

Mid-Cycle Evaluation (Year 3)

Peer-Evaluation Report

Spokane Community College

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NWCCU Liaison to the Peer Evaluation Team:

Dr. Ron Larsen

Senior Vice President

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Introduction

Spokane Community College (SCC) is a public, comprehensive community college located in eastern Washington, primarily serving the citizens of the greater Spokane area, as well as four surrounding rural counties. SCC is one of two comprehensive community colleges within District 17, the Community Colleges of Spokane (CCS) District, which includes SCC and Spokane Falls Community College (SFCC). While the two schools are governed by a district-level board of trustees, each is independently accredited by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU). SCC offers associate degrees, one-year certificates, short-term certificates, basic education for adults, and community education. In addition, the college offers one 4-year degree, the Bachelor of Applied Science in Respiratory Care.

Spokane Community College (SCC) was officially established as part of Washington state's community and technical college system in 1963, after having been a vocational training facility since 1916. Spokane Community College's accreditation was last reaffirmed in 2020 after evaluation of its 2020 Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report. The college is now in the middle of a new seven-year accreditation cycle. This report summarizes observations made during an October 2023 Mid-Cycle Evaluation visit. The evaluators would like to thank Spokane Community College for the time spent preparing for the visit, for their hospitality, and for their flexibility in working with the evaluation team.

Visit Summary

The visiting accreditation team interviewed college leaders, including Community Colleges of Spokane senior leaders in Human Resources, Finance, and Facilities Management, and the Chancellor; Spokane Community College staff, faculty, and administrators, including members of the Student Learning and Assessment Committee (SLAC), Fiscal Strategy Committee, the Diversity, Equity and Global Awareness Committee (DEGA), and others; reviewed documents; and toured the facilities at Spokane Community College campus and Felts Field.

While onsite during the mid-cycle visit, the evaluation team was provided a tour of the SCC campus facilities and grounds, including a remote aircraft mechanics training location at the Felts airfield. The evaluation team found campus facilities to be well maintained, functional, accessible and safe. Many of the facilities toured by the team have received updates, modernizing them to promote learning and healthful working environments that facilitate and sustain institutional mission, academic programs and services. The facilities at SCC during the visit were found to be fully utilized by students and provided a vibrant atmosphere of learning and community.

Part I: Mission Fulfillment

While the evaluation team was encouraged by the engagement and positive energy of the staff, faculty, and administrators interviewed, the team found it challenging to assess SCC's status regarding Mission Fulfillment.

In July 2021, the Community Colleges of Spokane implemented a new four-year strategic plan. Community Colleges of Spokane's Mission Statement is: "To provide all students an excellent education which transforms their lives and expands their opportunities." Spokane Community College uses this Community Colleges of Spokane mission statement to guide its work.

Community Colleges of Spokane further defines its Strategic Priorities as:

Student Success: Expanding the recruitment, enrollment, retention and academic achievement of a changing student population through consistently high-quality academic programming and innovative student support models that best serve the needs of tomorrow's regional workforce.

Operational Excellence: Ensuring the continuous improvement of our financial sustainability through ongoing academic and student service innovation, consistent data-informed decision-making and the constant pursuit of organizational efficiencies that make us quick to respond to student needs and external opportunities.

Employee Success and Excellence: Advancing the engagement and change management capacity of a high-quality faculty and staff through purposeful recruitment, development and retention, consistent standards of performance and accountability, and the relevant, timely and transparent internal communication needed to best serve our students.

In August 2021, Spokane Community College adopted the CCS Mission and Strategic Priorities and recommended modifying its core themes into visionary goals in order to align with the CCS Strategic Plan. The SCC goals include Academic Transfer, Adult Basic Education, Career and Technical Education, and Student Success. Specific objectives related to these goals include increasing Adult Education transition to workforce and transfer programs, increasing student retention and completion, and closing equity gaps. Dashboards on the Institutional Effectiveness website provide data on Adult Education transitions, retention and degree completion, and equity gaps.

Taken together, these objectives, data, and trends could constitute meaningful goals and objectives by which Spokane Community College could measure its Mission Fulfillment related to its Strategic Priority of Student Success. However, if SCC is going to rely on the CCS Mission Statement and Strategic Priorities in defining its Mission Fulfillment, it should better explain the relationship between district and college planning and decision making and report on all the measures by which CCS Strategic Priorities inform SCC's definition of Mission Fulfillment.

For example, Strategic Initiatives on Operational Excellence and Employee Success and Excellence are determined at the district and Board level but operationalized at the college. The college supports these initiatives by participating in LEAN training and processes, campus climate surveys and focus groups, and in other ways. These Strategic Initiatives are also referenced in Program Review process. Yet it is unclear if these initiatives constitute part of SCC's definition of Mission Fulfilment, and what benchmarks or levels of improvement constitute success. As written, the Strategic Priorities of Operational Excellence and Employee Success and Excellence only apply and can be measured at the district level, and Student Success is the only Strategic Priority the college reports on.

This lack of clarity between district and college definitions and measures of Mission Fulfilment extends to college planning and decision-making. For example, the Chancellor's Cabinet includes the CCS Chancellor, SCC President, and two Vice Presidents, while the SCC Cabinet includes the SCC President, two Vice Presidents, and Director of Institutional Effectiveness. Feedback and recommendations from SCC college committees--including Student Learning and Assessment (SLAC), the Diversity, Equity, and Global Awareness Committee (DEGA), and Fiscal Strategies Committee, as well as recommendations and resource requests that emerge from Program Reviews—are forwarded to the SCC Cabinet through the Vice President of Instruction and Vice President of Student Services, but faculty and staff report confusion about how those recommendations are vetted, prioritized, and acted upon. They report a lack of feedback “closing the loop” on these recommendations and requests.

In conclusion, Spokane Community College would benefit from a more clear and comprehensive definition of Mission Fulfilment, clarifying which components of the CCS Mission are integral to its own and report on those in its Self-Evaluation.

Part II: Student Achievement

SCC has established institutional (general education) learning outcomes across all levels of degrees, which are encapsulated in five Key Literacies: applied learning, communication, information, intercultural, and quantitative. These outcomes are also referred to as distribution area outcomes for transfer programs or student learning outcomes for technical programs. Program level outcomes are mapped to the institutional learning outcomes, but SCC is currently working to map key courses to the institutional learning outcomes. Prior to establishing the Key Literacies, SCC had identified four college-wide outcomes areas, one of which was assessed each year. The Key Literacies have been established recently, and indicators have been developed, but associated outcomes assessment is still to be completed.

SCC uses the results of its assessment efforts across departments to improve learning outcomes. Representation on committees (Curriculum, SLAC, DEGA, TLC, Guided Pathways Advisory Committees) is cross-departmental, so those parties directly impacting student

learning are informed and can adapt their practices as needed. For example, the recently updated DEI strategic plan includes identifying gaps in predictive courses and “toxic” course combinations, fostering peer mentoring, and connecting students with community-based organizations to improve retention for the marginalized student groups. The DEGA committee helped to develop EDI outcomes that are shared by all Student Success courses.

In 2023, SCC identified seven peer institutions (two regional and five national) based on metropolitan area, enrollment, and program offerings. The indicators are aligned with the college’s mission and four supporting goals. SCC selected IPEDS data for comparison of persistence, retention, and completion rates but does not include a comparison of postgraduation success, citing a lack of available data. SCC uses the same data set to compare its persistence and retention to that of the selected peers based on its interpretation that “students persist, and the institution retains.” Additionally, SCC developed a Benchmarking for Equity dashboard, where the information can be filtered to show institution-specific performance and is disaggregated by race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, and first year student status. The evaluation team could not find disaggregated information on age and first-generation college students for these indicators. The evaluation team encourages SCC to include that disaggregation for comparison with peer institutions.

The Equity Index includes additional SCC data pertaining to student achievement. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness shares student achievement information with the larger college community at the beginning of each academic year during convocation. The Office has representation on all major committees to consult and disseminate the data, thereby facilitating their work and improve student success. SCC’s disaggregated indicators of student achievement are available on the College’s website on various dashboards (Benchmarking for Excellence and Equity Index).

The demand for course modalities shifted significantly over the last years; currently, approximately 45% of classes are offered in an asynchronous online format and 70% of all classes use educational technology and publish a course shell. Adult basic education and Highschool+ programs reported a drastic increase in their student populations’ online enrollment showing strong completion rates.

To support student success, faculty work closely with the district’s e-Learning team and the TLC. The team includes success coaches who help students navigate the online environment and troubleshoot any problems as needed. Additionally, the team offers an online support course, teaches how to be a successful online student, hosts online events, and coordinates online peer mentoring. Finally, the early alert system calls attention to students not able to overcome challenges in their online learning.

SCC’s processes and methodologies for collecting and analyzing indicators of student achievement are transparent, and departments utilize the information to develop strategies and allocate resources that will mitigate any achievement gaps. For example, the TLC has a dynamic approach in their collaboration with faculty, as they seek to promote student success by ensuring faculty success. Similarly, EDI efforts, such as equitable grading and counseling

underserved student populations, and many of Student Services initiatives aim to close the achievement gaps.

Part III: Programmatic Assessment

Instructional program reviews are conducted every five years. Program faculty complete the review template with the support of data provided by the Institutional Effectiveness Office. The program chair and faculty meet with the VP of Instruction to discuss the review and determine a list of action items with the goal of making improvements to the program. In the past, a progress check on the action items occurred approximately six months after the review; department faculty may have followed up informally until the next program review. However, no formal process was in place to ensure that action items were completed. Recently, the College hired an Instructional Services Manager, who will meet with departments periodically to close the loop and make sure that action items are completed. Under leadership of SLAC (Student Learning and Assessment Committee), the program review template was designed to accommodate career technical as well as transfer programs and clearly outlines the pertinent sections for the respective faculty preparing the review.

Program Reviews have resulted in several changes; for example, the English department modified a course placement tool and was able to reduce the number of students in developmental education, while maintaining college level course completion rates. For another program, the review revealed that it was not marketed adequately. Subsequently, program faculty worked with the advisory committee, which included industry representatives, and was able to increase outreach and promotion. Last, a review identified the need for consistent foreign language tutoring, and the faculty member is currently working to secure funding for the tutoring positions.

Faculty have a central role in the assessment process: committees comprised largely of faculty oversee assessment, the program review process, and curriculum changes. Any assessment at the course and degree level is faculty driven. Finally, the TLC (Teaching and Learning Committee), whose membership is also mainly faculty, supports assessment efforts by providing instructional resources and workshops, for example on the Campus Development days.

Student Services conducts regular assessments and recently updated their program review template. An example of using results for improvement, the financial aid department created a one-stop shop, which provides quality service and timely information to students.

In response to recommendations of the Guided Pathways Steering Committee, SCC has reduced many of its programs to 90 credits to support student completion and graduation. Guided Pathways have been organized holistically into pillars and practices that aid student completion and strengthen student learning.

PART IV: Moving Forward

In addition to its reporting on its planning and assessment efforts, SCC also reported on initiatives in student services, enrollment management, and diversity, equity, and inclusion.

SCC intends to make improvements in its enrollment management and student engagement processes through implementation of a CRM application, improved new student onboarding, and ongoing systematic assessment of its student service functional areas. The recruiting suite has been largely implemented and enhances outreach, dual credit, and registration through its automatic messaging and email response features to student inquiries. Students are connected with pathway specialists who help them understand the nature and requirements of their programs and are a point of contact and general guidance. In addition to these specialists, various counselors in the areas of adult basic education, mental health and general guidance shepherd students through the process from recruitment to registration. The SCC catalog and the website also outline information pertaining to the various programs requirements to include graduation and transfer policies.

New students are oriented in several ways: Bigfoot - First Step (a resource page), Bigfoot 101 (required online classes designed to familiarize them with SCC), Future Sasquatch Day, and Guidance 102 (optional, in-person classes, that address career planning and counseling).

Results of the above efforts are yet to be assessed.

Program Review in student services have been ongoing since 2014, but a new model has just been introduced. Any improvements in service delivery and their impact on recruitment, enrollment, and retention can be reported in the upcoming comprehensive self-study.

Similarly, the reconstituted DEGA committee is bringing new energy to diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives at SCC. The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Strategic Plan 2021-2023 aligns with CCS and SCC values and lists dozens of specific action items to support its goals. The DEGA committee hopes to influence the District Equity Committee and the next iteration of the CCS strategic plan, to be renewed and extended in 2025—another reason why the relationship of SCC committees, leadership, and planning processes to CCS planning and decision-making needs to be clarified

PART V: Addendums

Recommendation 2: Fall 2020 Mission Fulfillment and Sustainability. Disseminate financial information to stakeholders for the purposes of financial planning and resource management. (2020 Standard[s] 2.E.2)

During the 2020 Mission Fulfillment and Sustainability peer evaluation, it was noted that in 2015, SCC implemented an Oracle based Enterprise Resource Management (ERP) system,

ctcLink. As a result of system limitations, the college lacked access to timely and reliable financial information, which subsequently led to NWCCU Recommendation 2 and 3. During 2023 mid-cycle interviews with senior financial administrators from the CCS district office (Community Colleges of Spokane - CCS), it was also learned that until 2021, year-end financials had not been closed for the four years after implementation of ctcLink.

To address Recommendation 2 in its fall 2023 report, SCC reported that it currently assigned two Budget and Accounting Senior Analysts from the District office who provide monthly updates to budget center managers using Excel spreadsheets. SCC also reported that the Budget and Accounting Senior Analysts provide necessary budgetary feedback to ensure that budget center managers have timely and relevant information to make sound financial decisions.

During the 2023, mid-cycle visit, the evaluation team asked senior financial personnel at the institution to explain what had transpired since the 2020 visit with regard to the ERP, and the lack of timely financial information being provide to budget center managers. SCC indicates that it is continues to utilize the ctcLink ERP, and that budget center financial reports are generated from queries in the ERP, which are then uploaded to a dashboard on the campus intranet system. SCC indicates that these uploaded reports are capable of providing real time data reflecting expenses, balances, and variances in managed accounts. Budget center managers are also provided monthly budget statements in Excel, which show month-end closing of their accounts, and overall financial budget position relative to their annual budget allocations.

Budget center managers interviewed by the mid-cycle evaluation team reported that when budget reports are received, they include adequate information about their budget position. However, budget center managers also indicated that they are still not receiving budget reports in a timely manner. During the visit, it was reported to the evaluation team that budget center managers had not received financial reports for the month of June 2023, showing their final budget performance for the year ending FY23. It was also noted by budget center managers that they had not yet been provided with their final approved budgets for FY24.

Budget center managers interviewed by the evaluation team cited problems with employee turnover and potential problems with the cumbersome ctcLink Enterprise Resource Planning system as possible causes for the lapse in budget reporting. To that issue, the 2023 evaluation team learned that one of the Accounting and Budget Specialists was hired by SCC just six months ago, while the other had only been recently assigned to SCC by the CCS district office. One of the Accounting and Budget Specialists assigned to SCC did indicate that the College may not be fully implementing ctcLink capabilities, which might help solve some of the problems associated with institutional financial management.

Recommendation #3: Institutional Planning - 2010 Standard 3.A.1, 3.A.4; Mission Fulfillment, Adaptation and Sustainability – 2010 Standard 5.A, 5.B; Improving Institutional Effectiveness- (2020 Standard 1.B.1, 1.B.3)

The 2020 peer evaluation team observed that while there was evidence of planning focused on Mission Fulfillment, and SCC personnel had a good understanding of the CCS Strategic Plan and the Institutional Effectiveness Plan, there were no examples of operational, unit, or budgetary plans offered by SCC in their self-evaluation report. The 2020 peer evaluation team speculated that the lack of the budgetary documents was related to the inadequacy of real time budgetary information during the ctcLink ERP implementation. These issues led to a peer evaluation concern that SCC lacked full capability to allocate its resources effectively. SCC responded at the time that developing unit budgets was a high priority for the college. The 2020 Peer evaluators also noted that the newly formed Fiscal Strategies Committee, while offering helpful input on budget creation and resource allocation, resulting budgeting documents at the institution was not yet fully developed to ensure mission fulfillment.

To evaluate planning changes made by SCC, and to gauge the maturation of SCC planning and reporting initiatives since 2021, the 2023 peer evaluation team separately interviewed senior financial personnel, the Budget and Accounting Senior Analysts, and members of the Fiscal Strategies Committee (FSC), which included a large number of budget center managers.

The FSC is made up of a diverse group of stakeholders which include faculty, staff, and administrators, many of whom are also budget center managers. FSC assisted in creating the new budget timeline, which begins in February and ends in mid-May. The iterative process includes input from budget center managers regarding fee requests, IT and other equipment needs, and requests for new personnel. The FSC is instrumental in preparing guidelines for budget creation, long term visioning, and assistance with allocation recommendations for the president's annual innovation fund. Conversely, a group of college administrators, deans and directors prepare the proposed budget for final approval by the College Cabinet such that it is aligned with the overall mission of the institution.

In speaking with members of the Facilities Strategy Committee (FSC), there appeared to be a universal understanding of the committee charge and its role in budget creation. As a group, members felt that inclusiveness had been improved through its committee's functions, and that members were respected and listened to by the administration. A few comments inferred that the administration was not always transparent about why some programs were cut, citing carpentry and civil engineering technology as examples. However, it was also noted that those programs had been cut many years ago, which was prior to the formation of the FSC. Accordingly, the evaluation team asked FSC members if they felt that their committee could serve as a good venue for informing the administration that it would like to see a higher level of transparency about final resource allocations. Members appeared to believe that within the current cultural environment at SCC, its committee could engage in this type of conversation with senior administration members.

In addition, the evaluation team finds that SCC faculty and staff engage in ongoing continuous improvement efforts in teaching and student services. SCC's data dashboards, program review process, and Fiscal Strategies Committee are significant steps toward addressing this recommendation. However, faculty engagement in continuous improvement of curriculum, instruction, and inclusive teaching practices are not well documented, and faculty do not clearly understand the connection between their efforts and the more formal assessment and program review processes. Student learning assessment is perceived by at least some faculty as an administrative requirement rather than an authentic process of data informed self-reflection. Lack of clarity about the efficacy of faculty recommendations and resource requests, lack of administrative feedback, and not "closing the loop" contribute to this disconnect.

Even deans and directors in the College Leadership and Planning group had difficulty articulating the college's definition of Mission Fulfillment and understanding the relationship of assessment to planning and resource allocation. As stated earlier in this report, confusion about how mission fulfillment is defined and about who makes decisions, by what criteria, and how they are made was pervasive outside the senior administrative level. Some attributed this disconnect to turnover in leadership and other factors. Nevertheless, clarifying these processes and the roles of various participants will be essential to addressing this in a comprehensive report.

Finally, SCC leadership chose not to invite faculty and staff, including leaders and active participants in important faculty and staff committees, to opening or closing sessions of the evaluation team visit. This choice illustrates and exacerbates the perception of a significant disconnect between senior administrators and other college leaders. It is also a missed opportunity to inform and educate college staff about the planning, assessment, and accreditation processes.

Appendix

The NWCCU requested that while the evaluation team was on site, that it also review Physical Resources, Human Resources, and the Library as a primer to the pending Year 7 self-report. The following entries are included in this report for advisory purposes only. The evaluation team extends its gratitude to the departments of Facilities, Library, and Human Resources for the time it spent with the evaluation team, and the openness that it shared with regard to the essential functions it provides to the institution.

Human Resources (2.F)

The CCS district office employs two human resources personnel who administer comprehensive human resources management functions for faculty, staff and administrators at SCC. Human Resources provides readily accessible information regarding conditions of employment, rights and responsibilities, as well as procedures for evaluation, retention and termination of

personnel. Required and elective trainings are offered, or facilitated through Human Resources for all SCC employees. Human Resources also tracks trainings administered, as well as performance evaluations in a CCS database. Elective professional development opportunities for faculty are budgeted and managed at the academic department level, although sabbatical information is retained by Human Resources. Other elective training records may be added to the employee's personnel file if requested by the employee. CCS reports Employee evaluations are systematically administered and recorded in accordance with district policies that establish criteria and frequency of required evaluations for each class of personnel employed by the institution.

As with many educational institutions, loss of experienced personnel during the COVID pandemic, and a national trend of dwindling qualified applicant pools among some trades and professional areas within the workplace, have presented challenges to SCC. However, SCC was fortunate that natural employee attrition during the pandemic helped the institution deal with declining enrollment revenues, and that this impact averted the need for a reduction in force by the institution. SCC reports that the numbers of its personnel are back to similar overall staffing levels that it had pre-COVID.

As a school that offers apprenticeship credentials, and substantial hands-on training programs, such as aviation maintenance technology and diesel and heavy-duty equipment, SCC was more resilient during COVID, enabling the school to retain instructional personnel by restoring classes more quickly once it could make adjustments in personal protection requirements. Some employee turnover has negatively affected SCC. The loss of the SCC Budget and Accounting Specialist was cited as a potential reason that budgetary information is not being provided in a timely manner. The district office has responded by assigning a second Specialist to SCC, in addition to replacing the open position. Overall, SCC appears to employ sufficient numbers of experienced faculty, staff, and administrators to execute educational objectives, operational responsibilities, oversee policies, and to ensure the integrity and continuity of its academic offerings.

Library and Information Resources (2.H)

While the Library serves primarily SCC, it also serves much smaller constituencies that include some Spokane Falls Community College students, as well as a small number of the general public within Spokane. The size and quality of the physical space for the library appears to be adequate for meeting the learning objectives desired by SCC faculty and students. The Library employs a dean, and four full-time librarians, who are also assigned assistant librarians as direct reports. Librarians and their immediate reports are assigned to specific academic departments and training curricular instructional areas of SCC. The SCC library also facilitates student learning by providing local and remote meeting and study spaces, as well as tutoring service for all of SCC.

The SCC library cites numerous resource sharing opportunities that it utilizes to broaden the academic and training breadth of its offerings. SCC librarians and their staff meet regularly with faculty and instructors to advise them on available services, facilitate provisioning of needed resource materials for planned coursework, and to offer online course embedment services when desired. Embedded course work by librarians may include class instruction on resource acquisition for how to use the library, or introduction for conducting research.

The SCC library has been indirectly impacted by the construction of the new freeway, and a lack of campus signage to cue faculty and students to its location may also detract from the recognition of the library as a prominent campus resource. However, the existing library physical space is inviting, open, well maintained, and appears to provide available resources of sufficient quantity and quality to facilitate institutional mission, and to support academic and training programs as well as other relevant services required by the institution.

Physical and Technology Infrastructure (2.1)

While onsite during the mid-cycle visit, the evaluation team was provided a tour of the SCC campus facilities and grounds, including a remote aircraft mechanics training location at the Felts airfield. The evaluation team found campus facilities to be well maintained, functional, accessible and safe. Many of the facilities toured by the team have received updates, modernizing them to promote learning and healthful working environments that facilitate and sustain institutional mission, academic programs and services. The facilities at SCC during the visit were found to be fully utilized by students and provided a vibrant atmosphere of learning and community.