

# **Mid-Cycle Peer-Evaluation Report**

## **Great Falls College Montana State University**

Great Falls, Montana

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

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## Institutional Assessment

During the evaluation visit to Great Falls College Montana State University, the evaluators met with committees, teams, and faculty members including:

- Executive Team
- Chief Academic Officer
- College Analysis Committee
- Institutional Researcher
- Director of Academic Advising
- Chair, Internal Academic Program Review
- Administrative Program Review Committee
- Director General Studies Division
- Developmental Math and Writing Pathways faculty
- Campus Planning, Budget and Analysis Committee
- Director of Academic Assessment

### Part I: Assessment Process for Mission Fulfillment

**GFC MSU Mission: The mission of Great Falls College MSU is to educate and inspire you.**

Great Falls College Montana State University (GFC MSU) is part of the Montana University System, but it is a stand-alone, two-year college that is independently accredited with its own mission, vision, core themes and outcomes.

GFC MSU has done a tremendous amount of work since its Year Seven Evaluation. Through college-wide efforts, the mission, vision, core themes, and core theme objectives and indicators were revised, and the Eight Abilities were rewritten and refined into five College Learning Outcomes (CLOs). In addition, programs, processes, procedures, and outcomes were revised and prioritized, and a systematic strategic plan was developed that links budget and planning to mission fulfillment.

Subcommittees of the campus-wide Campus Planning, Budget and Analysis Committee (CPBAC) re-evaluated strategic goals, core theme objectives, and metrics and then modified operational plans for each objective. Strategic enrollment management and an internal program review are included in the assessment of mission fulfillment.

The Administrative Program Review (ARP) was put into place to extend measurement and assessment of effectiveness to the non-academic and administrative arena. The committee's efforts in this direction are expected to take a year to put into place. During this initial period, the committee will determine how to assess administrative functions, set goals and objectives for those functions, and determine the appropriate focus and design when administrative areas differ widely in functionality and methods. During the second year, the committee plans to begin an ongoing process of data gathering to discover patterns, to generate self-improvement initiatives, and to support budget allocation requests with assessment data and performance analysis results.

Institutional Research is active at several levels that support effective assessment throughout the College. Assurance of data quality, assistance in data design for new metrics, review of appropriateness of data to its intended use, and education of data users are among the professional services the office supports. The institutional researcher is also an active participant in several of the governance units, both providing and gaining insight into the value of and the need for well-designed and carefully collected data in the various decision processes.

The Campus Planning, Budget and Analysis Committee functions as one of the core organizational bodies in the participatory management structure. It serves to integrate the strategic aspect of planning and the tactical aspect of resource allocation for implementation, as well as to conduct analysis necessary for effective feedback and plan adjustment. Strengths of this body include the cross-campus representation in its makeup and the open atmosphere within which it operates. As a result, academic services and student services are not siloed, and credit and non-credit programs have a close working relationship. However, it does not appear that the reporting, informational, and decision-making connections that tie the CPBAC and other management together are always completely clear to all parts of the college community.

The College Analysis Committee (CAC) draws from many of the other committees and teams to provide strategic focus on analysis of the efficacy of major strategic initiatives. It provides a valuable high-level service for analysis of process and meaning of assessment data toward understanding of College achievements.

The GFC MSU mission statement, combined with the vision statement, values, and core themes and objectives, makes the institution's intent evident, and together they guide the institutional processes and provide logical connections for analysis of institutional outcomes.

However, the evaluation team found that not all of the Core Indicators are defined appropriately enough to provide data for a logical connection to the analysis of institutional outcomes and to ultimately and accurately assess mission fulfillment. In some cases, it is questionable whether the data accurately measures the purpose of the core theme. In addition, Core Indicator three provides one measurement tool in the mid-cycle report, but the strategic plan lists four.

For example, Core Theme 2 is Transfer Preparation. One of the indicators is enrollment (indicator 2.1.1), but enrollment does not mean that students have succeeded in the program, and it doesn't indicate that the institution has succeeded in preparing students for entry into a four-year in institution. Likewise, the number of students retained in a program (indicator 2.1.2) does not assess the actual preparation of students to be successful at the next level of education.

The final two indicators for transfer preparation include the number of transfer graduates and student transfer. While these four indicators shed light on preparation, none of them measure actual student learning. GFC MSU uses terms such as "success" and "to the degree that" in the

narrative regarding Core Indicators, but it is unclear what those terms actually mean regarding outcomes assessment and mission fulfillment.

These are a few examples, but similar problems occur in each of the Core Indicators.

It is also unclear that College Learning Outcomes (CLOs) data (that does measure student learning outcomes) is included as core indicators leading to mission fulfillment. The institution needs to make sure that the Core Indicators efficiently and accurately demonstrate the achievement of intended outcomes and accurately demonstrate mission fulfillment.

## **Student Learning Assessment**

### **Part II: Student Learning Outcomes Assessment**

All general education/transfer courses are mapped from course learning outcomes to the CLOs, but it is not clear that program outcomes are mapped to CLOs. GFC MSU next plans to assist faculty in other programs to align course learning outcomes to the CLOs.

Faculty noted that the transition from Eight Abilities to College Learning Outcomes has not so much changed the practice of teaching at the College as it has provided a clearer picture of what faculty are looking at when evaluating student achievement and gives a clearer picture for students of the expectations instructors have of them.

Faculty focus groups provide significant input into the ongoing work on outcomes assessment. It was noted that state-level common course standards often include course outcomes that are not measurable. Faculty are active in efforts to define parallel outcomes in measurable terms that can contribute to mission fulfillment evaluation.

Faculty have been conducting course assessment over the years and using that information to improve courses and close the loop. Because of the enormous changes that have taken place and new processes and procedures implemented, there is little data available under the new process at the current time. The institution is working hard to get everything in place and data gathered to be ready for the Year Seven Evaluation.

The evaluation team found that there is no official link between assessment of CLOs and mission fulfillment. No clearly defined person or committee/team is/are responsible to provide that data when evaluating mission fulfillment. GFC MSU needs to clearly map the connection from course and program learning outcomes through the assessment process to mission fulfillment.

## Evaluation Overview

### Part III: Preparation for Year Seven

GFC MSU has made great progress in revamping its assessment and strategic processes, and while it has a ways to go before all the procedures and indicators are in place, this is expected given the vast changes being made. The administration, faculty, and other entities are working hard, and the evaluation team is confident that the College will be ready for the Year Seven Evaluation in 2022.

In its mid-cycle report, GFC MSU acknowledges that further work is needed to link all the assessments at the institution together to determine mission fulfillment. The prioritization process is in place and working, an effective internal academic review process is in place, and plans to assess the CLOs are in progress. Non-academic department assessments are still in development, but that is moving forward. Putting all of the assessment pieces together in a working process is underway.

To prepare for the Year Seven Evaluation, Great Falls College Montana State University needs to:

1. Document clearly the relationships that connect Learning Objectives assessment and Core Theme Objectives assessment, and make it clear how course, program, and college learning outcomes move through the mission fulfillment process.
2. Ensure that Core Indicators efficiently and accurately demonstrate the achievement of intended outcomes and ultimately lead to mission fulfillment.
3. Clearly illustrate how the institution's assessment processes fit/link together and lead to mission fulfillment.
4. Map the identity and data flow of all entities funneling information to the Executive Team for decision making.
5. Clarify the working relationships, information flows and pathways, and recommendation/decision responsibilities and authorities among the various committees and teams that make up the College governance structure.
6. Refine and implement non-academic department assessment processes and procedures.
7. Document the work done by the Academic Advising Office in evaluating the success of the advising staff's professional development and training activities.