Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness

Peer-Evaluation Report

Great Falls College

Montana State University

Great Falls, Montana

April 20-22, 2022

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

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II. Introduction

A three-person evaluation committee conducted a Year Seven Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness (EIE) visit to Great Falls College Montana State University from April 20 – 22, 2022. The virtual visit covered Standard One in response to the Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report submitted by Great Falls College to the Commission on February 24, 2022.

Great Falls College is a public, two-year institution of higher education affiliated with Montana State University. Under the purview of the Montana University System Board of Regents, the college offers comprehensive educational and service programs to meet the needs of the students and communities of north central Montana. The college offers many programs and classes in distance delivery formats to meet the needs of Montana's vast rural communities.

Students are supported by a full suite of resources including a full-service library and tutoring center. The college partners with the Community College of the Air Force to allow U.S. Air Force members to earn 15 of the 64 credits towards an Associate's Degree. The campus also maintains space for four-year programming provided from partner four-year institutions in other areas. Two major healthcare employers provide access to clinical instructors and space for student clinical practice.

Great Falls College offers associate degrees, certificates, and associate of applied science degrees in 27 programs. Also, the Center for Lifelong Learning offers non-credit personal enrichment classes and customized training for the community.

III. Assessment of Self-Evaluation Report and Support Materials

An electronic copy of the Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness (EIE) report was uploaded into Box approximately seven weeks prior to the visit. The 44-page document included sections addressing all required components of the EIE. The evaluation committee found the report to be generally well organized and informative. Appendices were included as links within the report and/or uploaded to Box. A more complete set of evidence such as governance committee agendas and minutes, and program review documents would have been valuable, but these were supplied during the visit when requested. The Accreditation Liaison Officer made sure that all requests of the evaluation committee were fulfilled right away.

In the weeks leading up to the visit, the Accreditation Liaison Officer was very helpful and on time with draft schedules and any requests that were made. This helped the evaluation committee be well prepared going into the visit.

IV. Visit Summary

The three-person evaluation committee met with members of the Great Falls College Executive Team, Accreditation Committee, Academic Affairs, Assessment, Communications and Marketing, Curriculum Committee, Library, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee, as well as the College Planning, Budget, and Analysis Committee. The evaluation committee chair also met with the Commissioner of Higher Education and the Board of Regents Chair.

During the visit, the meetings were well organized. Individuals and groups were accommodating to the evaluation committee's requests. When additional information was requested, it was provided quickly. The Board of Regents, administration, faculty, staff and students were very welcoming, forthright, and accommodating throughout the visit. Many took the time to work with the evaluators and aided the evaluation committee greatly in learning more about Great Falls College.

Three forums were held, one for faculty, one for staff, and one for students. The forums had limited attendance, with only three faculty and two students present to respond to questions during the faculty and student forums, respectively. The faculty and students that did participate were forthcoming with responses to questions, while the staff were more reserved during the staff forum. Increased participation would have aided the committee in learning about the campus culture and operations.

The evaluation committee sincerely thanks the college for its hospitality and support before, during, and after the visit.

V. Topics Addressed as an Addendum to the Self-Evaluation Report

The college responded to the Peer Evaluation Report of the Policies, Regulations, and Financial Review of March 2021, which concluded that the following two items needed improvement.

> Standard 2.A.1 Governance
>
> Needs Improvement: Board's calendar for reviewing institutional board policies and procedures.
>
> Standard 2.C.4 Policies and Procedures
>
> Needs improvement: Policies/procedures regarding secure retention of student records, i.e. back-up, confidentiality, release, protection from cybersecurity issues or other emergencies.

The Year Seven evaluation committee concluded that Great Falls College adequately addressed both items identified in the Peer Evaluation Report of the Policies, Regulations, and Financial Review.

To address the Standard 2.A.1 finding, a three-year review schedule was developed and implemented to review policies and procedures. At the time of the Year Seven site visit, the review was well underway, with 78 of the 162 policies reviewed.

To address the Standard 2.C.4 finding, a cybercrimes audit was conducted in October 2021. Together with the other Montana State University campuses, Great Falls College is working to upgrade its cybersecurity protections. The evaluation committee chair met with the Chief Technology Officer and the Executive Director of Operations to evaluate progress on the cybersecurity upgrades. In response to the MSU audit focused on cybersecurity, Great Falls College offered training specific to findings of the audit report using software (SoftChalk Cloud) linked to the Learning Management System (Desire2Learn) to faculty and staff with access to student records. In addition, the team was provided with the revised identity theft policy, which was updated in the past year.

Based on review of the evidence provided, the evaluation committee concluded that the college has satisfactorily addressed the findings of the Policies, Regulations, and Financial Review of March 2021.

VI. STANDARD 1

a. Standard 1.A: Mission

1.A.1

Great Falls College MSU's mission articulates a broad educational purpose and its commitment to student learning and achievement. The mission's purpose is appropriate to Great Falls College as an institution of higher learning:

"Great Falls College MSU provides high quality educational experiences supporting student success and meeting the needs of our community."

The mission statement was refined through a strategic plan revision process, and adopted in December 2019.

Academic programs at Great Falls College reflect demand in the local community and the region for healthcare providers, business and computer technicians, and the skilled trades. To ensure high quality educational experiences, the college emphasizes program-specific accreditation and third-party licensing and exams, connections to the community through program advisory committees, internal academic program review, and student learning outcomes assessment. Great Falls College further serves the community through its Lifelong Learning Center.

b. Standard 1.B: Improving Institutional Effectiveness

1.B.1

Continuous improvement at Great Falls College includes formal assessment processes including strategic planning, academic and administrative program review, and student learning outcomes assessment. The College Planning, Budget and Analysis Committee (CPBAC) oversees much of this work. The College Assessment, Analysis and Accreditation Committee (CAAAC) developed annual goals and action plans and reported progress to the CPBAC and the Executive Team.

The 2016-2022 strategic plan was revised after the NWCCU Mid-Cycle visit in 2018 and completed early so that a new strategic plan could begin in 2022. The college is currently in the developing stages of the new strategic plan, which is intended to be more inclusive and broader in focus than the previous plan, which was more operational. The Executive Team is gathering input from various campus groups in three categories: Opportunities — expand enrollment and engage communities; Inclusivity — remove barriers and provide support; Excellence — learn, assess, and innovate. There are plans to develop metrics to assess institutional effectiveness.

Concern: There is little history of ongoing and systematic evaluation of institutional effectiveness. Strategic plans have been altered every few years, resulting in a lack of maturity in evaluation processes to effectively inform and refine effectiveness, assign resources, and improve student learning and achievement.

Governing committees will be restructured to better align with the new strategic plan, with the leadership and vision of the new Chief Executive Officer / Dean, who started just 10 months prior to the site visit. The evaluation committee was provided drafts of the new committee structure, along with evidence that discussions are underway to implement the new structure on July 1, 2022.

Compliment: The new leadership has made planning and evaluation a priority, and has a clear vision for implementing processes and procedures to inform institutional effectiveness work.

The CPBAC will be restructured into a College Council that will ensure that policies and procedures support the college's strategic plan and mission. This group will facilitate communication across departments and divisions, providing input and feedback on college-wide initiatives and financial decisions. The College Assessment, Analysis and Accreditation Committee (CAAAC) will be restructured to a standing committee called Strategic Analysis and Reporting (StAR). This group will be led by the college's Institutional Researcher, whose role will be expanded to oversee institutional effectiveness. While there is a plan in place to align strategic planning and evaluation to budgeting and resource allocation, these processes were not clearly aligned at the time of the site visit.

Concern: Strategic planning and evaluation is not clearly aligned to budgeting and resource allocation.

Internal academic program review helps to align the college's academic programs with fulfillment of the college mission. The college reviews programs on a five-year cycle, and distributes annual program snapshots to program directors and division directors each fall. Each snapshot includes program enrollment, retention, degree production, job placement, and wage data. Program performance on each of eleven variables are graphed using quintiles to allow comparisons across all programs at the college. Program directors and division directors use the information to make decisions about their programs.

Compliment: The academic program review process at Great Falls College is data-driven and objective.

While the use of annual program snapshots has led to changes in academic programs, the academic program review process was not clearly connected to broader decision-making and assignment of resources. Through meetings with campus leaders, there appeared to be a weak connection between academic program review and institutional decision-making and resource allocation.

Concern: The connection between academic program review and institutional decision-making and resource allocation is lacking.

An administrative program review process was designed by a committee of employees from non-academic areas and was piloted in 2018. All non-academic areas participated in administrative program review the following year. The intent is to review all administrative departments on a three-year cycle as a component of continuous improvement and to support institutional resource allocation. The evaluation committee found this process to be very new, not well established, and not connected to other aspects of continuous improvement, decision making, or resource allocation.

Concern: The connection between administrative program review and institutional decision-making and resource allocation is lacking.

Student learning outcomes assessment is led by the director of teaching and learning innovation, who collaborates with a Student Learning Assessment Committee, program directors, department chairs, and individual faculty. Data is collected and assembled into an annual assessment report.

In general, the evaluation committee found that formal evaluation of mission fulfillment at Great Falls College was a newer concept, and there is a lack of maturity in the use of strategic planning tools. There was difficulty in connecting changes or decisions made directly to the strategic plan and continuous improvement processes.

1.B.2

The most recent strategic plan was adopted in December 2019. It includes three strategic goals with Actions (Objectives) and Metrics (Indicators). The goals in the strategic plan are tied to the state's performance funding model, which prioritizes retention and completion.

Strategic Goal 1: Promote student success, leading to increased retention and completion.

Strategic Goal 2: Increase enrollment and retention of General Education and General Studies students to ensure sustainability.

Strategic Goal 3: Strengthen the campus culture and work environment.

Only Strategic Goal 2 can be compared to regional and national peer institutions. A review of the final report of the 2016 – 2022 strategic plan did not show any such comparisons. The strategic plan formally expires in 2022, and will be replaced with a new strategic plan on July 1, 2022.

Concern: Indicators of mission fulfillment outlined in the most recent strategic plan are not evaluated in the context of, and in comparison with, regional and national peer institutions.

Concern: Significant time has been spent frequently changing the strategic plan. Some indicators and data seem to lack meaning, and there is limited data available to use for planning and decision-making.

The Montana University System has joined the Postsecondary Data Partnership, allowing all units of the Montana University System access to the data points to compare with other institutions, including gateway-course completion; credit accumulation rate; credit completion ratio; retention and persistence; transfers; completion rates and earned credentials at two-, four-, six-, or eight-year intervals; credentials conferred and time to credential. This will be an important data source moving forward.

1.B.3

The CPBAC leads strategic and annual (operational) planning and evaluation, as well as review of budget proposals. This group is composed of 25 committee members representing faculty, staff, and students.

The CPBAC is charged with gathering and interpreting institutional data to evaluate performance and effectiveness at the institution, division, and department levels. As part of the budget planning process, the executive director of operations compiles budget proposals and presents them to the CPBAC. The CPBAC makes budget recommendations to the Executive Team. Annual operating budgets receive final approval from the Montana Board of Regents at its September meeting.

The evaluation committee met with several members of the CPBAC, The Executive Team, as well as the Academic and Administrative Program Review Committees. The lack of connection between strategic planning, improvement efforts, and resource allocation became clear.

Much of the work on improvement initiatives takes place through the Joint Directors, which consists of representatives from the academic and student services departments. This group works together to implement strategies such as the 8-Week Advantage scheduling to enable students to enroll in the second block. Joint Directors also formed a First-Year Experience group which identified gaps in the first-year student experience, focused on increasing student retention. Such efforts have increased student success and retention, but are not clearly tied to planning and resource allocation. Individual campus initiatives are evaluated using separate data sources, rather than tying directly to the strategic plan.

Concern: There is a lack of consistent collection and review of data to regularly assess efforts, sharing data with the greater campus community, annual planning for improvement, and resource allocation. These activities are not clearly connected.

Concern: There was limited use of results of evidence-based assessment to make data-driven decisions around quality and effectiveness of improvement efforts leading to mission fulfillment.

1.B.4

Strategic plan metrics are reviewed by the CAAAC and reported to the CPBAC and Executive Team.

The internal Academic Program Review process includes annual program snapshots that track projected and/or actual job openings or transfer rate, median wages, degree/certificate production, retention, and annual FTE. In meeting with the committee, the evaluation committee learned that the program review process was revised to be much more objective, and the developmental aspects of the process were purposefully removed. The old process was very subjective, and did not allow for valid comparisons. For example, one aspect was the number of partnerships, with no consideration of the impact or scope of the partnership. The committee spent a lot of time evaluating narratives. "There was so much narrative, and what we needed got lost in the words," as one program review committee member put it.

The revised program review process is streamlined, objective, and results in clear action. The annual program snapshot data, along with a program self-evaluation are presented to the Internal Academic Program Review Committee, which makes recommendations to the division directors and the Executive Team. The committee also submits a summary report to the Faculty Senate and CPBAC each year.

Compliment: The restructuring of academic program review and the continued use of annual program snapshots has resulted in an efficient and effective system for reviewing the college's academic programs.

Campus initiatives such as the 8-Week Advantage are evaluated using separate data sources. After implementing a change to 8-week blocks of instruction, the college began collecting qualitative and quantitative data on the initiative. A report summarizing the results was delivered to multiple campus groups, as well as to the Montana State University Council and the Montana Board of Regents. The report notes that the first-time, full-time fall 2018 cohort had a 1-year retention/completion rate higher than the fall 2014-2017 cohorts, students maintained the same proportion of completed credits in spring 2020 despite COVID impact, first-time students completed college-level math and writing at a higher rate in the first year than previously, and students completed a higher proportion of Great Falls College courses with passing grades than previously.

Compliment: The college took some innovative risks with scheduling in order to make the college more accessible, with a focus on meeting the needs of adult learners. Data tracking of retention, completion rate of courses attempted, completion of college-level math and writing, and pass rates from before and after full implementation of the 8-Week Advantage show gains in student achievement.

The college employs several approaches to monitoring its external environment: engaging with industry and program advisory committees for all AAS programs; gathering national, state, and regional labor market data; participating in national data gathering (IPEDS); partnerships with secondary schools; community listening sessions; and tracking requests for programs not offered. The college uses both the Montana Department of Labor and Industry and EMSI Burning Glass databases as external information sources about employment openings, trends in new fields, and current and projected wages.

Compliment: The college has strong interactions with the broader Great Falls community. The number of community leaders (business leaders, Native American leaders, K-12, etc.) that are knowledgeable and engaged in the college is impressive.

c. Standard 1.C: Student Learning

1.C.1

Great Falls College offers programs with appropriate content and rigor that are consistent with its mission. The college has adopted the general education course learning outcomes for common course numbered (CCN) courses established by the Montana University System (MUS), thus supporting transfer.

The General Education categories and broad outcomes used by Great Falls College were established at the state level. The MUS Transferrable Core includes general education core outcomes in eight categories: written and oral communication, mathematics, humanities, fine arts, natural science, social sciences, history, cultural diversity. At least one course must include significant instruction in the cultural heritage of American Indians.

Programs outside of the general education curriculum collaborate with various stakeholders both institutionally and externally (e.g. external accreditors, advisory boards) to ensure student learning outcomes, program outcomes, and completion of degrees aligns with the standards in the respective fields and the institution's mission.

Conversations with the Student Learning Assessment Committee and others revealed that the MUS General Education Council that oversees the MUS Transferable Core has not met in a number of years, and there have been no recent efforts to update the general education core outcomes to ensure broad transferability across the state.

1.C.2

Great Falls College awards credits, degrees, certificates, or credentials for programs that are based upon student learning and learning outcomes. A review of Great Falls College's current learning outcomes assessment efforts and future plans showed a trend toward meaningful assessment. The curriculum mapping and assessment planning by departments and programs demonstrates the efforts to ensure breadth, depth, sequencing, and synthesis of learning.

1.C.3

Great Falls College clearly identifies and publishes the program and degree learning outcomes for all credentials in a number of locations. The college-level learning outcomes can be found online on the webpage with the institution's mission, as well as the assessment page. The program-level outcomes can be found in the catalog for each program. The college learning outcomes and program outcomes can also be found in assessment plans and curriculum maps created by each program and department on the assessment website. The evaluation committee verified that the expected learning outcomes for each course are shared with students on the course syllabus. Further, there is evidence that assessment tools are mapped to course, program, degree, and college learning outcomes. These are shared with students on course syllabi.

Compliment: The college has made efforts to meaningfully align and map the course outcomes with the respective program, degree, and college learning outcomes, as well as with assessment tools, and the mapping of outcomes is shared with students on course syllabi.

1.C.4

There is evidence that the Great Falls College's admission information is clearly displayed in an easily navigable fashion on the admissions website. Information on this page is accessed within just a few clicks. The requirements for admission are clear and comprehensive in the catalog. Programs with separate admissions requirements and applications have the information clearly posted on their respective websites.

Graduation requirements are published on the website and in the academic catalog, however it is not as easily accessible on the website as is the admissions information. However, a general search of the website for "graduation" does pull up a page with information on graduation, but this page does not include graduation or credential requirements. The graduation requirements on the website appear to be only available by logging into DegreeWorks. Credential and graduation requirements are available in the catalog on each respective program's catalog page under the "Program Requirements" tab.

Concern: Though the graduation requirements for each program are available in the academic catalog, it takes multiple clicks and searches in order to get to the requirements. A space on the website's main page linking to the program pages with some guidance would make this information much more accessible to individuals not well-versed in the language of higher education.

1.C.5

The institution has provided evidence of an effective system of assessment that evaluates the quality of learning in its departments and programs. It is clear that a lot of intentional planning has gone into the development of the assessment process by the Student Learning Assessment Committee and the director of teaching & learning innovation.

Concern: The learning outcomes assessment process remains focused on individual course level outcomes, though there is evidence that efforts are shifting toward the assessment of the college learning outcomes.

There is evidence that Great Falls College recognizes and values the central role of faculty in establishing curricula, assessing student learning, and improving instructional programs. Faculty representatives are on the Curriculum Committee, the Student Learning Assessment Committee, and the Internal Academic Program Review Committee. Based upon conversations with faculty, the Curriculum Committee, and others at the institution, the development of curricula seems to take place in departments by faculty and their respective directors and chairs. Throughout the visit, faculty indicated that they feel empowered to develop curricula, make decisions in their respective classrooms, and feel they have academic freedom.

Compliment: Throughout the visit, faculty noted that they feel respected and empowered to do their work in developing and delivering curricula.

1.C.6

Consistent with its mission, Great Falls College has established college learning outcomes. Based upon the documentation in the reporting provided by the institution, the college learning outcomes have evolved a number of times since 2016. The college learning outcomes, per the report provided to the evaluation committee, were last revised in 2019. Great Falls College consulted with Dr. Natasha Jankowski of the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) on the revision of their college learning outcomes and engaged in a process inclusive of stakeholders to determine the current college learning outcomes: critical thinking, communication, and professionalism.

Based upon conversations with the Student Learning Assessment Committee and information provided in the report, the institution's assessment processes are evolving toward the assessment of college learning outcomes, but the 2020 implementation of the college learning outcomes assessment was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Compliment: Though the assessment of college learning outcomes was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the institution did continue their previous assessment of student learning outcomes.

Concern: The assessment of college learning outcomes has not taken place, though efforts are underway for this work.

The general education courses align with the statewide MUS Transferrable Core, which includes core outcomes in eight categories: written and oral communication, mathematics, humanities, fine arts, natural science, social sciences, history, cultural diversity. At least one course must include significant instruction in the cultural heritage of American Indians. The MUS Core outcomes apply to the General Studies Certificate and the Associate of Arts or Associate of Science transfer degrees. The general education learning outcomes are assessed during the academic year established for that outcome. For example, Writing 101 has all five of the MUS Core written communication core outcomes listed. When the written communication outcomes are due to be assessed, Writing 101 would be on the schedule for that year (as would other courses aligned with the same outcomes). This assessment cycle is reflected in the assessment plan document shared with the evaluation committee, and was verified during meetings with faculty and staff.

Concern: The college recognizes that some of the MUS Transferable Core general education outcomes are not measurable. However, the college has not used the flexibility that does exist to develop more measurable learning outcomes.

1.C.7

Great Falls College's learning outcomes assessment efforts have been evolving. The work of creating a standing committee, the Student Learning Assessment Committee, chaired by the director of teaching & learning innovation, demonstrates a commitment to continuing evolution. Faculty do engage in continuous improvement of their practices based upon the student learning outcome self-evaluations and reflections. The college is in the midst of expanding learning outcomes assessment to include college learning outcomes. It is also refining the process to implement changes based upon findings from assessment cycles.

The student learning outcomes assessment is being revised to ensure the process is aligned with external accreditation of career and technical programs. Program assessment reports provide clear examples of proposed curricular and pedagogical improvements. However, assessment reports do not make clear links between assessment data leading to identification of a learning gap and the proposed improvements.

Compliment: The college recognized instances where assessment loops were not being closed and has taken action in planning and implementing processes to close these loops.

Concern: Assessment practices and measured results do not consistently inform planning and practices.

1.C.8

Great Falls College has transfer credit and credit for prior learning information that is clearly defined, published, and accessible. The college uses the Montana University System's policies governing transfer. Information regarding transfer is available in the catalog, and a transfer equivalency tool is available on the admissions website for transfer students. Policies related to credit for prior learning are available on the website as well.

1.C.9

Great Falls College does not offer graduate programs.

d. Standard 1.D: Student Achievement

1.D.1

Great Falls College uses traditional means to recruit high school students, maintaining positive relationships with high school districts. For example, weekly office hours are maintained at each high school in the district. Annual college and career fairs cover all three regions in the state. Adult learners are recruited through employers and community-based organizations. A Montana University System portal has become a prospecting tool.

Once admitted, students meet with an advisor to ensure an academic plan is individualized. Students stay with the same advisor throughout their experience, with the addition of a faculty advisor. The Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) Program Communication Team identifies ways to enhance outreach to potential students and to market new programs. Progress is checked and reported at the Joint Directors Committee meetings. This group includes representatives from all campus divisions and

departments. Admissions/Recruitment and Enrollment develops print and digital marketing materials and uses the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software system to communicate to prospects and applicants. The college works to ensure that its federal and state reporting requirements are made publicly available, including gainful employment and veteran's benefits. The college uses software to ensure accessibility. The academic catalog contains appropriate notifications regarding degree and program requirements.

1.D.2

Great Falls College has established indicators for student achievement and makes the indicators available to faculty and staff using Tableau. Consistent with its mission, Great Falls College has established regional and national peer institutions for comparison related to these indicators. Comparison institutions include a custom comparison group of 34 institutions from across the country for its annual IPEDS Feedback Report and comparison to other two-year institutions in the Montana University System (MUS). The MUS dashboards provide indicators for student achievement including, but not limited to, persistence, completion, retention, and post-graduation success. While these data are available, the evaluation committee could not find evidence that data are used to help promote student achievement and close equity gaps.

The college has not yet established a regular and systematic review of student success indicators with full involvement of faculty and staff. Such indicators of student achievement are not consistently disaggregated by race, ethnicity, age, gender, socioeconomic status, first generation college student, and any other institutionally meaningful categories that may help promote student achievement and close barriers to academic excellence and success.

Concern: Student success indicators are not used to evaluate the accomplishment of institutional objectives and close equity gaps.

1.D.3

All faculty and staff who undergo training can access the Tableau dashboards generated by Great Falls College, which report retention and completion rates that can be disaggregated by gender, age, veteran status, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity/race.

Montana University System (MUS) dashboards provide indicators for student achievement including, but not limited to, persistence, completion, retention, and post-graduation success. They are posted publicly (https://mus.edu/data/dashboards/) as well as linked through the Great Falls College Institutional Research webpage. These dashboards also provide disaggregation for American Indian/non-American Indian, PELL, gender, full-time/part-time and other status.

Great Falls College has incorporated some elements of the readily available dashboard data into internal academic program review. The primary goals of academic program review are to enhance the alignment of the college's academic programs with fulfillment of the college mission. To achieve these goals, internal academic program review procedures encourage strategic self-study and planning. Internal academic program review is based on self-inquiry, review, and improvement. The college reviews programs on a five-year cycle. This cycle may be accelerated for any program at the discretion of the chief academic officer based on a need identified in annual program snapshot data prepared by the institutional researcher. The annual program snapshots are distributed to program directors and division

directors each fall. The snapshot includes enrollment, retention, degree production, job placement, and wage data. Program directors and division directors use the information to make decisions about their programs.

Concern: While Great Falls College uses data in academic program review to compare and assess academic programs, the recommendations of academic program review are not clearly linked to the processes used for continuous improvement to inform planning, decision making, and allocation of resources.

1.D.4

Each year, academic and administrative units are provided data from institutional research to inform their program reviews. This data is widely available and allows the college to share unit performance for review, reflection, and committee evaluation.

Compliment: The initiation of transparent, objective processes for academic and administrative program review, evaluated by a shared governance committee, provides opportunity for gap identification at the department and program level. These reviews provide for comparative data across academic and administrative areas.

Great Falls College operates through a committee structure intended to ensure that continuous improvement in student achievement is addressed through its strategic plan. Committees involved in continuous improvement cycles include the College Assessment, Analysis, and Accreditation Committee (CAAAC), Internal Academic Program Review Committee, Administrative Program Review Committee, and the Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Committee. The College Planning Budget and Analysis Committee (CPBAC) has a role to involve various campus constituencies, allowing multiple voices to be heard. Responsibility for planning rests with the Executive Team, which has charged the CPBAC with gathering and interpreting institutional data to evaluate performance and effectiveness at the institution, division, and department levels. The CPBAC is also charged with leading strategic and annual (operational) planning and works with the college's leadership to strategically allocate resources to improve overall institution effectiveness and achieve the priorities as set forth by the strategic plan.

In practice, Great Falls College has not fully clarified the relationships and roles between these committees related to continuous improvement of student achievement. Specifically, the links between the communication/decision responsibilities of these committees to inform and implement strategies and allocate resources to mitigate perceived gaps in achievement and equity are lacking.

Concern: Results and recommendations from CAAAC, Academic and Administrative Program Review Committees, and Student Learning Outcomes Assessment committee are not clearly linked to the strategic planning or budget development processes.

VII. Summary

Great Falls College Montana State University remains committed to its mission as a two-year institution of higher education serving its students and community. The evaluation committee was impressed with the successful transition from the previous CEO/Dean to the leadership of the new Dean, who assumed the position on July 1, 2022. The evaluation committee received overwhelmingly positive feedback about the approach and strengths of the new leadership to guide the future of Great Falls College.

During the remote visit, the evaluation committee was not able to get a true sense of the campus culture and environment, but staff members commented that it was very collegial and "feels like family" and that there is a lot of support from top to bottom. The accessibility of the leadership, and focus on personal connections help set the tone of the college.

The college took some innovative risks with scheduling to make the college more accessible, with a focus on adult learners. The most far-reaching initiative implemented during this accreditation cycle was the 8-Week Advantage, which changed the course schedule to 8-week blocked schedules to promote student success leading to increased retention and completion. Other unique initiatives to support adult learners include One MSU and Connections 101.

Great Falls College remains committed to distance education and getting the classroom out to students, wherever they may be. Faculty and staff were very thoughtful about getting quality technology into the classrooms and offering more hyflex sections to keep students engaged during the changing conditions of the pandemic.

An academic program prioritization process held in 2015-2016 led to transformations in how the college uses data to review its academic programs. Annual academic program snapshots developed during the prioritization process were continued in the restructured academic program review process, which is more efficient and effective than the previous process. In addition, the college is doing a lot of good work around learning outcomes assessment and implementing high impact practices.

The college has strong connections with the broader Great Falls community, with lots of engagement from community leaders, including business leaders, Native American leaders, and K-12 partners. This helps provide more opportunities for students, such as internships and apprenticeships.

The two main areas of concern noted by the evaluation committee were 1) the lack of maturity in the systematic evaluation and planning process, and 2) the lack of disaggregated data use to close achievement gaps. As noted above, the implementation of a new strategic plan, the restructure of committees to implement and evaluate the plan, as well as the expansion of the role of institutional effectiveness will make Great Falls College well poised to address these shortcomings.

VIII. Commendations and Recommendations

Commendations

The evaluation committee commends the Great Falls College community for:

1. Establishing a collaborative and supportive environment focused on students.

2. Being innovative, flexible, and responsive to community workforce needs, expanding access to relevant programs, and intentionally scheduling courses and programs to increase student success.

3. Its expansion of remote instruction, support services, and engagement activities during the pandemic.

Recommendations

The evaluation committee recommends that Great Falls College:

1. Continue to develop an ongoing and systematic evaluation and inclusive planning process to inform and refine its effectiveness, assign resources, and improve student learning and achievement (NWCCU 2020 Standards 1.B.1 and 1.B.3).

2. Widely publish and use disaggregated indicators of student achievement to identify and mitigate gaps in achievement and equity through planning, decision making, and allocation of resources. (NWCCU 2020 Standards 1.D.3 and 1.D.4)