

**REPORT OF A FOCUSED VISIT**

**TO**

**OZARKA COLLEGE**

**Melbourne, Arkansas**

**October 28-29, 2002**

for the

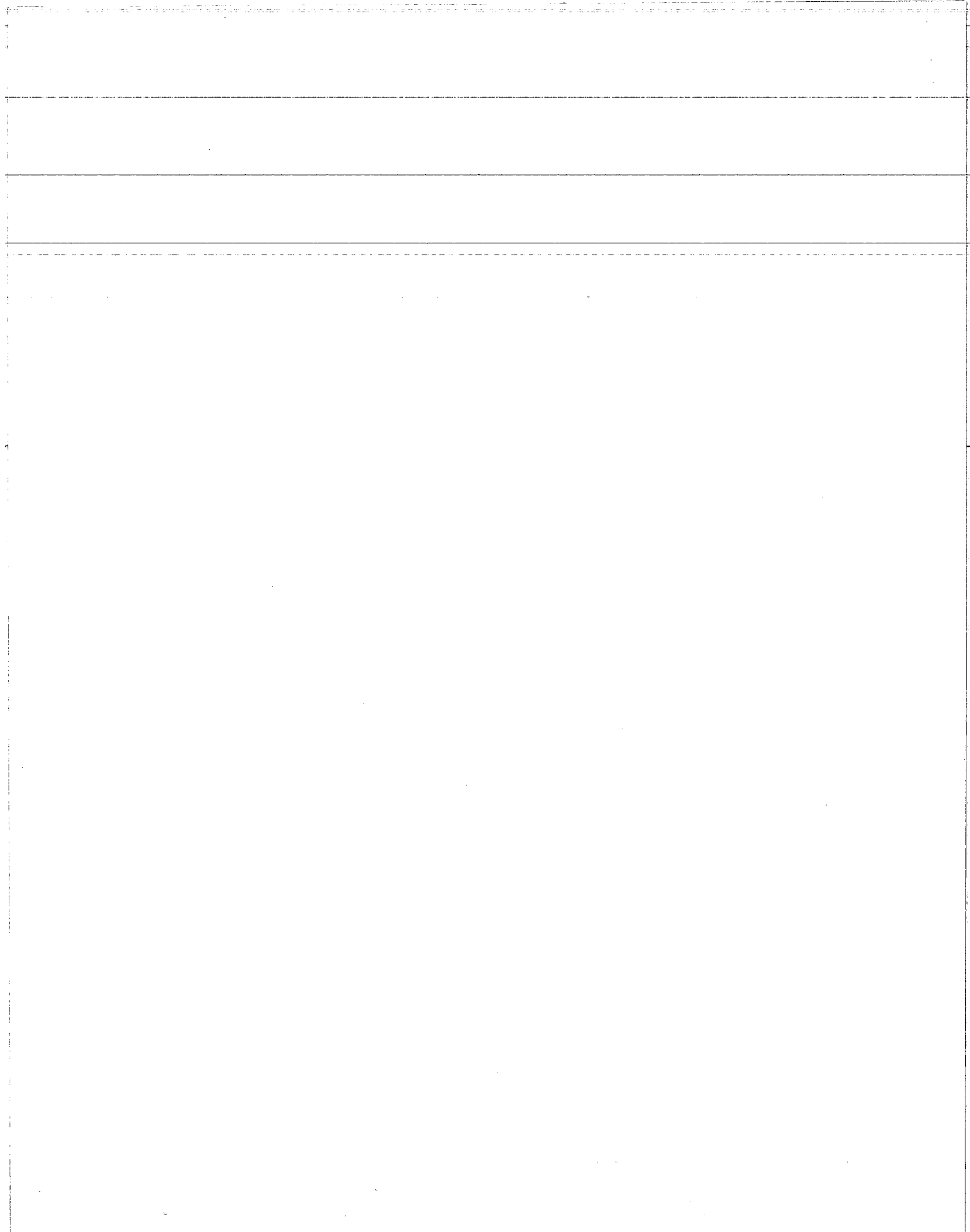
Higher Learning Commission

of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

**EVALUATION TEAM**

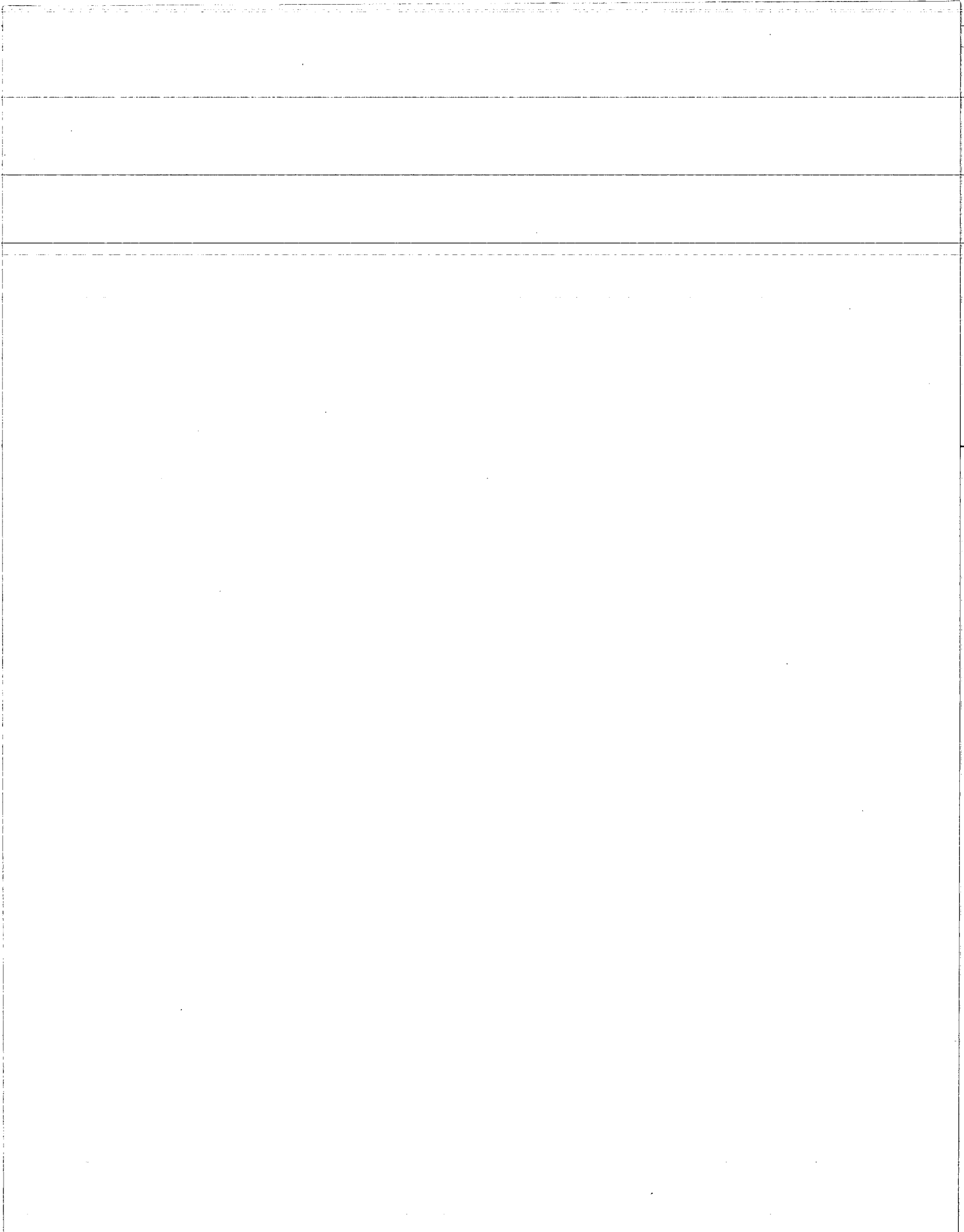
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## **SECTION I: INTRODUCTION**

### **Organization of the Report**

This report of a Focused Visit to Ozarka College is divided into five sections: 1) Introduction; 2) The team's assessment of the areas of focus and the College's request to open a new permanent site; 3) The team's judgments regarding the institution's strengths and challenges; 4) The team's advice and suggestions for institutional improvement; and 5) The team's recommendations to the Commission and the rationale for those recommendations.

### **Accreditation History**

Ozarka Vocational Technical School first opened its doors in 1975 and was initially accredited by the North Central Association Commission on Schools in 1988. In 1991, the Arkansas Legislature converted a number of vocational technical schools, including Ozarka, into technical colleges. In 1993, the College received candidacy status with the North Central Association Commission on Institutions of Higher Education. That same year, it was authorized by the Arkansas Board of Higher Education to award the Associate of Applied Science degree. One year later, in 1994, the College received authorization from both the Commission and the state of Arkansas to offer the Associate of Arts degree. The College underwent a review for continued candidacy in 1995, and was granted initial accreditation from the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education in 1996. The College's most recent comprehensive visit took place in October of 2000. In addition to recommending that Ozarka College's accreditation be extended to

2010-2011, the visiting team in 2000 recommended a Focused Visit in October 2002 to evaluate the effectiveness of the new division chair structure and to review the curriculum and program evaluation processes.

### **Scope and Structure of the Focused Visit**

The team of two consultant-evaluators arrived in Melbourne, Arkansas the evening of Saturday, October 26. The official campus visit took place on Monday and Tuesday, October 28-29. Prior to the visit, the team reviewed the College's Focused Visit Self-Study Report; Request for Institutional Change: Addition of a New Site; Employee Handbook; and 2002-2003 Catalog. While on campus, the team met with the President and his Administrative Council; the Curriculum Committee; the three Division Chairs; the Board of Trustees; the Vice President for Academic Affairs; the Institutional Assessment Committee (which included two students); and the Faculty.

The team also reviewed documents in the Team Resource Room, including Course Syllabi for Spring 2001-2002 and Fall 2002-2003; the Program Review and Assessment Plan; 2002 Institutional Assessment Committee Reports; Faculty Assessment Reports; Program Review Self-Studies; Program Proposals; Curriculum Committee Minutes; Division Chair Minutes; and Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board Minutes.

The College's temporary facility in Ash Flat was also evaluated. While in Ash Flat, one member of the team met with local business and educational leaders in order to gauge community support for the College's plan to build a permanent new facility in that area.

**Usefulness of the Focused Evaluation Report**

The College is to be commended for putting together a very thorough Focused Visit Self-Study Report and Request for Institutional Change. The latter was especially well-documented.

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**SECTION II: TEAM'S ASSESSMENT OF THE AREAS OF FOCUS**

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**Efficacy of the New Division Chair Structure**

After lengthy discussions dating back to 1998, the division chair structure at Ozarka was implemented on July 1, 2000 – just three and a half months prior to the Comprehensive Visit in October of 2000. At the time of the visit, the visiting team expressed concern that the division chairs were “unclear as to the exact delineation and scope of their duties.”

Current division chair responsibilities are described in the Self-Study. Among other things, the division chairs mentor adjunct faculty, serve as liaisons between the faculty and the Vice President of Academic Affairs, facilitate assessment activities, and arrange program advisory committee meetings. After discussing the concerns of the previous team with the division chairs, upper-level administrators, and the faculty, the focused visit team has no concerns about the efficacy of the new division chair structure at Ozarka College.

**Curriculum Development Process**

Ozarka College, with consistent input and review of faculty and administration, has implemented a systematic and effective approach to the curriculum process. There are procedures in place whereby the Faculty Council reviews all actions taken by the Curriculum Committee. In the instance of new programs, the Faculty Council submits recommendations to the Administrative Council for Governing Board approval. If a proposal is rejected by the Faculty Council, a rationale coupled with suggested revisions,



if appropriate, are provided to the Curriculum Committee. The Curriculum Committee meets monthly to insure the consistency and relevancy of new courses and programs.

Interviews with several faculty members and discussions with Administrative

Council confirm the process is productive and serves the institution well in providing quality education. Recommendations and proposals are linked to available resources and there is a procedure that communicates information about curriculum matters to all college personnel. To complete the curriculum process, a calendar has been established for assessment of outcomes. Throughout the entire process, Ozarka College assures compliance with the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board Guidelines through a comprehensive review of all proposals by the Vice-President for Academic Affairs.

It is suggested that the Curriculum Committee consider developing a form that would include substantive documentation of all resources (fiscal and human), availability of credentialed faculty, job opportunities, and library requirements for all new courses and programs.

### **Program Review and Assessment Processes**

Ozarka College now has a very thorough program review process. According to the Institutional Assessment Committee and the procedures manual, each program is evaluated using fourteen criteria: 1) faculty credentials; 2) professional activity of faculty; 3) number of full-time-equivalent faculty; 4) hours in the program; 5) Advisory Committee and Curriculum Committee recommendations; 6) frequency of course offerings; 7) library holdings; 8) facilities and equipment; 9) number of students enrolled in the program; 10) number of graduates from the program; 11) assessment of student

learning using multiple measures; 12) transfer/placement effectiveness; 13) alumni satisfaction; and 14) employer satisfaction.

The previous visiting team was concerned that the program review process at Ozarka was limited to data collection without analysis and recommendations for improvement. Discussions with faculty and the Institutional Assessment Committee (which includes the Vice President for Academic Affairs and the Division Chairs), as well as an examination of the Program Review Self-Studies available in the Resource Room, indicate that evaluation of the collected data is now taking place and that improvements are being made to the programs as a result of these evaluations. Programs are also reviewed twice a year by advisory committees in order to insure the currency and relevancy of the curriculum.

As indicated above, the assessment of student learning is part of the program review process at Ozarka. The visiting team in 2000 expressed concern about “the recent decentralization of academic responsibilities” at Ozarka, and the fact that assessment and program evaluation were assigned to non-academic areas. At the time of the visit in 2000, the Vice President of Planning and Assessment had primary responsibility for the assessment of student learning. Following the advice of the visiting team, the College reassigned responsibility for assessment to the Vice President for Academic Affairs beginning July 1, 2001. With strong leadership from the Chief Academic Officer, the College has made significant progress in assessment since that time.

Much of this progress can be traced to focused professional development activities. In July, 2001, for instance, the Vice President for Academic Affairs attended

an assessment workshop offered by the Higher Learning Commission in Phoenix, AZ. In March, 2002, a team of four from Ozarka attended the Higher Learning Commission Annual Meeting in Chicago. In May, 2002, a team of seven from the College attended a workshop on assessment sponsored by the Arkansas Association of Two-Year Colleges. And, in June of 2002, a team of six participated in an AAHE / Higher Learning Commission assessment workshop in Kansas City.

As a result of this focused professional development and ongoing concerted efforts in assessment, the Academic Vice President and the three Division Chairs see the institution at Level II in the Commission's Levels of Implementation. The College can point with pride to a number of recent developments in the area of assessment:

- In order to facilitate course-level assessment, the Ozarka faculty have been reviewing all course syllabi to ensure that they explicitly state minimum course competencies for each course offered at Ozarka College. These competencies were included in the "master syllabi" on file in the Team Resource Room.
- All of the program descriptions in the 2002-2003 College Catalog included a list of program objectives.
- The College President appointed an Institutional Assessment Committee in June, 2002. This committee, which is responsible for evaluating overall institutional effectiveness as well as student learning, has an academic curriculum and assessment subcommittee, which focuses on the assessment of student academic achievement.
- Students began serving on the Institutional Assessment Committee during the Fall, 2002 semester.

- The Assessment Committee appears to have a good understanding of the different purposes behind such related undertakings as the assessment of student learning, program review, faculty evaluation, placement testing, and the assessment of overall institutional effectiveness. These activities are often confused on other campuses.
- The College administration clearly understands the value of supporting professional development in assessment.
- The faculty, as well as the administration, clearly understand that the primary goal of assessment is the improvement of student learning.

Though many of these improvements to the assessment process at Ozarka are recent developments, the team is confident that they are sustainable. In fact, it now appears that the Institution is so committed to assessment that with continued focused professional development and ongoing effort, the College could well find itself at Level III within a relatively short period of time.

Despite the fact that the team agrees that Ozarka College is at Level II in its assessment efforts, it also sees room for improvement, especially in the assessment of General Education. The institution's General Education Philosophy and seven goals for General Education are listed on p. 68 of the 2002-2003 Ozarka College Catalog. It was not clear to the team how all degree-seeking students at Ozarka could meet all of these goals, given that students earning applied degrees are required to take only a limited number of General Education courses (described on p. 69 of the Catalog). Furthermore, after discussing these goals with the Institutional Assessment Committee, it was not

evident that everyone at the College interprets all of the goals for General Education in the same way.

The program-level assessment tools for each program are clearly indicated in Ozarka's Program Review and Assessment Plan (available in the Resource Room). As mandated by the state of Arkansas, Ozarka uses the CAAP test to assess many of the goals for its General Education program. However, some of these goals, such as the goal for oral communication ("Communicate accurately and convincingly in . . . spoken . . . form . . .") cannot be assessed using CAAP. Though the College has mechanisms in place for assessing this and other goals that cannot be evaluated using CAAP, the faculty and Assessment Committee have not been documenting, aggregating, and analyzing the results of these assessments above the level of the classroom.

Moreover, though the faculty and Assessment Committee had no trouble citing examples of how they had used the results of assessment to improve teaching and learning, these examples were not well-documented.

In light of these findings, the team makes the following recommendations regarding the assessment process at Ozarka:

- The College needs to be more diligent in documenting the improvements made as a result of the assessment of student learning and overall institutional effectiveness.
- The College also needs to improve its documentation of assessment efforts when assessing those General Education outcomes that cannot be evaluated using the CAAP test.

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- The College must insure that all students, regardless of their degree program, are taking courses that would allow them to meet all of the publicly-stated General Education outcomes.
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- The College should review and, if necessary, revise its General Education outcome statements so that:
    - a. Everyone at the College understands exactly what is expected of the students.
    - b. All of the outcomes are assessable using direct measures.
  - The Assessment Committee should consider developing a table or grid that would clearly indicate which classes a student could take to meet all of the General Education outcomes published in the college catalog.

**Request for Institutional Change: Addition of a Permanent New Site**

Ozarka College has completed a comprehensive assessment identifying the need for an additional educational center in Sharp County, Arkansas. Several primary stakeholders were involved in establishing a proposal which demonstrates external, as well as internal, support for a permanent site in Ash Flat. Strong and enthusiastic leadership is being provided to insure that there is substantial community participation and that quality education will be consistently delivered at this site. Local government officials, economic development specialists, business leaders, and approval from the Arkansas Department of Higher Education substantiate support for a new permanent location.

Ash Flat is located approximately twenty nine miles northeast of the Melbourne Campus. While the distance between the two locations is accessible under normal circumstances, there are climatic conditions which restrict safe passage and greatly reduce personal security. This is especially true during the winter and early spring seasons.

The institution has demonstrated that a permanent facility at Ash Flat would support the mission of providing comprehensive higher education to an area that could reach Fulton, Izard, Sharp, and Stone Counties. A permanent presence of Ozarka College in the Ash Flat community will allow a broad array of offerings such as adult education (GED), transfer courses, associate degrees, continuing education, and workforce development opportunities. Presently, the college offers a limited number of continuing education, computer literacy, and transfer courses in five rooms leased at a strip mall in the center of town. There are very few cancelled classes each semester and, because of

steadily increasing enrollments, the administration is worried that it may be forced to turn away students. The staff is so concerned with accommodating enrollment growth that they are investigating other lease options and non-traditional scheduling.

Numerous strategies are being considered to provide adequate support services for students. A financial aid officer will be at the Ash Flat center at designated, announced times, and an academic advisor will be available through telephone and electronic hotlines.

Though library resources are limited, the master plan and the budgeting process indicate that holdings will be added annually. Moreover, students at the new facility will have access to the same online databases and other electronic resources available to students at the main campus in Melbourne. In addition, the students in Ash Flat will also be able to take advantage of intra- and inter-library loan services.

Faculty selection and evaluation at Ash Flat will be comparable to past practices at the Melbourne Campus. Proactive recruiting for classroom instructors will be initiated in Cherokee Village, Highland, and Hardy, Arkansas.

The rationale for choosing the Ash Flat site is sound, is consistent with the priorities of the institution's mission, demonstrates a well-conceived comprehensive planning strategy, and indicates sufficient input from the service area. Recently, student interest and community requests have increased to a level whereby the college must take aggressive action to accommodate the constituencies served. Ozarka has been proactive in attempting to meet the needs of the communities it serves. This is evidenced by letters from business leaders, an advisory committee that includes local school principals, and attendance by students from as far away as southern Missouri.



Ozarka College has done an exemplary job in identifying funds for establishing a permanent site in Ash Flat, Arkansas. In July 2002, the township of Ash Flat overwhelmingly (90.5%) passed a 3/8 cent sales tax increase that will provide a permanent source of funding for maintenance and operation. This could be in excess of \$180,000 annually. A private donor and a local bank provided thirty (30) acres of land, complete with water, sewer, and blacktop road for easy access, estimated at approximately \$125-\$150,000. This site will satisfy immediate needs and allow for expansion as dictated by enrollment.

Preparation for a permanent site in Ash Flat has been ongoing for the past seven years through state general revenue bonds (\$1.2 M). In addition to bond funding, the costs for leasing the temporary facilities (approximately \$41,800 annually), will be directly allocated to the permanent education center. Although, initially, there will be no new administrative costs, the need for full-time faculty is imminent. Ozarka College has additional funds for support services through Title IV, TRIO, and Title III. In the final analysis, Ozarka College has developed a sound fiscal strategy, one which will take the Institution to its next level of maturation.

Of concern to the team is the absence of a clear vision as to exactly when the College will be able to offer an entire associate's degree at the Ash Flat Education Center. However, several discussions with College personnel and community leaders indicate that the College is ready to provide the necessary resources whenever the enrollment dictates.

**SECTION III: INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES****Strengths**

1. Everyone at Ozarka College is properly focused on student success. At Ozarka, students come first.
2. With exemplary leadership from the Vice President for Academic Affairs, the College has made significant progress since the comprehensive visit in the fall of 2000 in the assessment of student learning. With continued focused effort in this area, the College could well be at Level III in the assessment of student academic achievement within a relatively short period of time.
3. The President and Board of Trustees have done an excellent job developing community support for the new site in Ash Flat as well as for the main campus in Melbourne.
4. The College leadership team has engaged in a concerted effort to inform constituents in the four-county service area of the benefits and advantages of having Ozarka in their region. This has resulted in strong support from both community leaders and Ozarka graduates.

## Challenges

1. It is imperative for the College to insure that the quality of the courses and student support services offered at the new site in Ash Flat, as well as the site already established in Mountain View, are comparable to those offered at the main campus in Melbourne. To do this, the College must make certain that its assessments of student learning and overall institutional effectiveness extend beyond the main campus to all of its satellite facilities and course sites.
2. Until the College either builds new laboratories in Ash Flat or it arranges to make use of the science labs at the local high school, students will have to continue driving to Melbourne in order to fulfill all of their degree requirements. In the evening, and particularly during the winter months, this can be a hazardous drive.
3. The College needs to improve its documentation of changes made as a result of the assessment of student learning and overall institutional effectiveness.
4. The College needs to do a better job of documenting, aggregating, and evaluating assessment results when assessing those General Education outcomes not covered by the CAAP exam.
5. The College should review and, where appropriate, revise the wording of its General Education outcome statements and insure that:
  - a. Everyone at the College agrees on exactly what is expected of the students.
  - b. All of the outcomes are assessable using direct measures.
  - c. All students, regardless of their degree program, are taking courses that would allow them to meet all of the intended outcomes.

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**SECTION IV: ADVICE AND SUGGESTIONS FOR INSTITUTIONAL  
IMPROVEMENT**

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1. The Assessment Committee should consider developing a table or grid that would clearly indicate which classes a student could take to meet all of the General Education outcomes published in the College Catalog.
2. As enrollments continue to increase and the number of faculty increases in proportion, the College should consider devolving more responsibility for faculty hiring, staffing, and evaluation from the Vice President of Academic Affairs to the Division Chairs.
3. Ozarka should consider inviting a four-year college or university to deliver upper division courses at the new Ash-Flat facility so that students in that area of the state could complete a bachelor's degree, as well as an associate's degree, without the inconvenience of lengthy commutes.

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**SECTION V: TEAM RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE**

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**Recommendation**

The team recommends that accreditation be extended to 2010-2011 and that Ozarka College be approved to open a new degree-granting site in Ash-Flat.

**Rationale**

The reasons for this recommendation are as follows:

The College has satisfactorily addressed all of the concerns raised by the previous team during the comprehensive visit in October, 2000: The new division chair structure and the curriculum development process appear to be working well and the College is doing a commendable job in the assessment of student learning and program review.

The Institution has submitted a thoroughly-documented proposal for opening a new permanent site in Ash Flat. During the campus visit as well as in its Request for Institutional Change, the College:

- persuasively explained the factors that led to its decision to open a new site in Ash Flat;
- demonstrated that it has obtained the necessary internal and external approvals for the new site;
- identified the challenges directly related to opening the new site and described how it plans to address those challenges;
- demonstrated that it has the human and financial resources necessary to maintain as well as construct the new facility; and

- outlined its strategies to evaluate the efficacy of the new site.

In making this recommendation, the team also took into consideration that Ozarka

College has a proven track record in providing quality course offerings and student support services at its current off-campus locations in both Ash-Flat and Mountain View, and that the College has remarkably strong community support for the new site in Ash-Flat.

# WORKSHEET FOR STATEMENT OF AFFILIATION STATUS

INSTITUTION: OZARKA COLLEGE  
P.O. Box 10  
Melbourne, AR 72556

TYPE OF REVIEW: A visit focused on the efficacy of the new structure and the progress made in curriculum and program evaluation processes and to add new site

DATE OF THIS REVIEW: October 28, 2002 — October 29, 2002

COMMISSION ACTION:

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STATUS: *Accredited (1996- .)*

Institution *Recommended Wording:* RETAIN ORIGINAL WORDING

Team *Recommended Wording:* RETAIN ORIGINAL WORDING

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HIGHEST DEGREE AWARDED: *Associate's.*

Institution *Recommended Wording:* RETAIN ORIGINAL WORDING

Team *Recommended Wording:* RETAIN ORIGINAL WORDING

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MOST RECENT ACTION: *February 23, 2001.*

TO BE CHANGED BY THE COMMISSION OFFICE

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STIPULATIONS ON AFFILIATION STATUS: *Accreditation at the Associate's level is limited to the A.A.S. degree and the A.A. degree.*

Institution *Recommended Wording:* RETAIN ORIGINAL WORDING

Team *Recommended Wording:* RETAIN ORIGINAL WORDING

**NEW DEGREE  
SITES:***Prior Commission approval required.*

Institution      *Recommended Wording:*      RETAIN ORIGINAL WORDING

Team      *Recommended Wording:*      RETAIN ORIGINAL WORDING

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**PROGRESS REPORTS  
REQUIRED:***None.*

Team      *Recommended Wording:*      NONE.

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**MONITORING REPORTS  
REQUIRED:***None.*

Team      *Recommended Wording:*      NONE.

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**CONTINGENCY REPORTS  
REQUIRED:**

*The College must file a contingency report outlining plans to maintain financial stability if there are changes within the state legislative appropriations, such as performance based funding or if there is diversion of funds from property taxes and/or a significant decline in enrollment projections.*

Team      *Recommended Wording:*      RETAIN ORIGINAL WORDING

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**OTHER VISITS  
REQUIRED:***None.*

Team      *Recommended Wording:*      NONE.

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**LAST COMPREHENSIVE  
EVALUATION:***2000-01.*

TO BE CHANGED BY THE COMMISSION OFFICE

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**NEXT COMPREHENSIVE  
EVALUATION:***2010-11.*

Team      *Recommended Wording:*      RETAIN ORIGINAL DATES.





## The Higher Learning Commission

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### OZARKA COLLEGE

P.O. Box 10  
Melbourne, AR 72556

#### *Statement of Affiliation Status*

*Status:* Accredited (1996- .)

*Highest degree awarded:* Associate's.

*Most recent action:* April 4, 2003.

*Stipulations on affiliation status:* Accreditation at the Associate's level is limited to the A.A.S. degree and the A.A. degree.

*New degree sites:* Prior Commission approval required.

*Progress reports required:* None.

*Monitoring reports required:* None.

*Contingency reports required:* The College must file a contingency report outlining plans to maintain financial stability if there are changes within the state legislative appropriations, such as performance based funding or if there is diversion of funds from property taxes and/or a significant decline in enrollment projections.

*Other visits required:* None.

*Last comprehensive evaluation:* 2000-01.

*Next comprehensive evaluation:* 2010-11.