

**Focused Ad Hoc
Peer-Evaluation Report**

Clatsop Community College

Astoria, Oregon

April 29, 2021

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

Roster of Evaluators

Dr. Jeff Wagnitz (Chair), Special Assistant to the President, Bates Technical College, Tacoma, WA

Dr. Jason Pickavance, Associate Provost for Academic Operations, Salt Lake Community College, Salt Lake City, UT

Dr. Ron Larsen (NWCCU Liaison to the Committee), Senior Vice President, Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, Redmond, WA

Introduction

Clatsop Community College hosted a virtual ad hoc evaluation visit April 29, 2021, in response to Recommendation 2 from the institution's 2019 Fall Mission Fulfillment and Sustainability Evaluation. That recommendation called on the college to:

Review and revise its institutional planning processes to ensure that data collectively support mission fulfillment and effective strategic decision-making (2020 Standards: 1.B.1, 1.B.3, 1.B.4).

Throughout the day, as well as in the weeks leading up to the visit, Clatsop's representatives were universally collegial, candid, and responsive. The evaluators are grateful for the institution's openness and hospitality in preparing for and carrying out the evaluation.

Assessment of Self-Evaluation and Support Materials

The college posted its seven-page *Ad Hoc Self-Evaluation Report* March 17, 2021. The document appended an attractive, full-color document, *Charting Our Course: Strategic Plan 2018-23*. Largely mirroring the material on the college's strategic planning [website](#), the appendix presented Clatsop's mission, vision, values, and four strategic initiatives — Strengthen the Academic Environment, Cultivate Connections with the Community, Commit to Equity and Inclusiveness, and Advance Institutional Accountability — with three to four objectives for each initiative. As additional background, the evaluators reviewed the institution's 2019 *Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report* and 2019 *Mission Fulfillment and Sustainability Peer-Evaluation Report*, both publicly available on CCC's accreditation [site](#).

Clearly written and commendably forthright, the *Ad Hoc Self-Evaluation Report* provided helpful context for the visit, beginning with a catalog of setbacks — COVID-19 impacts, recent leadership changes, and a troubled enterprise software conversion — which, presumably, had impeded progress on the response to Recommendation 2. The heart of the report offered seven examples of surveys, area-specific planning exercises, and enrollment-management and program-prioritization initiatives undertaken recently at Clatsop. The text did not provide evidence that institutional planning processes or data analysis had triggered these activities. On the contrary, the narrative generally reversed the relationship between planning and action, starting with an activity and inserting a claim that “This [project or survey] connects to the 2021-

23 Strategic Plan” in some manner. The report concluded with a first-person passage that cast CCC’s response to Recommendation 2 almost entirely in the future tense. Tellingly subtitled “Aspirational Approach,” the text promised that by fall 2021 a yet-to-be-written proposal would “move [the college] to mission fulfillment goals [that] use metrics for the planning cycle” (p. 7).

The self-study’s appendix struck a similar tone, concluding with a section subheaded “Let’s Get to Work.” That final section promised that, sometime in the future, college leaders would “form teams to develop implementation plans . . . and identify the metrics by which progress will be measured,” adding that “A strategic plan dashboard will be established to monitor progress.” No timeline for this work was offered.

On the eve of the visit, the college emailed a one-page “Plan to Address Recommendation 2” document. Typical of its contents were items like “Create a NWCCU Planning Committee,” and “Evaluate the College’s cycle of planning.” No specific timetables, accountable parties, or milestone descriptors were included.

Visit Summary

During the daylong visit, the evaluators interacted with well over 30 Clatsop Community College staff and faculty. No board, student, or community-member interviews were requested. In keeping with COVID-19 precautions, all interviews took place through two-way videoconference in one-to-one, small-group, and committee conversations.

The day’s exchanges largely reinforced the impressions conveyed by the college’s paperwork. Throughout, respondents routinely cited the combined challenges of the pandemic, the debacle of the Campus Nexus data system rollout, and high turnover in key positions as unprecedented difficulties. It was evident that Clatsop staff went above and beyond in responding to these challenges and were, at the end of the academic year, worn out.

Despite these setbacks, the evaluators were impressed with faculty and staff’s commitment to students, to the community, and to each other. It was clear that CCC’s people engage in high-impact approaches to teaching and student support. Further, Clatsop employees see their relatively small size as a strength, giving them the opportunity to connect with learners one-on-one or in small groups, with a eye to meeting the needs of the whole student.

This collegial, student-centered spirit was one of several positive themes that emerged in the course of the evaluators’ conversations, some having direct application to Recommendation 2:

- Generally, members of the college community confirmed that they had had opportunity to weigh in on CCC’s strategic planning process. Employees seemed generally aware of the plan’s outlines, and they understood that their work supported its underlying themes.
- Clatsop appeared to be very much an interpersonal operation. The pandemic not only disrupted operations, it disrupted the cultural and educational habits of the institution. One faculty member noted, “I don’t think we realized how much business gets done in the hallways.” A return to face-to-face operations seems likely to rekindle that energy.

- Pockets of faculty and staff appreciate the value of data-driven decision making. For example, the academic departments’ key initiatives are fueled by data gathering and analysis. Departments compose annual strategic plans, gather assessment data, and review these data in a well-established cycle. The campus’s Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion group also exhibit an active interest in data and target-setting.
- For data analysis, Clatsop Community College contracts with a five-college [Coordinated Oregon Research Enterprise](#) consortium, informally called COREGON, housed at Linn Benton Community College. In meeting with the Data and Decision Support lead from Linn-Benton, it became clear to the evaluators that Clatsop has access to a robust and ready-at-hand data resource through the consortium.

Despite these positive themes, serious concerns also emerged from the evaluators’ interviews, underscoring the need for Clatsop to hasten its response to Recommendation 2:

- According to the COREGON support staff, the available data dashboard is mostly used by a few “power users” at Clatsop, suggesting that there is need — and opportunity — to generate greater understanding and participation around the tool.
- The evaluators noted a disconnection between the institutional strategic plan and the strategic, data-driven work that happens at a local level within various departments. For example, faculty leadership did not see the strategic plan driving their work. Student success personnel voiced similar concerns, stressing that their day-to-day priority was to meet student needs. Few saw their work as accountable to strategic objectives or metrics.
- Along the same lines, even in the midst of widespread buy-in to college-wide values, the evaluators came away with a mixed sense of Clatsop’s commitment to rigorous goal setting and measurement at the institutional level.

In short, interviews tended to confirm that 2019’s Recommendation 2 was warranted and, at present, unresolved. The college community recognizes that its institutional planning process needs to be more data-driven, to better inform strategic decision making, and to provide a clearer picture of mission fulfillment.

Findings and Conclusions

Clatsop Community College’s strategic plan remains essentially unaltered from its earlier form as Appendix B of the 2019 *Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report* (pp. 205-210). Since then, no associated data sources, metrics, thresholds of achievement, or institutional assessment protocols have been built out. While visit-day interviews confirmed that the plan was crafted inclusively and remains thematically meaningful to the campus community, much work is left to be done. As one interviewee put it, where the strategic planning process is concerned, Clatsop “dropped out of the race with one more lap left to run.”

Partly mitigating this lack of progress — in what the evaluators read and heard — were the

repeated, earnest descriptions of the heavy impact of obstacles that had beset the campus of late. In the end, the evaluators were persuaded that these factors, all beyond CCC's control, were substantive factors in slowing the college's planning-related development.

The delay, however, only adds urgency to the original concerns. The current evaluators were especially disappointed that, in the college's paperwork, little detail was provided regarding timelines, responsible parties, or concrete milestones — let alone achievements to date — to remedy the deficiencies noted by the 2019 visitors. If Clatsop Community College is to recapture its momentum and ultimately resolve Recommendation 2, it is essential that the college formalize its response plans and, without further delay, begin to implement them. As an immediate next step, the restart plan must lay out:

- A detailed, aggressive timeline for implementation, with milestones clearly identified
- Clear accountability for finalization and implementation of the plan's elements, including not only executive responsibilities but also the membership, expectations, and leadership of any subgroups formed to provide constituent participation

The more substantive work — that is, the work of enacting a mission- and measurement-driven institutional planning process — must begin as soon as the people and tasks have been assigned to that goal. As those efforts go forward, the college must ensure that the product articulates:

- Measurable indicators of success for each objective within CCC's four strategic initiative areas, using these metrics to define mission fulfillment
- An ongoing and systematic evaluation and planning process that meaningfully integrates data analysis to inform and refine CCC's effectiveness, assign resources, and improve student learning and achievement

Fortunately, Clatsop Community College can draw on several key assets in undertaking this work. For one, the campus's widespread buy-in around the current plan's themes can go a long way in sustaining commitment to the tasks ahead. Second, while the evaluators would agree with CCC's contention that outside expertise could help guide the campus's efforts, it may also be worthwhile to audit the substantial planning, measurement, and assessment resources that are already at hand, spotlighting them as idea-generators and knowledge banks.

Ideally, given Clatsop Community College's spirit of collegiality, community, and student-focus, the final product could reflect — in concrete, measurable terms — everyone's good work.