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April 14, 2011

Dr. Ana M. Guzman, President
Palo Alto College
1400 West Villaret Blvd.
San Antonio, Texas 78224

Dear Dr. Guzman:

I am pleased to inform you that Palo Alto College's Landscape and Horticulture Science program has been granted Provisional Accreditation at the two-year Associate of Applied Science level, for a period not to exceed three (3) years, for meeting the Landscape Contracting Model Curriculum established by the PLANET Landscape Contracting Accreditation Board. Upon completion of the requirements listed on page nine of the report, Full Accreditation will be extended to a full seven years, until 2018, at which time another review and site visit will be required.

Congratulations on this accomplishment. The formal presentation will be made at Faculty Forum during the PLANET Student Career Days at Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas, March 22 – 25, 2012.

The PLANET Accreditation Review Team, made up of landscape contracting professionals and educators, conducted a thorough review of the Landscape and Horticulture Science program's curriculums and the facilities at Palo Alto College on February 27 – March 1, 2011. The report outlining the PLANET Accreditation Review Team's findings, recommendations and requirements is attached.

The Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) is the official trade association for the landscape contracting and lawncare industry. PLANET members are involved in landscape construction, design/build contracting, landscape maintenance, reclamation and erosion control, irrigation, lawn care, interiorscaping and all aspects of installation, construction and maintenance of the living environment. PLANET emerged on January 1, 2005, when the Associated Landscape Contractors of America (ALCA) and the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA) joined forces to become a more encompassing network of green industry professionals. ALCA, founded in 1961, was the premier global trade association for landscape maintenance, installation, and design/build contractors and interiorscapers. PLCAA, organized in 1979, was the premier global trade association for residential and commercial lawn care professionals.

PLANET develops and maintains active programs for approximately 3,600 member firms in the area of business management, government affairs, public relations, technical assistance, safety and insurance, education, and inter-industry relations with other facets of the green industry.

Again, congratulations on this achievement. We look forward to a mutually beneficial working relationship with the faculty and students of Palo Alto College's Landscape and Horticulture Science program.

Cordially,

Edward Plaster, CP

Edward Plaster, CP
PLANET Accreditation Site Team Co-Chair

cc: Dr. Stacy Johnson, Vice President of Academic Affairs
Gary Shelman, Dean of Career and Technical Education
Kirk Williams, Instructor, Landscape and Horticultural Science
Weldon Riggs, Instructor, Landscape and Horticultural Science



Professional Landcare Network (PLANET)

Accreditation Review Team

Accreditation Report

For

Palo Alto College

Landscape and Horticultural Science

San Antonio, Texas

February 27 – March 1, 2011

PLANET Accreditation Site Visitation Team:

Edward Plaster, CP, Instructor Dakota County Technical College, Rosemount, Minnesota, retired. Team Leader and Co-coordinator of Site Teams, Professional Landcare Network

Randey Wall, Instructor, Illinois Central College, Peoria, Illinois. Faculty member, Professional Landcare Network

Scott Frampton, Owner, Landscape Renovations, Inc. Afton, Minnesota. Industry member, Professional Landcare Network

Steve Goodson, The Grass Is Greener Landscape, San Antonio, Texas. Industry member, Professional Landcare Network.

Report of PLANET Accreditation Team Site Visit to Palo Alto College, San Antonio, Texas General Comments on meeting PLANET Accreditation Standards

The Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) Accreditation program recognizes landscaping curricula that meet the needs of the landscape industry. The program recognizes four-year Bachelor of Science and two-year Associate of Science Degree programs.

The Accreditation Team, selected by PLANET, is charged with the responsibility and authority of the on-site review and recognition of institutions of higher learning. Our team is pleased to grant "Provisional Accreditation" to Palo Alto College's Landscape and Horticultural Science program. Accreditation will be for seven years, until the year 2018, at which time another review will be required.

The observations decided upon by this site visitation team are reported in the form of:

- Findings
- Requirements
- Recommendations/Suggestions
- Requirements for continuing accreditation

FINDINGS:

The Accreditation Team finds the Landscape and Horticultural Science program to be a young program that, with the help of its administration, has successfully weathered some difficult times. The program is also the only two-year landscape program in the region, making it important for the industry. It appears to be a quality program with potential for growth.

Section I: General Standards

Program mission and planning

- The mission statement emphasizes employment at the entry level and lower level management. It suits the needs of students and industry.
- We did not see the mission statement posted in the facilities and students were not aware of it.
- The program has five broad performance objectives that reflect an accurate, broad perspective of the industry.

- Documents in the self-study briefly address ethics and professionalism. We could not determine if these were emphasized in class.
- The program is engaged in a continuous planning process through five-year program reviews with follow-up action plans.
- We did not discover course-level assessment of learning methodologies.
- Seeking PLANET Accreditation is evidence of efforts to improve the program.

Governance and administration

- The number of instructors appears to be adequate for the program.
- The program has an aide.
- The budget seems adequate for what the program does.
- The administration expresses strong support for the program.
- The administration has devoted extra resources to the program.
- The administration has high expectations of the program.
- We commend the college for assigning a work force recruiter to assist program recruitment.
- Dean Shelman seems to be a great supporter of the program.
- The administration is seeking ways to use work study students to maintain the botanical garden and grounds. This is important for maintaining visual quality and instructional usefulness.
- Dr. Guzman appreciates work done on the grounds by the program and other contributions to the college.

Faculty

- Faculty carries credentials appropriate to their roles.
- Faculty carries both academic credentials and appropriate work experience.
- The design instructor is a registered Landscape architect in Texas, as required by PLANET.
- Instructors possess appropriate certifications and licensures for their area of instruction.
- Faculty are active in the Texas Nursery and Landscape Association (TNLA).

- Faculty make many professional presentations to trade organizations and others. They appear to do so with greater frequency than most two-year faculty around the country.
- Faculty engages in continuing education to maintain their certifications and licensures.
- Students appreciate the full-time faculty's availability and support.
- Students expressed concern that it was difficult to communicate with adjunct faculty outside of class, even by email.

Students

- We met with many of the students in class as well as student club members.
- The program has an exceptionally diverse student body which reflects the demographics of the community.
- This program is more heavily weighted with male students than most other programs observed by team members.
- The program has a mature student body, which is not unusual for landscape programs in two year colleges.
- Students are active in the TNLA and attend some of their shows. None appear to currently be members.
- A few students are members of PLANET.
- Students have assisted in preparations of TNLA events as a volunteer activity. We are happy to see this.
- There is an active student club with significant student participation.
- There is evidence that students are involved in community service and outreach projects, such as the Mi Casa project.
- Students expressed interest in obtaining credit for volunteer work in and outside of the program.
- Student placement in employment is adequate.
- We did not see internship evaluations so could not use them as a tool for determining employer satisfaction with interns.
- Students enjoy availability of scholarships.
- President Guzman is proud of work done on the campus by students.

- Students have a less than adequate understanding of PLANET.
- President Guzman stated that creating networks is a special challenge for minority students.
- Students like the hands-on experience of their education. They like the mix of lecture and lab.
- Some students felt the program needed more supplies.

Alumni

- We met with several alumni during our visit
- Alumni are an active part of the advisory committee. Their perspective can be a valuable asset to any advisory committee.
- Alumni felt they were well prepared for their careers.
- Some alumni were active in the TNLA, which is an indicator of professionalism.
- Alumni have been successful in obtaining appropriate certifications, an indicator both of educational success and professionalism.
- Alumni have also been used as guest speakers.

Industry

- We met with several members of industry and employers. Some were graduates of the program.
- Industry representatives are used as guest speakers.
- The TNLA is supportive of the program, and has supplied scholarships to the students.
- Industry has made in-kind contributions to the program.
- There were few job postings visible in the department so we wonder if it has effectively made connections with local industry for internships and employment.
- There are career fairs, but we learned little about them.
- Student Career Days participation would boost connections to national employers.
- The program has hosted industry meetings on campus.

Advisory committee

- There is an active advisory committee that meets twice a year.
- Many members of the advisory committee were present at our meeting.
- The committee represents a variety of organizations and businesses, including a high school teacher and an extension agent. This variety should be helpful to the program. The representation by landscape design/build firms could be expanded.
- Meeting minutes reveal that a lot of business is accomplished during meetings.
- A significant portion of the agenda is dictated by college and state policy.
- Advisory committee business appears to be faculty and administration driven rather than industry driven.
- The advisory committee is strongly supportive of the program.
- Advisory committee members have acted as guest speakers and have hosted learning activities at their facilities.
- Alumni and students are represented on the committee, as suggested by PLANET.
- Advisory committee appears to be well utilized by the program in a variety of capacities.

Relationship to the overall institution and community

- The program appears to enjoy a good relationship with Texas A&M with a transfer agreement. We consider this beneficial
- There have been interesting joint programs with the art department to beautify the grounds and display student work. Both the students and the college benefit from this unusual arrangement and we encourage its continuance.
- There is joint participation with the biology department in the new botanical garden. As long as it is well maintained, this should be a helpful learning tool for both departments.
- We feel that if allowed, the department could have more input into grounds design and beautification.
- It appears the program has beneficial relationships with outside organizations like Master Gardeners, 4-H, the Mi Casa program, and others.
- Faculty have been judges in 4-H competitions and the like. This puts them in contact with younger potential students and strengthens ties with important outside organizations.

- The program benefits the entire college by its plant sales. Administration has emphasized the value of this.

Facilities, equipment and information systems

- A facilities transitional period has created difficulties for the program.
- The fine new facilities such as classrooms and putting green should benefit the program.
- A fine new greenhouse will be a valuable asset.
- The library has an excellent collection used in class assignments. The number of professional journal titles is somewhat limited, and they often carry the most current information. Possibly bilingual publications could be helpful for some students, though the students appeared to be English proficient.
- We commend the library liaison for her efforts providing resources to students. We enjoyed her web site.
- Equipment owned by the department is limited, particularly landscaping equipment, but they do extensive equipment rental.
- The department lacks a truck and trailer which complicates work on the grounds or in picking up materials. A truck would also permit better instruction in truck and trailer handling.
- We observed several safety violations in the working areas such as a lack of proper safety signage. None that we saw created an immediate hazard.
- The program does not have adequate design facilities. We recognize that the college has moved away from hand rendering in many programs, but in this industry, hand drawing is still commonly practiced and most industry members feel that hand rendering is an important foundational skill for designers.
- Campus buildings and grounds were neat, clean, and attractive. They were conducive to a learning environment.
- The program uses the grounds as a learning facility, with a landscape lab area, an equipment operations area, botanical garden, and lab/storage areas. At this point, their grounds usage for landscaping appears to be restricted to a large courtyard.

Other general observations

- As we have observed in other colleges, the college and program websites could be improved to serve as a more effective recruiting and informational tool.
- About half the polled students became aware of the program through its website, so there should be good potential for attracting more students with a more exciting, more informational, and less static site.
- The club has a Facebook page, and the library actually has a program page. Both are interesting additions to the program's web presence.

Section II: Curriculum Standards

- The curriculum meets most PLANET requirements.
- Computer learning and usage requirements do not appear to be satisfied.
- Soils material appears to underemphasize the physical and biological properties of soils. We gather this from the course outline and the text used in the course.
- Some syllabi provided to the committee did not appear to contain enough information.
- The curriculum seems to meet the needs of local industry.
- We commend the administration for assisting in developing dual credit classes with high schools.
- The math placement test and math classes emphasize algebra rather than the practical mathematics used in landscaping. This mathematics seems to challenge students in landscape classes and is a barrier to material mastery.
- The college has a reading, writing and math placement test review session for incoming students which helps students (particularly adult students) to reduce the number of developmental classes students would have to take.
- President Guzman and Vice-President Johnson appeared to actively support the concept that not all students need a bachelor's degree to be successful. This is a plus for the career programs, including Landscape Management.
- The curriculum includes some business classes, which are important to rapid career advancement and to the industry as a whole.
- An internship is required by the program, as required by PLANET. We did not learn a lot about the how the internship is structured.

- We were uneasy to see that unpaid internships were allowed, but were reassured to learn that, in practice, internships are paid. Interns should be paid unless a student elects to volunteer at some public or nonprofit institution.
- There is no computer aided design class.
- The program might be missing opportunities for more extensive training for design careers. Such training might attract female students.

REQUIREMENTS:

- Conduct an official safety audit signed off by the insurance company.
- Incorporate more computer education and software usage into class.
- Take teams to the PLANET Student Career Days.
- Utilize PLANET logos and the fact of PLANET accreditation in recruitment material and website.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Adjunct faculty should work to develop improved lines of communication.
- Acquaint students with the Mission Statement and post it prominently in the facilities.
- Consider offering a CAD class.
- Consider expanding design offerings and consider improved design facilities.
- Work to improve understanding of the basic mathematics of landscaping early in the student's time in the program.
- Use PLANET/MNLA Landlovers material in recruitment. Committee member Scott Frampton is familiar with the material and may be reached for information.
- Actively approach local TNLA members to solicit them as internship stations and for permanent employment.
- Create a book of job postings for students to use in searching for jobs. The presence of such a book can also reinforce the employment opportunities in the industry.
- Have students review the TNLA and PLANET Codes of Ethics in business education class as a tool for teaching ethics and professionalism. Use them to illustrate broader concepts of business ethics and professionalism.

- Follow the PLANET/BYU occupational analysis documents as a student learning self-assessment tool, as explained in our oral presentation. Committee member Randey Wall can be contacted for more information.
- Find ways to have students take certification tests as another tool of learning assessment. Industry members also expressed the usefulness for students to enter the workplace with these certifications.
- Dean Shelman should attend a Student Career Days. If he can attend this year, he can gather information for future SCD events.
- Special attention should be paid to connecting students with state and national organizations with a view to improve their networking skills. Examples include the annual PLANET Green Industry Conference, including their Student Ambassador program, Student Career Days, and TNLA meetings. Be sure to focus on networking skills during these activities.
- Alumni should be recruited as ambassadors of the program in recruitment efforts. They should be a valuable asset, and the ones we spoke with appeared willing.
- The program should acquire a truck and trailer.
- The advisory committee should review the equipment and tool inventory and make recommendations for possible acquisitions.
- The program's website should be upgraded to be less static, more user-friendly, and more effective as a marketing tool. News of the program, images of student activities, graduate and community testimonials, links to PLANET and TNLA (in both directions), and other material could be included. Blogs and facebook pages can be useful. Committee members Ed Plaster and Randey Wall can be contacted for more information.
- There seems to be some potential for expanding material on rain harvesting, water reclamation, and sustainable design.
- Sign campus projects for a bit of self-promotion. The same could be said for art projects.
- Safety instruction should be analyzed to ensure that it is comprehensive and complete.
- Students should be become members of TNLA.
- Efforts should be made to improve the décor of classrooms and hallways with appropriate posters, student work, or other graphics. Set the clocks.
- Use work-study students to maintain the botanical garden, horticulture facility and landscape sites on the campus.
- Create mechanisms for crediting students for volunteer work. This honors student efforts, can polish their resume, and promotes community involvement in accordance with the regional

accrediting agency. We discussed one way to do this while reporting verbally and Randey Wall can be contacted for more information.

- Use internship evaluations as a learning assessment tool. This may require revision of the grading form.
- Horticultural club members could be educated on how to solicit donations to the program. Committee member Steve Goodson can be helpful in this work.

REQUIREMENTS FOR CONTINUED ACCREDITATION:

- Report annually on the status of the Requirements for Full Accreditation.
- Maintain a PLANET Chapter membership.
- Lead student delegations to the PLANET Student Career Days.
- Make an annual report due by December 15th each year to PLANET to include:

Number of students enrolled in program

Number of program graduates

Names, firms, and addresses of industry advisory committee members

Numbers of students placed in internships (list firms and where located)

Publications Authored, Co-Authored or Researched by faculty since last report

PLANET meetings attended

Results of most recent PLANET Student Career Day

PLANET Scholarships received

PLANET Student Chapter activities

Placement/Graduation statistics

Salary statistics of interns

Salary statistics of graduates

Graduation percentage of students enrolled and those that complete the program

Graduation numbers

Testimonials related to PLANET and how accreditation has helped your program

Success stories of interns and graduates

- During the sixth year of accreditation, Senior Program Faculty members must make application for the next seven-year accreditation review. During the last year a self-study evaluation report is to be prepared and submitted to PLANET 30 days prior to the Accreditation Team campus visit.

The visitation team commends Palo Alto College for the program it offers in Landscape and Horticultural Science. The team also recognizes Palo Alto College for its dedicated administration and faculty, hands-on learning, and its efforts to improve the program and its facilities.

PLANET and Accreditation team looks forward to a continuing on-going association with Palo Alto College

Accreditation Review Team:

Edward Plaster, CP, Instructor Dakota County Technical College, retired, Rosemount, Minnesota

Randey Wall, Instructor, Illinois Central College

Scott Frampton, Owner, Landscape Renovations, Inc., Afton, Minnesota

Steve Goodson, TCLP, The Grass is Greener Landscape, San Antonio, Texas

Dr. Ana M. Guzman, President

Dr. Stacy Johnson, Vice President of Academic Affairs

Gary Shelman, Dean of Career and Technical Education

Kirk Williams, Instructor Landscape and Horticultural Science

Weldon Riggs, Instructor, Landscape and Horticultural Science