



**MWCC Response to NECHE Evaluation Team Final Report
February 14, 2023**

General Response

The NECHE accreditation comprehensive evaluation process provides an institution with ample opportunities for self-reflection and visioning. On behalf of the students, faculty and staff, administration, and Board of Trustees of Mount Wachusett Community College, we offer our deepest appreciation for the leadership demonstrated by Team Chair President Brian Bicknell. The diverse, experienced, and engaged team of NECHE evaluators conducted their meetings openly and sought to assist our college community in self-reflection and visioning for our future.

It is important to emphasize two significant college processes that were on-going simultaneously: our NECHE self-study and our five-year strategic planning process. Occurring together and culminating during the fall semester of 2022 was both daunting and exciting. The synergy created by these significant endeavors has made us a better college as we look to the future. Furthermore, this work was done under the challenging circumstances of COVID-19 restrictions, impacts, and change. Again, this made the work more difficult but it, too, provided opportunities for synergy. As we prepared for the site visit and as we developed our strategic plan, we were forced to envision a new future for community college education in a post-COVID, decreasing enrollment, and challenging financial environment in which we find ourselves.

We openly and firmly accept the feedback provided to us by the Evaluation Team. The Evaluation team's reflections on our self-study and their subsequent meetings on campus confirmed our honest look at our successes and challenges. The process of challenging ourselves to write a comprehensive self-study resulted in immediate efforts to improve our services along the way.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge all the students, faculty, staff, and community members of Mount Wachusett Community College for their effort in this process. Self-reflection is hard. However, we experienced so many individuals across our community who recognized that the confluence of world and local events meant that the time is upon us for an honest look at our future. We offer the following feedback or progress updates on the relevant points presented in the Evaluation Team's final report.

Standard 1

- We appreciate how effectively the Evaluation Team made meaningful connections during the site visit, which we feel amplified the depth of their understanding of the MWCC community and revealed the MWCC commitment to the community, mission strength, and connection with the strategic plan.

Standard 2

The Mass DHE approved the 2023-2027 Strategic Plan in September 2022. The associated processes are underway with good momentum. Here is a summary of the updates on the plans in progress:

- **Operational Plan:** annual operational plans for FY23 are in place and plans for FY24 are on track to be completed before July 1, 2023. During the winter of 2023, each divisional VP or Executive Director has been leading their division in collective impact activities to update and refine the annual operation plan and the associate budget planning. During late spring 2023, the College will be implementing a college-wide prioritization process of the submitted divisional operational plans to inform final decision-making on institutional priorities and resource allocation by the President (and LT).
- **Enrollment Plan:** A new enrollment plan will be completed by the end of FY24.
- **Master Plan:** A new Master Plan planning process has set FY26 as a target. Components of the full Master Plan, such as a Capital Projects plan are underway and will be completed by the end of FY24.
- **Financial Plan:** With the planning of the FY24 budget, we are building the data infrastructure and process for moving forward with a rolling 3-year financial plan. We hired a budget analyst to provide guidance to each cost center and provide the projections to refine the budget planning process and align planning with the strategic plan and the operational plans with more disciplined prioritization processes in place.
- **Financial Transparency:** The College is taking steps toward a more transparent financial process. Steps taken to date included reviewing program and department fee structure and benchmarks of fee rates from other MA community colleges. The Leadership Team received FY24 budget scenarios to review and a budget request process at the cost center level requiring vetting through the unit vice-president.
- **Assessment Plan:** The Director of Assessment has drafted an Assessment Plan and has formed an ad hoc committee with faculty and is moving forward with a formalizing the commitment of the Academic Senate to create a new assessment committee to finalize the plan and lead assessment efforts moving forward.
- **Retention Plan:** A cross-college Retention Planning Committee has been conducting community visioning sessions to inform the development of the Retention Plan. The team is now closing in on completion of a draft that will be reviewed by students, faculty, and staff prior to submission to the Academic Senate for endorsement and approval by the Leadership Team/President. The final draft will be reviewed by the Senate no later than May 2023.
- **Academic Plan:** The broadly collaborative planning process for the Academic Plan creation is underway. This plan will provide an overarching vision for strengthening and expanding the scope of academic programs and services. Component pieces of the plan will be comprised of the Assessment Plan, the Retention Plan, the Learning Design & Technology, Library Plan, Learning Success, and School plans. The Academic Plan will also align with other, integrally linked plans, such as the ITS Plan, Enrollment Plan, Advising Plan. We expect to have an Academic Plan finalized by June 30, 2023.
- Discussions are underway with leadership to finalize the reorganization into an Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE).
- In addition to the formation of the OIE, a new operational reporting tool, Informer 5, was purchased in December 2022. ITS is finalizing the set-up and training for ITS and OIRA staff is expected in March 2023. Additionally, a Data Governance Working Group was formed with ITS, OIRA, Dean of Academic Affairs, and Admission staff to create a first draft for the scope and responsibility of Data Governance at MWCC.

Standard 3

- The Board of Trustees will establish a self-assessment committee to begin the process of conducting a self-assessment evaluation during the summer of 2023.
- MWCC now has a total of 10 Trustees, moving us closer to the maximum of eleven.
- The Academic Senate initiated a process of self-evaluation in Dec 2022.
- MWCC implemented a robust orientation for the BOT designed to familiarize the Trustees with MWCC student demographics and success rates, divisions, and leadership team. The first meeting was on Nov. 30, 2023. The agenda included: a tour of the campus, an overview of the strategic plan and DEI efforts, a session on the Institutional Dashboard created for the BOT, and divisional presentations and an overview of Board Responsibilities

Standard 4

- The new Director of Assessment (hired July 2022) has established strong momentum in organizing and moving forward Institutional Learning Outcomes assessment and Program Review in close collaboration with faculty.
- The Director of Assessment has been focused on leading faculty professional development workshops and establishing the processes for implementing best practices in assessment and program review.

Standard 5

- The College purchased Liaison TargetX Retention Suite (CRM) and Othot (Data analysis) in December 2022, and the implementation will occur over the next 9 months. The software will increase our capabilities for optimizing tracking, communication and collaboration across the student enrollment cycle and communicating across all college touchpoints.
- We are implementing an advising pathway for all MWCC students that incorporates the different advising offices and includes robust first and second+ year advising curriculum and key touch points throughout the student enrollment cycle. A new Advising Assessment Team was created to collectively identify student learning outcomes, advising outcomes, and assessment metrics for all MWCC students.

Standard 6

- MWCC is creating a dedicated, college-wide teaching & learning/professional development space (recently renamed the *Learning Hub* [formerly the Center for Teaching and Learning]) to be launched summer 2023. This virtual learning environment and repository will provide the infrastructure for institution-wide learning opportunities. The Hub will provide the foundational onboarding of all staff and faculty, general professional development across the college, and cross-disciplinary learning by supporting the learning environment and through pedagogical consultation and instructional design support. The Hub will be useful for organizing the content, scheduling, and communications for virtual as well as on-campus workshops or training sessions. It will also prove invaluable for onboarding adjunct faculty.

- The Director of Assessment is partnering with academic departments and the Academic Senate on the development of an Assessment committee to formalize processes for assessment and program review.
- MWCC has scheduled three professional days in recent history, and in AY23-24 there are several additional professional days for intensive workshops with faculty exclusively dedicated to assessment.

Standard 7

- We are conducting negotiations regarding the new space and lease for the Devens instructional location. After evaluating the program offerings, we reduced the footprint by approximately 50% to mitigate costs.
- The CFO is building the tools to enable the College to effectively adapt to changes in revenue for the current or future years. The hiring of a budget analyst and close alignment of budget planning and strategic prioritization has strengthened this capability.
- The Leominster campus reopened on schedule in Jan 2023 for spring courses and is fully operational.

Standard 8

- We concur with the Evaluation Team's observation that some confusion around the overlap and differences between General Education requirements and Institutional Learning Outcomes (ISLOs) persists among groups of faculty. Several years have passed since the ISLO assessment was initially developed, and the faculty need refreshing on the concepts. The Director of Assessment has been addressing these concepts and their practical application with the faculty through in-depth workshops and frequent engagement in departmental meetings. We are establishing the understanding that the ISLOs are focused on broad competencies that students gain in both academic and co-curricular activities. Gen Ed courses can be mapped to ISLOs, and thus can be assessed through an ISLO assessment process. Course mapping to ISLOs is underway and will allow for alignment of Gen Ed requirements with ISLOs.
- The Director of Assessment and faculty are submitting a proposal to the Academic Senate to enable the formation of standing ISLO assessment committee for AY2024.
- The achievement of program level outcomes has been primarily assessed in externally accredited programs. The Director of Assessment is working closely with faculty to create a process for program outcome assessment.
- In February 2023 the Director of Assessment led specific training sessions which provided clarity on gen eds, ISLOs, an updated annual report process, and an introduction to Tableau dashboards. The Director of Assessment is working closely with the OIRA staff to create new program dashboards with the demographic disaggregation needed. Disaggregated data will be incorporated into academic program review starting in AY2023-24.
- MWCC is committed to using the NECHE feedback to start discussions with faculty and the Academic Senate on creating transparency of program outcomes. Developing a single location for this information and a consistent format will be part of the process.

Standard 9

- All MWCC governance entities are working to identify the best strategy for transparency and information sharing from meetings.

Addressing Summary Concerns in the Evaluation Team Report

Planning and Prioritization: MWCC recognizes that the ambitious initiatives included in the Strategic Plan (SP) and annual Operational Plans (OP) will need to undergo a prioritization process – both for budgetary and time/human bandwidth considerations. The Strategic Planning team has worked closely with each Leadership Team member and with all divisions/offices to implement a new annual process for OP refinement, activity/deliverable tracking, prioritizing, budget-alignment, and external funding source identification process. In October 2022, MWCC’s President, Leadership Team, and Academic Deans were trained in-person by EAB on a “Strategic and Operational Plan Pivoting and Prioritization Process.” The prioritization process uses six variables (cost, time to implement, pre-cursor to other items, organizational readiness, strategic alignment, and racial equity alignment) to score each operational activity, thus creating a rank for each operational activity. In winter 2023, the college community was trained on this prioritization process through individual functional area trainings, a faculty focused Professional Development Day, and college-wide workshop that was recorded and distributed the college community. Beginning in spring 2023, the Office of Resource and Strategic Initiative Development will be implementing a college-wide prioritization process through several open college-wide sessions. The completed list of prioritized operational activities will be submitted to the President and Leadership Team in June 2023, which includes a close review for budget planning alignment by the Office of Finance and Administration.

Enrollment Declines and Online Learning: In an effort to expand the potential for new enrollment and to promote innovation and accessibility to a greater diversity of learners within and beyond our service delivery area (capitalizing on our NC-SARA membership), MWCC is planning to intentionally to expand online course offerings, expand the number of fully online degree and certificate programs, and ultimately to grow online enrollment. We are also planning to expand multi-modal learning (including, for example, hybrid and HyFlex modes of study). The investment in instructional design quality, navigability, and consistency of online and hybrid courses is expected to improve student success and satisfaction and establishes the necessary foundation for expansion of multi-modal opportunities. The plan for multi-modal learning will be elaborated in the Academic Plan in close collaboration with Enrollment Management. Although offering more online courses and programs is not a panacea for declining enrollment, investment in quality and growing multi-model opportunities serve both help grow enrollment and promote the success of diverse learners.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we emphasize our college community’s commitment to continuous improvement even prior to the completion of the comprehensive evaluation process. This experience has energized our efforts to reflect on where have come, who we are, and where we are going in the service of our students and our region. We are ready to continue our efforts to meet the needs of our students and fulfill our Mission.