

College Academic Senate Response to the College Brain Trust Reports and Administrative Documents

**Compiled by Shawn Dry, College Academic Senate Chair
Presented to the College Academic Senate on July 11, 2013**

The following document contains comments on the College Brain Trust reports and administrative documents that were shared with the college on May 8, 2013. The comments have been compiled from three sources: reports submitted by College Academic Senate standing committees in May 2013; open forums held in May and June 2013 on each campus and moderated by a Campus Academic Senate chair; and the College Academic Senate committee of the whole discussion on June 13, 2013.

The comments are presented in a summary fashion and are organized by report and document. I have retained all original documentation should the specific provenance and original wording of any comment be required.

Section I: Overall Comments

- The Senate sees many valuable and useful recommendations in these reports and documents. If implemented properly, the potential contained within them to improve the institution for the benefit of student learning is enormous. The Senate applauds the hard work by the College Brain Trust (CBT) consultants and administrators that went into their production.
- The relationship between the CBT reports on the one hand and the administrative guiding principles and prospective actions on the other hand is not always clear. At times, some of which will be indicated within this response document, whole sections of a CBT report appear to have been discarded or ignored when the administration's guiding principles and prospective actions were being crafted. The Senate and the college as a whole would appreciate more comprehensive communication on how the CBT reports are impacting and will impact changes at OCC.
- The Senate notes that all of these reports and documents are brief and summary in nature. In particular, the data that the CBT consultants and college administrators collected to justify changes of the scope called for in these reports and documents have not been shared with the college community. If the chancellor and administration genuinely desire the members of the college to fully participate in and support the changes recommended in these materials, the data to support them must be shared.
- The Senate is concerned with the proliferation of "corporate language" utilized in the administrative guiding principles and prospective actions. Terms like "CEO" and "stakeholders" may be commonplace in the business world outside Oakland Community College but should be utilized carefully and rarely within it. While this is a minor point in comparison to others, the Senate believes that words matter and should reflect genuine intent.
- The danger in their use lies in the projection of a top-down, heavy-handed, siloed, mid-20th century corporate governance structure that is not only inappropriate to an academic institution but is also increasingly being abandoned by the most progressive 21st century businesses.

Section II: Governance, Administration, and Communication

College Brain Trust Report

Part 1: Opening Material

- Any discussion of student success should clearly define the parameters of success. If, for example, graduation and retention rates alone are meant, then this leaves out other reasons why students attend OCC (e.g., professional credentialing, personal enrichment, etc.).
- The decision to centralize the administrative structure in the midst of the CBT review of options seemed to hand the CBT consultants the answer before the data were in place. Where were the data demonstrating that the “previous” system was broken?
- Many of the CBT input sessions were scheduled with little notice at times that teaching faculty found difficult to attend. Would the CBT consultants have come away with a different perception of the Senate and the college’s committee structure and activities if they had received a more inclusive perspective? Would the college community now have more trust in the findings of the CBT report and the guiding principles and prospective actions that have emerged from them if more inclusiveness had existed from the beginning?
- Another way to view the “slow decision-making process” of college committees is as democratic due process. When a committee is making changes in curriculum or assessment practices it is vitally important that there is a process of testing and revision before implementation. If for example a change in assessment is going to impact hundreds of instructors and students, it should be made after careful thought and debate.

Part 2: Recommendations for Administration

- The Senate supports the recommendations to update administrative job descriptions and perform regular evaluations (**#s 1-5**).
- The Senate condemns transferring course scheduling authority to academic deans (**#6**). Reasons for opposing this change include:
 - current department responsiveness to students’ needs and a lack of shared data demonstrating otherwise
 - the differences between a schedule that is efficient in the eyes of an administrator and one that serves the needs of students
 - the already overloaded responsibilities of academic deans
- The Senate questions the absolute necessity for the College Foundation (**#7**) to be self-supporting, given that it is an essential arm of the institution. Would the Foundation truly be disbanded if this goal were not met?
- The Senate is cautiously supportive of a Grants and Contracts Office (**#8**). While many saw the benefit of more attention to this area, a cost-benefit analysis would need to demonstrate that loss to other areas in an era of limited resources would be worth the corresponding advancement of student learning.

Part 3: Recommendations for Administrative Committees

- In general the Senate would like to hear more on how this committee structure would function and how it would differ from the current structure.
- While there was common support for clarifying the responsibilities of chairs, areas of potential concern with the administrative committees recommendations included siloing of employee groups, limitations on participation and shared governance, limiting decision-making authority to potentially inadequately informed administrators, and the absence of a feedback loop to assess the effectiveness of administrative decisions.

Part 4: Recommendations for Participatory Governance Committees

- In addition to the confusion and concern noted above for administrative committees, much of what was suggested in this section of the CBT report appears to duplicate or replace work traditionally performed by the College Academic Senate (e.g., #s 3, 4a, 5). If this is not the intent of the chancellor and administration, additional clarifying communication is needed.
- While the Senate has never advocated compensation for members of committees (#11), it continues to advocate for the compensation of Senate chair positions.
- The Senate supports training for committee chairs (#14).

Part 5: Recommendations for Academic Senate

- While the Senate was pleased to see that areas like curriculum development and grading policies were regarded as business that should continue to be performed by a Senate, some of the items identified are currently handled through union negotiation (#1.g) rather than through the Senate.
- The Senate fully supports both regular meetings between its chair and the chancellor and working closely with the vice chancellor of academic and student affairs (#s 2-3).

Part 6: Recommendations for Search Committees

- The Senate supports adequate and consistent training for search committee members.
- Some search committee compositions (#2) and processes (#s 3-4) are governed by union contract negotiation and will need to take that reality into account.

Part 7: Recommendations for Communication

- The Senate enthusiastically supports the changes to the current communication environment recommended by the CBT consultants. In particular, the variety of communication models and approaches recommended--both unidirectional (#1) and interactive (#s 4-5)--would be welcome alterations to current college practice.

Guiding Principles Document

Part 1: Delegation of Authority

- See the comment about “corporate language” above in Section I.

Part 2: Advisory Groups

- See the comments above about committees, search committees, and the Senate.
- See the comments above about the disconnect between the CBT report and what is included in these administrative guiding principles (e.g., regular communication between Senate and the chancellor).
- By selecting to list as the Senate’s role only the accreditation compliance piece from the larger CBT list, the sense communicated is that the Senate’s role in the college will be reduced to this sole function. If such was not the intent, additional communication is required.
- The Community Senates generated a great deal of confusion and concern. Would they replace or duplicate the functions performed by Campus Academic Senates? More information on the roles and functioning of a Community Senate within the larger shared governance structure is needed.

Part 3: Communications

- See the comments above about communication.

Part 4: Planning Hierarchy

- While the Strategic Plan is mentioned here, neither it nor its elements appear in the Educational Master Plan (see below).

Prospective Actions Document

- See the comments above about brevity and disconnect from the CBT report.

Section III: Policies and Procedures

College Brain Trust Report

Part 1: Task Overview

- The Senate hopes that faculty and other academic experts will be included in the work established here for the CBT consultants and the Academic Leadership Team.

Part 2: Recommendations

- The Senate supports all six recommendations. As noted above, the Senate hopes that faculty and other academic experts at the college will be part of these processes. Student participation would also be valuable, perhaps utilizing the Student Governments active at the college.

Guiding Principles Document

- The inclusion of the “Framework for delegating authority, etc.” in the policies and procedures guiding principles document implies that management, faculty, and staff merely obey policies and procedures and have no role in crafting them. Since the framework primarily speaks to governance and authority, it might best be moved to that guiding principle document.
- Similarly, the Senate would like further information on the following statement: “The top two tiers of authority (Board and Cabinet) support innovation; the remaining two tiers (Management and Staff) create outcomes.” Explanation as to why this statement is in the policies and procedures guiding principles document rather than the governance one is also requested.
- The remaining elements of this document are more relevant to policies and procedures and are supported by the Senate.
- The significant piece missing in this document is any guiding principle related to the creation and adjustment of policies and procedures. The Senate recommends the creation of an additional guiding principle that speaks to the necessity of an inclusive process for the creation and adjustment of policies and procedures. An inclusive process that involves members and input from every college community group is necessary to ensure both the quality of and support for policies and procedures.
- The campus forums collected numerous examples of past and current policies and procedures that failed or are failing because of a lack of inclusiveness in their creation.

Prospective Actions Document

- See the comments above on the guiding principles document.

Section IV: Educational Master Plan

College Brain Trust Report

- This report demonstrates the greatest degree of disconnect between what the CBT consultants recommended and what the administration is putting into practice. In particular, the CBT report calls for a two-phased approach to implementing a college-level academic master plan, with a small number of objectives addressed first to get the process correct before launching a larger effort. The administration seems to have bypassed the first phase and gone directly to full, large-scale implementation.
- The Senate supports a smaller first effort in line with the CBT recommendations. It supports, as the CBT report recommends, selecting three to five objectives to implement as a first, learning phase before moving on to a larger effort. The current administrative plan to work on fifteen objectives immediately seems overly ambitious.
- When the CBT consultants speak of “stakeholders” (see the comments above about corporate language), they leave out students. As noted above, the Senate believes that student

involvement should be solicited in the course of developing and implementing an Educational Master Plan, perhaps by utilizing campus Student Governments.

Educational Master Plan Steps and Timeline

- The timeline presented has a number of errors. The college forums moderated by Richard Holcomb and Shawn Dry were held in the fall of 2011 and winter of 2012, not in the fall of 2012. In addition, the events in the box that begins “CAMP, CPC conducted a detailed review...” occurred in the summer I 2012 semester. Finally, CBT interviews began as early as fall 2011.
- According to the correct timeline events, therefore, the Senate and the College Planning Council completed its reviews and revisions of the academic master plan by June 2012. The CBT consultants then performed their own review of this material and presented the administration with its results on December 5, 2012. It then took the administration five months to produce the documents which were shared with the college on May 8, 2013.
- This revised timeline demonstrates that the work of nearly an entire year (July 2012 to May 2013) was performed by CBT consultants and administrators with little to no input from or involvement of the larger college community, despite repeated requests from Senate members to participate. The Senate suggests that had a different procedure been followed during this crucial time, the resulting Educational Master Plan and all of its components would be meeting a different reception now.
- Moving forward, the Senate advocates leaving behind the top-down approach of establishing Educational Master Plan (EMP) objectives and instead embracing an inclusive, multi-party approach that will both improve the quality of the final product and the enthusiasm of the college community to embrace it.

OCC Master Plan Moves Forward (Infomart Statements)

- The composition and work of the Academic Leadership Team (ALT) elicited comments and concerns. The absence of full-time faculty among the group responsible for the academic direction and programming of the institution is troubling to the Senate. There is also confusion about the degree to which the efforts of the ALT and EMP implementation teams will duplicate and/or replace the work traditionally performed by Senate committees (e.g., curriculum review and assessment). The Senate would appreciate communication about these issues.
- Though the governance guiding principles document states that the Strategic Plan “creates the priorities that satisfy community needs and student interests,” the Educational Master Plan utilizes priority categories different from those contained within the Strategic Plan. In fact, no reference to the Strategic Plan, its priorities, or its outcomes exists at all within the EMP documentation.
- The Senate approves of the work steps outlined for the implementation teams.
- The Senate requests more communication on the implementation work that has already commenced. It also expresses concern that the beginning of implementation suggests that the EMP is now being shared “after the fact” and that it is too late to provide substantive input on its creation.
- The Senate expresses concern over the reference to limiting implementation teams to “the optimal number of people.” There are obvious dangers of exclusion and favoritism implied in this approach that the Senate hopes the administration wishes to avoid.

Guiding Principles Document

- The Senate fully supports the principles of this document.

- As in the policies and procedures guiding principles document, the Senate requests the addition of a guiding principle that enshrines an inclusive process for the creation, implementation, and revision of the Educational Master Plan.

Developmental Education Objective

- The Senate is concerned that the partial implementation of this objective has begun without a complete plan in place (i.e., the work steps outlined for implementation teams are not being properly followed).
- There is also concern that two of the three identified driving evidence pieces are from Achieving the Dream, since the effectiveness of this program and the validity of its data have been contested.
- The Senate also hopes that any development of a new academic program would utilize established Senate curriculum development and review processes.

Curriculum Objectives

- The first two objectives (review academic offerings and set curriculum direction) are problematic for several reasons.
 - First, they do not seem to be discreetly actionable objectives (i.e., they are very broad and vague), which seems to contradict the criterion established by the ALT for rejecting academic planning objectives established by the Senate process in 2012.
 - Second, they imply that this work is not already being done. In fact, the Senate through its curriculum, curriculum review, and student outcomes assessment committees has been accomplishing these objectives for years. If there are specific, actionable pieces that the ALT believes need to be accomplished, the objectives should speak directly to them.
 - Third, the Senate would like to see someone with teaching experience responsible for objectives relating to curriculum revision.
- The third and fourth objectives (honors college and service learning) are supported by the Senate, as long as the work steps outlined for implementation are followed and the Senate's roles in curriculum development and review are maintained.

Student Learning Objectives

- The first objective (improve assessment practices) is again both too broad to be actionable and seems to imply that such work is not already ongoing.
- Ongoing work by the Senate student outcomes assessment committee also seems to be ignored in the wording of several other objectives (benchmarks for general education outcomes, assess student learning in relation to benchmarks, evaluate program changes).
- The Senate recommends that any objective related to student learning assessment both specifically states what aspect of assessment it wants to correct or improve and also utilizes the Senate committee structure in its implementation.

Enrollment Management Objectives

- These objectives seem to suggest that the administration has already made important decisions about enrollment management, including what percentage of the college's attention and budget will be directed toward its potential student groups (developmental, transfer, continuing education, etc.) and what type of student has the ability to benefit from the college experience. The Senate recommends establishing objectives to inclusively make these decisions before moving on to "next step" objectives.

- The wordings of the first two objectives (enrollment management plan and student retention plans) are too broad to be actionable. The Senate once again recommends specific, actionable language in the Educational Master Plan objectives.

Distance Learning Objectives

- As above, objectives to increase online access and obtain HLC approval for online degrees assume that someone has already made the decision that these are desirable college policies. The Senate alternatively recommends beginning with an objective to inclusively determine college policy on these issues.
- Because online delivery of curriculum is still a curricular issue, the Senate recommends that work on these objectives be made in conjunction with the Senate curricular committee structure.

Section V: Closing Comments

- The Senate appreciates the opportunity to review and comment on these reports and documents. Such openness to feedback is a crucial phase of a shared governance environment.
- The Senate hopes that the chancellor and administration will pay close attention to the comments compiled in this response document and will use them to alter and improve the implementation of the CBT recommendations and administrative guiding principles and prospective actions. Such incorporation of feedback is also a crucial phase of a shared governance environment.