Introduction

Ten years ago as a Self-study was being completed for Mohegan Community College, merger legislation had passed and it was anticipated that Thames Valley State Technical College and Mohegan Community College would be merged the following fall. Shortly thereafter, the complicated task of the merger had begun and a leader for the newly formed institution sought. A presidential search committee was formed, reviewed and ranked the candidates, and as their final report was to be issued, a representative from the System office nullified the search and announced the appointment of the next president. Since that time, the merged institution’s management team has transitioned through three appointed or acting presidents, four appointed or acting deans of instruction, and three appointed or acting deans of student services. The positions of dean of technology, assistant dean of instruction, and associate dean of continuing education have been eliminated. The System office has seen a merged board, four transitions in the Chancellor’s office and three transitions of Chief Academic Officer. Each of these transitions represents loss and change.

Complicating matters was the conversion of a relatively simple, information management system to the Banner information system. As a result, key staff from the institution spent their time split between their campus functions and banner training in Hartford. Along with the effects of multiple transitions in the management team, the academic team experienced its own effects as the expectation of an easily merged faculty and staff became difficult. The Thames Valley culture was autocratic and strongly governed through the union and their contract, while the Mohegan culture was completely committed to consensus building and institutional governance. This dichotomy was clear and polarization of the two cultures manifested itself in open opposition, misperceptions, and perpetual “finger pointing”. Consultants were brought in to assimilate the two cultures but to no avail. Over time, both sides became united for the common cause of collocation.

Collocation became an institutional obsession. It was perceived that collocation would “heal all wounds” experienced by the merger but instead it represented a constant cycle of anticipation, planning, then disappointment. Despite the incomplete nature of the merger (collocation), the institution has evolved through the process (as if it was planned) and has remained focused on student success and service to the community.

Institutional Assessment and Planning, although sporadic and at times undocumented and informal, has continued throughout the past ten years either as a result of internal initiative or external mandate. The institution was largely autonomous under Chancellor Andy, as planning was internal and goals were somewhat self-determined. The planning process was driven by division which then sent goals to governance; governance forwarded them on to cabinet and simultaneously all components of the institution worked to assess needs, plan the future and implement goals. In the early years following the merger, this process did not work due to the polarized cultures of the two campuses so, assessment and planning became the role of cabinet. The merger became increasingly apparent with the physical relocation of offices and the bi-location of administrators. Upon Chancellor Andy’s retirement, Chancellor Leslie created a set of goals for each institution under the umbrella of “academic models”. Each president was given a goal that resulted in the implementation of a “best practice” model to apply on each campus,
which was then delivered to each of the eleven merged institutions for system-wide implementation.

Immediately, Three Rivers formed an Intra-divisional Committee chaired by the Dean of Instruction. This committee was charged with planning and institutional assessment and met weekly for approximately two and a half years. Each member of this committee (much like a NEASC subcommittee chair), established a subcommittee and was assigned an area of the college to examine. During this time, the institution established a new division, hired a new dean and developed a new planning group in educational technology. A new policy was developed for student advising and transfer following review, shifting these functions from Student Services to the Instructional Division. Simultaneously, a full time transfer evaluator was hired upon assessment of student needs, resulting in increased articulation agreements with other institutions, efficient evaluation of incoming transfer credit, and the Eastern CSU Compact. Institutional Assessment and matching fund legislation has enhanced fund raising initiatives and developed the institution’s endowment, evolving from essentially no systemic fund raising to sophisticated and respected fund raising initiatives in just ten years.

The institution has responded to the region’s shift from an industrial and defense oriented power base to service and hi-tech industries and their diverse populations. Community and industry growth have resulted in the institution’s assessment of credit and credit-free educational services and programs. Governance, planning committees, and division meetings have all logged countless hours exploring relationships and services to the area’s evolving industries.

Cultural parody between the two campuses is now in sight, due largely to increased retirements and new faculty and staff hires. Governance participation, once completely consisting of those from the Mohegan campus experiences ever-increasing Thames Valley participation and is chaired by a faculty member from the Technology Division. The (mostly) consolidated campus culture now recognizes the importance of both communication and participation.

Chancellor Leslie’s Academic Models has given way to Chancellor Marc’s “21st Century Skills” and while the semantics have changed, the essence of those goals has not. While the formal planning and institutional assessment reports generated under Chancellor Leslie have diminished in intensity, a planning committee remains ongoing and institutional planning and continual assessment in place. New courses, programs, projects and proposals for change now include assessment, anticipated outcomes or learning objectives, and strategies for measuring those outcomes.

President Jones is committed to assessment, measurement, and institutional growth and has formalized a vision for holistic student and institutional development, while calling for the transformation of Three Rivers into a “Learning Community”. Dr. Jones’ presidency represents the first time the merged institution chose together – as one, through an open process, the leadership of the institution. President Jones now leads a Cabinet that can focus its energies on growth and purposeful progress toward the fulfillment of Three Rivers’ Mission Statement. While collocation remains a goal, deeper and more reflective and introspective analysis reaffirms the institution’s ten-year progress toward systemic assessment, effective planning and careful implementation. Through all this, Three Rivers recognizes that our hope and success lies not in a new building but rather in reasserting the institution’s purpose, service to students, and function in the community.
Continual evaluation and improvement are recognized as an important part of any higher education institution. To accomplish this, Three Rivers Community College has established a participatory planning process that determines strategic goals that complement the strategic goals issued by the System Office of the Community Technical College System as approved by the Board of Trustees. These strategic goals are:

1. **21st CENTURY ACADEMIC BEST PRACTICES** - To assure students a quality education by means of academic best practices that foster student success and life-long learning;
2. **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT** - To provide workforce-focused education and training in response to employment needs and the state’s interest in business development and technology transfer;
3. **COMMUNICATIONS** - To define and communicate the college and system missions of fulfilling the lifelong learning needs of the state and its people, and to enhance the visibility and public perception of the community colleges;
4. **FINANCE / RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT** - To promote student success, optimum efficiency in operations, and effectiveness in service delivery by providing appropriate and adequate resources, funding, and facilities;
5. **TECHNOLOGY** - To enhance capacity and use of technology to support teaching, learning, and services to students;
6. **MANAGEMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES** - To enhance the management of human resources and labor relations with the system.

A number of planning documents have been developed including the Three Rivers Community College Strategic Plan. Three Rivers has an ongoing planning process. The college’s Information Technology Advisory Committee (ITAC) has coordinated the latest update to the Three Rivers Strategic Plan. The ITAC committee was created in 1999 just after the formation of the Information Technology Division. ITAC is comprised of representatives from each of the college’s divisions and was originally tasked with formulating IT planning, policies, and priorities. The planning scope of the committee was expanded to be college-wide in 2000.

The College Cabinet has provided substantial input toward the development and has endorsed this plan. Each division within the college monitors its individual operations and assesses progress with regard to compliance with strategic goals. Specific objectives are normally assigned to one of the Deans for implementation and oversight. Weekly Cabinet meetings allow for the development of cross-divisional planning and process tasks. The President oversees the planning and implementation processes and sets re-prioritization of planned activities as contingencies arise and as directed by the Chancellor. Ongoing issues of college-wide impact are presented for discussion, feedback, and recommendations to the Governance. The Cabinet holds an annual retreat each summer in order to assess achievement of planned outcomes and to update and adjust the planning goals as required.

In addition, a number of institutional effectiveness activities have been undertaken over the years to assist in the assessment of various academic, support services, administrative, and organizational processes. These have been carried out by a combination of departments, committees, task forces, and consultants. Recent examples of these evaluative actions include the annual graduate satisfaction survey, a student satisfaction survey conducted in Fall 2001, a local employer survey in December 2001, academic program reviews, information technology infrastructure plans, and site analyses for various campus consolidation plans. Additionally, the CT Department of Higher Education, at the direction of the CT Legislature, has established some
peer review accountability measures that have been collected annually since 2000. Data are collected by groups of CT Community Colleges ranked by approximate size and compared against peer colleges of similar characteristics across the nation.

APPRAISAL
Three Rivers participatory planning and evaluation process results in a comprehensive Strategic Plan that complements the mission of the College. This major document is supplemented by reports of various task forces. A major impediment to Three Rivers’ long range planning has centered on the inability to determine a site for a consolidated campus. Consolidation planning has been ongoing since 1992, the year in which Mohegan Community College merged with Thames Valley State Technical College to become Three Rivers. This entire process is described in detail in the paper, “Three Rivers Community College …A Very Long Road to New Facilities – A History” which is available in the reference room. Lack of a consolidated campus has been frustrating and has made facility management difficult to plan.

Three Rivers collects and uses data to support its planning efforts and to enhance institutional effectiveness. Since 1997, the college’s institutional researcher (IR) position was shared among three CT community colleges (Middlesex, Quinebaug Valley, and Three Rivers). Beginning in June 2002, this situation improved when one college created an independent IR position, allowing the shared position to report to two institutions, Three Rivers and Quinebaug Valley. The CT Department of Higher Education has developed performance measures to assist in the assessment of CT institutions of higher learning. These measures, along with a combination of other indicators are reviewed periodically by Three Rivers to assist in the evaluation of our overall institution effectiveness.

In addition, college Divisions use a variety of other assessment methods to focus on divisional and departmental goals and priorities. These include surveys, internal audits, and focus groups. The CT Community College System has developed Program and Discipline review guidelines that Three Rivers uses to assess the effectiveness of our academic programs in addition to locally developed criteria. The Community College System’s Office of Planning and Assessment filled a key position in 2001 allowing for a significant increase in institutional planning and assessment at the System level. Since January 2002, the future direction of the college has received a heightened awareness throughout the campus community. The “Learning College” concept and how to implement this model at Three Rivers is helping shape our planning and assessment efforts.

PROJECTION
Planning and evaluation will receive even greater attention in the upcoming years. Identifying a consolidation site will enable Three Rivers to realize the benefits of a single main campus. As Three Rivers stands ready to move ahead with this project, the college continues to pursue its mission as effectively as possible. Anticipating collocation, the college prepares and updates the Space Utilization Plan originally developed in 1995, which is currently under thorough review by an outside facility-planning consultant. The college will continue to seek alternate resources as uncertainties of State funding continue. The demand for accountability along with the college’s desire for better information will require increased attention to evaluation in all aspects of the operation of the College.