



## Web features

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[image:media contact]

### New Structures Get a Thorough Going Over

To make sure that everything works as it should, the LACCD is using whole building commissioning. The process begins at the design stage and continues long after contractors pack up and move on to their next job.

[image:Mission College's first exercise in whole building commissioning was during the construction of the Health, Fitness & Athletics Complex, which opened in January 2010.]Building was less complicated in the old days. Architects designed, contractors built and, when the structure was completed, somebody walked through to make sure all the windows opened and all the doors shut.

Today, things aren't so simple, but a lot more efficient. With the development of a vast array of energy-saving features, from solar panels to automated air-conditioning systems that produce ice to cool the buildings, the task of certifying that all of the complex building systems are functioning properly is a job in itself.

For the Los Angeles Community College District, that job, called whole building commissioning, is handled by the inici group. Eight of the District's nine colleges has its own inici commissioning coordinator.

"Buildings have become like living computers," said Karl Schulz, founder of the inici group. "In the old days, you would buy a furnace, turn it on and could walk away. Now, you have complex systems that need to be double and triple checked."

In fact, the process of commissioning begins on the drawing board and continues long after the contractors have packed up and moved on to their next job. Coordinators offer input at the design stage, trying to anticipate problems before the first shovel digs into the earth. They monitor ongoing construction. And, of course, they vigorously examine the finished structure by doing a series of tests throughout the building, checking such things as doors, electrical, plumbing, mechanical systems and warranties.

"We want to make sure the job is done right the first time," Schulz said, "to reduce the number of times someone has to be called back for repairs."

"When you are building a hospital, for example, you don't want to have to come back after the patients are already in the room. That can be disruptive to the caregiving process. At the LACCD college level, we don't want to be disruptive to the classroom experience."

While many commissioning coordinators come from a mechanical engineering background, they don't profess to be experts in every area of the project.

"They have a good working knowledge of multiple systems," Schulz said, "but no one person knows it all. A guy who can put tires on a car doesn't necessarily know anything about carburetors."

But while a commissioning coordinator doesn't have all the answers, he knows who to call to get them.

Schulz acknowledged that not every contractor has greeted the commissioning coordinator with open arms. The idea of having someone helping them by constantly looking over their shoulder was a situation they weren't used to.

"It took a little time for people to appreciate what we do," Schulz said. "But we've proven we can be a team member and help make the project more successful."

It works as long as commissioning coordinators don't overstep their boundaries. It is not the coordinator's role to tell the contractors how to do their job, but merely to point out deficiencies the coordinator may spot either in design or implementation.

Bill Corneli, project manager at Los Angeles Mission College, is a believer in the program.

"The important thing is to make sure we are getting what we paid for and that nothing has been overlooked," he said. "The last thing you would want is to discover a problem years later when the warranty has expired. This is like buying insurance."

The commissioning process has evolved over the last decade. It was originally required for buildings that were to be LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified, concentrating on the mechanical systems that powered the sustainability

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features of the structure. But now, there is whole building commissioning, which is just what the name implies, a look at every aspect of the structure, including plumbing, ducts, light fixtures and the systems that control them.

“Not everyone agrees that whole building commissioning is worth the cost,” Corneli conceded. “But I think, for community colleges in particular, this is very valuable because, due to severe budget restrictions, we hold on to our buildings for a long time and we want to be sure they continue to function efficiently over that period.”



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