



# The Clark Journal

October 2006

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## The President's Perspective

Dr. Ron Baker, executive vice president of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU), told a great story when he visited the college this month. Ron said that the way in which colleges and universities approach accreditation is the same way that students approach their classes. Some students want to do just enough to get by and pass the class. Others want to learn everything they can. That's the choice—actually, the opportunity—facing Clark College as we start the two-year process working toward our 10-year reaccreditation.

I believe that we are all committed to learning as much as we can during the accreditation process. While this is a time of transition in the president's office, the changes that we're going through actually give us the opportunity to look at everything with fresh eyes and with a firm focus on how we support our students. It will strengthen our commitment to our vision, mission, strategic plan, mission imperatives and goals and provide an opportunity to clearly define the internal processes necessary to achieve our goals. It will also give us the opportunity to acknowledge the work done by everyone at the college to serve our students and the greater community.

We began the accreditation process with an excellent discussion during our fall orientation. Ron Baker joined us then, and he returned to the college this month to meet with our steering committee. This issue of *The Clark Journal* offers an update on where we are in the accreditation process—and where we're going. I think it's especially noteworthy that our accreditation will take place in October 2008—coinciding with the college's 75th anniversary celebration.

Dr. Tim Cook and Dr. Charlene Montierth deserve thanks from all of us for agreeing to serve as co-chairs of our 2008 accreditation process, as does Candy Bennett, who is the Accreditation Liaison Officer between the college and NWCCU. And thanks to everyone who has volunteered to be part of the nine teams that are focusing on our accreditation standards. However, it will take the efforts and commitment of all of us to make this process truly successful—to learn everything we can to make our 2008 accreditation and our 75th anniversary a cause for celebration.

Bob Knight, Interim President



## From the Board of Trustees

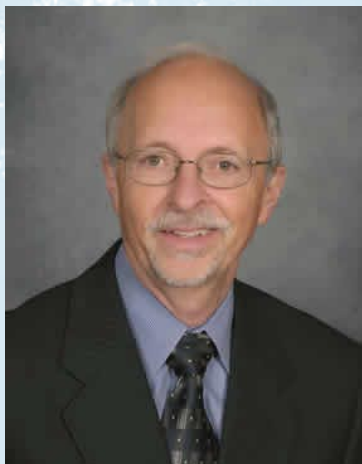


The Clark College Board of Trustees, pictured with 2006 graduation speaker and Washington Governor Christine Gregoire (L to R): Sherry Parker, Vice Chair Addison Jacobs, Kim Peery, Governor Gregoire, former board member Sue Fratt, and Chair Rhona Sen Hoss.

**I**n Clark College's 1998 accreditation report, one line especially stands out. It's listed under "Institutional Integrity." It says: "While we have had our challenges, we have also faced them squarely." What was true in 1998 remains true today.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, I want to express our confidence in interim President Bob Knight for, as Trustee Addison Jacobs put it, "stepping up admirably while serving as both acting CEO and Vice President of Administrative Services." Bob's appointment has been extremely well received by the college community and the community at large. The next step will be a discussion on a process to select a permanent president. We have set no timetable. As we did during the discussion about an interim president, we want to ensure that the discussion is as inclusive as possible and that the entire college community has the opportunity to share their thoughts.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Sue Fratt for her 10 years of tireless service and commitment to the college as a member of the Board of Trustees. Sue is no longer a trustee, but I'm delighted that she will continue to support the college as a member of the Clark College Alumni Association.



Finally, I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome John White (pictured at left) to the board. As vice president of BERGER/ABAM Engineers Inc. and manager of their JD White division (the company he founded in 1976), John is a respected professional who has been part of our community for more than 30 years. I know that his honesty, integrity and commitment to excellence will serve the board—and the college—well.

The team that worked on the 1998 accreditation report noted that they presented it "with pride and confidence." It is with pride and confidence that we look forward to our 2008 reaccreditation and thank all of you for the work you do every day to support our students and our community.

Rhona Sen Hoss, Chair  
Clark College Board of Trustees



## Accreditation 101: *The Next Step*



Members of the Clark College accreditation steering committee met in early October in preparation for the two-year process.

In case you haven't already, mark your calendars now for big things happening at Clark College in October 2008. Not only is it the month of our 75th anniversary, but it is also when the college's 10-year accreditation visit from the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) occurs. While that may seem a long way off, there is much to be done toward accreditation—and the process has already begun.

During the Opening Day session held on September 6 entitled "Accreditation 101: What Do We Measure and How Do We Measure Up?" the Clark community learned about the accreditation process for colleges and universities. Delivered by Ron Baker, executive vice president of NWCCU, Clarkers learned that accreditation is a "voluntary, non-governmental process of self-analysis and peer review that assures educational quality and encourages purposeful improvement through evaluations based on institutional mission, accepted academic standards and expectations of the public."

But what does this mean? How does a college or university "do" accreditation? The notion that accreditation is a voluntary process of self-analysis implies that it is up to the institution to determine how to "do" accreditation—and this is true, at least in part. The evaluation criteria by which an institution measures and reports on each of the nine standards (see sidebar) is flexible as long as they "exhibit essential principals of quality and effectiveness." This flexibility is important because it allows institutions of various sizes, backgrounds, and missions to address the standards as they relate to their own mission and historical and operational perspectives. For Clark, this means the ability to address issues of mission, educational program, administration, and resources (among others) in our own right. How well we perform this process, and what we learn from it, is entirely up to us. Baker likens it to the divergent attitudes a student may bring to a class: one attitude is to find out the least amount required to pass and do no more; the other is to put as much energy into—and thus gain the most knowledge out of—the learning process.

Leading Clark through the accreditation process are co-chairs Tim Cook, division chair for behavioral sciences and counseling lead, and Charlene Montierth, professor of geology—both of whom worked on Clark's five-year interim accreditation report—and Executive Dean of Planning and Advancement Candy Bennett. Cook and Montierth were

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There are nine accreditation standards that every institution's self-study must address:

- ❖ *Institutional mission, goals, planning and effectiveness*
- ❖ *Educational program and its effectiveness*
- ❖ *Students*
- ❖ *Faculty*
- ❖ *Library and information resources*
- ❖ *Governance and administration*
- ❖ *Finance*
- ❖ *Physical resources*
- ❖ *Institutional integrity*



## Accreditation 101: *The Next Step* (continued)



Ron Baker, executive vice president of NWCCU, speaks to the Clark community during Opening Day.

asked to serve as co-chairs in early 2006 and already have undergone training and visits to help them lead the college through the accreditation process. Both feel it is important and noteworthy that the accreditation process be led by faculty members—but are quick to point out that it involves the entire campus: “We feel it is important that accreditation is a faculty-driven process,” said Cook, “but it will take campus-wide involvement to achieve.”

For most of us, accreditation has been at best a topic of occasional conversation since that early September morning. Not so for Cook, Montierth, and Bennett, who meet weekly. “Standards committee chairs were announced on Opening Day,” said Bennett. “We have since identified a cross-section of faculty, staff and students to serve on the committees in each of the nine standards areas.” Accreditation has become more real for some as they received appointment letters notifying them of the standard committee on which they will serve. By the end of the

process, every person at Clark will be involved in or impacted by accreditation—this is Montierth’s goal: “This process isn’t about Tim, Candy and I,” she said. “This process is about everyone. If it is going to be valuable, we all need to participate. If at the end of this process someone says, ‘I had nothing to do with it, it doesn’t mean anything to me’ then we have failed in some way.”

Accreditation goes back to the mission of the school: are we doing what we say we do? That is, are we fulfilling our mission? Over the next few months, standards committee members will be gathering information to document the methods and practices in which Clark College engages. Every area of the college will be involved in establishing the supporting information that is required to understand how well we are fulfilling each of the standards. This information-gathering stage of accreditation is an integral part of our self-study. “This is a chance for us to tell our story—our opportunities and our challenges,” said Cook. “This is our time to talk about issues and investigate our own areas. It’s a bit like having a checkup with the doctor—once you’ve been told it’s important, you’ll do it.”

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A survey of faculty and staff during the accreditation session on September 6 helped in the formation of standards committees.

### Accreditation Timeline Highlights

**Oct. 27, 2006**

Deadline for all standards committees to hold first meeting

**Nov. 2006 - Mar. 2007**

Data gathering by standards committees

**May 1, 2007**

First drafts of standards reports completed

**Sept. 2007**

First edited draft of self study available for review by campus community

**Sept. 2007 - Dec. 2007**

Revisions to first draft and additional data gathering

**Feb. 15, 2008**

Second draft of self study available for review by campus community

**Feb. 15 – Mar. 1, 2008**

Campus forums

**April 2008**

Final editing of self study

**May 21, 2008**

Self study presented to Board of Trustees

**Sept. 2008**

Self study mailed to NWCCU

**Oct. 2008**

Accreditation evaluation team visit



## Accreditation 101: *The Next Step* (continued)



Miles Jackson, Tim Cook, Charlene Montierth, and Candy Bennett listen carefully as Ron Baker discusses the accreditation process.

Once the information is gathered it will be reviewed by the standards committees. In this second phase of the self-study, the college will take an honest and direct look at the data to determine how well we are fulfilling our mission. Montierth is quick to point out, though, that this is a chance to identify successes as well as areas for improvement: "The opportunity of accreditation is that it gives us a chance to establish where we are in everything we're meant to be doing as an academic institution. This is not meant to be a punitive or self-flagellation process." This evaluation will comprise the self-study report submitted to NWCCU in September 2008; it is where we evaluate how well we are performing in each of the nine standards.

Once completed, the report will be sent to a team of accreditation evaluators—volunteers from community colleges within our accreditation region and across the country. Each

evaluation team reviews only one institution. During their October 2008 visit, Clark's evaluation team will review the results of our self-study report and any supporting documentation provided, and will conduct interviews with individuals within the college community. Following the visit, the team will submit its report to NWCCU; the commission reviews the evaluation team's report and the institution's self study before issuing its final recommendations and commendations to the college.

Results from the accreditation process will be available in early 2009. However, Baker is quick to point out that an institution that has conducted a thorough self-study should not find any major surprises in its results: "A good evaluation and self-study process will not give major surprises in the results," said Baker. "That is, the institution should be aware of areas [of commendation or

recommendation] in the same way that the evaluators see and notice issues."

Some may wonder about the impact on accreditation of being in an interim presidency situation. Those involved with the process all view it as an opportunity. "Having Bob [Knight] as interim president during the accreditation process is a stabilizing force for the college," said Cook. "His presence in the office will help maintain consistency in our focus and direction just as we are examining those very issues." Montierth adds: "I can't imagine a better tool to provide a new president than a newly completed (or nearly complete, whichever the case may be) comprehensive self-study."

Of course, accreditation goes beyond a report. As Bennett points out, "Our ten-year accreditation is one of the most significant opportunities we have for institutional planning and continuous improvement." The big question that will remain is: now what? How will the college address the concerns that are surfaced through the self study? How will it celebrate the successes? The answers to those questions will, in part, come from the NWCCU's recommendations and commendations—but it is ultimately up to the college to decide how to move forward. "This is about Clark—what works and what need fixing," said Cook. "That message has been well received by the campus. And for me, the process, the dialogue, is more interesting—this is a chance to talk about where we are and where we're going as a college."





## Accreditation & Assessment: A Complementary Coupling

For the past 15 years Clark College has been developing its outcomes assessment policies and procedures. As the college's attention to accreditation increases in the coming months, so too will the attention to assessment. The reason for this is not unwarranted: as committee members begin gathering data relating to the nine standards of evaluation used in the accreditation process, assessment results will be used to establish our successes and shortcomings in student learning.

Accreditation, however, is not the driving force behind outcomes assessment; rather, it is accountability. "Assessment has been a common practice in the K-12 educational system," said Rebecca Martin, professor of biology and outcomes assessment liaison at Clark. "The pressure is now on higher education to do the same."

Outcomes assessment is a process whereby measurable skills

are tested at various points in the learning process to determine whether the students are, in fact, learning those skills—and at what level. The results of an assessment are then used to inform educational design in a continual process of refinement and improvement.

Much of the activity occurring in outcomes assessment right now is the assessing—that is, measuring student learning of specific skills. Since the beginning of the academic year, some 80 assessment projects have been reported, up significantly from last year's 14 reported projects. Although some of the increase may simply be a function of increased reporting, Martin does believe accreditation is also a factor: "Assessment does gain momentum through the accreditation process. One of the standards in accreditation asks whether we have clearly articulated goals for our students—and how we know if they are achieving those goals."

Evaluation of results follows the measurement phase in what is ultimately a circular process. "The next step [in outcomes assessment] is to evaluate data for what is happening, make changes and improvements, then reform new questions and start the process over again," explained Martin. "In other words, as the loop comes around, do we pay attention to the results of our assessment?"

As much as accreditation and outcomes assessment are complementary processes, assessment in its own right has a place at Clark. "We need to applaud our efforts in many ways, but we also need to find the holes where we need to improve," said Martin. "Hopefully it excites people to learn ways they can improve their teaching for the benefit of their students—I know it does for me."

