

Report to the Faculty, Administrators, Trustees, Students
Of
Harrisburg Area Community College
Harrisburg, PA

Prepared following analysis of the institution's
Periodic Review Report

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Evaluation of the Periodic Review Report of Harrisburg Area Community College

I. Introduction

Harrisburg Area Community College (HACC) a public, two-year institution was founded in 1964 to serve the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. HACC is a multi-campus, complex institution enrolling nearly 23,000 students in a service delivery area that includes a ten-county region in central Pennsylvania. The College operates five regional campuses as well as offering programs at several centers, the midtown areas; and the Virtual Campus. HACC offers Associate Degree in Arts (AA) in Science (AS) and in Applied Science (AAS). Additionally there are shorter term certificate and diploma options as well as non-credit, skill-building and workforce entry programs.

The Periodic Review Report (PRR) submitted in June, 2012 reflects the complexity of the Institution. The PRR provides a broad overview of the College's response to the decennial Self-Study conducted in 2007. The PRR Task Force led the Institution in a process that was comprehensive and inclusive. The Task Force began its work in early 2011, holding brainstorming sessions, conducting research, examining the Self-Study responses, sharing information and eliciting responses from the College as a whole. The members of the Task Force are to be commended for the robustness of the process as a whole.

The report provides confirmation of successful progress in several key areas mentioned in the 2007 Self-Study but also demonstrates significant remaining challenges with regard to assessment. The PRR provides evidence of honest self-reflection and also demonstrates the need for emphasis and substantial progress in the more challenging areas of assessment.

II. Responses to Recommendations from Previous Decennial Evaluation

The visiting team made one recommendation following 2007 Self-Study site visit, which was as follows: *“The College should develop a documented, organized, and sustained assessment process for individual courses to evaluate and improve student learning. The plan should include ‘clear, realistic guidelines and timetable, and should be supported by the appropriate investment of institutional resources’ (Characteristics of Excellence). With no definitive course or general education student outcomes assessment, the college is unable to document the use of assessment information as part of institutional assessment.”*

The PRR identified actions the College has undertaken since 2007 in an effort to implement and organize sustained assessment; however it remains clear that the College has been unable to fully realize its intentions regarding assessment. While numerous committees were charged with various pieces of assessment and professional development activities have focused upon assessment, the actual implementation of assessment activities to satisfy the 2007

recommendation appears to be lacking. In addition, the PRR referenced difficulties in managing assessment activities, particularly as the College experienced a reorganization that caused inconsistent leadership with assessment following the shifting of administrative roles and responsibilities. The most recent 2010 follow-up report to the Commission included a number of action steps that the College identified were needed to more fully realize its commitment to assessment; however, the College admits that it remains in the process of implementing those action steps.

*The readers **require** that the College commit to bringing the 2007 Self-Study recommendation to fruition by developing a documented, organized, and sustained assessment process for individual courses to evaluate and improve student learning, particularly with regard to general education outcomes. The College should assign responsibility and establish timelines for addressing their shortcomings with regard to the assessment of institutional effectiveness and student learning. The readers **require** that the College use assessment results to improve student learning and advance the institution. The readers **require** that the College continue to build a stronger culture of assessment that promotes institutional effectiveness, informs decision-making, and impacts resource allocation.*

III. Major Challenges and/or Opportunities

The PRR notes five major challenges and opportunities that were addressed (partially) as a result of the 2007 Self-Study.

Reorganization: A 2008 administrative reorganization, undertaken to further advance the ‘one college concept’ has netted ambiguous results. “The intent was to enhance the culture of one college, many voices, geographically dispersed, high community involvement, very inclusive and allow a consultative governance style.” The PRR continues, “In general, the effects of the reorganization are obscured by other changes in various area of the College that occurred contemporaneously in responses to the rapid growth in enrollments.”

Response to College Growth: The PRR notes the unprecedented growth from 2007 – 2010 resulting in the creation of the York Campus and the expansion of the Virtual Campus. “Growth at the York Campus was projected in a five-year model, however the actual growth was unexpected and was hard to gauge or predict for planning a response.” It is important to note the following, “Administrators at both the Virtual and York Campuses reported that growth has hindered their ability to simultaneously execute their curricular administrative responsibilities along with their campus administrative duties. These combined responsibilities were a product of the academic affairs reorganization that occurred with [the] general College reorganization.”

Financial Sustainability: A stated goal of the reorganization was to encourage each campus to become financially self-sustaining. However, as noted in the PRR, “Sustainability is challenged as the College transitions from a prolonged growth phase to a period of slower growth or decline. Historically, the College has relied on growth to meet expenses.” The College has prudently

examined and eliminated some low-enrolled programs. Scheduling strategies are being employed to improve the revenue to expense ratio.

Changes in Governance: The PRR discusses several initiatives with regard to Changes in Governance, most notably the Faculty Council's revision of the Faculty Constitution, and a combined administrator/professional organization. The College is to be commended for this initiative particularly as the stated goals are to foster interconnectedness and communication, and in the case of the Faculty Constitution, to "Improve faculty responsibility and role in College budgeting."

Administrative Changes: The PRR indicates that there have been several administrative changes, new administrators at each of the Campuses, a new department chair structure, changes with the Board of Trustees and the transition of a new President, Dr. John J. "Ski" Sygielski. Additionally, there has been a renewed focus on Personnel Transition and Leadership Development in anticipation of personnel turnover in the upcoming years as a result of retirement, attrition and organizational change.

The PRR included several recommendations with regard to Challenges and Opportunities:

- The Engagement Survey results indicate the College needs to consider improving the clarity of reporting lines, cost reduction, effective department operations, collegiality, and consistent communication and leadership in the implementation of efficiency initiatives.
- Institutional effectiveness data should be used to assess the results of SEM, financial sustainability efforts, and efficiency initiatives.
- Because of the evolution of governance within individual constituencies, this report reaffirms the 2007 Self-Study recommendation that the College should implement regular assessments of its governing bodies and the whole governance process.

The PRR addressed several convergent areas with regards to the challenges and opportunities facing the College.

*The readers **recommend** the College establish stringent timeline with specific benchmarks and deliverables for assessing College governance.*

The readers endorse the Colleges recommendations with regard to Challenges and Opportunities and commend the College for its self-reflection and initiative.

IV. Enrollment and Finance Trends

As noted in the PRR the enrollment and finance trends have been positive overall since the Self-Study in 2007. It is important to note the following trends, reported by the independent auditors in the Management Discussion and Analysis (MD&A) Report for the period 2007-2011:

- Enrollment growth and increased tuition were drivers for revenue growth
- Enrollment growth was accompanied by increases in operating expenses

- Federal grants contributed to increased revenue
- In FY 2011-2012 there was a reduction in State appropriation in the amount of \$3.3 million
- Capital additions and contributions have varied throughout the period

As noted earlier the College has experienced unprecedented growth over the last several years, due in some part, to the increase in the service delivery area. As indicated, enrollment growth was accompanied by an increase in operating expenses. The College prudently maintains an operating fund balance equal to three months operating expenses.

In keeping with national trends, the College experienced a decline in enrollment as well as declining and/or flat state a local funding beginning in 2011. As noted above, the College is looking to increase efficiencies with scheduling and improve revenue to expense ratios. HACC has recently begun to examine some deficit generating activities in non-credit programming.

The 2001-2014 Strategic Plan identifies tasks that will assist the College in the future by developing a set of financial measures to monitor the College's financial condition. This includes a more detailed analysis of the budget with the assistance of newly acquired budgeting software, monthly budget reports reviewed by Deans and upper administration, and a deeper look at cost efficiencies.

*The readers **suggest** a continued deep and consistent focus on budget planning and development. In particular the budget foundations (enrollment growth and tuition increases) must be assessed for their continued viability.*

V. Assessment Process and Plans

With regard to institutional assessment, the PRR revealed that most assessment activities have been in preparation for assessment with little assessment actually taking place. For example, in Table 4-1, Standard 7 – Institutional Assessment, the College addresses the areas of (1) strategic planning; (2) college organization; (3) students; (4) employees; (5) finance and college operations; and (6) development. In many areas, assessment processes have been identified but analysis is scheduled for a future date. While this represents an important step for the College, the pace at which the institution has responded to the recommendation in 2007 and moved assessment initiatives forward beyond 2007, despite regular reporting to the Commission, has been slow.

With regard to the assessment of non-academic areas, while Appendix P identifies critical areas for assessment, the PRR does not reveal how institutional unit-specific plans and data are used for improvement and contribute to institutional effectiveness. In addition, few examples were provided on how any of these services have been improved as a result of assessment or how the results from the assessments that have already occurred were used to inform decision-making and the allocation of resources. One recent example was reported in February 2012, where Strategic Enrollment Management-Enrollment Services (SEM-ES) discovered immediate solutions to the student web experience that could be adopted to reduce barriers in enrollment.

While assessment activities are identified in support of the move from data-driven enrollment to strategic enrollment management in 2011, substantial unit-level assessment in the non-academic areas lacks clarity.

With regard to the assessment of academic courses and programming, the College submitted monitoring and follow-up reports to the Commission to share the first round of assessment results, how the results were used, and provide longer-term goals with regard to assessment. The College indicates that AP718 defines core knowledge areas for general education courses, AP765 describes procedures for program and course assessment, and AP772 specifically addresses the assessment of the online student's academic experience. Yet, the College admits that not all departments are conducting course and program assessments.

In 2010, the follow-up report to the Commission identified action steps that were needed to institutionalize the assessment of student learning; however, the PRR states that due to changes impacting the College from 2009 to 2010, they were unable to implement these goals. While the Office of Institutional Effectiveness is engaged in improving the process of assessment of student learning at the College, the College has not been able to move forward effectively in support of documented assessment relating to student learning. The College admits that the overall number of courses and academic programs being assessed needs improvement. Appendix V offers multiple spreadsheets maintained by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, and review of these reveal few programs have produced documentation of assessment or program plans for assessment.

In 2010, the follow-up report to the Commission reported that the first General Education and Core Assessment pilot was developed to establish a baseline for student work across the ten core competencies. Of the ten, within the area of "core outcome," six areas were described in the PRR as "under development." The findings of the pilot failed to provide a comprehensive overview of general education. Next action steps have been identified in the PRR as a result of the pilot study, however; the next action steps seem misaligned with the current state of assessment. It is critical that the College identify the outcomes within each core knowledge area and then determine the most appropriate assessment approach to measure whether that core outcome has been met. The College should immediately focus upon establishing student learning outcomes at the course-level that can be assessed and lend to program-level assessment, which also needs to be systematized.

The College reports that it has adopted an academic program review process that lends to the assessment of potential new programs and existing programs through the Program Development Committee and the *Developing a Curriculum Model*, or *DACUM*. In the *DACUM* example provided, it is unclear how the "tasks," or student learning outcomes, identified for students translate into the curriculum or program outcomes. The Program Development Committee and the use of *DACUM*, while noteworthy, cannot serve as substitutes for actual course and program assessment.

The Office of Institutional Effectiveness has developed an Assessment Strategic Plan and recognizes that institutionalization of course assessment needs to be improved. While the readers commend the institution's commitment of resources to support assessment through the

creation of a new position and financial funding toward professional development, the actual foundations of assessment remain lacking and collaborative college-wide assessment efforts seem to have stalled during their period of reorganization. The Assessment Strategic Plan, developed in November of 2011, speaks more to preparations for assessment rather than actual engagement in assessment activities, which serves as additional evidence that the College is struggling to implement the 2007 Self-Study recommendation. The PRR reported an intention to have benchmarking accomplished by late-2012 to early-2013.

*The readers **require** that the College commit to bringing the 2007 Self-Study recommendation to fruition by developing a documented, organized, and sustained assessment process for individual courses to evaluate and improve student learning, particularly with regard to general education outcomes. The College should assign responsibility and establish timelines for addressing their shortcomings with regard to the assessment of institutional effectiveness and student learning. The readers **require** that the College use assessment results to improve student learning and advance the institution. The readers **require** that the College continue to build a stronger culture of assessment that promotes institutional effectiveness, informs decision-making, and impacts resource allocation.*

VI. Linked Institutional Planning and Budgeting Process

The PRR clearly notes that the Strategic Plan is aligned with the mission and vision of the institution and that it was developed by a college-wide committee, representing all constituencies at the College. The PRR states, “Since 2007, the College has built a connection between the strategic planning process and the College’s budget via the procedures governing the Strategic Plan.” And candidly states, “The College has informally linked strategic planning to the College budget in several ways:

- Personnel planning
- Capitol requests
- Enrollment projections
- Monitoring of the debt ratio
- College initiatives linked to the Strategic Plan”

It is important to note that the primary connection linking institutional planning and the budget process rests with the President’s Cabinet Administrators, working in both areas. Additionally, the PRR recognizes that this link must be strengthened and submits the following recommendation:

- 5-1 Revise the procedures pertaining to Strategic Planning and budgeting to make the link between the two formal. This includes making budget timelines reflect the connection between budgeting and strategic planning.

*The readers endorse this recommendation and **require** the College develop a formal connection that clearly delineates the connection between strategic planning and budgeting.*

VII. Conclusion

Harrisburg Area Community College is a complex, multi-campus institution that has prided itself on its ability to be responsive to the needs of the citizens of Pennsylvania. And to that end has expanded its service delivery area and created new programs and college offerings. HACC is justifiably proud of its efforts.

As HACC was growing and developing internal programs and services the political, cultural and economic landscape was changing on national, state, and regional levels. Never before have colleges been called upon to demonstrate such levels of accountability for the quality of our educational offerings, display fiscal acuity and nimbleness, and promote continuous improvement of all our efforts.

Taken as a whole, this PRR reflects an institution that has undergone what appears to be continuous reorganization over the last few years. This upheaval seems to have consumed much of the energy and resources of the institution. That is understandable. However, fundamental college operations such as the assessment of student learning and aligning strategic planning and budgeting must be accomplished, no matter what the circumstances. The PRR provides evidence that there are pieces of assessment in place, for both institutional effectiveness and the assessment of student learning, there are also indications that recent efforts have failed to systematize assessment. Additionally, HACC has gone to great lengths to include the campus community in budget development however, the next step, connecting the budget to the strategic plan is yet to be realized. HACC has accomplished much in each of these areas, and much remains to be accomplished.

Our suggestions, recommendations, and requirements are restated as follows:

Suggestions:

*The readers **suggest** a continued deep and consistent focus on budget planning and development. In particular the budget foundations (enrollment growth and tuition increases) must be assessed for their continued sustainability.*

Recommendations:

*The readers **recommend** the College establish stringent timeline with specific benchmarks and deliverables for assessing College governance*

Requirements:

*The readers **require** that the College commit to bringing the 2007 Self-Study recommendation to fruition by developing a documented, organized, and sustained assessment process for individual courses to evaluate and improve student learning, particularly with regard to general education outcomes. The College should assign responsibility and establish timelines for addressing their shortcomings with regard to the assessment of institutional effectiveness and student learning.*

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