

Mid-Cycle Peer-Evaluation Report

Lane Community College

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A confidential report of findings prepared for the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities

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Introduction

During October 24-25, 2017, an NWCCU accreditation team conducted a Mid-Cycle site visit to evaluate the readiness of Lane Community College (LCC) for the year seven Mission Fulfillment evaluation. The visit provided for a formative, collegial discussion to assist the college in preparing for a successful Year Seven visit through the provision of evidence of outcomes assessment. The accreditation team was also charged with following up on Recommendations 4, 5, and 6 from the October 2014 Year Seven Mission and Core Themes Peer-Evaluation Report.

Lane Community College (LCC) is a two-year public institution serving most of Oregon's Lane County and some selected school districts in Benton, Linn, and Douglas Counties. The college district represents slightly less than 10 percent of Oregon's general population. Closely adjacent to LCC is the University of Oregon, and institution with which LCC has many partnerships and collaborations. The college has intentionally expanded programming to centers in Cottage Grove and Florence, the Eugene Airport, and downtown Eugene.

This document presents the report of the Mid-Cycle site visit. It was evident to the evaluation team that LCC has invested considerable resources and energy in developing a comprehensive plan to assess student learning, engage in thoughtful and systematic reviews of college programs and services, and link assessment and strategic planning activities to the college's Core Themes.

Part I: Overview of Institutional Assessment Plan

LCC's "Self-Evaluation Report" and "Addendum" was received by the Committee on September 18, 2017. In addition to the printed reports, two flash drives were provided that held copies of supporting documents (academic program review reports) and electronic copies of the evaluation reports. The documents provide a general narrative in response to each of the three elements of the Mid-Cycle Report. The Committee found the on-campus visit was important to provide additional information and clarity in support of the reports. In particular, the Committee sought a deeper analysis of the college's assessment efforts as operationalizing mission and core themes progressing from indicators to objectives to outcomes to mission fulfillment. The Committee also sought additional evidence of the sustainability of ongoing assessment efforts, and an "on the ground" review of how the college continues to address NWCCU's prior year-7 recommendations.

Assessment Planning

LCC has developed a substantial and thoughtful assessment process. Much work has been accomplished in developing processes and frameworks for inclusive and holistic assessment of program learning outcomes, core learning outcomes, and college service/student affairs outcomes. The depth of instructional engagement in these processes is the result of intentional inclusion, which while contributing to a slower pace and fewer data points to date, has created an assessment culture that values student learning and organizational improvement over mere compliance. The college faculty and staff demonstrate a genuine appreciation of the vital role assessment and planning plays in contributing to student success and demonstration of mission fulfillment

Much work has also been accomplished around academic program review, with the faculty determining what constitutes a program. The result is a more inclusive definition that includes departments/disciplines in addition to degrees. Currently each academic program completes an annual planning report which includes strategic planning, requests for resource allocation, and a five-year review. The five-year review includes reflective questions from the Academic Program Review Oversight Committee (APROC) and the Administrative Management Team (AMT) as well as questions program faculty wish to explore. The strengths of this approach include the ability to customize the reports to reflect unique aspects of individual programs, building an assessment culture for program improvement rather than compliance, and mitigating concerns that program review will be "used against" programs in punitive ways. The institutional research office provides a substantial quantity of data for each program, which may be referenced in the report and appendices. While this is very promising work, the committee does have concerns about the lack of key indicators being addressed in all academic program reviews (such as key student success metrics). Therefore, a suggestion was made that in addition to the current reflective questions, a structure be provided that includes KPIs that align with LCC's core themes and/or core learning outcomes for all program reviews moving forward.

LCC has developed a significant body of documents and numerous processes and committees in support of institutional assessment. These are clear evidence of considerable thought, time, and commitment to meaningful assessment. This significant ground work will continue to benefit LCC as it moves to the Year-7 report. LCC's assessment page on their website provides links to a faculty tool kit, information on the CLOs, and to the Assessment Team (A-Team) documents. Assessment Fellows, faculty who have already completed a five-year program review, and the CLO Coordinator are also available to assist. LCC has also developed a software interface that assists faculty in identifying course level outcomes and linking courses to the core learning outcomes (LCC's terminology for general education outcomes). The programs provide both structure for the assessment process and useful reports for review. A similar interface is being discussed for college services and student affairs units.

Assessable Outcomes

LCC faculty have completed substantial work developing assessments for course level and core learning outcomes. LCC has developed a software interface that assists faculty in identifying course level outcomes and linking courses to the core learning outcomes (CLO's--LCC's terminology for general education outcomes). The software tools both help structure the process and provide reports for review. These tools will be useful as LCC continues to develop and refine its assessment structure across the college.

Clear, assessable outcomes are provided for both the Speech and Communication Studies (SCS) and the Physical Therapist Assistant (PTA) in the representative examples included in the report. These examples are discussed in more detail below.

Most of LCC's core theme indicators represent either inputs (e.g. percentage of majors with articulation agreements, and percentage of distance education course per program) or outputs (e.g. percentage of students completing gateway math requirement in two years). This focus on inputs/outputs may contribute to the difficulty some academic programs have in linking their teaching and learning efforts to relevant core themes, and in turn, to mission fulfillment. This may also be a result of the focus on establishing robust processes within a short amount of time. The inputs and outputs included as core theme indicators represent important aspects of maintaining a positive learning environment; however, they are insufficient by themselves to provide comprehensive assessment of student learning. The institutional measures, as presented, do not consistently incorporate direct assessment of student learning. The committee encourages LCC to continue efforts around developing assessments that more directly address student learning outcomes, and in turn, Core Theme Objectives.

LCC has begun planning assessment of co-curricular student learning and proposes to use the Council on the Advancement of Standards (CAS) in Higher Education.

Assessment Implementation

Assessment Implementation refers to the collection of data and development of review criteria by relevant faculty and college staff. This process is institutionalized in the academic area through the annual report and five-year program review report. Similarly, there is clear evidence that assessment is both thoughtfully planned and taking place in the college services and student affairs area as well. LCC has established a process of academic program review; this process is coordinated through the APROC Committee with support from the Institutional Research, Assessment, and Planning office (IRAP). It is LCC's intention this year to develop core theme teams/committees to support data collection and review in support of the core themes. As discussed previously, working to develop clear alignment between academic program review, course outcomes, core learning outcomes, and core theme indicators will help LCC develop a more effective implementation process. Therefore, while there is a clear and robust assessment model in place across college units, the important work of analyzing results and using results to improve student learning and mission fulfillment is emergent.

Alignment

Clear alignment between LCC's mission, strategic plan, core themes, and outcomes is emergent and will continue to mature with time. The work represented in the two representative examples is impressive and substantial; however, more focus on alignment and clarity is needed to demonstrate how the program review evidence supports the college's core themes and core learning objectives. The lack of reference to the core themes in many academic program review reports in addition to the representative examples, suggest there is a lack of clarity in how course level outcomes inform college core theme outcomes and provide evidence of mission fulfillment. Clear, direct, and intentional alignment between curriculum, student learning outcomes, support services, core themes, and mission fulfillment will provide stronger evidence of alignment.

Valid and Reliable Results

Because LCC has been intentional about building a thoughtful and engaged culture of assessment in a relatively short amount of time, there is currently limited data collection and analysis evidenced in the Mid-Cycle Report, the Addendum, and the APRs. While the Committee was informed that data are provided by IR to each program (on 22+ measures), it was still unclear as to the level of data collection, analysis, and utilization currently taking place. In both representative examples, a clear and thoughtful three-year cycle—Year 1: Plan/Prepare/Collect; Year 2: Analyze/Share and Reflect; Year 3: Improve—was employed, driven by faculty in the programs and supported by the A Team. In both examples, faculty identified areas for curricular revision, refinement of student learning outcomes, and so on. That said, there has not been sufficient time to assess the impact on student learning of the revisions/changes that have been implemented because of these assessment activities. It is a concern of the Committee that

LCC will not have data for multiple years of measures to address issues of validity and reliability. It may be that the data provided by institutional research can provide longitudinal data on college outputs. If, as suggested, LCC adds standardized KPIs for each program review, that may provide a more meaningful body of data.

Annual Feedback on Assessment Efforts

Currently the college includes an established annual feedback process for all program areas with clear links to the budget development process and institutional support and strategic planning. Clearly, course level assessments have strong support within the faculty for continuous improvement. It is evident that LCC has established regular review protocols for its institutional effectiveness framework, including the strategic planning committee, The Assessment Team (A-Team), and the Academic Program Review Oversight Committee (APROC). It is impressive that a cultural shift and a greater sense of agency has occurred at LCC due to the Year-7 recommendations. There is great promise in having an engaged faculty and substantial organizational processes; as a next step, the development and articulation of clear learning outcomes aligned to core themes will assist LCC in developing actionable results based on these assessments. As noted above, while there are areas in which the process is still emergent, there is a clear understanding of their role in student learning outcomes and mission fulfillment to be built upon.

Results are Used

In both the Mid-Cycle Report and in all the conversations during the visit, the Committee saw and heard evidence that the results of assessment efforts are being reviewed and utilized. Clearly, meaningful discussions are taking place at both the program and institutional level with the goal of continual improvement. The challenge, not untypical, is to balance the focus on improving the process of assessment and the focus on improving student learning. In the representative examples, the former is a stronger element, perhaps appropriate for these early days in a substantially new process. As LCC provided additional APRs for the Committee's review, it should be noted that even when a pedagogical issue was identified in the review process, no improvement plan or goal was presented in the APR summaries.

Planning and Budgeting

LCC has made a clear and important distinction between academic program review for assessment and improvement (the 5-Year Report) and the annual planning report which supports strategic planning and resource allocation decisions. These efforts align with LCC's strategic objective to "develop planning, decision-making and resource allocation structures for programs and services to achieve optimal enrollment levels, student affordability, and fiscal sustainability while continuing to support a high-quality teaching and learning environment."

Part II: Representative Examples

As provided in the Mid-Cycle Report, there are clear, assessable outcomes for both the Speech and Communication Studies (SCS) and the Physical Therapist Assistant (PTA) in the representative examples provided. Both examples follow a three-year evaluation and assessment cycle that provides time for thoughtful design and implementation of assessments around Core Learning Outcomes. In the COMM 218 course example, the learning outcomes are assessed through the direct observation of students' speeches and scored based on a shared rubric. Notably, the Speech and Communication Studies department also includes student perceptions in the assessment of learning through a student perception survey. In the PTA example, multiple course learning outcomes are assessed and alignment with LCC's CLOs clearly documented. But in neither example is clear alignment to LCC's core themes overtly stated and documented. This is a next logical step in making clear connections between student learning outcomes at the course and program level and the overarching Core Themes of the college.

The examples provided demonstrate a workable, authentic model for program level assessment that holds great promise; as the college continues to refine this process, clear articulation of linkages between Core Themes and the programs' contributions to Mission Fulfillment will no doubt be more apparent.

Summary/General Observations from the Visit:

- It is clear that college has responded with great focus to the recommendations generated from the 7-year visit and subsequent reviews/findings by the Commission.
- College response is not solely driven by concerns around compliance; college faculty and staff demonstrate a genuine appreciation of the vital role assessment and planning plays in contributing to student success and demonstration of mission fulfillment.
- A tremendous amount of thought and work has gone into the work to date--much has been accomplished, but there is still significant work ahead.
- Development of software tools to organize and support assessment and program review work shows promise; initial roll out and testing will confirm value moving forward.
- Based on initial review of documents by the team, there was shared concern regarding both the complexity of the process being undertaken by the college and maintaining the progress being made toward being ready to show mission fulfillment in 7-year review; therefore,
- Much conversation ensued around complexity of work, sustainability of effort over the "long haul," articulating clear and cogent linkage between/among work groups, and integration of key elements/language of assessment and planning (Core Themes, Student Learning Outcomes, Core Learning Outcomes across the planning and assessment efforts being undertaken). From these conversations, the team gained a better understanding of the rationale being employed by the college to address planning and assessment. While the work being accomplished may seem "messy," there is wide institutional participation and buy in, particularly from key faculty.

Hence, this complexity, while sometimes difficult to articulate to those not intimately engaged in the work, is necessary and will result in structures, processes and shared understandings that will be “owned” by the college community and result in genuine and authentic planning and assessment strategies.

Based on these observations, the Evaluation Committee offers the following suggestions:

- The college may wish to refine visual representations of the various activities and groups working on planning and assessment, in order to help those “outside” the work to grasp the interrelationships and linkages which are apparent to those involved in the work.
- Existing plans/documents might benefit from revisions to articulate/specifically reference key vocabulary: Core Themes, Student Learning Outcomes, etc. This will help bind the work together conceptually.
- Wherever possible express indicators in terms of “student outcomes” as opposed to college outputs.
- While the flexibility and adaptability of the current Academic Review Process is laudable and logical, it is strongly suggested that each Program Review include a discussion of how Student Learning Outcomes and Core Themes are addressed by the program in question. This will link ARP work more clearly to planning and assessment of student learning outcomes.
- The college may wish to consider more fully the sustainability of the current level of effort being expended. While adequate resources have been identified and are being employed, long term sustainability will be a challenge.

Part III: Preparation for Year Seven

The Evaluation Committee wishes to re-assert that Lane has made significant progress and continues to work diligently and thoughtfully toward outcomes assessment and mission fulfillment during a period of administrative transition and organizational change. These environmental factors could have easily distracted attention and hampered progress; however, the faculty and staff have persevered and are making strides toward improvement. They are to be commended on the depth and breadth of process development they have accomplished. While the complexity of their process raises concerns about sustainability, both in level of resources committed and in maintaining consistent quality over time, LCC is vigorously optimistic that sustainability will not be an issue. **Lane is on track for a successful Year Seven visit.**