

Mid-Cycle Evaluation Report

Prepared by Mr. Dan Lange and Dr. David Todd

Introduction

The Mid-Cycle Evaluation was conceived to replace the Year Three Evaluation Visit and Report. The purpose of the Mid-Cycle Evaluation is to focus on the readiness of the institution being evaluated as it prepares for the Year Seven Comprehensive Self-Study and Visit. Rather than evaluating the resources and capacity of the institution, this report is intended to reinforce and guide the planning and assessment activities of, in this case, Lower Columbia College (LCC). Two evaluators will first assess the college's report of its planning and practices, followed by a visit from the evaluators of one and one-half days to confirm that the practices regarding planning and assessment are being carried out. While the product of the evaluation will be this report submitted to the Commission, there will be no commendations or recommendations as this is to be a formative evaluation. The process is expressly designed to focus on Standards One, Three, Four, and Five of the 2013 Accreditation Handbook, and will not address the prior recommendations by the Commission to LCC.

The Mid-Cycle Evaluation Self-Study and supporting materials received by the evaluators are comprehensive and thorough. Meetings during the visit on October 22, 2014 provided further insights into the multiple levels of planning and assessment. This self-study contains all the elements required for the Mid-Cycle Evaluation and rigorously follows the guidelines for the evaluation as set forth in the "Guidelines for the Mid-Cycle Evaluation" document provided by NWCCU. Additionally, LCC provided (due to the recent change from the Year Three report and visit) its self-study for Standard Two – Resources and Capacity. The evaluation team for this visit is not charged with evaluating Standard Two, but will include only those criteria where the necessary portions of that standard are called into question for assuring the readiness of the college to adequately plan, collect data, analyze, and set into motion initiatives and efforts to improve based on that analysis.

Standard One

LCC's Year One Report, which specifically addresses Standard One, was submitted to the Commission in the fall of 2011. A Year One panel of three evaluators responded with an evaluation report late that fall complimenting the college for its "clearly mapped linkage between the mission statement, the core themes, and the Key Performance Indicators..." The Panel

recognized the, “clear, usable path toward development of core themes, outcomes, and ultimately indicators.” (Page 9) The Panel’s summary states that, “The College has established an appropriate mission statement for a comprehensive community college.” The panel also noted that, “The College has established four core themes that support the mission. The themes have objectives, indicators of achievement, and tools for assessment.” (Page 10) The Panel included a recommendation for the completion of its newly-developed indicators to comprehensively address the core theme performance and mission fulfillment – institutionalizing these indicators by creating the necessary Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). The Mid-Cycle finds that Standard One has been updated to include six new KPIs that along with pre-existing KPIs mapped to the core themes, fully assess core theme accomplishment and mission fulfillment.

Mid-Cycle Evaluation

Part One

The college prepared for its Year One Report by repackaging the existing seven College Outcomes into four core themes: Workforce and Economic Development; Transfer and Academic Preparation; Student Access, Support, and Completion; and, Institutional Excellence. Due to a long record of successful assessment, the college retained the original College Outcomes.

Five monitoring report review teams play a key role in the planning, analyzing and reporting the progress and intended actions for improvement for each core theme with a focus on the supporting KPIs. During interviews with a diverse group of personnel at LCC, it was consistently emphasized that the monitor reports are key to institutional assessment and effectiveness. The monitoring reports are well-established, data-centric, and contain both analyses and recommendations for improvement. Data reporting consistently provides multiple year performance to easily view improvement over time. A part of each report is an overview of actions taken to improve the institution with respect to that KPI.

LCC has successfully connected, yet maintained separation of its college outcomes from core themes assessment by mapping the two within its monitoring reports as well as other planning documents. By incorporating regular review focused on support of the strategic plan as well as core theme assessment, the monitoring report review maintains effective, systematic processes of data acquisition, analyses and improvement based on the data. The college assesses the assessment as evidenced by the spring 2014 review which asked input from the president’s cabinet, the Accreditation Steering Committee, the Operations Council, and each of the five Monitoring review teams. The mid-cycle self-study contains bulleted lists of the strengths and ways to improve this process.

Part Two

Part two of the LCC mid-cycle evaluation presents three examples: One for core theme one – “Demonstration of Program Competencies;” one for core theme two – “Demonstration of General Education Outcomes;” and another for core theme two – “Academic Performance of Development Education Students.”

The first example outlines changes made in the assessment process, most notably, the reconfiguring of the assessment committee to a faculty-led assessment committee. It was clear during the visit how vital this committee is, particularly to learning outcomes assessment. As assessment processes have matured, the theory and concepts of effective learning outcomes assessment have been operationalized and internalized by the members of the committee. These members rotate on and off, but remain faculty champions and mentors for newer faculty and those still struggling with applying assessment.

The Curriculum and Program Review process serves as the guiding document for assessment and includes questions meant to assure systematic learning assessment. Programs are accountable to this on a quarterly basis, although the timeline has been revised to be two terms for the building of key assessment components with assessment being done spring term. With this process, there doesn't appear to be a standard for data acquisition. Rather, it is left to the program to design this. Therefore, there is little if any common data across the institution for learning outcomes assessment – this is left to assessment of global skills, the summer assessment institutes, and to some extent, the monitoring reports. The current design for curriculum and program review provides ownership by the program, with assessments designed by the faculty within the program, but approved institutionally.

The second example employs more traditional learning outcome methodology by providing matrices to all departments and programs to assess general education outcomes referred to as “global skills.” Each document (one for each global skill: Communication, Critical Thinking, Interpersonal Relations, and Numeracy) states the outcome, the sub-outcomes, and the rubric for each sub-outcome. The acquisition of learning outcomes data is done by assembling representative student work (i.e. artifacts) and scoring that work to the appropriate rubric during a weeklong summer assessment institute. This process has the advantage of featuring an inter-rater reliability component to assure a more reliable assessment. It is also a system where all faculty are not required to participate in assessing work, but conceivably, all are required to provide random samples of their students' work. During interviews, it was brought out that even though more faculty involvement is needed on Monitoring Report review teams, this is not the case with the summer institutes, where there is more demand than available seats. While one outcome addressed each year is more manageable and provides a clearer assessment message, it also creates a span of four years from one assessment to the next for each global skill. When asked about this, the report was confirmed. The summer activity is briefed to the college community during the following pre-service, then time is given to incorporate the improvements into the curriculum. Following a period of implementation and use, faculty are asked to provide

learning artifacts for the upcoming summer assessment institute to address the global skill that was earlier assessed. By the time the next round of assessment for that skill occurs, little shelf time has passed where the skill's assessment has been left unattended.

The third example is occupied by the academic performance of developmental education students. The college has focused its efforts since 2011 when it joined Achieving the Dream. Lower Columbia College has been recently named an Achieving the Dream leader college due to its excellent work in developmental education student success initiatives and its mature data collection and analysis processes. In addition to program assessment processes of the first example, a second data point is success in the first (or gateway) college-level course. The report states that following significant changes to improve math developmental education persistence (more diagnostic placement, modular courses, etc.), early results indicate that students are succeeding at the same rate as before even though the withdrawal rate is down. The radical extent of those changes may mean that success rates will improve with refinements in the employment of the new curriculum.

Part Three

Lower Columbia College has been honest and forthcoming in responding to the question posed in Part III of the "Guidelines for the Mid-Cycle Evaluation: Moving forward to the Year Seven what will you need to do?" The college seeks to have more involvement on Monitoring Report review teams, seek to include students, have more professional development, and create higher levels of engagement of the faculty. The maturity of the assessment process has moved beyond the fundamental task of developing and providing assessment tools to applying the assessment process to assessment itself; assessment tools and techniques are continuously evaluated for effectiveness and efficiency, and enhanced to improve their value in the overall assessment effort. The level of awareness of the value of the Summer Assessment Institute mechanism for intentional analysis of assessment data is attested to by its recurring oversubscription by faculty members desiring to participate in this process. Monitoring Report teams have broadly representative membership from across the campus community; the report development process and its subsequent reporting encompass the college vertically, from the faculty and staff level to the Board of Trustees. Tying the data presented in Monitoring Reports to the annual planning and prioritizing processes, led by the college president and participated in by the Monitoring Report review teams, ensure that this part of the assessment effort serves not just to provide feedback on performance and status, but also serves a feed-forward role in informing the quality improvement efforts that are embodied in college priorities for the succeeding year.

As the college moves toward the Year Seven self-study, the aspects noted above represent solid accomplishments in embedding a culture of assessment in its practices and processes. The primary effort they recognize as needing to be ready for the self-study effort can be described as an ongoing effort to broaden, strengthen, and sustain the existing use of assessment. The Mid-

Cycle Self-Study and the conversations during the evaluation visit highlighted and reinforced several aspects of this effort that the college recognizes:

- Enlarging the participation in the Monitoring process to include more members of the campus community, especially adjunct faculty, and students
- In-depth training of new Monitoring Report review team members to ensure continuity and knowledge management to preserve 'lessons learned' intelligence
- Formal orientation of new employees in the nature and processes of the culture of assessment
- Ongoing 'assessment of assessment' to improve the metrics applied to assessment, in meaningfulness and utility

Summary

LCC possesses highly developed assessment planning that creates valid and reliable results. Its planning and budgeting as well as use of those results are highly developed as well. Its assessable outcomes has been developed with certain aspects that are highly developed. Assessment implementation is developed and needs to incorporate multiple data sets with greater engagement of faculty to be highly developed. The college has developed processes that effectively provide feedback, but do so in a four-year cycle rather than annually. Use of results leading to improved learning has been designed and implemented in such a way that faculty are involved, yet the processes are not highly developed (per the Assessment Plan and Progress evaluation rubric) as the institution continues to more deeply engage the faculty. There is clearly institutional support for the multiple tiers of assessment developed and implemented by the college. The support for assessment is seen in the college's passion and pride for the effective framework it has developed for both institutional assessment, but perhaps more so for the levels of engagement and the quality of assessment, analysis, and resulting improvements that have occurred through several iterations of assessment. LCC is encouraged to continue its already well-developed efforts and work for higher levels of engagement of faculty and students, increased professional development for learning outcomes assessment, and finally, more viable and meaningful indicators for "Community Enrichment."