and employee talent. To enable cast and crew members to work with professionals in the field, Oakton often invites professionals from the Chicago area and the national and international arts community as guest directors, performers, and designers. In addition to theatrical performances, the PAC season also includes the College's Six Piano Ensemble, which has performed worldwide; a jazz band; choir performances; and the Oakton Follies, a semiannual review featuring Oakton employees. The PAC supplements its regular season by contracting load-in musical and dance events, as well as special programs for families. The PAC is also home to several fundraising events sponsored by the Oakton Educational Foundation. All PAC performances are open to the public, and ticket prices are reasonable, with discounted tickets available for Oakton students, who may also attend low-cost preview performances of many productions. In the 2006-2007 season, 4,750 people attended performances in the Performing Arts Center. Information related to performances is posted on Oakton's Web site, and brochures listing events are widely available to the College community, published each semester and mailed to 8,500 households each year.

The PAC also connects with the community through acting classes and music lessons and ensembles; Oakton students and community members participate in all of these activities in almost equal proportions. "Backstage Pass," a program begun in 2005 by the Performing Arts Department, is an avenue for engagement and service with area high school students. Each semester, high school students or classes are invited to a major production to have dinner, attend the show, and participate in a brief tour and preshow discussion with the Director and the Technical Director. Finally, the PAC has a special relationship with senior citizens in our





community, as students from the College's acting classes tour senior centers to present shows, and seniors regularly attend mainstage shows and volunteer as ushers. Clearly Oakton's PAC serves our internal and external constituencies equally and also forges connections between these two groups.

Koehnline Museum of Art

Oakton is home to a distinctive visual arts program that serves as a powerful vehicle for engaging with the district and the greater Chicago community. For 17 years, Oakton has hosted the Kids' College Art Fair, now known as Studio 3. Invitations to participate are sent to K-8 art teachers at all public and private schools within Oakton's district, and art teachers from each participating school then select the artwork to display. Participants attend an awards ceremony, where Oakton's President presents certificates to the artists. For two years, Oakton also has hosted a spring exhibition of art by area high school students; this event includes a parent-student reception that draws to the campus many people who had never visited Oakton. In Spring 2007, Oakton was selected to host the statewide Collegiate Student Artist Competition, bringing many individuals to campus for the first time. Both of these activities nurture community



commitment to the visual arts while making the College known to young people and their parents.

Hosting 10 exhibitions per year, the Koehnline Museum of Art at the Des Plaines campus is a distinctive element of Oakton's institutional culture. Most exhibits feature important local, national, and international artists, and the Museum's curator prepares a detailed catalog to accompany the exhibits. Each year the Museum also showcases the work of Oakton faculty and students. Some shows scheduled during 2006-2007 include "New Acquisitions: Figurative and Abstract Expressionistic Paintings," "Song Lines – Michele Russman: Sculpture and Mark Nelson: Music," "Joseph Delaney: People and Sights of Urban Life," "2007 Annual Collegiate Artists Competition," and "Sculpture Invasion." In addition to its own exhibits, the Museum collaborates with the PAC to host chamber music

recitals and other smaller arts events. The Art Museum maintains a mailing list of more than 800 individuals and draws approximately 50,000 visitors per year (duplicated headcount).

The College also has an extensive art collection that includes paintings, etchings, and sculptures. Both campuses feature permanent art installations in the buildings, as well as large outdoor sculptures. Some of Oakton's art has been commissioned by the College for a specific purpose or location, while other pieces have been donated or purchased for the College by various groups. Brochures for self-guided tours are available on each campus. A guide to the collection is also available on the College's Web site. Developed by the curator of the Koehnline Museum, who also teaches the Museum Studies courses at the College, the Web site and gallery guides are tangible evidence that Oakton fosters the learning of both external and internal community members.

Oakton's extensive art collection is appreciated and visited by students, as evidenced by many students participating in the camera research project described in Criterion Two that emphasized the value of art for the learning environment. Also, 43 percent of respondents to the 2005 Baccalaureate Alumni survey indicated they had visited the Art Museum, and 66 percent said they had viewed other artworks displayed on our campuses.

Early Childhood Education Demonstration Centers

Oakton maintains licensed and accredited Early Childhood Education Demonstration Centers on the Des Plaines and Skokie campuses. These centers provide both a needed service to the local community and learning opportunities for students in the Early Childhood Education (ECE) program. The Centers “foster developmentally appropriate play based curriculum designed to support the children’s social, emotional, physical, cognitive, and creative development.” Day care fees are competitive with fees of other local providers. The Board of Student Affairs (BSA) provides grants that partially offset fees for Oakton students who demonstrate a need and have an educational plan, although relatively few students make use of the Centers for their children; most users are community residents or staff members. While the Centers provide important services and learning opportunities, costs to the College remain significant, and sustaining two centers will be reviewed by the “One College: Four Campuses” Task Force.



Community Use of Oakton Facilities

Oakton makes our facilities available for use by local community organizations, professional associations, and businesses to host conferences, educational training, and other events. The Business Conference Center is a suite of five rooms with kitchen facilities at the Des Plaines campus. One room has a capacity of 120, three rooms have capacities of 35—one funded by Allstate, a leading business in the district long represented on the College Foundation—and one room has a capacity of 20. Since 1996 the College has also had a multipurpose meeting area, the TenHoeve Center, that includes four adjacent rooms, each with a capacity of about 150 and a total capacity of 600 with tables and chairs, or more than 1,000 with chairs only. The four rooms can be used individually or in multiples, depending on the size of the group. These facilities are reserved on a first come, first served basis. The Skokie campus also has a variety of meeting spaces, including three rooms with 1,000 to 1,200 square feet of space and two tiered auditoriums, each with a seating capacity of 65. An additional space, the Acorn Room in the new Art, Science, and Technology Pavilion, seats 250.

A review of space usage reports for 2002 and 2005 indicated extensive usage of Oakton’s space by a multitude of area businesses and industries; local, state, and federal government groups; car shows; medical facilities; educational institutions; and other external constituents, including Chinese and Iranian Schools sponsored by heritage communities to support the learning of language and culture for their children, the local Hands of Peace program for promoting understanding between Arab and Israeli communities, and career exploration summer courses for high school students. Coordinated by the Business Institute, rentals net an average of \$116,000 annually. A detailed listing of Special Events usage and external rentals for 2000 and 2005, as well as a list of events held for or in conjunction with local K-12 school districts, are available in the Resource Room. The College’s connectedness with the community is reinforced by the differentiation in rental rates for profit and nonprofit rentals. Frequently, as with the nonprofit Hands of Peace initiative, the President waives the rental fee for the space.



Summary of Core Component 5B

Community service and engagement is a core feature of Oakton’s mission, and the multiple avenues for connecting students, faculty, administrators, and staff with external communities in the curricular and cocurricular settings discussed above demonstrate that Oakton is living this part of our mission. As the College moves into the future, this connectedness will continue to enable Oakton to learn about and respond with appropriateness and creativity to community needs.

Core Component 5C:

The College demonstrates its responsiveness to those constituencies that depend on it for service.

The previous discussion has demonstrated how Oakton learns from constituents and examined the College's capacity to respond to their needs and expectations; it also presented examples of programs and services offered to the community. This section considers the primary means of engaging with core external constituents, including K-12 schools, students, and community members seeking employment; Oakton students seeking to transfer; professionals seeking continuing education credits; community residents of all ages seeking education for life skills and personal enrichment; and employers seeking training for their workforces. The section concludes with information about Oakton's College Advancement office and activities because, unless Oakton is able to communicate effectively with constituencies, they will not know about or be able to connect with available programs and services.

K-12 Outreach and Partnerships

Oakton works with local K-12 schools to inform students and families about college opportunities and to prepare students for transitioning to college, using a variety of programs and services to accomplish these objectives.

Most outreach to local high school students and the counselors who work with them is coordinated through the Admission and Enrollment Management office. Oakton participates in College Nights at each district high school, and representatives of Oakton regularly visit in-district public and private high schools, as well as some outside the district, to meet with high school students interested in Oakton. On average, Oakton representatives visit more than 30 schools twice each year and connect with more than 1,500 students. The Admission and Enrollment Management Office, the Advising and Counseling Center, and the Financial Assistance Office also work closely with academic programs within the College to host information sessions at Oakton for potential students. For example, the health career programs organize one to four information sessions each semester. Since these are limited enrollment programs, students need to know their admission requirements, along with information about financial assistance and career opportunities for graduates. Information sessions are well publicized through the College's Web site, ads in school and community newspapers, and informational posters. More than 300 interested individuals attended a total of 11 different informational sessions in Fall 2006 alone.

In 1994, Admission and Enrollment Management began offering on-site testing, orientation, and registration sessions to high school seniors planning to attend Oakton. Held in the spring, these sessions are now delivered at all nine public in-district high schools and in four to six additional schools. In 2007, approximately 430 high school students from 12 high schools participated in this program. Oakton also offers COL 101: College Success Seminar in several local high schools. COL 101 is a three-credit course designed to give students information and skills to succeed in college. The College uses the ICCB P-16 grant to offset tuition and fees so that students, who receive Oakton credit, take the course at no cost.

Through Oakton's partnership with NSERVE, noted briefly above, the College serves high school students exploring careers. For example, Oakton and NSERVE sponsor summer courses held at Oakton for high school students considering health, business, technical, and engineering careers. Students receive high school credit for three-week courses that engage them through classroom presentations and discussions, laboratory exercises, and field trips. Recent learning modules in the health career course focused on team building, an introduction to anatomy and physiology that included examination of a human cadaver, and visits to a variety of health care facilities, among them training facilities for a Chicago professional sports team.

Another popular activity sponsored in collaboration with NSERVE is the annual Media.COM, a one-day conference for both high school and Oakton students and faculty focusing on careers in communications; this conference has at least one keynote presenter and 14 to 16 breakout sessions on specialized topics led by industry professionals. Oakton also partners with NSERVE on numerous other programs, including the regional IDEA (Illinois Drafting Education Association) high school drafting competition; iTech, an event held at the Skokie campus that gives students hands-on experiences with Oakton's manufacturing and computer labs; and the WYSE (Worldwide Youth in Science and Engineering) competition.

Oakton has awarded college credit to high school students through two pathways. One is articulated courses. Oakton and high school faculty identified comparable courses at the high school and in the College's career and technical education (CTE) programs. Students earning an A or B in high school courses and three or more credits of C grades in college-level courses at Oakton after high school may apply for Oakton credit in the articulated course within two years of high school graduation. Despite efforts to interest students in this pathway, fewer than 60 students have sought articulated credit in more than eight years, probably because most recent high school graduates at Oakton pursue transfer curricula in which the CTE courses are of little value.

The other pathway is dual credit. High school students take selected courses in high school to earn credit at both their high schools and at Oakton. These courses are taught either by an Oakton faculty member or by a high school instructor meeting Oakton's teaching credentials, and the courses follow Oakton's generic course syllabi. In Spring 2007, 287 students enrolled in dual credit courses. The College is actively engaged in expanding dual credit offerings with high schools that recently have intensified their interest in dual credit. For example, Oakton faculty, Evanston Township High School faculty, and Evanston police and fire department officials worked together to create a new dual credit course on public safety; the new course will give students a combination of classroom and workplace experiences. This course grew out of the police and fire departments' concern that few new recruits came from the local community. The development of this course exemplifies Oakton's responsiveness to community needs, in this case, the needs of municipal agencies and the high school.

Oakton's STEM program, described in Criterion Four, also links to high schools. The Peer Tutor Training (PTT) component trains high school juniors and seniors with strong math skills (i.e., AP enrolled, National Honor Society) to become Oakton peer tutors. High school juniors and seniors who complete AP Calculus and are interested in tutoring mathematics courses below the AP Calculus level are selected to participate in the program. Participants learn techniques, methods, theories, and approaches that improve learning. Through readings, class discussion, case studies, journals, group work, and a practicum, participants develop the academic and personal skills that help students achieve their academic goals. Each summer, six students are selected for this program, the only one in the country that trains high school students to become tutors.

Student-Industry-Teacher Simulations (SIT SIMs) are work-related simulations developed by teams of industry professionals and community college STEM faculty to provide high school students with work based, hands-on learning opportunities. Math and science teachers at participating high schools participate alongside students as they experience real-world STEM problem simulations presented by industry professionals and gain confidence from working in teams. Beginning in 2007, NSERVE will collaborate with CP-STEM to organize SIT SIMs. CP-STEM also offers the Conference for Promoting STEM. Each summer, 15 selected high school teachers interested in integrating SIT SIMs into their teaching will study with the Oakton faculty and industry professionals who developed SIT SIMs. Two Oakton faculty members are selected to be CP-STEM high school liaisons; they present each semester at district high schools to promote CP-STEM programs and STEM careers.

Other programs also demonstrate Oakton's responsiveness to K-12 interests in helping





students to explore careers. Futures Unlimited was initiated at the College in Spring 1992. This program, reinstated in Spring 2007 after a two-year hiatus, brings 500 eighth-grade girls to campus for hands-on-sessions in STEM areas and enables them to meet successful women role models working in the sciences and technology-related fields. The hands-on sessions of Futures are similar to the SIT SIMs workshops of STEM, and the College is currently working to coordinate these activities.

Office of Career Services

Oakton has robust career services support for students, alumni, and community members at both the Des Plaines and Skokie campuses. Career counselors help job seekers learn to write effective resumes and cover letters, interview successfully, network and capitalize on networking, and locate job leads through the internet. Throughout the year the Career Services Center offers free one-session workshops on job seeking skills and numerous job search resources, such as computers with internet access, computer assisted career guidance, and information and word processing software. Career Services also has a printer, fax machine, and telephone for use in career exploration and job search activities. Though employers use Career Services to seek employees, the primary role of Career Services is not to serve as a placement service but rather to help individuals become knowledgeable job seekers.

Transfer Services

Most students enter Oakton wanting to transfer to a four-year institution. From the 2006 Current Student Survey, 61 percent of students under age 25 and 49 percent of all students indicated transfer was their main objective. To support transferability of Oakton's general education courses, Oakton has participated in the Illinois Articulation Initiative (IAI) since its inception in 1998. The IAI is a statewide, cooperative effort by two- and four-year colleges from public and private sectors. Under the IAI, institutions have agreed upon a lower division general education core curriculum to be accepted at all participating institutions; the ICCB requires that community college transfer associate degrees conform to the IAI. Many of Oakton's introductory courses have been approved by IAI general education panels and assigned an IAI code included in the Oakton course catalog. The 2006-2007 catalog lists the following numbers of IAI approved courses for each general education area: three in Communications, nine in Mathematics, 16 in Science, 36 in Social and Behavioral Science, and 51 in Humanities and Fine Arts, plus all 202, 205, and 210 modern language classes. Students who complete the IAI core at Oakton are assured acceptance of their general education courses for a bachelor's degree when they transfer to a participating institution. Though the IAI has brought some clarity and consistency across institutions regarding transfer, some faculty perceive that it has narrowed curriculum development and creativity because students gravitate to IAI certified courses. In addition to agreements that are part of the IAI, Oakton has articulation or dual enrollment agreements with 23 institutions, including universities in Michigan, Indiana and Wisconsin, and overseas (see page 28 of the *Oakton Community College Catalog 2007-2008* for a list of articulation, 2+2, and dual admission agreements).

Advising and Counseling Center and TRiO program staff counsel students about transfer. Representatives from senior institutions regularly visit the College to meet with prospective students, and several universities offer scholarships targeted for transfers. An ongoing challenge is to help students understand the intricacies of transfer, especially because Oakton students transfer to many different colleges and universities and because transfer credits may serve a variety of uses at four-year institutions: to meet general education requirements, to meet requirements or prerequisites in a major, or to count as electives. Differences among institutions and among majors within the same institution further complicate the transfer process. Respondents to the Baccalaureate Alumni survey indicate all or nearly all Oakton credits transfer, and the College hears only a few concerns about course transferability.

Continuing Education and Workforce Development

As a community college, Oakton is mandated by the Illinois Community College Act to provide continuing education, occupational training, and community service activities for external constituents, and this mandate has always remained a central part of the College's mission. Most services to external constituents are delivered through the two primary divisions of the Continuing Education, Training and Workforce Development Office: the Alliance for Lifelong Learning and the Business Institute.

Alliance for Lifelong Learning. The Alliance for Lifelong Learning is the continuing education division of Oakton. The Alliance is actually a consortium that includes Oakton and four of the five school districts in Oakton's service area: Evanston, Maine and Niles Township, and Glenbrook high schools. This consortium, formerly known as MONNACEP, evolved in 1971 when Oakton's Board entered into an agreement with the Boards of Education of Maine and Niles Township High Schools. Glenbrook High Schools joined the consortium in 1978, and Evanston Township High School joined in May 2007, presenting significant opportunities for outreach to the eastern part of Oakton's district. By consolidating course offerings, services, staff, and funding streams, and allowing for a unified governance structure and coordination of programs and services, the consortium has enabled Oakton to become a leader in adult and continuing education in Illinois.

The Alliance comprises nine distinct program areas: Community Education, Continuing Education for Health Professionals (CEHP), General Education Development (GED), Evening High School, Kid's College (now called Studio 3), noncredit English as a Second Language (ESL), the Community Services Program (CSP), and the Emeritus and Literacy programs. Table 5.1 lists enrollments in each of these programs from FY01-06.

Currently the Alliance offers 3,016 classes annually at more than 225 locations, including the Niles, Maine, and Glenbrook high schools and both Oakton campuses. Alliance offerings are presented in a variety of formats, with some meeting only once, and others offered on a 10- or 12-week schedule. The content of these courses ranges from vocational, technical, and professional development skills to lifestyle enhancement, hobbies, and recreation.

CEHP. As Table 5.1 indicates, Continuing Education for Health Professionals (CEHP) programs represent primary areas of growth for Oakton. This growth reflects the increasing



Table 5.1

Duplicated Headcount Enrollments in Continuing Education, Training and Workforce Development Programs ¹						
	FY01 ²	FY02	FY03	FY04	FY05	FY06
ALL Community Education	4,965	4,896	4,352	3,848	4,882	4,953
Business Institute	2,174	1,582	1,312	1,292	1,127	1,070
CEHP	6,282	14,540	16,922	14,306	15,026	18,610
Emeritus	15,320	19,126	18,853	13,172	12,890	18,881
GED	591	600	635	559	446	512
Evening High School	578	707	648	663	616	583
Kids' College (now STUDIO 3)	1,102	991	981	944	1,096	817
Community Services/Activities	40,446	33,814	33,367	35,375	49,325	52,354
ESL/Literacy (noncredit)	5,514	6,410	5,360	5,051	4,772	5,924
Totals	76,972	82,666	82,430	75,210	90,180	103,704

¹ Data Collected from the Annual Executive Summaries for the Alliance for Lifelong Learning Governing Board.

² Enrollments for a fiscal year are defined as Summer, Fall and Spring. Thus FY01 includes the enrollments for Summer 2000, Fall 2000, and Spring 2001 semesters/terms.

demand by state and regulatory agencies for updating skills for licensure and continued employment in health related fields. CEHP focuses on developing and delivering continuing education programs that respond to the educational needs of today’s health care professionals. Partnering with associations, human service organizations, and other health care providers, the program’s team of health professionals and adult educators uses their expertise to create high quality, cost effective continuing education programs at both Oakton and offsite locations.

The Alliance’s aggressive pursuit and receipt of “approved continuing education provider status” by multiple national, state, and regulatory agencies has resulted in numerous ongoing training relationships with large state agencies and local employers. Recognized as a leader in health care education, the College’s CEHP program is an approved provider of continuing education by several state and accreditation agencies. Approval is based on meeting specific criteria through submission of written self studies and/or site evaluation visits. CEHP offers continuing education units (CEUs) that meet recertification criteria for the professional groups outlined in Table 5.2.



Emeritus Program. The Emeritus program is one of the public service programs designed to meet the educational needs of older adults (50+, or “for the student who wasn’t born yesterday”). The program, begun in 1975 as “Grey Matters,” was supervised by a faculty member and offered a limited number of offsite credit classes to students over 50 who valued and supported education. In 1997, after several program name changes, the Emeritus Program became part of the Continuing Education and Training division of the College. The goal of the Emeritus program is to offer intellectually stimulating credit and noncredit classes at a reasonable cost to persons over the age of 50. To meet this goal and the needs of this expanding audience, the program includes a variety of courses, tours, and lectures at the Skokie and Des Plaines campuses, as well as humanities discussions led by trained volunteers at offsite libraries, senior centers, park districts, and other community settings.

GED. A different segment of the adult population in the district can complete their high school education by participating in either the General Education Development (GED) or Evening High School program. The Alliance offers placement assessment and evaluation using the Test of Adult Basic Education, individual counseling, and registration into preparatory classes in the five subject areas of GED testing and the U.S. and Illinois Constitutions (required in Illinois for high school graduation). Preparatory classes are offered in English and

Table 5.2

Continuing Education for Health Professionals Continuing Education Unit Certifications

Accrediting Organization	Profession/Employment Category
American Association of Health Education	Certified Health Education Specialists
American Nurse’s Credentialing Center’s Commission on Accreditation	Nurses
Commission on Dietetic Regulation	Registered Dietitians and Dietetic Technicians
Illinois Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Professional Certification Association	Addiction Counselors
Illinois Department of Nuclear Safety	Radiation and Nuclear Medicine Technicians
Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulations	Clinical Social Workers, Counselor/Clinical Counselors, Marriage/Family Therapists, Nursing Home Administrators, Respiratory Care Practitioner, and Social Workers
Illinois Board of Education	K-12 Teachers
International Board of Lactation Consultant Examiners	Lactation Counselors

Spanish at Oakton, three high school locations, and community sites in Oakton's district. In Illinois, students are required to be 19 years of age or older to take GED tests.

The Evening High School program, housed at Maine South High School in Park Ridge, works closely with the Maine School District Board of Education to ensure the curriculum meets school and state guidelines to fulfill graduation requirements for both Maine and Niles district students. Designed for 18- to 21-year-olds, Evening High School allows young adults to complete their course work while employed at full-time jobs or otherwise engaged during the day, a significant opportunity for over 500 young adults annually.

The Kids' College program provides enrichment courses in math, science, languages, and sports activities to over 500 children in grades K-6 every summer. The districtwide Studio 3 art fair discussed earlier annually attracts more than 700 visitors to the College, with approximately 45 schools and 200 children artists participating. The Before and After School Language classes are offered to children in grades K-8.

Noncredit ESL. While Oakton's credit ESL program discussed in Criterion Three focuses on mainstreaming adult learners into the academic and work worlds, the noncredit English as a Second Language (ESL) and Literacy programs offer classes that teach students how to speak, read, and write English. Given the diversity in Oakton's district, with over 80 countries and 55 languages represented, these classes give many community members the opportunity to develop language skills necessary for pursuing a variety of personal, professional, and educational goals.

The Alliance noncredit ESL and Literacy offerings are enhanced through the Volunteers in Teaching Adults (VITA) program. VITA began at the College in 1978 to support the noncredit ESL program. Funded through the ICCB, Oakton's VITA program is large, in part because the district has both many immigrants needing ESL classes and a wealth of volunteer resources. Today VITA continues to support noncredit ESL, as well as an adult reading program that began in 1983 and now enrolls about 1,000 students annually. Oakton's noncredit ESL program began in 1974 with 200 students at two sites within Oakton's district; today the ESL program enrolls 3,000 students annually across 11 sites.

Noncredit ESL classes are typically scheduled for two 165-minute sessions per week (day, evening, or weekend) and are led by a qualified, paid teacher. These classes generally enroll 20 to 45 students. VITA tutors supplement the work of ESL teachers by tutoring individual students who have special needs, assisting latecomers to the program, and teaching smaller groups of students who cannot be placed in a regular classroom setting. VITA tutors also assist teachers in The Literacy Program, which offers adult reading tracks for both native and nonnative readers of English. It includes GED preparation and bridges with credit academic reading and writing programs.

Approximately 350 to 375 men and women from a diverse range of ethnicities, ranging in age from 16 to 91 years, serve as VITA tutors. They are required to attend three preservice training workshops taught quarterly. Oakton students may earn Service Learning credit by volunteering as VITA tutors. The College recognizes the efforts of VITA tutors by sponsoring a biannual banquet for VITA volunteers, their guests, the Board of Trustees, and College administration. These banquets are generally attended by about 400 volunteers and volunteer guests. Selected students from the program demonstrate new skills as they speak about their experience with the program. The state of Illinois also recognizes VITA tutors and their students by presenting 10 awards each year to outstanding tutors and another 10 to outstanding students in VITA tutored classes, and Oakton tutors and students have been honored. The VITA program is both learning-centered and distinctive, characterized by the life-changing connections shared by volunteers and their students that enrich the lives of those who teach as well as those who learn.

Business Institute. The Business Institute has several distinct functions: economic and workforce development activities that involve contracting with employers to deliver customized training to employees, providing assessment and consulting services to area organizations, and



Adult Education Programs that Change Lives

James Gore is a shining example of how students can achieve through Oakton's noncredit programs. When James first registered at the College, he tested at a fourth-grade reading level. For years he had hidden his dyslexia from his children and turned down job promotions because of his poor reading ability. James agreed to take a literacy class at the Skokie campus and was paired with a wonderful VITA tutor, Ernest Mutuc, who helped him improve his reading level enough to be accepted into the pre-GED program within a few months. Next James tested into the GED program and met his goal of beginning the journey toward earning his GED certificate within six months. After sustaining a back injury in a truck driving accident, he began to address his educational needs on a full-time basis, spending many extra hours in the ESL/computer lab improving his reading and math skills. James is very grateful to Oakton for all the caring office staff, teachers, and tutors who have supported and encouraged him. He is well on his way to meeting his educational goals.

obtaining training grant funds to assist district businesses and organizations; arranging rental of Oakton's meeting facilities to the public; and marketing of Oakton's educational opportunities to the business community. Between 1999 and 2005, more than 12,000 individuals attended professional development courses or workshops. The Institute also coordinates rentals of Oakton facilities by outside groups, as described earlier in this Criterion, and was home to the College's internship program for three years, also noted earlier.

In partnership with the Workforce Board of Northern Cook County (and their partnership with the National Retail Federation), the Business Institute spearheaded an arrangement for classroom space at the Westfield Old Orchard Shopping Center in Skokie. Tailored to meet the needs of retailers at this popular central shopping location (the first "outdoor" mall in the country), in addition to the community surrounding the mall, the Institute and several Oakton CTE programs offer a range of courses at this location: Customer Service, Food Service Sanitation for Supervisors, Food Service Sanitation Review, Small Business Strategies, Business Etiquette, and ESL classes. Other examples of Business Institute customized training courses include ESL classes at Lutheran General Hospital in Park Ridge, designed to improve the quality of patient care and services; the Small Business Strategies workshops offered at the Illinois Eye Institute in Chicago, which educates third- and fourth-year students about how to open their own medical practices; and remedial mathematics and English classes at Evanston's Presbyterian Home, designed to prepare Certified Nurse Assistant employees to enroll in a Licensed Practical Nursing (LPN) program.

Institute revenues jumped from an average of \$190,000 in FY03 and FY04 to more than \$1.1 million in each of the next two years, primarily as a result of greater demand for continuing education and training for health professionals and paraprofessionals. This demand is likely to continue, although Institute revenues may fluctuate because of declines in state funding for activities previously underwritten as priorities in the state budget.

Informing Constituencies: the Office of College Advancement

As noted in the introduction to this Core Component, Oakton, like any organization, must effectively inform constituents about available programs and services. The College's primary responsibility for planning and implementing communication strategies is vested in the Office of College Advancement.

The Office of College Advancement serves a dual function, to inform the community about College programs and services and to raise funds for compelling initiatives not supported by the College budget or other grants. In this section, we examine the first of these functions. Because Oakton remains "dedicated, first, to excellence in teaching and learning," College Advancement develops and implements marketing strategies—advertising, direct mail, print and electronic publications, public and media relations, and special events—that seek to inform the community about programs and services and encourage participation in them.

College Advancement produces and distributes a variety of publications, including *Outlook*, an annual magazine highlighting Oakton's unique programs, student and faculty achievements, and outstanding alumni; *Pavilion Pulse*, a biannual newsletter focusing on programs unique to the Skokie campus; and *ArtWalk*, a catalog of the permanent art collection housed in the Koehnline Museum at the Des Plaines campus.

Every year College Advancement organizes special events that attract and inform members of the community. Recent programs include "Dig This," the official groundbreaking ceremony for the Art, Science, and Technology Pavilion in 2002; the dedication of the Art, Science, and Technology Pavilion in 2006; the yearly Theater Volunteers' Recognition Day; and the grand opening of the Center for Professional Development at the Westfield Old Orchard Shopping Center in 2007. In addition, each semester College Advancement hosts a "President's Circle" breakfast for specific targeted groups such as corporate, civic, or educational leaders in the community. College Advancement also works with the Oakton Educational Foundation to

coordinate three Foundation fundraisers each year that continue to attract community residents: the *Christmas Spirits Bar Revue* in January, a spring benefit in May, and *Oakton at Arlington* in August.

Oakton maintains a presence at various community fairs sponsored throughout the district, including the Skokie Festival of Cultures, Taste of Des Plaines, and Northbrook Days. College Advancement also sends representatives to college fairs, golf outings, and Chambers of Commerce meetings. The Executive Director of College Advancement is a member of various community groups, including the Skokie Village Communicators, The Art Center Affiliates, and the Roosevelt University Community Advisory Board.

Finally, College Advancement maintains relationships with the news media. With few exceptions, community weeklies print most of the news releases they receive from Oakton. The public relations team in College Advancement works vigorously to attract the attention of the daily newspapers and enjoys frequent success in landing stories in the *Daily Herald* and the *Chicago Tribune*.

A modest marketing budget remains an ongoing challenge for College Advancement. Although the marketing budget increased by \$50,000 in FY03 (from \$100,000 to \$150,000), spiraling costs for advertising and direct mail hamper aggressive integrated marketing efforts. This budget also precludes launching marketing campaigns that target specific audiences. According to the latest *VoiceTrak* report released by Arbitron (2006), Oakton ranks 55th in media spending among college advertisers in Chicago—significantly behind College of DuPage (#15), Moraine Valley (#27), Harper (#31), Triton (#37), and College of Lake County (#39). Yet, the College leverages the budget in strategic ways to generate visibility and increase awareness about Oakton in the community. Out-of-home campaigns, for example, feature Oakton in the district's theaters and on Pace buses, billboards, and Metra platforms. Front-page ads in the *Pioneer Press* position Oakton prominently and promote class registration. In her oral report summarizing findings from the Aslanian Group's Spring 2007 research for Oakton, Carol Aslanian expressed surprise at the modesty of Oakton's budget and underscored the importance of having an adequate marketing budget to inform students and draw them to a college.

In 2003, College Advancement rolled out a new identity for the College that included a distinctive oak leaf shape and the tag line "Start here. Go anywhere." Within a year, the College had adopted the new logo on business cards, letterhead, and marketing materials. Further extending the brand, Oakton installed new signage at both campuses, a significant improvement for first-time visitors to the College. In FY08, the College will engage JB Chicago, an advertising agency that offers fresh ideas for stretching the budget, including the use of contemporary media outlets such as Facebook, My Space, and YouTube.

Summary of Core Component 5C

Through a multitude of programs that serve students of all ages, Oakton demonstrates responsiveness to the needs of core external constituencies. The services provided to students seeking continuing education and to those needing adult basic education, GED, and ESL learning opportunities evidence the breadth and depth of Oakton's support for the learning needs of the communities we serve. The College has used multiple approaches to communicate with constituencies about available programs and services and has produced award-winning print materials and campaigns, yet Oakton's ability to communicate adequately is hampered by a modest budget and numerous competing claimants for attention. The College will continue to address this challenge.



Core Component 5D:

Internal and external constituencies value the services Oakton provides.

Oakton serves its communities with a range of distinctive facilities, programs, and services. In this section, we present evidence demonstrating the value placed on these programs and services by the College's constituents.

Internal Constituents

The discussion in this Criterion has primarily focused on external constituents. Criteria Three and Four considered how well Oakton serves students and employees. Those criteria also detailed evidence that these constituents valued the services provided. In this section, we discuss additional evidence demonstrating that internal constituents value the College.

For many years, respondents to the Baccalaureate Alumni Survey have been asked whether, if they could do it over again, they would attend Oakton. On a 7-point scale, with one representing the least likelihood of attending Oakton, and 7 the highest, most students indicated a strong likelihood that they would attend Oakton. Between 1998 and 2006, nearly 90 percent of respondents have said "yes" (responding with a 5, 6, or 7) in answering the question, "If you had it to do over, how likely would you be to attend Oakton?" Alumni were also asked to respond to an open-ended qualitative question concerning any "especially outstanding person, course, or event" that stood out in their experience at Oakton. Almost all comments offer praise for specific faculty, staff, administrators, courses, or events, further evidence that alumni appreciate their experience at Oakton. Table 5.3 contains a sample of comments from the 2006 Baccalaureate Alumni Survey.

Alumni of career programs also generally indicate a strong level of satisfaction with their educational experiences at Oakton (see Table 4.12, Criterion Four).

Employees also express satisfaction. As noted earlier in the self study, Oakton's period of transition has caused some dissatisfaction among employees as a new institutional culture develops. However, that disagreements have emerged is itself indicative of the level of commitment employees feel toward Oakton and the communities served, as such disagreements would not be taken seriously if we did not care. It is important to remember that most areas of concern center on the need for better collaboration and communication among staff, faculty, and administrators as we build a common vision of the future together. The College has undertaken a series of important steps to address these concerns, including coming to agreement on a Memorandum of Understanding with the full-time faculty regarding shared governance and involving all Oakton employees in creating *Change Matters*.

The results of the Constellation Survey derived from the Vital Focus project described earlier demonstrate the value placed on Oakton and our services by employees. For example, 89 percent of employees indicated that they were "satisfied" with professional life at Oakton, with 73 percent indicating "highly satisfied." Most employees indicated that Oakton trusts them to perform their work effectively and that this trust is an important part of life the College. Significantly, 64 percent of employees believe that Oakton has the resources and commitment to change, and can satisfactorily resolve the issues confronting us while continuing to provide high quality services and programs to students and other constituents.

An indirect indicator of the value employees place on the organization is employee enthusiasm for special events such as the annual employee recognition dinner and the Orientation Week all-College brunch, all infused with a spirit of camaraderie and genuine affection for the College and for one another.

Table 5.3

Sample Comments About Outstanding Persons, Courses or Events from 2006 Baccalaureate Alumni Survey

I had many well-prepared courses and very good teachers.
All teachers were great.
Teachers [at Oakton] were more accessible than any other college that I've attended.
As a whole the school was very good. I felt the courses were challenging.
Every teacher I had was very organized.
It was overall a wonderful experience.
Overall, the courses had excellent quality.
Teachers at Oakton were awesome compared to other schools. They were more knowledgeable.
The entire staff was outstanding.
The seminar courses were outstanding. They were enjoyable and very knowledgeable.
The teachers were all marvelous.
They were all good. It was just an overall good experience. All the teachers were great.

External Constituents

Measuring the value of services to the wide variety of organizations, businesses, and individuals who make up Oakton's external constituencies is difficult to do directly. The College makes extensive use of program evaluations, asking participants to complete short evaluation forms. Though many participants choose not to complete formal evaluations, ratings are highly positive. The Alliance for Lifelong Learning and the Business Institute seek input from professional organizations and employers who contract for continuing education and customized training to gauge their satisfaction and discover whether they found value in courses and services provided. Respondents to the Spring 2007 Community Survey who had taken an Oakton course or who had a household member take a course were very satisfied; on a 5-point scale, with 5 equal to "very satisfied," the mean rating was 4.4, and 86 percent of respondents gave satisfaction ratings of 4 or 5. Results of the Aslanian Group study of community residents and employers also indicated that respondents who had experiences with Oakton were very satisfied, although the study also showed that many individuals remain unaware of the College.

Another indicator of connection and community satisfaction is the extent to which external groups use Oakton's facilities, as noted earlier in this Criterion. Each year Oakton handles approximately 400 rentals of facilities to various organizations.

Other indicators of Oakton's value are less direct but also compelling. They include the large number of community members who volunteer their time and expertise to serve on an advisory committee; who attend workshops, special events, and other programs open to the public or requested by specific community and business groups; and who spontaneously express gratitude to faculty, staff, administrators, and Board members. A representative example is a letter from a referee at a recent intercollegiate baseball game who wrote to compliment Oakton's baseball team and staff on their exemplary conduct and sportsmanship, noting how positively they represented the College. The donations made to Oakton's Educational Foundation, detailed in Criterion Three, as well as the increasing number of competitive grants obtained by the College, also indicate the value of our services to the community.

Summary of Core Component 5D

Oakton uses a number of methods to determine how constituents value the College, and evidence demonstrates that both internal and external constituents place high value on the range and quality of our programs and services.

Conclusion to Criterion Five:

In this Criterion we have examined the College's service to external constituents in terms of how we learn what services and programs are needed, how we examine our ability to meet those needs, and how constituents value our services and programs. As the community's college, Oakton provides needed services and programs to the community. Through numerous points of intersection, formal and informal, Oakton remains connected with a range of external constituents in the north and northwest suburbs of Chicago. They value the College, and the College values them.

Strengths:

- Oakton has been a leader in Illinois in the area of adult and continuing education, and we now serve 36,000 people annually. Through collaborations with local high school districts, public agencies, and community groups, the Alliance for Lifelong Learning currently offers courses at more than 200 locations. While the Alliance leads in providing noncredit courses across the district, other Oakton departments offer credit courses in high schools and business settings, evidence that the concept of a neighborhood campus extends to the credit as well as noncredit environment.
- Oakton draws more students from several area high schools than any other college or university and has strong ties with local high school districts, as evidenced by on-site testing/orientation/registration sessions, dual credit courses, special programs to bring high school students to Oakton's campus, and a partnership with NSERVE. Both the Performing Arts Center and the Koehline Museum offer a variety of programs that involve students, employees, professionals in the arts, and community members.
- Oakton uses multiple approaches to remain informed about emerging community and business needs and to engage external constituents in shaping College offerings.

Challenges and Possible Solutions:

- Oakton is acknowledged in many quarters as a premier community college, as evidenced in the recent *New York Times* article cited earlier. However, while our strengths, detailed throughout this self study, are considerable, Chicago's North Shore is rich with high quality education agencies, not only colleges and universities, but also continuing education providers such as park districts, libraries, and religious and community organizations. As a result, Oakton remains underappreciated by external constituencies, although those who come into contact with the College almost universally praise us. An ongoing challenge is to penetrate community perceptions about Oakton and foster a climate where Oakton is as renowned locally as it is becoming nationally.

Conclusion to the Self Study



Oakton Community College has a long history and proud tradition of providing high quality education to its students and exceptional services to its community. We are recognized nationally among community colleges for our innovative programs and services, and our 37-year history records a substantial number of awards and distinctions. We fulfill our mission and exemplify our values at our two comprehensive campuses, through our distance learning programs, and at the more than 200 satellite centers that reach out into our District. Taken together, these multiple locations form the picture of a unique institution where teaching and learning are central, and people are sustained by a sense of common purpose and concern for one another.

We identified two primary goals for our self study in its Introduction. The first was to fulfill in part the Higher Learning Commission's requirements for reaccreditation by demonstrating that Oakton meets the HLC five criteria. The second was to provide the College community and the larger public we serve with a careful and critical reflection on who we are and who we want to be as a public community college. This reflection entails an assessment of our strengths, the major challenges facing our College in the future, and our capacity for meeting those challenges. We believe we have met those goals in our self study and briefly summarize here what we have learned about our institution using the Higher Learning Commission's four cross-cutting themes as our framework.

A Future Oriented Organization

We are mission driven, and our vision, mission, and values are widely supported across the institution. We engaged in a strategic planning process that involved the entire College community, drew from external constituencies, and resulted in a bold plan that includes measurable objectives. We created an implementation process that assigns responsibility for goals and objectives to College leaders, as well as existing and new departments, committees, and task forces. We have a tradition of sound financial stewardship and a resource base that give us confidence that we can continue to maintain and strengthen our programs and services. We acknowledge the changing local, national, and global environment and have the creativity, capacity, and courage to meet the challenge of change.

A Learning Focused Organization

Our *Vision, Mission and Values* speaks directly to the core importance of teaching and learning. We offer a wide range of credit and noncredit programs and courses, and we develop new ones in response to student interests and community and employer needs. We have a well-developed array of remedial and other courses that address the needs of special populations and student support services to help underprepared students succeed, though we acknowledge more work in this area is essential. We encourage and support professional development opportunities for all employees, including part-time faculty and staff, with special emphasis on programs that support excellence in teaching. We have committed to involving at least 80 percent of employees in learning activities that address issues of bias and racism. We have used the Higher Learning Commission self study process to prompt learning about ourselves and to initiate new approaches for working together to address concerns about communication and collaboration.

A Connected Organization

We maintain a strong network of relationships with external constituencies through vehicles such as our Board of Trustees, the Educational Foundation Board, Advisory Committees, campus programs and services, community service activities, memberships in local organizations, workplace learning opportunities for students, and research projects. We sustain strong ties with transfer institutions and with local high schools, recognizing that Oakton is a crucial entity as students transition from high school to college and move forward to earn their baccalaureate degrees. We have sustained a caring community in which employees and students help one another and provide extensive outreach to our community, nation, and world, even while undergoing substantial personnel turnover that has challenged long-standing relationships. We have begun fostering new relationships based on collaboration, mutual trust, and shared visions for the College and for students.

A Distinctive Organization

We have been recognized by the *New York Times* as an exceptional community college. We have invested in the arts, particularly the Koehnline Museum and an extensive art collection widely appreciated by students, employees, and the community. We have developed unique cocurricular relationships between the Museum and our Performing Arts Center and our classes. We have had remarkable stability in presidential leadership. We are leaders in creating innovative learning environments such as our learning communities, new transfer certificate programs, and focus on undergraduate research. We have one of the largest and most respected adult and continuing education divisions in the state, and we engage more than 400 volunteers in teaching English as a second language and literacy. Through our involvement with the Skyway Conference, STEM, Foundations of Excellence[®], and a host of other important statewide and national projects, we have cemented our role as a leader of distinction among Illinois community colleges.

In the last two years, Oakton has invested substantial resources to engage the College community in serious reflection and planning for the future. The two documents that emerged from these efforts, our self study, *Learning Matters*, and our new strategic plan, *Change Matters*, together demonstrate how we are inextricably linked to each other and to the constituencies we serve as a community of learners and a changing community. Oakton is not a perfect institution; no college is. But we are confident, as demonstrated in this self study, that we have the resources, knowledge, and will to sustain excellence, confront challenges, and move forward into the future.

Oakton Community College respectfully requests continued accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools for a period of 10 years.

Federal Compliance



Oakton operates with integrity, in compliance with federal and state laws, regulations, and rules; in conformity with College policies regarding fiscal and personnel policies and practices; and through observing accepted standards of accounting. In this chapter we demonstrate the College's compliance with federal rules and regulations.

Credits, Program Length and Tuition

Oakton's courses are based on semester credit hours and comply with Illinois Community College Board rules that define credit hours in terms of contact hours (Administrative Rules of the Illinois Community College Board, April 2006, Section 1501.309 b). In lecture/discussion courses, one semester credit is assigned for each 15 classroom contact hours of instruction, with the understanding that 50 minutes of class time is counted as one hour. Laboratory and clinical courses are assigned one semester credit for each 30 to 45 classroom contact hours. Nonclinical internships, practicum, or on-the-job supervised instruction are assigned one semester credit for each 75 to 149 contact hours. The ICCB also expects classes to be scheduled such that no more than one semester credit is awarded for each week the course is in session. Flexibility exists for distance learning courses. Every Oakton course must be approved by the ICCB to be eligible for state apportionment funds; part of our documentation for approval includes the credit:lecture:lab ratios assigned to a course, so the ICCB can ensure we are in compliance. In addition, periodically the ICCB conducts a "recognition visit" to a community college and, as part of this visit, may examine class schedules to ensure compliance.

The ICCB also has established rules governing program length. Each degree and certificate must be approved by the ICCB before the College is authorized to award it. All degrees and certificates meet credit hour expectations for similar programs. A minimum of 60 semester credit hours is required in every associate degree; some require more. Certificates range from as few as five credits to as many as 42.

Oakton does not charge program-specific tuition. The College has four tuition rates: in-district residents and full-time employees of qualified in-district employers, Illinois residents who reside out-of-district, and out-of-state and international students. District residents over the age of 60 pay one-half the in-district tuition rate. In addition to tuition, Oakton charges application, registration, and student activities fees, as well as laboratory fees for some courses. Through joint agreements with neighboring community colleges, residents of Oakton's district may be eligible to enroll in programs at other community colleges at their in-district tuition rates provided that Oakton does not offer the same program. Likewise, residents of other community college districts may be eligible to enroll at in-district tuition rates in Oakton programs not offered at their home institutions. Tuition and fee information is available in the College catalog, the Oakton class schedule, and on Oakton's Web site.

Institutional Compliance with the Higher Education Reauthorization Act

Oakton is in compliance with provisions of the Higher Education Reauthorization Act. Student loan cohort default rates for FY02 through FY04 show averages of below 8.5 percent, based on only five to six individuals in default. The projected FY05 rate, set by the federal Department of Education in February 2007, is 5.1 percent. The final FY05 rate will be published in September 2007 and will be made available during the October 2007 HLC team visit.

	FY02	FY03	FY04
Default rate	6.3%	7.3%	8.5%
Number in default	6	5	6
Number in repayment	94	68	70

The College will make available all documents related to compliance with Title IV regulations, including the program participation agreement; Eligibility and Certification Renewal; reports from internal and external auditors, including the federal A-133 report; and default rate reports. Oakton has not received a visit from a federal Program Review team or notification of any limitation, suspension, or termination proceedings.

The Office of Student Financial Assistance works diligently to help student loan borrowers understand the terms and conditions associated with borrowing a federal student loan. Oakton students complete online loan counseling for each academic year they seek a student loan, and they receive additional written loan counseling materials at the time of their first disbursement and the end of their loan period. These extra processes are intentional, designed to help curb the College's student loan default rate. No additional questions or requirements have been posed by auditors or the federal Department of Education to prompt a corrective action plan for the institution's default rate.

Oakton complies with the many regulations associated with the administration of Title IV financial assistance, including the student notification requirements such as campus crime-reporting and release of completion/graduation rates. Information is provided to outside reporting agencies and made available to the public. No outside agency has demanded a corrective action plan.

Since Oakton's last accreditation review, the College has dedicated additional resources to the administration of the financial assistance program, including compliance with regulations. In July 1999, a director position at the administrative level and four additional staff members were added to the Student Financial Assistance Department. The College also purchased the Powerfaids® financial aid software from the College Board to manage the flow of financial aid application data, to assist in the awarding and disbursing of financial aid funds, and to provide additional functionality managing and reporting financial aid information.

Campus Crime and Graduation Rate Statistics

Crime statistics are published on the Oakton homepage in the Public Safety area. The URL is www.oakton.edu/hlc/crimestats. Oakton's Spring class schedule includes a notice about the availability of these data. The College's Web site provides graduation rate data in the Office of Registration and Records area. These data are also available on the Integrated Post-secondary Education Data Systems (IPEDS) Web site that contains institutional data for students and the public; the site is entitled College Opportunities Online (COOL). The College does not award athletic scholarships and is, therefore, not obligated to report graduation rates for athletes.

Federal Compliance Visits to Off-Campus Locations

Oakton operates as one college with two campuses, one in Des Plaines and one in Skokie. The HLC accredits Oakton as one college. Both campuses have been in operation since 1980. The campuses are governed together as one college, with a single administration, faculty, and staff. College policies cover both campuses as well. Students apply to Oakton, not to a campus, and may register for classes at whichever campus they choose. General education, transfer, and remedial courses are offered at both locations, as are many career and technical education (CTE) courses. Students can complete more than 50 percent of most degrees at either campus. A small number of CTE programs are assigned to just one campus because of the need for special equipment or laboratories that cannot be justified at two locations. The College offers a small number of credit classes, but not certificate or degree programs, at locations throughout the district. The Alliance for Lifelong Learning and Business Institute provide noncredit courses at more than 200 locations. Based on this information, it is evident that Oakton does not operate an off-campus site separate and apart from its two campuses.

Advertising and Recruitment Materials

Oakton includes the Higher Learning Commission address and telephone number when making reference to our affiliation with the Commission, as evidenced in the College catalog, page 2, and on our Web site (see www.oakton.edu/hlc/contact). Oakton also publishes contact information for the College on our Web site and in the College catalog, class schedule, brochures, and other publications.

Professional Accreditation

Several Oakton programs have received specialized accreditation: Health Information Technology A.A.S., accredited by the Commission on the Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs; Medical Laboratory Technology A.A.S., accredited by the National Accrediting Agency for the Clinical Laboratory Sciences; the Nursing A.A.S., accredited by the National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission; and the Physical Therapy Assistant A.A.S., accredited by the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education. There have been no adverse actions.

Institutions Holding Dual Institutional Accreditation

Oakton does not hold dual institutional accreditations.

Institutional Records of Student Complaints

Oakton has defined policies and procedures for handling student complaints in the Student Academic Integrity Policy, which contains the Code of Student Conduct. We also have a Nondiscrimination Policy and a Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault Policy. All these policies are in the Student Handbook, and summaries are in the College catalog. Student complaints originating from violations of any of these policies are handled by the Vice President for Student Affairs Office; this office maintains files and a log of student complaints. The Vice President for Student Affairs also manages complaints that go to the President's Office; increasingly students go to the Office of the President first.

Complaints about instructors (that are not sexual harassment or discrimination complaints, but more about instruction) are first handled by the department chairperson if the complaint is about a part-time faculty member or by the appropriate dean if it is about a full-time faculty member. Every effort is made to settle complaints through informal processes, but, when this is not feasible, formal and clearly articulated steps to pursue and resolve complaints exist.

Acronyms

AA – Associate Degree in Liberal Arts	IPRC – Institutional Program Review Committee
AAT – Associate Degree in Education	IRB – Institutional Review Board
ACC – Accounting course prefix	ISAC – Illinois Student Assistance Commission
ACCORD – Advocating a College Community of Respect for Diversity	IT – Office of Information Technology
ACIIE – American Council on International Intercultural Education	ITR – International Trade course prefix
AFA – Associate Degree in Fine Arts	LAE – Law Enforcement course prefix
AHIMA – American Health Information Management Association	LHE – Lecture hour equivalents
AHR – Air Conditioning and Refrigeration course prefix	MEC – Mechanical Design course prefix
ALL – Alliance for Lifelong Learning	MFG – Manufacturing Technology course prefix
ANCC – American Nurses Credentialing Center	MGT – Management and Supervision course prefix
ARC – Architectural Technology course prefix	MKT – Marketing Management course prefix
AS – Associate Degree in Science	MLT – Medical Laboratory Technology course prefix
ASE – Associate Degree in Engineering	MOU – Memoranda of understanding
AUT – Automotive Technology course prefix	MTA – Machine Technology course prefix
BNA – Basic Nurse Assistant Training course prefix	NCISC – North Cook Intermediate Service Center
BSA – Board of Student Affairs	NIN – Northern Illinois Network for staff exchanges
CAB – Computer Applications for Business course prefix	NIPSTA – Northeastern Illinois Public Safety Training Academy
CCSSE – Community College Survey of Student Engagement	NJCAA – National Junior College Athletic Association
CEHP – Continuing Education for Health Professionals	NSERVE – North Suburban Education Region for Vocational Education
CIAA – Council of Industry and Academic Advisors	NSF – National Science Foundation
CIS – Computer Information Systems course prefix	NUR – Nursing course prefix
CMG – Construction Management course prefix	OCC – Oakton Community College
CNS – Computer Networking and Systems course prefix	OCC AFA – Oakton Community College Adjunct Faculty Association
COCAC – Council of Chairs and Coordinators	OCCFA – Oakton Community College Faculty Association
COOL – College Opportunities Online	OCCSA – Oakton College Classified Staff Association
COT – Computer Office Technology course prefix	OCTE – Oakton Conference for Teaching Excellence
CPB – College Program Board	OESR – Oakton Educators for Social Responsibility
CPD – Center for Professional Development	OFSSE – Oakton Faculty Survey of Student Engagement
CP-STEM – Center for Promoting Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math	OIR – Office of Institutional Research
CSP – Community Services Program	OSCAR – Oakton Staff Converse and Relax
CTE – Career and Technical Education	PAC – Performing Arts Center
DECA – Distributive Education Club of American	PAC – Professional Advancement Credit
ECE – Early Childhood Education	PBT – Phlebotomy course prefix
ECE – Early Childhood Education course prefix	PDPSC – Professional Development Program Steering Committee
ELT – Electronics and Computer Technology course prefix	PHM – Pharmacy Technician course prefix
EPP – Educational Policies and Procedures	PTA – Physical Therapist Assistant course prefix
ESL – English As a Second Language	PTELL – Property Tax Extension Limitation Law
ETC – Education to Careers	PTT – Peer Tutor Training
FERPA – Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act	R&D – Research and Development Committee
FIR – Fire Science Technology course prefix	RAMP – Resource Allocation Management Plan
FIS – Financial Services course prefix	RES – Real Estate course prefix
FME – Facilities Management and Engineering course prefix	RFID – Radio Frequency Identification
FoE – Foundations of Excellence®	RHC – Ray Hartstein Campus in Skokie
GED – General Education Development	SAAT – Student Academic Assessment Team
GFOA – Government Finance Officers Association	SAILS – Standardized Assessment of Information Literacy Skills
GOST – Go Online Support Team	SDC – Staff Development Committee
GRD – Graphic Design course prefix	SETF – Special Events Task Force
GRS – Graduation Rate Survey	SIT SIMS – Student-Industry-Teacher Simulations
HFM – Hospitality and Foodservice Management course prefix	SLP – Service Learning Program
HIT – Health Information Technology course prefix	SOAP – Standards of Academic Progress
HLC – Higher Learning Commission	STAFF – Staff Topics, Activities, Facts & Feedback Newsletter
HSV – Human Services course prefix	STEM – Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
IAC – Institutional Advisory Committee	STEP – Science Talent Expansion Program
IAI – Illinois Articulation Initiative	SURS – State University Retirement System
IBHE – Illinois Board of Higher Education	URC – Undergraduate Research Collaborative Grant
ICCB – Illinois Community College Board	VITA – Volunteers in Teaching Adults
ICISP – Illinois Consortium for International Studies and Programs	VMV – Vision, Mission and Values
IDEA – Illinois Drafting Education Association	WISE – Welcome, Inform, Support and Engage
IMS – Instructional Media Services	WWW – World Wide Web course prefix
IPEDS – Integrated Post-secondary Education Data Systems	



Oakton Community College

Des Plaines Campus

1600 East Golf Road, Des Plaines, Illinois 60016

Ray Hartstein Campus

7701 North Lincoln Avenue, Skokie, Illinois 60077

www.oakton.edu

847.635.1600