Standard II: Educational Program and Its Effectiveness

Overview: General Requirements

Recently committed to focusing exclusively on undergraduate education, Linfield College consists of the McMinnville Campus, with 34 majors, the Portland Campus with two majors, and the Division of Continuing Education (DCE), with its Adult Degree Program featuring six majors—three identical to majors on the McMinnville Campus and three specific to the Adult Degree Program only. The college thus offers a total of 40 distinct academic majors. Standards for and courses in all majors are subject to review and oversight by the relevant academic department, the college-wide Curriculum Committee and, ultimately, the Faculty Assembly. Similarly, teaching faculty, both permanent and adjunct, are hired only after review and endorsement of credentials by the relevant academic department chairpersons.

2.A.1 The standards of the permanent faculty are indicated by those possessing doctoral degrees: 90, or 62 percent. (Data are for 1997-98.) Of the 45 who lack doctorates, 30 are in either fine or performing arts, nursing, physical education, or the library—all fields for which a master’s degree, both by official Linfield policy and common practice, is the terminal degree. No member of the permanent faculty possesses less than a master’s degree. That Linfield possesses adequate physical and financial resources to augment the human resources devoted to teaching is evident from any number of considerations: a student to teaching faculty ratio of 12.6:1, a physical plant with an insured value of $83.6m, a total operating budget of $32m, and financial aid of $9.3m.

2.A.2 The integrity of academic programs is entirely in the hands of the Faculty Assembly and its standing committee structure. In curricular matters the faculty is sovereign. Recent revision of the general education program, for instance, followed established practice. Curriculum Committee action moved the Faculty Assembly to create a General Education Curriculum (GEC) Revision Committee composed of elected faculty and students, which in 1995-96 reviewed and assessed the previous general education program. The committee then devised and refined the new Linfield Curriculum (LC), with the help of a faculty-wide retreat in fall of 1996, and secured adoption of the program with an 80 percent vote of the Faculty Assembly in February of 1997. The LC was formally implemented in fall of 1997 for all students, albeit with certain accommodations made for continuing students. As respects curricular changes in departmental majors and minors, all proposals are brought by departments to the college-wide Curriculum Committee for its approval. Actions of that committee are placed on the agenda of the Faculty Assembly for its review and endorsement. Proposals for new majors as well as for dissolution of existing majors are faculty responsibilities.

Review of faculty procedures is on-going. The committee structure was thoroughly revised in 1995-96, resulting in fewer committees and a rationalization of function. None of these changes, however, affected basic faculty responsibility for curricular matters. All faculty committees pertaining to curriculum and instruction and to student conduct feature student representation.

2.A.3 The coherence, breadth, depth, and assessment of individual majors is discussed in the departmental sections below. Linfield librarians have an incentive to be pro-active in outreach to fellow faculty members across disciplines because all but the head librarian enjoy faculty status and are evaluated in part on their teaching. The college’s librarians also collaborate with all faculty teaching the first-year Inquiry Seminar (the touchstone first-year course of the Linfield Curriculum) to make bibliographic instruction an integral component of this writing-intensive class.

2.A.4 As part of its assessment program, Linfield College publishes the learning goals for each of its majors in the catalog. These goals are the main reference point for each department’s
assessment plan. These plans and the assessment activities falling under them are discussed in the departmental sections below.

2.A.5 The college offers courses in concentrated formats in three areas: summer session, the eight- or ten-week terms of the Division of Continuing Education, and the four-week term during January. The teaching calendars during these non-standard terms are carefully arranged to provide the same instructor contact available during the regular fall and spring semesters on the McMinnville and Portland Campuses. Which courses are suited to these non-standard terms is left to the determination of the academic departments. Many departments, for example, do not offer key major or prerequisite courses outside the semester-long format. Other departments extend beyond the typical time frame of the concentrated format (e.g., January Term's version of organic chemistry mandates a fifth week—normally a vacation period—for enrolled students). A consultant to the college has undertaken a two-year study to compare results of courses taught within different formats; the study design and progress report are included in Exhibit II-1. Results of this study will be distributed to the departments involved in such instruction.

Linfield's semesters for McMinnville and Portland are 15 weeks in length, with three, four, or five meetings each week for courses of three, four, or five credits. January Term is four weeks in length. and save for off-campus travel courses that meet six or seven days a week, the number of credits accords with the definition of a unit of credit on p. 146 of the Accreditation Handbook. With the termination of Linfield's graduate program, only three tuition rates are charged: the full rate for the McMinnville and Portland Campuses, the rate for the Division of Continuing Education, and the rate for obtaining teaching licensure as a post-baccalaureate student. Each of these is justified by the difference in the level of services provided. Division of Continuing Education students do not have access to athletic facilities, student services, and other support services provided to full tuition students. Because students qualifying for the post-baccalaureate rate have exhausted their Linfield financial aid, lower rates recognize that situation and accommodate their probable status as fifth-year students.

2.A.6 The college has maintained the same calendar as in the 1988 accreditation review—two semesters of 15 weeks each plus a January Term of four weeks. A concern about conducting five-credit courses during January Term (which seemed inconsistent with the definition of one unit of credit on p. 146 of the Accreditation Handbook) has recently been resolved by a Faculty Assembly vote in April of 1998 mandating that January Term courses earn a maximum of four credits for the four-week term, and that five-credit courses must meet for a fifth week during the intersession break preceding spring semester.

2.A.7 Departments route all curricular changes to the college-wide Curriculum Committee, which reports directly to the Faculty Assembly. In practice, the trustees have made the Faculty Assembly sovereign in curricular matters.

2.A.8 Librarians at Linfield are members of the faculty. They instruct students in information gathering, largely in partnership with faculty teaching in specific disciplines. Students evaluate the instruction provided by the librarians through formal written assessment procedures, and these evaluations are on record for consideration in tenure and promotion decision-making. A librarian representative belongs to each of the college's five divisions; similarly, one librarian devotes half-time of her appointment to the Division of Continuing Education. The Academic Support Committee of the Faculty Assembly advises on library policy. Departments are routinely consulted on and provide expertise for book and periodical acquisition in expending their respective library allocations.

2.A.9 Learning is optimized by preparing new students for the rigors of college-level work, paying careful attention to prerequisites, and challenging students throughout their course of study with work of increasing complexity. Overall, the college curriculum is planned with careful attention to mapping the appropriate sequencing of courses so that the prerequisites necessary for success are clearly identified. The new Linfield Curriculum (LC) includes in its first year a
required Inquiry Seminar designed as an introduction to the life of the mind, focusing on the qualities required to ask interesting, intellectually-driven questions and to provide rigorous, disciplined answers to those questions. In its other areas, the LC has opened much more room for general education courses drawn from the upper division offerings of numerous departments, encouraging students to regard general education as an on-going educational experience rather as a set of predominantly introductory courses to be completed with dispatch and disengagement early in one's undergraduate history, before the "real" work of one's major begins. Thus the LC has been integrated into the efforts associated with education in the major, where departments pay careful attention to increasing the complexity of student coursework over time. Review of each major's content and internal organization is a departmental responsibility, with Curriculum Committee oversight.

2.A.10 Credit for prior experiential learning is only offered at Linfield College through the Division of Continuing Education, which has instituted a rigorous portfolio assessment procedure. Review of all student portfolios submitted for such credit is controlled within the relevant academic department. The Linfield process conforms to Policy 2.3 of the Accreditation Handbook, as demonstrated in the fuller discussion under the Division of Continuing Education, below.

2.A.11 & 12 Policies for course or program addition or deletion are subject to regular review by the Curriculum Committee and Faculty Assembly. In the four cases of program elimination since our 1988 accreditation review (Family and Consumer Studies in 1989; Applied Physics—Electronics in 1992; Arts Management in 1994; and the M.Ed. degree in 1995), adequate notice was provided to prospective new applicants, and all students active in the program were allowed time and provided courses sufficient to allow completion of their degrees. In spring of 1995 the Faculty Assembly and trustees adopted an explicit policy to formalize the practice of faculty review of any proposed dissolution of an academic program.

Overview: Planning and Assessment

2.B.1 Linfield's interim evaluation report to the Commission on Colleges in spring of 1993 did not identify any deficiencies with the college's assessment activities. Nonetheless, the college recognized that assessment of student learning and its links to educational planning lay at the center of the commission's approach to accreditation.

Preparation for a renewed emphasis on assessment coincided with the hiring in July of 1994 of Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of Faculty Marvin Henberg. Having recently participated in writing portions of the accreditation self-study for his previous institution, Henberg was aware of the desirability of developing a college-wide approach to assessment and educational planning. He began by evaluating where Linfield stood with respect to assessment. In 1994 there were pockets (e.g., in the Division of Continuing Education and in the Nursing and Education Departments) where assessment planning and implementation were well advanced. These units provided a nucleus for developing a culture of assessment extending outward to all other academic units.

Because a viable assessment program requires both departmentally-based and institution-wide components, the college adopted a two-pronged strategy to meet the assessment challenge. The first prong was to develop means of engaging departments in assessment practices for Linfield's academic majors. As no systematic annual reporting from academic departments existed, the first step toward an assessment plan was to inaugurate annual reports to the dean of faculty from each department in spring of 1995 (See Exhibit II-2). Chairpersons were asked to report on the following four categories: 1) Curriculum Highlights; 2) Faculty Activity and Achievement; 3) Student Activity and Achievement; and 4) Assessment. Embedding assessment within the annual report emphasized its importance to curriculum design and review. In addition, annual reporting paved the way for departments to monitor and
document student achievement systematically—a necessary step in compiling evidence of improvement in student learning.

In the 1995–96 and 1996–97 annual reports, departments developed and began implementing their assessment programs. A consensus emerged that, given its variety of disciplines, Linfield would be best served by a decentralized approach to assessment. Some disciplines (e.g., accounting) were obviously disposed toward use of objective, external, and quantifiable assessment instruments. Other disciplines (e.g., those in the humanities) tended to favor largely qualitative approaches to assessment. It was clear that a Procrustean bed fitting every plan to exactly the same dimensions would not serve a college with a liberal arts orientation, a broad profile of professional programs, and an ambitious Division of Continuing Education.

Nevertheless, departments felt the need for some uniform framework with respect to articulating assessment goals, measures, and implications for planning. Accordingly, the request for the 1997-98 Annual Report stipulated a common format for assessment. Departments were asked to develop their programs as follows: 1) Goals for the Major/Minor; 2) Means of Assessing Achievement of these Goals; and 3) Use of Assessment in Curricular Planning. Based on their two prior years of deliberation, units responsible for Linfield's academic majors were able to articulate sufficiently robust plans that the assessment portion of the 1997-98 Annual Report was compiled into a separate entity: Linfield College Assessment Plan, 1997-98, which has been updated for 1998-99 (See Exhibit II-3).

The second prong in preparing the college for meeting the assessment challenge was to augment the sources of information available to departments and divisions about student life and learning at Linfield. A major boost to this portion of the strategy was provided by Henberg's predecessor, Ken Goodrich, who served for the 1994-95 academic year as a special assistant to the president, responsible for establishing an Office of Institutional Research. Goodrich developed the information for the Fact Book (Exhibit I-2) which in each of its three editions has proven useful to academic as well as to institutional planning. Goodrich also developed an institution-wide senior survey (Exhibit I-5), which has been administered in each of the past four years. Results of the 1995 survey were compiled and distributed in timely fashion to all academic departments. Some items (e.g., the weighted lists of persons named as exemplars of what a Linfield faculty member should be) were employed in the faculty evaluation process. The GEC Revision Committee made use of survey information in devising the Linfield Curriculum. Student comments on individual majors were distributed to departments for their use in curriculum and program review.

A high degree of turnover in the Office of Institutional Research subsequent to Goodrich’s retirement meant that results of the 1996 and 1997 surveys were compiled and distributed to departments later than desirable—in the spring of 1998. Together with the 1995 survey, these later reports provide the college a data base for longitudinal tracking of senior cohorts responding to the same questions. In spring of 1997 and 1998, the college supplemented the senior survey with one (Exhibit I-3) administered by the Noel-Levitz Corporation. This latter helpfully compares senior student satisfaction at Linfield with that of seniors at comparable institutions nationally.

Other college-wide sources of assessment information include a regular six-month alumni follow-up conducted by the Career Services Office. (See Exhibit I-6) That office also conducted an ambitious five-year follow-up study for the cohort classes graduating in 1989 (See also Exhibit I-6). Recent deliberations among staff from College Relations, Career Services, and the Office of Academic Affairs have led to the conclusion that a more valuable source of alumni feedback for purposes of academic planning would be a survey of graduates four or five years after leaving the institution. Not only will these graduates be more settled in their careers than at six months, but they will be in a position to reflect more maturely on their experience at Linfield. Some subset of the questions asked on the senior survey will be reprised for this follow-up of alumni at four or five years.
2.B.2 The result of Linfield's decentralized, departmentally-based approach to assessment may be seen in the learning goals developed for each major and printed in the 1998 college catalog. The means of assessing these goals and the uses within each major of assessment information may be found in the overall assessment documents for 1997-98 and 1998-99.

The greatest remaining assessment challenge for the college lies in developing means and measures for monitoring and improving the new Linfield Curriculum. This effort to assess the LC will necessarily grow and deepen as the curriculum does. In the deliberations producing the revised general education program, regular attention was paid to the necessity for timely evaluation of the fledgling curriculum. The proposal approved by the Faculty Assembly in spring of 1997 directed the Curriculum Committee to undertake an assessment of the LC by spring of 1999. Members of the GEC Revision Committee have also been put on alert to their continuing role in the evaluation process alongside members of the Curriculum Committee. To that end, development of a student-based evaluation instrument for the Inquiry Seminar (IQS) is already under way. In the first semester of the IQS, Dr. Lex Runciman, director of Linfield's Writing Center and coordinator of faculty development workshops for prospective instructors of the course, drafted a preliminary evaluation form and administered it to students in fall 1997 IQS sections. (See Exhibit II-4) That vehicle will be refined and re-administered by the general education coordinator as a standard procedure for all subsequent IQS sections beginning fall of 1998, with results presented to the Curriculum Committee as a tool in its formal reviewing process.

The Curriculum Committee has already signaled an interest in collaborating with faculty regularly teaching courses in the five Areas of Inquiry and the diversity components of the LC to refine the goals and emphases informing each category. To assist that effort, the college has secured a Hewlett Foundation grant of $100,000 to bring faculty together to highlight and sharpen the curricular commonalities integrating classes housed within the various Areas of Inquiry (the Vital Past, the Natural World, etc.). The first such seminar was held in the spring of 1998 for a dozen Images and Arts faculty. Since a prominent feature of the grant proposal involves the development of a comprehensive assessment strategy for the LC, it stands to reason that the Curriculum Committee will work closely with the faculty participating in the Hewlett seminars (scheduled through fall 1999) to complete its task of assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the new curriculum. Accordingly, the full process will likely extend beyond the two years mandated by the Faculty Assembly for a preliminary assessment of the program.

Meanwhile, evaluation of individual courses within the LC will continue to operate at the instructor and departmental levels. Similarly, the senior survey includes questions about the general education program that will allow comparison between student responses to the previous GEC and to the new Linfield Curriculum.

2.B.3 The fuller story of Linfield assessment unfolds in the departmental sections that follow. We take the broad pattern of on-going assessment activities at the levels of department, general education, Division of Continuing Education, and the college as a whole to be proof of a sincere desire of Linfield faculty and staff to do a better job of educating today than they did yesterday.

Undergraduate Program

2.C.1 Fall of 1997 saw the inauguration of the college's new general education program, the Linfield Curriculum (See Attachment II-D). The new curriculum was the result of two years of deliberation by a committee elected by the Faculty Assembly (augmented by three student members appointed by the ASLC) and chaired by Professor Peter Richardson of the Modern Languages Department. In assessing the need for change, the GEC Revision Committee met intensively with all campus constituencies, reviewed dozens of general education programs at sister institutions, and conducted a college-wide faculty retreat in the fall of 1996 (See Exhibit II-5 for GEC revision materials). The result is an inquiry-based curriculum identifying broad
learning goals among discipline-based courses that fall into five cross-disciplinary Areas of Inquiry: The Vital Past (VP); Ultimate Questions (UQ); Individuals, Systems, and Societies (SS); The Natural World (NW); and Images and Arts (IA). Two courses, including a required Inquiry Seminar (IQS), must be completed in each of these categories. In addition, students must complete one course satisfying each of two diversity requirements: Global Diversity (DG) and American Pluralisms (DA). These latter courses may fall in any of the five Areas of Inquiry or coincide, depending on the topic, with an IQS.

Written and oral communication skills lie at the heart of the Inquiry Seminar and are reinforced in follow-up writing-intensive (WI) courses found across disciplines, at least one of which must be successfully completed to satisfy the LC. Quantitative proficiency must be demonstrated through one of the following: a minimum SAT mathematics score of 520 or a minimum CBEST score of 41; completion of a prescribed college math course with a grade of C or higher; or a passing score on a mathematics proficiency test administered by the Mathematics Department. Quantitative skills are thereafter required and reinforced in all courses satisfying the Natural World requirement and by many courses within Individuals, Systems, and Societies, where statistics is a common tool of analysis. Critical analysis, logical thinking, and effective marshaling of evidence are stressed throughout the Linfield Curriculum, but especially in the Inquiry Seminars and in courses examining Ultimate Questions. Images and Arts expands this analytic orientation by immersing students in questions of aesthetic form and experimentation. Writing-intensive (WI) courses have been developed across departments so that most students may satisfy this portion of the Linfield Curriculum by taking a WI course in their major field of study. While data won't be available until 1997’s entering students graduate in 2001, the curriculum is intended to reinforce literacy in the mode of discourse appropriate to each student’s program of study.

It is important to note that the new Linfield Curriculum, like the GEC it replaced, links all students graduating from the college, whether from the McMinnville Campus, the Portland Campus, or the Division of Continuing Education. With a short grace period to process through to graduation those students who matriculated at Linfield under the previous general education curriculum, the same policies and procedures for evaluation of transfer credits apply across the board to students from each of these areas.

2.C.2 In moving toward the new general education program, the GEC Revision Committee introduced numerous versions of the Linfield Curriculum to multiple constituencies within the college, compared them with general education programs elsewhere, hired consultants, and presented their preliminary recommendations at a college-wide faculty retreat. The rationale for the Linfield Curriculum approved by the Faculty Assembly in February of 1997 is based on two years of assessing strengths and weaknesses of the GEC. In particular, it became clear that students and faculty alike were dissatisfied with the lack of flexibility in the old GEC. The senior survey, for instance, showed student appreciation of course content, but indicated dissatisfaction over bottlenecks in the curriculum (e.g., the required lower division religion course could not be accessed by first-year and sophomore students). The relatively larger number of GEC, as opposed to departmental, courses taught by adjunct faculty (especially those in “homeless” classes like GEC 120-123, Western Culture and World Civilizations) indicated that some means should be found for increasing broad departmental ownership in general education.

2.C.3 A hallmark of the LC is its dedication to cross-disciplinary definitions of the intellectual goals associated with each requirement. Humanities and fine arts are represented in the Linfield Curriculum by courses satisfying Ultimate Questions as well as Images and Arts. Courses across the natural sciences (including an introductory psychology course with a physiological emphasis) are prescribed by and required within The Natural World. Though not formally incorporated into any of the five Areas of Inquiry, mathematics is represented by the proficiency requirement as described in response to Standard 2.C.1 immediately above. Social science courses comprise the vast majority of offerings in Individuals, Systems, and Societies.
The interrelationships among these general Areas of Inquiry are handled in an innovative manner new to curricular thinking at Linfield. The LC recognizes that divisions separating humanities, fine arts, social science, and science are, though well-defined for mainstream examples, fluid at the actual borders between classifications. For this reason, some courses from a field usually regarded as a social science (e.g., Political Theory) satisfy the learning goals for Ultimate Questions, an area of philosophical inquiry more typically associated with the humanities. The focus of the new curriculum, then, is less on the disciplinary pedigree of a course than on the particular mode of intellectual questioning it embodies (e.g., a historically-based philosophy course such as Medieval Thought falls under The Vital Past as well as under Ultimate Questions.) Accordingly, the interrelationship among traditional classifications of knowledge (humanities versus social science, or philosophy versus history) is emphasized within the LC. In addition to this novel mode of classification, interdisciplinary understanding is promoted in the Linfield Curriculum by deliberately designed interdepartmental courses such as Introduction to Film (English and Communication) and Environmental Literature (English and Biology).

2.C.4 Basic Linfield College transfer policy is articulated in the catalog (p. 30, 1997 edition):
“Generally, full credit is acknowledged for work completed at an accredited four-year college or university, provided the courses are comparable to courses listed in the Linfield College catalog and no grade in those courses is C- or below. Up to 72 credits can be granted for work taken at an accredited two-year college. Generally, these must be courses numbered 100 or above.” In practice, valid certification from the registrar of an accredited institution, whether two- or four-year, of successful completion of a course at grade C- or above, leads to credit toward a Linfield degree for any student admitted to the college. The registrar, in consultation with department chairpersons and the general education coordinator, is charged with determining credit in non-standard, questionable, or marginal cases. In no cases are unfamiliar courses approved for transfer without supporting evidence contained in a catalog description from the previous institution or a valid syllabus.

2.C.5 The college-wide advising program, targeted at first-year students, is discussed below. It has won national recognition and has contributed significantly to a marked rise in retention into the sophomore year.

2.C.6 Students who, in the judgment of the Admissions and Financial Aid Committee, need additional academic help are required to enroll during their first semester in a learning skills course, a condition stipulated in their letters of acceptance. Students with learning disabilities or other indicators of special needs are directed to and assisted by the director of Learning Support Services.

2.C.7 On the McMinnville Campus, over the three years for which data have been collected, the full-time faculty have taught just over 75 percent of courses in fall and spring and just over 70 percent of courses in January Term. There is thus about a 25 percent reliance on adjunct faculty in fall and spring, and a 30 percent reliance on adjuncts in January Term (See Exhibit II-6). In all cases, departmental chairpersons and faculty review credentials of adjunct applicants and recommend hires to the academic dean. All majors are housed within an academic department consisting of at least two members, save for the Health Sciences major, which is supervised by an interdisciplinary committee drawn from various disciplines. Supplemented by adjuncts, the faculty numbers for each major have offered sufficient courses for students to complete their degrees in timely fashion. To maximize faculty resources, many upper division courses are offered only in alternate years.

Academic Departments and Special Programs
In order to provide consistency and relevance in the departmental sections, departments were asked to discuss and analyze the coherence and design of their curricula (2.A.3), their means of assessing courses in abbreviated time frames (2.A.5), involvement with the library (2.A.8), assessment of
student learning (2.B, 1-3), participation in general education (2.C.1), advising (2.C.5), faculty qualifications (2.C.7), and relations with the Division of Continuing Education and participation in January Term and in International Programs (2.G.1-12). Some of these standards were selected to reflect strengths of Linfield (e.g., the broad-based departmental involvement of permanent faculty members in the Division of Continuing Education), whereas others were selected to reflect areas where we recognize the need to improve (e.g., the college is still grappling with how to assess comparability of student learning in regular format courses versus non-standard or abbreviated formats.) To the extent possible, we have attempted to avoid repetition of information readily available in the college catalog, assessment documents, Faculty Handbook, or Fact Book. There is no discussion of Standards 2.D, 2.E, or 2.F, for Linfield has no graduate programs.

Academic Advising

A primary function of Academic Advising is coordination of the Colloquium, a program designed to help first-year students make a successful transition from high school to college. The program is wholly consistent with the mission of the college in "creating a supportive, caring environment" for new students" based upon a close association between faculty and students," and in engaging students in discussions about "the liberal arts as the unifying basis of all learning." Academic Advising is responsible for recruiting and training peer and faculty advisors, planning many Orientation activities, scheduling placement exams, annually revising the Colloquium schedule and curriculum, and integrating first-semester advising with subsequent majors' advising. Other responsibilities of Academic Advising include oversight of the change of advisor and declaration of major processes, advising of student applicants for competitive fellowships and scholarships, and coordination and improvement of faculty advising at all stages of a student's career at Linfield.

Colloquium was established in 1987 in a college-wide effort to increase retention. The most significant outcome assessment, therefore, is the retention rate. In 1986, just prior to its establishment, the first-year to sophomore retention rate was 70.3 percent. In nine of the ten subsequent years, first-year to sophomore retention has fluctuated between 76.0 percent and 84.2 percent. The 1996 retention figure of 84.2 percent is well above the national average of 79 percent for private institutions and higher by 13.9 percent than Linfield's rate in 1986. Linfield was the recipient of the 1996 Outstanding Institutional Advising Program Award presented by the National Academic Advising Association, underscoring the importance of the Colloquium program and its contribution to increased student satisfaction and retention. In the 11 sub-grouping calculations made by Noel-Levitz in the Student Satisfaction Inventory in spring 1997, Academic Advising had the highest satisfaction level. Additionally, Academic Advising had an importance level of 6.48 (on a 7.0 scale) and the smallest "gap" (i.e., difference between students' perceived importance and students' perceived satisfaction).

From the outset, systematic, annual assessment of Colloquium has been conducted through a student survey. At the conclusion of Colloquium, students are asked to rate all aspects of the program, and they are invited to record their individual comments on the evaluation form. Every year, adjustments are made to the program in response to this assessment and in consultation with a committee of experienced faculty and peer advisors. Negative student evaluations, especially in 1993, led to a significant revision of the schedule and curriculum beginning in the fall of 1994. Large numbers of students let us know that Colloquium was initially very helpful but less so as the semester wore on. They also informed us that the sessions on sexuality, AIDS, alcohol, and diversity repeated much of what they had learned in high school and should not be required. The revised schedule and curriculum resulted from a series of meetings among the director of academic advising, the dean of enrollment services, the counseling staff, health education staff, and the colloquium revision committee, comprised of student and faculty advisors. The changes, facilitated by the addition of another day to Orientation, increased the number of meetings during Orientation and the first week of the semester, and reduced the number of meetings thereafter. Individual meetings between advisors and students were added during Orientation, and an additional session co-taught by peer advisors and resident advisors (RAs) was added. Sessions on sexuality, AIDS, alcohol, and diversity were moved out
of the Colloquium syllabus, yet were retained as events during Orientation and the early weeks of school.

As a result of the new schedule and curriculum with its focus more directly on academic advising, evaluations in 1994 were considerably improved over the previous year. In the following areas, student responses were markedly higher than in 1993: availability of faculty advisors (11 percent increase); availability of peer advisor (19 percent increase); individual meetings with faculty advisors (15 percent increase); individual meetings with peer advisors (30 percent increase); letter to advisor (21 percent increase); tentative academic plan (18 percent increase). Negative written comments by students also fell from 124 in 1993 to 46 in 1994.

Student use of the award-winning 1994 Companion—a HyperCard, on-line resource for students—was disappointingly low (presumably because of its last-minute inclusion in the schedule); however, negative student comments about the Companion were fewer than for the printed version of previous years. The revision committee, therefore, planned new ways to introduce students to the 1995 Companion and to engage them in a more interactive manner.

Overall, student response to the 1995 Colloquium was positive and confirmed that the “front-end-loaded” format with its greater emphasis on academic advising should be retained. The number of positive written comments increased and the number of negative comments decreased. Significant increases in student satisfaction occurred in two areas: academic departmental open houses (19 percent increase) and the tentative academic plan (10 percent increase). Student satisfaction also remained high for the following sessions, with between 70 and 91 percent of all students rating these as “very” or “somewhat” helpful or worthwhile: dessert meeting during Orientation; placement and registration sessions; individual meetings with faculty and peer advisors; academic adjustment to college session; and the session on the liberal arts.

Student satisfaction with the 1995 Companion was low. Use increased significantly but satisfaction with it as a valuable resource was only 22 percent. Negative reaction may have been associated with a mandatory assignment on the Companion. In response to these findings, the revision committee agreed to change the format of the Companion, moving it from its 1994/1995 HyperCard version to the Linfield home page of the web, cutting back content that was duplicated in other sources, and integrating it with other on-line information.

Student response to the newly-added session run by peer advisors and RAs was reasonably positive (65 percent positive); peer advisor and RA reaction was more positive, and the revision committee decided to retain the session in 1996. Response to the unstructured, advisor-planned session (new to 1995) was also positive and this session was therefore retained.

Student evaluations of the 1996 Colloquium continued to be positive, as the number of positive written comments again increased and the number of negative comments decreased. Significant increases were also observed in faculty advisor availability (from 85 percent to 95 percent) and peer advisor availability (from 66 percent to 96 percent, after a dip of 4 percent in this area in 1995).

Students continued to find the individual meetings with faculty and peer advisors worthwhile (93 percent and 89 percent respectively). For the first time, students were asked to assess their faculty and peer advisors’ helpfulness in three specific areas: helpfulness in scheduling and registration (faculty advisors: 91 percent, peer advisors: 96 percent); helpfulness in discussing long-range academic plans (faculty advisors: 91 percent, peer advisors: 93 percent); helpfulness in referring to other resources on campus (faculty advisors: 92 percent, peer advisors: 95 percent). These data and those collected from subsequent years will be used to modify on-going advisor training.

Students in 1996 found their participation in Colloquium especially contributed to: learning about resources at Linfield (81 percent—5 percent increase); learning about student organizations (81 percent—11 percent increase); understanding the academic expectations of college (73 percent—3 percent increase); learning about traditions and “how things work at Linfield” (72 percent—6 percent increase); and feeling a part of the college community (72 percent—7 percent increase).
Overall, students did not find their participation in Colloquium especially contributed to: learning to live in a diverse community (40 percent); developing better study skills (46 percent); or understanding how to manage time (52 percent). In response to these results, advisor training in diversity was increased in 1997, a special study area for first-year students staffed by Colloquium peer advisors was created, and advisors were encouraged to put together panels of successful students to discuss with first-year students such issues as time management and study skills.

There was a significant decrease in use of the 1996 Companion (from 71 to 31 percent), with only 28 percent of those who used it indicating that it was helpful to their transition to college. Instead of registering negative comments, students indicated that they did not know what it was or simply never used it. The “Getting Connected” session during Orientation, in which the Companion was introduced, was not well attended and students found other means of learning the information it contained. In response to this problem, the 1997 Companion was redesigned as a resource for students to use during the summer before they arrive at college, when the information it contains would be most helpful. The content was focused more on orienting the newcomer to the campus and there was a large increase in the number of photographs (e.g. buildings, residence hall rooms). Information duplicated by the ASLC Student Handbook—more useful to students once they were on campus—was eliminated.

Because of observations from faculty members that too many students are not proficient in basic computer skills, the “Getting Connected” technology session during Orientation was replaced with a series of workshops on e-mail, the Internet, and word processing. As students fulfilled the various assignments for Colloquium, peer advisors monitored basic student proficiency in these three areas.

Advisors have been provided with more information about their advisees. In addition to standard information (SAT scores, AP test results, etc.), advisors are notified of individuals who have special learning needs and those who are first generation college students. During fall semester when “early alert” notices are issued to students in academic difficulty, advisors of first-year students are notified so that they may discuss this during the student’s individual advising session.

A brochure, “A Student’s Guide to User-Friendly Academic Advising,” (Exhibit II-7) was developed to clarify advising procedures such as the declaration of major and change of advisor process. It offers students suggestions about when to meet with an advisor, preparing for an advising session, and maintaining good records. Distributed at the last meeting of Colloquium, it is part of a campaign to teach students to assume responsibility for their own academic planning.

Because transfer students do not participate in Colloquium and come to Linfield with different degrees of preparation for college life, meeting their initial advising needs has been difficult. Since 1996, a special transfer advising/registration session has been held in mid-August. These sessions have been well attended and the small number of evaluations returned indicate that they are helpful. The assistance of eight faculty advisors and a number of peer advisors contribute to their success. A separate transfer session during Orientation and the assignment of the “peer advisor at large” to work with transfer students were other successful innovations beginning in 1996.

Plans For The Future

Assessment is an on-going aspect of the Colloquium program, and evaluation data from the 1997 Colloquium will be used to modify the 1998 program. When studying the results, special attention will be paid to: the new format as well as the level of use of the Companion; student response to the new computer proficiency requirement; student response to questions about diversity, time management and study skills; and student comments about the alcohol, sexuality, AIDS, and diversity programs. The director of multicultural programs will head a team to evaluate the future format and coordination of these formerly required Colloquium sessions.

Because Colloquium is required, it is not possible to compare the outcome of students who take the course to that of students who did not, and yearly retention figures and satisfaction results on student evaluations are at present the major assessment tools. Preliminary plans are under way to
conduct a number of focus groups in 1998-99. Targeting graduating seniors, they would provide additional information about the usefulness of Colloquium three years after student participation in the program. Questions would focus on the role of Colloquium in four key areas known to affect retention (and for which data have been collected on Colloquium evaluations since 1994): knowledge about and use of campus resources; participation in college organizations and activities; development of a tentative academic plan; and identification of a campus mentor.

As in the past, faculty and peer advisor evaluations of training sessions will provide guidance for next year’s sessions. Advisors will continue to receive copies of the Academic Advising Handbook, the Handbook of Suggested Activities and additional advising materials in an advising notebook (See Exhibit II-8). Some of the thirteen faculty advisors who plan to continue in the program will help train new advisors through mentoring lunches, and returning peer advisors will play a key role in the training of new peer advisors. No changes will be made in the area of peer advisor or faculty recruitment, both pools having experienced increased applicants in recent years due to changes in recruiting strategies.

A significant challenge ahead is the training of faculty advisors in COLLEAGUE 14, the new administrative computing system implemented in December 1997. Based upon the success of faculty training in COLLEAGUE 13 conducted in 1996, Academic Advising will coordinate training of Colloquium advisors in fall 1998. Training of other faculty will follow with the goal of having all faculty trained to use the special view-only faculty screen by the end of fall 1998, well before degree audit is available.