

# Mid-Cycle Peer-Evaluation Report

Highline College

Des Moines, WA

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*A confidential report of findings prepared for the  
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## Introduction

Highline College, located in Des Moines, Washington, was founded in 1961. Highline College's accreditation was last reaffirmed in 2014 after evaluation of its 2013 Comprehensive Self-Evaluation Report. The college is now in the middle of a seven-year accreditation cycle. This report summarizes observations made during an October 2016 Mid-Cycle Evaluation visit.

## Assessment of Self-Evaluation Report and Support Materials

The College did an excellent job of providing the evaluators with the information required to conduct the mid-cycle evaluation. The *Mid-Cycle Evaluation Report* was clearly organized and provided an appropriate balance of explanation and evaluation. The evaluators would like to thank Highline College for the time spent preparing for the visit and for their hospitality while the team was on campus.

## Mid-Cycle Evaluation Format

As directed by NWCCU, the intent of this report is to evaluate the processes that Highline College is using as it continues to assess its core themes in support of verifying mission fulfillment. As the college was asked to organize its report into three distinct parts, the evaluation team has chosen to address each part in a similar narrative fashion.

## Part I: Assessing Mission Fulfillment

Highline College has a clear process of measuring and reporting mission fulfillment that has been in place for a number of years. Mission fulfillment is measured through the assessment of four core themes that are derived from and encompass the institutional mission. The college has had the same four core themes for a significant period of time. They are well known and understood across campus and appear to serve the college well.

Each core theme is assessed via a limited number of objectives, measures, and indicators measured against internal, state, and national benchmarks. The institution measures performance at Highline against these benchmarks and has determined that exceeding a minimum threshold in 80% of the indicators equates to mission fulfillment.

Highline reports progress related to mission fulfillment in an annual *Mission Fulfillment Report (MFR)*. This report is shared with the larger campus community and is reviewed by administrative units at the college and by the Board of Trustees at its annual retreat. Where benchmarks are not being met, the college takes action to address deficiencies and to improve performance. The college is able to provide clear evidence of using the results of the MFR to measure success and to drive change at the institution. Moreover, the College is to be commended for looking for ways to set stretch goals in areas where

benchmarks are consistently being surpassed, thereby creating opportunities for innovation. Highline's consistent use of core themes and the MFR has evolved into a process that is ingrained in the institution and appears to be well understood and accepted throughout the College.

While the MFR provides a clear quantitative report of Highline's performance compared to both internal and external benchmarks, it became clear during the visit that the stories and context behind those measurements and the discussions that the MFR generates are more valuable to the institution than the metrics themselves. As preparations for the Year Seven Visit continue, the College will want to ensure that the assessment metrics are a vehicle to help explain the larger story of mission fulfillment at Highline, rather than replacing those stories.

In some cases, the alignment of the MFR between the objectives, indicators, and measures is unclear. For example, Objective 2 under Core Theme #1 states, "Diverse teaching methods, innovative curricula, and student support services fulfill the learning needs of students." However, the indicators and measures for that objective do not appear to speak directly to teaching methods or curriculum, but rather to participation rates and student perceptions. While the College clearly states that it does not anticipate major changes in objectives, indicators, and core themes going forward, attention should be paid to ensuring alignment among each level of assessment within each core theme.

The College acknowledges that the quality of measures and indicators is uneven across the four core themes, specifically noting concerns with measures in Core Theme Three. Going forward, it will be important for the College to continue to find ways to define more meaningful ways to measure success in these areas.

## **Part II: Examples of Mission and Core Them Operationalization**

Highline College's first example of operationalizing its mission and core themes revolves around student learning assessment.

It is clear from discussions with members of the Assessment Committee that this process is faculty driven and that the college has "turned a corner" in terms of faculty understanding the positive impact that assessment of student learning can have in the classroom. The college's willingness to provide resources to the assessment process in terms of an assessment budget appears to be having a positive impact on both full-time and part-time faculty participation.

The success of the work of the Assessment Committee has led to discussion about the sustainability of the current process. Discussions are already underway regarding how additional peer evaluators can be trained on campus to take some of the review load off of the Assessment Committee, while also encouraging additional dialog between faculty. Highline should be applauded for taking this proactive approach to ensuring that the good work that has been done to this point is sustainable over the next several years.

While a considerable amount of work has been done in the area of course level student learning outcomes, the assessment of learning outcomes at the degree and college levels is less developed. While those interviewed acknowledged a need to focus on student learning outcomes at these levels, they described that work as emerging rather than being fully developed. The College will need to continue to focus on assessment at each of these levels going forward. A modification to the online reporting system used by the college for tracking student learning outcomes may prove beneficial in this area.

A significant focus of the student learning assessment example is linked to professional development opportunities being made available to faculty surrounding learning assessment. The College should be applauded for its focus on providing faculty with the tools needed to write clear learning objectives that can be assessed and used for continuous improvement. It is critical that new faculty are included in existing processes as they come on board.

Going forward, the College will need to continue to explore ways to tell the story of successes in student learning assessment. While some metrics measuring faculty participation are currently being used in the MFR, the college is not completely satisfied with them and recognizes that they do not necessarily measure success. Attention will need to be paid to methods of reporting success, or the need for improvement, in ways that are meaningful to the College, its students, and the communities it serves.

The second example focused on Student Support Services using the college-wide system of academic probation as a focal point for improvement. The team applauds Highline College for selecting a Student Services example for Mission and Core Theme Operationalization. After meeting with Student Affairs employees, it is clear that student learning is positively impacted outside the classroom based on the example of examining students who move from first term to a second term of probation.

This vision provides clear expectations for students to avoid progressive probation “to jointly expand cohort-based and targeted-need supports...that promote early intervention and whole student engagement and success” through:

- Communications improvements
- THRIVE Intervention workshops
- Achievement socials by celebrating students who earn their first 15, 30 and 45 credits
- Guidelines for advising students who are on probation

When asked how the probation measure in the MFR was selected by the Accreditation Steering Committee, the team learned that that the probation issue was a specific area where all areas of the student services division could have an impact.

When asked about the collaboration that is occurring between the Accreditation Recommendation Response Team and the Advising Taskforce, the team learned that professional development activities for faculty advisors that focus on pathway-based advising was a first step to evaluating Highline’s pathways through the lens of student navigation.

Overall, the team was impressed with the efforts made in the two examples and was especially encouraged by conversations that have engaged both faculty and student services employees in collaborative discussions about student learning outcomes.

### **Part III: Moving Forward**

Highline College has embraced a culture of continuous improvement and has a clear focus and commitment to the accreditation process and mission fulfillment. There are clear connections between the college mission and core themes, and there is a mature and well understood process for measuring mission fulfillment. As noted in their self-study, there is work to be done in terms of adjusting metrics within the existing process to ensure that they are both meaningful and measurable and discussion surrounding these changes is already taking place. It will also be important for the college to continue to improve assessment of student learning outcomes beyond the course level. The College understands that the majority of its focus over the next several years will be upon refining and improving existing work rather than inventing new processes and the evaluation team feels that the college is well positioned to accomplish this task.

### **Conclusion**

After reviewing Highline's Mid-Cycle Evaluation Report and visiting the campus, the evaluation team is confident that the College is well positioned to provide evidence of mission fulfillment and sustainability in its Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report.