

Mid-Cycle Peer Evaluation Report

Miles Community College

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A confidential report of findings prepared for the
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Introduction

Miles Community College (MCC), located in Miles City, Montana was founded in 1939. Miles Community College was last reaffirmed in 2015 on the basis of the Spring 2015 Year Seven Peer Evaluation Report. The College is now in the middle of its seven-year accreditation cycle. This report summarizes observations made during the April 2018 Mid-Cycle Evaluation Visit.

Assessment of Self-Evaluation Report and Support Materials

The College did an excellent job of providing the evaluators with the information required to conduct the Mid-Cycle Evaluation. The Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation Report was clearly organized and provided an appropriate balance of explanation and evaluation. The evaluators would like to thank Miles Community College for the time spent preparing for the visit. A special thanks to Garth Sleight, Associate Dean of Academic Affairs/Accreditation Liaison Officer, for his prompt and thorough response to our requests regarding the organization and scheduling time for us to meet with stakeholders and coordinating the logistics for our visit.

Mid-Cycle Evaluation Format

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

Part I: Overview of Institutional Assessment Planning and Assessment

MCC Mission: Miles Community College prepares students for success and provides opportunities for lifelong learning through quality programs, community outreach, and partnerships.

Core Themes:

1. Student Success
2. Academic Achievement
3. Workforce Training and Partnerships
4. Community Outreach and Lifelong Learning

MCC's process for measuring and reporting mission fulfillment involves "describing the different levels of assessment that occur at Miles Community College, how assessment takes place, and how outcomes inform planning and decision-making" (Mid-Cycle Report, p. 3). Mission fulfillment is measured through the assessment of the four core themes that are derived from and encompass the College Mission.

Three levels of Planning and Assessment are described—Aspirational, Institutional and Operational Planning and Assessment. The Vision 2020 document, the Core Theme Indicator Scorecard and the annual Strategic Plans, have been widely shared internally and externally with various stakeholders. At the Aspirational Planning level, we commend the MCC Board of Trustees for their interest and support in planning and assessment, particularly their astute understanding of the importance of data in guiding the decisions that the College makes.

At the Institutional Planning level, planning and assessment is reflected in the College 's Core Theme Indicator Scorecard. Examples are provided on how each core theme is assessed through indicators, targets, results and timeframe.

When some benchmarks are not met, the College acts to address deficiencies and to improve performance. While the College's Core Theme Indicator Scorecard provides a quantitative report of its performance, it is clear to the peer evaluators that the examples behind the measures are more valuable to the Institution than the measures themselves. As preparation for the Year Seven Report and Visit unfolds, the College will want to ensure that the assessment measures serve as a vehicle to help explain the larger story of mission fulfillment at Miles Community College.

During our visit and in discussion with various stakeholders, acknowledgment was made that the quality of indicators is uneven across the four core themes, specifically based on the examples provided in the Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation Report. Going forward, it will be important for the College to continue to identify and define more meaningful ways to measure success for its Core Themes.

At the Operational level, planning and assessment is reflected in the College's Annual Strategic Plans. It is unclear how the annual strategic plans are shared with the college community. In discussing this with the Institutional Effectiveness Committee during our visit, the development of an Institutional Research website using data from Tableau Public would be helpful for sharing data college-wide at the operational level for planning and assessment.

Part II: Operationalizing Mission and Core Themes

Representative Example 1: Nursing Program Assessment

MCC chose to present the outcomes and assessment work of the Nursing Department because this group, over the past few years, has demonstrated well-developed assessment processes. It is notable to recognize the commendable work that the Nursing Department at MCC did in diving into their data and identifying key areas that needed shoring up and improvement. They focused upon four end-of-program student learning outcomes for their assessment process: 1) Human Flourishing, 2) Nursing Judgment, 3) Professional Identity, and 4) Spirit of Inquiry. As they analyzed the data, they discovered that the first-time pass rate on the NCLEX licensure exam for their graduates was at 55% in comparison with the national average, which was over 80%. They realized how high the stakes were for nursing students and how high the need was to prepare qualified nurses to meet the occupational demand.

After doing an intensive study and analysis, the decision was made to implement changes to increase student retention and attainment. These changes were organized within an action plan, which unfolded over several academic years:

- 2015 – Decided to implement the Model Curriculum in fall of 2016;
- 2016 – Changed the standards of admission for fall semester by:

- a. Increasing the course grades for pre-requisites and all nursing courses from 78 to 79.51;
 - b. Increasing the GPA to 2.76 cumulative;
 - c. Changing the benchmark on third party assessments to 70% from 60%;
 - d. Increasing the Kaplan pre-nursing score from 60% to 70%;
 - e. Implementing Canvas as a learning management system.
- 2017 - Implemented a new interactive IT (Pexip) system for distance learning, which is a lecture capture capability allowing students to listen repeatedly to a lecture for a period of up to two additional weeks. This was found to be especially helpful to students commuting as they could listen to lectures while they were driving to and from the College.

In addition to the changes implemented in the action plan, nursing faculty recognized the importance of identifying students at risk for academic failure earlier so that interventions to support student success could be made. Faculty examined the Kaplan pre-entrance exam results for both first and second year nursing students and found that students taking Anatomy and Physiology (A & P) at Miles Community College scored lower in science in comparison with students who took the course at another college. Pathophysiology was an area where several students failed and upon further investigation, the faculty found that these students had not had the necessary information in A & P to prepare them for the rigors of the nursing curriculum. The decision was made to have a nursing instructor develop a section of A & P that comprehensively covered the course learning outcomes, but also highlighted scientific areas specifically important to nursing curriculum. The nursing faculty will review the Kaplan pre-nursing exam scores at the end of spring 2018 to see if a significant improvement is seen in science scores.

Another intervention method used by nursing faculty during Spring 2018 was to refer any nursing student who had a grade of 83% or less within any nursing course to a tutor for additional review, remediation, and support. Remediation plans were developed and implemented using information from the Kaplan and Sherpath assessments.

The Nursing Department also decided to reduce the first-year nursing admittance from 38 nursing students to 19 students to address retention and completion rates. This was a brave decision to make, especially when funding support is so reliant upon FTE number. However, the decision also shows MCC's priority and commitment to create optimal learning environments that support student retention, completion, and success. The Director of Nursing indicated that in 2017 the first-time pass rate for NCLEX exams increased by a total of 15%, from 55% to 70%, which was a very positive increase towards the College's goal of 80%. With this positive indicator, the Director of Nursing indicated that next year, 2018-19, the department would be returning to their admittance quota of 38 first-year nursing students.

It was quite apparent to the Evaluation team, both from the mid-cycle report and from the interviews with nursing faculty, staff, and administrators that the Nursing Department at MCC has a well-developed assessment process, which is at the heart and soul of their teaching and learning practice. For the past two academic years, since the College migrated to Canvas, they have been working with features in Canvas to link and assess course-to-program assessment. The Evaluation team encourages the Nursing Department to share their assessment practices with faculty in other divisions, both to inspire and lead the College in moving towards an institution where all units, both instructional and non-instructional,

flourish through consistent and systematic assessment, which is documented and used across all programs and departments. This would contribute greatly to ensuring that college-wide focus on assessment and continual improvement is well-grounded as the College prepares for their 7-year Evaluation Study.

Representative Example 2: Incorporation of Canvas for the Improvement of Teaching and Learning

The Evaluation team was duly impressed with the level of inclusion in getting college-wide faculty input and review to determine what Learning Management System (LMS) would be used at MCC. Summer 2015 was the first term that Canvas was used and by summer 2016 the full migration had been accomplished. It is remarkable that the College was able to complete the full migration to Canvas in just one year! This is an amazing feat and demonstrates the faculty's commitment to evaluating and implementing resources that support and enhance student learning.

The Mid-Cycle report indicated that there is currently a group of faculty "super users" who have begun investigating the more advanced capacities, features, and tools available within Canvas, particularly the analytic features. Canvas Analytics can support faculty in linking course assignments and exams with student learning outcomes (SLO) to assess at what level SLOs are being achieved at the course level. It can also be very useful in linking and assessing course-to-program, and course-to-general education learning outcomes.

The super users or "A team" are working together to build the infrastructure within Canvas by experimenting with their own classes before disseminating the Canvas course-to program assessment process to the rest of the faculty. This is a best practice model. The Evaluation team believes the super users might want to consider working closely with the new Institutional Researcher in establishing student success dashboards where faculty can review retention and completion data at the course level, particularly their own courses. The new IR director needs to work with the VP of Academic Affairs and Division Chairs to learn more about faculty data needs and how to share data with faculty about student success and completion.

The Evaluation team was able to meet with sixteen faculty, across many divisions, including Career and Technical faculty as well as Academic Transfer faculty regarding their assessment plans. The scope and comprehensiveness of the assessment plans presented by faculty in the Ad Hoc report and in person were commendable. The progress towards meeting Recommendation 2 is noteworthy as demonstrated by the assessment plans presented. The Evaluation team encourages MCC to continue fostering this focus of assessment so that it becomes an academic "lifestyle" and not just a onetime occurrence to meet an accreditation requirement. Sustaining this effort and keeping continual improvement for student success at the forefront will support mission fulfillment for this remarkable institution. Supporting the faculty with professional development in Canvas Analytics, assessment, and usefulness of rubrics for those who would like to develop them would also assist and help to sustain college-wide assessment planning and progress.

Representative Example 3: Academic Program Prioritization to Assess Current Viability and Sustainability of the College's Academic Programs

Although not required, the third representative example illustrates the importance of:

- New course and certificate development (MS Server course and cybersecurity)
- Advisory Committee input for more hands-on projects/internships for students and collaboration with Montana's STEAM initiatives to recruit students for the IT program
- Interdisciplinary approaches to improve program outcomes (Agriculture/Business/HEO and GIS features)
- Faculty access to regional employment data through Economic modeling through EMSI to consider how to modify existing programs to make them relevant and strategies to identify new program needs.

Overall the Peer Evaluation team was impressed with the efforts made in the representative examples and are especially encouraged by the conversations that have engaged both faculty and student services employees in collaborative discussions about student learning outcomes.

Part III: Moving Forward to the Year Seven Evaluation

MCC is moving in a positive direction in its student learning outcomes assessment processes; it is evident that working on the assessment changes and the relationship between learning outcomes assessment and quality teaching is building among faculty. There is still more to be done, but the administration and faculty are making progress.

For the Year Seven Evaluation, the Mid-Cycle Peer Evaluation team suggests the following:

1. Continue to refine established student learning outcomes assessment process in place. This needs to be implemented in time to show the assessment plan is working and that the assessment process closes the loop.
2. Ensure that assessments used are balanced and have a mix of direct and indirect measures of Academic Achievement (Core Theme 2). The evaluation team still doesn't understand how the targets for the Core Theme Indicator Score Card were determined and the significance of the results when they don't exceed the specified target.
3. The Peer Evaluation team thinks the College is on the right track of using Canvas for course to program assessment and exploring the University of Oregon's Demonstration Project as a helpful reference point.
4. Sustain the assessment work that is being developed and ensure that it becomes a foundation of the College culture. Ensure that assessing learning outcomes at the course, program and general education levels becomes a faculty practice or "mindset" to inform their teaching for continual improvement.

5. Expand the AP3 process to access non-credit workforce development and training programs.
6. Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes is an on-going process. We encourage you to have on-going discussions annually about the Academic Program Prioritization Process (AP3), the Strategic Enrollment Plans (SEP) and the Planning, Budget, and Assessment (PBA) reviews.
7. We encourage you to start AP3 discussions for Student Engagement, Auxiliary Services, and Administrative Operations.
8. Canvas implementation seems to be on-track. The Canvas Project “A” team is to be commended—you are creating a solid culture of evidence. We heard this need from several stakeholders that “this is a change to institutional culture--not just a futile accreditation activity”. We heard that the task itself is important for faculty to learn new teaching and learning strategies that can improve student performance and show how the institution is making process by continually improving and providing relevant educational programs and services to the stakeholders you serve.
9. Use Faculty Days to continue faculty discussions about learning outcomes assessment throughout the year annually.
10. Faculty need access to regional employment data through Economic modeling through EMSI to consider how to modify existing programs to make them relevant and strategies to identify new program needs.
11. Continue to involve industry partners through Advisory Councils in the AP3, SEP and PBA processes.

Conclusion

After reviewing MCC’s Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation Report and visiting with College stakeholders, the Evaluation team is confident that the College is well positioned to provide evidence of mission fulfillment and sustainability in its Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report. There are clear connections between the College Mission and Core Themes.

As noted in your Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation Report, there is work still to be done over the next four years to adjust indicators for your core themes and to ensure they are meaningful and measurable. On-going discussions need to happen in preparation for the Year Seven Evaluation. It is important that the College begin to assess student learning outcomes beyond the course and general education outcome levels. The focus of the next four years needs to refine and improve existing processes—not create new processes. The Evaluation team feels the College is well positioned to accomplish this task.