Year One Peer-Evaluation Report

University of Montana-Helena College of Technology

Helena, Montana

March 1 – May 10, 2011

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Introduction

University of Montana-Helena College of Technology is a comprehensive community college with two campuses located in the capitol city of Helena, Montana. The Donaldson Campus houses the administrative and student support services as well as the academic programs. The Airport Campus is located approximately two miles away and houses the trades programs. During the 1994 restructuring of the post-secondary system in Montana, the College was affiliated with the University of Montana. The enrollment at the College has doubled over the past five years to a current FTE of 1,067.

From March 1 to May 10, 2011, a three-person peer-evaluation team from the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (Commission) conducted a year one comprehensive peer evaluation of the University of Montana-Helena College of Technology in an off-site virtual environment. The structure of the evaluation consisted of a virtual organizational meeting and virtual evaluation meetings through audio conferencing authorized by the Commission. The peer evaluation was conducted based upon the Commission's 2010 Accreditation Standards and Eligibility Requirements.

The Institution experienced its last regular interim visit in the spring of 2010. The evaluation team made four recommendations. The College responded to Recommendation 1 in an addendum to the College's *Year One Report*.

Report on Recommendation 1

The University of Montana-Helena College of Technology hosted a full-scale evaluation in April of 2010. The Evaluation Committee gave four commendations and four recommendations. The Commission informed the College that in reaffirming accreditation it found that the recommendations were areas "where the College was substantially in compliance with Commission criteria for accreditation, but in need of improvement." The Commission requested that the College address Recommendation 1 in an addendum to its Year One Self-Evaluation Report. Recommendation 1 is as follows:

> The committee recommends UM-Helena carefully and strategically considers staffing decisions through an inclusive process that makes provision for faculty, student and staff input (Standard 6.A.3) and results in:
> - Sufficient faculty with primary commitment to the College who guide curriculum in all majors and disciplines in which the College offers major work. (Standard 4.A.1)
> - Administrative and student services that are staffed with qualified individuals whose academic preparation and/or experience are appropriate to their position, duties, and responsibilities. (Standard 5.D.1)
> - Staffing decisions that are consistently tied to strategic goals and objectives. (Standards 6.B.7, 7.A.2)

The University of Montana-Helena College of Technology responded to Recommendation 1 by providing a two-page narrative report in its *Year One Self-Evaluation Report*. The Peer-Evaluation Committee based its evaluation and determination on this narrative response with respect to the Standards now in effect.

Recommendation 1 states in part that the College "carefully and strategically consider staffing decisions through an inclusive process that makes provision for faculty, student, and staff input and results in sufficient faculty with primary commitment to the College who guide curriculum in all majors and disciplines in which the college offers major work."

The College responded to this recommendation by hiring a full-time, tenure-track instructor in January of 2011 for the Fire & Rescue program. This was a replacement position as the previous instructor left at mid-year in 2010. Other recent hires include a full-time staff person who supervises and teaches courses in the new Water Resources program and a new General Education & Business Technology Division Chair who provides oversight for adjunct faculty who teach general education courses in fine arts, history, drafting, Spanish, anthropology, sociology and physics. With these recent additions, the College has shown that it has taken steps to strengthen its faculty core while providing oversight of its faculty. As enrollment grows at the College, particularly in general education courses and degree and certificate programs, the College will need to continue to employ a sufficient number of qualified faculty. This will enable the College to achieve its educational objectives and to preserve the integrity of its academic programs. (Standards 2.B.4, 2.C.5)

Recommendation 1 states in part that the College "carefully and strategically consider staffing decisions through an inclusive process that makes provision for faculty, student, and staff input and results in administrative and student services that are staffed with qualified individuals whose academic preparation and/or experience are appropriate to their position, duties, and responsibilities."

In response, the College notes in its narrative that in the past the UM-Helena library relied on work study positions to staff the library information desk. In April of 2010, the library committed to staff the information desk with paid, regular employees. With the addition of a .5 FTE librarian position, the library has provided a part-time staff member whose qualifications are appropriate to the duties and responsibilities of library services. This recent hire has enabled the library to provide professional staffing at all times of operation. (Standards 2.B.1, 2.E.3)

Recommendation 1 states in part that "UM-Helena carefully and strategically consider staffing decisions through an inclusive process that makes provision for faculty, student, and staff input and results in staffing decision that are consistently tied to strategic goals and objectives."

The College articulated in its narrative that it has used an inclusive process for considering staffing decisions since 2005. All requests are connected to a "priorities for action" for one or more of the College's four strategic goals as stated in the College's strategic plan. Staff

requests are made directly to the College's Budget Committee, which includes faculty, staff, and student representatives. This process was strengthened in 2009-10 when the Budget Committee asked the College's leadership to prioritize staffing requests and to return its recommendations to the Budget Committee. The College has shown that it considers staffing decisions through an inclusive process and that staffing decisions are tied to the College's strategic plan. (Standards 2.A.1, 2.C.5)

Assessment of the Self-Evaluation Report

The Peer-Evaluation Committee received an electronic and hard copy of the *Year One Self-Evaluation Report* and the *2010-11 Catalog* from the College in a timely manner. The *Year One Report* showed evidence of a broad-based approach to the development of a new mission statement and supportive core themes. The College began the process of mission review and core theme development in the fall of 2010 and included internal and external constituents, including students, faculty, business leaders, k-12 stakeholders, and administration, with a final review by the campus community prior to the mission being accepted by the College Council on January 25, 2011.

The Evaluation Committee found the report to be appropriately organized and easy to read. It provided a thorough institutional context that allowed the members to get a sense for the development of the College from a historical perspective, beginning as the first vocational school in the State of Montana to current status of maintaining occupational training as degree programs. The report provided a response to Recommendation 1 from the spring 2010 regular interim report. In addition, the report provided a review of the development of the new mission with supportive core themes. The individual core themes and indicators with rationale and desired outcomes were provided in an easy-to-read table format.

Report on Eligibility Requirements

The Evaluation Committee understood that the Commission's request to provide an Executive Summary of Eligibility Requirements (ER) 2 and 3 was a late addition to the guidelines for writing the Year One Self-Evaluation Report. Thus, the Committee encourages the College to follow the guidelines released in March of 2011 to ensure that its next report addresses the ERs as noted in the guidelines.

The University of Montana-Helena College of Technology is authorized to deliver certificates and degrees by the Montana Board of Regents. (Eligibility Requirement 2)

Evaluators found evidence of partial compliance with Eligibility Requirement 3. The mission and core themes of the College are clearly identified within the *Year One Report*. The *2010-11 Catalog* lists the previous mission and core value statements. It is expected that the new mission and core themes will be included in the 2011-12 catalog. Adoption of the mission by the College Council is referenced; however, there is no reference to the adoption of the core themes by the College Council. Furthermore, the Evaluation Committee did not find evidence that the College's governing board, the Montana Board of

Regents, has adopted the College's mission statement and core themes. (Eligibility Requirement 3)

Concern:

1. The University of Montana-Helena College of Technology has not provided evidence that its mission statement and core themes have been adopted by its governing board. (Eligibility Requirement 3)

Section One

Introduction:

The University of Montana-Helena College of Technology articulated its mission statement in its *Year One Self Evaluation Report* as "The University of Montana—Helena College of Technology, a comprehensive two-year college, provides access to and support of lifelong educational opportunities to our diverse community." According to the report, mission aspects are defined as Access, Support, and Lifelong Learning. The College has identified three cores themes as key elements of the mission statement. These include Provide Access and Support, Demonstrate Academic Excellence, and Strengthen the Community. Additionally, the College has identified nine objectives. Each objective includes indicators of achievement, rationale, and desired outcomes.

Report on Standard 1.A Mission:

The University of Montana-Helena College of Technology has a published mission statement that was approved by the College Council in January of 2011 and is appropriate for an institution of higher learning. The mission provides direction for its efforts, was developed from a broad-based group of community stake holders, and is generally understood. (Standard 1.A.1)

The College defines mission fulfillment as, "the community accesses college's services, activities and educational programs to achieve their goals." Demonstration of mission fulfillment appears to occur by meeting intended outcomes that were selected to support the mission. Intended outcomes were referenced in the core theme table that was submitted as part of the report; however, specific outcome measures are targeted to be developed for many of the desired outcomes over the next three years of data collection and desired outcomes are targeted as "continuous increase." The Evaluation Committee found that desired outcomes do not identify levels of achievement through clearly identified thresholds. (Standard 1.A.2)

Concern:

1. The College is encouraged identify an acceptable threshold of mission fulfillment by setting fixed thresholds, rather than "continuous increase," for desired outcomes. (Standard 1.A.2)

Report on Standard 1.B Core Themes:

The University of Montana-Helena College of Technology has identified three core themes, which manifest elements of its mission statement. These themes include, Provide Access and Support, Demonstrate Academic Excellence, and Strengthen the Community. The *Year One Self-Evaluation Report* provided evidence that the core themes were derived from a broad-based process that included students, faculty, community business leaders, K-12 partners, college administration, and other community members. (Standard 1B.1)

The College has identified nine objectives for each of the three core themes, which identify a basis for evaluating continual improvement. The College developed several indicators, each with a rationale and desired outcome, for the three core themes in order to measure the accomplishment of each objective. The Evaluation Committee found the indicators to be relevant to the objectives, but in several instances, the benchmarks for meeting the desired outcomes have yet to be established. The College indicates the need to establish these benchmarks through data collection and analysis over the next three years. (Standard 1.B.2)

Examples of specific desired outcomes concerns follow:

Core Theme #1, Objective #2, Indictor #3: Retention Rates. The Evaluation Team recognizes the desire of the Institution to make continuous improvement. However, once the retention rate meets 100% there is no room for further increase. The College is encouraged to set an achievable outcome to satisfy this indicator.

Core Theme #2, Objective #1, Indicator #1: Pass Rates in Remedial English and Math Courses. Once again, the Evaluation Team recognizes the desire of the Institution to make continuous improvement. Once a 100% success rate is achieved there is no room for further improvement. The College is encouraged to set an achievable outcome to satisfy this indicator.

Core Theme #3, Objective #1, Indicator #1: Placement of students into regional workplace. Once again, the Evaluation Team recognizes the desire of the Institution to make continuous improvement. Once a 100% success rate is achieved there is no room for further improvement. The College is encouraged to set an achievable outcome to satisfy this indicator.

Core Theme #2, Objective #1, Indicator #2: Attrition Rates in Remedial English and Math Courses. The desired outcome of this indicator is to have a "continuous increase." The evaluation team understands the intent of the desired outcome to be one of continuous

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improvement. The Committee encourages the College to rethink use of the word "increase" in this area and consider using decreased attrition rates until meeting a set achievable standard as mentioned previously.

Concern:

1. The College should refine desired outcomes for each indicator of achievement to ensure that outcomes are measurable for evaluating the accomplishment of the objectives for each core theme. (Standard 1.B.2)

Summary

The University of Montana-Helena College of Technology's *Year One Self-Evaluation Report* was clearly written, thereby allowing the Evaluation Committee an opportunity to gain knowledge of the institution, its mission, and the method by which mission fulfillment is accomplished. Moreover, the addendum to the College's *Year One Report* enabled the Committee to make a determination of the current status of Recommendation 1 with respect to the 2010 Standards.

The College has established an appropriate mission statement for a comprehensive community college. The mission statement provides a basis for establishing the identity and focus of the Institution. The Committee found that further development is needed to establish an acceptable threshold of mission fulfillment based upon clearly identified levels of achievement.

The College has established three core themes supporting its mission statement. The themes have objectives, indicators of achievement, rationale, and desired outcomes. The Evaluation Committee found that more work is needed to ensure that indicators of achievement are measurable for evaluating the accomplishment of the objectives for each core theme.

The College's addendum with regards to Recommendation 1 enabled the Evaluation Committee to provide an objective evaluation of the recommendation. The Committee found that the College has met the criteria in Recommendation 1.

Recommendations

Recommendations:

1. The Evaluation Committee recommends that the College provide evidence that its mission statement and core themes have been adopted by its governing board. (Eligibility Requirement 3)

2. The Evaluation Committee recommends that the College identify an acceptable threshold of mission fulfillment based upon fixed thresholds for desired outcomes. (Standard 1.A.2)

3. The Evaluation Committee recommends that the College refine the desired outcomes for each indicator of achievement so that each provides assessable and verifiable measures of success. (Standard 1.B.2)