



Los Angeles Community College District

District Planning Committee



District/College Roles & Functions Assessment Report

Approved by the DPC: February 26, 2010
Approved by the Board of Trustees, March 10, 2010

Survey Purpose & Methodology

As part of its first evaluation of the delineation of District and college roles and functions, the District Planning Committee surveyed stakeholder assessments of the accuracy of the definition of the “District/College Relationship” as contained in the “District/College Functional Map” (2008). This brief survey was undertaken in response to accreditor recommendations received during the spring 2009 “Cityside” round of self study visits at East Los Angeles College, Los Angeles City College, and Los Angeles Trade-Technical College. Offered online and in paper form, the survey asked respondents to read the two-page description of the District/College Relationship as it originally appeared on pages 3 and 4 of the 2008 version of the *LACCD District/College Functional Map* and then invited them to rate the accuracy of this description in relation to District and college roles.

The summary definition of the District/College relationship in the 2008 *Functional Map* offered a thumbnail sketch of the history of the District and the development of the District/college relationship. This history was told in three succinct paragraphs:

The relationship between the nine LACCD colleges and the District Office is by nature both complex and continuously evolving. During the district’s early years, the operations of the District Office were highly centralized, with the District Office or district-wide organizations controlling nearly all critical college decisions and processes related to college finance and budget, capital projects, hiring, payroll, contracts, and curriculum. Following the Board’s decision to reform and restructure the District in 2000, the colleges were given more autonomy and authority for local decision making. This was done to increase college capacity for strategic leadership, to streamline administrative processes, to encourage innovation across the district, and to make college decision makers more directly accountable to the local communities they serve.

Since that time, the role of the District Office in relation to the colleges has shifted from one of ‘command and control’ to one that might best be described as ‘coordination & service.’ While the District Office once directed all major college processes, today district administrators and staff work collaboratively with the colleges to achieve a mutually-defined, mutually-supportive mission. As a result, college and district personnel tend to collaborate closely on almost every process...

This ‘hybrid’ approach to the distribution of organizational responsibilities can be seen in almost every aspect of district/college function—from the setting of FTES and budget targets to the mutually reinforcing activities of District and college Student Success and planning committees.

Next, the areas of administrative activity that remain centralized at the District Office were offered in a series of 12 bullet points:

- The Board of Trustees and Board Operations
- The Personnel Commission
- The Office of General Counsel
- District-wide bond programs
- District IT Systems
- Internal audit and accounting
- Attendance accounting and student information reporting
- The coordination of district-wide grants
- Collective bargaining
- Negotiation of health benefits
- Long-term financial planning
- Compliance with mandated reporting requirements

Then, the seven primary roles and responsibilities of the District Office were offered:

Within this mutually-defined, collaborative relationship, the District Office exists to fulfill the following functions:

1. To provide vision and leadership for the strategic institutional development and long-term financial stability of the District and District colleges;
2. To provide a district-wide framework for institutional self assessment, accountability, and continuous organizational improvement;
3. To assure compliance with state and federal laws and mandates through the implementation of Board Rules, Chancellor's Directives, Administrative Regulations, and other adopted procedures;
4. To provide essential administrative support services in areas related to educational programs, student services, business and financial services, and bond and capital construction programs;
5. To facilitate coordination of college activities and the sharing of best practices across the District, when appropriate;
6. To identify and implement district-wide collaborative projects and joint services that result in increased efficiencies and economies of scale;
7. To represent the District and District colleges to external stakeholders and constituencies.

Finally, the roles and responsibilities of the colleges were summarized:

Within this mutually reinforcing relationship, the colleges fulfill the following functions:	
1.	To provide effective educational programs and student support services that lead to verifiable student learning outcomes and that meet the varied needs of local communities;
2.	To provide current and prospective students with clear information about college and career pathways, campus resources, course offerings, degree/certificate options, and financial aid through effective counseling services, marketing, and community outreach;
3.	To comply with all accreditation eligibility requirement and standards;
4.	To maintain effective partnership with K-12 and 4-year partner institutions, including maintenance of articulation and transfer agreements;
5.	To plan and manage operational budgets effectively and meet annual budget targets;
6.	To create, implement, and assess the effectiveness of all college planning efforts, including those related to educational, facilities, student services, information technology master plans and program review;
7.	To oversee the implementation of bond and other capital construction programs;
8.	To provide effective human resources services, intra-organizational communications, and professional development, and training opportunities for all college employees;
9.	To maintain positive and productive relationships with local business, civic, and community organizations via advisory groups and participation in local associations;
10.	To provide students and staff with a safe, clean, welcoming, and culturally responsive campus environment.

Once respondents had read this description of the “District/College Functional Relationship,” they were invited to indicate their level of agreement on a five-part Likert scale with the following two statements:

Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with the following statements by placing an “X” in the appropriate box on the right.		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Opinion/ Don't Know
1.	The delineation of <u>district-level</u> functions offered below from the “District/College Functional Map” accurately reflects the primary roles and responsibilities of the District in relationship to the colleges.					
2.	The delineation of <u>college-level</u> functions offered below from the “District/College Functional Map” accurately reflects the primary roles and responsibilities of the District in relationship to the colleges.					

The survey instrument then asked respondents to offer open-ended suggestions for editorial changes to the text of the definition that would increase its accuracy. Respondents were also asked to suggest “organizational or administrative changes” they felt would improve the relationship between the colleges and the District system.

Given the fact that the survey required a significant amount of contextualization before subjects could respond to it in an informed way, the DPC agreed that it would not be effective to send it out to all District employees. Instead, the decision was made to focus on surveying the faculty, students, staff, and administrators who are most centrally involved in district-wide decision making bodies and processes. This group includes the following:

- The Chancellor’s Cabinet
- The District Council of Academic Affairs
- The District Council of Student Services
- The District Administrative Council
- The District Academic Senate (Full membership)
- The Executive Board of the American Federation of Teachers Union, Local 1521
- The Executive Board of the AFT 1521 Staff Guild
- The nine College Academic Senates (Full membership)
- The nine College Shared Governance Committees (Full membership, including faculty, administrators, staff, and students)
- The Student Affairs Committee (including the nine ASO college student presidents)

This was the same group of district-wide leaders who were asked to participate in the recent Assessment of District-level Governance and Decision Making study.

Paper copies of the survey were initially distributed during an accreditation update to attendees at the AFT Department Chairs Workshop on October 23, 2009. Thereafter, all district-level administrative councils, the nine college governance councils, the nine college academic senates, and the stakeholder groups listed above were visited by members of the DPC, provided with an overview of the roles and functions assessment survey, and invited to complete it online.

In all, 185 surveys were completed, with stakeholder groups being represented as follows:

Stakeholder Group	Total Responses	Response %
Faculty	71	38.3%
Department Chairs	50	27.0%
Administrators	32	17.3%
Classified Staff	21	11.4%
Managers	2	1.1%
Students (ASO)	2	1.1%
Not Identified	7	3.8%
Total	185	100%

Of this group, it is important to note that since department chairs are also faculty members, the number of faculty respondents totaled 121 and represented 65.3% of all those submitting a survey.

Distribution of respondents by District location broke down as follows:

Location	Total Responses	% Response
East Los Angeles College	27	14.6%
Los Angeles City College	25	13.5%
Los Angeles Harbor College	16	8.6%
Los Angeles Mission College	12	6.5%
Pierce College	24	13.0%
Los Angeles Southwest College	3	1.6%
Los Angeles Trade-Tech College	25	13.5%
Los Angeles Valley College	22	11.9%
West Los Angeles College	25	13.5%
District Office	4	2.2%
Not Identified	2	1.1%
Total Responding	185	100%

Survey Findings: Accuracy of the Delineation of Roles and Functions Description

Responses to the two Likert Scale items were generally more positive, while comments offered by respondents tended to be more critical of the District/college relationship. 66% of those responding to the survey agreed that the delineation of district-level functions offered in the 2008 version of the *District/College Functional Map* accurately reflects the primary roles and responsibilities of the District in relationship to the colleges. Only 7.8% of those surveyed indicated any disagreement with the summary description offered in the *Functional Map*. The second item relating to the description of college roles and responsibilities elicited a slightly more positive response. Nearly 68% of those responding agreed that the delineation of college-level functions offered in the 2008 *District/College Functional Map* accurately reflects the primary roles and responsibilities of the colleges. Only 6% of respondents disagreed with this assertion.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Opinion/Don't Know
1. The delineation of district-level functions offered below from the "District/College Functional Map" accurately reflects the primary roles and responsibilities of the District in relationship to the colleges.	7.2% (11)	58.8% (90)	5.2% (8)	2.6% (4)	26.1% (40)
2. The delineation of college-level functions offered below from the "District/College Functional Map" accurately reflects the primary roles and responsibilities of the District in relationship to the colleges.	8.7% (13)	59.1% (88)	4.0% (6)	2.0% (3)	26.8% (40)

The relatively low number of respondents overall and the high number of those responding with “No Opinion/Don’t Know” may be the result of the fact that the survey required takers to read a rather lengthy description of the District/college relationship and the fact that this description was contained in an attachment sent out with the directions to the survey itself.

Survey Findings: Suggestions for Improvement

51 survey completers responded to the invitation to offer editorial revisions meant to improve on the description of District/college roles and functions as outlined in the 2008 *Functional Map*. Many of these comments and suggestions did not address the text of the descriptions of the functional relationship itself, but focused instead on general complaints about perceived inefficiencies of the District Office, inequities in the budget allocation process, or the imposition of state or federal mandates. However, a few specific suggestions were made for improving the delineation of District/college roles and functions. These included the following:

- Make the delineation of functions in the *Functional Map* as brief as possible
- Include a glossary of terms in the revision of the *Functional Map*
- Include payroll and CalSTRS reporting in District level functions
- Include a more accurate picture of District organization
- Include the names of those responsible for various functions

A slightly larger number of survey takers, 68 in all, offered comments and suggestions in response to the question “*What organizational or administrative changes would you suggest for improving the relationship between the District and the colleges?*” Again, many of the comments and suggestions focused on complaints about the District Office and the perceived over-centralization of administrative functions and decision making. Respondents’ suggestions for improvement fell into the following categories:

Comment/Suggestion	#
Decentralize or Rethink District/College Relations	15
Improve Communications	14
Streamline Operations/Processes	8
Increase Representation in Decision Making	4
College-related Comments	12
N/A or No Opinion or Unclear	23
OK at this time	3

As might be expected during a severe budget crisis, the largest category of suggestions had to do with improving District Office effectiveness and “decentralizing” administrative functions. Recommendations in this category ranged from cutting the budget of the District Office and providing more autonomy for colleges with a balanced budget to elimination of the Personnel Commission:

[What is needed is] An allocation model that truly reflects the student population (FTES) and needs of each college. A model that rewards colleges for innovative and successful programs and allows them to spend their ‘balances’ on their students rather than on subsidizing poor practices by other colleges.

Treat the colleges as we should treat each student, recognize the individual characteristics and not treat every college according to what is appropriate to the least common denominator.

The District must move down from [the] Administration to discover the needs [of] college programs. Faculty hold the key to the services offered to our product—the students.

While most of the suggestions in this category expressed general discontent with the District, a few specific recommendations for improving the District/college relationship did emerge, including the following:

- A reassessment and revision of the District budget allocation model to provide more equitable division of resources and to encourage fiscal responsibility
- Creation of a district-wide ombudsperson to “channel questions and concerns” between and among the colleges and the District Office
- More time spent by District senior staff at the colleges

As in the case with the District-level Governance and Decision Making Assessment, a number of respondents also suggested that more effective communications would help ease some of the problems caused by the District’s size and complexity. Indeed, the need for more effective communications was often linked to the perceived “over-centralization” of District functions.

Analysis, Conclusions & Recommendations

As in the case of the District-level Governance and Decision Making Assessment, it is not surprising that this survey of the accuracy of the delineation of District/college functions and roles elicited a number of negative critiques of the District Office. Such tensions are fairly common in the history of the District, and they have been exacerbated in recent months by the statewide budget crisis. However, it is important to note that, overall, the survey does indicate general satisfaction with the accuracy of the delineation of District and college roles and responsibilities as described within the 2008 version of the *Functional Map*.

Revision of the Functional Map

To improve, it is recommended that specific editorial revisions noted by survey completers be included in the 2010 revision of the *Functional Map*, including notations regarding payroll and STRS reporting and the creation of a glossary of terms. In addition, new sections will be added to

the revised *Functional Map* that will provide more detail on district-level governance processes and the roles played by stakeholder groups in District decision making.

Substantive Changes in District/College Relations

To address on-going concerns about District centralization and the perceived inequities of the District budget planning and allocation process, it is recommended that as part of revision of the *District Strategic Plan, 2006-2011*, District leadership take the following steps to improve District/college relations:

Recommendation 1. Review the District Budget Process

As part of the process of renewing the *District Strategic Plan*, the District's budget process should be reviewed over the next 18 months. This review (already initiated by the Fiscal Planning and Review Subcommittee of the District Budget Committee) should be designed to produce mechanisms that:

- Enforce fiscal accountability at the District and college levels
- Optimize the distribution of financial resources across the District
- Provide adequate funding for basic administrative, educational, and student support services
- Link budget and planning priorities
- Incentivize innovation and student success

Final results of this review should be reported to the District Budget Committee and to the Board of Trustees by June 15, 2011.

Recommendation 2. Optimize District/College Administrative Operations

As part of the new District Strategic Planning process slated to begin in spring 2010, a formal review of the District Office should be undertaken to accomplish the following:

- Identify and mitigate duplication of effort between District and college administrative units
- Identify any functions currently provided by the District Office that can be performed more effectively by the colleges
- Identify functions at the college-level that can be performed more effectively from the District Office

This review should be completed by the time of the adoption of the next District Strategic Plan by June 15, 2011.

Limitations of the Study

The primary challenge involved in this survey arose from the fact that it sought to assess respondents' evaluation of the accuracy of a text—that is, of the written delineation of District/college roles and responsibilities as they appear in the 2008 version of the *LACCD District/college Functional Map*. This meant that participants had to be familiar with a relatively

dense two-page definition of the District/college relationship before they could respond to the survey in an informed way. While it was possible to provide context to some of the groups surveyed during in-person meetings, including background on the Cityside accreditation reports and a thorough overview of the content of the Functional Map, it was not possible to conduct such presentations for all. Instead, many of those surveyed at the colleges were asked to read a two-page excerpt from the *Functional Map* after a brief orientation by their local District Planning Committee representatives. It is recommended that the DPC re-design this assessment effort when it is repeated as scheduled in 2011 prior to the next round of Seaside college Self Study reports and Cityside college Mid-term reports, due in spring 2012.