

Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities

AD HOC EVALUATION

Miles Community College

Miles City, Montana

April 11-12, 2016

Prepared by

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A Confidential Report prepared for the

Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities

Introduction

Miles Community College (MCC) is a small two-year public community college in eastern Montana, serving approximately 500 students. The College offers vocational and academic programs at its main campus near the center of Miles City and at a branch campus on the west side of the city. The College has residential accommodation and an athletics program appropriate to its size. The College was founded in 1939, and was the first community college in Montana. It is one of three (non-tribal) independently operating public community colleges in the State.

After a Year Seven Evaluation Visit in April 2015, the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities reaffirmed the accreditation of Miles Community College with four commendations and six recommendations. The Commission requested that the College prepare an Ad Hoc Report to address progress under these recommendations and host a Commission evaluator in spring 2016. The full text of each Recommendation is included in the body of this report.

Report and Visit

The Ad Hoc Report prepared by the College for this visit (April 2016) is a comprehensive, detailed description of actions taken and progress made on Recommendations 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 since the College's Comprehensive Year 7 evaluation in April 2015. The College provided substantial additional information and exhibits. The Ad Hoc Report appears to provide evidence that the college has made significant progress on each of the Recommendations.

The evaluator was positively received by the College during the visit. All conversations with college personnel were candid and cordial. At various times and in various combinations, the evaluator met with the President, members of the Executive Team, instructional and student services administrators, committee members, and several faculty representing various departments and programs of study. Additional documents and evidence, when requested, were provided promptly. The evaluator thanks MCC staff for their preparation for and hospitality during the visit.

Report on Recommendations

Report on Recommendation 1. *It is recommended that the College improve the timeliness and consistency of business processes (Standard 2.F.4 and Standard 2.F.7)*

In the Ad Hoc Report and during the visit, the College described the impact of staffing turnover in administrative services on maintaining financial reporting processes. While senior positions in administrative services have been filled, it was clear from the Year Seven Report that the College faced significant challenges in bringing both financial records and fiscal processes up to date. The Ad Hoc Report described how the College has made process improvements to its financial reporting and management systems a clear priority. A significant investment of time by one member of staff in administrative services has resulted in several years of financial data being brought current and made accessible for reporting purposes.

Compliment: The College administrative services staff is to be complimented for their commitment and effort toward improving the timeliness and availability of College financial information.

While there is an intention to utilize a newly implemented system (Banner) to manage financial reports, the College found the financial management aspects of Banner to be complex. However, staff have established learning partnerships with other institutions in the State using Banner for administrative purposes, and are now establishing real-time access to financial data and processes for developing reports. In the interim, the considerable effort made by the aforementioned staff member means that monthly budget reports are up to date and provided to leadership and Trustees. The College Budget Committee receives current and accurate information and worksheets to support budget planning processes. In addition, ad hoc reports are quickly available by request from faculty and departments.

The College intends to have the real-time self-service budget reporting function available, utilizing Banner, in the very near future, and are also currently developing plans for associated training. At this point in time, the efforts made to correct and make financial data and processes current are sufficient to provide timely and accurate budget reporting to staff and trustees.

The College has also completed a process to bring external financial audits up to date. A backlog of annual financial audits has been addressed, with outstanding reports from 2011 and 2012 (combined), 2013, and 2014 submitted to their State Legislative Audit Committee and audits completed. The 2015 report has been submitted to the State Legislative Audit Committee and findings will be available this summer.

While all positions in administrative services are now filled, the College recognizes the impact caused by staff turnover in this department. To protect the College from staff turnover in the future, the College is developing a procedures manual to enable the immediate infill of positions and the maintenance of essential financial management procedures in the event of a position vacancy.

The College is encouraged to complete the implementation of the on-demand budget reporting system, however the College has made significant progress in bringing financial data up to date, and has established processes to make accurate and timely financial information available to College constituents.

The evaluator finds that this recommendation has been met.

Report on Recommendation 2. *It is recommended that the College update long range plans for facilities, technology, and equipment replacement (Standard 2.F.5, Standard 2.G.3, Standard 2.G.4, and Standard 2.G.8).*

The College has made significant progress in responding to this recommendation in institutional planning for facilities and technology.

The College is currently in the process of developing and implementing a facilities master plan, which will address both maintenance requirements and investment in new facilities. While the College had a facilities master plan in the 2004/05 year, staff turnover meant that this plan had not been updated. In 2015/16 an external consultant was contracted and completed a detailed evaluation of the condition and suitability of existing facilities. This report is available to a College facilities Planning Committee which is tasked with establishing priorities and work plans to address the findings of the report. Previously, College budget meetings would address facilities planning, and consider immediate and long term requests for funding on an ad hoc basis from college staff and departments. However, to ensure focused capital planning processes, and to enable long-term facilities planning, the College established the facilities Planning Committee. The College Planning Committee also oversees a sub-group to develop a replacement schedule for instructional equipment and vehicles. Faculty are active participants in this group.

Between the submission of the Ad Hoc Report and the visit, the Planning Committee met to conduct a SWOT analysis of the College in the context of facilities and equipment planning. This was the first meeting of the group, and minutes of that meeting were provided to the evaluator. While the findings of the consultants did not identify any significant critical areas for repair or alteration, the report did identify several areas for attention. The College is also currently in the early stages of a major new investment in an instructional and events arena.

During the visit, College staff could verbally describe some criteria for determining how investments would be prioritized, and the strategic intention of the new arena facility. However, the College lacks a process by which minor and major capital investments are clearly articulated to the College Mission and Core Themes, and which describes how resources will be prioritized and allocated to the facilities plan. Completing the process to ‘close the loop’ on capital planning to clearly define how resource allocation and major investments align with and support the College mission will assist the college in ensuring an effective implementation of their facilities master plan.

The College provided a comprehensive five year technology plan as part of the Ad-Hoc Report. This plan is scheduled to be reviewed and updated annually. The plan, as provided to the evaluator, addresses equipment replacement, operational technology, and instructional technology. The Plan clearly defines the contribution of technology, current and planned, to the College Mission. Oversight of the Plan is provided by a College Technology Committee which comprises technology specialist staff, administration, faculty and students.

The evaluator finds that the College has made substantial progress in updating long range plans for facilities, technology and equipment replacement. However, the College needs to complete the process of clearly connecting the capital plans to College Mission.

The evaluator finds that Standards 2.G.4 and 2.G.B have been met.

Recommendation 1. It is recommended that the College continue to develop and implement updated long range plans for facilities, and ensure that those plans clearly connect facilities planning and investment to the College mission and core themes. (Standard 2.F.5 and Standard 2.G.3)

Report on Recommendation 3. *It is recommended that the College centralize institutional research efforts including data and analysis (standard 4.A.2).*

MCC is a small College that does not have a dedicated Institutional Research position. In addressing the recommendation, and to ensure that college is able to address the data collection and reporting needs of the College and its constituents, the College established an Institutional Research Committee. This Committee includes representation from faculty and student support and administrative staff, representing all areas of the institution directly involved in the collection and application of data for external and internal reporting purposes.

The College's Financial Aid Director, a member of the Institutional Research Committee, has been the College point of contact for the implementation of the conversion to Banner. In order to ensure the successful implementation of Banner, the Financial Aid Director has formed formal and informal learning partnerships with other colleges and universities in the State to provide expertise and support.

While oversight of institutional research functions is the responsibility of the Institutional Research Committee, the Financial Aid Director's role has developed as a technical lead for institutional research reporting. The College has also implemented Tableau, and the Director is working with the learning partnerships to develop and publish Tableau dashboards to assist the College with benchmarking and reporting. College Tableau dashboards were demonstrated to the evaluator during the visit, and several data reporting tables, reports, and other examples were provided to the evaluator along with the Ad Hoc Report.

Throughout the visit, the interest in and demand for accurate and relevant data to support program, departments, and institutional level planning and assessment was clear, and the Committee is demonstrating effective institutional research practice to meet this demand. Recent reports provided to the College Board of Trustees have been well received and applied to Trustee planning activities and retreats. Revisions to Core Themes and indicators were described to the evaluator during the visit (and reported in the concurrent Year One Report), and the College has established and published quantifiable benchmarks, with baselines, progress reports, and targets for its strategic priorities provided through the Institutional Research Committee.

The evaluator finds that this recommendation has been met.

Commendation. The College is to be commended for its inclusive and professional approach to addressing institutional research at a small institution, which maximizes collaborative opportunities for training and support.

Report on Recommendations 4, 5 and 6

Recommendation 4. *It is recommended that the College systematically assess student learning outcomes and the course, program and institutional level (Standard 4.A.3 and Standard 4.A.6).*

Recommendation 5. *It is recommended that the College use the results of its assessment of student learning to inform planning and practices in all areas of the College (Standard 4.B.2).*

Recommendation 6. *It is recommended that the College engage in a system of evaluation of its programs and services in order to make determinations of quality, effectiveness, and mission fulfillment (Standard 1.B.2, Standard 4.A.2, and Standard 5.A.2).*

Recommendations 4, 5 and 6 were addressed collectively in the College's Ad Hoc Report, as they interrelated under assessment and evaluation practice. During the visit, each recommendation was considered independently, and all three recommendations were also considered collectively to enable the evaluation of overlapping progress and actions and consider synergies across assessment practice at the College.

The College provided extensive examples of program assessment processes and reports both in the written report and electronically. Typically, these reports included course level assessments and outcomes as well. In some cases, such as for the Nursing program, course and program level assessments were very clearly defined, measurable, and responses to findings were described. Program assessment plans consistently and clearly articulate the connection between learning outcomes at the course and program level.

Compliment: The College is to be complimented on the clear articulation of learning outcomes at the course and program level as evidenced by program assessment plans.

However, while there is clear evidence of comprehensive assessment practice at the course, program, and degree level, there are inconsistent practices with regard to documenting actions taken as a result of assessment practice, and of the continued evaluation of those actions. During the visit, the evaluator met with several faculty from general education, vocational, and academic transfer programs. Faculty and academic administrators were consistently able to describe effective and informed assessment practice. There was a clear understanding of data collection and application for assessment, and without exception a visible commitment to evidence-based continuous improvement for student learning was demonstrated. However, while assessment plans described the assessment methods in use and intended actions, these plans did not include documentation of assessment findings nor articulate actions to these findings.

Similarly, while the College does not have a standard assessment method in place for departments, the College provided evidence of thoughtful, informed, and ongoing assessment that showed a clear alignment between functions such as tutoring support and enrollment

management with student success. It was clear from the evidence provided with the Ad Hoc Report, and in meetings with student support staff, that effective assessment utilizing a variety of methods and tools is taking place, and actions are implemented in accordance with those findings. Some support functions, such as the library, were applying nationally recognized rubrics to assess the impact of the department on student learning. Again, however, the College lacks a system to record and document both assessment practice and the resulting actions, and to close the loop on assessment in both instructional programs and student support departments.

Compliment: The College is to be complemented on providing outstanding examples of and a visible commitment to course, program and student support assessment by faculty and staff.

The evaluator finds that significant work is being done to evaluate both instructional and support programs' effectiveness with regard to student learning and success, and that the College clearly communicates course, program and degree learning outcomes. However, The evaluator finds that while extensive assessment of student learning is taking place, and in many examples there is clear evidence of that assessment informing improvements, there is more work to be done to systematically record the assessment practice and planning to ensure 'closing the loop'.

At the institutional level, the College described changes made to Core Theme indicators that align measures included in college strategic plans with the Core Themes and College Mission. Revised indicators are quantifiable and measurable, and provide a context for program and department indicators to support wider measures of mission fulfilment. While this work is submitted in the concurrent Year One Report, and was not part of the Ad Hoc Visit, examples of how indicators had been defined, and what data was being collected was provided. For example, Enrollment Services staff described how department evaluations and assessments of new student orientations were being correlated to institutional indicators such as retention and completion. Again, while the College was able to clearly demonstrate thoughtful assessment and data collection processes at the institutional level, there is a lack of systems to document that work.

The evaluator finds that Standard 4.A.6 of Recommendation 4 of the Year Seven Evaluation has been met.

The evaluator finds that Recommendation 6 of the Year Seven Evaluation has been met.

The evaluator finds that while substantial progress has been made with regard to Standards 4.A.3 and 4.B.2 of Recommendations 4 and 5 of the Year Seven Evaluation, the College needs to implement effective systems to record and document existing assessment practice.

Recommendation 2. It is recommended that the College develop consistent and systematic processes to record and document assessment practice and planning across all programs and departments. (Standard 4.A.3, 4.B.2)

Conclusion

The College has made commendable progress on all six recommendations. In the opinion of the evaluator, the College has adequately addressed several of the recommendations, wholly or in part, expressed by the previous evaluation team. Despite recent vacancies in significant

leadership positions (now filled), and the inherent challenges of a small institution, the College has developed plans, strategies and processes to meet several of the expectations described in the Year Seven Report Recommendations and the associated Standards. The College exhibits a clear understanding of the importance and characteristics of effective assessment and planning practice, however, the College needs to ensure that processes and documentation fully ‘close the loop’ on assessment and evaluation, and ensure an ongoing cycle of continuous improvement.

Commendation

1. The College is to be commended for its inclusive and professional approach to addressing institutional research at a small institution, which maximizes collaborative opportunities for training and support.

Recommendations

1. It is recommended that the College continue to develop and implement updated long range plans for facilities, and ensure that those plans clearly connect facilities planning and investment to the College mission and core themes (Standard 2.F.5 and Standard 2.G.3).

2. It is recommended that the College develop consistent and systematic processes to record and document assessment practice and planning across all programs and departments. (Standard 4.A.3, 4.B.2)