

Preface

Institutional Assessment Charge

In August 2000, Erie Community College began a process to create an overall Institutional Assessment/Feasibility Study to assist in the creation of a Master Plan. The long-range objective was to position ECC as the "Leader in Workforce Development" in Western New York. Action taken on the basis of this project will provide citizens and businesses with opportunities for education, training and/or upgrading of skill sets. Outcomes of the study include both long and short-term strategic recommendations and plans for specifically identified Focus Areas that are congruent with ECC's vision, mission and core.

The Purpose of This Report

The purpose of this report is to present a picture of what ECC might look like 10-15 years in the future to enhance the College's position as a leader in workforce development for Western New York.

This systematic study is about the future of Erie Community College. As an institutional assessment and feasibility study, it approaches the future strategically, based on the input and involvement of people who work and study at ECC, people from outside ECC, and from data about the college, the community and examples of other similar institutions.

The study is not a Master Strategic Plan; rather, it is a *strategic identification*. A strategic plan starts with a particular situation then works out into the future through extrapolation and responsiveness to existing conditions, opportunities, and constraints. In contrast, a strategic identification is a systematic approach to describing some desired future state. In this case the timeframe is 15 years.

The importance of this study is that it allows one to transcend shorter-term perspectives, as well as immediate personnel and political issues, so all constituencies can assist in defining a picture of the future that meets the vision and mission of the institution, and of the region it serves. These pictures should initiate further thought and not be taken as final plans or proposals.

That is what this study has done. By drawing on a wealth of data and scores of individuals, the report provides a snapshot of what ECC might become. The project's purpose can be summed up simply: While traditional planning often identifies the reasons why an institution cannot do things, strategic identification identifies a clear, shared sense of what could be. With the shared sense of the future, the institution can undertake the processes of planning and acting to achieve the goals.

The study's value is that ECC can establish a timeframe 15 years out, identify what attributes it might require to have been judged a successful community college for the region, and develop a shared sense of purpose among its constituents for the long-term.

Often this process is referred to as 'working backwards' from a goal. Yet, all plans must have parameters, as does this report. For the purpose of the study, the assumptions for ECC are the following:

1. ECC will exist as an accredited institution of higher education.
2. Erie County & the State of New York will have some relationship with ECC.
3. ECC will have high quality, easily accessible locations in Erie County, with brick and mortar decisions being driven by the mission.
4. ECC will offer flexible, educational and training programming and student services that are responsive to the needs of the community at that time, and those needs that are emerging. Examples of flexible programming today: 2-4 programming/Distance learning/Partners with private and public sector/Career ladders/Certification programs.
5. Academic programming and student services will be determined by "the needs of the times" and not limited to a single or multiple campus, or a day or evening format.
6. ECC will be increasingly dependent on alternative sources of revenue other than tuition or county and state subsidy.
7. ECC will have a highly qualified unionized workforce, involved in decision-making.
8. ECC will be vision and mission driven.
9. ECC will increase its diversity in student enrollment and workforce.

Uses of this Report

This report is to be used by the Administration and Board of Erie Community College, the office of The Executive of the County of Erie, the Erie County Legislature, and other interested constituents of ECC to determine direction and focus for specific details of a Master Plan for Erie Community College.

This report should be used as a base for the first steps of long-term planning, including the consideration of such issues as resource allocation; faculty recruitment, retention and development; curriculum enhancement; facilities maintenance, renovation, repair, and construction; student support; administrative support; revenue enhancement; and all other aspects of longer term planning.

Next Steps

The next steps should be in-depth Scenario Modeling to explore a variety of academic, facility and location configurations to determine which best supports the fulfillment of ECC's Mission, Vision and Values. In-depth Scenarios will help guide investment decisions in both the near and longer term and after a preferred scenario is chosen, lead to the creation of a detailed Master Facilities Plan.

6 Major Focus Areas

In this study there were Six Major Focus Areas: Facilities, Alternative Revenue, Curriculum Currency, Economies and Efficiencies, Support Services and Technology.

The project methodology facilitated the creation and selection of 128 recommendations from three specific sources in the focus areas listed above,

1. 32 of the 128 recommendations are based on the work of Focus Area Teams, representing a variety of constituents from Western New York. An extensive series of consensus building sessions were conducted in each of the 6 Focus Areas to identify high-level strategic qualities, attributes and characteristics of what ECC might look like in the next 10-15 years. A total of 232 participants¹ representing most major constituent groups in Western New York examined ECC from the Six Major Focus Areas listed above to create their recommendations.
2. 79 of the 128 Recommendations come from the input of consultants from the Resultants International, Inc. Project Management Team who bring experience and expertise from both inside and outside of the Western New York region, and
3. 17 of the 128 Recommendations were from Wendel Duchscherer, the consultants who conducted the Facilities Audit.

What makes this assessment and the subsequent report different from other consultant's reports is that Resultants International, Inc. has engaged a wide variety of constituent groups from the community AT THE BEGINNING to participate in the creation of alternatives rather than trying to get constituency buy-in AFTER the recommendations were presented.

This project focuses on creating a VISION of what ECC might look like through the eyes of Western New Yorkers and those with experience outside of WNY.

¹ A listing of all participants appears in the ADDENDUM beginning on page xxix.

Creating A Preferred Future

Erie Community College has many options and opportunities as it defines its preferred future fifteen years ahead of time. Across the many conversations during this Institutional Assessment process a series of underlying themes emerged that capture the essence of the future for the college.

Clearly, the next fifteen years holds uncertainties. There is no crystal ball that illuminates the future. Nonetheless, strategies and scenarios can be crafted that make the future more attractive than it might otherwise be. For purposes of this study, the Mission and Vision are assumed to remain constant, the nature of the governance systems are assumed to be similar to today, and the current funding sources are assumed to remain the same. Changes in any of these would result in significant shifts throughout the college, of course.

Yet, even with assumptions of stability of certain areas, changes in demographics, regional and state economic circumstances, political priorities, competition from many new sources, changing patterns of consumer behavior, changing curriculum – whether in content or delivery – all will assure the next fifteen years to be dynamic and eventful.

Over the many months of data collection and meetings, assumptions about what ECC is and how it will operate began to emerge. By addressing the below, ECC can shape its future.

- 1. Will ECC craft a strategy that adapts to its market (reactive strategy) or will it seek opportunities to shape its environment (proactive strategy)? Is ECC a community leader, shaping the region and defining workforce and economic development, for instance; or is it a strong community citizen, responding to market forces; or is it independent of market forces, deciding on its own what to offer?**
- 2. Will ECC wait until most of a situation's uncertainty is reduced before making key decisions or will it make decisions based on its mission and vision and accept the risk? Part of the answer to the question depends on ECC's sense of what it should look like: for example, what is ECC's optimal size, demographics, program mix, space utilization pattern, internal resource allocation model, and so forth.**
- 3. Will ECC maintain the same operating model that it has or will it shape its operations to meet the needs of the region? ECC's current operating model is an interconnected college with three campuses and one administrative structure. The question for the college is what model best reflects its aspirations? Should the college be centralized, decentralized, interdisciplinary, departmental, regional or some other model? How many campuses should ECC have, with what type of governance structure and scope of responsibilities?**

4. **Will ECC address issues through traditional higher education models or will it address them through shared governance?** Traditional academic planning starts with internal consideration and applies them to students and markets. Shared governance includes students, community, and outside expertise as well as all the internal constituents. Scenarios are built rather than positions defended; uncertainties are viewed as opportunities more than as reasons not to act.
5. **Will ECC create a decision-making model that adapts to the changes in the region or will it rely on traditional higher education models?** Traditional higher education models are calendar driven, routinized, and risk-averse. Market based models rely on just-in-time decision making, much like what occurs in continuing education programs. They also rely on the ability to reallocate internal resources if necessary and to experiment.

The bulk of this study address what ECC might be doing the next fifteen years. Each of these five areas helps to define how ECC will address the next fifteen years.

With a difficult economic and demographic landscape facing the Buffalo metropolitan area, ECC's future has the potential to make a significant difference in the lives of thousands of people. The stakes are high, and the fifteen-year clock is ticking and according to Peter Drucker, "The best way to predict the future is to create it!"

Four Processes ECC Must Adopt

Specifically, for ECC to achieve its future vision as revealed from the collective insights of hundreds of local constituents requires adopting the following 4 processes:

1. **Adaptive stability:** ECC must have the ability to change as needed without losing its sense of integrity and purpose.
2. **Focused Diversification:** ECC must have the ability to offer many programs and services, to many different types of people, in many different ways and still maintain a laser-point focus on excellence.
3. **New Tools in Old Frameworks:** Technology, partnerships, and new facilities are three new tools that ECC may have in the future. However, the core mission is excellence in teaching and learning, a framework that is timeless and enduring.
4. **Process-Driven Decision-Making:** Clear processes leading to clear decisions are essential in times of change. What is called for now are decisions that are driven by the vision of what ECC could be in the future.

ECC Must Be Ahead of the Time

In the context of ECC's aspirations and Western New York's needs, ECC will indeed have to be a leader, an innovator, and a community partner. ECC decisions will often have to be ahead of the changes in society. For example, knowing that there will be increasing numbers of non-English speakers in the region may well mean creating English-as-a-second-language programs for adults before the demand is felt, thus expanding a market in new ways. And to do this requires institutional autonomy.

ECC's future success will ultimately be found in the alignment of strategy, processes, people, technology, and performance with the needs and expectations of all constituencies. Theorist John Maxwell created a concept called "The Law of the Catalyst." As applied to ECC, the concept might be stated as "Successful colleges make things happen that improve the whole region"

ECC can help shape the future of Western New York, but it requires accepting risk and stepping out with vision.

Consultant's Commentary

This institutional assessment has resulted in four inescapable conclusions :

1. **ECC is a critically important part of the regional educational framework.** No other institution does what ECC does, as well as ECC does it, and in the manner that ECC does it.
2. **ECC is a critical part of Buffalo and Western New York's future.** As the economic landscape shifts, ECC has the ability to be the regional post-secondary institution most responsible for assuring timely, excellent education and training service throughout a person's life. The role of the urban community college is just now emerging across America. In a nutshell, one might accurately state: "No great city exists without a great community college."
3. **ECC's greatness rests on two foundations.** The first is the college's own aspirations to excellence. The second is the region's respect for ECC's mission and operations. These two are linked. Occasionally, people in the focus groups said that ECC is "just a community college," implying that colleges are somehow lesser institutions that universities or that people come to ECC because they have to, not because they want to. This type of comment misses the point about the role of an urban college. Understanding that role, promoting that role, and celebrating that role will be a major part of the emergence of ECC as a national community college model and as an integral part of the Western New York educational and economic scene.

4. **The future of ECC is one that can be shaped by all the members of the ECC family communicating and working in the best interests of the citizens whom ECC serves.** While all institutions can be inwardly focused and shorter-term in perspective, ECC has the opportunity to rise above the daily grind mentality to achieve a longer term good for the region. One of the most important parts of shifting mindsets from the day-to-day to a broader panorama is to develop a shared sense of institutional literacy, an understanding by the entire ECC family of how the institution works and where it is going. In an academic environment, process is often as important as the outcome, a fact of college life that occasionally baffles non-academics, but nonetheless a reality of American higher education. In this spirit, many of the recommendation began with groups discussing the future and communication with others.

Four Significant Points of Constituent Agreement

There were many areas in which various constituents saw an ideal future differently. However, of greater relevance than differences, are points of consensus. In broad-brush terms, there were four significant points of consensus among all constituents about the future of ECC. Consideration of any suggestion or recommendation in this or any other planning process, including the consideration of the location and/or expansion of facilities, must take the following points into consideration. These points are, in alphabetical order:

1. **Access and Participation:** ECC has to remain accessible to all the region's citizens. This accessibility includes, but is not limited to, financial access, physical access, curricular access, transportation access, and enrollment access. With open access, students and community members can participate in the wealth of ECC's educational, training, cultural, entertainment, and community development offerings.
2. **Educational Excellence:** All constituencies indicated that the integrity and relevance of ECC's mission are founded on educational excellence. Whether credit or noncredit, on-campus or distance learning course, excellence was at the heart of teaching and learning. A student's ability to compete successfully for a job and the region's ability to compete in a global economy are both considered to related to ECC's educational capabilities.
3. **Student Success:** From a student's first experience at ECC to graduation, certification, or participation, each student should find hers or his own levels of success. Further, the student's success has to translate to the advancement of the student's academic or career goals and to ultimate success as a participant in society. ECC serves and will continue to serve diverse populations, so providing an appropriate supportive environment will mean everything from residency on campus to accommodating senior

citizens, to serving students with disabilities, to serving a diverse ethnic population, from athletics and other student activities to academic organizations.

4. **Workforce and Economic Development:** ECC's regional mission is directly linked to workforce development, which in turn relates to economic development. To these ends, ECC's dual responsibilities include responsiveness to regional economic and quality of life needs and leadership in assisting in the definition and preparation of new careers for a dynamic marketplace to help create a *New Western New York*.

Respectfully Submitted



President, Resultants International, Inc.
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