



HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION

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April 4, 2018

President Kevin Boys
Southern State Community College
100 Hobart Dr.
Hillsboro, OH 45133

Dear President Boys:

The interim report you submitted to our office has now been reviewed. A staff analysis of the report is enclosed.

On behalf of the Higher Learning Commission staff received the report on assessment and student retention, persistence and completion. No further reports are required.

The Open Pathway Assurance Review is scheduled for 2019 – 2020. The institution's next reaffirmation of accreditation is scheduled for 2025 – 2026.

For more information on the interim report process contact Lil Nakutis, Accreditation Processes Manager, at lnakutis@hlcommission.org. Your HLC staff liaison is Steph Brzuzy (sbrzuzy@hlcommission.org); (800) 621-7440 x 106.

Thank you.

HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION



STAFF ANALYSIS OF INSTITUTIONAL REPORT

DATE: April 4, 2018

STAFF LIAISON: Steph Brzuzy

REVIEWED BY: Steven Kapelke

INSTITUTION: Southern State Community College, Hillsboro, OH

EXECUTIVE OFFICER: Dr. Kevin Boys, President

PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTION AND SOURCES: An interim report is required by 11/30/2017 on assessment and student retention, persistence and completion.

This interim report derives from the Team Report of the institution's 2015 Comprehensive Evaluation.

The comprehensive evaluation visiting team recommends that Southern State Community College submit a monitoring report focused on demonstrated improvements in student learning stemming from its assessment system (Core Component 4.B). In addition, the team recommends that the aforementioned monitoring report include a second component that addresses the college's system of goals, data tracking and collection, analysis, interventions for improvements, and metrics for determining whether the interventions were or were not successful, in the area of student retention, persistence, and completion (Core Component 4.C). For both components, the report should emphasize the capacity for the systems to lead to improvements warranted by the data analyzed, and that actual improvements can be detected by the system.

REPORT PRESENTATION AND QUALITY: The Southern State Community College interim report is presented clearly; the narrative is written competently and the report is effectively organized around the two HLC Core Components (4.B and 4.C) identified in the 2015 Team Report. The report includes an extensive appendix that contains, among other items, the Program Assessment Intervention Summary, the Assessment Handbook, and the Institutional Effectiveness Plan.

REPORT SUMMARY: Following introductory materials that include some details of the College's recent accreditation history and a College Snapshot, the body of the report centers on the institution's efforts at using assessment data to improve student learning, (CC 4.B) and a more systematic and comprehensive approach to the use of retention, persistence and completion data for decision-making purposes (CC 4.C).

With regard to CC 4.B, the report notes that the institution's Assessment Liaison revised the Assessment Report template to include a section on "*Results and Intervention*." Here the report cites several examples of reports submitted since the addition of the "*change/intervention*" component. One such example, from the Health and Recreation program states this:

In the Health and Physical Recreation Discipline, faculty reported,

In spring semester 2016, I added a quiz to each chapter in this course because during the previous semester, the average post test score was 8.75 (58%). I administered the assessment post-test to that section during the last week of the course, and the students' average score on it was 13.4, which is 89%.

Since students had better success on the post-test using this strategy, I continued this plan during the 2016-17 academic year in the fall and spring. The fall semester 2016 class had a post-test average score of 11 (73%). Since the spring 2017 average post test score was almost identical as spring 2016 (13.46 which is 89.7%), I have concluded that I should continue this practice. This same assessment activity will be performed next year to see if requiring quizzes along with labs and LearnSmart activities continues to help improve scores (which should indicate student learning) on the post test.

According to the report, the evidence provided in this and other examples reflects a stronger understanding among the faculty of "*closing the loop*," and a greater focus on student learning rather than other factors. At the same time, the College acknowledges the need for further and continued improvement in this area, supported by additional professional development for the faculty.

The report also provides details of other actions and initiatives taken by the College to aid its efforts in improving its assessment procedures. These include the recent update of the Assessment Handbook and greater accountability for faculty and academic administrators; according to the report, "*the new accountability framework has constructed assessment responsibilities into the job description of faculty division coordinators...and is echoed by mandatory involvement and oversight by the Dean of Core Studies and the Dean of Technical Studies.*"

Here the report notes the institution's intended participation in the HLC Assessment Academy, seeing this activity "*as a necessary intervention and means of accelerating practices on campus*," but citing the departure of the Institutional Researcher as one inhibiting factor in its assessment efforts, including its impending application to the Academy.

The College has made the decision to adopt a new Learning Management System (LMS)—Canvas—in the belief that the new LMS, which has improved outcome tracking

features and an assessment component that enables instructors to align quiz questions with course outcomes, will assist its assessment efforts. The new system is being piloted in Spring 2018, with full implementation scheduled for Summer 2018.

As pertains to CC 4.C, the institution's report acknowledges that it may previously have been over-reliant on its Campus Completion Plan and IPEDs data as the primary sources of evidence showing ongoing improvement in educational processes. The newly developed Institutional Effectiveness Plan will continue to employ these data, but bringing them together with "*new, data-driven initiatives supported by an institutional research function.*" The Plan seeks to use a wide range of assessment and other data to create a useful model for continuous improvement. The document has identified key performance indicators in a number of areas, listed below.

- *Student Access*
- *Affordability*
- *Quality Academic Programs and Services (including Retention, Persistence, and Completion)*
- *Institution Viability*
- *Student Engagement*
- *Student Learning*
- *Student Support*

Here the report notes that the development of the plan and its integrated approach to measuring success is new to the institution, but makes reference to the institution's confidence that this initiative will strengthen its planning efforts. In addition, this action "*broadens awareness of retention, persistence, and completion goals among all stakeholders,*" and will ideally set the stage for additional "*technology enhanced tracking and reporting mechanisms...*"

In a subcategory within 4.C, titled "*Evidence of Capacity Building Initiatives,*" the report describes in some detail two specific actions. The first of these is the (Ohio) Student Success Leadership Institute (SSLI), through which the Ohio Association of Community Colleges (OACC), working with partner organizations seeks to reach several goals:

- *Implementation of structured pathways reforms*
- *Adoption of institutional policies and practices that meet the needs of students*
- *Development of a cadre of leaders engaged in transformational change*
- *Stronger campus completion plans*
- *Increase in the course completion rate and student success points*

Data reports that have derived from this initiative have been employed in the College's Institutional Effectiveness Plan, and membership in the SSLI has provided the institution with additional resources as well, including support in key institutional research areas.

The second of the initiatives identified in this subcategory is the Ohio Campus Completion Plan, which provides "*a continuous improvement framework that speaks*

directly to student persistence and completion.” The institution has worked to improve its process since the Completion Plan was implemented in 2014, most notably in the range of stakeholders involved in the plan. Here the report describes specific ways in which this initiative is helping the institution “*introduce strategies that have realistic measures, meaningful outcomes, and most importantly, relevancy in the broader retention, persistence, and completion agenda.*”

The second subcategory in CC 4.C, “*Evidence of Capacity Building Investments and Emerging Practice,*” lists and describes several examples of investments undertaken by the College in support of its efforts toward continuous improvement. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

- *Financial Investment in Institutional Research*, and in particular the hiring of a Director of Institutional Research.
- *Membership in the Voluntary Framework of Accountability (VFA)*, which enables the College to expand its data capacity. The institution has participated in the AY2015-2016 and 2016-2017 data collection cycles, from which it was able to draw solid baseline data.
- *Adoption of Key Financial Performance Indicators*, a draft of which was being reviewed by the institution’s Board of Trustees at the time this interim report was submitted.
- *Participation in Incentivizing Continuous Enrollment* seeks to improve student progress toward degrees by providing incentives for summer enrollments. The College has been selected to participate in the two-year study, which is led by MDRC.

The report’s conclusion recounts a number of points in the body of the document, stating, “*The College believes it ...is poised to accelerate its capacity for continuous improvement in assessment and effectiveness,*” citing “*Renewed emphasis on closing the assessment loop, increased accountability, and a well-documented handbook [that] will better align assessment of student learning outcomes with broader planning and goal setting endeavors.*”

In closing, the report notes the importance of the senior administrations efforts to support the institution’s endeavors in these areas through the development of inclusive planning and evaluation procedures and continued investment in such areas as institutional research and professional development for assessment.

STAFF FINDING:

Note the relevant Criterion, Core Component(s) or Assumed Practice(s): **Core Component 4.B**

Statements of Analysis (check one below)

- Evidence demonstrates adequate progress in the area of focus.
- Evidence demonstrates that further organizational attention is required in the area of focus.
- Evidence demonstrates that further organizational attention and HLC follow-up are required.
- Evidence is insufficient and a HLC focused visit is warranted.

Note the relevant Criterion, Core Component(s) or Assumed Practice(s): **Core Component 4.C**

Statements of Analysis (check one below)

- Evidence demonstrates adequate progress in the area of focus.
- Evidence demonstrates that further organizational attention is required in the area of focus.
- Evidence demonstrates that further organizational attention and HLC follow-up are required.
- Evidence is insufficient and a HLC focused visit is warranted.

REPORT ANALYSIS: The Southern State Community College interim report describes in some detail the institution's efforts at resolving concerns pertaining to Core Components 4.B and 4.C identified in the Team Report of the institution's 2015 Comprehensive Evaluation. It is evident that the institution has made substantial progress in these areas, while, at the same time, recognizing that there remains work yet to be done.

With regard to Core Component 4.B, the materials provided in the report show that the institution is taking steps to ascertain that assessment data are being used for the purposes of improving student learning. Indications are that the institution previously had in place reasonably effective assessment procedures but that the data derived from assessment were not employed systematically to "close the assessment loop."

To address this concern, the College has made a number of salutary changes, including updating the annual Assessment Reports to include sections on "*Results and Intervention*," and revising the Faculty Handbook and the job descriptions of division coordinators to reflect greater emphasis on their assessment responsibilities. Early results of these changes have been positive, with several examples provided in the report narrative. The following is an excerpt from the Assessment Handbook:

Introduction

The Assessment of Student Learning Handbook provides a framework to guide the work of assessing student learning. It is essential to ensuring the ongoing, systematic, and integrated efforts to understand and demonstrate student learning across the curriculum. It is an essential component of the College's commitment to institutional effectiveness which embraces the philosophy that data informed decisions are essential to continuous improvement. To this end, the College has adopted the following guiding principles:

Institutional Guiding Principles for Assessment of Student Learning

- Assessment is driven by a true and meaningful purpose that emerges from the College's stakeholders.
- The execution of well-constructed assessment plans can lead to institutional improvement.
- Assessment must be embraced at every level of the institution in order for it to hold value to the greater good.
- The College must provide clear processes, timelines, and common definitions in order to maximize assessment efforts.
- Assessment must be sustained by financial, human resource, and professional development investments.

The report cites additional investments the institution has made in support of assessment, most notably in its intended/projected application to the HLC Assessment Academy and in an upgrade in its learning management system to Canvas, which offers greater capabilities in certain areas related directly to learning outcomes assessment. The appointment of an Institutional Researcher will have an impact on its efforts in assessment and, more generally, in the College's continuous improvement activities.

The documentation provided in the report indicates also that the institution has begun making substantive improvements in its ability to collect, analyze and use data for the purposes of decision making in student retention, persistence and completion (CC 4.C). No longer restricted to data derived from its Campus Completion Plan and IPEDs, the College has identified a range of additional options/initiatives that will add to its data "bank" and enable it to build its decision-making on a more intricate data foundation. Several of these are cited in the Report Summary section above—most notably, perhaps is the institution's participation in the Student Success Leadership Institute (SSLI) and the *Ohio Campus Completion Plan*. These are both included in the "*Institutional Assessment*" section of the *Institutional Effectiveness Plan 2017-2018*.

The Plan itself contains two sections on planning as well as a specific category developed to "*Institutional Assessment and Effectiveness Measures*," and makes

reference to the SSLI and the *Campus Completion Plan*. The Institutional Effectiveness Plan also introduces a program prioritization system by which the institution can measure program vitality through specific measures in “*viability, academic quality, student profile, faculty and market indicators.*” The *Program Vitality Framework*, shown below, is to be piloted in AY2018-2019.

Program Vitality Framework (Under Construction) * Pilot in Academic Year 2018				
Program Data Measures				
<i>Viability</i>	<i>Academic Quality</i>	<i>Students</i>	<i>Faculty</i>	<i>Market</i>
Enrollment	GPA	Student Demographic Profile	Appropriately Credentialed Faculty	5-Year Occupational Outlook
FTE 3-5 Year Trend	Program Assessment Report	Student Satisfaction	Teaching Load	Internship/Co-Op Experiences
HC 3-5 Year Trend	Advisory Committee Engagement		FT/PT Ratio	
Prospect Pool	Student/Full-Faculty Ratio			
Retention: Fall to Fall	Student/Part-Time Faculty Ratio			
Retention: Fall to Spring	Accreditation Status			
Retention: Spring to Summer	External Assessments			
Graduation Rate				
Transfer Rate				
Revenue/Expenses				

Analysis Concluding Statement: The Higher Learning Commission acknowledges the institution’s efforts to date in addressing concerns pertaining to Core Components 4.B and 4.C. The HLC will not require additional reporting in these areas.

However, as the College itself recognizes, much of what is described in the report are recently added initiatives or modifications to existing procedures. Consequently, the resulting information/data are new and not tested over time—indeed, some items described in the report represent intentions rather than initiatives already in place. This is not a criticism; it is evident that the institution has made genuine efforts at improvement. Nonetheless, it is essential that the College give continued attention to these areas, as designated in the Staff Finding section above. It is likely that the HLC

Evaluation Team conducting the AY2019-2020 Open Pathway Assurance Review, will want to further examine the institution's progress in these matters.

STAFF ACTION: Receive the report on assessment and student retention, persistence and completion. No further reports are required.

The Open Pathway Assurance Review is scheduled for 2019 – 2020. The institution's next reaffirmation of accreditation is scheduled for 2025 – 2026.