MID-CYCLE PEER EVALUATION REPORT

SPOKANE COMMUNITY COLLEGE
SPOKANE, WA
OCTOBER 31 – NOVEMBER 1, 2016

A confidential report of findings prepared for the
Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities

EVALUATORS

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INTRODUCTION

Spokane Community College (SCC), located in Spokane Washington, was granted Initial Accreditation in 1967.   It is currently one of two independently accredited colleges in the Spokane Community College System, accredited as an operationally separate unit in 1973.   SCC's accreditation was last reaffirmed in January 2014 after evaluation of its Fall 2013 Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report. Dr. Ryan Carstens, President, has been at SCC for about a year, and has instituted several changes in support of demonstrating Mission Fulfillment, outlined later in this report.

The year 7 visit resulted in five Recommendations. In April 2014 the Commission determined that Recommendation 3 was in compliance, Recommendations 1, 2, 4 & 5 were addressed in the college's Fall 2014 Ad Hoc report, and at that time only Recommendations 1 & 2 were continued. These Recommendations were addressed in the 2016 Ad Hoc report that was accepted by the commission in February 2016.

This report is based on our evaluation of the Mid-cycle self-evaluation, and observations from the 2016 Mid-Cycle Evaluation visit (October 31-November 1).

ASSESSMENT OF SELF-EVALUATION REPORT AND SUPPORT MATERIALS

In a clearly written and well-organized report, Spokane Community College answered the questions posed by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) for a mid-cycle visit. At times it was difficult to fully understand the details and efficacy of the processes described in the report because evidence or supporting information was not included. But, upon request, the college provided information relevant to College Wide Assessment processes including rubrics and scoring, Program Learning outcomes with initial mapping, Washington state Student Achievement Initiative (SAI) point information and Program Review examples from both Instruction and Student Services. In addition, Core Theme Team documents pertaining to objectives, indicators and accompanying assessment plans were provided for review.

The team would like to thank the college for working to clarify questions about the report and its supporting materials during the time leading up to the campus visit and during the visit itself. Information was provided in a collegial, courteous, and timely manner. The college was open to frank discussions about the strengths and weaknesses of various processes, and some exceptional challenges. We would also like to recognize and thank the college for its very gracious hospitality.

MID-CYCLE EVALUATION FORMAT

As directed by NWCCU, the intent of this report is to evaluate the processes that Spokane Community College is using as it continues to assess its core themes in support of verifying mission fulfillment. As the college was asked to organize its report into three distinct parts, the evaluation team will address each part in a similar narrative fashion.

PART I: OVERVIEW OF INSTITUTIONAL ASSESSMENT PLAN

INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL ASSESSMENT

The College has four Core Themes that align with the college mission: Academic Transfer, Workforce Development, College Readiness, and Student Success. The corresponding objectives, indicators, benchmarks, and targets were laid out in the Year One report. SCC has developed a system of weighted indicators and performance thresholds and protocol for aggregation of the data upward to demonstrate Mission Fulfillment. This was shown in detail for one Core Theme in the Appendix A of the mid-cycle report. The data are reported and communicated regularly through the mission fulfillment dashboard available on the College's Intranet.

Core Theme Teams are charged with reviewing baselines, targets, and annual data reviewing/revising core theme objectives and indicators and targets as appropriate, and making recommendations and engaging in annual planning on core themes. These teams will also provide the Core Theme lenses for other elements of accreditation reporting (such as Resources and Capacity) as needed. The membership of the Core Theme teams is impressive, suggesting broad and active involvement by many faculty members. The report identified revision to several of the core theme indicators, indicating reflection on and improvement to the usefulness of the data.

We learned from several groups that evaluation of initial data for the set of mission fulfillment indicators was accomplished by convening a forum for all four Core Theme Teams together. This collaborative event resulted in a number of recommendations that were rolled in to the Title III grant application, which was subsequently funded. In talking with faculty involved in these teams, it was clear that they found value in the data analysis and were energized by talking with colleagues from across the college. Faculty were also pleased with the clear connection between the work they were doing with indicators and assessment that resulted in college wide activities

Unfortunately, this good work was interrupted by a major problem in the implementation of an enterprise-level software system that resulted in the corruption of critical data (including that for enrollment, scheduling, finance), and inability to access new data within the college system for over a year. Efforts to retrieve and/or reconstruct the data that was lost have been a significant challenge for the college. In April, 2016, SCC submitted a letter of disclosure to NWCCU regarding the software adoption issues. It is anticipated that SCC will be able to get complete data for the 16-17 year, and that four years of data will be available before the Year Seven visit.

It is worth noting that during the time in which data was not available, core theme work was not put aside. The teams continued to meet, and were active in college wide planning efforts, particularly with regards to the Title III grant and First Year Experience planning, and some teams met together in spite of the internal data issues. During the mid-cycle review, faculty spoke with enthusiasm about the value of discussing core themes, data, and mission fulfillment across department lines.

As data is able to be collected again, the work of the Core Theme Teams will return to include scrutiny of each indicator and review of targets set, and analyze data for recommendations for improving outcomes. There are still some targets that need to be identified, and some indicators that might be revisited to more effectively focus data on specific core themes. The calculations for acceptable thresholds warrants some review, as in many cases a significant decrease relative to the 2012-13 baseline calculates out to an acceptable threshold. Out of 51 indicators identified in the 2013-14 dashboard report, only 1 was found to be below the acceptable threshold, and needed an action plan.

The President noted that an initial priority for his leadership at SCC was to develop a more integrated and intentional governance structure. Instead of reporting directly to the President, the Core Theme Teams now make recommendations to a new College Planning and Leadership Council, whose membership includes administration and faculty (Core Theme Team co-chairs and the Chairs of the Council of Chairs). This body looks at the results and recommendations of all of the Core themes, and identifies criteria for recommending and prioritizing actions and initiatives, and essentially institutionalized the prior ad hoc collaboration among the Core Theme Teams. The president also established the Instructional Leadership Council, which takes recommendations based from several sources (including Program Reviews, Curriculum Committee, and the Student Learning and Assessment Committee (SLAC). It was clear to the evaluators that the collaborative and inclusive nature of these new Councils has engaged deans in planning.

The evaluators were asked to discuss the results provided from the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC) that was based on the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDs) reporting, especially regarding discrepancies that might exist, and results that might be informed by institutional context. The data provided covered the period from 2004 – 2014. The SCC Executive Team commented that the data looked mostly correct, and noted that the significant increase in both headcount and part time enrollment in 2014 reflected the merger of the Community Colleges of Spokane district's Institute for Extended Learning to become a part of Spokane Community College.

GENERAL EDUCATION ASSESSMENT
In 2014, the college adopted a four-year cycle to assess general education that is embodied in the four college-wide abilities (CWA): Problem-solving, written and oral communication, global awareness, and responsibility. This process is overseen by a cross-disciplinary faculty team, the Student Learning and Assessment Committee (SLAC). The SLAC has adopted a method for assessing its college-wide student abilities by obtaining student work generated in common assignments and scoring these using a common rubric. The first iteration of this approach focused on Problem Solving. A total of 152 student artifacts were obtained from students in courses selected by a random process, and scored by a group of faculty from different disciplines. The scores suggested a positive correlation between the number of credits and performance on the assessment. More important were the anecdotal "lessons learned" that will inform subsequent work, including consideration of how to align assignment to outcome to rubric, how to increase inter-rater reliably, and how to obtain an appropriately representative sample. Broader conversations have been generated from this and subsequent iterations: Do we mean Problem Solving or Critical Thinking? Should we really combine Written and Oral Communication, or are they different? In this way, active assessment is helping SCC to define more precisely what outcomes they both value and assess at the same time as the college is working out how to assess broad outcomes in a meaningful way.

The college clearly recognizes the importance of developing appropriate systems of assessment that will lead to meaningful measures of achievement of student learning outcomes, and is poised to make significant and thoughtful progress in this area prior to the Year Seven report. It will be important to define a meaningful metric for expressing student achievement of these outcomes in a manner that is congruent with their other indicators.

PROGRAM LEVEL ASSESSMENT

In Spring 2014, the College implemented a program review process that engages faculty and administration in reflecting on program quality and future direction. Each instructional program is on a five-year review cycle; student services programs are reviewed every three years. A table showing the schedule for all college instructional programs, with a repeat of the cycle starting in 2019-20, was provided. Examples of program reviews for both instructional areas and student services were provided. Several examples of improvements based on findings from instructional program review were offered in the report, showing the relationship between the review process and improvements to enhance teaching and learning. Faculty department chairs and deans affirmed the value of this process. Connection to real budgeting is more difficult to ascertain since the overall budgeting process was seriously impacted by the data issues described above.

Program review is cited as the place where program (or degree/certificate) outcomes and assessments are documented, but this is not evident in the program reviews that have occurred thus far. The program review questions relating to learning outcomes and assessment resulted in vague, "process" related answers. Data or other results indicating student attainment of program level outcomes were not evident and thus did not appear to inform recommendations or budget allocation. It is not clear that all of the programs or degrees/certificates, including some of the career and technical programs, have clearly defined learning outcomes at this time. In the "Programs A-to-Z" section of the public-facing website, many programs do list the learning outcomes, but for quite a few, even for some career technical areas, none are posted. Faculty in the transfer disciplines are working with the challenge of determining the definition of "program" -- and clearly this is foundational level work. Where program (or degree/certificate) outcomes have been developed, they should be posted, and some evidence of assessment, both for student attainment and for improving teaching and learning, should be included.

The Acting Vice President of Instruction recognizes this as problematic, and plans to change the section on program level outcomes to focus on documenting evidence that students attain the outcomes for their programs, degrees and certificates. It may take some time and effort to get meaningful results, as it has not been an expectation to date. One of the indicators for mission fulfillment speaks directly to this: "1.3.1: Students demonstrate that they have met program-level outcomes (direct measure) (critical)." For this indicator, metrics were "TBD" at the time of the mid-cycle visit. There is undoubtedly good work going on routinely within the many programs, and it will be important for the faculty to have clear direction as to what is needed to both demonstrate that students meet the outcomes of their programs, degrees and certificates and to support the relevant indicator(s).

It is somewhat troubling that programs with external accreditation are not required to participate in the college program review process, and also do not share findings more broadly with the college. Information important to SCC may be missed if programs do not undergo program review in a way that

addresses the questions that SCC had deemed sufficiently important to query in program review. For example, some external accreditations focus more (or less) on evidence that students have met all of the stated program outcomes. A national test may address a subset of identified program outcomes), but addressing all of the outcomes is important for regional accreditation. Also, it would be helpful for all programs (with or without external accreditation requirements) to have a common framework of assessing and reporting to the college and to one another on a set of consistent performance indicators And for those areas in which external assessment is robust, the methods would have value to other programs if shared with the college.

PART II: REPRESENTATIVE EXAMPLES

I: CORE THEME ASSESSMENT AND PLANNING RESULTING IN CHANGES IN FIRST-YEAR CURRICULUM, ADVISING AND TUTORING

Critical evaluation of core theme assessment led to the focus on retention and completion data and suggested that this would be an appropriate target for improvement. Core Theme teams presented administration with recommendations for improvements. First co-chairs of the Core Theme teams, and then full membership were convened in a forum to discuss and prioritize interventions to improve retention and completion. The college used this evidence to support their application for Title III funding, which was awarded in October 2015. This funding focuses on development of a First Year Experience (FYE), in planning that involved faculty and student services, and engaged Core Theme teams in support of specific working groups. Continued analysis of institutional data had been paused due to the problems with the information systems described above, so turning to implementation of best practices related to their areas kept the team members engaged and moved the development of the FYE program forward.

This very impactful example illustrates a mechanism for and interest in the practice of broad and thoughtful analysis of indicators of mission fulfillment to suggest and support focused improvements. An additional result that was noted in this regard was the President's commitment to increase the Institutional Research staff, in order to support future data-driven initiatives and assessment of their efficacy. It is also noteworthy that the college community was able to see the direct and powerful effect of institutional assessment leading to important action.

II: CORE THEME ASSESSMENT RESULTING IN CHANGES IN BUSINESS TECHNOLOGY CURRICULUM AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

The Business Technology (BT) Department reviewed core theme retention rates for their students specifically (first to second quarter, and first to second year) and also administered a satisfaction survey to employers following student internships. The results of analysis resulted in the revision of a course that had been originally intended to assist students who were identified as underprepared for post-secondary education, and has long been a requirement of BT programs. The BT 152 course was significantly revised and refocused with an emphasis on the behaviors of successful students, based largely on the "On Course" curriculum. Retention data indicated significant improvement following the implementation of the revised course. In addition, other programs have adopted or revised the course for their use.

While this specific example did not involve direct assessment of student learning outcomes, it does reflect good understanding of using thoughtful analysis of data to drive focused recommendations, and of the importance of closing the loop to determine the efficacy of the change. Having this culture and framework in place and applying it to direct evidence of student attainment of learning outcomes will serve the college well in addressing the assessment expectations of accreditation.

PART III: MOVING FORWARD

The Mid-Cycle report and supporting evidence suggest that SCC has some areas that are strong and moving well towards demonstrating mission fulfillment, some that are developing, and some that will need to see focused effort.

With regard to the core theme objectives and indicators, some important changes have been made, and the Core Theme Teams do engage in thoughtful reflection and develop action plans to address areas that need attention. Although this was put on hold while data was not available, examination of some of the indicators (especially those that have yet to be determined) should be a priority.

For assessment of student learning, the focus on the college-wide outcomes as indicative of General Education learning is appropriate, and the approach adopted is promising. Clearly identifying program-level outcomes, especially for the career and technical degrees and certificates, and including demonstration of student attainment of those outcomes in program review should be a priority as well.

The college is in the process of recovering from a profound loss of data due to transition to a new enterprise resource planning (ERP) system, hiring a new Institutional Research Director and team, and supporting the systems of assessment and program review that were started under different academic leadership (the former Vice President of Instruction and the former Director of Accreditation and Assessment, who left the college within the last year). These are all challenging tasks, but the college, from the Executive team to the Core Theme Teams to faculty department chairs as well as those on key committees, appear to clearly understand the urgency of this work. The new systems of governance and accountability should help connect all these processes.

CONCLUSION

After reviewing Spokane Community College's Mid-Cycle Evaluation Report and visiting the campus, the evaluation team believes that the college is positioned to provide evidence of mission fulfillment and sustainability in its Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report, but some focused work will be required. The structures and committees are in place, and there is good practice and value perceived in making changes to improve teaching and learning based on evidence. SCC has the start of a promising method for assessing college-wide outcomes, and will need to aggressively pursue intentional incremental improvements. Program review is also relatively new, clearly used to inform planning and budgetary changes, but more attention is needed to identifying program outcomes and carrying out, as well as using the results of the assessment of those outcomes. Key administrative positions that were recently vacated will need to be filled, and quickly. The data problem has been addressed, and while still imperfect, the

College is confident that they will be able to resume regular evaluation of the indicators of mission fulfillment.