HIGHLINE COLLEGE

Ad Hoc Report:
Response to Recommendation 1 of the
Fall 2013 Year Seven Peer Evaluation Report

Submitted to the
Northwest Commission on
Colleges and Universities

September 15, 2016

Though the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities later added a recommendation of its own on financial audits (Standard 2.F.7), Highline College's *Fall 2013 Year Seven Peer Evaluation Report* concluded with a single recommendation:

> In the spirit of continuous improvement as contemplated by the Standards, the evaluation committee recommends that the College gather and maintain evidence that the depth, breadth, coherence, content, and sequence of programs are appropriate (Standard 2.C.4 and 2.C.5).

In its February 10, 2015, letter of acceptance for Highline College's *Year One Mission and Core Themes Report*, the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities requested that Highline address fall 2013's Recommendation 1 in an already-scheduled fall 2016 *ad hoc* report and visit to review the college's initial bachelor's degree offerings. This report details the college's actions during the past three years to meet the recommendation's intent.

Over that time, Highline has approached Recommendation 1 at three levels of engagement — documentation, improvement, and maintenance. More specifically, in addressing the recommendation, Highline took the opportunity to (1) consolidate its curriculum-planning resources, (2) reframe curricular sequences as guideways for student navigation, and (3) refine the program-review processes that maintain the curriculum's integrity.

Level One Response: Consolidation and Documentation of Curriculum Oversight

When the Year Seven Peer Evaluation Committee visited Highline in fall 2013, the college's curriculum-alignment responsibilities primarily resided in the transfer and professional-technical deans' offices. As a routine element of curriculum development, the deans advised departments of the relevant guidelines for building and revising Highline's credentials. No single repository of those guidelines was readily available to the faculty and staff at large.

At the first level of response to Recommendation 1, the college set out to remedy that gap, compiling the agreements, guidelines, and processes that assure local alignment with the commonly shared expectations for depth, breadth, coherence, content, and sequencing of programs. Those items are now linked from the Academic Affairs Website as a durable resource for department coordinators and other interested parties.

The materials address both transfer and professional-technical credentials, as follows:

University Transfer Alignment

> Highline College transfer degrees (Associate of Arts, Associate of Business, Associate of Elementary Education, Associate of Pre-Nursing, and Associate of Science) are aligned to the guidelines of the Inter-College Relations Committee (ICRC) of the Washington Council for High School-College Relations. Highline College develops and maintains its transfer curricula in accordance with the *ICRC Handbook*. In Washington, two-year transfer degrees are articulated to the corresponding baccalaureate pathways under the state's Direct Transfer Agreement (DTA), a voluntary compact among all of the public two- and four-year campuses, along with most of the private baccalaureate institutions,

statewide.   When changes are made at the ICRC level, the Articulation Transfer Council (ATC), whose members are transfer-area deans from across Washington's community and technical colleges, facilitate compliance on their local campuses. At Highline College, the Dean of Instruction for Transfer and Pre-College Education takes these changes back to the appropriate constituent groups on Highline College's campus. In developing and maintaining transfer curricula, faculty work closely with department coordinators, division chairs, and the dean of instruction to demonstrate a coherent sequencing of courses that align with the current transfer degree guidelines. Degree requirements and programs are clearly defined and published in the college catalog.

<p align="center">Professional-Technical Program Alignment</p>

Highline College's professional-technical credentials (Associate of Applied Science, Associate of Applied Science-T, and certificates) are aligned with the requirements of the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) and follow the Program Approval Review (PAR) process as determined by the SBCTC, which invites commentary from peer institutions. Applied bachelor's degrees (Bachelor of Applied Science and Bachelor of Applied Behavioral Science) require individual approval by the State Board itself, after a rigorous examination by SBCTC staff, an SBCTC-convened peer review committee, and a formal presentation to the full board. In either case, the campus process includes consideration and approval by the programs' advisory committees, comprised of local professionals with appropriate technical skills relevant to the particular profession. The advisory committee includes representation of employers, employees, and organized labor. Advisory committees meet a minimum of twice annually to review curriculum, assuring appropriate sequencing of courses, coherent design, relevance to the industry, and adequate breadth and depth of instruction. The Dean of Instruction for Professional Technical Education works closely with content faculty, department coordinators, and division chairs throughout the curriculum-development process and communicates with instruction constituents in Instruction Cabinet, Instruction Council, and Faculty Senate. Degree requirements and programs are clearly defined and widely published in the college catalog.

Institution-wide, whether curricula are developed in the transfer or professional-technical environment, Highline's courses and programs are developed, approved, and overseen by a trio of academic governance groups, each with a long history on campus. In all cases, faculty play a major role in curricular-review processes:

Instruction Council: Comprised of two faculty representatives per division, Instruction Council meets quarterly to consider individual course proposals. The council emphasizes cross-division alignment and non-duplication of curriculum.

Instruction Cabinet: Instruction cabinet includes the instructional deans, selected instructional directors, and the faculty division chairs. The Cabinet sets academic policy and allocates resources — faculty positions, equipment, user fees, and facility usage — to support curriculum.

Faculty Senate: With a minimum of two elected representatives from each division, the Senate establishes and maintains broad guidelines for the content of Highline's degrees and certificates. Among other items, Senate reviews general-education distributions, related instruction requirements, credit and grade minimums, and required approvals by advisory committees or other outside entities.

Despite the lengthy history of these three groups, their interrelationships are nuanced and sometimes overlap. When the college developed its first bachelor's-level degrees in 2013-14, the process provided an opportunity to revisit and further clarify each committee's curricular roles. Over the 2014-15 and 2015-16 academic years, Faculty Senate and Instruction Cabinet set about to codify a single-source, sequential model for approval of new degrees and certificates, clarifying the responsibilities of each participant group along the way. The resulting flowchart, endorsed by both Instruction Cabinet and Faculty Senate in spring 2016, is publicly available on the Academic Affairs website and in Senate archives.

In summary, at the first level of response to 2013's Recommendation 1, Highline focused on consolidating and better documenting its processes for the design, approval, implementation, and revision of the curriculum through structures and processes with clearly defined authority and responsibilities. The resulting resources provide evidence of Highline's capacity to ensure that the depth, breadth, coherence, content, and sequence of programs remain appropriate over time.

Level Two Response: A Student-Pathway Model for Degree Sequencing and Advising

In interpreting Recommendation 1's intent, Highline College took to heart the evaluation committee's reference to "the spirit of continuous improvement." Accordingly, rather than concentrating solely on the college's existing capacity for curricular quality-assurance, the campus embraced Recommendation 1 as a call to substantially improve student navigability of the curriculum itself. At the second level of response to the recommendation, faculty and staff reflected on ways to enhance the persistence and attainment of degrees for Highline's uniquely diverse student population.

To launch this reflective process, the Vice President for Academic Affairs convened the Accreditation Recommendation Response Team (ARRT) in January 2014. ARRT's eight members (Appendix A) represented a range of stakeholders who advise and support students, and who are involved in academic planning, transfer, and meta-major pathways at the college. The group's primary charge was to craft better pathway-based course sequences and schedule-planning tools to provide students with a clearer path their chosen credential, integrating career exploration and college-success skills to sustain learners' progress along the way.

Background

The professional literature suggests strongly that the majority of incoming community college students are not completely clear about their educational pathway, nor are they aware of all the choices of credentials available to them. At the same time, with changes to federal financial aid rules and other pressures, students have less and less time to try different courses and find the right fit. Further, there is clear evidence that nationally, many students simply wander without completing a degree or transferring, and the lack of clear structure in the educational pathway is

an important contributor to this problem. ARRT was tasked to address this problem locally.

The Accreditation Recommendation Response Team's Processes

Initially, during 2014, ARRT spent time researching initiatives at two- and four-year schools across the country, as well as examining research by the American Association of Community Colleges, the Community College Research Center, Complete College America, and other entities that have been active in pathway-based curricular design. Drawing on that research, ARRT proposed a multi-pronged approach to providing a more coherent structure for Highline students that would positively impact their completion of credentials.

Common in the research was the use of maps to illustrate major pathways, an approach has been successfully implemented at Arizona State University, Florida State University, Valencia Community College, and the Miami-Dade Colleges, among others. The best of these maps help students narrow their choices as they first start out, and then keep them on track as they move forward. Accordingly, two critical components of ARRT's initial approach were to draft degree pathway maps and to pilot a prescriptive set of pathway guides to help students to make course selections for their first 30 credits.

Since Highline College already had identified six broad pathways of study, ARRT had a foundation to begin. The six pathways, however, had largely been employed as a marketing tool, used to organize the range of majors available to prospective Highline enrollees. To make the pathways more meaningful as a curriculum-building and advising resource, ARRT met with division chairs, and then with select faculty in each pathway to receive input. Faculty suggested, and the team developed, guides for some specific degree pathways (e.g. business AAS and AA). The result was nine initial pathway guides which were piloted in half of the new student orientation sessions for winter quarter 2016 registration. The remaining half of the orientation groups served as a control.

In that initial pilot, among the 69 students who used the pathway guides, 54% of their next-term course registrations were selected from the pathway guide that they used. The students who did not use the guides registered for fewer courses (43%) that matched their indicated pathway. Since one of Highline's goals is to ensure that students take more courses that match their stated educational interests, the guides appeared to help with that to some degree.

Despite the pilot's limitations, based on its findings, ARRT decided to continue using the guides for at least another registration period. Ideally, as a second emphasis of the effort, the college needs to help students choose a degree and course of study earlier, enabling advisors to provide pathway information in a more efficient, useful manner. Thus, the ARRT identified two issues to focus on as it moves forward: pathway choice and pathway information delivery.

Next Steps

At this date, the ARRT has merged with the Advising Task Force to better articulate ARRT's work with current efforts to refine the advising process generally. The larger membership will allow the two to create subgroups to work on specific solutions to this multi-dimensional issue.

Additionally, since the work will have ripple effects and the success of the project will hinge on anticipating those effects, the combined groups will be bringing others to the table. At a minimum, those will include financial aid, admissions, registration/records, and technology. As Highline prepares for fall 2016's start-up, the college's Opening Week Committee has set aside a full day of in-service activity around pathway-based advising. Faculty will gather into their pathway groups for information-sharing, barrier-identification, and next-step planning. Though the day will focus on advising tools and practices, it represents a first faculty-wide step in evaluating Highline's curricular pathways through the lens of student navigation. The event also signals Highline's initial intent to formalize a relationship with Washington's Guided Pathways initiative, a grant-funded, multi-year effort to promote pathway-based curriculum sequencing, alignment of learning outcomes, and integrated student-support resources across the state's two-year college system. Going forward, Highline's engagement in these initiatives will strengthen its ability to assure that its degree programs consistently demonstrate a coherent design with appropriate breadth, depth, sequencing of courses, and synthesis of learning.

Level Three Response: Maintenance of Curricular Alignment through Program Review

Closely aligned to continuous improvement is the need for continuous maintenance. Recognizing that relationship, Highline's faculty and staff additionally viewed Recommendation1 as an opportunity to strengthen the college's program review processes, with an eye to ensuring that curricula remain as current, coherent, and learning-rich as possible over time. As 2013's peer evaluators noted, "Academic Affairs has created a well-defined process for program review. This review process is not on a regular cycle but instead relies on a 'trigger' event such as changes in enrollment or community needs." As a result of this comment, the college undertook new efforts to regularize, strengthen, and better document its program review infrastructure.

Program Review Process for Professional-Technical Programs

Since 2013, Highline College has an refined its process for reviewing professional-technical programs to better assure comprehensive examination, allow focus on pertinent areas, and ensure timely action on recommendations. Under the revised procedures, professional-technical education programs will be reviewed every three years. However, the stakeholders have continued to express concerns that a purely *pro forma* schedule could be seen as repetitive and of little use. Therefore, at the scheduled year of review, if after initial consultation with the program coordinator, division chair, and dean, there appears to be no need for or benefit of engaging in the review process at that time, the program may request a waiver for review until the next three-year review cycle. The request proceeds to the Vice President for Academic Affairs. If the vice president concurs with the stakeholders' recommendation, one waiver may be granted. Conversely, if the stakeholders believe a review is more urgent for a particular program, the vice president can accelerate its slot in the rotation.

The program review process is initiated by the Dean of Instruction for Professional-Technical Education. Each review committee includes faculty representation from the department, division, and at large, as well as the division chair and the dean. The Office of Institutional Research collaborates in the review design. Additional faculty and staff may be invited to meetings for specific input. Advisory committee members gather and report feedback directly through representative participation or through full-committee meetings. The process may

incorporate quantitative and qualitative data collection, including interviews with employer-industry representatives, faculty, and students and student and alumni focus groups.

The review committee determines the focal points of the review process, which typically include but are not limited to examination of the following:

Curriculum

- Mapping of degree/program outcomes, college wide outcomes, curriculum and course alignment, and student learning outcomes
- Curriculum review for relevance, currency, and alignment with industry standards
- Use of evidenced-based teaching methodology and cultural responsiveness of the curriculum

Industry and Community Relationships

- Advisory Committee meeting regularity, appropriate membership representation, and program contributions
- Review of student work-based learning/internship opportunities
- Data tracking for employment in the industry post completion/graduation
- Employer satisfaction and feedback regarding graduate preparation, advancement opportunities, and wage progression
- Participation in outreach, recruitment, and community engagement

Student Achievement

- Student enrollment, retention, and completion data review
- Program-level academic advising for new and current students
- Opportunities for pathways to related bachelor degrees and actual utilization demonstrating student access

Faculty Service and Leadership

- Commitment to and participation in teaching, learning, and assessment responsibilities and professional development
- Contributions from and participation of the department faculty to shared governance and campus vitality
- Inclusion of adjunct faculty in professional development and curriculum planning
- Collaboration with other departments and/or campus resources

Program Outreach, Recruitment and Marketing

- Participation in outreach, recruitment, and community engagement
- Program web presence, social media use, and marketing materials
- Academic advising for new students

Following these criteria, the program review committee completes a report of recommendations that includes relevant data, recommendations, potential challenges, a timeline for implementation, and identification of individuals with lead responsibility. The Vice President for Academic Affairs receives the report and, after reviewing its contents, meets with the program review committee and department members. The vice president provides feedback and suggestions, assists in identifying resources for implementation, and approves the final report.

This recursive process ensures continuous quality improvement and, where necessary or advantageous, regular assessment of departmental progress toward implementation of recommended actions. In particular, through its specific component on curriculum, the review schedule serves to maintain a coherent design of career-credential programs, with appropriate breadth, depth, sequencing of courses, and synthesis of learning in each pathway.

Program Review for Transfer Degrees

Drawing on the recent efforts in professional-technical education, the Dean of Instruction for Transfer and Pre-College has begun meetings with relevant constituents to initiate a comparable program review for transfer degrees. Using the program review for professional-technical programs and the experience of those who created it as a guide, the college plans to draft a process for transfer degrees by the spring of 2016-17. Like its professional-technical counterpart, the transfer review process will encourage continuous improvement as well as the long-term maintenance of curricular quality.

A current, detailed description of Highline College's campus-wide efforts in learning outcomes assessment appears in the campus's 2016 *Mid-Cycle Self Evaluation Report*.

Concluding Comment

Highline College has been repeatedly recognized for its culture of collaboration and innovation. Those qualities were fully evident in the campus's response to Recommendation 1 from the *Fall 2013 Year Seven Peer Evaluation Report*. Faculty and staff took Recommendation 1's wording as encouragement not only to remedy weaknesses but also to initiate broad, durable enhancements to Highline's curriculum processes. The Accreditation Recommendation Response Team (AART), the academic deans, and the campus's instructional governance committees played especially central roles in shaping and carrying out the college's plans. In organizing the work, the campus's three-level approach — consolidation of curriculum resources, navigation-driven course sequencing, and enhancements to program review — was foundational from the beginning. As this trio of initiatives moved forward, the discussions were consistently informed by the core terms of Standards 2.C.4 and 2.C.5, emphasizing well-defined, faculty-driven structures and processes for the design, approval, implementation, and revision of curricula that exhibit appropriate breadth, depth, sequencing of courses, and synthesis of learning. In addressing all of these elements, Highline College has worked to manifest the "spirit of continuous improvement" that the fall 2013 evaluators called for.

Appendix A: Accreditation Recommendation Response Team (AART) Membership

Jeff Wagnitz, Vice President for Academic Affairs

Ruth Frickle, Social Science and Pre-College Studies Division Chair and former Accreditation Steering Committee Chair

Allison Lau, Associate Dean for Counseling and Student Judicial Affairs

Tanya Kasselman, Transition Success Center Adviser

Dan Drischel, Faculty, Human Services Program

Monica Luce, Dean of Instructional Resources

Jennifer Cooke, Director of Advising and High School Programs (joined spring 2015)

Emily Coates, Institutional Research Manager (ex officio member)