

Year One Peer Evaluation Report

Truckee Meadows Community College

Reno, Nevada

November 2011

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

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Introduction

Initially accredited in 1975 as the Reno-Sparks Campus of Western Nevada Community College, the Board of Regents of the University of Nevada System acted on December 19, 1979 to establish Truckee Meadows Community College (TMCC) as the fourth community college within the community college system of Nevada. TMCC was accredited by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) as a separate unit in the University of Nevada System in June, 1980. TMCC's most recent comprehensive evaluation occurred in 2005 followed by a Focused Interim Report in 2007 and a Regular Interim Report in 2010.

The College embarked upon the tasks of simplifying its mission statement, reducing the number of initiatives in the institution's strategic plan, and creating vision and values statements in 2008. This endeavor involved faculty, staff, administration, students and community advisory groups. The resulting vision, mission and values statements were finalized in March 2009 and approved by the Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE) Board of Regents in April, 2009. The College's strategic initiatives were updated in September, 2009.

Following the adoption of a new accreditation process and new standards by the NWCCU in 2010, TMCC selected three core themes to reflect key elements of the College's mission: *Student Success, Academic Excellence, and Access to Lifelong Learning*. These themes were formally presented to the College community at a campus-wide forum in August, 2011.

In accordance with the newly-revised accreditation process, this report provides an overview and analysis of *Standard I – Mission, Core Themes and Expectations* for Truckee Meadows Community College. As such, it reviews eligibility requirements; mission and extent of mission fulfillment; core themes with objectives, indicators, and rationale. This report also reviews the College's progress in responding to the Commission's recommendations following the 2010 Regular Interim Report (Appendix A).

The intent of this Evaluation Team is to offer collegial input on the quality and usefulness of TMCC's Year One Report and to provide a critical analysis of the College's response to Standard I and the Commission's recommendations of 2010.

Assessment of the Self-Evaluation Report and Support Materials

The Evaluation Team acknowledges the College for its efforts in developing the Year One Report and in addressing the new eligibility requirements, a new Standard 1, and the two recommendations from its 2010 Regular Interim evaluation.

The TMCC report is well-organized, effectively written and addresses the required elements of this first report in the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities new accreditation process. The support materials in Appendix A, B, C were useful in addressing the Colleges' response to the 2010 Regular Interim evaluation and supplementing the College's response to Standard I.

However, despite the availability of the College catalog as a .pdf file on the College website, it would have been helpful had the College provided a hard copy to the evaluation team since the College reports that degree outcomes and measures were published in the 2011-2012 catalog and that student learning outcomes and measures for every degree, emphasis and certificate program are also published in the 2011-2012 catalog. The 2011-2012 catalog is, therefore, primary evidence of these assertions.

This Year One Report has established an initial understanding of Truckee Meadow Community College's mission and core themes as well as its progress toward implementing a system of ongoing assessment that encompasses all of its course offerings as well as making its program learning outcomes accessible to students and the public.

Topics Addressed as Addenda to the Self-Evaluation Report

Truckee Meadows Community College received two recommendations as a result of the 2010 Regular Interim Evaluation.

Recommendations

- 1. The committee did not find evidence that program learning outcomes are accessible to students and the public, or that through regular and systematic assessment the college demonstrates that graduates of all programs have achieved these outcomes. It is recommended that the college consistently identify and publish the expected learning outcomes for each of its certificate and degree programs (2.B.2).*
- 2. While faculty have made significant gains in course, discipline, and program assessment, the institutional process for assessing its educational programs continues to be in a state of review (PDR) in 2010. The multiple efforts to create master course outlines and assessment review processes in courses, disciplines, and programs are not consistently defined or integrated into the overall planning and evaluation plan. It is recommended that the college finalize and implement a system of assessment that encompasses all of its offerings and is conducted on a regular basis (2.B.1).*

In response, TMCC reports that it developed and implemented a five-part plan to:

1. Develop and publish outcomes and measures for TMCC's four degrees: the Associate of Arts, Associate of Science, Associate of Applied Science and Associate of General Studies.
2. Develop and publish learning outcomes and measures for all degree, emphasis, and certificate courses of study.
3. Refine the relationships between course, certificate, emphasis and degree assessment with annual and periodic assessment; solidify connection between assessment of offerings and planning and evaluation processes.
4. Create and implement an assessment process for TMCC's general education program for transfer degrees.
5. Establish the spring 2011 semester as a benchmark semester for assessment.

As a result, the College reports that degree outcomes and measures were established and published in the 2011-2012 catalog. The College also asserts that student learning outcomes and measures are established for every emphasis and certificate program. These too are published in the 2011-2012 catalog.

Further, the College states that the relationship between the annual program, discipline, course assessment process and the periodic program/unit review process has been clarified, resulting in a

progressive assessment cycle from courses to degrees, emphases and certificates. Additionally, a general education assessment cycle has been established and will coincide with department assessment cycles. The first cycle of general education assessment is scheduled to occur in the 2011-2012 academic year.

While Truckee Meadows Community College is making important progress toward establishing a culture of assessment, including the systematic assessment of student learning outcomes, it appears there is some lack of clarity in identifying and articulating outcomes. The difference between an objective (intended action) and an outcome (the result of that action) is important to note. For example, on page A-2, the College reports that "Working in teams, the groups identified 4-5 outcomes for each degree. These outcomes define what each degree will do *for students...*" [Emphasis added] A student *outcome* should identify what the student can do as a result of his or her learning, not what the degree will do "for the student." An institutional objective may define what the degree will "do," but this is different than an outcome that demonstrates what actually occurred. It is important for the College to make this distinction when it conceptualizes and articulates its *outcomes*. Outcomes demonstrate mission fulfillment.

Compliment:

1. The Evaluation Team compliments the College for making substantial progress toward establishing and implementing a system of assessment that encompasses all of its offerings while facing historic budget, workload and administrative challenges.

Concern:

1. College faculty and staff need to distinguish between an objective--what the institution intends to achieve--and an outcome—a meaningful and assessable result.

Eligibility Requirements

The Executive Summary of Eligibility Requirements 2 and 3 addressed ER2 but omitted any discussion of ER3.

ER 2. Authority

The institution is authorized to operate and award degrees as a higher education institution by the appropriate governmental organization, agency, or governing board as required by the jurisdiction in which it operates.

The College reports that Truckee Meadows Community College is authorized to operate and award degrees by the Constitution of the State of Nevada and the authority it grants to the Nevada System of Higher Education Board of Regents. Elected to serve a six-year term, the thirteen Regents set policies and approve budgets for Nevada's entire public system of higher education.

ER 3. Mission and Core Themes

The institution's mission and Core Themes are clearly defined and adopted by its governing board(s) consistent with its legal authorization, and are appropriate to a degree-granting institution of higher education. The institution's purpose is to serve the educational interests of its students and its principal programs lead to recognized degrees. The institution devotes all, or substantially all, of its resources to support its educational mission and Core Themes.

While Eligibility Requirement 3 is not specifically addressed in the College's Year One Report, much of ER3 is addressed in the body of the report, specifically in response to Standard 1.A and 1.B, Mission and Core Themes. The TMCC's mission statement was affirmed by the Board of Regents in March, 2009. However, the College did not provide evidence that TMCC's core themes were also adopted by its governing board.

Mission, Core Themes, and Expectations

Standard 1.A Mission

The College mission statement is:

Truckee Meadows Community College promotes student success, academic excellence, and access to lifelong learning by delivering high-quality education and services to our diverse communities.

The mission statement was affirmed by the NSHE Board of Regents in March, 2009. It is published on the College website and in the 2011-2012 College catalog.

Standard 1.B Core Themes

TMCC has identified three core themes that manifest essential elements of its mission:

- Student Success
- Academic Excellence
- Access to Lifelong Learning

One or more objectives has been identified for each core theme, with corresponding indicators of achievement.

Student Success

The College has established one-objective for accomplishing Student Success:

1. *Provide services for students to achieve college readiness and increase student retention, persistence, graduation and transfer rates.*

The objective is a statement of intention, what the College intends to do to facilitate student success. The presumed outcome is that *students will achieve college readiness, persist in pursuing their educational goals, graduate on time, and when applicable, transfer to a baccalaureate-granting institution.*

The indicators of achievement are:

- successful transition--developmental to collegiate math
- successful transition--developmental to collegiate English
- retention (course completion rate)
- persistence fall to spring
- persistence fall to fall
- graduation rate

- transfer

The above indicators are generally accepted measures for evaluating student success and can provide an institution with valuable longitudinal and comparative performance data. However, the 2015 benchmarks represent significant gains over the baseline year of 2010 and raise the question as to how the College expects to achieve these gains, especially at a time when budget and resource reductions are likely to limit the College's ability to implement intervention strategies. Benchmarks are outcomes that represent an acceptable threshold or extent of mission fulfillment. Benchmarks should be realistic, and the College should address what actions it will implement to accomplish these benchmarks in order to demonstrate they are achievable.

Academic Excellence

The College has established three-objectives for accomplishing Academic Excellence:

1. *Implement a comprehensive process to assess student learning outcomes and use the results to consistently improve curricula and the delivery of instructional programs and services.*
2. *Establish and implement college-wide processes that include regular assessment of all college programs and services delivered in support of academic programs.*
3. *Regularly assess the skills needed to meet workforce needs in the service area.*

The indicators of achievement for each of the above objectives measure institutional processes-- assessment cycles, submission schedules, professional development activities, etc. It is assumed these processes will lead to academic excellence but the College has not clearly defined what constitutes academic excellence. Is academic excellence defined by processes or by outcomes? Examples of outcomes might include student achievement in the classroom, job placement in the workforce and student satisfaction with student services? Indicators of achievement should measure outcomes, for it is outcomes that define mission fulfillment.

Access to Lifelong Learning

The College has established two-objectives for accomplishing Access to Lifelong Learning:

1. *Create, expand and/or strengthen partnerships with civic, community, educational and business/industry organizations to provide lifelong learning opportunities.*
2. *Serve as a resource for the community by providing a variety of opportunities for cultural and educational enrichment.*

The indicators of achievement of the first objective measure partnerships with some outcome data centered on the results of partnerships, such as the number of high school students who place into pre-college level courses or who matriculate to TMCC. The indicators of achievement for the second objective measure the number of events offered. The implied assumptions are that partnerships lead to TMCC enrollment, and cultural and community-oriented events provide access to lifelong learning

opportunities. But what are the needs of the community for lifelong learning opportunities? Is it continuing education, civic education, cultural activities, etc.? To what extent, and in what areas? Is that demand being met? Is the community satisfied? How does the College know? And how does demand for access to lifelong learning opportunities inform College decisions for allocating resources to continue support for these activities?

An element of the TMCC mission that has not been identified as a core theme is the commitment to deliver *high-quality education and services to our diverse communities*. It appears that this element has been subsumed as Objective 2 under the core theme *Academic Excellence*. However, the indicators for achieving this objective measure processes--developing and implementing assessment cycles. Is TMCC delivering high-quality education and services to its diverse communities and, therefore, fulfilling its mission? How does TMCC know? What is the acceptable threshold and what is the evidence that the College has accomplished this objective?

While the College has identified indicators of achievement for each of its core theme objectives, indicators that measure processes do not provide evidence that the College has achieved its intended outcomes. Processes are evidence of intent; outcomes are evidence of institutional performance. Indicators of achievement should measure outcomes that, in the aggregate, define mission fulfillment.

Compliment:

1. The Evaluation Team compliments the College for making substantial progress toward establishing and implementing a system of assessment that encompasses all of its offerings while facing historic budget, workload and administrative challenges.

Concern:

1. While the core theme of Student Success may be viewed as a manifestation of the College's success in delivering *high-quality education and services*, the College has not explicitly addressed this element of its mission. Further, since it appears that the core theme of *Academic Excellence* also contributes to the ability of the College to succeed in delivering *high-quality education and services*, this too should be explicitly addressed.
2. College faculty and staff need to distinguish between an objective--what the institution intends to achieve--and an outcome—a meaningful and assessable result.
3. Indicators of achievement should measure outcomes, for it is outcomes that define mission fulfillment.
4. Benchmarks for defining success should be realistic.

Summary

Truckee Meadows Community College embarked upon the task of simplifying its mission statement in 2008. Its revised mission was approved by the Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE) Board of Regents in April, 2009. However, it is not clear whether TMCC's core themes were also adopted by its governing board (ER 3).

TMCC selected three core themes to reflect key elements of the College's mission: *Student Success*, *Academic Excellence*, and *Access to Lifelong Learning*. These themes were formally presented to the College community at a campus-wide forum in August, 2011.

The College has identified just one objective for achieving *Student Success* although it enumerates multiple indicators of achievement. These indicators are generally accepted measures for evaluating student success. However, the 2015 benchmarks represent significant gains over the baseline year of 2010 and raise the question as to how the College expects to achieve these gains, especially at a time when budget and resource reductions are likely to limit the College's ability to implement intervention strategies. Benchmarks should be realistic, and the College should address what actions it will implement to accomplish these benchmarks in order to demonstrate they are achievable.

The College has established three-objectives for accomplishing *Academic Excellence*. The indicators of achievement for each of these objectives measure institutional processes—assessment cycles, submission schedules, and professional development activities. While it is assumed these processes will lead to academic excellence, the College has not clearly defined what constitutes academic excellence. Is academic excellence defined by processes or by outcomes? Examples of the latter are student achievement in the classroom, job placement in the workforce and student satisfaction with student services. The College should specifically delineate outcomes for each of its core theme objectives and identify indicators of achievement that measure these outcomes.

There are two objectives for accomplishing *Access to Lifelong Learning*. The indicators of achievement for the first objective measure partnerships; the indicators of achievement for the second objective measure the number of events offered. The implied assumptions are: partnerships lead to TMCC enrollment and grant opportunities; cultural and community-oriented events provide access to lifelong learning opportunities. But what are the needs of the community for lifelong learning opportunities? How does the College know? And how does demand for access to lifelong learning opportunities inform College decisions for allocating resources to continue support for these activities?

It is unclear how the College defines mission fulfillment. While the College has identified indicators of achievement for each of its core themes—*student success*, *academic excellence*, and *access to lifelong learning*—it has not explicitly identified indicators for measuring its success in "*delivering high-quality education and services to our diverse communities*." It appears that this element of the College mission has been subsumed as an objective under the core theme of *Academic Excellence*. However, the indicators for achieving this objective measure processes—developing and implementing assessment

cycles. How does TMCC know it is delivering high-quality education and services to its diverse communities? What is the evidence?

While the College has identified indicators of achievement for each of its core theme objectives, indicators that measure processes do not provide evidence that the College has achieved its intended outcomes. Processes are evidence of intent; outcomes are evidence of institutional performance. Indicators of achievement should measure outcomes that, in the aggregate, define mission fulfillment.

Recommendations

1. While the core theme of Student Success may be viewed as a manifestation of the College's success in delivering *high-quality education and services*, the College has not explicitly addressed this element of its mission. Further, since it appears that the core theme of Academic Excellence also contributes to the ability of the College to succeed in delivering *high-quality education and services*, this too should be explicitly addressed. The Evaluation Team recommends that the College ensure that its core themes individually manifest essential elements of its mission and that core themes are adopted by its governing board consistent with its legal authority. (Eligibility Requirement 3, Standard 1.B.1)
2. Indicators of achievement that measure processes do not provide sufficient evidence that the College is achieving its core themes and, therefore, its mission. Indicators of achievement need to measure outcomes. The Evaluation Team recommends that the College identify meaningful, assessable, and verifiable indicators of achievement that form the basis for evaluating the accomplishment of the College's core themes and, therefore, fulfillment of its mission. (Standard 1.B.2)