

STANDARD IX

INSTITUTIONAL INTEGRITY

INTRODUCTION

Standard IX addresses policies and procedures for handling a variety of situations that affect ethical practices at South Seattle Community College. The college strives to achieve the highest ethical standards in its representation to its constituencies and to the public; in its teaching, scholarship, and service; in its treatment of its students, faculty, and staff; and in its relationships with regulatory and accrediting agencies.

An institution's culture and its expectations affect employees' ethical behavior. Both the Chancellor of the Seattle Community College District and the President of the college have the respect of faculty and staff. The last few years have been marked by an increase in openness and a sense of pride in our instructional and institutional accomplishments.

The focus of Standard IX was to: a) ensure that the college is in compliance with this standard, b) determine whether there was a structure in place which guides the college through these issues, c) determine the extent to which college staff were involved in or aware of these issues/principles, and d) to address recommendations relating to Standard IX from the 1990 Accreditation Report. This was accomplished by reviewing existing District Policies and Procedures, examining internal structures that are established to address staff/student concerns relative to these issues, and by adding supplemental questions to the 1999 Climate Survey which specifically addressed ethics. The data gathered was then analyzed and compared with results from other surveys.

ADHERENCE TO HIGH ETHICAL STANDARDS

An institution's commitment to high ethical standards can be measured in part by employees' perceptions of fairness and openness. South Seattle Community College has made progress in many

areas, particularly in the way in which instructional and institutional decisions are made. It has moved from a closed, top-down decision-making process to a more open, broadened, advisory process as manifested by the College Council, Curriculum and Instruction Committee, and Institutional Effectiveness Committee. Satisfaction with this more participatory governance structure is reflected in the responses to the 1999 Climate Survey. Of the 14 areas of greatest increase in satisfaction from 1995 to 1999, 10 of those areas dealt with employee involvement in policy development, resource allocation, program review, information sharing, decision-making regarding institutional priorities and the college mission, and employee input. Question 128, the extent to which the college informs faculty and staff about the state ethics law and district ethics codes:

- 63 percent of both administrators and full-time faculty, 51 percent of part-time faculty, and 28 percent of classified staff were either satisfied or very satisfied
- 37 percent of administrators and full-time faculty, 48 percent of part-time faculty and 72 percent of classified staff were dissatisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, or did not know or felt the question did not apply to them

The Climate Survey also gauges employee pride. One of the areas of greatest satisfaction in the 1999 Climate Survey was Question 67: "The extent to which I am proud to be an employee of South Seattle Community College." Of the respondents, 66 percent stated they were satisfied, while only 11 percent stated they were dissatisfied.

The survey also showed a decrease in dissatisfaction regarding the communication of college policies and procedures (see Exhibits – 1999 Climate Survey). Responses to the question concerning "the extent to which state ethics law and district ethics codes are upheld at the college" revealed satisfaction among administrators, fair satisfaction from

faculty, but the most dissatisfaction (22 percent) among classified staff. Question 129 of the 1999 Climate Survey measured “the extent to which state ethics law and district ethics codes are upheld at the college.” On this question, administrators were the most satisfied (62 percent). Among faculty, 43 percent/36 percent (full/part time) were satisfied; 4 percent/3 percent were dissatisfied. Most did not know, were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, or did not think the question applied. Classified staff indicated the most dissatisfaction (22 percent).

The district has been somewhat inconsistent on how long-term employees receive information relating to the ethics laws. There are gray areas where employees may be unclear of procedure and policy. The spring 1999 Climate Survey responses to Question 128 indicated some dissatisfaction or lack of knowledge in this area.

Three questions on the climate survey addressed the hard-to-define atmosphere that sets the tone for a college. High ethical standards could be expected to correlate with a sense of mission, involvement, and commitment to the institution. Three questions on the survey show a significant increase in satisfaction with the culture of the college:

6. The extent to which the mission is reflected in decision-making (14% increase)
26. Employee involvement in policy development at the college (19% increase)
27. The extent to which employee input is sought in the decision-making process at the college (10% increase)

All three of these measures suggest that the establishment of advisory committees, such as the Curriculum and Instruction Committee (CIC) and College Council, and the integration of mission with planning and decision-making have created a more positive climate.

A sense of integrity must also be communicated to students, as an article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* pointed out (Wilson, Robin. “Colleges Urged to Better Define Academic Integrity and to Stress Its Importance,” Oct. 15, 1999, p. A18).

The Center for Academic Integrity advises institutions to adopt formal policies not merely prohibiting certain behaviors but describing the kind of behavior they expect of students.

Many teachers at South include prescriptive expectations in their syllabi; they find that knowing each student well and knowing the student’s work is the best deterrent to cheating. The Student Handbook includes a policy on plagiarism and cheating (see Exhibits – p. 24 of the 1999-2000 Student Handbook 1999-2000), warning that the college may impose sanctions for “academic dishonesty, to include cheating, plagiarism, or knowingly furnishing false information to the colleges.”

With advancing technology; however, more questions have arisen about how to insure that students do their own work. One challenge to intellectual honesty is the ease with which research papers are available on the Internet. A workshop for teachers on how to shape assignments in order to control plagiarism was conducted in April 2000.

INTEGRITY IN PRACTICES AND PROCEDURES

An institution can demonstrate integrity in its practices and procedures in different ways. First and foremost, the institution must have appropriate practices and procedures in place. The college’s policies are adopted by the Board of Trustees for the entire Seattle Community College District. The district has several policies and procedures that address ethical standards for all district employees (see Exhibits – Policies or web site address: <http://seaccd.sccd.ctc.edu/serve/policies/100/default.htm>).

At the college, employees or students can have their concerns addressed in many ways. These include formal grievance procedures as outlined in district policies and procedures and bargaining agreements; informal processes, such as town meetings, lunch club discussions, and the president’s meetings with students; and other structures such as the College Council, Faculty Senate, and CIC.

Because of the rapid increase in availability of e-mail and Internet access, the college and the district have struggled with the issues of the use of state resources. As defined in WAC 292-110-010 as adopted by the Washington State Executive Ethics Committee April 24, 1998, the state has a restrictive policy on using such resources. See the Academic Freedom section of Standard IV as an example of how the college has addressed this issue in one area.

DEALINGS WITH STUDENTS

Integrity in policies and procedures also includes the way students are dealt with, including consistency of assessment, accurate placement in courses, and the process for evaluating instructors.

Consistency of assessment is important within a required course such as English 101 that is taught by a variety of instructors, including part-time instructors. In order to define standards for grading essays, the English faculty hold norming sessions with teachers of key writing classes.

Accurate placement in required courses such as English and math is important to students because it influences how quickly and successfully they move through the curriculum in these areas. The college relies on standardized testing (Assessment Skills for Successful Entry and Transfer [ASSET], Computerized Placement and Assessment Support System [COMPASS], or Secondary Level English Proficiency [SLEP]) for initial placement. Both faculties supplement this placement, however, with secondary assessment. In the English unit, students who are dissatisfied or uncertain about their placement can do a writing sample, which is evaluated by English faculty. In Applied Communications, students are tested the first week of class and adjustments made. In ESL (English as a Second Language) classes, a writing sample and reading test are administered in classes the first week and appropriate changes are made. In math, students may be given an internally developed test that double-checks their placement in arithmetic, algebra, or precalculus.

On the 1996 Student Survey, 59 percent of students felt they were correctly placed in their first math course; 26 percent disagreed that they were; 15 percent found the question not applicable. In English, 64 percent felt they were correctly placed; 22 percent disagreed, and 1 percent found the question not applicable.

Students must have a fair method of evaluating instructors. On the same survey, 56 percent of students were very satisfied or satisfied with the “quality of the process that gives students the opportunity to evaluate their instructors”; 32 percent were neutral; 12 percent were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. With respect to knowing how to make a complaint, 42 percent of students said they had wanted to make a complaint at one time, but only 24 percent knew where to go. Of the 22 percent who had talked to a college employee about a complaint, 30 percent were very satisfied or satisfied with the service received; 44 percent were neutral, and 26 percent were dissatisfied or very satisfied. The complaint policy is published in the Student Handbook and is also published on occasion in the student newspaper, *The Sentinel*.

The impulse for distance learning has been very strong among administrators and district personnel, who see it as one solution to access, enrollment, and staffing problems. When Distance Learning courses were first introduced on campus, several discussions were initiated by faculty. These discussions shifted the focus to the instructional and learning advantages and disadvantages.

For Distance Learning, evaluation of instructors and making complaints is more difficult because many are taught by instructors at other institutions. To address this issue, the WAOL (Washington On Line) course outlines and syllabi have been approved by South’s CIC. Instructor evaluation procedures are left to the institution offering credit for the course, but none of the usual administrative review processes (observations, tenure and post-tenure evaluations, for example) are in place, so this merits ongoing review through the program review process.

REGULAR REVIEW AND UPDATING OF POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

District policies and procedures are reviewed and updated on an ongoing basis. During the 1998-2000 years, all district policies have been reviewed, many updated, and several rewritten.

The college also endeavors to institutionalize integrity or ethical behavior through its Mission and Goals and its Strategic Plan. All three of these are bound together and play a pivotal role in how the college allocates its budget and makes decisions.

ACCURATE REPRESENTATION

South Seattle Community College makes every effort to represent itself to its constituencies, the public, and prospective students, in a clear, accurate and concise manner. College publications are regularly reviewed for compliance with statutes and accuracy of information. The process through which the major publications move is a cumbersome but careful one that involves collaboration to promote accuracy, effectiveness, and consistency of message about the college.

The 1990 Self-Study recommended that the college catalogue developed by the district be reviewed and revised to make it more user friendly to students and to describe student options and responsibilities. The 1998-2000 Catalog has two changes that make it more readable for students: Programs are listed by college with easy to find labels (“Basic Studies South”) on the edges of “thumbable” pages; course descriptions for all courses are listed alphabetically at the back with the same edge labels (“Course Descriptions Combined Campus”).

The institutional web site for the college is another platform from which information goes out to the public. The college has had some difficulty in hiring a webmaster to update and maintain the web site because of a competitive employment market. A temporary solution has been to use the webmaster instructor and student interns to maintain the site. The collaborative processes used to produce the class schedule and program brochures will be used as the web site grows.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All Seattle Community College District Employees and Board of Trustee members are required to follow the policies and procedures outlined by the Seattle Community Colleges relating to conflict of interest issues. These include policies on the legal basis of the Board of Trustees, a code of ethics for the Board of Trustees, a policy on tendering and accepting gifts, ethical conduct, conflict of interest standards, and employment of relatives (see Exhibits – Policies 100-07, 131, 152, and 400.10-.80 and 410 in the Exhibit or <http://seaccd.sccd.ctc.edu/serve/policies/100/default.htm>). Policies governing trustees are given to them at the time of appointment and covered in the trustee orientations. In addition, the Trustee Association for Community and Technical Colleges and the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges keep trustees apprised of state laws pertaining to their work.

All policies are listed and are accessible on the Seattle Community College District Web Site (<http://www.sccd.ctc.edu/serve/policies/index>). In addition, new employee orientation on the district level includes information on the State Employee Whistleblower Act (Procedures and Protections for Reporting State Employee Misconduct) and the Ethical Conduct/Conflict of Interest Standards. At this orientation, every new full-time employee, in all constituent groups, receives relevant policies and procedures.

The 1995 Campus Climate Survey indicated that not everyone was aware of the requirements of the Washington State Ethics Law. In order to rectify this situation, in September of 1998, the college presented a workshop entitled “Ethics is for Everyone” for Managers, Administrators, and Supervisors. The presentation was given by the Washington State Executive Ethics Board and provided a general review of the Washington State Ethics Law.

The Part-Time Faculty Guide, now online (www.sccd.ctc.edu/ptf/), addresses the issues of receiving gifts, using electronic messaging systems, and using the internet in acceptable and unacceptable ways.

ACADEMIC FREEDOM

The Seattle Community College District expresses its commitment to intellectual and academic freedom in its collective bargaining agreement with the Seattle Community College Federation of Teachers, in District Policy 365 “Student Rights, Freedoms, and Responsibilities (Exhibit # 1, Standard 9.), and in District Procedure, “Student Complaints” (See Exhibits).

The collective bargaining agreement states in section 6.9 that “academic freedom is viewed as the freedom of speech guaranteed to all citizens by the First Amendment. Free inquiry and free discourse shall not be abridged, whether directly or indirectly, by statute or community pressure.” The agreement further states that academic freedom specifically includes freedom in the classroom and a prohibition on censorship of library collections.

Student freedom of inquiry is assured by District Policy 365 that states that “Seattle Community College District exists for the transmission of knowledge, the pursuit of truth, the development of students, and the general well-being of society. Free inquiry, free expression, protection against improper academic evaluation, and protection against improper disclosure are indispensable to the attainment of these goals.”

District Procedure 370.40f, “Complaints Regarding Grades” (See Exhibits) further protects the academic freedom of faculty by specifying that “course mastery is exclusively within the province of the instructor of a particular course.”

Recently the district has confronted the possible conflict between its commitment to academic freedom and its policy and procedures on the use of e-mail and the Internet. The district and the SCCFT recognize that state law forbids use of electronic resources for personal ends, political campaigning, or harassment of individuals. Faculty were concerned that these restrictions not prevent faculty and students from discussing unpopular or offensive views via e-mail and the world wide web. A committee of faculty and administrators crafted a set of procedures which will protect free inquiry while at

the same time respecting state law (see Policy 259, “Use of Electronic Information Resources”).

Other issues addressed under academic freedom related the state’s current emphasis on accountability and the objective measurement of outcomes has resulted in some pressure on faculty to place the college’s student learning outcomes in course syllabi. The bargaining agreement clearly states, however, that “No restraint other than those required by the nature of the curriculum shall be placed on academic employees regarding the content of their teaching or conduct of their classes,” so including SLOs cannot be a requirement for syllabi. However, the Student Learning Outcomes were adopted by the entire faculty. The Curriculum and Instruction Committee does consider how they are addressed through the program review process, in course outlines.

With respect to whether academic freedom is respected and upheld at the college, 48 percent of full-time faculty indicated they were satisfied or very satisfied. Part-time faculty and administrators responded in a similar manner except that a higher number of full-time faculty were dissatisfied (16% compared to 9%). The next larger number, 36 percent, were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. Sixteen percent were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied; 10% did not know or felt it did not apply. These answers indicate that for the majority, the issue is either not of high concern, not clear, or a source of dissatisfaction. Since the daily work of teachers depends upon academic freedom, this issue merits further study.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

As seen in the first 8 standards and in the issues raised in Standard IX, the faculty and staff of South Seattle Community College have expressed a sense of greater openness in the college climate, increased satisfaction with involvement in decision-making, and more pride in working at the college. Since 1995, additional strengths related to the integrity of the institution that have emerged include consistency in placement of students and in instructional standards and a system of regular program review.

As the college has continued to improve, change is occurring rapidly in higher education with increasing demands placed on flexibility and responsiveness.

Several continuing and emerging areas require our attention:

- Decision-making around Distance Learning and evaluation of instruction that originates off-campus
- More opportunities, especially for classified staff, to discuss and/or gain information about ethics policies
- Academic freedom
- Presentation of accurate schedule information on the Web

In response to these concerns, the college has initiated the following:

- A joint (administrative-faculty) district committee to make policy concerning Distance Learning; this committee was negotiated in 1999 and began meeting in 2000.
- Updating the college webpages through the webmaster instructional program

Other actions under consideration include:

- Distribution of a copy of the policies to all employees/constituent groups at the same time each year
- Providing employees with information about who on campus they can address questions to and establishing ways of updating and providing information through campus communication systems
- A workshop for faculty and administrators exploring the nature, purpose, and condition of academic freedom at the college

Standard IX

Index

Academic Freedom	193
Accurate Representation	192
Adherence to Ethical Standards	189
Conflict of Interest	192
Dealings With Students	191
Formal grievance procedures	190
Integrity In Practices and Procedures	190
Regular Review and Updating of Policies and Procedures	192
Student Handbook	190

