Mid-Cycle Evaluation (Year 3)

Peer-Evaluation Report

Spokane Falls Community College

Spokane, WA

April 22-23, 2024

NWCCU Liaison to the Peer Evaluation Team:

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A confidential report of findings prepared for the

Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities

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Introduction

On behalf of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU), the evaluation committee reviewed Spokane Falls Community College's (SFCC) Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation Report and conducted a site visit April 22-23, 2024. The evaluation committee consisted of Dr. Jason Pickavance, Interim Provost at Salt Lake Community College; Dr. Lori Wamsley, Librarian/Instruction Coordinator at Mt. Hood Community College; and Dr. Leanne Frost, Executive Director of Instruction and Student Success at Great Falls College Montana State University. The NWCCU liaison was Dr. Ron Larsen, Senior Vice President, NWCCU.

Spokane Falls Community College, located in Spokane, Washington, is a comprehensive community college offering certificates, associate's, and applied bachelor's degree programs. SFCC is part of a community college district that includes Spokane Community College and a chancellor who oversees both institutions. SFCC is largely focused on transfer programs, with two-thirds of their students enrolled in programs designed for transfer to baccalaureate, degree-granting institutions. The remaining third of students participate in the college's professional and technical programs.

The purpose of the Mid-Cycle visit was to review and provide feedback to SFCC on their preparation and readiness in meeting the requirements and standards for the comprehensive year seven Mission Fulfillment and Institutional Effectiveness, reaffirmation of accreditation report and visit. The committee also reviewed prior recommendations from the Spring 2021 visit to provide observations to the NWCCU Commission regarding the status and progress in addressing those recommendations.

The evaluation committee received a Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation Report. The report included a significant number of links to various resources including website links and data. The evaluation committee recommends making those links readily available on the website for the year seven visit instead of putting them behind an Office 365 wall. NWCCU asks for both Mid-Cycle and EIE reports that ALOs "ensure that all internal links within the Self-Evaluation Report are functional and independent of institutional portals, servers, or websites." The committee also recommends SFCC use Excel to create more readable data visualizations for the report instead of relying on screen captures. The committee generally found the screen capture data in the report difficult to read. The evaluators appreciate SFCC's work to make supplementary materials available and to answer questions during and prior to the visit.

Visit Summary

The site visit was well-structured and provided opportunities to meet with faculty, staff, and administrators relevant to evaluating Standard 1 and Recommendations 1 and 2. Meetings were informative and provided adequate time for team members to address prepared

questions and follow-up questions as needed. Discussions focused primarily on the following areas:

- Mission and Institutional Effectiveness
- Student Achievement
- Student Learning and Assessment
- Follow-up to recommendations related to institutional effectiveness and assessment and program learning

The evaluators greatly appreciate the time campus members provided to contribute and support the Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation Report and to answer questions. The team would like to provide a special thanks to Bonnie Glantz, Cheryl Pickett, and Megan Gibson for their engagement and support in advance and throughout the visit. The evaluators met with a large number of individuals and groups throughout the institution including the following:

- Executive leadership
- The Guided Pathways Operational committee
- Governance Council
- The Search Advocate leadership team
- The Learning Outcomes Assessment coordinators
- Budget Governance Council
- Diversity, Equity, and Global Awareness Committee
- Facilities
- Planning, Institutional Effectiveness and Research
- Lead faculty of the Guidance 105 project
- Human Resources
- Disability Access Services
- Faculty Librarians
- Deans
- Center for Engaged Teaching and Learning coordinators (current and incoming)
- E-Learning District Director
- Admissions and Advising leadership
- Faculty from cohort 1 and 2 of program review
- Pullman Campus staff

Part I: Mission Fulfillment

SFCC is one of two community colleges in the Community Colleges of Spokane (CCS) District 17. The mission and strategic plan are set by the district. The CCS mission is "To provide all students an excellent education that transforms their lives and expands their opportunities." The CCS mission statement effectively defines the broad educational purpose of SFCC and its commitment to student learning and achievement (1.A.1).

While the district sets the mission and strategic plan, SFCC has developed what it calls an "operational plan." The operational plan describes how the district strategic plan is operationalized at SFCC. SFCC has developed an Alignment Matrix that shows the relationship between the district priorities and the college operational plan. Both the strategic priorities and the SFCC operational work logically flow from the mission. In sum, CCS and SFCC have developed a relevant and coherent strategic and operational plan that directs the work of the college in achieving its mission (1.B.1).

Because SFCC is accredited as a single institution, having a district-authored strategic plan presents certain challenges. SFCC must address the strategic priorities of the CSS plan. While the strategic priorities are general enough to encompass several operational plans at SFCC, the evaluators observed that the operational work was not always as tightly coordinated with the district strategic priorities. In some cases, pre-existing initiatives and programs (like the Search Advocate program) were slotted in to align with the district strategic priorities, but they were not the product of those priorities. This is not in and of itself a problem, but the evaluators observed that the district office authored metrics and gathered data that were not readily available to SFCC.

Despite the challenges presented by the district model, SFCC possesses a coherent institutional effectiveness process (1.B.2). The evaluators believe that process is most effective for the strategic priority of student success. Washington State Guided Pathways work provides a well-developed student success framework and metrics with a clear logic model (1.B.3). The Guided Pathways approach appears to be working well for SFCC, not only in terms of making progress on metrics like timely student completion but also in terms of helping the college establish important pieces of institutional effectiveness, student achievement, and programmatic assessment processes that all contribute to mission fulfillment. The Guided Pathways initiative has pushed SFCC to do significant work when it comes to aligning program outcomes, revising the admissions and intake process, and reorganizing student support across student and academic affairs.

Frameworks for the remaining two strategic priorities at SFCC feel less well-developed. The evaluators did not see published reports, data, or dashboards for the metrics associated with Operational Success or Employee Success. This is where the district model hinders SFCC's ability

to do institutional effectiveness work. Perhaps a dashboard related to these strategic priorities could be developed and published to help the internal community and evaluators track SFCC's progress toward achieving these priorities. The evaluators believe the connections are there and just need to be surfaced. Future evaluators will expect to see clear reporting and performance indicator data for Operational Success and Employee Excellence. For now, the evaluators believe the metrics and data for these priorities need to be further refined.

The evaluators see SFCC's new program review process as playing an important role in their developing institutional effectiveness model. They understood the newly developed governance structure to be the place where the institutional effectiveness process engages appropriate constituencies within the college (1.B.3). Both the program review process and the Governance Council represent strong efforts toward satisfying standards around institutional effectiveness and mission fulfillment. However, the process still feels somewhat fragmented to the evaluators. Although evaluating mission is in the charge of the governance council, it did not seem members of that council had fully internalized that element of the charge. In addition, the evaluators believe the SFCC program review process would profit from being further integrated into the governance council or affiliated committee.

With respect to the governance structure, the evaluators also see opportunity to more effectively align the work of the governance committees (DEGA and Budget) with college strategic priorities. The work of DEGA in particular felt ad hoc and not coordinated with the strategic work of the college. The evaluators believe the Budget Governance council shows real promise when it comes to supporting a system of assigning resources.

SFCC's planning process and its processes are generally inclusive and provide ample opportunity for appropriate constituencies to weigh in (1B.3). SFCC should take pride in its inclusive processes. The evaluators observed a collegial and collaborative atmosphere throughout the visit.

Through district and college leadership, SFCC weighs its strategic position, but the evaluators suggest SFCC better leverage the Governance Council in this work. This might present that council with an additional charge that stands it up as a playing a (1.B.4).

Summary: SFCC's mission articulates its purpose and captures the college's commitment to student success and achievement (1.A.1), and in order to achieve that mission, SFCC has developed a coherent strategic plan with meaningful goals and indicators of those goals (1.B.1). The evaluators observe that Guided Pathways is working particularly well for SFCC, but the strategic plan feels less effective when it comes to the other strategic priorities. The pieces are in place for having a strong institutional effectiveness and governance process for the year seven visit. The Governance Council and its affiliated committees and the program review process are strong pieces and should be further developed and integrated. The evaluators see

several emerging structures and practices that should culminate in a strong institutional effectiveness framework going forward.

Part II: Student Achievement

SFCC's work implementing Guided Pathways helps the institution meet several of NWCCU's Student Achievement standards. Not only does the college "recruit and admit students with the potential to benefit" as stated in standard 1.D.1 and evidenced by the procedures outlined in the "Admissions and Registration" information in the catalog, but the college uses its newly developed student success GUID 105 course to help students explore careers and identify a college pathway with prescribed courses. The faculty lead for the project listed the student learning outcomes for the course as students being able to say:

- I belong at Spokane Falls Community College.
- I know where I'm going.
- I know how to be successful.

These concepts are reinforced throughout campus with prominently displayed yellow and blue banners stating, "You belong here!" "Find your path!" "Explore your passion!" and "It's All About You!"

Further fostering student achievement, faculty and advisor trainings have been built around the GUID 105 course, including creating a Community of Practice that meets for an hour each week and work with the Center for Engaged Teaching and Learning (CETL) to incorporate quality course design and instructional practices such as using Transparency in Teaching and Learning (TILT) to improve student success. Course instructors complete an Advising 101 course to be able to provide important information at key points in the semester, again strengthening efforts to meet standard 1.D.1 to ensure students "receive timely, useful, and accurate information and advice about relevant academic requirements…"

In regard to standard 1.D.2, the college completed a peer college selection process to broaden its list of peer institutions beyond the state of Washington. It now has state, regional and national peer institutions against which to measure student achievement indicators. Data is published on SFCC's Institutional Effectiveness webpage.

Both the DEGA and Guided Pathways Special Ops groups are working to remove barriers to academic success and close equity gaps. A systematic approach to using data to inform decisions and measure the effectiveness of their efforts has not been implemented yet. Guided Pathways Special Ops seem to be further along in the process of incorporating data than DEGA.

All groups seemed comfortable asking for data from PIER and understand the data request process. Various groups stated they had access to the data they needed, calling the campus "rich in data."

Per standard 1.D.3, and as stated above, disaggregated indicators of student success are published and available on the college's Institutional Effectiveness webpage. Across campus, pockets of people are using student achievement data well to improve planning and in decision making, as required in standard 1.D.3. The goals set for student achievement through the implementation of Guided Pathways were aspirational and meant to transform the college. Benchmarks and data related to Guided Pathways and the GUID 105 course are being tracked, and improvements made based on the data are being documented for those efforts. Instructional and Student Affairs departments are also using data and documenting changes through the Program Review process.

In addition, "Data Ambassadors" help train faculty to use student achievement data to make improvements. It seems at this time discussions regarding data are being conducted at the department level, but it is unclear how systematic the conversations are and if and how any subsequent changes are being made. As stated by SFCC in its Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation Report on page 12, "SFCC has realized that we do not have a systematic and intentional structure in place to document these actions and any resulting successes."

As required in standard 1.D.4, several groups on campus are using indicators of student achievement to "inform and implement strategies and allocate resources to mitigate perceived gaps in achievement and equity." The PIER office is collecting quantitative student achievement data from available sources. Quarterly listening sessions and student surveys, such as pre- and post-surveys of students in GUID 105, provide additional qualitative data. Student affairs has semiannual retreats to review data and use the information to prioritize their work and request funds through the budget process. There does appear to be a disconnect, however, between DEGA's and the Governance Council's use of data to inform decisions, including the allocation of resources. Asking the questions, "What data should we look at in planning and prioritizing our work?" and "How are we going to assess the effectiveness of our efforts?" would help the college meet standard 1.D.4.

Summary: A lot of work has been done in the past three years, especially in establishing regional and national peer institutions. Multiple constituents spoke confidently about their access to data to use in making decisions, and pockets of data-informed decisions using student achievement data are occurring on campus. Using student achievement data across campus could be strengthened, becoming more systematic, especially in closing equity gaps and allocating resources.

Part III: Programmatic Assessment

SFCC offers 15 direct transfer degrees, 54 professional technical programs, and 4 Bachelor of Applied Science degrees. Each has learning outcomes that are published and aligned within guided pathways. SFCC has fully implemented the Guided Pathways model and all degrees have

guided pathway maps for students to follow. SFCC has also invested significantly in the development of a course known as Guidance 105 (GUID 105), which supports students in identifying their learning pathway and serves as a student retention effort.

Students who are in enrolled in a DTA degree are required to take GUID 105 and all other students are highly encouraged to participate in the GUID 105 course within their first two terms. SFCC reports they are seeing positive initial data from their Guided Pathways and GUID 105 efforts supporting student retention and completion rates. Guided Pathways are being used by SFCC to ensure student learning and learning outcomes are offered in a sequence and students are awarded credit, degrees, certificates or other credentials upon completing their chosen pathway. These Guided Pathways have also helped them to identify appropriate sequencing of courses and appropriate breadth and depth of coursework.

SFCC publishes learning outcomes on its website through its Guided Pathway maps. The college's admission and graduation requirements are articulated and published in the college's catalog and on its website. While learning outcomes are published on the college website which is accessible by students, learning outcomes for specific degrees and programs at the college are not published in the shared district college catalog. Depending on how students access degree and program information, students may or may not see learning outcomes (1.C.3).

SFCC has recently implemented a new program review process in the 2022-2023 academic year for both transfer and CTE programs. Faculty complete the program review process on a three-year cycle, and program review reports are reviewed by the dean of each area and by the vice president of the area. Deans provide ongoing feedback on the program review report and vice presidents provide feedback on the program review reports annually. This process is evolving, and the evaluators heard from faculty in the year 1 and 2 program cohorts that they are still becoming familiar with using the data for improvement of instructional programs and assessment processes. The evaluators did not see a consistent use of assessment data by faculty or by departments to improve instructional programs. Some transfer faculty indicated they are waiting to complete the full three-year cycle of data gathering before initiating changes, while CTE faculty are already engaged in reviewing data for instructional program improvements. At this time, it is unclear to the evaluators how the program review reports are integrated into the budget or planning processes. The college Governance Council and Budgeting Council indicated to evaluators their hope to review program review reports at a future point in time, but review could be happening now with initial data that has been gathered (1.C.5).

SFCC uses Guided Pathways as a mapping tool for all of its program, thus all program learning outcomes have been successfully mapped to course learning outcomes. Assessment of course learning outcomes is conducted by individual faculty determining if students have met or did not meet course learning outcomes. Each course learning outcome assessment is at the discretion and expertise of each faculty teaching the course. The college has learning outcome assessment coaches (LOACs) who assist faculty with the development of measurable course

learning outcomes and program learning outcomes. The LOACs also assist faculty in mapping program outcomes to course learning outcomes and navigate issues that may arise when course learning outcomes are revised and cause changes upstream to previously mapped program learning outcomes. Since assessment is done only at the course learning outcome assessment, the college does not have an established assessment process across all programs, other than mapping course learning outcomes to program learning outcomes. Assuring consistency and quality of learning across course sections, or programs, is not currently done. Some conversations around consistency and quality of learning arises following program review or through the review of guided pathways data, but it is not captured or applied in a consistent, established process across programs (1.C.6, 1.C.7).

The transfer credit and credit for prior learning policies are articulated in the college's catalog and website. SFCC follows the statewide transfer credit policy, endorsed by the State Board of Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC). The college does not offer graduate-level programs.

Summary: The college has made tremendous efforts to build course and program learning outcomes and align and publish them. This work will set the stage for more successful program learning outcomes assessment efforts going forward. The evaluators did note that the online catalog and district shared catalog are not aligned with regard to the publication of program learning outcomes; specifically, the district shared catalog does not publish the program learning outcomes.

The implementation of program review has moved the college forward in its assessment of its programs. The reports themselves are meaningful but the team did not see how the reviews are integrated into the budget and planning process, or how that data is being used consistently to improve quality of student learning.

Faculty are making great strides in their course learning outcome assessment work, but situating that assessment only within the course and making it a binary decision (outcome met or not met) presents challenges when it comes to evaluating the quality of programs.

PART IV: Moving Forward

SFCC has established a number of new structures and processes that should set it up for success in the year seven visit. Particularly beneficial first steps have been the work to revise and align course and program learning outcomes. That structure will set the stage for additional programmatic assessment efforts going forward. In particular, the newly established Program Review process represents a strong foundation for a process of continuous improvement.

SFCC's new governance structure also shows promising signs of helping the college better corral institutional efforts. The evaluators recommend better leveraging the governance structure (the governance council and its DEGA and budget committees) to organize, align, and prioritize college work and to support the process of continuous evaluation.

Finally, SFCC's Guided Pathways efforts are notable for their success in moving the needle and facilitating real change and collaboration between academic and student affairs on behalf of student success.

There are groups on campus who are using student achievement data to make decisions and close barriers, such as the Guided Pathways Special Ops, faculty leads for GUID 105, Student Affairs, and certain instructional departments. Such use of data to prioritize work, improve planning and increase student achievement could serve as a model for other councils and groups on campus who have not yet incorporated a systematic use of data to make decisions or measure effectiveness.

Currently, the college is robustly engaged in course learning outcomes assessment. The college may want to think about how it is evaluating the quality of student learning at the program level and across all programs in a consistent way, particularly in the transfer programs. Mapping course learning outcomes to program learning outcomes aids this process greatly, but does it fully address the depth and quality of learning a student attains at the completion of a program? How does the program review process and course learning outcome assessment data drive and demonstrate continuous improvement of student learning? How will program review data and student learning program outcome assessment data be used to improve academic planning and support?

SFCC has made great progress since its year seven visit and has put the pieces in place to be successful for its next seven-year evaluation. SFCC should continue to build on the strong work it has already accomplished.

PART V: Addendums
Progress on Recommendation 1
Recommendation 1
Formalize an inclusive, systematic planning and evaluation process, which informs and refines institutional effectiveness, assigns resources, and improves student learning and student achievement. (2020 Standard(s) 1.B.1; 1.B.3)

The relevant standards are included for reference.
1.B.1 The institution demonstrates a continuous process to assess institutional effectiveness, including student learning and achievement and support services. The institution uses an ongoing and systematic evaluation and planning process to inform and refine its effectiveness, assign resources, and improve student learning and achievement.

1.B.3 The Institution provides evidence that its planning process is inclusive and offers opportunities for comment by appropriate constituencies, allocates necessary resources, and leads to improvement of institutional effectiveness.

Evaluator response

1.B.1. SFCC has developed program review, assessment, and governance processes that should prepare them to have a mature institutional effectiveness process by the year seven visit. The evaluators encourage SFCC to continue to build upon, refine, and integrate these processes.

More specifically, the Governance Council did not seem to fully understand or embrace its role in the institutional effectiveness process, particularly relating to mission fulfillment. And the Budget committee felt too limited in its current scope to play a significant role in assigning resources as part of a college wide institutional effectiveness process.

The program review and program learning assessment processes represent an excellent start to developing a continuous process to assess institutional effectiveness, but they need to be somehow integrated into the newly established governance structure to amplify their effectiveness.

Finally, the district and SFCC strategic and operational plan need to be further developed and aligned when it comes to the strategic priorities of Operational Excellence and Employee Success. The Student Success portion of the plan appears to be working well for SFCC in terms of driving meaningful work that is aligned with the priority and producing measurable outcomes that support ongoing improvement.

1.B.3. Though its new governance structure, SFCC is inclusive in its planning and continuous improvement process and offers opportunities for comment by appropriate constituencies. The evaluators see the overall collegiality of the college as a real strength.

Progress on Recommendation 2

Identify and publish expected program and degree learning outcomes, and engage in regular and ongoing assessment to evaluate quality of learning in its academic transfer programs. (2020 Standards 1.C.3; 1.C.5)

The relevant standards are included for reference:
1.C.3 The institution identifies and publishes expected program and degree learning outcomes for all degrees, certificates, and credentials. Information on expected student learning outcomes for all courses is provided to enrolled students.

1.C.5 The institution engages in an effective system of assessment to evaluate the quality of learning in its programs. The institutional recognizes the central role of faculty to establish curricula, assess student learning, and improve instructional programs.

Evaluator response

1.C.3 The college publishes learning outcomes on its website through its guided pathway maps. The college has invested significantly in the development of the Guidance 105, which supports students in identifying their learning pathway and developing college success skills and

knowledge. While learning outcomes are published on the college website which is accessible by students, learning outcomes for specific degrees and programs at the college are not published in the shared district college catalog. Depending on how students access degree and program information, students may or may not see learning outcomes for their program of study.

1.C.5 The college has recently implemented a new program review process in the 2022-2023 academic year. Faculty are engaged fully in the completion of program reviews on a three-year cycle and program review reports are reviewed by the dean of each area and by the vice president of the area. Deans provide ongoing feedback to faculty on program review and vice presidents also provide feedback on the program review reports, but it is not clear how this leads to faculty improving the quality of its learning programs. At this time, it is unclear how the program review reports are integrated into the budget or planning processes.