

Advancement Section

REPORT OF A COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION VISIT

TO

Danville Area Community College
Danville, IL

April 27-29, 2009

FOR

The Higher Learning Commission

A Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

EVALUATION TEAM

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Contents

I. Overall Observations about the Organization.....	3
II. Consultations of the Team.....	3
A. Online Degree Request.....	3
B. Criterion 1.....	5
C. Criterion 3.....	6
D. Criterion 4.....	7
III. Recognition of Significant Accomplishments, Progress, and/or Practices.....	7

I. OVERALL OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION

Danville Area Community College (DACC) is an accredited public two-year community college providing higher education opportunities for youth and adults in East Central Illinois. According to *A Chance for All*, which was written by the first President of the College, Mary Miller, the College was established initially as an extension center of the University of Illinois in 1946 to serve veterans returning from World War II who were eligible for the GI Bill. It became a public junior college named Danville Community College as part of the Danville public schools in 1949. In 1951 the name was changed to Danville Junior College. The College was housed at Danville High School until 1965, when it moved to its current location on the southeast edge of Danville, Illinois. In June of 1966 the College separated from the Danville School District under provision of the Public Junior College Act and became an independent, two-year area college under the control of the Board of Trustees of Junior College District No. 507. Danville Junior College was granted initial accreditation with the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA) in 1967. The name was changed to Danville Area Community College in 1979 to better reflect the entire district, which includes about 89,000 residents.

The College has and is serving its mission with noble purpose and commitment. The physical plant is one of its major assets with picturesque landscapes and stately buildings which are a blending of old and new. The community is delighted with the service that the College provides and is very supportive of all the College work throughout the community.

II. CONSULTATIONS OF THE TEAM

Online Degree Request

Danville Area Community College has, since it was granted permission by the Higher Learning Commission in 2004, offered several degrees through on-line learning. The potential of this medium to positively affect the college's enrollment, its connections to the communities it serves and its instructional staff is nearly limitless. The college has seen only the beginning of the interest in learning through electronic means that it will see over the next several years. However, in order to serve its students well, it must pay more careful attention to purposefully designing and implementing student services and instructional support services. Planning, administrative oversight, technical support, quality control, student support, and curriculum development are all necessary in order to offer exceptional on-line learning.

The recommendations cited below may provide fuel for thoughtful discussion among college faculty and administrators in their attempts to strengthen online learning.

- a. Development of a greater sense of "community" between and among faculty instructing through online delivery will strengthen their sense of collegiality and deepen their sense of sharing within the community. Consideration might be given to the creation of an "Online Faculty Lounge" where faculty who instruct online can chat with one another, share issues, resolve problems, etc. The creation of an "Online Advisory Council" made up of 90% faculty and 10% support staff to advise the principle decision-makers for the college's e-learning initiative could provide valuable faculty input into the creation of policies and procedures

needed to further develop the online learning activities. Face-to-Face retreats as well as virtual retreats could be established so that faculty could engage in practical sharing of “best practices”. Other social gatherings would further develop the sense of camaraderie needed for faculty teaching at a distance. The importance of creating a sense of community among faculty teaching through online delivery, who may seldom or never physically share time with one another, is critical to the further development of these online delivery programs. This “Online Advisory Council” will very easily be worked into the College’s existing CQI committee structure.

- b. Faculties at DACC are in need of more extensive staff development in issues relating to online delivery. While it is critical for them to have training associated with the actual use of the platform tools, it is vital, as well, for them to have more extensive training in instructing through electronic means. DACC might consider designing more staff development activities to ensure that faculty have both one-on-one technical support, access to a well-staffed instructional design center (or individual), and the opportunity to attend local, regional, and national seminars and symposia associated with developing the skills necessary to expand online teaching capabilities. The team would recommend attendance at conferences designed by and associated with the League for Innovation in Community Colleges, WCET, and other national leaders in online educational delivery.
- c. The creation of a college-based learning objects repository for faculty to share and the creation of an electronic resource guide would assist faculty as well.
- d. As more and more students access online learning as a mode of instruction, there is a need for faculty and administrators to be aware of the accessibility needs of students with disabilities. Consideration should be given to requiring faculty who teach online to have accessibility training prior to actually designing online learning courses.
- e. Additional support in the online learning environment is important for students as well as faculty. DACC may want to consider engaging in an Institutional Self-Assessment provided by WCET. This audit is designed to assist educational institutions in determining the level of service available to virtual students in 10 service areas, in uncovering the greatest challenges to the institutions, and in designing plans to improve student services in an online educational environment. Information can be found at <http://www.wcet.info/2.0/index.php?q=node/312> and at <http://www.centss.org/> . Even without engaging in a WCET audit, the college should examine, carefully, how its services to students can be transformed into virtual services. If students have to come to the college to hand in materials, if they have to mail applications for services, if they must come to the college to take advantage of counseling, advising, or financial aid or if the college needs to mail materials to them, there are ways to strengthen the services to ensure easy access electronically.
- f. Issues abound with business practices, coordination, policy development, etc. in the on-line world. All of these issues should be carefully reviewed, addressed, and administered. The team would recommend that administrative personnel associated with DACC’s on-line learning become actively involved with other state and national administrative leaders. Additional resource-sharing and best practice-sharing with other state consortia will likewise prove invaluable. A good source for instructional design and policy issues can be found by

examining <http://www.Distance-Educator.com> . This resource discusses issues daily relating to online learning, hosts model programming ideas, and alerts faculty to current issues relating to online delivery issues.

- g. The team would recommend careful examination of institutional policies and procedures used to handle the myriad of issues associated with online learning and students' access to such learning. While there is always a "tug" between faculty autonomy and the need to centralize or systemize policies and procedures, this team believes it is critical for DACC personnel (both faculty and administrators) to engage in the hard discussions about which policies, procedures, forms, etc. should be centralized for students' benefits and for establishing the most effective and efficient delivery mechanisms possible.
- h. Before DACC establishes additional degrees to offer through on-line learning, this team would recommend establishing working committees comprised of administrators, faculty, support staff, and students to discuss and make policy and procedure recommendations to the institution's decision-makers. Perhaps an On-line Council to oversee the college's work might be established with working groups associated with academic affairs, student services, fiscal affairs, etc. designed to engage a broader scope of the college's work. More participation by staff other than senior administrative staff is, in this team's view, critical for the college's future on-line program development. By doing so, more administrators, faculty, support staff, and students could become engaged and committed to the program's work.
- i. Lastly, the college should consider providing dedicated, sufficient leadership and support to enable its faculty and its students to engage in excellent learning through an e-learning format. Although dispersed academic leadership allows for the integration of learning across the college's academic divisions, it is important to have a centralized leader who is the champion of all aspects of the e-learning venture. Faculty must have assistance in both curricular design and professional development through the services of an instructional designer or instructional support personnel. The electronic infrastructure needs dedicated technology support, and students need access to a dedicated help desk. All aspects of the college supporting the on-line learning initiative should be carefully reviewed to ensure that it has adequate staffing to support additional work through on-line learning.

The team recognizes that the development of online programming is a challenge in many, many ways. It hopes that at least something in the recommendations above will spur greater conversation and decision-making regarding the future of online learning for Danville Area Community College.

Criterion 1

- a. A college with diverse educational offerings, deep community connections, and challenging institutional initiatives such as DACC will find it difficult to have communication structures which ensure total employee involvement. Challenges abound with keeping open lines of communication among college employees, especially when personnel are spread out within the buildings of the beautiful DACC campus. The team would recommend that the college undertake some form of communication audit to determine both the current pathways of

information flow and to discover the potential improvements to the communication processes on campus. An outside consultant may assist the college in this regard, or a cross-constituent task force might assist with the design of the audit, the analysis of data and the recommendations for institutional improvement in communication. An all-day series of discussions for all employees (Critical Communication Conversations) could be held to solicit employee feedback about present processes and to recommend new or revised processes. The critical issue, from this team's perspective, is to involve all of the employees in this discussion about strengthening the college's internal communication processes. The team recognizes that communication will always be less-than-perfect in any organization. We see, however, an opportunity for DACC to advance its internal processes by focusing upon its communication structures.

- b. It is clear from this team's collective perspective that DACC's employees are extremely proud of the college, of its students, and of the dedicated work the employees have undertaken to ensure a rich academic life for students. It is less clear, however, that all employees feel valued, involved in, and knowledgeable about the college initiatives and decision-making processes. DACC might consider a more thorough review of employee satisfaction at the college. While a brief employee satisfaction instrument has been used in the past, a more robust instrument, perhaps one similar to the Noel Levitz employee satisfaction survey might be considered. Following the completion of a more detailed employee satisfaction survey, the college might consider creating a cross-constituent team to review the data, determine the critical areas for greater review, and design a focus-group process to more completely understand these critical areas. Following this more comprehensive data collection and review, DACC's administrative team, in coordination with representatives from all college units, might design improvement strategies to address how the institution will improve policies, processes, and activities to strengthen the college's overall employee satisfaction level.

Criterion 3

- a. There should be a concerted effort to involve DACC's off-site employees in the life of the college. While it is true that the great distances between the off-sites and the main campus inhibit face-to-face contact, these distances can be ameliorated through the use of technologies. We recommend that off-site staff be allowed to participate in the meetings of the appropriate division(s) via teleconferencing methodologies. Off-site employees' email addresses should be on all appropriate mailing lists so they can receive routine mass mailings. Off-site employees should also receive all routine mass mailings that on-site employees receive (e.g., employee newsletter).
- b. All curricula for college credit offered at the off-sites should be reviewed by the DACC Curriculum Committee. This body should review these curricula with an eye toward calibrating and aligning them with the main campus.
- c. The assessment regime in place at the main campus should be replicated at the off-sites.

- d. The credentials of all instructional staff at the off-sites should be reviewed to assure that they meet the standards of DACC and the Higher Learning Commission.

Criterion 4

- a. While DACC has measures in place to assess two of the general education outcomes (communications and critical inquiry), instruments to measure technological competence or cultural awareness are lacking. Options for DACC to consider in assessing these two general education outcomes could include adding a specific course requirement for each of these general education goals, where specific skills are included in the course content that would satisfactorily meet each of these competencies. Successful completion of the course(s) would indicate competency and satisfy the general education outcome.
- b. Another option to consider is a review of literature of available instruments to measure these competencies. One possibility to further investigate is READI (Readiness for Education At a Distance Indicator). Although this tool is targeted to identifying levels of student readiness for online learning, one of its assessment components measures technical competency which is described as “measuring the degree to which the participant possesses basic instructional technology skills” with the technical knowledge section of READI “measuring the degree to which the participant possesses knowledge of items related to instructional technology.” There may well be other appropriate tools to measure these two remaining general education outcomes

III. RECOGNITION OF SIGNIFICANT ACCOMPLISHMENTS, PROGRESS, AND/OR PRACTICES

The Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) process that DACC has in place appears to provide a valuable and effective committee structure with participation and input from a cross-section of college personnel.

The College’s work with the K-12 systems in the County to provide vocation and career education on the College’s campus is laudable.