Core Themes Conversation
Two NWCCU reports due this spring – an Ad Hoc and the Year 1.

The Ad Hoc is to address specific points from past evaluations. The College currently tracks community activities, but not we do not capture the data well. NWCCU wants us to come up with a better way to show mission fulfillment. The current numeric formula masks some things and exposes others. The current framework measures too many things, not really using all the data. Look to streamline to ensure we are tracking useful data, measure less, and use it in a meaningful way.

The Year 1 starts the 7-year accreditation cycle, perfectly timed for Strategic Plan review. Will make minor changes to the Mission and the Core Themes, but probably not the Vision statement at this time. Mike and Chad met yesterday; Chad brought a handout of expressed thoughts from their discussion.

Current Core Themes are written as activities; discussed as follows:

- **Core Theme One – Provide Access and Support**
  Would like to add **Success**, but cannot really provide success. Some of that is student responsibility. Rather, create an environment that makes students more likely to succeed instead of creating hurdles. Not providing success, but ensuring the opportunity to succeed exists. **Change Core Theme One to Access and Success.**

- **Core Theme Two – Demonstrate Academic Excellence**
  If the focus of Core Theme One shifts to Access and Success, some Core Theme Two outcomes would move to Core Theme One. Need a clear connection that students are achieving instructional outcomes at a high rate. Discussed adding **Scholarship, High-Quality, and Learning vs. Education** to encompass more than academics (successful habits, disciplines, civic engagement, etc.) **Learning** is more difficult to measure from Student Affairs perspective; **education** is a more narrow definition and demonstrates what students have learned. Student Learning Outcomes must be central to the Mission and Core Themes. Mike, Bryon, and Chad are creating a database to structurally assess learning outcomes. Course outcomes must support program outcomes. Creating this database forces the group to figure out how they connect. Passing tests does not mean students have all the skills they need to be successful in the workplace. Ensuring they do needs to drive assessment practices.
NWCCU requires we evaluate our institutional competencies:
1. Written and Oral Communication
2. Quantitative Reasoning
3. Critical Thinking
4. Info Literacy
5. Diversity
6. Applied program outcomes

Rather than adding another layer of assessment for program outcomes, map the concrete outcomes to a lower level. The instructor correlates assignments/assessments 1:1 to course outcomes. Over the course of the program, map which courses address program outcomes. Some programs have certification (NCLEX, FAA, etc.), but mapping will be the best option for programs that do not. Institutional competencies are broad can cannot be mapped from course/program outcomes, but some are addressed further down in the chain (critical thinking at the course/program level). No need to measure institutional competencies as a superimposed layer or bring all other assessment to that level. Rather, measure things that are not already assessed in lower levels. Info literacy modules are running in library with good participation; could be our chief indicator. Need something equally meaningful for diversity. Discussed integrating these in the classroom, but unsure how to administrate to ensure students completed successfully and how to fill that gap if they have not. Not all programs have a diversity requirement. This is another strong reason to implement first year experience. Regardless of major, we want students to be informed citizens. **Change Core Theme Two to High Quality Education.**

- **Core Theme Three – Strengthen the Community**

  Quantitative indicators for community engagement are difficult to come by. The Carnegie Foundation is doing a community engagement initiative. If campuses apply, they help develop a rubric to measure community engagement. They give some good definitions of what community engagement is; it is different depending on the partnership. The College has been counting activities and partnerships; however, the numbers are not that important. The quality is what matters, what participants take away from community events. Discussed economic impact survey — chamber of commerce, school board, etc. — but do not have the funding to pay for it. Could do a better job surveying employers to get some of the data, maybe do an annual community impact survey. Part of the vision is to be intellectual and cultural hub, but how do we measure that?

  Discussed removing **Strengthen** and adding **Engagement, Impact, or Enrichment**. Reflects partnership, internally and externally, something to indicate that we are building and developing relationships. Discussed simply stating **Community**. Could break down objectives into Partnership (Miller welding, Boeing WIG, HCF activities, internships), Engagement (largely counting — how many interactions, events, etc.), and Service (how is the institution giving back to the community). **Change Core Theme Three to Community Enrichment.**

For the Year 1 report due in March, we need the framework, i.e., Core Themes and Objectives and how we will measure them. **Mike will check to see if indicators must be included in the Year 1 report.** Some current Objectives are action items, need to be outcomes. The Strategic Plan and Core Themes do not need to be completely aligned, but they must support each other. Core Themes are fundamental aspects of Mission; Objectives are end state. The Strategic Plan says how we get there.

The Mission currently reads:

  **Helena College University of Montana, a comprehensive two-year college, provides access to and support of lifelong educational opportunities to our diverse community.**
SPA members discussed roll-out to campus, perhaps have people review the current one and the revised one to see if the edits change their opinion of what we do. Approach by stating, “Based on recommendations, SPA proposes these minor changes. What does this mean to you?” Also discussed doing a major change vs. to a smaller one. The last time the Mission was rewritten, Dean Bingham took the draft out to the campus community for feedback. Mostly simply responded favorably without providing input.

SPA members discussed the pros and cons of the following different edits to the Mission:

- Helena College University of Montana, a comprehensive two-year college, provides access to and support of high quality lifelong educational opportunities for our diverse community.

...or...

- Helena College University of Montana, a comprehensive two-year college, provides access high quality lifelong educational opportunities supporting success for our diverse community.

Tammy moved to recommend the following edited mission statement to Leadership:

Helena College University of Montana, a comprehensive two-year college, provides access to and support of high quality lifelong educational opportunities for our diverse community.

Brenda seconded. No further discussion. Seven in favor, one abstained, motion carried. Chad will put it on next Leadership agenda, and Mike will write up a one-paragraph explanation for the change. Will roll out to the campus during January IDD days before submitting to OCHE for BOR approval (due date for January BOR is December 20). The more extensive revision can be discussed at a later date.

Next SPA meeting is December 15, right before IDD. Mike and Chad will draft potential objectives and indicators to consider at that time. The Strategic Plan update is on hold until the work group can meet November 30; a draft proposal will be shared after they meet. Other discussion items (program review, midcycle assessments, etc.) are not time sensitive and will be discussed at a later date.

**Deliverables**

- Recommended revision to Core Themes:
  - Access and Success
  - High Quality Education
  - Community Enrichment
- Recommended revision to Mission:
  
  *Helena College University of Montana, a comprehensive two-year college, provides access to and support of high quality lifelong educational opportunities for our diverse community.*

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- Chad will put it on next Leadership agenda, and Mike will write up a one-paragraph explanation for the change.