Rock Valley College

Executive Summary | 2014

ABOUT THE SELF-STUDY

Rock Valley College has been engaged in a self-study process to attain continued accreditation from the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), as well as engage in continuous improvement. This self-study process officially began with an introduction to accreditation and the self-study process at a special meeting of the Board of Trustees on September 6, 2011 followed by a College-wide kick off presented by Karen Solomon later that month.

The self-study process provides an opportunity for the College to review changes made over the past ten years and provides information for future planning and decision making. As such, the goals of the self-study were as follows:
- Ensure that every college employee has the opportunity to participate in self-study and continuous improvement processes.
- Gain a better understanding of RVC students and the College community and identify ways to better serve them.
- Identify strengths to build upon and challenges to meet.
- Receive continued accreditation.

This effort at RVC has been guided by the HLC Accreditation Steering Committee and criteria subcommittees. Subcommittees were formed with membership that was representative of faculty and staff from across the College, but also with attention to roles within the College that might best inform the self-study process. In addition to opportunities to participate on criteria subcommittees, all faculty and staff were provided opportunities to participate in review and feedback of the process through various development day activities. Updates were also provided at meetings and study sessions of the Board of Trustees, as well as to various faculty and staff groups and committees.

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

This document contains conclusions and recommendations for each of the five self-study criteria of the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) based on the process described above. For full details that inform these conclusions and recommendations, view the full Self-study Report which can be found on the College's website (http://www.rockvalleycollege.edu/About/Accreditation.cfm).

CRITERIA 1: MISSION

The institution's mission is clear and articulated publicly; it guides the institution's operations.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengths:

- The College has a well-published, clearly defined mission document that is consistent with the mission for community colleges as defined by the State.

- The RVC mission document is further articulated and supported by additional public documents, including the College Catalog; Student, Faculty and Employee Handbooks; and strategic planning documents.

- Credit and non-credit learning opportunities and support services are aligned to and address the breadth of the College's mission statement.

Challenges:

- While consistent with the State's defined purpose for community colleges, the mission document has not recently been reviewed or refined. Furthermore, RVC lacks a formal procedure for regular review and affirmation of its mission document.

- RVC has procedures in place to foster the development of a diverse workforce; however, data indicates that hiring practices have not increased the number of minority hires and that the employee demographics are not consistent with regional and/or student demographics.

As a result of the self-study:

- The criterion subcommittee recommended that the mission document be reviewed and, as needed, be refined. In January of 2014, the HLC Steering Committee initiated a Mission Review Committee by identifying one faculty and one staff member as co-chairs. The co-chairs are charged with forming a committee representative of the College community (i.e., to include representation from different employee groups, students, Board of Trustees, and community members), reviewing existing mission documents (i.e., Vision, Mission, and Core Value statements) and refining as necessary, and establishing a timeline for on-going review and affirmation of the mission document.

- The self-study process led to the development of a new College Strategic Plan. Based on this subcommittee's findings, College leadership determined that adding goals and initiatives to that plan that address the having and maintaining a diverse workforce was critical to taking next steps to address this challenge. Thus, the review of disaggregated staffing data informed the development of the following:

    o **Goal 5:** Promote an inclusive and diverse community that enhances the College climate and workforce

    o **Initiative 5.A:** Through student and staff recruitment and retention efforts, build a College community that reflects the diversity of the region served and prepares district residents to live and work in a global society

    To address this strategic initiative, Human Resources has initiated an evaluation of practices for retaining a diverse work force that have demonstrated success at other colleges and plans to conduct an audit of the search committee process this fiscal year.

CRITERIA 2: ETHICAL AND RESPONSIBLE CONDUCT

The institution acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengths:

1. Students and the District 511 community have access to College information through multiple platforms (e.g., electronic and paper versions of the College catalog).

2. The institution ensures the responsible acquisition, discovery and application of knowledge.

3. Policies and procedures are in place to ensure that the institution operates with integrity.

Challenges:

1. Feedback during the self-study process suggests that the multiple platforms (i.e., web site, Quarry, College catalog, and various handbooks) can impede efficiency and effectiveness of communication when information within is not fully duplicated, consistent, and current.

2. Campus climate/morale has been damaged by recent contract negotiations and leadership changes.

3. RVC has no regular, systematic review of institutional policies and procedures. Such a review process is necessary to ensure currency and confirm that no gaps exist.

As a result of the self-study:

- Given that the College website is a critical tool for sharing information about RVC with the community, a redesign was deemed necessary to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of communication. Planning for this redesign has begun. Initial changes to date include the addition of a language converter to the website, creation and activation of an e-schedule and related how-to tutorial, and launch of a mobile application that allows for access to general RVC information.

- Faculty and staff have once again begun to come together to bring focus to the need for RVC to be our community's college. Focusing talents on efforts needed within our community (e.g., retraining regional un- and under-employed and assisting with reshaping high school curriculum) has helped to improved relations and boost morale within some areas of the College.

- Initiative 5.B of the College Strategic Plan was developed, in part, as a response to morale issues. To address this initiative, Leadership Team has developed an initial plan to improve organizational and communication streams that include attending future Faculty Council, Professional Staff Association (PSA), and Educational Support Personnel (ESP) meetings to establish regular opportunities to talk to College leadership on issues important to the College. Other action items (e.g., comprehensive job study, presidential advisory council, and supervisory training programs) have been proposed, but are awaiting approval and implementation when the next, non-interim president of RVC is appointed.

- Human Resources staff have been working with a committee to review institutional policies and procedures. As gaps have been identified, they are being addressed. For example, a conflict of interest policy was added to the Administrative Policy Manual; this policy was adopted at the July meeting of the Board of Trustees. As part of this review is a reorganizing of the policies, which is on course to be completed by January of 2014. Once the manual has been fully reorganized, the review will consider any additional potential policy gaps.

CRITERIA 3: TEACHING AND LEARNING – QUALITY, RESOURCES, AND SUPPORT

The institution provides high quality education, wherever and however its offerings are delivered.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengths:

1. RVC offers a comprehensive general education program that leads to successful transfer.

2. RVC awards a variety of certificate and degree programs that develop skills adaptable to changing environments. Many CTE programs have consistently high passing rates on licensure exams.

3. The College articulates common expectations for all students through its institutional student learning outcomes, as well as program a course specific learning goals.

4. RVC faculty and students regularly contribute to and share discovery of knowledge, creativity, innovation and artistic expression with others in the College community and beyond.

5. The College maintains processes to ensure that all instructors are appropriately credentialed.

6. The College provides a variety of supports for teaching and learning.

7. RVC offers students curricular and co-curricular opportunities that foster the knowledge and skills necessary for life-long learning.

Challenges:

1. The College lacks a formal, institutional-level process for collecting information pertaining to faculty efforts in scholarly research and publications.

2. RVC needs to develop strategies to more successfully recruit and maintain qualified, skilled adjuncts, especially in high-demand and STEM disciplines, as well as address consistency (e.g., across time and program/discipline) in their preparation and evaluation.

3. Student support services at the College are provided on a limited schedule outside of normal business hours.

4. Provide consistent co-curricular programming to support the learning needs of a continually changing community college student population.

As a result of the self-study

- Faculty participated in a series of round table discussions and workshops that resulted in the refinement of the institutional student learning outcomes. Additional details about this effort are addressed in the Conclusions and Recommendations of Criterion 4.

- Through a collaborative effort between the academic disciplines and Institutional Research improvements have been made to the process for student evaluation of faculty. This includes the

purchase and implantation of Class Climate, which has led to a reduction in time between student completion of the evaluation of faculty and their return to faculty.   Next steps in this process include the revision of the evaluation form to improve consistency in the evaluation process, especially as it relates to the evaluation across methods of course delivery. Furthermore, in conjunction with divisions and faculty, the use of student evaluation of faculty to improve instruction and enhance student engagement with faculty will be explored.

- Providing additional Academic Advisors to decrease the ratio of advisor to student was prioritized in recent position planning and further endorsed by Board of Trustees, in part through recent work of the Ad Hoc Committee. As such, the College is planning to move forward to address on hiring. Nonetheless, further exploration and identification of ways in which the College could best extend support services to online students and those enrolling primarily in night and weekend courses should be built into the process and documentation of 2016-2018 versions of the Academic and Strategic Enrollment Management plans.

- A checklist was developed and distributed at the Adjunct Faculty Institute. This checklist provided adjunct faculty with resources available to them. They were encouraged to work with their respective Deans and Academic Chairs to access these resources. The implementation of this checklist will be reviewed to determine its perceived impact on more adequately preparing adjuncts for their role at the College, and additional processes will be developed with divisions to ensure consistent adjunct preparation and evaluation.

- The need to develop a process for collecting information pertaining to faculty efforts in scholarly research at an institutional level was identified. The development of this process will be included in future Academy of Teaching and Learning Excellence (ATLE) planning.

CRITERIA 4: TEACHING AND LEARNING – EVALUATION AND IMPROVEMENT

The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments, and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness for student learning through processes designed to promote continuous improvement.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengths:

1. The College has a regular program review cycle that informs program change.

2. The curriculum approval and assessment processes uphold rigor.

3. CTE programs are accredited through industry-appropriate agencies.

4. Students who transfer to 4-year schools are successful, as demonstrated by GPA comparisons to transfers from other community colleges and students who began their studies at 4-year institutions.

5. Assessment workshops have been integrated into faculty development days, and assessment responsibilities have been added to the faculty contract.

6. The College's Academic Plan and Strategic Enrollment Management Plan include goals to improve retention, persistence, and completion.

Challenges:

1. The sharing of program review results has been informational rather than to inform decision-making.

2. While Records and Registration staff understand extant protocols for accepting transfer credit, some Academic Chairs and Associate Deans lack sufficient guidance in making determinations, because such situations are often unique.

3. The College's institutional student learning outcomes were unclear and difficult to measure.

4. Growth of the assessment culture has been slow.

5. KPI data indicate persistence, retention, and graduation rate achievement gaps for Black/African American students.

As a result of the self-study:

- Previously, academic program review reports were shared through the President's Council, which was designed as an information sharing group. Certificate program review reports were shared at Data-driven Decision Making (DDDM) a College leadership group, also as information sharing but with the potential to inform decision-making. In FY2011, President's Council was restructured to forums, so academic program review reports were no longer shared. In 2011-2012, the Assessment Committee recommended that academic program review be shared at Curriculum Committee. Results of 2012 program review indicated that, again, this sharing was conducted in an information manner that limited the decision-making potential of the process. As such, academic program reviews will be shared with DDDM, as well as Curriculum Committee.

- In some instances, Chairs have access to a syllabus from another institution. In others, they have samples of student work from that class. The College recognized the need for better training for Academic Chairs, and a manual for this employee group was developed within the previous learning management system (LMS). This resource has yet to be moved to the new LMS platform, Canvas.

- Midway through AY2012-2013, based on recommendations from the committee working on criterion three of the HLC Self Study, the Assessment Committee began to revise the College's SLO based on concern that they were not well-defined or measurable. The SLO revision process extended from Summer 2012 through Fall 2013 and involved several faculty and staff members from Liberal Arts and Sciences, Career and Technical Education, Academic Affairs, and Student Development. Most of the drafting was done by the Assessment Committee and a small group of interested faculty during Fall 2012 and Spring 2013. A targeted survey was conducted in Summer 2013 to gather feedback about the proposed SLO, and faculty and staff had several additional opportunities to provide feedback throughout Fall 2013. In December 2013, the new institutional SLO were finalized and presented to the Teaching and Learning Committee of the Board of Trustees. In Spring 2014, faculty will update MCS by mapping course objectives to the new institutional SLO. Students will begin seeing the new SLO on syllabi and displayed around campus in Summer and Fall 2014.

- The College has taken steps to improve the assessment culture by adding responsibilities to the faculty contract, involving faculty in the Assessment Committee and SLO revision process, and providing professional development opportunities for faculty and staff. Future professional development will reinforce the importance of assessment and provide resources for integrating course and program assessment.

- The following SEM 2.0 action steps begin to address achievement gaps:
    o Evaluate success of students of color mentorship program (offered by Intercultural Student Services) and offer program for up to 100 students in FY2013 (Action Step IV.2.d).
    o Implement at least two new student support programs offered by Intercultural Student Services department in FY2013 and FY2014, track and share results (Action Step V.1.b).
    o Using best practices reduce the number of achievement gaps between subgroups of students (e.g., status, race/ethnicity, gender) by FY2015 (Action Step V.1.e).

CRITERIA 5: RESOURCES, PLANNING, AND INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

The institution's resources, structures, and processes are sufficient to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its educational offerings, and respond to future challenges and opportunities. The institution plans for the future.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengths:

1. Strong processes (e.g., budget and financial planning, hiring of faculty and non-faculty continuous employees, and computer replacement) guide the College's resource allocation and operations in an institutionally effective manner.

2. The College has consistently maintained a zero-balance budget. Furthermore, the budget and financial reporting have been recognized as outstanding by the Government Financial Officers Association (GFOA).

3. Strategic planning documents are consistent with the mission and values of the College and operate compatibly to define direction for the College.

4. The College engages in regular monitoring and report of strategic initiatives.

5. Processes and decision-making include opportunities for faculty, staff, and student contribution and collaboration.

Challenges:

1. While strategic planning documents have been designed to operate compatibly, RVC lacked an overarching College strategic plan that would provide for more effective alignment of resource planning and allocation to College mission.

2. Awareness of strategic planning documents, resource allocation, and alignment of assessment to operational processes is inconsistent across the College community and limits engagement in decision-making by various groups.

3. Strategic initiatives and priorities have not consistently focused on institutional effectiveness outcomes.

4. The College lacks a comprehensive, consistent, and timely process for orienting new members of the Board of Trustees to the College and higher education.

5. Maintaining fiscal and human resources to support operations, program delivery, and new initiatives has been difficult given recent economy and changes in key College leaders after a long period of stability.

As a result of the self-study

- An overarching College Strategic Plan was developed by the Leadership Team through a series of planning meetings. The 2013-2015 plan used key findings and criteria subcommittee recommendations from the self-study process in conjunction with elements of the Strategic Enrollment Management Plan and the Academic Plan to develop five broad goals and annual strategic initiatives. Members of the Leadership Team are responsible for monitoring the College Strategic Plan and reporting progress to the Board of Trustees (and the College community) on a quarterly basis.

   Providing for a consistent and comprehensive awareness of these strategic goals and initiatives will be enhanced with the revised performance review process for non-faculty employees. Beginning in Spring of 2014, all employees will be required to align their performance goals to a goal or initiative

of the College Strategic Plan. This process will be done electronically, so employees will not be able to complete their plan without reading and identifying one of these.

Moving forward, the College Strategic Plan will lead the strategic planning cycle in other areas. Through the process of developing this plan and the newer iterations of the Academic and Strategic Enrollment Management plans, models have been developed to reflect the development of initiatives and priorities that focus on institutional effectiveness outcomes rather that completion of tasks.

- The development of a formal orientation process will be addressed as the institutional policies are reviewed and updated during the Spring of 2014.

- In the fall of 2013 the Leadership Team developed a position priority list to address fiscal and human resources needed to adequately support operations, program delivery, and strategic initiatives. This list has been reviewed with the Board of Trustees and will inform budget planning for the next fiscal year. Furthermore, a transitional plan has been implemented to address recent vacancies in key areas of College leadership, recognizing that this plan is not a long-term solution but providing the College an opportunity for smooth transition while continuing normal operations.