

**Mid-Cycle Evaluation
Peer Evaluation Report**

**Lower Columbia College
Longview, WA
October 25-26, 2021**

*A confidential report of findings prepared for the
Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU)*

Lower Columbia College

Mid-Cycle Evaluation Committee Report

Evaluators

The evaluation committee for the Mid-Cycle Evaluation of Lower Columbia College (LCC) consisted of Dr. Clifton Sanders, Provost for Academic Affairs, Salt Lake Community College, and Dr. Leanne Frost, Executive Director of Instruction, Great Falls College Montana State University. The NWCCU liaison was Dr. Ron Larsen, Senior Vice President, Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities.

Overview of the Mid-Cycle Evaluation Visit to Lower Columbia College

The Mid-Cycle Review of Lower Columbia College was conducted as a virtual visit due to the continuing Covid-19 pandemic.

Because the Lower Columbia College Mid-Cycle report contained extensive hyperlinks to referenced documents, websites and other information, the virtual site visit was very easy to manage. The evaluators very much appreciated the report format as this provided a nimble template for virtual meetings with various college stakeholder groups. We especially thank Wendy Hall, Lower Columbia College ALO, and her team for their outstanding work and coordination with us prior to the site visit. Meetings via Zoom proceeded smoothly without any major interruptions. The coordination provided by NWCCU was critical to the logistical success of this site visit.

All meetings were collegial and informative, allowing for quality conversations regarding the practices and evidence associated with the institution's progress toward mission fulfillment. The interaction between college representatives, including administration, staff, faculty, students and Trustee representatives with the evaluators was open, honest and productive for increasing student success and the progress of the institution.

The visit focused on providing helpful feedback to Lower Columbia College in preparation for a successful, year seven, comprehensive evaluation.

Overview of this Report

The report represents the primary questions/areas noted in NWCCU guidelines as stated in the NWCCU Accreditation Handbook 2020 Appendix I. Such areas were addressed by LCC's formal report and guided the conversations during the virtual visit. This report reflects observations/strengths and suggestions associated with 1: Mission Fulfillment, 2: Student Achievement, 3: Programmatic Assessment (two representative examples), and 4: Moving Forward (preparatory efforts toward the year seven review).

Mission Fulfillment

LCC defines and assesses mission fulfillment according to an institutional effectiveness framework consisting of three components: Institutional Monitoring, Curriculum and Program Review, and Global Skills assessment.

Institutional Monitoring

LCC's Institutional Monitoring framework focuses upon the five mission areas of the LCC Strategic Plan: Workforce and Economic Development, Preparation for College Level Studies, Academic Transfer, Student Access, Support and Completion, and Institutional Excellence and Community Enrichment. Achievement goal thresholds and stretch goals were added recently by the LCC trustees. An annual monitoring report is generated for each mission area. Teams for each area review annually the monitoring report and other data (e.g. the Key Performance Indicator (KPI) dashboard), and conduct an annual SWOT analysis with the college President. After extensive review, the monitoring report is presented to the Board of Trustees for review and response in five separate meetings throughout the year and in two retreats per year.

Each monitoring report team consists of 20-25 people including faculty (just under 50%), students, and community representatives from the LCC Foundation Board of Directors (beginning in 2021-22). Collectively, the five teams comprise the college's Strategic Planning Committee and participate in annual strategic and operational planning with LCC's president.

Comment: The Mid-Cycle evaluation team is very impressed with LCC's institutional monitoring framework and process (Standard 1.B.1-1.B.4). Mission Areas, Objectives and Indicators are well-defined, clear, meaningful, and assessable. Monitoring reports provide meaningful information with acceptable benchmarking against regional and national sources. The primary regional benchmarking source is the entire Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges. However, given the heterogeneity of institutions in this system, LCC will use subsets of system and disaggregated data for internal purposes when it is helpful to compare with institutions with similar targeted characteristics. Data is consistently and appropriately disaggregated, and 5-year trends provide valuable information. The Monitoring Report Review Team member orientation document provides an excellent guide for new team members and trustees, along with links to resources and data dashboards, etc. LCC's Institutional Research capacity has expanded to accommodate the increasing need and demands from both internal and external stakeholders for data to support strategic planning and institutional effectiveness.

It is abundantly clear from Mid-Cycle evaluation team discussions with LCC that there is extraordinary engagement, representation, and collaboration by all major stakeholders in LCC's strategic planning process. LCC's institutional effectiveness program, developed and improved over several years, is systematic and accompanied by ample evidence that annual monitoring leads to continuous quality improvement of all institutional systems, structures, and practices. In response to NWCCU 2020 standards, feedback and input from Trustees, and system initiatives (e.g., Guided Pathways), several innovations at LCC are in early stages. The evaluators therefore encourage LCC to evaluate recent innovations, etc., with the same rigor and

thoroughness, and particularly, “closing the loop,” and continuous quality improvement for these efforts as they prepare for a successful Year 7 evaluation.

Curriculum and Program Review

LCC has a well-established framework for curriculum and program review. These processes are clearly faculty-led and well-supported by data dashboards and key information provided by Institutional Research. Instructional programs are evaluated over a 2-year cycle according to six sections as noted in the Mid-Cycle Review (p 6). The majority of this work occurs on designated “assessment days” which provide faculty time to focus on specific review areas, interpret and reflect upon data, and develop plans and interventions to address identified gaps or deficiencies. Because programs are reviewed over 2-year cycles, there is opportunity each year to assess prior year interventions and adjust plans as needed. The curriculum and program review process allows excellent support for faculty to improve their assessment knowledge and practice via peer interaction, meetings with regional and national assessment experts, and via training and guidance from Institutional Research on assessment methodology, etc.

Comment: Per Standard 1.C.5, LCC clearly has a highly developed system for assessing the quality of student learning. Not only are faculty leading the assessment work, LCC has developed a committed and highly effective culture of assessment at the institution that prioritizes student learning success, faculty professional development (and new faculty selection), and pedagogical innovation. The Mid-Cycle evaluators compliment LCC for developing an exemplary assessment program. The evaluators encourage LCC to continue to act upon program review results in a thorough manner, and to provide a variety of examples as evidence of successful curriculum and program review as they prepare for the Year 7 evaluation. Additionally, the evaluators encourage LCC to continuously improve their awareness and assessment expertise in addressing the needs of their diverse populations, especially where numbers are small and challenging to assess with traditional methodologies, etc.

Global Skills Assessment

LCC assesses general education learning outcomes as a set of Global Skills for all credential seeking students. Until recently, this assessment was limited to transfer students, but LCC has now added Global Skills assessment for workforce programs. Although transfer and workforce programs are assessed separately, there is extensive collaboration between faculty from both areas. Global Skills assessments involve analysis of randomly selected artifacts for each of the categories: Communication, Critical Thinking, Interpersonal Relations, and Quantitative Literacy. Faculty are trained to use rubrics to evaluate the artifacts; the rubrics are continuously refined as part of the assessment continuous improvement. Student information to-date is de-identified for the transfer Global Skills assessment, which does not permit ready disaggregation. However, based upon the Mid-Cycle evaluation with LCC faculty, there is clear indication that faculty reflect upon Global Skills assessment results and connect their evaluations to strategies for course and academic program improvement. Course and academic program data are

disaggregated; therefore, Global Skills assessments as performed currently have influence and impact upon specific programs.

Comment: LCC's Global Skills assessment is highly developed and clearly aligned with Standard 1.C.5. Faculty are fully engaged in leading and improving the assessment processes. The Mid-Cycle evaluators encourage LCC to fully develop Global Skills evaluations for workforce programs as they prepare for the Year 7 evaluation.

Student Achievement

LCC has a robust system for measuring student achievement. In alignment with Standard 1.D.1, the college collects data on student persistence, completion, engagement, performance, and post-graduation success. Data are also collected on transfer rates and national initiative indicators, such as completion of college-level math and English in the first year as part of Guided Pathways. Licensure and placement rates are tracked. General education outcomes, called "Global Skills" at LCC, are assessed separately for transfer and workforce programs.

As per Standard 1.D.3, the LCC data is benchmarked against other institutions through national collection tools, such as the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), and data collected by the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges. The data is disaggregated in an effort to identify equity gaps. LCC shares the data on its website through its monitoring reports, Fact Book, and "Student Right to Know" webpages.

Institutional-level student achievement data is applied to the program and course levels through LCC's Curriculum and Program Review process. Faculty review data for their areas and create action plans to address areas identified for improvement during quarterly "assessment days." The effects of the action plans are then evaluated in the next cycle by examining the data after the plans' implementation, and the plans are adjusted if needed.

Both instructional and student services professionals are involved in assessing student learning and achievement at LCC, in alignment with Standard 1.C.7. Faculty, administrators, and student services staff participate together in the monitoring committees and work together to meet the college's KPIs. For example, the Vice President of Student Services and the Vice President of Instruction co-chair the Guided Pathways Steering Committee, overseeing an initiative to improve student learning and achievement.

Comment: During the Mid-Cycle visit, LCC faculty were able to articulate how they analyzed institutional-level data to make course and program level changes to improve student achievement. The faculty were also able to provide examples of the continuous improvement cycle created by the assessment process. In addition, students recognized the importance of learning outcomes in their course syllabi and the connection between the course outcomes, program outcomes, and their future careers. The students did not, however, know where they could find LCC student achievement data even though it is readily available on the LCC website, and they expressed a desire to know such information. Students also could not articulate the four Global Skills areas although they recognized the importance of general education courses.

Programmatic Assessment

LCC provided summary and detailed assessment information for English, Machine Trades, and Chemistry programs. Each academic program at LCC is reviewed over a 2-year cycle. LCC uses a comprehensive, well-designed assessment instrument that helps faculty engage program data consistently and effectively. The assessment template outlines a sequential process for faculty to evaluate their programs by reviewing Data and Equity (Phases 1 and 2), Outcomes, Curriculum, and Environment. An additional category, Action Plans, provides opportunity for faculty to translate evaluation into meaningful action. Each category contains links to dashboards and other information, along with prompts and questions that assist and guide faculty in their review, reflection and planning.

It is clear that the process and template easily accommodate and support faculty ability to evaluate and assess their programs. The process allows faculty to select meaningful student learning outcomes, develop appropriate assessment methodologies and evaluation rubrics, analyze program specific demographic and outcome data with disaggregation, and develop action steps to address student learning and equity gaps. Data is analyzed each year of the assessment cycle, which allows for reflection and program adjustments to determine promising practices in shorter timeframes. For the 2-year report, faculty provide responses to question prompts in relation to the nature of their respective programs (i.e., transfer, workforce, etc.).

Comment: LCC's Curriculum and Program Review process is truly exemplary, and easily fulfills Standards 1.C.5 – 1.C.7. All facets of LCC's process are highly developed and ongoing, built upon a long history of assessment practice and development. The Mid-Cycle evaluators compliment LCC for leveraging grant opportunities such as Achieving the Dream and Guided Pathways to expand and sustain institutional research capacity. This has proven to be absolutely essential to the high quality of their data, assessment, and support for faculty and the LCC's robust assessment processes.

Moving forward

The Mid-Cycle evaluators concur with LCC's reflections in their report. We encourage LCC to continue to address the issues identified by the institution. We compliment LCC for the exceptional overall quality of their Mission Fulfillment, Student Achievement and Programmatic Assessment processes. The level of institutional collaboration; Trustee support and leadership; well-developed, meaningful strategic planning; and a robust Culture of Assessment provides LCC with every component needed to continue on course for a successful and satisfying Year 7 evaluation. The Mid-Cycle evaluators offer the following encouragements based upon our observations:

- “Tell your story”-- provide narrative depth to your data results. Include more examples of how faculty and staff have used data to improve student achievement, as this would bring to life the effectiveness of LCC's assessment process and structure.

- Document well how you “close the loop” on the new initiatives underway and be ready to share these as appropriate for the Year 7 evaluation
- Highlight your multilevel approach to benchmarking for institutional effectiveness. In addition to system benchmarks, make sure you explain how you also use comparison data with similar institutions, etc., as part of your analytical and assessment framework.
- Per the Mid-Cycle Report reflections, consider ways to evolve the (transfer) Global Skills Assessment to address the need to consider disaggregated data and equity gaps in student learning.

Conclusion

The Mid-Cycle evaluation team was impressed with LCC’s vigorous mission fulfillment and assessment processes. A robust and thoroughgoing “culture of assessment” has been created through the strong leadership of the President, the Leadership Team, Trustees, Vice President of Effectiveness & College Relations and early faculty champions, and fostered through open communication, outstanding collaboration, effective orientation and support, and the transparent use of data. LCC has done extraordinary work to-date and is well positioned for future success.