

Progress Report to the  
Middle States Commission on Higher Education  
from  
MONROE COMMUNITY COLLEGE  
Rochester, NY 14623

Anne M. Kress, President

Valarie Avalone, Director of Planning  
Accreditation Liaison Officer

November 1, 2012

Subject of the Follow-Up Report:

To accept the Periodic Review Report and to reaffirm accreditation. To request a progress report, due November 1, 2012, documenting (1) that institutional assessment results are shared with relevant constituencies including the governing board (Standard 7) and (2) further evidence of the use of general education and distance education assessment results to improve institutional effectiveness and student learning (Standards 12 and 14).

PRR Submitted: June 1, 2011

## **Introduction**

Founded in 1961, Monroe Community College (MCC) is a dynamic and comprehensive postsecondary institution located in Rochester, New York. The College, a vital resource for the community, serves the educational and workforce development needs of a region in transition. The College offers over 90 transfer, career, and certificate programs at four instructional sites and two extension sites.

MCC is governed by a Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees sets policy and institutional priorities; the president of the College leads the institution in its work toward those priorities. The Board of Trustees is comprised of nine community leaders and one student. Four trustees are appointed by the Governor of New York; five are appointed by the Monroe County Legislature (the College's local sponsor); and a student trustee is elected annually by his or her peers. This process follows the provisions of the New York State Education Law.

The Faculty Senate, MCC's academic governance organization, the Faculty Association, the union for teaching and professional staff, and the Civil Service Employees Association, the union for local government employees and state workers, together are recognized for their important roles and participation in the overall leadership of the College.

MCC has a long history of articulating its goals, implementing strategies to achieve those goals, assessing the achievement of those goals, and using the results of those assessments to improve programs and services and to inform planning and resource allocation. The College has designed and continues to implement one integrated planning model. The Institutional Effectiveness Model (IEM) was developed to illustrate the relationship among the college's major planning initiatives. Measuring institutional effectiveness, both qualitatively and quantitatively, supports the complementary functions of institutional improvement and accountability to the College's many stakeholders.

## **Progress-to-Date and Current Status**

### Standard 7

Since our comprehensive and college-wide PRR efforts, the College has researched, written, and launched a new Strategic Plan. Titled *Fulfilling the Promise* (Attachment 1), this tightly focused strategic plan focuses on four core directions, outlining a clear framework for the future reshaping of the College. What is most relevant to our purpose here, however, is that the College used both the Commission's concerns and the reviewer's comments to build a transparent and collaborative culture around the planning process. Indeed, not only would this protocol shape the drafting of the strategic plan, it would provide a robust foundation for future reporting and evaluation.

Several key steps help to document that effort to invite all constituencies into the process, especially focusing on the governing board:

- On February 1, 2011, President Kress invited all College stakeholders to volunteer for the Strategic Planning Team (Attachment 2).
- Two co-chairs, fifteen members, and two resource experts were appointed to form the team on March 1, 2011. The group represented all College divisions and reflected the rich diversity of the whole student and staff community (Attachment 3).
- Over an intense four-month period, the Strategic Planning Team sought the input of an impressive array of internal and external stakeholders. In short, the team conducted thirty-two interviews with leaders of local government, business and industry, community and non-profit groups, local and regional educational institutions, and healthcare organizations. The team listened to eleven presentations by our community leaders and senior college administrators. In addition, team members conducted twenty-two group interviews with faculty, staff, and students.
- On December 7, 2011, the team launched an online survey to promote feedback on the draft of the proposed plan (Attachment 4). Many of these responses helped the team to revise essential elements of the Strategic Plan, especially evident in the reframing of a missions statement (Attachment 5).
- In light of the Commission's concern, the Strategic Planning Team made a focused effort to engage the Board of Trustees and to establish a framework for their combined engagement with the progress of the Plan. As a result, the Board of Trustees reestablished a long dormant committee, the Policy and Planning Committee, chaired by Trustee Howard Konar.

At a special committee meeting on November 15, 2011, MCC's President and Trustee Konar led a discussion about the draft of the Strategic Plan and explored the ways in which the Board would be able to measure progress on the goals and to provide additional commentary and direction (Attachment 6). This meeting prompted changes in the mission statement, additions to two directions, and a clearer understanding of reporting mechanisms.

- The Board of Trustees approved MCC's 2012-2016 Strategic Plan on February 6, 2012. It went into effect on September 1, 2012, and the Board will receive periodic updates on key performance indicators linked to the plan goals, beginning with a baseline report in December.
- In an effort to communicate to all campus stakeholders that the strategic plan is a "living document" and to document progress, President Kress has revised her twice yearly College addresses. Now, President Kress and the five College officers will provide strategic plan updates and invite all campus members to participate in the realization of the plan's goals (Attachment 7).

Dr. Kress is also co-convening with the Faculty Senate a year-long series of college-wide discussions that examine a single question: "What could/should/will MCC look like when

‘Fulfilling the Promise’ concludes? The goal is to contextualize the new strategic plan as an opportunity to impact the college in meaningful ways, such that MCC is not just different at the end, but truly better in the ways we serve students and our community.

- In an effort to assure that MCC is engaged in fully integrated planning in service of improved institutional effectiveness, Dr. Kress has launched a Planning Coordination Council, a representative oversight group with membership drawn from the multiple planning entities across the college and from our shared governance stakeholder groups. The charge of the committee is to assure that MCC’s planning processes are integrated and mutually supporting, that the college can document its efforts along these lines to assure institutional effectiveness, and that data/outcomes generated through the multiple processes are “fed back” into the overall picture to inform resource allocation and strategic direction. The Planning Coordination Council is designed to make sure each planning process understands how it relates to the others so that we are achieving the greatest collective impact on MCC’s performance, as measured by reported metrics.

#### Standards 12 and 14

The Periodic Review Report process resulted in a significant re-evaluation of the College’s approach to general education and especially the assessment activities of student learning of knowledge, skills, and competencies associated with general education.

Since the filing of the PRR, Monroe Community College has undertaken the following activities:

- The Provost and Vice President of Academic Services and the President of the Faculty Senate formed a joint committee with the task to “re-imagine, re-invent, and re-engineer” MCC’s approach to general education (Attachment 8). In January 2012, this college-wide committee started its two-year inquiry, focusing on those changes to the general education program that will likely yield greater emphasis on new general education student learning outcomes. In addition, this committee will seek to promote curricula revision focused on high-impact teaching and learning practices.
- The Provost and Vice-President of Academic Services charged a faculty committee with the task of assessing and re-evaluating the purpose and focus of the College’s flagship transfer degree, the A.S. in Liberal Arts, General Studies. This committee began its work in September 2011, and continues its review process while working collaboratively with the general education committee, so as to ensure the seamless implementation of any changes recommended by either team. In addition to focusing on the development of an updated general education program, the Liberal Arts Evaluation Committee is also giving special consideration to curriculum design, management issues, and assessment protocols that affect student retention and completion.
- In support of these two initiatives, MCC sponsored a team of faculty and administrative leaders to attend the 2012 AACU General Education Institute in order to gain additional training on best practices and current trends in general education program design and

management. Team members consisted of individuals currently serving on at least one of the two committees mentioned earlier.

- The robust assessment of SUNY General Education outcomes continues. However, significant changes in MCC's approach to general education have required new practices in assessment. As a result of the recommendations of MCC's College Assessment and Program Evaluation Committee (CAPE), the College has effectively moved away from a SUNY-centered model of assessment to an MCC-centered model that more directly addresses MSCHE standards. This shift of focus, as published in *Foundations for Student Success IV: Closing the Assessment Loop*, resulted in a College-wide reorganization of general education assessment (Attachment 9). Academic departments now fully own, and are responsible for, assessment activities. In short, projects associated with the assessment of general education outcomes now fall under the control and jurisdiction of single academic departments.
- In December 2011, the Office of Curriculum and Program Development added the *Curriculum Tab* to the myMCC Portal (Attachment 10). By clicking on the link MCC faculty and staff have immediate access to the College's complete curriculum resources, including all assessment reports. This transparency empowers all internal stakeholders to participate in the curricula and assessment culture of the College and provides a direct mechanism for "closing the loop."
- In spring 2011, the College launched an assessment database that integrates with the curriculum database, providing an even greater level of transparency and evidence of the curriculum actions taken by faculty to improve teaching and learning of general education outcomes. Indeed, there is concrete evidence to suggest that the faculty are already significantly engaged in this process of reflection and revision, demonstrating how they use assessment results to improve teaching and learning:
  - The Program Review Summary 2010, (Attachment 11) documents the broad range of recommendations resulting from these comprehensive assessments and, more importantly, the departmental action plans to implement those reforms. The recommendations range from identifying specific curricula needs (adding additional plant biology to the A.A.S. Biotechnology program) to revealing the need for additional institutional resources (adding a technical tutor for the A.A.S. Mechanical Technology program or increasing the number of industry relationships in the A.A.S. Biotechnology program).
  - The 2011 Program Review Summary (Attachment 12) documents the same faculty-led process: a robust assessment, the gathering of benchmark data, the resulting recommendations, and the development of department-based action plans. Especially relevant here, however, is the assessment of 11 on-line courses, an assessment initiative prompted by the *Distance Learning Assessment Initiative*. This project, outlined in the *Executive Summary* in Attachment 13, piloted these initial assessments, but, more importantly, have informed the College's ongoing efforts to fully implement the assessment of online learning.

The Committee on Assessment and Program Evaluation (CAPE) is working to develop faculty guidelines for online assessment in accordance with the Faculty Senate governance process. CAPE asserts that the assessment of online courses requires two levels of assessment, levels similar to MCC's general education course assessment and to the program review evaluation process. The faculty who led the online program evaluation used online course assessment data extracted from general education course assessments and program evaluations. However, these assessments were not specifically designed for an online learning environment. Further, discipline faculty provided feedback that the assessment of online course outcome is not always compatible or equivalent to the face-to-face experience. CAPE has welcomed the request to design the online course assessment to ensure an appropriate protocol is followed that will result in meaningful outcomes and understanding of online learning.

During this interim period, while the CAPE committee completes their work, the assessment of online courses continues within the framework and cycles of general education learning outcomes assessment and program evaluation. The faculty efforts to improve learning are focused on students' readiness for online learning, orientation, advising and tutoring that are readily accessible to support face-to-face students, and online pedagogy.

The College expects to begin full implementation of the plan next year and to complete one three year cycle of online learning assessment before the next Self-Study report.

- (Attachment 14), *General Education Assessments, 2009-2010*, identifies the 38 specific revisions made to general education learning outcomes.
- The schedule of academic department assessment in general education over the next three years is as follows:
  - 2011-12 (completed by February 2013)
    - American History
    - Mathematics
    - World Languages
    - Oral Communication
  - 2012-13 (completed by July 2013)
    - Chemistry
    - Geosciences
    - Biology
    - Physics
    - Anthropology
    - Sociology
    - Political Science

- World History and Culture
  - English for the Humanities
  - Art and Music
  - Communication, Speech, and Theater
- 2013-14 (completed by July 2014)
    - Critical Thinking
    - Information Literacy
    - Technological Competency
    - English for Written Expression
    - Psychology
    - Economics
- MCC’s approach to preparing faculty to teach online or hybrid courses also reflects the College’s commitment to support student achievement and desired learning outcomes. The College applies the *Quality Matters Rubric* to evaluate the design of online and blended courses because the set of eight general standards included in the rubric align with the College’s curriculum development standards:

- Course Overview and Introduction
- Learning Objectives (Competencies)
- Assessment and Measurement
- Instructional Materials
- Learner Interaction and Engagement
- Course Technology
- Learner Support
- Accessibility

Other offerings provided by Office of Online Learning and Instructional Technology (OOLIT) to enhance online teaching and learning include

- ANGEL Nuggets. One or two hour presentations on topics such as
  - ANGEL Grade book
  - Creating and Using Rubrics
  - Early Warning Notifications
  - Faculty Showcase – Best Practices;
- SLN Hosted Workshops for experienced faculty;
- SUNY Center for Professional Development (CPD) conference opportunities (<http://www.suny.edu/sunytrainingcenter/index.cfm>);
- OOLIT collaborates with the Teaching and Creativity Center: one instructional designer is part of the Faculty Inquiry Group (FIG) on online learning and another designer provides a presentation on “Free Resources for the Digital Classroom” at a TCC-sponsored adjunct workshop;

- Technology Training;
- One-on-one support in the Faculty Innovation Center on a regular basis.

In addition, the Office of Online Learning and Instructional Technology has redesigned the workshops series for faculty interested in offering an online or hybrid course. The workshop series concludes with a very focused session on developing appropriate assessment tool and how to incorporate those results in any course redesign efforts (Attachment 15).

## **Appendices of Supporting Documentation**

- Attachment 1: *Fulfilling the Promise: Monroe Community College's 2012-2016 Strategic Plan*
- Attachment 2: Tribune Announcement: *Volunteers Needed for Strategic Planning Team*
- Attachment 3: Tribune Announcement: *Strategic Planning Team Named*
- Attachment 4: Tribune Announcement: *Input Sought on Strategic Plan for 2012-2016 Draft*
- Attachment 5: Memo of 12/19/11: *Comments from New Strategic Plan*
- Attachment 6: Board of Trustees Policy and Planning Committee Minutes, 11/15/11
- Attachment 7: Tribune Announcement: *Message to the College Community: Panel Discussion Format*
- Attachment 8: Tribune Announcement: *MCC General Education: Reimagine, Reinvent, Reengineer*
- Attachment 9: *Foundations for Student Success IV: Closing the Assessment Loop*
- Attachment 10: Tribune Announcement: *Curriculum Tab "Live" on myMCC Portal*
- Attachment 11: Program Review Summary Report, 2010
- Attachment 12: Program Review Summary Report, 2011
- Attachment 13: Executive Summary: *Distance Learning Assessment Initiative*
- Attachment 14: *General Education Assessments, 2009-2010*
- Attachment 15: SLN ANGEL Workshops (redesigned)
- Attachment 16: *iDashboard*, Key Performance Indicators
- Attachment 17: *Compliance Assist*, Example of strategies linked to strategic goal 1.2
- Attachment 18: *Compliance Assist*, expanded view of one strategy

## **Conclusions**

We believe that we have begun to make significant changes in our institutional culture and have made significant progress in addressing the Commission's concerns. As the first seven attachments document, the planning, writing, and execution of the College's new Strategic Plan reveals a remarkable degree of transparency and collaboration. The document was shaped by **all** stakeholders. More importantly, the Board of Trustees has adopted policies designed to enhance their review of and influence on the Plan.

New Board members, and there have been two in the past six months, are provided a rigorous orientation, a significant part of which involves a review of *iDashboard*, MCC's digital record of

key performance indicators (Attachment 16). By using *iDashboard*, Board members have instant access to those data points that reflect institutional progress.

The Board has identified a member – Trustee Konar – to act as a liaison to the Office of Institutional Planning, Effectiveness, and Accountability. This new relationship allows the Board immediate access to those assessment results that inform their decisions as a governing body.

Moreover, both the College President and the Board of Trustees have revised the actual meeting format, making the reporting of institutional assessments and Strategic Plan updates a permanent agenda item.

Finally, after a thorough review of the available products, the College purchased *Compliance Assist*. This comprehensive online tool allows the College to more easily provide evidence of institutional effectiveness and to document how the results improve institutional performance. To date, over one hundred faculty and staff have been trained to use *Compliance Assist*. As units across the College begin to enter their specific strategies in support of the Strategic Plan, key stakeholders will be able to view current operational activities and results-to-date. *Compliance Assist* promotes the kind of fluid exchange with a Strategic Plan, with planning, and with current assessments not possible before, reflecting the College's substantial commitment to sharing assessments with all relevant constituencies. Attachments 17 and 18 illustrate how the College is using *Compliance Assist*. The first attachment, revealing the goal of improving graduation rates for first-time, full-time learners, provides easy access to each specific strategy proposed by a broad array of campus departments and offices. The second attachment highlights one of those proposed strategies. In this example, Institutional Research reveals how they will manage those key performance indicators associated with this goal.

In a similar way, the College believes that it has established a strong culture of assessment and that there is evidence of how faculty use the assessment of general education to improve teaching and learning. Indeed, *Foundations for Student Success IV: Closing the Assessment Loop*, the expansion of the curriculum database and the more robust use of technology, and the general education assessment calendar for 2011-2014 all document this campus-wide engagement and suggest the comprehensive assessment framework that is in place. The College fully anticipates that the assessments in progress and those that have yet to begin will prompt significant revisions in pedagogical practice and in student learning outcomes.

Like many institutions, MCC is in the process of undertaking a global assessment of online learning. It is certainly accurate to suggest that the sudden growth of online learning has outpaced assessment plans. However, that robust assessment process has begun and the 11 online courses assessed in 2011 generated a wide range of crucial revisions: the need for pre-assessment tools; the focus on more writing-intensive assignments; and the critical effort to update supplemental learning materials. This initial assessment and the sustained work on the *Distance Learning Assessment Initiative* suggest that College has created a clear and effective assessment plan for online learning.