Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness (Year 7)

Peer-Evaluation Report

Helena College

Helena, Montana

April 10-12, 2024

NWCCU Liaison to the Peer Evaluation Team:
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A confidential report of findings prepared for the
Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities

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I.   Introduction

A four-person peer evaluation team conducted a Year Seven Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness (EIE) visit to Helena College from April 10-12, in response to the *Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report* submitted by the Helena College to NWCCU on February 14, 2024.

The comprehensive visit covered Standard One, and elements from Standard Two identified as needing follow-ups from the Year-Six Policies, Regulations, and Financial Review (PRFR) report. These included Standards 2.D.1, 2.G.6, and Helena College had one outstanding recommendation, Recommendation 4: Spring 2020 Ad Hoc Report - Use the results of the assessment efforts to inform academic and learning-support planning and practices to continuously improve student learning outcomes. (2020 Standard(s) 1.C.7)

Helena College is an open enrollment institution situated in Montana's state capital where government is the major employer. Helena College is committed to providing access to postsecondary education for the entire community. The college typically enrolls students from Lewis & Clark, Jefferson, and Broadwater counties where area students seek education for careers within in their community or transfer. Helena College students frequently have external commitments, such as childcare or existing employment, which impact their enrollment. Fifty percent of degree-seeking students enroll part-time, and 40% are enrolled in at least one course that could be completed online. Total enrollment for fall 2023 was 1,496, about half of those being dual enrollment students. Approximately 12% of students identify as American Indian, Alaska Native, Asian, Black/African-American, Hispanic, or Multi-Racial. Forty-two percent of degree-seeking students received the Federal Pell Grant. Nearly a third of the students are first-generation college students.

Currently, Helana College has 32 faculty, one contract administrator, 20 contract professionals, and 35 classified FTE.

II.   Assessment of Self-Evaluation and Support Materials

An electronic copy of the Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness (EIE) report was uploaded into Box approximately eight weeks prior to the visit. The 70-page document and comprehensive appendix included sections addressing all required components of the Standard One EIE.

The evaluation team found the report to be generally well organized and informative. Appendices were included as links within the report and/or uploaded to Box. The Accreditation Liaison Officer made sure that all requests of the evaluation committee were fulfilled right away.

In the weeks leading up to the visit, the Accreditation Liaison Officer was very helpful and on time with draft schedules and any requests that were made. This helped the evaluation team be well prepared going into the visit.

III.   **Visit Summary**

The four-person evaluation team met with members of the Helena College Cabinet, Senate Presidents, Dean's Campus Advisory Council (DCAC), Airport Campus faculty and students, Fire and Emergency Services program, Institutional Development, Effectiveness, and Accreditation Committee (IDEA), Academic Standards and Curriculum Review Committee (ASCRC), Advising Team, Recruitment & Admissions Requirements & Publications, Faculty, Academic Program Review Committee (APRC), and Institutional Effectiveness.. The Chair and NWCCU Liaison also met with the Vice Chair of the Montana Board of Regents and the Commissioner of Higher Education.

Three forums were held: one for faculty, one for staff, and one for students. Over 20 faculty, 19 staff, and 34 students participated. Participants were engaged and candid, sharing their appreciations and concerns with the team.

During the visit, the meetings were well organized. Individuals and groups were accommodating to the evaluation team's requests. When additional information was requested, it was provided quickly. The Board of Regents, administration, faculty, staff and students were very welcoming, forthright and accommodating throughout the visit. Many took the time to work with the evaluators and aided us greatly in learning more about Helena College.

The evaluation committee sincerely thanks Helena College for its hospitality and support before, during, and after the visit.

IV.   **Topics Addressed as an Addendum to the Self-Evaluation Report**

Helena College has one outstanding recommendation, Recommendation 4: Spring 2020 Ad Hoc Report - Use the results of the assessment efforts to inform academic and learning-support planning and practices to continuously improve student learning outcomes. (2020 Standard(s) 1.C.7).

Faculty and staff robustly utilize the locally developed database capturing course level evaluation/assessment activity. However, the locally developed database documents activity rather than capturing outcome assessment results leading to improvement of instructional programs. It is not clear how faculty are using annual workplans, program reviews, and student achievement data to inform academic and learning-support planning and assessment.

V.   Standard 1: Student Success and Institutional Mission and Effectiveness

    a.   Standard 1.A: Institutional Mission

     i.   1.A.1
1.A.1 The institution's mission statement defines its broad educational purposes and its commitment to student learning and achievement.

Helena College supports its diverse community by providing the paths and tools necessary to assist learners in achieving their educational and career goals. The college's mission statement was reviewed and revised within the new strategic plan for 2022-2027. The process of revision was inclusive and incorporated voices of the College through the Institutional Development, Effectiveness, and Accreditation (IDEA) Committee, in partnership with the Dean/CEO. A series of campus-wide discussion sessions provided an opportunity for all employees to give their input and share in conversations about the college's values and priorities as well as the vision statement and guiding principles which serve as the pillars for mission fulfillment.

The mission statement adequately and accurately defines the broad educational purposes of Helena College and its commitment to student learning and achievement.

    b.   Standard 1.B: Improving Institutional Effectiveness

     i.   1.B.1
1.B.1 The institution demonstrates a continuous process to assess institutional effectiveness, including student learning and achievement and support services. The institution uses an ongoing and systematic evaluation and planning process to inform and refine its effectiveness, assign resources, and improve student learning and achievement.

There is clear evidence of broad planning efforts at the unit/program level. All programs and departments annually document their goals for the next year and report the results. Multiple people reported improvements in the quality of goals and participation over the last few years.

Over the past three years, there has been a significant overhaul of the assessment processes at the program level. Numerous programs have undergone a transformative new assessment framework, widely regarded as a substantial enhancement over its predecessor. These program evaluations are now conducted within a structured cycle spanning three to five years. The results are documented and available on the website. Evidence shows program improvements in both academic (Nursing, Psychology, and others) and non-academic areas (Advising, Financial Aid, TRIO, among others). However,

assessment appears to be more localized and not connected to or with the perspective of overarching college-level goals and key performance indicators.

While recommendations from program reviews align with the Strategic Plan and can be assigned to a responsible party, there were no demonstrated mechanism in place to monitor whether recommendations are addressed unless programs actively connect their recommendations to their annual goals. Review processes for non-academic and career-technical academic programs exist, but general education program review is still under development.

While the Institutional Development, Effectiveness, and Accreditation Committee (IDEA)prepares the Mission Fulfillment Report, apart from publishing it on the website, there is little dissemination of their work, resulting in many employees struggling to know what the Key Performance Indicators are, or how to connect them to their work. There was no evidence provided to demonstrate a practice of using KPIs to plan campus wide.

Although annual work plans align with the Strategic Plan, resource allocation and prioritization are not driven by the Strategic Plan results. The college reported working to create a data-driven model for budget allocation that would connect to Strategic Plan priorities.

The learning assessment also reflects a similar disconnect. The institution has a robust system of course-level outcome assessment. However, due to the lack of direct assessment of institutional competencies, faculty did not express confidence in knowing whether students mastered those competencies. The lack of understanding if institutional competencies are mastered, combined with a lack of discussion on the achievement of those outcomes, appeared to lead to a lack of intentional efforts to improve them and thereby an inability to understand how the institution is closing the loop on assessment of student learning outcomes at the program/institutional level.

Overall, assessment and planning have a good foundation at the unit/program level, but the lack of connection to the Strategic Plan may lead to less strategic resource allocation. Additionally, the lack of an effective assessment process at the institutional level makes it harder for the college to know and demonstrate how it is fulfilling its mission. While the IDEA committee has made significant strides in improving planning at the unit/program level, there was a lack of clarity on their role or authority to provide effective guidance for institutional-level planning that reflects college priorities.

Compliment: The college's commitment to continuous improvement and broad participation in revamping assessment processes at the program level is commendable. It's encouraging to see the institution acknowledging shortcomings in the previous system and actively working to enhance the quality of goal setting and participation across multiple programs and departments.

Concern: The omission of institutional-level assessment data in guiding operational planning, along with the subsequent absence of initiatives prompted by assessment findings, raises questions regarding the college's efficacy in fostering alignment between strategic priorities, resource allocation, and the overarching mission and goals aimed at enhancing student learning and achievement.

ii.   1.B.2
1.B.2 The institution sets and articulates meaningful goals, objectives, and indicators of its goals to define mission fulfillment and to improve its effectiveness in the context of and in comparison with regional and national peer institutions.

Helena College's 2022-27 Strategic Plan forms the foundation for assessment at the institutional level. Helena College 's model for mission fulfillment utilizes three components:
1. Alignment and assessment of annual work plan goals to its guiding principles,
2. Systematic analysis of key performance indicators (KPIs); and
3. Annual evaluation of progress toward strategic goal targets.

This model was established by the IDEA Committee which reviews individual plans for quality and evaluates all plans together as a measure of overall institutional effectiveness. Annual work plans enable every academic program, non-academic department, senate, and committee to set goals and assess goal attainment on a yearly basis. Work Plans describe goals, actions, indicators of success, results, and final status of the goal (not completed, deferred for another year, in progress, or completed) to set the stage for future actions based on thoughtful analysis of the results.

Through the strategic planning process, Helena College has established eight strategic goals and 28 KPIs at the institutional level. However, the college struggles to spread awareness of those indicators or apply the results to drive planning and resource allocation. The considerable number of high-level indicators may contribute to the lack of awareness among campus stakeholders. The evaluation team was unable to validate with campus stakeholders that the indicators are being used to guide the college's work.

With respect to benchmarking, the college has undertaken an appropriate process to identify eight national and eight regional peer institutions. However, the comparative results against these peer institutions are not publicly available. It is unclear which key performance indicators are benchmarked, and there is no evidence that this peer data comparison was used in any planning, assessment, or resource allocation processes.

Compliment: Helena College's thoughtful process of selecting benchmark institutions is commendable, as it demonstrates a commitment to measuring performance against relevant peers and identifying areas for improvement.

Concern: Despite the effort put into selecting benchmark institutions, the lack of publicly available benchmarking data and the absence of evidence suggesting its utilization in

planning, assessment, or resource allocation processes raises concerns about the effectiveness of this benchmarking exercise. Without transparent access to this data and its integration into decision-making processes, the potential benefits of benchmarking may not be fully realized.

Concern: While units across the College utilize Work Plans for requesting resources, there is no evidence that the resource requests are compiled, reviewed, or utilized and stakeholders to not appear to receive feedback on the status of requests through this process.

iii.   1.B.3
1.B.3 The institution provides evidence that its planning process is inclusive and offers opportunities for comment by appropriate constituencies, allocates necessary resources, and leads to improvement of institutional effectiveness.

Helena College has demonstrated an inclusive and collaborative approach to strategic planning. The evaluators consistently heard from various departments across the college about their participation in the development of the strategic plan. This broad involvement fosters a sense of ownership and buy-in among employees, ensuring that the strategic direction aligns with the collective vision and priorities of the institution.

While the annual plan process allows for the discussion of needed resources, there appears to be a lack of an established mechanism to effectively use this information. Despite the perceived requests made through this process, employees appear to resort to alternative avenues to secure necessary resources. This disconnect between the resource requests and the actual budget decisions can lead to a perception among some employees that their voices and input may not have been fully heard or considered. The absence of an effective feedback loop on how budget decisions are made and why specific requests were approved or denied appeared to contribute to this perception of unaddressed concerns.

Helena College actively engages external constituents in its planning process. The college's professional programs proactively involve advisory councils, ensuring that the curriculum and student learning experiences are aligned with industry needs and best practices. Additionally, the college's efforts to learn from and collaborate with local organizations, such as K-12 institutions, Rotary, and Helena WINS, demonstrate a commitment to fostering community partnerships and incorporating diverse perspectives into their planning efforts.

Overall, Helena College demonstrated an inclusive and collaborative approach to strategic planning, but their evaluation team was concerned about the lack of an effective feedback mechanism and established clear process for addressing resource requests, which appear to lead to perceptions of voices not being fully heard or considered.

Compliment: Helena College's strategic planning process is commendable for its broad and inclusive approach, actively engaging various departments and stakeholders across the institution. Extending this collaborative and participatory mindset to other areas of operational planning could yield further enhancements and buy-in throughout the college.

Concern: The lack of use of key performance indicators to guide operational planning and resource allocation raises concerns about whether the planning processes are effectively contributing to improved institutional effectiveness. Without a clear connection between KPIs and decision-making, it becomes challenging to ascertain if the college's planning efforts are translating into tangible advancements in achieving its mission and strategic objectives.

iv. 1.B.4

1.B.4 The institution monitors its internal and external environments to identify current and emerging patterns, trends, and expectations. Through its governance system it considers such findings to assess its strategic position, define its future direction, and review and revise, as necessary, its mission, planning, intended outcomes of its programs and services, and indicators of achievement of its goals.

The college appears to gather a sufficient amount of information to monitor its internal and external environment. It has established relevant metrics and conducts multiple institutional surveys, such as the CCSSE, SENSE, Campus Climate, and Employee Satisfaction surveys. Additionally, it relies on membership in professional and industry organizations, advisory councils, and many other external organizations to stay informed. While there are some examples of clearly following up on the data, as evidenced by the reaction to the employee satisfaction survey and the responsiveness of career and technical education (CTE) programs to advisory councils, there is little evidence that surveys and gathered data are systemically analyzed and shared for plans for improvement.

There appears to be a disconnect between expectations and understanding of the role of the governance structure. Many employees expressed uncertainty about the expected communication from the Faculty Senate and the unclear role of the Deans' Campus Advisory Council, affecting their perception of the decision-making process.

Compliment: The college has invested an adequate amount of time and resources into ensuring it collects the necessary information to monitor its internal and external environments effectively. This commitment to data gathering is commendable and lays a solid foundation for informed decision-making.

Concern: While the college collects a sufficient amount of data, the mechanism to ensure this data is consistently used for driving improvement still needs further development. Establishing a more robust and structured process for leveraging the gathered information to create actionable plans for enhancement could help bridge any gaps and maximize the value of the college's data collection efforts.

Concern: While the IDEA committee is charged with advancing the strategic position of the college through assessment and planning, there is not a clear connection between this role and the review of results of internal and external monitoring of patterns, trends, or expectations.

c. Standard 1.C: Student Learning

i. 1.C.1

1.C.1 The institution offers programs with appropriate content and rigor that are consistent with its mission, culminate in achievement of clearly identified student learning outcomes that lead to collegiate-level degrees, certificates, or credentials and include designators consistent with program content in recognized fields of study.

Consistent with its mission to "provide the paths and tools necessary to assist learners in achieving their educational and career goals," Helena College offers workforce and transfer degrees, transfer pathways, dual enrollment courses for high school students, and non-degree training in a variety of fields with local and national demand. All degree-granting programs are regularly reviewed for relevance and applicability of skills and content. Faculty complete comprehensive program reviews every five years, which include evaluation of curriculum and alignment with community needs.

Compliment: Helena College programs utilize program advisory committees effectively to gain feedback about curricula, opportunities for student career placement, and gain industry support.

ii. 1.C.2

1.C.2 The institution awards credit, degrees, certificates, or credentials for programs that are based upon student learning and learning outcomes that offer an appropriate breadth, depth, sequencing, and synthesis of learning.

Learning outcomes are articulated for each course and credential offered by Helena College. Regular review of academic programs and courses occurs through two subcommittees of Faculty Senate: Academic Standards and Curriculum Review Committee (ASCRC) and Academic Program Review Committee (APRC).

iii. 1.C.3

1.C.3 The institution identifies and publishes expected program and degree learning outcomes for all degrees, certificates, and credentials. Information on expected student learning outcomes for all courses is provided to enrolled students.

Course learning outcomes, program outcomes, and institutional competencies are identified on each course syllabi. Learning outcomes for all credentials are documented in the Helena College Catalog available on the college website.

iv.   1.C.4

1.C.4 The institution's admission and completion or graduation requirements are clearly defined, widely published, and easily accessible to students and the public.

Helena College admissions requirements follow Montana BOR Policy 301 and are explained in the catalog. The Admissions and Enrollment page of the website also outlines requirements and necessary materials for different types of students, such as first-time, transfer, or dual enrollment students. Admissions counselors promote the priority application deadline and maintain regular contact with prospective students who have incomplete application requirements.

v.   1.C.5

1.C.5 The institution engages in an effective system of assessment to evaluate the quality of learning in its programs. The institution recognizes the central role of faculty to establish curricula, assess student learning, and improve instructional programs.

Regular review of academic programs and courses occurs through two subcommittees of Faculty Senate: Academic Program Review Committee (APRC) and Academic Standards and Curriculum Review Committee (ASCRC)

The functions of the APRC are to:

1. Oversee program review process throughout the year, and ensure training and data are provided in a timely manner.
2. Provide training and support throughout program review.
3. Review academic program reviews and makes recommendations to the program and Cabinet/IDEA Committee. Recommendations include (1) Decision regarding future of program (continue, continue with modifications, or discontinue) and (2) Rationale for decision.

The functions of ASCRC are to:

1. Facilitate the planning, development, delivery, and evaluation of the courses and programs offered by the College.
2. Ensure the integrity of the College curriculum by communicating its goals, purposes, and outcome measures with consistency, clarity, and efficiency.
3. Promote the continuous improvement and enhancement of the College curriculum through dialogue and collaboration with external and internal constituents of the College.
4. Provide faculty with a system that contributes to the effective and innovative delivery of skills, knowledge, values, and inspiration.
5. Provide a path/direction for the approval of curriculum.

The database system tracks activity related to course level assessment across disciplines as adopted by the Faculty Senate. However, the results of course level assessment do not

appear to be systematically utilized to improve individual courses. Credential outcomes and institutional competencies are identified but do not appear to be systematically measured. The adoption of credential outcomes for the AA and AS by the Academic Standards and Curriculum Review Committee represents a step in the direction of systematic program assessment, an opportunity to standardize credential level program assessment, and use of results for improvement of student learning.

Compliment: Faculty and staff robustly utilize the locally developed database capturing course level evaluation/assessment activity.

Concern: The locally developed database documents activity rather than capturing outcome assessment results leading to improvement of instructional programs.

Concern: The EIE Self-Evaluation report makes reference to the formation of a new assessment committee to oversee the assessment process, however, there does not appear to be knowledge of this occurring beyond executive leadership.

vi.   1.C.6
1.C.6 Consistent with its mission, the institution establishes and assesses, across all associate and bachelor level programs or within a General Education curriculum, institutional learning outcomes and/or core competencies. Examples of such learning outcomes and competencies include, but are not limited to, effective communication skills, global awareness, cultural sensitivity, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and logical thinking, problem solving, and/or information literacy.

Helena College has identified institutional competencies central to the academic, professional, and personal success of all Helena College students. Helena College has identified three institutional competencies:

   1. The student will learn to recognize and value individual, group, and cultural differences from and within local, national, and global perspectives and contexts.
   2. The student will learn to locate needed information, managing and evaluating the extracted information and using it critically and ethically.
   3. The student will use appropriate technology to access, manage, integrate, or create information, and/or use technology to effectively accomplish a given task.

The competencies are integrated within general education and program-specific curricula, and are introduced, reinforced, and assessed at the course level. Faculty map and measures credential learning outcomes (which have been mapped up from course learning outcomes) to institutional competencies.

Concern: Although Helena College utilizes Work Plans and Program Review referencing faculty assessing course learning outcomes, these assessments are not systematically aligned to program and institutional outcomes.

vii.   1.C.7

1.C.7 The institution uses the results of its assessment efforts to inform academic and learning-support planning and practices to continuously improve student learning outcomes.

Helena College has developed some practices for learning outcomes assessment along with a system to track each department's annual work plans and regular program review.

Learning Outcomes Assessment - The institution has completed course-level outcomes assessment for several programs (as provided in Appendix A of the EIE Self-Evaluation report). Outcomes are mapped using an internally developed assessment database developed in 2017.

Student Achievement Data – Faculty use course pass rates and qualitative data to inform changes to their pedagogy and assessment. The EIE Self-Evaluation report provided an example of how a faculty member used course pass rates as a data point to remove prerequisites for all college-level gateway math classes. This was also confirmed during the faculty forum.

Annual Work Plans and Program Review – Departments create an annual work plan that is used to outline their goals for the academic year. The data is uploaded to a Tableau dashboard and reviewed by the IDEA committee. A new program review process was launched in 2020-2021 where information is collected in an assessment database. Academic and non-academic program reviews are completed on a five- and three-year year cycle respectively to align with state requirements.

Concern: Although information is collected and populated into an assessment database, it is not clear how faculty are using annual workplans, program reviews, and student achievement data to inform academic and learning-support planning and assessment.

Concern: There was no evidence of student learning outcomes assessment beyond the course level. The EIE Self-Evaluation report mentions forming a new assessment committee in the future, however, faculty did not appear to be aware of this change. It was unclear who currently manages the assessment process at the institution.

viii.   1.C.8

1.C.8 Transfer credit and credit for prior learning is accepted according to clearly defined, widely published, and easily accessible policies that provide adequate safeguards to ensure academic quality. In accepting transfer credit, the receiving institution ensures that such credit accepted is appropriate for its programs and comparable in nature, content, academic rigor, and quality.

As part of the Montana University System, Helena Colleges practices requirements grounded in state regulation, policies, and practices. The online catalog is included in the Explore Programs area of the college website as a navigable pdf includes sections on credit by examination and transferring in credits. The "Advising – How do I...?" webpage includes the process for requesting prior learning credit.

Information is provided in the course catalog. Information on transfer credits into the college is included in the Admissions & Enrollment website, including a section dedicated to Transfer Students into Helena College, with specific guidance on "Do your credits transfer...?" Transfer Advising webpages include information on general transfer and articulation agreements. This webpage includes a link to a searchable database for transfer equivalencies by state.

Information is available on the college's website and easy to navigate using drop-down options and an effective search tool.

ix.   1.C.9

1.C.9 The institution's graduate programs are consistent with its mission, are in keeping with the expectations of its respective disciplines and professions, and are described through nomenclature that is appropriate to the levels of graduate and professional degrees offered. The graduate programs differ from undergraduate programs by requiring, among other things, greater: depth of study; demands on student intellectual or creative capacities; knowledge of the literature of the field; and ongoing student engagement in research, scholarship, creative expression, and/or relevant professional practice.

Helena College does not offer any graduate programs.

d.   Standard 1.D: Student Achievement

i.   1.D.1

1.D.1 Consistent with its mission, the institution recruits and admits students with the potential to benefit from its educational programs. It orients students to ensure they understand the requirements related to their programs of study and receive timely, useful, and accurate information and advice about relevant academic requirements, including graduation and transfer policies.

Recruitment of students comes from the local community, in particular the surrounding high schools, as shown in the increase in dual enrollment students. Academic advising is

distributed by program area and students are required to meet with an advisor every semester and receive a PIN to register for classes. Students are also provided opportunities to attend career panels made up of industry experts who share career advice early in their academic coursework.

The Marketing, Communications, and Alumni Relations Department works with local advertising agencies to create and distribute advertising on various platforms including social media and radio. This department also distributes information about the college's offerings to local high schools in collaboration with the admissions counselors.

Helena College has developed program pathways that map out the course requirements for each degree and certificate. After several iterations, the General Education department will be incorporating a first-year success course as a graduation requirement beginning 2024-2025.

Compliment: The college uses an intrusive advising model that has several touchpoints with students each semester, as well as for students who have paused out for two or more semesters.

ii. 1.D.2

1.D.2 Consistent with its mission and in the context of and in comparison with regional and national peer institutions, the institution establishes and shares widely a set of indicators for student achievement including, but not limited to, persistence, completion, retention, and postgraduation success. Such indicators of student achievement should be disaggregated by race, ethnicity, age, gender, socioeconomic status, first generation college student, and any other institutionally meaningful categories that may help promote student achievement and close barriers to academic excellence and success (equity gaps).

The college has identified key performance indicators (KPIs) including, but not limited to persistence and completion. The college noted that postgraduation success is challenging to track beyond transfer success. There was no evidence of the college systematically using regional and national peer institutional data. The college highlights the work of TRIO and Montana 10 as the primary program supporting underserved students. There was a lack of evidence that the college is using disaggregated student achievement data to address barriers and equity gaps except in special programs.

Compliment: The TRIO and Montana 10 program staff appear to collect, discuss and evaluate, and use their student achievement data to close barriers to academic excellence and success by allocation staff from half to fulltime, and resources to robustly support equitable access to program students.

Compliment: The math faculty have eliminated math pre-requisites in all programs by transitioning to a co-requisite model placing students directly in program math with structured supports. The faculty noted they are seeing an increase in course level pass rates, however, they have yet to explore retention and decrease time to completion data.

iii. 1.D.3

1.D.3 The institution's disaggregated indicators of student achievement should be widely published and available on the institution's website. Such disaggregated indicators should be aligned with meaningful, institutionally identified indicators benchmarked against indicators for peer institutions at the regional and national levels and be used for continuous improvement to inform planning, decision making, and allocation of resources.

The college has identified key performance indicators (KPIs); however, they are not widely published nor easily found on the college's website as they are embedded within the 2022-2027 Strategic Plan, which is available on the website. Employees reported that some data is stored locally such as in Microsoft Teams and not shared publicly or broadly. There was evidence that special programs, TRIO and Montana 10, utilized disaggregated data for reporting, and planning, however the process is not systematized across all college programs and departments.

The college has identified peer institutions using IPEDS data. As noted in the college's Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness report (2024), "The college does not currently have a systematic process for benchmarking data on a regular basis..." (p. 24).

Concern: There was limited evidence that student achievement data, summative or disaggregated, is used systematically to inform planning, decision making, and allocation of resources. Further, there were multiple concerns that allocation decisions made, especially by the Cabinet, were not broadly communicated across the college.

Concern: While Helena College has identified peer institutions, the College has not begun to benchmark against these institutions to identify opportunities for continuous improvement to inform planning, decision making, and allocation of resources.

iv. 1.D.4

1.D.4 The institution's processes and methodologies for collecting and analyzing indicators of student achievement are transparent and are used to inform and implement strategies and allocate resources to mitigate perceived gaps in achievement and equity.

Student achievement data collection and reporting is organized by the Director of Institutional Research and Effectiveness, who provides ad hoc reports to collegewide committees and other stakeholders including the IDEA Committee, Dean's Cabinet, and

Dean's Campus Advisory Council. Additional disaggregated data is also made available to college departments upon request. Specific examples include federal grant reporting such as TRIO and Perkins. The college does acknowledge that a more systematic assessment of disaggregated data is necessary.

Concern: Although it appears that select programs at such as TRIO and Montana 10 are using student attainment data for federal and state reporting purposes, it is unclear how the institution collects and uses indicators of student achievement to implement strategies and allocate resources to mitigate perceived gaps in achievement and equity.

VI.   **Standard 2: Governance, Resources, and Capacity**

Standards 2.A.4, 2.D.1, and 2.G.6 were specifically reviewed during the visit as either PRFR findings, items included in the self-evaluation report addenda, or as areas of interest resulting from meetings during the visit.

i. 2.A.4
2.A.4 The institution's decision-making structures and processes, which are documented and publicly available, must include provisions for the consideration of the views of faculty, staff, administrators, and students on matters in which each has a direct and reasonable interest.

Helena College's participatory governance system is intended to provide means for stakeholders across the college to provide input and gain feedback related to the College's institutional planning, progress, and resource allocations. The Faculty and Staff Senates are bodies that support the needs and interests of their constituents. The leadership of these bodies meet regularly with the Dean and also provide leadership on the Dean's Campus Advisory Council (DCAC) and representatives on Budget Management Team (BMT). The Institutional Development, Effectiveness, and Accreditation Committee (IDEA) has clearly identified responsibilities at the institutional level. In addition, the Academic Standards and Curriculum Review (ASCRC) and Program Review (PRC) Committees review key processes that impact student learning, and program viability and improvement.

Concern: The IDEA committee reviews data and provides feedback on all annual plans and program reviews. The feedback appears to be limited to a review of goals and activities, not results and improvement. There is no mechanism in place to drive changes at the program, department, or cabinet level.

Concern: Participation by stakeholders on governance structures do not appear to be providing clear opportunities for input, transparency, and feedback related to KPIs, mission fulfillment, resource allocation, redirecting of resources to meet strategic aims, and communication back to appropriate constituents. There is an opportunity to document the role of governance groups, committees, and workgroups to clarify role, scope, and decision-making processes.

ii. 2.D.1

2.D.1 The institution represents itself clearly, accurately, and consistently through its announcements, statements, and publications. It communicates its academic intentions, programs, and services to students and to the public and demonstrates that its academic programs can be completed in a timely fashion. It regularly reviews its publications to ensure accuracy and integrity in all representations about its mission, programs, and services.

Helena College's catalog, handbooks, and website are clear, accurate, and consistent, providing evidence that publications are reviewed to ensure accuracy and that students and the community can find and utilize appropriate information.

iii. 2.G.6

2.G.6 The institution designs, maintains, and evaluates a systematic and effective program of academic advisement to support student development and success. Personnel responsible for advising students are knowledgeable of the curriculum, program and graduation requirements, and are adequately prepared to successfully fulfill their responsibilities. Advising requirements and responsibilities of advisors are defined, published, and made available to students.

Advisement at Helena College benefits from relatively small advising loads by professional advisors who provide a supportive and personalized experience to help students navigate and complete their goals. The advising team has a common understanding of their responsibilities and requirements. Academic pathway maps and check-lists support student fulfillment of curriculum, program, and graduation requirements. Helena College adopts high impact practices in TRIO and Montana 10 with the intention of expanding these practices to a broader student audience.

VII.   Summary

Helena College is committed to its mission to empower students through impactful, affordable, lifelong education that is responsive to the needs of its community in ways that are enriching, collaborative, and equitable. The evaluation committee appreciated the clear focus on meeting community needs, the needs of students, and to the *esprit de corps* among faculty and staff.

The CEO/Dean is enhancing transparency and a collaborative approach to leadership at the College. An example of this is the Monday Morning Memo that updates the College on events, decisions, and initiatives. The evaluation committee received positive feedback about the inclusiveness and transparency of development of the new Strategic Plan. The evaluation team also noted many examples of Helena College's community focus, including hosting Hometown Helena, partnering with area high schools, substantial industry contributions in programs, and establishing a Cosmetology program.

Helena College utilizes a two-part framework for determining mission fulfillment: (1) systematic evaluation of key performance indicators, and (2) monitoring progress of department, program, and committee annual work plan goals aligned guiding principles that frame the strategic plan: effectiveness, stewardship, impact, and equity. The Institutional Development, Effectiveness, and Accreditation Committee (IDEA) is responsible for oversight of these processes and provides key insights and recommendations to the Dean's Cabinet and the campus community. Annual work plans have proven to be a meaningful way for all areas of campus to set yearly goals and document how those goals support the strategic plan. IDEA provides peer review for sustained improvement in the quality of the work plans and can also advance the institution's progress toward systematic evaluation of KPIs.

Helena College has an opportunity to further define mission fulfillment through an efficient and effective framework to guide planning and assessment efforts at the program and institution level. Helena College also has the opportunity to advance its budgeting process to ensure more inclusive allocation of resources in line with its mission and support the achievement of its vision.

The main areas of concern noted by the evaluation committee are centered around three major areas: (1) enhancing maturity of academic assessment to include outcomes at the program and institutional level and use of results for improvement, (2) broader review and use of KPIs, including disaggregated and comparative institutional data, to establish mission fulfillment, and (3) greater transparency and meaningful communication within the participatory governance structure, particularly around resource allocation. The evaluation team finds many reasons for optimism that Helena College is engaged in advancing its effectiveness and institutional climate.

VIII.   Commendations and Recommendations

Commendations

Commendation 1: The peer evaluation team commends Helena College for their robust learning support services provided to students as evidence and validated by feedback provided from students, faculty, and staff.

Commendation 2: The peer evaluation team commends Helena College for having quality facilities and equipment used for professional technical programs that appear to be reflective of industry standards.

Commendation 3: The evaluation team commends Helena College for recruitment and retention of women in trade programs on the Airport Campus.

Commendation 4: The evaluation team commends Helena College for their connection to their community as evidenced by their relationship to K-12 system, industry via advisory councils, and establishing a new program requested by the local community.

Commendation 5: The evaluation team commends Helena College staff and faculty for their genuine care for student achievement and success, student-centered approach, exceptional dedication, supporting one another, and serving in multiple roles wherever needed.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. The evaluation team recommends that Helena College implement an institutional-level assessment process that informs operational planning, allowing for effective resource allocation to enhance student learning and achievement. (1.B.1)

Recommendation 2. The evaluation team recommends that Helena College expand assessment beyond the course level, to include program and institutional outcomes that evaluate and demonstrate the quality of learning, and use the results to inform continuous improvement of student learning outcomes. (1.C.5, 1.C.6, 1.C.7)

Recommendation 3. The evaluation team recommends that Helena College widely publish identified disaggregated indicators of student achievement and those of peer institutions, and demonstrate use of the data to inform planning, decision making and allocation of resources. (1.D.2, 1.D.3)

Recommendation 4. The evaluation team recommends that Helena College widely use the institution's indicators of student achievement to inform, develop, and implement strategies and allocate resources to mitigate perceived gaps in achievement and equity. (1.D.4)

Recommendation 5. The evaluation team recommends that Helena College develop, document, and implement structures for decision making that considers feedback from existing governance groups consisting of faculty, staff, administrators, and students. (2.A.4)