

Mid-Cycle Evaluation
Peer Evaluation Report

Helena College
Helena, Montana

March 26 and 27, 2020

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

Helena College

Mid-Cycle Evaluation Committee Report

Evaluators

The virtual site evaluation committee for the Mid-Cycle Evaluation of the University of Montana consisted of Miles Jackson, Dean of Arts & Sciences at Clark College, and Dave Cox, Dean of Technical Education at Spokane Community College.

Overview of the Mid-Cycle Evaluation Visit to Helena College

Due to the COVID-19 virus the Mid-Cycle Evaluation Visit was conducted virtually via ZOOM on March 26 and 27, 2020. Prior to the visit, a digital copy of the Helena College's Mid-Cycle Report was received with sufficient time for study and consultation by the evaluators.

The meetings scheduled for the virtual visit were consistent with the three main parts of the Mid-Cycle report and included administrative, staff, faculty, and student representatives associated with the groups and functions addressed in the report. All meetings were collegial and informative, allowing for quality conversations regarding the practices and evidence associated with the assessment of Priorities for Action and institution's efforts toward mission fulfillment. The interaction between all campus representatives including administrators, staff, faculty and students with the evaluators was open, honest, and responsive to the improvement and success of the college. The visit focused on providing feedback to Helena College's current progress for a successful year seven comprehensive visit.

Overview of the Report

This report focuses on the primary questions/components noted in the NWCCU's Guidelines for the Mid-Cycle Evaluation. Some areas were addressed by Helena College's formal report and guided the informative conversations on the virtual visit. The virtual visit and this report reflect observations/strengths and suggestions associated with (1) Mission Fulfillment, (2) Student Achievement, and (3) Programmatic Assessment toward the year seven report. The report was well written and easy to follow.

Mission Fulfillment

The evaluators found that Helena College is making good progress with assessment and alignment of the mission with their three core themes. Throughout all meetings and interviews, it was evident that the institution had a clear focus on the PFAs, objectives/ indicators demonstrating the metrics for each PFA, and trajectory data for each objective/indicator. Mission Fulfillment progress is supported by the following observations and actions:

- The College's Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation Report clearly articulated that the it knows and understands where they are currently going. The Mid-Cycle report demonstrates what the institution has accomplished since its last comprehensive evaluation, what is occurring on campus now, and its goals leading to Year Seven.
- Collegiality and collaboration are evidenced in their development of the core themes and the objectives/indicators that have been established to assess each theme.
- Helena College's Institutional Research Department has been revitalized and is providing data analytics to aid the Institutional Development, Effectiveness, and Accreditation (IDEA) Committee, as well as all members of the campus community, with information needed for

decision-making related to recruitment, retention, persistence, completion, and achievement gaps.

- New dashboards have been created and faculty and others are making good use of them.
- The college's Mission Fulfillment Progress Report captures recommendations for improvement and future actions.

Student Achievement

In the Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation Report, Helena College presented objective/indicator data that included graduation rate, first-to-second year retention rate, and degrees awarded. These data were well thought out, detailed, and directly relevant to mission fulfillment.

Programmatic Assessment

The Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation Report of Helena College provided examples of programs as evidence of a continuous process of improvement, and the evaluators met with Directors, Faculty, and Staff from each program. Program review appears to be rigorous and comprehensive but still needs expansion into the larger college structure (i.e., systematic program review and assessment for student service departments).

Moving Forward

Helena Colleges' Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation report and the virtual site visit conversations indicate that the institution is making good progress toward the Year Seven comprehensive evaluation. The college does have significant work to still do related to:

- *The concept of "learning outcomes" at the course and program level is not universally well-understood*
- *General education course and program learning outcomes and assessment practices need more work and broader stakeholder engagement*
- *Although faculty are engaged in informal assessment and course improvement activities, there is a lack of documentation of faculty course and program assessment work*
- *Actions taken as a result of program review are not well-documented*
- *Program review for support services needs continued development*

The following recommendations are offered to help the college continue its progress:

- *Decide on using core themes or not ASAP*
- *Stay the course with your newer initiatives, don't be tempted to "jump ship"*
- *Provide support and training to ensure that all stakeholders understand the language, principles, and practices of learning outcomes and assessment at the course and program levels*
- *Ensure that course and program assessment are systematically conducted and explicitly document how assessment activities lead to improvements in student learning*
- *Intentionally align program review processes with resource allocation requests and budget planning at the college*

- *Develop program review processes for non-instructional units that encourage meaningful engagement in continuous improvement; it is not necessary that program review procedures are the same for instructional and non-instructional programs*
- *As feasible, disaggregate student outcome data to identify systemic disparities in student course success rates, program completion rates, and related outcomes data to identify equity gaps in student outcomes and take action to address inequitable outcomes*

Conclusion

The Mid-Cycle Report was well written and the meetings with members of the College community were insightful. Members of the College community appear to have excellent working relationships and collegiality and collaboration were evident. The institution appears to be committed and inclusive in its efforts to do so and we anticipate that focused data collection in the intervening years will ensure a successful Year Seven evaluation.