

Palo Alto College
Institutional Core Curriculum Evaluation Report
2010

Overview

Palo Alto College is a public, two-year, open-enrollment institution located on the south side of San Antonio and is one of the Alamo Colleges, serving San Antonio and the surrounding area. Palo Alto is an institution with particularly strong ties to its community. It exists as the realization of a focused community effort, spearheaded in 1982 by the Communities Organized for Public Service (COPS), a grassroots, predominantly Hispanic organization, to bring an institution of higher learning to the underserved south side of San Antonio. Subsequent enrollment growth at Palo Alto has measured the dimension of that unmet need, increasing from the original 231 students in fall of 1985 to 8,335 students in fall of 2009. Palo Alto has since been federally designated as a Hispanic-Serving Institution and brings higher education to a community with particular needs: approximately one-fifth of the student population is first-time-in-college and approximately 45 percent of the student population receives need-based financial aid. Palo Alto's four core values reflect its commitment to serve the population that brought it into being: *Student Success, Quality of Instruction, Commitment to Community, and Appreciation of Diversity*, and Palo Alto's mission rests upon those values: *to educate, nurture, and inspire students through a dynamic and supportive learning environment, which promotes the intellectual, cultural, economic and social life of the community.*

During the 25 years since its initial semester, Palo Alto College has diversified and expanded its offerings in order to meet the emerging and changing needs of the community.

The nature of student success, core to the college values, has also undergone an inevitable change. Inextricably tied to the college mission, student success potentially had a wealth of definitions; promoting intellectual, cultural, economic and social life gave success innumerable avenues to pursue. Consequently, three of the five strategic goals established by Palo Alto for the years 2006-2011 address specifically the need to diversify offerings and broaden the definition of success. Palo Alto, having found an early strength in, and early recognition for, transferring students into four-year institutions, has since worked steadily to greatly diversify its pathways to success. Palo Alto now offers a broad array of two-year programs in the arts and sciences, culminating in AA and AS degrees, and a growing number of career and technical programs, which may culminate at the certificate level or with an AAT or AAS degree. Community and corporate education has seen tremendous growth, and works closely with local businesses to provide multiple and direct pathways into employment.

At the heart of this constant change, however, is Palo Alto's belief that while education is infinitely varied in its specific goals, it is constant to an underlying purpose. That is, in order to thrive in a changing, sometimes kaleidoscopic world, it is the purpose of an exemplary education to ensure that every student has basic intellectual habits and skills that will promise a life of enquiry and understanding, founded in a sense of personal and social responsibility, and enriched by a lively appreciation for diversity. The core curriculum as outlined by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) in its rules and guidelines is founded in this same belief, and works to ensure that these fundamental educational goals are met for students pursuing two- or four-year degrees. In the report and appendices which follow is a summary of the work the faculty at Palo Alto have done to strengthen and diversify Palo Alto's core

curriculum since submitting the 2004 *Institutional Core Curriculum Report* to the Coordinating Board.

Purpose and Substance of the Palo Alto Core Curriculum

The purpose statement for the Palo Alto core curriculum appears in the college bulletins from 2004 through 2009 (see *Palo Alto College Bulletin 2007-2009*, p. 31), and is as follows:

The Core Curriculum for the Associate of Arts and the Associate of Science degrees at Palo Alto College reflects a common experience in academic foundation and provides a basis for transferability not only within the Alamo Community Colleges, but also among other Texas colleges and universities. The competency-based core aids in the development of academically capable and knowledgeable students whose basic intellectual skills include reading, writing, speaking, listening, critical thinking, and computer literacy.

In this statement Palo Alto declares that its core curriculum serves two primary purposes. The first parallels the Coordinating Board premise that the core curriculum is designed to facilitate transfer between public institutions of higher education in Texas; the second lists as specific Palo Alto goals the six basic intellectual competencies identified in the THECB core curriculum guidelines as necessary to success in any field of academic study or professional career. As can be seen in Appendix A in the Comprehensive Compliance Review Spreadsheet under the Intellectual tab, each of the courses in the Palo Alto core have been chosen because their learning outcomes address several of these basic competencies.

It is also the purpose of the Palo Alto core to provide students with an opportunity to develop each of the eight perspectives recommended by the THECB. The basic intellectual competencies cannot be strengthened and are without purpose until brought to bear on content. In turn, content provides merely training until disciplines are brought together, opposing theories creatively juxtaposed, and information is evaluated from multiple points of view. Perspective allows logic, aesthetics, science, and ethics to work together to provide a broader arena, a more informed space, in which the necessary decisions and judgments of life can be made. The core curriculum courses at Palo Alto have been evaluated for their contribution to these perspectives, and this evaluation is summarized in Appendix A in the Comprehensive Core Compliance Review Spreadsheet under the Perspectives Tab.

The substance of the Palo Alto core curriculum has undergone an interesting journey since the 2004 core curriculum report. The Alamo Colleges began in 2007 the process of constructing a common core curriculum for the five colleges in the Alamo Community College District. Under the leadership of the Chancellor, Dr. Bruce Leslie, the faculty of the Alamo Colleges worked at this time to align in several other areas, and many conversations were initiated on topics new to cross-college discussion. The structure of developmental education, college level course descriptions, prerequisites, and basic skill levels were alignment projects brought underway at the same time that work on a common core was begun. What follows is a brief summary and timeline for the development of the new, common core curriculum:

- September 2007: Work on the common core began under the direction of Dr. Zeigler, President of San Antonio College.

- December 2007: The deans, or designees, from each of the colleges were charged to work as a group to initiate discussions among faculty within the core disciplines in order to gather their recommendations for a common core.
- December 2007-April 2008: Conversations were held among the faculty and core curricula were collected from colleges throughout Texas for comparison purposes. Close scrutiny was made of the core exemplary educational objectives, the perspectives, and the underlying philosophy of the core curriculum, and the unique goals of each of the colleges were brought forward for discussion and accommodation in the process.
- May 2008: The first draft of a common core curriculum was submitted to the Vice Presidents of Academic Affairs for review, with three areas still without consensus: Humanities (41), the Institutionally Designated Option (90), and whether to include unique needs courses in the core.
- August 2008: The VPAAAs recommended the following: a) that the computer science courses intended to address computer literacy be dropped from the Institutionally Designated Option and the 90s component area address specifically health and wellness by requiring two hours of Kinesiology or Dance, b) that unique needs courses be kept in the core, and c) that the decision to include courses other than sophomore level literature classes in the 41 component area be tabled for further faculty review.
- September 2008-December 2008: A cross-college meeting with faculty representing the humanities, philosophy, history, languages, and English was held in order to find consensus over courses to include in component area 41. Two points of view distilled from this discussion. One held that humanities, philosophy, world history and language

courses should be included as choices in this area, in the belief that undergraduate students should have the greatest possible breadth of choice among the disciplines in the core. The second held that writing skills were of such a critical need for all students that the 41 area should be designed to ensure a focus on that basic intellectual competency, and therefore should include only sophomore level literature courses. The issues raised were not resolved; representatives returned to their respective colleges to discuss the issues again with a larger body of faculty. A small representative group met twice concluding on December 10, 2008.

- The final recommendation held that the three credit hours required by humanities component area 41 would include the following choices: all 2000-level literature courses, two world civilization courses, PHIL 2306 Ethics, HUMA 2319 American Minority Studies, and two 2000-level Spanish courses. These courses were all determined to be writing intensive.

The new common core curriculum for the Alamo Colleges was approved by the Alamo Colleges Board of Trustees in June, 2009, approved by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board in November, 2009, and became effective at each of the colleges in the fall semester of 2009.

Part 1: Extent to Which the Core Curriculum is Consistent with the Elements of the Core Curriculum Recommended by the THECB

The Palo Alto College (PAC) core curriculum, in both of its incarnations since the 2004 core curriculum report (referred to in this report as the 2004-2009 and the 2009-present core curricula), is designed to satisfy the exemplary educational objectives as defined under the

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board’s framework of five major component areas: Communication, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Humanities and Visual and Performing Arts, and Social and Behavioral Sciences. In addition to meeting these objectives, Palo Alto College elected in both of these core curricula to include the sixth component area, the Institutionally Designated Option as specified in the *Core Curriculum: Assumptions and Defining Characteristics*, in order to address exemplary outcomes not included in the five major component areas. In the 2004-2009 Palo Alto core, this institutionally designated option was chosen in order to address the objectives of both computer literacy, and health and wellness. In the 2009-present core curriculum, after the collective scrutiny of faculty across the Alamo Colleges and after considerable research and debate, this option was redesigned in order to focus on health and wellness.

Specifically, the 2004-2009, 47-hour core and the 2009-present 45-hour core both satisfy the semester credit hour parameters as outlined by Charts I and II in Chapter Four, Subchapter B, Section 4.28 of the THECB Rules and Regulations. Chart I and Chart II, which follow, outline this comparison:

CHART I (Must include a minimum of 36 semester credit hours)

Component Area	Minimum Semester Credit Hours Required by the THECB	Semester Credit Hours Required by 2004-2009 PAC Core	Semester Credit Hours Required by PAC 2009-present Core
(10) Communications	6 (English rhetoric/composition)	6 (English composition)	6 (English composition)
(20) Mathematics	3 (logic, college-level algebra equivalent, or above)	3 (college-level algebra or above)	3 (college-level algebra or above)
(30) Natural Sciences	6	7	7
(40 and 50)) Humanities, and Visual	6 (3 hours from the Humanities (40) and 3	3 (Humanities) 3 (Visual and	3 (Humanities) 3 (Visual and

and Performing Arts	from Visual and Performing Arts (50))	Performing Arts)	Performing Arts)
	15 (6 hours from U.S. History (60), 6 from Political Science (70), and 3 from the Social and Behavioral Sciences (80))	6 (U.S. History) 6 (Government) 3 (Social and Behavioral Sciences)	6 (U.S. History) 6 (Government) 3 (Social and Behavioral Sciences)
Total: 36 hours		Total: 37 hours	Total: 37 hours

CHART II (Institutions may select an additional 6-12 semester hours)

Component Area	Possible Additional Semester Credit Hours	Additional Semester Credit Hours Required by PAC 2004-2009 Core Curriculum	Additional Semester Credit Hours Required by PAC 2009-present Core Curriculum
(11) Communication (composition, speech, modern language, communication skills)	Up to 6	3 (speech)	3 (speech)
(21) Mathematics (finite math, statistics, calculus, or above)	Up to 3	0	0
(31) Natural Sciences	Up to 3	0	0
(41) Humanities (literature, philosophy, modern or classical language/literature and cultural studies)	Up to 3	3 (sophomore level literature and Spanish, freshman and sophomore level philosophy and humanities)	3 (sophomore level literature, history, philosophy, and Spanish)
(81) Social and Behavioral Sciences	Up to 3	0	0
(90) Institutionally Designated Option (May include additional hours in the categories listed above, computer literacy, health/wellness, or other courses that address the institutional mission.)	Up to 6	1 (kinesiology or dance) 3 (computer literacy)	2 (kinesiology, health and wellness, or dance)
		Total: 10 hours	Total: 8 hours

The courses chosen for inclusion in the core component areas for both the 2004-2009 and the 2009-present Palo Alto core curriculum were evaluated by faculty in terms of the number of learning outcomes which satisfied the exemplary educational objectives for their respective component areas. Attached in Appendix A is the Comprehensive Core Compliance Exemplary Outcomes Spreadsheet which summarizes for each Palo Alto course its contribution to the exemplary objectives. The individual course matrices, which are available on request, are the result of a course-by-course review of syllabi, learning outcomes, and assessment instruments conducted by Palo Alto faculty, lead instructors, and department chairs. A table detailing the changes made to the 2004 Palo Alto College core courses as a result of the work done to create a district common core curriculum in 2009 is in Appendix B of this report.

Part 2: Extent to Which the Palo Alto Core Curriculum is Consistent with the Texas Common Course Numbering System

All Palo Alto College core curriculum courses, with the exception of certain courses in kinesiology (falling within the 90s component area), follow the Texas Common Course Numbering System (TCCNS). Palo Alto College received permission from the THECB to number certain 2000-level physical activity KINE courses above the TCCNS maximum of 2150 in order to accommodate the large number of activity courses offered. These exceptions to the TCCNS rules are the following:

1. KINE 2176 Cardio Boot Camp II
2. KINE 2178 Jogging II
3. KINE 2180 Spin Bike II

4. KINE 2182 Walking II
5. KINE 2184 Weight Training II

All other kinesiology physical and recreational courses fall within the 1100-1150 and 2100-2150 range allowed by the TCCNS.

As part of the ongoing Alamo Colleges' curriculum alignment work almost all course titles at Palo Alto College have been changed to match those in the *2009 Academic Course Guide Manual* (ACGM). The work in this area is almost complete, and Appendix C of this report consists of a chart comparing the Palo Alto College Core courses and their titles to their counterparts in the 2009 ACGM. The core courses at Palo Alto College that do not conform to the ACGM titles are the following:

- ENGL 2375 – *Literature for Children and Adolescents*: this is a unique needs course in the PAC core curriculum and as such has no counterpart in the ACGM.
- The remaining Palo Alto College core curriculum course titles which do not match the corresponding course titles in the ACGM are similar enough to convey the same meaning. They are listed in the following chart:

Texas Common Course Number	Palo Alto College (Alamo Colleges) Core Course Title	ACGM Course Title
BIOL 1308	Principles of Biology	Biology for Non-Science Majors I
BIOL 1322	Introduction to Nutrition	Nutrition & Diet Therapy
BIOL 2301	Principles of Anatomy and Physiology	Anatomy & Physiology I
BIOL 2401	Human Anatomy and Physiology I	Anatomy & Physiology I
BIOL 2402	Human Anatomy and Physiology II	Anatomy & Physiology II

BIOL 2404	Human Anatomy and Physiology	Anatomy & Physiology
BIOL 2420	Microbiology and Pathology	Microbiology for Non-Science Majors
BIOL 2421	Microbiology	Microbiology for Science Majors
PHYS 1405	Introductory Physics I	Elementary Physics I
PHYS 1407	Introductory Physics II	Elementary Physics II
FREN 1411	Elementary French I	Beginning French 1
FREN 1412	Elementary French II	Beginning French II
SGNL 1301	American Sign Language I	Beginning American Sign Language I
SGNL 1302	American Sign Language II	Beginning American Sign Language II
GOVT 2305	National Government	Federal Government (Federal constitution & topics)
GOVT 2306	State Government	Texas Government (Texas constitution & topics)
KINE 1238	Concepts of Fitness and Wellness	Introduction to Physical Fitness & Sport
KINE 1301	Foundations of Kinesiology	Introduction to Physical Fitness & Sport
KINE 1308	Intramurals and Officiating	Sports Officiating I
KINE 1331	Physical Education for Elementary Education	Physical Education for Elementary Education Majors

Part 3: The Extent to Which Palo Alto’s Core Curriculum is Consistent With the Elements of the Core Curriculum Component Areas, Intellectual Competencies, and Perspectives as expressed in “Core Curriculum: Assumptions and Defining Characteristics” adopted by THECB

In order to assess how closely the Palo Alto College core curriculum adheres to the guiding principles for core curricula as provided in the Coordinating Board’s *Core Curriculum: Assumptions and Defining Characteristics*, Palo Alto College faculty completed 30 discipline-specific core matrix spreadsheets. A representative core matrix (Biology) can be found in Appendix D. These matrices cross-walk the spring 2010 course objectives for each core course to the exemplary objectives for the respective component area, to the basic intellectual

competencies, and to the eight core perspectives. In addition to this, faculty indicated their assessment methods on these matrices. A compilation of these crosswalk matrices can be found in the two Comprehensive Spreadsheets in Appendix A.

The Extent to Which Palo Alto's Core Curriculum is Consistent with the Elements of the Core Curriculum Component Areas

The core matrix spreadsheets (the Biology example is in Appendix D) show that Palo Alto's course objectives for core curriculum courses are consistent with the exemplary educational objectives of the core curriculum component areas. The Comprehensive Core Compliance Exemplary Educational Objectives spreadsheet in Appendix A compiles the core matrices for each component area in order to provide a clear, one-chart view of how closely PAC core objectives mirror the exemplary educational objectives. A summary analysis of this data for the core courses in each component area, taken from this comprehensive spreadsheet, follows:

Communication: All the communication core courses address all six Communication exemplary educational objectives.

Mathematics: All the mathematics core courses address all seven Mathematics exemplary educational objectives

Natural Sciences: Eighty-seven to 97 percent of the natural sciences core courses meet each of the exemplary educational objectives for this component area. The specific percentages for each objective follow.

Objective 1. “To understand and apply methods and appropriate technology to the study of natural sciences:” Ninety-seven percent (38/39) of the natural sciences core courses address this objective.

Objective 2. “To recognize scientific and quantitative methods and the differences between these approaches and other methods of inquiry and to communicate findings, analyses, and interpretation both orally and in writing:” Ninety-seven percent (38/39) of the natural sciences core courses address this objective.

Objective 3. “To identify and recognize the differences among competing scientific theories:” Eighty-seven percent (34/39) of the natural sciences core courses address this objective.

Objective 4. “To demonstrate knowledge of the major issues and problems facing modern science, including issues that touch upon ethics, values, and public policies:” Ninety-five percent (37/39) of the natural sciences core courses address this objective.

Objective 5. “To demonstrate knowledge of the interdependence of science and technology and their influence on, and contribution to, modern culture:” Ninety-two percent (36/39) of the natural sciences core courses address this objective.

Humanities and Visual and Performing Arts: All of the humanities and visual and performing arts core courses address exemplary objectives one, two, five, and six for this component area. Objectives with slightly less than 100 percent compliance follow:

Objective 3. “To respond critically to works in the arts and humanities:” Ninety-seven percent (38/39) of the core humanities and visual and performing arts courses address this objective.

Objective 4. “To engage in the creative process or interpretive performance and comprehend the physical and intellectual demands required of the author or visual or performing artist:” Ninety-five percent (37/39) of the core humanities and visual and performing arts courses address this objective.

Objective 7. “To demonstrate knowledge of the influence of literature, philosophy, and/or the arts on intercultural experiences:” Ninety-two percent (36/39) of the core humanities and visual and performing arts courses address this objective.

Social and Behavioral Sciences: Of the 36 core courses in the component areas of political science, and social and behavioral science, all of the government, history, economics, communication, and geography courses address all of the exemplary educational objectives for social and behavioral sciences; also, every core course in these component areas addresses objective three (“To use and critiques alternative explanatory systems or theories.”). A summary of the degree to which the Palo Alto core addresses the remaining educational objectives for this area follows:

Objective 1. “To employ the appropriate methods, technologies, and data that social and behavioral scientists use to investigate the human condition:” Ninety-four percent (34/36) core social and behavioral sciences courses address this objective.

Objective 2. “To examine social institutions and processes across a range of historical periods, social structures, and cultures:” Ninety-seven percent (35/36) core social and behavioral sciences courses address this objective.

Objective 4. “To develop and communicate alternative explanations or solutions for contemporary social issues:” Ninety-seven percent (35/36) core social and behavioral sciences courses address this objective.

Objective 5. “To analyze the effects of historical, social, political, economic, cultural, and global forces on the area under study:” Ninety-four percent (34/36) core social and behavioral sciences courses address this objective.

Objective 6. “To comprehend the origins and evolution of U.S. and Texas political systems, with a focus on the growth of political institutions, the constitutions of the U.S. and Texas, federalism, civil liberties, civil and human rights:” Sixty-seven percent (24/36) core social and behavioral sciences courses address this objective.

Objective 7. “To understand the evolution and current role of the U.S. in the world:” Seventy-two percent (26/36) core social and behavioral sciences courses address this objective.

Objective 8. “To differentiate and analyze historical evidence (documentary and statistical) and differing points of view:” Eighty-six percent (31/36) core social and behavioral sciences courses address this objective.

Objective 9. “To recognize and apply reasonable criteria for the acceptability of historical evidence and social research:” Eighty-six percent (31/36) core social and behavioral sciences courses address this objective.

Objective 10. “To analyze, critically assess, and develop creative solutions to public policy problems:” Ninety-two percent (33/36) core social and behavioral sciences courses address this objective.

Objective 11. “To recognize and assume one's responsibility as a citizen in a democratic society by learning to think for oneself, by engaging in public discourse, and by obtaining information through the news media and other appropriate information sources about politics and public policy:” Ninety-two percent (33/36) core social and behavioral sciences courses address this objective.

Objective 12. “To identify and understand differences and commonalities within diverse cultures:” Ninety-seven percent (35/36) core social and behavioral sciences courses address this objective.

Kinesiology (Institutionally Designated Option): All kinesiology and dance core courses address all five exemplary objectives.

The Extent to Which Palo Alto’s Core Curriculum is Consistent with the Six Intellectual Competencies of the Core

The discipline-specific core matrices created by the faculty (see the Biology example in Appendix D) show that Palo Alto’s Core Curriculum is consistent with the defining six Basic Intellectual Competencies outlined by the THECB. An analysis of these results, as compiled in the Comprehensive Core Compliance Intellectual and Perspectives spreadsheet in Appendix A (under the Intellectual tab), reveals that ninety-eight percent or better of the Palo Alto core

curriculum address the intellectual competencies of reading, writing, and critical thinking.

Listening is addressed in ninety-six percent of the core curriculum, and speaking and computer literacy are each addressed by eighty-nine percent of the core. Specifically:

Reading: 217/219 (99%) of Palo Alto core courses address this competency.

Writing: 214/219 (98%) of Palo Alto core courses address this competency.

Speaking: 195/219 (89%) of Palo Alto core courses address this competency.

Listening: 210/219 (96%) of Palo Alto core courses address this competency.

Critical Thinking: 218/219 (100%) of Palo Alto core courses address this competency.

Computer Literacy: 195/219 (89%) of Palo Alto core courses address this competency.

The Extent to Which Palo Alto's Core Curriculum is Consistent with the Eight Core

Perspectives

The discipline-specific core matrix spreadsheets created by the faculty also show that Palo Alto's Core Curriculum is well constructed for the purpose of developing in students multiple perspectives on the human experience. An analysis of these results, as compiled in the Comprehensive Core Compliance spreadsheet in Appendix A (under the Perspectives tab), reveals that Palo Alto's core courses address specifically the eight perspectives as outlined by the THECB. Ninety percent or better of the Palo Alto core courses address six of these perspectives (100% addressing the use of logical reasoning in problem solving), eighty-seven percent of the core courses address the ability to make aesthetic judgments, and although only

seventy-one percent address maintaining health and wellness, as the institutionally designated option all courses in the 90s component area address that perspective, and every core completer at Palo Alto will have given critical thought to that perspective. An analysis of the results under the Perspectives tab of Comprehensive Core Compliance spreadsheet in Appendix A reveals the following:

Perspective 1. "Establish broad and multiple perspectives on the individual in relation to the larger society and world in which he or she lives, and to understand the responsibilities of living in a culturally and ethnically diversified world:" Ninety-five percent (207/219) of the Palo Alto core courses address this perspective.

Perspective 2. "Stimulate a capacity to discuss and reflect upon individual, political, economic, and social aspects of life in order to understand ways in which to be a responsible member of society:" Ninety percent (197/219) of Palo Alto core courses address this perspective.

Perspective 3. "Recognize the importance of maintaining health and wellness:" Seventy-one percent (156/219) of Palo Alto core courses address this perspective.

Perspective 4. "Develop a capacity to use knowledge of how technology and science affect their lives:" Ninety-one percent (199/219) of the Palo Alto core courses address this perspective.

Perspective 5. "Develop personal values for ethical behavior:" Ninety percent (198/219) of the Palo Alto core courses address this perspective.

Perspective 6. “Develop the ability to make aesthetic judgments:” Eighty-seven percent (190/219) of the Palo Alto core courses address this perspective.

Perspective 7. “Use logical reasoning in problem solving:” One hundred percent (219/219) of the Palo Alto core courses address this perspective.

Perspective 8. “Integrate knowledge and understand the interrelationships of the scholarly disciplines:” Ninety-two percent (201/219) of the Palo Alto core courses address this perspective.

Part 4: The Extent to Which Palo Alto College’s Educational Goals and the Exemplary Educational Objectives of the Core Curriculum Recommended by the THECB Are Being Achieved

It is the intent underlying the design of the Palo Alto core curriculum that every core-complete student will have had many opportunities to strengthen each of the basic intellectual competencies, develop each of the core perspectives, and reach each of the educational objectives as described in the THECB’s *Core Curriculum: Assumptions and Defining Characteristics*. In order to assess the movement toward that goal since Palo Alto’s 2004 Core Curriculum Evaluation Report, the core strengths for the ninety core courses in 2004 that are still present in the current Palo Alto core were compared across that interval of time. For both the Perspectives and the Basic Intellectual Competencies, a strength grid was created for those common core courses in each discipline. The faculty, in the evaluation of the 2010 core, totaled for each course the number of learning outcomes that addressed each intellectual competency and each core perspective. These totals were recorded in their respective cells in each strength

matrix. In order to establish a comparison, each total was categorized by “none” for zero objectives, “incidental” for one objective, “moderate” for two objectives, and “extensive” for three or more objectives. The comparison was established in that these descriptors were used for the Palo Alto College core courses in 2004. The change in emphasis from 2004 to the present was indicated by coloring the cells in each strength matrix. Cells colored green indicate that the strength was extensive or had improved since 2004, cells colored yellow indicate that the strength had remained constant since 2004, and cells colored red indicate that the strength had decreased since the 2004 assessment.

An example strength grid (Math) and summary documents for the changes from 2004 to the present can be found in Appendix E. These results show an increase in the number of core courses reporting “Extensive Emphasis” in the six Intellectual Competencies and in the eight Core Perspectives. A closer examination of these results shows that the change occurred primarily in the core courses that shifted from “Moderate Emphasis” to “Extensive Emphasis” since 2004.

The strengths matrices for the core curriculum courses, and the growth in core strengths that they indicate, are the result of faculty assessment of the core curriculum courses. Supporting these findings, the results of the 2005, 2007, and 2009 Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) for Palo Alto indicate that students agree that the emphasis on core objectives is increasing in their courses. The 2005, 2007, and 2009 CCSSE Results spreadsheet in Appendix F provide trends for CCSSE questions tied to the Intellectual Competencies and Core Perspectives in the core curriculum. An examination of these trends

shows that the percentage of students who respond that the classroom focus on core competencies and perspectives is either “Quite a Bit” or “Very Much” is trending upward. The student responses are particularly strong for thinking critically and analytically (76.8%), and writing clearly and effectively (73.5%).

Thus, there is evidence in the strength matrices produced from faculty evaluations of individual core courses in 2004 and 2010, which is supported by CCSSE evidence of student evaluations of their classroom experiences, that indeed the Palo Alto core curriculum is improving the effectiveness with which its educational goals are being achieved.

Part 5: A Description of the Processes and Procedures Used to Evaluate Palo Alto College’s Core Curriculum

In addition to the processes of assessment designed specifically for this report, Palo Alto College’s Core Curriculum is evaluated using institutionalized, on-going processes which apply to all programs at Palo Alto. In that Palo Alto is a two-year institution, academic programs for which a degree is offered consist, typically, of the core curriculum plus an additional 15 hours. Thus any academic program assessment is to a great degree a core curriculum assessment. Palo Alto College has institutionalized three processes that assess instructional programs on an on-going basis: yearly Unit Planning, the five year Program Review cycle, and the Community College Survey of Student Engagement administered in spring semesters of odd years.

Yearly Unit Planning is a planning and budgeting process that requires each instructional program to review its accomplishments from the previous academic year in terms of their contribution to Palo Alto’s Strategic Goals and, as result of this review, to frame new,

consequent actions for the ensuing academic year. Palo Alto College has three Strategic Goals (with accompanying strategies) that directly impact curricular improvements to its core courses. These are:

- I. Integrate Closing the Gaps initiatives with Achieving the Dream objectives in a coordinated effort that will provide exemplary, accessible education and training to a diverse and aspiring community.
- II. Increase academic success of students with emphasis on low-income students and students of color.
 - a. Create programs and services for our students to increase learning persistence, goal completion, and satisfaction.
 - b. Increase the number of students who successfully complete development and gatekeeper courses, are retained from semester to semester, graduate and transfer to four year universities.
 - c. Adapt curricula to advance knowledge/skills, foster civic responsibility and provide global citizenship.
 - d. Advance capacities for tracking, monitoring, and reporting student academic performance and success.
- IV. Fulfill the college's commitment to community by increasing its capacity to
 - a. Increase and develop the employees (human capital) who serve the college to ensure student success.
 - b. Increase capacity to serve students through utilization and enhancement of state-of-the-art- technology and alternative modes of delivery 24/7.

The Unit Plan initiatives related to the core curriculum are most often those designed to improve the following measures related to Strategic Goal II: productive grade rates (the number of students earning an A, B, or C in the course divided by the number of students in the course on census day) and retention rates (the number of students completing the course divided by the number of students in the course on census day). In addition to improving these measures of student success, Unit Plan initiatives may create and assess changes in curriculum, with the

goal of improving learning outcomes for courses in a given program (Strategic Goals I, II, and IV). In order to illustrate the effectiveness of Unit Planning as an assessment tool for the core curriculum at Palo Alto College, the Unit Plans for this upcoming academic year were reviewed and curricular changes impacting core courses were documented (see Appendix F).

In addition to yearly Unit Planning, each program area at Palo Alto undergoes Program Review on a five year cycle. Program Review assesses each instructional program as a whole, and though it may on occasion move to the individual course level, this is not its primary purpose. Again, in that instructional programs at a community college are so often 75% core curriculum, this process for review of instructional programs is always to a degree a core curriculum review.

The measures in Program Review process include average productive grade rates, average retention, as well as graduation rates. Each instructional area also addresses curriculum/program quality, program impact, and faculty characteristics. Challenges to the program area that surfaced in the previous five years are also considered, and possible remedies suggested. The success or lack of success of the action plans designed during the previous Program Review is assessed. Many eyes review each Program Review document and evaluations and recommendations are provided from several sources. These reviewers include the faculty Program Review Committee, the department chair, the dean, the Palo Alto College Program Review Committee, the Vice President for the respective area, and the President of Palo Alto College. For the purposes of this report the Program Reviews for instructional programs were examined over the last seven years in order to document curricular changes and

to illustrate the effectiveness of Program Review as an assessment for core courses at Palo Alto College. The results of this review can be found in Appendix F.

A third institutionalized assessment that provides insight for Palo Alto College on the quality of students' experiences in core courses is the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), which has been administered to Palo Alto College students during the spring semesters of every other year, beginning in 2005. The survey results for key questions providing insight on assessment of core curriculum learning objectives were compiled and the trends in responses for the last three administrations for these questions were displayed and analyzed (see Section 4 and Appendix F).

In addition to these on-going, institutionalized assessments, a process was employed for the 2010 core curriculum evaluation to verify that Palo Alto College's core curriculum addressed the exemplary educational objectives, the basic intellectual competencies, and the core perspectives for every core completer. Also, a process was employed to determine the "value-added" component for the Intellectual Competencies and the Core Perspectives in the 2010 core courses, using the 2004 report as a baseline.

In each of the six core areas (Communication, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Humanities and Visual and Performing Arts, Social and Behavioral Sciences, and Kinesiology) a spreadsheet was created for each discipline within that core area (for instance, in the Communication area there was a spreadsheet created for English and a spreadsheet created for Speech). Each spreadsheet has three tabs: one for the exemplary objectives in that core area, one for the intellectual competencies common for all core courses, and one for core

perspectives common for all core courses. Each tab displays a matrix in which faculty cross-walked their core course objectives with the respective THECB exemplary objectives, intellectual competencies, and core perspectives. Faculty also indicated assessment measures for each course under each of the three tabs. These spreadsheets were completed March 31, 2010, and the results were compiled to create two “Comprehensive Core Compliance” spreadsheets: one for exemplary objectives with tabs for each of the six core areas, and a second summarizing the degree to which core courses met the THECB requirements for intellectual competencies and core perspectives.

The strength matrices described in Section 4 and the math example found in Appendix E provided the “value added” measure, comparing the extent to which each of the 90 core courses common to the 2004 and the 2010 core curriculum addressed the Basic Intellectual Competencies and the Core Perspectives in each of these two years of assessment. Summary documents were created for the 2004 and the 2010 results for both the Intellectual Competencies and the Core Perspectives (see Appendix E), and these documents were analyzed to determine changes in emphasis since 2004.

A final artifact that typifies Palo Alto College’s vigilance in assessing student learning and developing improvement strategies for core courses is the High Risk Course Memo included in Appendix F. This document specifies strategies for increasing student learning and success in high-enrolled core courses for which student success rates for spring 2009 fell below seventy percent. This document resulted from discipline leads’ participation in meetings with the Dean,

Vice President of Academic Affairs and the President, during which these strategies for success were developed.

Part 6: Ways in which the Core Reaffirmation Evaluation Results are Being or Will be Utilized to Improve the Core Curriculum at Palo Alto College

The core reaffirmation process has brought all of the Palo Alto core curriculum courses under close scrutiny and has also brought all of the institutional tools for assessing the core curriculum under close scrutiny. The first outcome brings the institution a snapshot state-of-being for the core and a snapshot rate of change. This provides two useful pieces of information: one is a sense of where one stands, and the other answers the question, if our processes since 2004 have brought change, has the change been in the right direction? For this 2010 Core Report, where we are is reasonable although not yet where we would like to be; and the answer to the question is that indications show that the changes made have been positive. The second outcome of core assessment this year, however, has brought by far a richer vein of information, and it is in the light of reviewing the tools for assessment that one may see how the Palo Alto core curriculum will improve as a result of this 2010 Core Curriculum Report.

The faculty assessment of student learning outcomes for each core curriculum course produced the 30 core matrices, which were the basis for establishing the degree to which the current Palo Alto core is consistent with the Board recommended elements of the core curriculum. This process, which was different from the process used for the 2004 assessment of the core curriculum, required faculty to re-evaluate the underlying purpose and the value of clearly stated student learning outcomes. Assessing student learning outcomes translated into

re-writing student outcomes, re-writing student outcomes brought forth faculty discussions, and faculty discussions brought new light into the essential goals of longstanding core courses. On the premise that clarity about one's goals lends greater probability that they may be reached, the intended outcomes for the Palo Alto core courses should in the next years produce even better realized outcomes.

Choosing to use CCSSE results as an assessment of the core from the students' point of view brought home to faculty, in this new context, something every faculty member knows is true: faculty may plan well, deliver clearly, assess fairly, and be completely wrong in their assumption that student learning will then be demonstrated. And, without student feedback there is no evidence to suggest where this well-intentioned process failed. Choosing to introduce the student view in core assessment provides that missing assessment perspective; continuing to use the CCSSE results, creating opportunities for further assessments by students, will provide better direction to core improvement strategies.

Unit Plans and Program Review were used on this occasion and have been used in the past as both assessment tools and improvement tools for the core curriculum. Although not designed specifically for the core curriculum, because the core forms the larger part of most academic programs at Palo Alto, improvements for units and programs have inevitably led to improvements for the core curriculum. The "value-added" measure indicated by the core strength matrices suggests that these institutionalized, longstanding processes have had some value for the core curriculum. However, as Unit Plans and Program Review came under scrutiny during this year, it was determined that these processes should be more closely tied to student

learning outcomes, program learning outcomes, and, in the end, to institutional learning outcomes. During the next year, the Program Review process at Palo Alto will be revised to strengthen its impact on learning outcomes at all levels.

The alignment of the Core Curriculum Report with SACS reaccreditation has introduced an assessment practice which will provide a new perspective on the efficacy of the core curriculum at Palo Alto. Under the impetus of SACS requirements faculty have been writing program learning outcomes and creating assessments of those outcomes. This has included the core curriculum in its incarnation as the A.A. in Liberal Studies. The first assessment of this A.A., in May, 2010, will initiate a new evaluation tool for the core curriculum.

The dovetailing of SACS reaccreditation and the Core Curriculum Report will have lent strength to the Palo Alto core in the years to come for one more reason. This year's focus on the core curriculum has placed the institution in a position to take advantage of the SACS requirements to create a strong assessment process for the college's general education competencies. Palo Alto's process for assessing institutional student learning outcomes will focus each year on new outcomes, choosing in spring 2010 the competency "Written and Oral Communication." During summer 2010 chairs will produce specific outcomes and in fall 2010 faculty will incorporate written and oral communication learning outcomes and the corresponding assessment plans in courses college-wide. Results of this assessment will be shared during the Spring Convocation. Each year in spring Palo Alto will choose additional institutional learning outcomes to assess, and it is expected that the new competencies will be one of the new, revised core competencies. This dovetailing of institutional and core

competencies, a consequence of this year's alignment of reaccreditation and core curriculum evaluation, may prove to be the most concrete way in which the core evaluation for the 2010 Core Curriculum Report will serve to improve the Palo Alto core.

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Palo Alto College

Institutional Core Curriculum Evaluation Report 2010

Appendices

Appendix A

1. Comprehensive Core Compliance of Intellectual Competencies and Core Perspectives spreadsheet (2 tabs)
2. Comprehensive Core Compliance of Exemplary Educational Objectives spreadsheet (7 tabs)

Appendix B

- A table comparing Palo Alto College Core Courses in 2004 to the Palo Alto College (Alamo Colleges) Core Courses in 2009

Appendix C

- A table comparing the Palo Alto College Core Course prefix, number and title to the TCCNS prefix and number and the ACGM title

Appendix D

- Biology Core Matrix

Appendix E

1. Math Strength spreadsheet
2. Intell and Persp 04 10 document

Appendix F

1. CCSSE Results spreadsheet
2. Program Review Core Highlights document
3. Unit Planning document
4. High Risk Course Memo document