*Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities*

# Year Three Evaluation Report

**Miles Community College**
**Miles City, Montana**

**April 30-May 2, 2012**

*A Confidential Report Prepared for the*
*Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities*
*That Represents the Views of the Evaluator*

# Evaluation Committee Report

**Miles Community College**
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**Introduction**

Miles Community College (MCC), located in Miles City Montana, a rural community of approximately 9,000 people, was founded in 1939 as Custer County Junior College. For almost 20 years, the College operated out of a few rooms in the local public high school. In 1957, the College moved into the former Milwaukee Railroad Depot building.  MCC is one of three community colleges in the state of Montana. In addition, Montana is home to five colleges of technology and seven tribal colleges that offer two-year postsecondary education.  The campus includes a student center that houses the cafeteria and bookstore, four student residential buildings and a commons building, a vocational building, a library/classroom building, and a physical education facility.

Miles Community College offers general transfer Associate of Arts and Associate of Science degrees, an Associate of Science in Nursing degree which is accredited by the National League of Nursing Accrediting Commission, Inc., Associate of Applied Science degrees in a variety of professional technical fields, Certificate programs, Continuing Education and Workforce Training, and Adult Basic Education. The College also sponsors intercollegiate athletic teams in basketball, baseball, golf, and rodeo.

In Fall Term 2011, Miles Community College served 510 state supported students, or 406.26 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) students.  Of this total, 41% enrolled in transfer programs, 50% in career-technical programs, and 6% were non-degree seeking students.

The College has been accredited since 1971:

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| 1971 | Initial Accreditation, effective September 1971. |
| 1976 | Full–scale Visit: Accreditation reaffirmed; requested progress on recommendations 3 and 4 and a visit by Commission representative in 1977 (focused interim) and a progress report on Recommendations 1 and 2 with a possible visit in 1979. |
| 1979 | Focused Interim: Accreditation reaffirmed. |
| 1986 | Full-scale Visit: Accreditation reaffirmed; requested progress report |
| 1996 | Full-scale Visit:  Accreditation reaffirmed; requested a progress report in spring 1997, and a focused interim report in spring 1998. |
| 1997 | Progress Report: Report accepted (General Recommendation 3 of the 1996.)  Evaluation Committee Report – formal structure and channel for communication be established to ensure that the faculty are involved in development of institutional policy – (Eligibility Requirement 7.) |
| 1998 | Focused Interim: Accreditation reaffirmed; (General Recommendations 1, 2 and 4 from the 1996 Evaluation Committee Report): financial resources; develop and implement a continuing process of academic planning, the assessment of outcomes; and direct link now be made between faculty evaluation and the continuous improvement of teaching and learning. Commission requested a progress report in spring 2000. |
| 2000 | Progress Report: Report accepted.  Readdressing General Recommendation 1 of the 1996 Evaluation Committee Report. |

2001    Regular Interim: Accreditation reaffirmed; requested progress report in spring 2002.
2002    Progress Report: Report accepted (Recommendation of spring 2002; Regular Interim Evaluation Report)
2006    Comprehensive Visit: Accreditation reaffirmed.
2007    Focused Visit: Accreditation reaffirmed.
2008    Progress Report: Report accepted.
2009    Focused Interim: Reaffirmed accreditation on the basis of the fall 2008 Focused Interim Report.
2011    Reaffirmed accreditation on the basis of the Spring 2011 Year One Evaluation which was expanded to address Recommendation 1 of the Fall 2008 Focused Interim Evaluator Report.

**Year Three Report and Evaluation Visit**

The evaluation visit on April 30-May 2, 2012, lasted two and a half days during which the evaluators conducted interviews with faculty, staff, students, and trustees; reviewed evidence in the team room organized by the College; reviewed documents on the website and other electronic resources; and toured the campus facilities. The faculty and staff were collegial and hospitable, and the support provided to the evaluators in terms of technology, navigating the campus, food, space, and other clerical needs was extensive.

The evaluation team found the Self-Evaluation Report to be very well-organized, and clear. The team found the additional electronic documents, that were provided on a flash drive when the report was mailed, to be informative and helped the evaluators better prepare for the visit.

**Eligibility Requirements**

The team found that Miles Community College meets or substantially meets all the eligibility requirements of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU).

# Chapter One: Mission, Core Themes, and Expectations

## Standard 1.A

Miles Community College (MCC) has a Mission statement that is well defined, is appropriate for an institution of higher education and is understood by the campus community (1.A.1). The College has adopted an approach of using the strategic planning process as the "foundation and paradigm upon which mission fulfillment is articulated and assessed" (pg 6). The five identified strategic initiatives ("Student Experience," "Enrollment," "Funding," "Reputation," "Innovativeness") "reflect the College's current priorities, needs and realities." (pg 5).

For each 'Strategic Initiative' a set of short-term 'tactics' is established. The associated 'performance indicators' are largely process statements; timeframes for accomplishment are within the current year; and assessment of the tactics a short-term process checklist.

Such strategic planning is explicitly recognized by the College as being responsive to current circumstances, and by extension the short-term 'tactics' used to implement strategic initiatives even more so. This work articulates some of what the College is doing, but does not provide a stable and complete basis for defining and assessing mission fulfillment. The Evaluators recommend that the College define a threshold of mission fulfillment that provides a clear basis establishing an "acceptable threshold or extent of mission fulfillment" (Standard 1.A.2).

## Standard 1.B

The College has identified four core themes in keeping with its mission: 'Student Success'; 'Academic Excellence', 'Resource Management' and 'Community Outreach and Partnerships'- each with a set of objectives.

The objectives are at times more of a documentation of process without a clear connection to the stated core theme. For example, Core Theme 2, "Academic Excellence" has as its first objective "Adhere to mandatory placement policies." While this may be good practice, data indicators established to track that, over time, are not sufficient to form the basis of evaluation the core theme of Academic Excellence as stated.

Many of the indicators of achievement do not establish data that provide evidence of successful results so much as a record of activity that is believed to support the Core Theme objective. For example, the factual account that the SOAR sessions took place documents an activity that may contribute to student success, rather than providing differential data showing actual student success.

Standard 1.B.2 requires that "the institution establishes objectives for each of its core themes and identifies meaningful, assessable, and verifiable indicators of achievement that form the basis for evaluating accomplishment of the objectives of its core themes." The Evaluators recommend that the College establish core theme outcomes and

indicators of achievement that provide direct evidence of results rather than process and which form the basis of evaluating the objectives of the core theme.

**Core Theme #1 - Student Success**[1]

Objective #1 identifies two programs, SOAR and First Year Pioneer as the vehicles to achieve this Objective. While the orientation programs, such as those noted, have been shown to positively impact students' success rates, they are not sufficient indices to form the basis for evaluating the core theme as it

Objective #1:   Equip students with the basic knowledge needed to navigate the educational process; and
Objective #2:   Provide a quality student experience.

is defined in the vision statement. Additionally, the tools of assessment for the indicators capture outputs rather than outcomes.

Objective #2 discusses a range of extracurricular activities as the indicators to achieve the objective of providing students with socially and culturally enriching opportunities.

The Evaluators are concerned that the indicators of this core theme together are still not sufficient to form the basis of evaluating the core theme as it is described in the vision statement.

**Core Theme #2 - Academic Excellence**[2]

Objective #1:   Adhere to mandatory placement policies.
Objective #2:   Provide a sequence of developmental courses to prepare students for college-level courses.
Objective #3:   Prepare students for entry into the job market through career and technical program completion.
Objective #4:   Prepare students to succeed at transfer institutions.

Core theme #2 is defined to include accessible, quality academic programs, with emphasis on progression, completion, and success in workforce and/or transfer.

Objective #1, adherence to mandatory placement policies, with minimal override by academic affairs administration, might be an attempt to

address the progression element of this core theme. Documenting adherence to policy does not document results in support of accomplishing the Core Theme.

Objective #2 (developmental sequence) might be an attempt to address the access and progression completion components of the Academic Excellence core theme. Again,

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[1] Core Theme #1 Statement: At Miles Community College, we have an open-door admissions policy. As a result, we face the ubiquitous challenge and opportunity of admitting students from diverse educational and socioeconomic backgrounds. Our goal is to identify our students' current level of preparation and then to help them succeed at achieving their academic potential in order to fulfill their personal goals. In addition, we strive to provide the students with socially and culturally enriching opportunities as they attend Miles Community College.

[2] Core theme #2 Statement: The mission of Miles Community College is to provide accessible quality programs and to facilitate students' progression through their respective areas of study.  As students complete their certificate or degree, they are prepared to succeed at their next goal, whether it is entering the workforce or continuing on to upper-division coursework at a transfer institution.

simply creating a sequence of developmental education courses does not document results in support of accomplishing the Core Theme.

The career/technical program completion (#3) and transfer preparation objectives (#4) relate to the completion element of Academic Excellence. Employment rates and licensing/certification rates (nursing) provide evidence of success in the CTE programs. Regarding success in transfer, objective #4 establishes the process for transfer (i.e., course alignment, system-wide transfer equivalencies, etc.), without, however, providing a means to assess the success of these processes.

Finally, the evaluators note that, none of the objectives in this core theme speak to the quality component of Academic Excellence which is included in the Core Theme Vision Statement. As a result, the evaluators are concerned that the core theme objectives and indicators do not form the basis for evaluating whether the College has achieved Academic Excellence.

## Core Theme #3 - Resource Management[3]

Core Theme #3 addresses stewardship and accountability related to financial resources, human resources, auxiliary services and facilities management, aimed at promoting student success and lifelong learning.  More specifically, Objectives #1-3 address fiscal management. Objective 1, "*obtain and account for all financial resources to support MCC's mission*," presents a plan for auditing, grants management, and reporting of financial conditions of the College, along with communicating these issues to legislators.

> Objective #1: Obtain and account for all financial resources to support the mission of the College.
> Objective #2: Ensure effective resource allocation through a transparent and collaborative budgeting process.
> Objective #3: Effectively manage college resources based on enrollment.
> Objective #4: Recruit, develop, and retain qualified faculty and staff.
> Objective #5: Provide auxiliary services that are sustainable and serve the needs of students, faculty, staff and the community.
> Objective #6: Provide a safe and functional facilities with available resources.
> Objective #7: Perform fundraising and friend-raising functions to support College activities.

Objective #2, which outlines the budgeting process, describes MCC's methods of developing budget documents and communicating budget information to the various stakeholders.  In Objective #3, enrollment-based budgeting processes are outlined.

Hiring, professional development, training and retention procedures (Objective #4) include meaningful, realistic indicators. Auxiliary services (#5) are evaluated using both process (usage data and student survey) and outcome (financial performance) indicators, and are continued if they are providing satisfactory and (presumably) revenue-generating services.  Objective #6 (facilities), too, is assessed using meaningful and verifiable

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[3] Core Theme #3 Statement: At Miles Community College, we strive to ensure responsible, prudent and effectual stewardship of and accountability for 1) financial resources, 2) human resources, 3) auxiliary services, and 4) facilities management, all with the ultimate aim of aiding all stakeholders in carrying out the College's mission of promoting student success and lifelong learning through accessible quality programs and community partnerships.

indicators, including master plan updates, safety analyses, and infrastructure improvement tracking. Fundraising efforts (#7) are evaluated through annual reporting by the Executive Director of the Endowment, with other assessment related to success of development efforts in helping support the prioritized needs of MCC.

In each of these objectives, the evaluators note that there did not appear to be an explicit connection to the "…..aim of aiding all stakeholders in carrying out the College's mission."

## Core Theme #4 - Community Outreach & Partnership[4]

The evaluators note that the objectives are more process oriented and do not cover all aspects of the core theme as stated.

For example, to offer new programs is a useful objective (#1), but simply listing them in the catalog does not demonstrate response to needs of the region.

To determine whether or not MCC has provided "timely, cutting-edge workforce training to

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| Objective #1:   Partner with other higher education institutions to provide additional degree program opportunities.<br>Objective #2:   Create linkages between secondary and postsecondary education.<br>Objective #3:   Provide workforce training to meet regional needs.<br>Objective #4:   Offer lifelong learning educational experiences to meet community needs. |

enhance business development in the area," it is not enough to offer courses and seminars, to meet with businesses to develop customized training, and to plan and market CE courses (#3).  Indicators should be meaningful in the context of the Objective: assessable, verifiable, and produce data that provide direction for determining whether outcomes have been met.

In summary, the objectives and its indicators do not appear to form the basis of evaluating the achievement of the core theme as it is defined.

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[4] Core Theme #4 Vision Statement: Miles Community College serves as an economic engine for our community and surrounding area.  Consequently, we strive to provide timely, cutting-edge workforce training to enhance business development in the area.  In addition, we provide meaningful opportunities to enrich the personal lives of area residents in order to foster lifelong learning.  As a small community college, we also understand the need to create partnerships and linkages with industry and other educational institutions to ensure fiscal solvency and to maximize our economies of scale.

## Chapter Two - Resources and Capacity

### *Standard 2.A Governance*

MCC has a seven-member Board of Trustees locally elected and charged with the responsibility of governance of the College with some oversight responsibilities held by the Montana Board of Regents of Higher Education[5]. The evaluators found that the Board members understood the Board's responsibility to be at the policy level, and that the Board was responsible for establishing and monitoring the Vision, Mission, Values and Strategic Direction of the College; determining the Board's annual goals and evaluating its own performance; and the hiring and regular evaluation of the CEO.

The evaluators also found Board members to be actively engaged in a systematic process for policy review. The Board expressed confidence in the leadership of the CEO and the senior administration of the College. It was clear to the evaluators that the Board took their responsibilities to heart and had a deep commitment to the College's mission.

MCC has several committees composed of faculty, staff, and students that engage with matters of the College, ranging from finance, technology, and curriculum to food services and residence life, to mention just a few. These committee structures make provision for the appropriate consideration of the view of constituent groups (2.A.1).

MCC has a collective bargaining agreement between the Board of Trustees and the Faculty Association that is affiliated with the MEA-MFT/NEA. Any changes proposed to these agreements during negotiations are reviewed to ensure that they support accreditation requirements (2.A.3).

MCC has well developed policies and procedures related to Academic and Academic Freedom, Students, Finance, Human Resources and Institutional Integrity. Some examples include (2.A.12 – 2.A.30):
- The policies of the Miles Community College Library are documented, published and enforced. They are available in a number of locations and a variety of formats, both formal and informal. For example, the Board Policy Handbook Policy 300.9 states that "The Library shall be open to all students, faculty, staff, and community members." Several policies are posted as appropriate in the library and additional policies are published on the MCC website. Wording is unambiguous with consequences of violation of policies clearly described. Guidelines for Collection Management, Complaints, Copyright and Academic Dishonesty, Confidentiality, and others are posted as well as a comprehensive Code of Conduct. (2.A.13)
- Policies and procedures regarding varied student's rights and responsibilities are clearly indicated and available to students. While these are available on campus, there is a need to review locations for pick up, and for making them readily available for distance students who do not take classes on campus at all. The latter information is unclear in one document. (2.A.15)

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[5] Oversight is defined by the *Montana Code Annotated.*

- Policies are clearly stated in the Board Policy Handbook for all levels of employees. New and emerging policies (e.g., types of progressive discipline) are discussed in the President's Council and other venues before a move to structured submission to the Board. (2.A.18)
- Consistent with the standards, policies on academic freedom are articulated clearly with regard to publication, institutional support, objective presentation of scholarship, and acknowledgment of intellectual property. Interviews with faculty confirmed the implementation of these policies and procedures in campus life at MCC. Also, a new Board policy (2/27/12) helps clarify Academic Freedom at MCC, and faculty seemed supportive of the adoption of this policy. (2.A.27-29)

## 2.B Human Resources

The College developed a new evaluation form for administrators and staff this past year. Evaluations are due to be completed yearly, with a deadline of June 30 each year. Staff and supervisors had input into the format and were trained in its use.

There are various opportunities for general professional development in on-campus, continuing education, area programs of the Chamber of Commerce, and other entities. There are some opportunities for professional development for administrators and staff in the State and elsewhere, but funding is limited. There appears to be a disparity between the opportunities for professional development for the faculty and other employees. (2.B.3)

Job descriptions appear to be linked to the needs of positions. An *Open Position* area is available on the College Web Site. Review of a random sample of resumes, as well as discussions with the Human Resource Director and through interviews with other personnel (and Team Colleagues) give substance to the qualifications for the Positions. The President appears to be well-qualified for her position; questions raised earlier about the Institutional Research duties of the Vice President responsible for this area need to be addressed further.

Regarding 2.B.4, on-site interviews confirmed MCC's employment of "appropriately qualified faculty sufficient in number to achieve its educational objectives, establish and oversee academic policies."

An issue was expressed by the faculty association leadership in connection to the composition of the 163-day contract year, including issues with past practice and the academic calendar. (2.B.5 )

The Self-Evaluation Report and Appendix D suggest that faculty are evaluated in a systematic fashion, The standard mandates that "all faculty are evaluated. . . at least once within every five-year period of service," and it seems that MCC has met or exceeded the expectations of this standard. A review of sample faculty evaluation files supports the systematic application of the faculty review processes. A detailed, weighted evaluation

process has been developed with substantial faculty input; this process includes feedback from a variety of peers and colleagues and appears to be holistic in nature. (2.B.6).

## *2.C Education Resources*

The Self-Evaluation Report summarizes a set of specific procedures for learning outcome identification and for adherence to program content in fields of study. (2.C.1)

In alignment with standard 2.C.2, Miles Community College identifies and publishes course and degree learning outcomes.  For some degrees, such as Associate of Applied Science (Biofuels), Associate of Arts, and Associate of Science, program outcomes are identified and published. However, some programs (i.e., Associate of Arts, Elementary Education Emphasis; Associate of Arts, Paraprofessional Education Emphasis; Associate of Arts, Physical Education Emphasis; Associate of Science, Agribusiness Emphasis) do not have published outcomes. Interviews with the Vice President of Academic Affairs clarified the timeline for finalization of all program outcomes, and it is expected that by May 2013 these will be complete. The evaluators suggest that this priority be addressed in a timely manner.

While MCC is in compliance with this standard, the role of the faculty in the Academic Standards and Curriculum Committee is worthy of further discussion. Though the standard describes "a major role in the design, approval, implementation and revision of the curriculum," the work of curriculum updating often happens in subcommittees with small groups of faculty and the Vice President for Academic Affairs. Adding clarity on this subcommittee structure might provide a vehicle for clearer communication of curriculum processes.  (2.C.5).

The Evaluation Committee complements Miles Community College faculty and the Director of the Library for partnering to provide appropriate instruction and support for students to enhance their effectiveness in obtaining, evaluating, and using library and information resources by integrating *Information Literacy* instruction into the learning process.

The use of library resources in College Writing I and College Writing II seems appropriate to the integration of library/information resources into the learning process.

MCC's *Credit for Prior Learning* standards and processes seem well-aligned with the NWCCU standard for this domain. Student meetings indicated some success in prior learning assessment, and its frequency in use might help further increase completion rates.  (2.C.7)

The general education section of the self-study, including material from the catalog, seems appropriate and clear. Moving the related instruction components to stand-alone coursework, as MCC has done over the past four years, seems like an important accomplishment.  (2.C.9)

The related instruction process has been updated in the past four years at MCC, as described in 2.C.9. The Vice President of Academic Affairs "ensures that faculty members who teach these courses are appropriately qualified to do so." As specified in the standards, appropriate teaching qualifications are required; the evaluators are satisfied with the systematic process of assessing instructors for qualification to deliver related instruction. (2.C.11)

The self-study indicates that continuing education programming is consistent with the College's mission and goals, and this seems largely accurate. However, it is unclear whether the evaluation of the continuing education programming investigates outcomes, or simply the enjoyment/satisfaction level of the participants. Content mastery (as addressed in 2.C.18) also bears consideration. (2.C.16)

## *2.D Student Support Resources*

While some learning issues, in particular those for new or potential college students, are reasonably well-developed with program initiatives, there is not an overall good usage of data collection, analysis and planning processes in order to systematically assess various and changing learning environments and the connection to student needs.(2.D.1) The College needs to regularly review, in an overarching way, the needs of students and the subsequent development of programs that meet those needs.

Crime policies and reports are listed prominently. Security and safety measures, inspections, student fines for safety breaches, and close working relationships with local Police and Fire Departments have assisted with quicker response times. An active Safety Committee, the composition of which encompasses all College entities, maintains regular inspections and reviews of different areas of the campus for safety violations such as illegal heating devices. (2.D.2)

Students are required to attend orientation sessions and the half-semester-long first-year student seminar if they have not identified a specific degree major or emphasis. (2.D.3) For distance students and others unable to attend the campus sessions of the initial orientation program, an on-line version with a 'test', focused on the information garnered, is required. Outcomes assessment of the pre-semester and the half-term course needs to be more focused on learning assessment, rather than outputs of attendance or review of course syllabi by faculty and others.

The process and implementation of program elimination is well documented within the Report. Interviews with the VPAA and other staff supported the documentation provided, utilizing a program being eliminated (i.e., Medical Receptionist) as an example.

The catalog is published every two years and is available in paper and electronic form. During the past academic year, the College published a one-time one-year catalog to track the changes made for the updated Montana University System common course numbering initiative. (2.D.5)

The College Catalog is complete in terms of its comprehensive listings and information about programs with licensure. On-line documents and program-specific websites provide adequate information and descriptors. (2.D.6)

The College has indicated a thorough process for record management. There is not, however, a system in place for documentation of employee knowledge of FERPA, the law that governs this Standard. (2.D.7)  The College should consider how to document employee knowledge.

Printed and electronic information appears to be well publicized, and College data forms outline disbursements of funds, and rates of default. (2.D.8)

The College mandates exit counseling and does comprehensive follow-up of students who do not appear for their sessions. The College has a very low loan default rate for student loans.  (2.D.9) Banner installation has automated this process well.

The current advising system appears to be clear and well understood. (2.D.10) Various materials indicate a new advising model in process. The new advising process has been proposed internally. The College should plan the unveiling and implementation of the new process so that it is widely understood by all constituencies.

The published materials clearly outline the various program and institutional processes of student activities. Students are invited to serve on most College committees, but a review of committee minutes indicates that student attendance and involvement on most committees is low. Student government leaders are trained for a week in the fall term, along with resident assistants. The Student Government President meets weekly with the President and attends and provides support at Board meetings. (2.D.11)

The auxiliary services provide a mix of support services to the campus and community. The residence halls, food service, bookstore, and Centra appear to be well-maintained, and utilized by students and employees. Each area has respective committees and other mechanisms for input and involvement. Interviews with faculty and staff suggest that the College's facilities are widely-used by community members. (2.D.12)

The published material indicates the full set of programs and requirements for intercollegiate athletics. (2.D.13) The *Centra* (the College's athletic facility) is well-utilized by students, athletic teams and community members. It appears that there are few conflicts for space, except during some winter months. Title IX compliance is acceptable, and the College is making strides in making programs more equitable and accessible for women athletes. Booster programs are in the process of moving towards integration with the  Endowment.

Published material duly outlines compliance with the regulation noted. While this Standard is followed, there is some apparent lack of equity in terms of the service provided to on-campus versus full distance learning students. The College is making

strides to reach out to the distance students in order to provide the same or equivalent service. (2.D.14)

## 2.E Library and Information Resources

The Judson H. Flower Jr. Library is a clean, accessible, well-organized, and inviting space for students to research and study on campus. To provide access to the physical collection, the library building is open fifty-two hours a week during the semester. The library provides study rooms with media equipment and the main library area provides internet access via twelve computers. A printer and a copy machine are also available.

Recent statistics show a weekly count of student visits more than twice the size of the entire student body. The twelve computers are heavily used as well. One recent tally of usage shows 188 uses in one week.

It is the policy of the library to provide resources and services to meet the needs of MCC's educational programs, to support the curriculum and, by extension, the students' ability to succeed in their courses. To this end, the Librarian serves on the Academic Standards and Curriculum Committee. Selection objectives are in keeping with the academic aims of the institution.

Local, state, and national resources are available through the library website to enhance rural students' access to academic resources. These include catalogs of a consortium of 24 libraries as well as online materials obtained through the Montana State Library. Most notable are databases from EBSCO, a major library vendor, the Montana Memory project (digital collections), and WorldCat, a database of holdings from libraries around the world (2.E.1).

In addition, a library-produced wiki, *MCC Online Reference Resources*, contains 92 pages of links and portals for each academic discipline. There are also links to non-academic resources for parents and seniors.

The Library Director is responsible for the withdrawal of worn and/or dated materials and for their replacement. Interested faculty make acquisitions suggestions to keep the collection current. To serve the needs of off-campus students, the librarian is increasing the availability of eBooks and online journals.

The Library Director collects and reports detailed statistics as required by state and national professional organizations, especially the *Association of College and Research Libraries*. In addition, she tracks onsite user counts and computer usage in order to make decisions about the purchase of materials and the allocation of human and material resources. User counts are kept hourly each day to determine peak and off-periods of use of library spaces. In the past, these data have led to staffing decisions, room reservations, and revised hours of operation (2.E.2).

In an effort to ensure that users effectively know how to use the resources provided by the library, beginning in the fall of 2010, MCC implemented a half-semester freshman seminar, First Year Pioneer, which includes instruction by the Library Director to help students become effective users of information resources (2.E.3). The results of pre- and post-testing are shared with faculty and used to inform appropriate changes in library instruction (2.E.2).

The librarian partners with the Writing faculty and others to provide appropriate instruction and support for students in obtaining and evaluating information resources by integrating Information Literacy instruction into the learning process. In 2011, the librarian made classroom presentations to 36 classes, instructing 463 students (2.E.3).

The Director of the Library has inaugurated increased security in the Library. To compensate for not having an electronic gate system—and to ensure user safety as well— she has physically arranged the furniture and book stacks in such a way that all areas of the room are visible from her desk (2.E.4).

Security requires limiting after-hours access by other than library staff and by enforcing the policy (2.A.13) that all materials must be checked out through the library's ILS. The integrity of the digital collections is protected under vendors' license agreements by limiting access through the EZ Proxy server to those holding the institution's library cards. This one-step authentication meets vendors' requirements but does not place a burden on the user.

## 2.F Financial Resources

**Financial Stability**
The evaluators have concluded that Miles Community College is financially stable (2.F.1), a conclusion substantiated by the College's deliberate approach to financial planning and budgeting, as well as its audited financial statements. Cash flow and financial reserves, while constrained by the realities of state appropriations and declining enrollments, are sufficient to ensure continuity of operations and mission fulfillment.

Satisfactory management of financial risk is achieved principally by (a) maintaining the maximum strategic reserve permitted by state law and (b) insuring against catastrophic losses. Financial management has improved markedly since the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities requested an Annual Report on Finance and Enrollment in 2008. The College has (a) increased professional and technical staffing in support of financial and business operations, (b) advocated for and benefitted from a revised funding formula that added a fixed-cost component to state appropriations, and (c) introduced strategic program planning.

As a result, deficit fund balances have been eliminated (although the bookstore manager's salary is being temporarily augmented by the general fund pursuant to a strategic e-learning initiative that decreased bookstore revenues); strategic reserves have been increased to the maximum allowed under state law; debt is manageable and

declining; audit findings have been reduced and, without exception, overall results have been unqualified; and a building fund has been established.

Enrollment is, of course, a major element of financial stability, and enrollment has continued to decline for reasons external to the College. At this juncture, however, the financial affairs of the College are being effectively managed by a competent management team. The evaluators applaud the College for demonstrating a high level of fiscal discipline.

**Resource Planning**
Budgets are developed annually by a committee of administrators, faculty, and staff under the supervision and leadership of the Vice President for Administrative Services and Finance. Under Board policy, campus stakeholders have the opportunity to submit budget requests (2.F.3). The committee reviews each request based on its strategic priority and subjective merit, as well as the objective reality of anticipated funding. Balanced proposed budgets are presented to the budget committee of the board of trustees, and finalized budgets are presented to the full Board for consideration and adoption. The College does not have a long-range financial forecasting capability, which reduces the capability of administrators to effectively and efficiently explore budgeting alternatives. Notwithstanding, the evaluators have concluded that budget planning is realistic and takes into account responsible projections of revenue sources and operational expenses (2.F.2).

**Accounting System**
The accounting system employed by Miles Community College is Banner, the conversion to which was mandated and (at least partially) paid for by the State in 2010. Banner (formerly by SunGard Higher Education, now Ellucian) is an information management system for students, staff, faculty, and alumni. Training on the new system is continuing, and the College is responsible for continuing training and licensing costs. Banner supports accounting data for state reporting, and the system produces a range of appropriate and useful local reports.

The Vice President for Administrative Services and Finance has overall responsibility for financial, accounting, business, and budgeting activities. The Vice President, who is a Certified Public Accountant, has a B.S. in Business Administration and an MBA, and she has extensive experience in the public and private sectors. The Controller, who reports to the Vice President, is responsible for accounting and internal controls.

Based in part on recent external audit reports, the evaluators have concluded that the accounting system and related processes follow generally accepted accounting principles and that the College has adequate internal controls (2.F.4).

**Capital Budgeting**
Miles Community College has a facilities master plan that was last updated in 2005, which precedes the 2010 NWCCU Standards for Accreditation. It is not surprising,

therefore, that the facilities master plan does not directly address the core themes or objectives presented elsewhere in the College's Year Three Self-Evaluation Report.

Increasingly, the expectation is that an institution's mission, vision, core themes, objectives, strategic plan, financial plan, facilities master plan, information technology master plan, capital plan, and annual budget are individual elements of an integrated whole. The evaluators suggest that planning be performed in an integrated manner and at a level of detail that addresses total life-cycle costs (2.F.5).

The evaluators note that the College intends to update its facilities master plan and attendant capital plan in FY2013 and that the current College facilities are being utilized at approximately 50% of capacity, which should limit the need for new-construction funds except for growth-oriented program initiatives like the equine program. The evaluators note that the current debt load, associated with student housing and the athletic center, is being aggressively retired with user fees. The College's management of debt is prudent.

**Auxiliary Enterprises**
The actions taken by the College prior to and pursuant to the 2008 Annual Report on Finance and Enrollment have brought the four auxiliary enterprises (food service, residential halls, bookstore operations, and athletic center operations) into the self-sustaining category. The one exception is the bookstore, which incurred an extraordinary but short-term expense associated with the College's e-learning initiative. This initiative has decreased bookstore revenues and, as a result, the bookstore manager's salary is temporarily being paid in part (at a 50-50 split) from the general fund. The College appropriately defines the financial relationship between its general operations and its auxiliary enterprises, and the President has the authority to move unobligated funds between general operations funds and auxiliary enterprise funds, as necessary (2.F.6).

**Financial Audits**
External financial audits that meet Single Audit Act requirements are performed annually, and federal program audits are performed every other year by an auditor selected by the state Legislative Audit Division. The College has an impressive recent history of unqualified audits. The most recent audit (FY2010) identified three findings, all of which have been addressed by the College (2.F.7).

**Fundraising Activities**
Miles Community College has authorized two organizations to conduct fundraising activities on behalf of the College: the Miles Community College Endowment and the Pioneer Club. The Endowment is a component unit of the College and is chartered in accordance with state and federal requirements; it is subject to annual audits. A review of the applicable Board policy, a review of the most recent independent audits, and a conversation with the College's administrators suggest that fundraising is conducted in a professional and ethical manner (2.F.8).

## 2.G Physical and Technological Infrastructure

**Physical Facilities**
Miles Community College is set on a 46-acre parcel in Miles City, Montana. The buildings and grounds are well-maintained, and the campus is well-lit and safe. The College provides student housing in four on-campus residence halls, the most recent of which was constructed in 2003. While many of the buildings are aging, the College has made good use of limited internal funds, endowment funds, and external funds (e.g. $700,000 in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds) to perform facility remodels and infrastructure upgrades. Recent projects include a remodel of the bookstore; new carpeting for offices and classrooms; major upgrades to heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems; upgraded science laboratories; a remodel of the food service facility; and the replacement of original windows with modern, energy-efficient ones. The College is to be recognized for its aggressive approach to modernizing campus facilities not only in the strategically important context of driving new enrollments, but also in light of the challenging financial circumstances that have accompanied decreased enrollments. The Vice President for Administrative Services and Finance—supported by the facilities director—works closely with faculty and staff to support the academic and other programs that are integral to the core themes of the College (2.G.1).

**Hazardous Materials**
A procedure entitled *Hazard Communication Program* addresses the identification, use, handling, storage, and disposal of hazardous materials. Individual department supervisors are responsible for complying with the procedure, which includes requirements associated with container labeling, material safety data sheets, and employee training. The safety officer is responsible for maintaining and monitoring the program (2.G.2).

Importantly, the procedure requires that training for new employees must be completed before starting work at Miles Community College. Training requirements include an introduction to and an overview of the hazard communication program, including the Hazard Communication Standard, but training is not formalized, lesson plans are not used, and records are not kept.

These programmatic failures take on special significance in view of a safety inspection that was performed by the state Department of Labor & Industry in April 2009. The department cited thirty-nine (39) safety violations, including several violations related to hazardous materials—all of which required formal, documented corrective action. One of the citations (Item #1 in the report) was that "the employer did not maintain a log of all recordable occupational injuries and illnesses as required," which included important observations and recommendations about the lack of new-employee training, task-specific training, continuing refresher training, periodic self-inspections, training documentation, written policies, and accident-investigation procedures. The College subsequently reported to the state that the deficiencies in Item #1 had been corrected.

However, it appears to the evaluators that the formal, documented response to the Department of Labor & Industry is *not* in accordance with actual practice. The evaluators

suggest that the College review, revise, and adhere to its procedure regarding safe use, storage, and disposal of hazardous or toxic materials. (2.G.2) The evaluators also suggest that the College incorporate into its procedure the requirements of the Montana Safety Culture Act of 1993, which were included in the Final Safety Order that the Montana Department of Labor & Industry issued to Miles Community College April 21, 2009.

**Facilities Planning**
Miles Community College has a facilities master plan that was last updated in 2005, which precedes the 2010 NWCCU Standards for Accreditation. It is not surprising, therefore, that the facilities master plan does not directly address the core themes or objectives presented elsewhere in the College's Year Three Self-Evaluation Report; notwithstanding, the evaluators find that the plan is generally consistent with the College's mission and core themes (2.G.3).

The evaluators note that the College intends to update its facilities master plan and attendant capital plan in FY2013. The new plan will address the acquisition of adjacent land for additional parking, improved access to the campus, and proposed new facilities. The College has a history of partnering with the community to enhance both the quality of living on campus and the quality of life in the community, so the new plan will also explore opportunities for shared college/community facilities. Finally, the plan will address opportunities for constructing new facilities dedicated to strategically important, growth-oriented "destination" programs like equine science.

**Facilities Equipment**
As addressed in the Physical Facilities paragraph, above, the campus is aging, but the current administration has been commendably aggressive about pursuing both traditional and alternate methods of funding to retire the backload of deferred maintenance and to modernize facilities, especially those that are elemental to academic excellence and student success. The evaluators find that equipment is generally sufficient in quantity and quality and is appropriately managed to support institutional functions and fulfill the College's mission (2.G.4).

**Technology Systems**
The Chief of Information Technology reports to the Vice President for Administrative Services and Finance and has the responsibility to provide the information technology (IT) infrastructure, systems, equipment, and expertise to support the delivery of instruction, the success of students, and the administrative and business functions of the College, including library operations.

While the College is limited by scarce resources, the IT department has been able to provide the College with the system resources that are both necessary and sufficient to support the mission and the strategic initiatives of the College. For example, the College maintains its own local area network; procures Internet access through two vendors; uses Microsoft Outlook for faculty, staff, and student e-mail; procures and maintains its own phone system; employs an instructional television system; supports e-learning; designs and maintains the College website; provides web-based access to Banner (the College's

new integrated student and finance management system); manages four computer laboratories; and supports classroom instruction and library operations.

An IT committee provides an active forum for stakeholders to discuss future needs and to solve current problems. Recognizing the need to upgrade Internet access for students who live on campus, and a shortage of general funds to pay for it, the IT committee and IT department successfully advocated for a new residence-hall technology fee.

Overall, the evaluators have concluded that the College has appropriate and adequate technology systems and infrastructure to support management and operational activities, academic programs, and support services (2.G.5).

**Technology Support**
The evaluators found evidence of technical support sufficient to meet the needs of the college community (2.G.6). The Banner team is tasked with teaching Banner-related procedures to staff, but the IT staff has supported the College by building a training module (with a quiz) for data entry and validation—and by making it available on Moodle (an e-learning software platform).

The IT staff has traditionally provided short, on-demand training sessions that have covered topics of interest to faculty, staff, and students, as well as training occasioned by the installation of new hardware or software. For example, the IT department recently conducted employee training prior to upgrading the Microsoft Office Suite from 2003 to 2007. The IT department partners with other departments to solve technology needs by researching prospective new software applications.

**Technology Planning**
In 2007, the College implemented its first technology master plan, and a revision to the plan is scheduled during 2012 or 2013 (the development of a new five-year master plan may be slowed by the recent, resource-intensive launch of the new Banner system). The director of information technology is responsible for overseeing the plan, and the IT committee and the director work together to provide stakeholder inputs to the budget committee during the annual budget cycle (2.G.7).

**Technology Replacement**
Reduced revenues, caused by a continuing decline in student enrollment, are beginning to interfere with the continuity of both planned improvements and unplanned replacements; for example, the current shelf inventory of backup computers is two, which renders the replacement of failed (unrepairable) units problematic. Another year of budget reductions will likely force a delay in the currently planned equipment replacement cycle; for example, recent upgrades to essential classroom technology will cause a one-year delay in planned upgrades to an open computer laboratory. However, the College recognizes that continuing to effectively plan is the best approach for effectively managing change, whether anticipated or unanticipated (2.G.8).

## General Commendations and Recommendations:

**Commendations:**

1. The evaluators commend the faculty and staff for their unwavering commitment to the students and the community. The College has created a nurturing and vibrant learning environment that encourages student engagement in the classroom and outside the classroom. In particular, students highlighted the dedication and diligence of the Miles Community College faculty, including their accessibility, knowledge, and the willingness of faculty (and staff) to provide intensive, individualized attention to students in order to help them succeed.

2. The evaluators commend the Board of Trustees and the President for their leadership in institutional policy and planning; further, they note that the Board has a high level of confidence in the President and her effective stewardship of the College.

3. The evaluators commend the Writing faculty and the Librarian for partnering to provide instructional resources for students in a rich and accessible learning environment by systematically integrating Information Literacy instruction into the learning process.

4. Miles Community College was a finalist in both 2012 and 2013 for the prestigious Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence. The evaluators commend this success, which involves being in the top ten percent of all community colleges nationwide in terms of performance and improvement in four key areas: graduation rates, degrees awarded, student retention rates, and equity in student outcomes.

5. The College is to be commended for its aggressive approach to modernizing campus facilities under challenging financial circumstances.

**Recommendations:**

1. The Evaluators recommend that the College establish core theme outcomes and indicators of achievement that provide direct evidence of results rather than process, and which form the *basis of evaluating* the objectives of the core theme. (1.B.2). Further the evaluators recommend that the College strengthen its definition of an *acceptable threshold of mission fulfillment*. (1.A.2)