

MID-CYCLE PEER EVALUATION REPORT

SALT LAKE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH

OCTOBER 11-12, 2017

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

EVALUATORS

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INTRODUCTION

Salt Lake Community College (SLCC), located in Salt Lake City, Utah, was granted Initial Accreditation in 1969, and is currently the only comprehensive community college in Utah. SLCC's accreditation was last reaffirmed in January 2015 on the basis of its Fall 2014 Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report. Dr. Deneece G. Huftalin, has been President since September 2014.

The Year Seven visit resulted in two Recommendations. Recommendation 1 was addressed in the Fall 2015 Year one *Mission and Core Themes* report, and in February 2016 the Commission determined that the college had satisfied the Commission's expectations. The college's response to Recommendation 2 was supplied as an addendum to this Mid-cycle self-evaluation.

This report is based on our evaluation of the Mid-cycle self-evaluation, and observations from the 2017 Mid-Cycle Evaluation visit (October 11-12).

ASSESSMENT OF SELF-EVALUATION REPORT AND SUPPORT MATERIALS

In a clearly written and well-organized report, Salt Lake Community College answered the questions posed by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) for a mid-cycle visit. At times it was difficult to fully understand the details of the processes described in the report because the report omitted some evidence or supporting information which would have been helpful prior to the visit. College staff members were very accommodating in making reports and other sources of information available to us.

The team would like to thank the college for working to clarify and provide additional details about elements of the report and its supporting materials during the time leading up to the campus visit and during the visit itself. Information was provided in a collegial, courteous, and timely manner. The college was open to frank discussions about the strengths and challenges of various processes. We would also like to recognize and thank the college for its very gracious and thoughtful hospitality.

MID-CYCLE EVALUATION FORMAT

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

PART I: OVERVIEW OF INSTITUTIONAL ASSESSMENT PLAN

The plan for assessment of mission fulfillment presented in the Mid-cycle report represents a significant change from past practice for the college. First, the Mission Statement is new (three similar drafts presented at the time of the Year 1 report), and the Core Themes reduced to three.

The college's approach for assessing mission fulfillment is presented as having three Areas of Evidence:

- Performance on core theme objectives
- Student learning and achievement outcomes
- Institutional practices to advance mission and core themes.

For the Core Themes specifically, there are now just seven indicators, representing an effort to focus on priority outcomes for students. This change was a result of the college working through Recommendation 1 from the Year 7 report. The prior set of indicators was determined by college leadership to be too complex to be effective. The new indicators represent the highest and most direct goal for each Core Theme. The groups charged with evaluating the Core Theme would have access to a broader set of underlying measures, and have the ability to ask for additional data that might help flesh out or explain the broader results. For these reasons the nature of the data might well vary from year to year. The college feels that a larger set of general and standardized metrics may not be sufficient, and offer too much distraction. The focus on a higher-level analysis allows for the combination of some standardized and some *ad hoc* research and reports that may help them to understand their higher-level metrics better. In the end, the college feels that these "big" indicators are what matter most. This seemed like a convincing argument in support of what is arguably an unusual approach to identifying Core Theme objectives and indicators.

Student learning and achievement outcomes are assessed robustly at SLCC, both at the course-and program level via the Student Learning Outcomes Assessment (SLOA) process, and college-wide in an e-portfolio based-assessment of General Education outcomes. The results are presented in different reports – General Education assessment report and the many program-level reports that are associated with Program Review. Given the extent and maturity of SLCCs learning outcomes assessment practices, it was surprising that there was no measure offered for these within the Core Themes, since student learning is central to all other measures relating to success. It seems likely that the complexity of trying to force the large amount of granular and nuanced data into a limited number of higher-level metrics of would result in a measure with little meaning. However, without having a home in the Core Themes evaluation, this good and important work may not be recognized as contributing to mission fulfillment, or even if it is, not amenable to analysis in the same way (and by the same people) as access, completion, transfer and employment.

The third area, Institutional Practices, is also handled differently from Core Theme in terms of evaluation. This also again may be due to the challenge of rolling up measurable elements into neat and still meaningful metrics, and runs the same risk as not being included meaningfully in Mission Fulfillment. During the visit, there was some consideration of whether these elements should really be included in demonstrating Mission Fulfillment, since they speak more strongly to how SLCC does its work than to what the measurable outcome of the work is.

The Mid Cycle Report describes an evaluation protocol that combines these three areas of evidence by using one rubric for each Core theme, each with the three elements (Core Theme Indicators, Student Learning and Achievement and Institutional Practices). This was explained more fully in Part III of their report, and will be addressed below.

PART II: REPRESENTATIVE EXAMPLES OF OPERATIONALIZING SLCC MISSION

Salt Lake Community College provided two examples of how the college has operationalized its mission and core themes. The first example, Mathways, was offered as an example relating to the Access and Success core theme, and the second example came from the Transfer core theme detailing the work of developing clearer program articulation agreements with four-year colleges and universities where SLCC's students typically transfer to.

MATHWAYS

The Mathways initiative was chosen because it reflected the way SLCC faculty and administration worked together to identify an academic barrier of student success and progression to degree attainment. Three years ago SLCC made the change to Mathways after studying student math placement data and finding that nearly 70% of students were placing into Math 990 (elementary algebra) or below (basic math or pre-algebra courses), making the pathway to college math long and arduous. Data also revealed that only a small percentage of SLCC students placing into the basic math and pre-algebra courses ever made it to college math, which meant that they did not complete a degree. Math 1010, intermediate algebra, had a pass rate of 58% and seemed to be the “gatekeeper course” that kept students from progressing towards fulfilling their quantitative requirement towards degree attainment. Math faculty re-evaluated topic areas offered in the pre-college algebra courses and after a year of careful study and assessment a new curriculum and math course sequence was developed.

A new course, Math 980, was developed which can serve as the entry point for one of three next steps:

- Math 1010, the traditional Intermediate Algebra for Stem, CSIS and Business
- Math 1030, a quantitative reasoning course for students in Arts, Humanities, and General Studies
- Math 1040, Statistics, needed by students in Social and Health Sciences

The course sequence change of the Mathways model was only implemented a year ago, but the emerging data from this year's model revealed a significant increase in the number of Math 1030 sections. More students have access and opportunity to this college math course, but the pass rate is down to 71% from 82% last year. Interestingly though, pass rates are up in Math 1050 (college algebra), which may be indicative of a more “stem” focused and math prepared student. Before the multiple math pathways model was implemented the majority of degree seeking students, regardless of their major took this course.

Since there has only been one year of the Mathways model, not enough data has been collected to make a definitive analysis as to an upward trajectory in getting a greater number of students successfully to and through a college math course.

The multiple math pathways model that is now available at SLCC is to be applauded. Having several more years of Mathways data will allow SLCC to assess the scope of success in operationalizing their mission by the time they prepare to write their 7-Year Accreditation Report.

PROGRAM ARTICULATION

SLCC's goal of increasing their degree conversion rate from 39% to 60% (Bachelors degree attainment in 4 years, from Associates degree completers), was identified during the college's strategic planning effort. A comprehensive study was undertaken to see why so many transfer students were unable to have junior status once they transferred to a four-year college or university within the state system. The "disappearing sophomore year" was discovered as a significant obstacle to conversion from the A.S. to a B.S. degree as some four-year colleges and universities were converting 2000 level courses to 3000 level courses without any discussion with SLCC (incentivized by differential funding). There also seemed to be a historical loss of transfer credit power when SLCC went from a quarter to a semester system a number of years ago. Although faculty are fully involved with their counterparts at the four-year colleges and universities through annual "major meetings" where faculty from both two- and four-year institutions work together to align courses and develop articulation agreements, some structural differences, including this curricular gap at the 2000-level are creating disadvantages to SLCC students' learning and transferability.

Some positive changes that recently emerged came about from the work that faculty within discipline-specific departments such as geoscience, sociology, and social work have done in successfully negotiating new course articulations. This has resulted in some 3000 level courses being returned to their 2000 level course status. Additionally, recent legislation has taken place to remove the financial incentives for converting 2000 level courses to 3000 level courses. However, it appears that it will take both faculty and senior administration working together and with their counterparts in the four-year colleges and universities to improve communication between institutions and program articulations. This united effort will be key to achieving the positive impact to SLCC's operationalized transfer degree conversion rate set as indicator of mission fulfillment.

PART III: MOVING FORWARD

The college recently implemented their three-part assessment rubric for the Core theme of Access and Success, which was carried out by the Senior Leadership Team (a large group with broad administrative leadership across all areas of the college, as well as faculty and student leaders) in a June 2017 retreat. Members were provided with supplemental data (the Student Access and Success Core Theme analysis) and asked to review, score, and then meet to discuss their findings. Based on the template and example (from this retreat) shown in Appendix B, there was likely other information supplied by which the group would evaluate Student Learning and College practices. For the Core Theme indicators, this analysis is focused on whether the measured performance—levels are seen as acceptable, needing work etc. It was noted in the report that the Senior Leadership team that implemented this process found it to be "valuable but challenging" with "aspects of the process needing improvement."

It is less clear how the information gleaned from the robust processes that are in place to assess student learning outcome attainment. The General Education Outcomes assessment via e-portfolio and the

Student Learning Outcomes Assessment (SLOA) processes that focus on course and program level assessment generate considerable valuable information, but it is not clear how they are evaluated and understood. At a department level, assessment-informed changes to teaching and learning is captured in the 5 year Program Review cycle, as well as in annual reports, and a General Education report is published annually, but college acknowledges the need for “additional work to strength the connection between classroom learning and institution-level student learning outcomes.” There would be much value in finding a way to bring the ample results relating to assessment of student learning more directly and clearly into the assessment of mission fulfillment. The rubric templates shown suggest this rolling up of assessment information, but it’s not yet clear how the data will be managed to accomplish that.

The college does have a variety of strong and thoughtful systems for connecting planning around its Strategic plan (which aligns tightly with the Core Themes), to both budget planning and problem solving.

The Intentional Budget Process involves a systematic look at key metrics for college sustainability conducted by the cabinet over the year, looking at program health and viability, program review recommendations and other key inputs. Supplementing this process the cabinet invites, from all departments, requests for both operational and strategic resource allocation. The requests are reviewed by the respective cabinet members and may be moved forward to full cabinet for prioritization and funding consideration. This approach has allowed for the implementation of ideas that might not have otherwise been considered (e.g., supporting FAFSA preparation events, which proved so valuable that it was moved from one-time to sustained funding).

Two other noteworthy approaches integrate assessment with focused problem solving. The “SLCC 360” event engages the entire college community on identified topics annually, and often surfaces the need for additional focus on particular areas. The use of Collaborative Work Teams (CWTs), commissioned either by the Senior Leadership Team or by Cabinet, allows appropriate staff to work specifically and strategically on defined problems, sometimes with research and recommendation, sometimes with implementation, and often with both.

CONCLUSION

After reviewing Salt Lake Community College’s Mid-Cycle Evaluation Report and visiting the campus, the evaluation team believes that the college is positioned to demonstrate mission fulfillment and sustainability in its Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report. Overall, SLCC has strong, collaborative leadership in place with a high level of engagement and understanding of mission, strategic thinking, focused problem solving not only in senior leadership, but among faculty and supporting staff. The processes by which the indicators of mission fulfillment area evaluated, analyzed and acted upon are relatively new, but appear to be sound and on a good path for functional development. As long as the Commission is focused on Core Themes and the indicators thereof as the primary evidence of mission fulfillment, finding one or more ways to identify and incorporate metrics related directly to student learning outcome attainment into the Core Theme indicators would strengthen the evidence provided by SLCC.