

Report to the  
Faculty, Administration, Trustees, Students

of

Mount Wachusett Community College  
Gardner, Massachusetts

by

An Evaluation Team representing the  
New England Commission of Higher Education

Prepared after study of the institution's  
self-evaluation report and a site visit  
November 6-9, 2022

**The members of the team:**

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This report represents the views of the evaluation committee as interpreted by the chairperson. Its content is based on the committee's evaluation of the institution with respect to the Commission's criteria for accreditation. It is a confidential document in which all comments are made in good faith. The report is prepared both as an educational service to the institution and to assist the Commission in making a decision about the institution's accreditation status.

**\*-New England Commission of Higher Education  
Preface Page to the Team Report**

Please complete **during the team visit** and include with the report prepared by the visiting team

**Date form completed:**   11/8/22  

**Name of Institution:** Mount Wachusett Community College

**1. History:** Year chartered or authorized   November 1963   Year first degrees awarded   1966  

**2. Type of control:**  State     City     Religious Group; specify: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Private, not-for-profit     Other; specify: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Proprietary

**3. Degree level:**  
 Associate     Baccalaureate     Masters     Professional     Doctorate

**4. Enrollment in Degree Programs:** (Use figures from fall semester of most recent year):

	Full-time	Part-time	FTE	Retention <sup>a</sup>	Graduation <sup>b</sup>	# Degrees <sup>c</sup>
<b>Associate</b>	979	1915	1233.7	53.8%	27.2%	540
<b>Baccalaureate</b>	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
<b>Graduate</b>	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

(a) full-time 1<sup>st</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> year    (b) 3 or 6 year graduation rate (Assoc & Cert)    (c) number of degrees awarded most recent year

**5. Student debt:**

	Most Recent Year	One Year Prior	Two Years Prior
<b>Three-year Cohort Default Rate</b>	4.1	11.3	12.7
<b>Three-year Loan Repayment Rate</b>	55.6%	55.7%	57.7%

	Associate	Baccalaureate	Graduate
<b>Average % of graduates leaving with debt</b>	46%	n/a	n/a
<b>Average amount of debt for graduates</b>	\$11,290	n/a	n/a

**6. Number of current faculty:** Full-time   67   Part-time   174 (adjunct)   FTE     

**7. Current fund data for most recently completed fiscal year:** (Specify year:   FY2021-2022  )  
(Double click in any cell to enter spreadsheet. Enter dollars in millions, e.g., \$1,456,200 = \$1.456)

Revenues		Expenditures	
Tuition	\$8.589	Instruction	\$13.682
Gov't Appropriations	\$28.116	Research	
Gifts/Grants/Endowment	\$21.279	General	\$40.614
Auxiliary Enterprises	\$0.621	Auxiliary Enterprises	
Other	\$0.522	Other	\$1.068
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$59.127</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>\$55.364</b>

**8. Number of off-campus locations:**  
In-state   7      Other U.S.   0      International   0      Total   7  

**9. Number of degrees and certificates offered electronically:**  
Programs offered entirely on-line   12      Programs offered 50-99% on-line   37  

**10. Is instruction offered through a contractual relationship?**  
 No     Yes    Specify program(s): \_\_\_\_\_

## Introduction

Throughout the Evaluation Team's visit, all members of the Mount Wachusett Community College community were candid in their comments and offered full assistance to the team. All of the individuals with whom the team met were well aware of the self-study report and the purpose of the team's visit. Throughout the visit a significant number of meetings were conducted with leaders and campus members at Mount Wachusett Community College. These meetings included group meetings with staff, faculty, Trustees, Alumni, and students. Some meetings were rather large, others were small groups, while others were conducted in a one-on-one environment. The college provided virtual options for campus members who could not attend in person. The visit began with a dinner on Sunday night, which was attended by a significant number of campus members from the college. Each team member was assigned to a table and was able to converse with members throughout the institution. Two team members of the visiting team, including the chair, were able to visit three off-site campuses. These visits revealed a commitment to the college's mission and a high fidelity to academic integrity.

The Evaluation Team found the self-study report and the other materials provided, such as the strategic plan, audited financial statements, and data first forms to be sufficiently comprehensive and an accurate description of the state of the College. The team appreciates the preparation of the self-study to include links to important exhibits. A review of these documents before and during the team's visit to Mount Wachusett Community College, the chairs' preliminary visit the summer before the visit to the campus have, together, provided the basis for the information and evaluative judgments contained in this report, which address the Standards for Accreditation of the New England Commission of Higher Education.

### *1. Mission and Purposes*

Since its founding as the Mount Wachusett Community College in 1963, MWCC has developed in response to changing times and the educational needs of its students. The college has made a shift from its original focus on transfer programs to a broader approach that emphasizes strength in career preparation programs. The college has demonstrated a commitment to advancement opportunities for citizens in the region. This can be understood through the addition of instructional sites in multiple locations that offer specialty programs (Devens, Leominster).

The self-study and the visit revealed several mission-driven initiatives were undertaken directly in response to community needs and in support of the college's mission. One example is the development of a one-year schedule for credit courses, and the introduction of several new programs (associate's in Math, Computer Science, Paramedic Technology, Veterinary Technology, and Dual Language Business Administration certificate). Additionally, in response to the needs identified with the community's healthcare capacity, the college completed a \$400,000 MA Skills Capital Project to update the Health Professions Simulation Lab. Furthermore, The Automotive Program has moved in to a new, modern, 11,000 square foot teaching center with

special capacity in elective Vehicle repair. The college has also received a significant grant to train future childcare workers and teachers, which will help fill a need in the state.

The college now has a new mission statement, that was finalized within the past year. It is well written and provides a philosophical grounding and drives the institution's priorities. It was the mission statement that served as a compass for the college's ambitious strategic plan, which was completed in Fall 2022. A review of the plan demonstrates alignment with the college's mission and its commitment to student success, equitable access, college, and career alignment, improved academic programming and student learning outcome assessment, and institutional and regional workforce development. Throughout the visit, there was a concerted effort to align the assessment of the strategic plan with the college's mission and vision.

## *2. Planning and Evaluation*

Mount Wachusett Community College (MWCC) has made notable progress towards embracing a culture of planning and evaluation, although, that progress has come in "fits and starts." The Self-Study recognizes a "new era" inaugurated in 2017 by the appointment of Dr. James Vander Hooven as the College's third President. Dr. Vander Hooven's tenancy follows two, long-serving leaders namely, President Haley from 1963-1986 and President Asquino from 1987-2017. Given the atypically long tenure of the former Presidents it is easy to understand why portions of MWCC's culture resists change that has occasionally stalled systemic planning and evaluation. Additionally, initiative prioritization remains a diminishing obstacle at the Institution, but their awareness of said challenge is encouraging. Overall, MWCC is on a progressive track despite the hurdles they have encountered, and this visit characterized their place on the journey to becoming a more comprehensively planned and targeted institution.

**Planning:** Prior to Dr. Vander Hooven's tenure, MWCC was governed by a long-standing and largely compartmentalized leadership. In contrast, Dr. Vander Hooven supports a more participatory leadership model with a desire to vitalize a culture of community-substantiated planning and evaluation at the College. The Self-Study cites actualizing a framework following the Society for College and University's Integrated Planning Model. This model includes a participatory approach consisting of both internal and external stakeholders as well as a comprehensive environmental scan. All employees, faculty, and staff indicated that they had many opportunities to be involved in the planning process, whether through meeting attendance, draft feedback, or other channels. Additionally, MWCC cites incorporating the Voluntary Framework of Accountability with its focus on leading statistics into the institution's evaluative toolbox. MWCC demonstrates a desire to observe themselves through an objective and discerning eye. However, it is also clear that this desire is not evenly shared across the institution and such discord may be obstructing their progress.

While the initial 2017-2018 launch of MWCC's most recent planning effort was well received and inclusive, its progress stalled out in 2020 due to a significant level of attrition involving crucial staff combined with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Much of the aforementioned turnover is attributed to an early-retirement offer that arose during the COVID-19 pandemic and not necessarily a result of the change in leadership. More specifically, full-time employees at the college dropped 7% between 2020 and 2021 and 13 of MWCC's chief institutional officers have turned over since 2021. Given such a radical shift in senior leadership and the unpredictability of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is understandable that the momentum in planning facilitated by Dr. Vander Hooven stalled between 2020 and 2021.

Once the planning process was reinvigorated in 2021 the timeline moved ahead at a productive pace, and each stage of the state-mandated plan approval process demonstrates a rigorous checks and balances approach to institutional strategic planning. In summary, the draft was reviewed and approved by the MWCC Board of Trustees in April 2022 before being submitted to the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education (DHE), who approved the draft in May 2022. Finally, the Board of Higher Education (BHE) Commissioner reviewed the draft plan over the Summer of 2022 before giving it back to MWCC for final adoption at the end of August. Beyond the Strategic Plan, MWCC maintains an annual Operational Plan that is designed to actualize and evaluate their mission, vision, and goals. Subsequent sectorial plans are later constructed to target operational initiatives for different divisions and working areas, each contributing to the overall direction and priorities of the College. Unfortunately, the stalled strategic planning process between 2020-2022 led to a continued reliance on the expired 2015-2018 Strategic Plan, effectively misaligning their otherwise well-conceived planning hierarchy. Of particular concern is the fact that MWCC does not currently have an active Master, Academic, Financial, Enrollment, or Development Plan. According to the Self-Study, each of these critical ancillary or sectorial plans has been waiting on the finalization of the Strategic Plan. Despite this holding pattern, MWCC does have current Comprehensive Technology, Library, and Retention Plans each addressing areas that were of note in the previous NECHE visit and report. The College's mobilization of these three sectorial plans demonstrates their commitment to improvement based on evaluative feedback and the NECHE accreditation process. Moving forward, the campus members noted the need to prioritize aligning each level of subsequent planning to the new 2023-2027 Strategic Plan and in doing so, bring cohesiveness to the overall long-term direction of the institution.

The Operational Plan lacks a contributory process of cross-community input similar to that demonstrated through the drafting of the new Strategic Plan. Although the Operational Plan is reviewed by all departments semi-annually, the Self-Study states that MWCC lacks a "systematic, college-wide process" for incorporating stakeholder input into the Plan as it is drafted and executed. This results in an occasional disconnect between operations and budget prioritization. The Self-Study notes that the Vice-President of Finance is working on a more inclusive and transparent budgeting process, projecting its completion over the next 2-5 Years. Campus members noted the

importance of the drafting of the Operational Plan to be inclusive and cross-institutional alongside the continued evaluation of the funded priorities contained therein. The site visit revealed that the structure for widescale input is in place, however, campus members noted an opportunity to improve bidirectional communication.

MWCC has a well-articulated understanding of the balance between being responsive to emergent community needs and long-term institutional priorities. However, the institution recognizes that they have struggled occasionally with not being able to transition grant-funded start-up initiatives into their long-term funded infrastructure. They cite their “failed” Title III Aspire Project as an example of a student-centered initiative that failed to secure permanent funding following the grant’s expiration. The shuttering of the Aspire Title III program led to a reversion to less-successful advising strategies and decreased levels of targeted student service. To minimize the chances of this happening again, the College rebranded and elevated their Grants and Development Office to be the Office of Resource and Strategic Initiative Development in 2022. This new department, headed by an Executive Director who sits on the Leadership Team, is evidence of MWCC’s desire to cultivate transformative change and to discern between its priorities. Moving forward, the College expressed a focus on strategic alignment and a tighter prioritization of initiatives through community-wide support of this new administrative office.

**Evaluation:** The 2012 NECHE (NEASC) comprehensive report cited failing infrastructure as a concern for MWCC’s campuses and the college took those concerns seriously. Among the actions taken were the renovations of both the Science Center and the Haley Academic Building, the construction of the new Brewer Student Center, and the current ongoing overhaul of the Leominster campus. Today the College’s facilities are not only clean and in working order, but they are bright and serve as a healthy learning and community environment for its students. Moving forward, MWCC should formalize a long-term proactive and preventative maintenance plan designed to maintain and incrementally refurbish college infrastructure. Such a plan could prevent a similar accumulation of deferred maintenance that resulted in the observations recorded in the 2012 NECHE (NEASC) comprehensive report. Beyond maintenance, growth at the College is well-informed by community demand combined with data-informed analysis as evidenced in the formation of the new Paramedic Technology Certificate and the newly relocated Automotive Center. It is clear that MWCC is moving to balance quantitative data, including Labor Market Data, with the experience and entrepreneurial drive of program advisory committees.

Another example of the College’s willingness to respond to opportunities illuminated by data and evaluation is the creation of the THRIVE Retention Center. The Center was established with the goal of increasing retention between Fall 2020 and Fall 2024. In its first year, despite COVID-19, the Center’s formation has empowered that goal. Specifically, between Fall 2019 and Fall 2020, retention of full-time students increased from 52% to 56%, however in the two more recent years retention has notably decreased. Regardless of the most recent decline, student feedback on the THRIVE Center substantiates the impact that THRIVE has on a student’s ability to persist and

achieve despite arising circumstances. Another example of transformative reform is how MWCC has used evaluation to modernize and target their Admissions recruitment strategy. The College is moving away from large-scale open house events in favor of “smaller, program-based interactions with prospective students” that showcase targeted connections with faculty and program resources. This reform in the prospecting approach is carried out through the enrollment funnel and is projected to expand through MWCC’s investment in a new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software platform. Campus members expressed encouragement that many are embracing software solutions, like Salesforce, from the business world as a means of strengthening its connection with potential students.

MWCC has demonstrated a desire to advance both the use and interpretation of its institutional data sources. In the past, the internal distribution of institutional data was tightly controlled by leadership and reports were limited to a distinct subset of the college community resulting in a reluctance to share data in the present. Additionally, the College admits to having a collection of vast and rich datasets, but access to that data is constrained by aging and expired reporting platforms. In response to the access issue, MWCC invested in the Tableau platform two years ago and has made measurable progress in migrating several of their reports to that platform. Although the volume of Tableau dashboards has grown and are hosted in the accessible Tableau Public environment, there is still some reluctance to promote their existence. Beyond historical fear, their reluctance is also in part due to widespread data literacy issues that limit some stakeholder’s confidence when trying to understand the applicability of institutional data to their evaluation efforts. This combined lack of access and interpretability means that the data does not always find its way to the decision-making table, and MWCC is clear about their need to change this reality and move towards true data transparency.

The Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA) is “laying the groundwork” to build a comprehensive structure for both data and process governance alongside cultivating data literacy and confidence. Institutionally, MWCC’s leadership has the intention of rebranding and repositioning the OIRA as an Institutional Effectiveness division, a move that speaks directly to the value they place on both data integration and continual improvement as an institution. Furthermore, this repositioning has been prioritized in their NECHE projections for the next 1-2 years, which is evidence of their intended commitment to challenging cultural assumptions in favor of more objectively substantiated and universal data intelligence. The OIRA team has started to include explicit methodologies in their published Tableau reports and dashboards. Doing so not only promotes increased data literacy, but it also serves to build confidence in the data when it comes to end user application.

In summary, MWCC has made some important strides towards cultivating and institutional value for planning and evaluation. They have purchased the data tools necessary, including both Tableau Server and Informer, to move forward towards a more data transparent culture. However, the momentum of this change remains stifled by lingering cultural obstacles and internal divisions . MWCC has worked hard to draft

and adopt a new 2023-2027 Strategic Plan and now plans to embark on connecting their Operational and Sectorial Plans to it, which in turn will allow their initiative priorities to come into alignment with one another and support the institution's vision for the future.

### *3. Organization and Governance*

The institution has a system of governance that facilitates the accomplishment of its mission and purposes and supports institutional effectiveness and integrity. Through its organizational design and governance structure, the institution creates and sustains an environment that encourages teaching, learning, service, scholarship, and where appropriate, research and creative activity. It demonstrates administrative capacity by assuring the provision of support adequate for the appropriate functioning of each organizational component. The institution has sufficient autonomy and control of its programs and operations consistent with its mission to be held directly accountable for meeting the Commission's *Standards for Accreditation*.

The organizational chart and collective bargaining agreements display the authority, responsibilities, and relationships among administration, faculty, and staff. The by-laws of the board of trustees of Mount Wachusett Community College (BOT) display the authority, responsibilities, and relationship of the BOT to the college. The shared governance structure of the college includes a Student Government Association (SGA), the Academic Senate, and the All College Forum. The Student Government Association (SGA) has given students a "strong voice" with regular access to the President. Meeting with students showed the esteem students had for this organization and the work they are doing.

The Academic Senate (composed of faculty, professional staff, a student representative, and an adjunct faculty member) has a substantive voice in matters of educational programs and other aspects of institutional policy. The Senate has subcommittees for Curriculum and Online Learning. There are mixed views as to the effectiveness of this structure. Some faculty expressed a desire for more participation but thought it was effective. There was an acknowledgment that some faculty had were critical of the structure and were encouraged to participate more robustly.

The All College Forum is not a deliberative body but a forum for reporting what is happening across the college. The integrity and quality of academic programming is assured through the curriculum committee, which is a long-standing committee that predates the Academic Senate. Department approval is required of new courses, followed by school approval, and then submission to the committee before going to the Vice President of Academic Affairs and President. Syllabi are reviewed after the semester starts. Upcoming professional development includes workshops with the new instructional designer. Issues of Academic dishonesty are first addressed by the individual faculty member and can be referred for sanctions under the student code of conduct. There is a policy in the catalog and on some syllabi. The institution's

organizational structure and system of governance is relatively new – for instance, the Academic Senate is 4 years old – and those years were negatively affected by and disrupted by COVID.

**Governing Board:** The MWCC Board of Trustees is comprised of 11 members - 10 appointed by the governor and one student selected by the student body. They supervise the strategic and fiscal operations of the College. The Board of Trustees operates according to its bylaws and works closely with the President and the Leadership Team to ensure that the College is fulfilling its mission and is managing its resources efficiently and effectively.

Based on interviews with several Trustees, it appears that the appointment and onboarding experience for Trustees differ but takes several months to complete. According to the self-study, training topics included conflict of interest, fiduciary duty, fraud awareness, open meeting law, principles of effective public contracting for higher education, public records law, and a state comptroller’s office training. They report that they “absolutely” are provided the appropriate information to do their jobs.

They see the distinctive mission of MWCC as mirroring the needs of the community, furthering the mission to end generational poverty, and having strong connections and a local commitment that includes integrating with local high schools. The Board of Trustees is effective at helping the institution make strategic decisions by, in the words of one trustee: keeping to the “governing” level and staying clear of “managing” the institution thereby ceding the requisite authority and autonomy for the President to manage the institution. They have “robust” finance conversations and are looking to ensure the future of MWCC. They report that the president is fiscally prudent, and they hold him in high regard and report that the lines of communication are strong.

When asked how they judge the performance of the president, a trustee said he judges the “performance of the college” not the president. However, the bylaws of the BOT specifically state that “To annually evaluate the performance of the President and to make appropriate recommendations regarding the reappointment and compensation of the President to the Board of Higher Education.”

The board addressed diversity within its membership by stating the diverse backgrounds of its members. The different skills and market sectors represented – from business, education, health care, social services, and law – gives this “community oriented” group the skills they need to support the college’s mission. Writers of the self-study were unable to find evidence that the BOT had conducted any self-assessment or self-evaluation since 2007.

#### *4. The Academic Program*

**Introduction:** MWCC offers 74 degree and certificate programs. Fifty-three programs

are associates degree and are 21 certificate programs. There are three nondegree academic programs. All degree and certificate programs are designed to prepare students to transfer to four-year institutions, enter the work force, or both. All programs require a minimum of 60 credits with the nursing associates totaling 74.

One substantive change has been completed which affects MWCC's degree or certificate granting. The New England Commission of Higher Education approved MWCC's Second Chance Pell program locations in September 2018 (NECHE letter dated October 22, 2018).

A filterable list is available on the MWCC website showing degree programs and certificates that are online.

- The largest associate degree programs are Liberal Arts and Sciences, Business Administration Transfer, and Human Services; the largest certificate program is Business Administration Transfer.
- The college catalog and student handbook are set up well for academic concerns. Program Student Learning Outcomes and Technical Standards are available on the site for each program
- A review of selected syllabi across various courses and programs provided evidence that course level student learning outcomes are consistently included. The visiting team found MWCC's academic programs to be clear and coherent, with standards of achievement appropriate for an associate degree. Some programs, such as Automotive Technology, Dental Assisting and Hygiene, Medical Assisting, Nursing, Physical Therapist Assistant, and Paramedic have program guidance from external accreditations.

**Assuring Academic Quality:** Academic quality is verified through the use of program reviews. Academic program reviews follow a 5-year cycle or if a professionally accredited program the cycle prescribed by the accrediting agency. The cycle starts with a data run which provides persistence, retention, and headcounts. The process spans months beginning in fall and concluding at the end of the spring. During the process, the curriculum is mapped to outcomes. Program needs may dictate that an external consultant would be brought in to support the campus. An annual review occurs for each program with a similar data set. It is reviewed by the departments.

Both the annual data gathering, and the program review processes have been used to inform some program changes and hiring decisions. There is adherence to the review, and it is followed as currently designed. Evidence of the program review analysis was provided by the development of new standalone departments and the closure of programs. The college has experienced success in supporting students in the Liberal Arts and Sciences program. The data collection cycle amasses a significant amount of data with the tools that have been available. MWCC's analysis component of program review is set firmly, but the assessment component lacks an organized approach to reviewing and using the information provided. However, a director of assessment was recently hired to provide direction and guidance for assessing programs.

**Undergraduate Degree Programs:** All degree and certificate programs prepare students to enter the workforce or transfer. The rationale and structure of each program is available on the website. Each program page generally describes the intent and utility of the program after graduation.

The college's placement practices, which include multiple measures, shifted to guided self-placement in response to the pandemic. Approximately 90% of students followed the advisor's recommendations. Results were mixed and the College, due to the recency of the collected information and significant data variables, could not identify the exact cause. The newly hired director of assessment is expected to continue to collect and better analyze the data.

MWCC's Dual Language Learner program model well supports its native Spanish-speaking students. The business degree program has content instructors working in tandem with ESL instructors. All courses necessary for this program are included. It was expressed that the program is still in the early stages and the ability to expand or scale the program would need to be evaluated with more data from the current effort.

The Early College program, which provides opportunities for area high school students to take college courses during their junior and senior years, while also engaging in career exploration, fall under the auspices of Academic Affairs and are approached like any other credit-bearing courses in terms of learning outcome alignment and assessment of learning. Campus members reported that this program is successful and sustainable. The conduct of dual enrollment programs is consistent with the operation of other academic programs. MWCC maintains authority over curriculum, faculty qualification, and instructional materials. Faculty who teach at MWCC also teach the classes at the high schools.

**General Education:** Students graduating from an MWCC program must complete one of the general education core sets. Students in all programs are required to take two English literacy courses (College Writing I and II). The core further requires elective courses in humanities, social sciences, science, and mathematics. The Non-STEM transfer degree requires 34-36 credits. STEM transfer degree programs require 28-30 and career degree programs 21-24. In discussions with the MWCC, there was no process to evaluate the value of the selection of general education requirements and outcomes, however, MWCC looks forward to the newly hired assessment director working to establish metrics and outcomes in this area.

**The Major or Concentration:** Five Institutional Student Learning Outcomes (ISLOs) have been developed for all academic programs. The ISLOs describe a common framework of knowledge and abilities expected from all graduates of the institution. They define the requisite skills students will acquire upon graduation from MWCC: Analyze, communicate, create, engage, and research. Course-level ISLOs align with the relevant program or department outcomes and are communicated through the syllabus. Academic program-level SLOs align with the five ISLOs and are communicated on program sheets in the course catalog. Campus members reported

that the establishment of the ISLOs helps pave the way for deep assessment of learning across the curriculum.

Service learning through the Center for Civic Learning provides 10% of MWCC's students opportunities to engage in many hours of service in the region. The academic program component is designed and overseen by academics. However, it is student affairs who work directly with students to set up, monitor, and operate the activities. It has been acknowledged by the academic leadership that the program remains high quality and highly valuable to the students.

**Transfer Credit:** Students are able to transfer seamlessly to the four-year MassTransfer program. Participation in the program removes barriers to transfer to all four-year colleges within the State University and UMASS System. Links to information about MassTransfer are contained on the MWCC website and embedded into the program pages. Transfer agreement information is made available to students on the website.

**Integrity in the Award of Academic Credit:** All syllabi reviewed from MWCC's part-time and full-time faculty and across programs demonstrated credit assignment consistent with MWCC's policies. Consistency in syllabi activities and assignments was observed between courses in different formats, online and on-campus. Learning outcomes are provided in all sampled syllabi. Syllabi frequently have embedded the course descriptions from the college catalog. Courses in the same program that are sequenced at different levels provide assignments at different successive levels.

The credit hour policy is defined on the college's website and is consistent with NECHE policy, requiring nine hours of engaged time for a three-credit class. Credit and instructional time are reviewed in the syllabi by the department chairs and deans at the end of the semester. In discussions with the vice president of academic affairs, the deans and the full-time faculty, an understanding of the credit hour policy including its applicability to distance learning was demonstrated.

## *5. Students*

**Admissions:** Like most New England Community Colleges, Mount Wachusett has been experiencing a decline in enrollment prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. From FY 2019 to FY 2022 there has been an 18% decrease in unduplicated headcount. Total credits fell during this same time period by 24%, indicating a shift towards part-time enrollment.

The proportion of Pell-eligible students in the MWCC student body held steady during this same time period, comprising 42% of the student body in fall 2018 and 41% in fall 2021.

Between FY 2020 and FY 2021 the overall headcount decreased by 9.9% with male students experiencing a 19.9% decrease compared to a 4.6% for female students. There was a 3.0% decrease in Hispanic/Latinx enrollment, a 12.0% decrease in Black/African American Enrollment and a 12.5% decrease in White enrollment. The School of Liberal Arts, Humanities, Education and Communication had a 17% decrease in enrollment compared to a 15% decrease in the School of Business, Science, Technology and Math and an 8% decrease for the School of Health Professions, Public Service Programs and Social Sciences.

In 2021, MWCC enrolled 3,156 students, 71% of whom attend part-time. 60.1% were first generation, 66.9% female and 34.4% students of color. While MWCC enrolls a higher proportion of students of color than represented in the service area population, the accepted to enrolled yield rates of students of color is lower than the overall yield rate of 41.9%. Campus members expressed this to be an important metric to analyze and address with an enrollment plan that has strategies directly related to yield for students of color and other identified populations.

In the fall of 2022, the student headcount fell to 2,949 which represents a 7.2% decline from fall 2021.

The guaranteed admissions pathway for students who complete a CNA to LPN Walkway Cohort is an important recruitment strategy, however space in the nursing cohort is limited. The admissions staff works hard to ensure that students are aware of other allied health related careers during the recruitment and admissions process. There is also an introductory course, HEA 106, that helps students interested in the health professions develop and identify other prospective career opportunities. MWCC has a strong dual-enrollment program enrolling 365 students in the fall of 2021. This constitutes 11.6% of the fall 2021 overall enrollment. Dual enrollment should also be named in an updated enrollment plan as a promising recruitment strategy.

The Office of Admissions has named a set of strategies for addressing these enrollment challenges including expanding outreach to high schools, highlighting the advantages of Mass Transfer, improving the process for transfer students, and increasing marketing for non-credit to credit pathways.

MWCC recruits and enrolls students from its mostly rural service area in North Central Massachusetts in fulfillment of its open access mission. There are some majors with selective admissions processes and review for these programs is conducted in partnership with the academic department. The admissions team provides multiple ways for students to learn about the prerequisites needed to apply to these programs and there is a mandatory information session for nursing and other selective programs that is part of the application process.

Prospective students are contacted by phone, email and text and can schedule individual appointments with admissions counselors for assistance in the enrollment process. Students can schedule these meetings themselves on the Admissions webpage. The implementation of a new CRM is proving critical in terms of providing an ability to analyze enrollment trends, create an automated workflow and collect greater data intelligence on prospective students.

Admissions, in collaboration with academic departments, hosts Academic Preview Days which provide program-specific information to prospective students, however much of this work is also now happening via Zoom appointments. Finding the balance between in-person and Zoom opportunities will be an important priority moving forward. There is a clear desire to focus on accessibility but ensuring that staff are able to continue with the pace of the work will need to be monitored. In addition, consideration of the current space configuration that houses admissions and student financial services will be important as confidential conversations are occurring in an open office model.

Mount 101 is a required online introduction to the tools and resources needed for students to successfully begin their studies with a focus on their first advising appointment. Students are matched with an advisor based on their specific needs within 24 hours of completing Mount 101. Advisors work with students on course placement using measures such as high school GPA, guided self-placement and Accuplacer.

Campus members stated that a continued focus on clarifying advising roles and having a more consistent and unified approach to advising will be critical for retention moving forward. The monthly Advising In-Services is an excellent place to start sharing and implementing best practices, as well as the creation of the role Assistant Director of Advising whose work involves developing a standards-based, sustainable assessment process for advising. Because professional advising is housed in multiple locations, there is an added necessity to ensure that clear collaboration and consistent practices are being utilized.

In addition, the adoption of retention software which will enable comprehensive student tracking and communication across divisions is a key strategy to implement moving forward. There is very strong work happening in advising, but it needs to be connected beyond the boundaries of specific population focused programming and have a mechanism to feed into the goals of the upcoming strategic plan.

**Student Services and Co-Curricular Experiences:** While all students have access to student support services, there are a number of specialized support programs including HCOP, EEC, TRIO and NCEOC. New Student Orientation provides an overview of key student services and students are currently able to utilize the iConnect platform to find out about events and resources. The college is currently in the process of adopting and implementing EdReady which will become a hub of communication and resources for students. The SGA and other student leaders have been instrumental in the process of adopting this technology and the institution is optimistic that this platform can help to

address some of their identified communication challenges that result from a decentralized advising model.

The Student Life Office provides students with tremendous co-curricular opportunities including clubs and organizations, as well as leadership development opportunities. The SGA is the voice of students in relationship to the administration. There is a student trustee, and the college is focused on student leadership development. They are online members of The National Society of Leadership and Success. Since 2014, 1,300 MWCC students have been inducted. Student leaders are clearly proud of the Mount and seek out ways to ensure that all students are connected to these offerings and feel part of the larger community.

In addition, there is a clear focus on addressing student's basic needs and connecting students to local service organizations that can help to address these gaps in the long term. There is a campus-based food pantry and a mental health counselor on site.

A focus on creating an inclusive environment and improving access to underrepresented populations led to the hiring of a Director of Student Services at the Leominster campus. The Academic Support Center offers one-on-one and small group tutoring in a highly visible location in the library. This space has been rebranded as the Learning Success Center with a new focus on a strengths-based approach and utilizes Peer Learning Consultants. In addition, supplemental instruction is also provided in some courses.

Career service advising is available throughout the admissions process. There are career kiosks for student use in the admissions area and a dedicated career counselor whose space also houses an open computer lab. The physical location of the career center makes it a highly visible resource for students to access.

There is clear financial aid information on the web site, including a net price calculator. In addition, the department utilizes a Banner module with rules that are designed to support departmental and institutional DEI goals. The collaboration of the SFS, TRIO and Student Services offices around financial literacy is important and can be built upon to ensure students have a strong financial literacy foundation.

The reorganization of Financial Aid and Student Accounts to form Student Financial Services resulted in streamlining the student experience and was initiated because of clear student feedback. This strategic response to data and feedback will be an important strategy to continue to utilize in the future.

The college publishes policies on student rights and responsibilities in the College Catalog and Student Handbook. Students are also reminded at the beginning of each semester and during Mount 101. There is a hope that the new EdReady platform will further ensure that students are aware of policies.

DEI team is charged with creating educational, social, and recreational programs to exemplify the value of diversity in the larger community. The College hired its first DEI executive in 2022. The Chief Diversity Executive is a member of the President's Leadership Team.

## *6. Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship*

**Faculty and Academic Staff:** Mount Wachusett Community College (MWCC) had a faculty of 62 (25.2%) full-time and 184 (74.8%) part-time as of fall 2021. The number of male faculty is 93 and that of female faculty is 153. As reported in the Data First Forms and noted in the report, in fall 2022, 14(22.6%) full-time faculty hold doctorate degrees, 47(75.8%) full-time and 93% of part-time faculty hold a master's degree, and 1 full-time faculty holds professional license. Those holding the rank of full professor total 26, associate professor 25, assistant professor 10, and instructor 1. According to the Data First Forms, 38 of the full-time faculty are tenured. New full-time faculty are integrated through a yearlong onboarding group facilitated by the division of academic and student affairs. They receive introduction to various college services, policies, and teaching and learning related topics. They regularly meet with department chairs and school deans to discuss teaching schedules and other responsibilities. The onboarding of new part-time faculty was done by Board of Adjunct Faculty Advisors between 2017 and 2019 but it has been discontinued. Based on the discussion with department chairs, the current onboarding and integration of part-time faculty varies from department to department. As noted in the report, the number of full-time faculty has decreased from 72 in 2018 to 62 in 2021. Based on the Data First Form, between 2019 and 2022, 14 full-time faculty members have departed, and 11 full-time faculty have retired. The Data First Form also shows that 25 new full-time faculty have been hired during this same period. On the staff side, the college had 40 academic staff that provide support service to faculty and students including 6 librarians and 12 advisors.

MWCC faculty and staff belong to Massachusetts Community College Council (MCCC) union. MCCC contract includes guidelines on faculty workload, promotion, salary, academic freedom, faculty evaluation process, and grievances. Non-tenured faculty are evaluated every year until they are awarded tenure, and tenured faculty are evaluated every three years post-tenure following the contract guidelines.

MWCC hiring process follows procedures that comply with Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's (EEOC) guidelines. Vacant positions for faculty and academic staff are posted on MWCC website, professional career websites, and local and national professional publications if applicable. For hiring full-time faculty, a committee of at least five members representing different areas of the college would be established. Faculty are invited to serve on the committee. As noted in the report, the committee must include one member who is charged with ensuring diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) during the hiring process. Based on team meetings with faculty and

department chairs, faculty serve on the search committee and provide input in the hiring process.

**Faculty and Staff Diversity:** As noted in the report, in fall 2021, 91.5% of MWCC full-time and adjunct faculty self-identified as white, 8.1 % of full-time and adjunct faculty self-identified as Hispanic/Latinx, Black/African American, or Asian. On the staff side, 9.2 % were persons of color. Based on the Data First Form, 64.5% full-time and 61.4% of part-time faculty are female, 4.8% full-time and 2.7% part-time faculty are Hispanic/Latinx, 3.2 % of full-time and 1.6% of part-time faculty are Black/African American, and 4.8% of full-time and 2.2% of par-time faculty are Asian. In 2021, the student body was 66.9% female, 18% self-identify as Hispanic/Latinx, 9.9 % self-identify as Black/African American. As stated in the report, MWCC leadership is concerned about this difference and has created a new position of Chief Diversity Executive to explore strategies for diversifying faculty and staff. From the team meeting with the vice president of human resources, interim vice president of academic affairs, and other college administration members, the hirings of six new full-time faculty members in FY2021 has not been successful in addressing the concern. The college is working with its Chief Diversity Executive to improve the diversity of its faculty by recruiting diverse faculty.

**Advising:** Advising at MWCC is done by full-time faculty and professional staff in ACT (Advising, Career, and Transfer) and THRIVE (Together, Harnessing the Resources that Inspire a Valuable Education) grant funded programs. Federal grant funded TRIO program services Vision and Rx programs are also available to support students from first generation, low-income background, and students with disabilities to graduate and transfer. The Vision program provides support services for students majoring in non-health science. The Rx program provides support services for students majoring in health-sciences. The THRIVE mission is to support students' persistence and retention by supporting vulnerable students with resources tailored to them. According to the MCCC Day contract faculty advising is limited to 18 students per semester. Specialty program areas such as Nursing and Auto Tech assign department faculty as advisors to provide their students with the best advice in their course selection and career planning. Based on the team meeting with students, students actively participate in student organizations and volunteer activities. The students were eager to share their personal success stories as a result of continued support services they have been receiving from faculty and staff at the college. Based on the team separate meeting discussions with staff and faculty, the advising centers serve students well in their own areas but there is lack of coordination between the different areas.

**Professional Development:** Faculty and staff participate in professional development activities by attending three Professional Days that the college holds during the academic year, led by Academic Affairs and Teaching and Learning Committee of the Academic Senate, and facilitated by faculty and staff, and by participating in local and national professional conferences and workshops. Faculty can also volunteer to commit three years to participate in the MWCC Faculty Academy (FA) and work with other faculty from sister community colleges and state university on curriculum development

that is relevant and engaging for students based on the Pedagogy of Real Talk. Pedagogy provides educators with tools to connect and engage at risk students, who may see school/college as obstacle, by emphasizing on connection-first by revealing the instructor's own experience of vulnerability. Based on team meeting discussion with faculty, there are cohorts of faculty who have already completed the program. There are also cohorts who are in their first year, second year, and third year. During team meetings with faculty, some of the faculty who have completed FA have shared their positive experience and how FA helped them adopt the pedagogy, engage with their students, and help them succeed in the courses they are teaching. Each cohort has 8-12 faculty members, and three cohorts would give approximately 24-36 faculty members out of MWCC's 62 full time faculty. At team meetings with both staff and faculty, a need for centralized and coordinated professional development activities was emphasized. MWCC has been developing a nascent Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) which is expected to offer faculty and staff various professional development courses online using Blackboard starting in fall 2022.

MWCC HR provides funding for professional development activities. It provides funding based on the recommendation of a review committee. The committee prioritizes training related to four areas: student success, access, integrative planning, and sustainability of the college's mission. As noted in the report, the college's budget for professional development has increased from \$20,000 in FY2022 to \$40,000 for FY2023 due to increased request for funding that exceeded the allocated amount by more \$36,000 for fall 2022. Based on team meeting, the increase in demand was attributed to improved communications about the availability of funds and eligibility. At separate team meetings with staff and faculty, some of the faculty and staff members have shared their experience related to professional development application and funding and pointed out the lack of clarity in communication about professional development and its application review process. They have also emphasized the need for more professional development opportunities.

**Teaching and Learning:** Teaching is the primary role of faculty at MWCC. The faculty are responsible for curriculum proposal and revision, course delivery, setting program and course level student learning outcomes and developing and adopting new pedagogies. The college offers courses in traditional and non-traditional modalities: online(asynchronous), online(synchronous), and Hyflex. Hyflex mode of teaching and learning provides students with flexibility for remote learning when they are not able to make it to classroom in person. The report notes that 25 classrooms were upgraded to Hyflex media-rich classrooms during the pandemic but student interest in Hyflex courses has decreased post pandemic. Mandatory training on Hyflex best practices is provided by the director of educational technology and media services to Faculty teaching Hyflex courses. Faculty and staff also serve on various college governance committees and search committees

Faculty at MWCC experiment with different teaching pedagogies that actively engage students inside and outside classroom. A pilot dual language certificate program offers courses in Spanish with co-requisite ESL course. The course is offered in Hyflex

classroom to give flexibility to students. Service-Learning and Honors Program provides students with active, engaging, and challenging learning opportunities. Based on the Honors Program reapproval letter provided as evidence to the team, MWCC has been offering Honors Program for over 25 years. The program provides talented students with an opportunity to take special honor courses that incorporate independent research, colloquium, and individual advising. In courses that incorporate Service Learning, students engage in projects relevant to the community and themselves. Nursing and Graphic Design are two of the programs that involve students in service learning and have shared their experiences at the team meeting with faculty.

**Assessment of Learning Outcomes:** MWCC has Institutional Student Learning outcomes (ISLOs) under the umbrellas of ANALYZE, COMMUNICATE, CREATE, ENGAGE, and RESEARCH expected of all students upon graduation. According to the report, the ISLOs are developed by faculty and are integrated into the programs and courses. Programs and Course level Student learning outcomes are in the program outcome and course syllabus, respectively. The documents provided to the team show curriculum mapping of courses in programs with ISLOs. General education core courses also have their own learning outcomes. As noted in the report and information gathered at team meetings, assessment plan for ISLOs and course level learning outcomes, that provides feedback to help improve the learning and teaching process by closing the loop, has not been done but the process is expected to start in fall 2022 with the guidance of director of institutional research and assessment. As noted in the report and confirmed at team discussions, a high percentage of courses, including the ones with multiple sections, are taught by adjunct faculty. Course syllabi are reviewed by department chairs and dean every semester. They are required to include course learning outcomes. Based on team meetings with department chairs and faculty, courses with multiple sections, in some departments, have a person who coordinates the course to maintain consistency.

## *7. Institutional Resources*

**Human Resources:** The 2019 early retirement incentive led to 25 faculty and staff retiring. The college hired six faculty members in 2021- 2022 and is projecting to hire 14 faculty in 2022-2023. The Self-Study has a projection in Standard 6 to develop a plan to diversify the faculty to mirror the diversity of the student body and recently hired a Chief Diversity Executive. However, the opportunity of having multiple faculty hires did not result in any increase in diversifying faculty. During the department chair meeting, the chairs noted that the applicant pools were not diverse, suggesting a need for broadening recruitment efforts. The Vice President of Human Resources indicated the office has multiple ways of promoting positions, but recruitment needs to be emphasized. An effort was established, pre-COVID, to work with programs at UMASS Amherst to develop a pipeline for potential teaching positions.

MWCC has three classifications of employees with two of them associated with the MCCC or AFSCME unions. AFSCME and the MCCC Day Contract and MCCC Division of Continuing Education (DCE) are the three labor contracts governing terms of employment. At the time of the visit employees covered under the MCCC Day Contract are currently working without a contract. The union contracts, as well as a New Employee Orientation Guide, are posted on the college website.

The college has experienced significant turnover, especially in key positions. The VPASA left the college in July 2021 and was replaced by an Interim VP of Academic Affairs and an Interim VP of Student Affairs. The Asst Dean of the Library, Director of Educational Technology, and the Registrar all left the college ~July 2021 and were replaced by January 2022. The VP of Grant Development retired and was not replaced, and the VP of Workforce Dev/Life Long Learning was also replaced in 2021. Successful faculty searches have included two in automotive, four in nursing, two in English, as well as two in Math. Two Nursing searches were not successful while two other faculty searches are on hold. Department chairs expressed satisfaction with the energy and commitment of the new faculty. However, concerns were expressed for the loss of institutional knowledge. Turnover in both Financial Aid and the Business Office has negatively impacted operations in those areas. However, the hiring of a Director of Student Financial Services and the hiring of the CFO has stabilized each respective area.

Although there are many new hires, employees expressed appreciation for the energy and new perspectives of the newly hired faculty and staff. The turnover in senior management appears to have slowed, allowing for some stability.

The Vice President of Human Resources indicated that the college is undecided on whether to post a combined Dean of Academic and Student Affairs or to post both positions separately. The college has had both structures.

The Data First form of Headcount of Employees by Occupational Category contains errors in FY2019 significantly overreporting unduplicated employee counts. As reported elsewhere in the report, data systems, collection and integrity should be strengthened. An example is Student and Academic Affairs. IPEDS Data, as reported by HR, indicates 174 employees in 2019 and 167 employees in 2020, but Institutional Research puts the number at 31 for 2022. The Director of Institutional Research and Assessment indicates that Human Resources and Institutional Research, which both use different databases, will be collaborating closely for consistent reporting.

Compensation is determined by the appropriate collective bargaining agreement. While faculty felt salaries might be too low, they do appear to be competitive. Evaluations are done in accordance with collective bargaining agreements. The MCCC Day Contract has strict evaluation procedures. Standard 9 lists a projection to provide systematic, consistent training on policies and procedures, including evaluation.

While there are opportunities for professional development, faculty expressed confusion over the process and unclear guidelines regarding the approval process. The Vice President of Human Resources explained a committee of managers reviews requests and is recommending that accreditation-required trainings should be operationalized and not go through the professional development process. Professional development slowed during COVID but is rebounding and has a budget of \$40,000.00.

**Financial Resources:** According to the Fall 2022 Enrollment Tracker Executive Summary, enrollment has declined for nine consecutive years. The Chief Financial Officer attributes this year's recent decline, in part, to the Massachusetts Community College system COVID vaccine requirement. Tuition and fee revenue has declined 20% from \$16.9 million in 2019 to \$13.5 million in 2023. At the same time operating expenditures have increased 7% from \$53.8 million in 2019 to \$57.7 million in 2023. During this same time, the State appropriation increased 11% from \$20.9 million in 2019 to \$23.6 million in 2023.

In spite of declining enrollment coupled with rising expenses, the college was able to not only maintain, but to grow, its reserve from \$4 million in 2019 to \$7.5 million in 2022. The reserve is made up of the college's investments of \$2.0 million and \$5.5 million of cash and cash equivalents. The college has no plans to tap its reserve funds. According to the 2021 Financial Statements expenses for instruction, academic support, student services and student aid – in support of the academic mission. The next largest expenditures were for institutional support and maintenance at 24% and public service and the fitness center at 4%.

While senior management has worked closely with the board on financial planning, employees were unclear about the budget process. The Self-Study uses the term 'cost center managers' for departmental budgets. The CFO is automating processes and increasing budget transparency by allowing electronic access to budget information. The CFO reported that due to the turnover in the Business Office, financial procedures need to be updated, posted on the intranet, and publicized.

The most recent financial statements as of June 30, 2021, are audited by O'Connor & Drew P.C. In Management's Discussion and Analysis, regional concerns included an aging and diverse population, 'rural communities where economic development and workforce development issues are dependent upon higher education to respond.' In addition, 'The College's ability to respond to these concerns depends on the continuation of state funding, the availability of federal and state grants and contracts, a steady enrollment, and cost containment and conservation strategies in order to meet the College's basic operational needs.'

Tuition is \$25 per credit hour. College fees per credit hour were \$197 for the past three years and increased to \$200 for the current fiscal year. Program and Special Course Fees vary, with Dental and Automotive having \$4 thousand fees for kits, Vet. Tech with a \$1,000 fee. Total Federal Financial Aid has declined from \$11.9 million in 2019 to \$8.0 million in 2022. Tuition and fees account for 47% of total operating revenues. The CFO is

working with Business Office staff to allocate costs to programs, to determine, in part, if fees may need to be adjusted.

The CFO and President work closely with the Board and Finance Committee, being supportive of the college's efforts to maintain its financial position. Finance Committee minutes indicate the Board is actively involved. The college has aggressively pursued grants and has many grant-funded positions. Both the CFO and Executive Director of Resource and Strategic Initiative Development agree the college will be more strategic and analytical in reviewing grant applications. The grants office raises between \$6 million and \$9 million each year for the college. The Mount Wachusett Community College Foundation does fundraise on behalf of the college. It has assets of \$12.1 million. In addition to awarding scholarships to students, the Foundation purchased the building in Gardner for the automotive program.

The college has maintained a healthy current ratio, from 1.95 in 2019 to 3.62 in 2021. The college has issued five bonds. Long-term debt has decreased from \$9.8 million in 2019 to \$7.6 million in 2022. Management has indicated that it has ruled out taking on further debt.

The college has taken advantage of federal funds disbursed during the pandemic under the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) with \$7.4 million in student aid award, \$10.1 in institutional award and \$353 thousand in strengthening institution program. These funds have been used to support IT initiatives.

The management team is well aware of the fiscal challenges – anticipated continuing declines in enrollment, uncertain state funding, the loss of one-time CARES funding, increasing expenditures due to inflation. The college is looking at growing alternate revenue streams, better cost allocation to identify revenue-producing programs, and starting a rolling 3-year budget projection. The college should continue efforts to integrate the budget with strategic planning processes. While the CFO has started laying the groundwork for possible austerity measures given the serious financial challenges, the Board and management should continue the college's long history of fiscal prudence by developing detailed contingency plans.

**Physical Resources:** MWCC has its main campus in Gardner with three off-site locations in Devens, Fitchburg and Leominster. Two team members visited the Auto Technology Center in Gardner, the Dental Hygiene campus in Fitchburg and the Leominster Campus. The Auto Center has two Hyflex classrooms, a shop, office space on the second floor, as well as space for program expansion. Two graduating students, who had already secured employment, spoke highly of the program and the support they received from faculty. The program has very high job placement. The college is exploring grant opportunities to expand into e-vehicle technologies.

The Dental program is located inside the Community Health Connections facility in Fitchburg. Students have private operatories, state-of-the-art equipment as well as having the benefit of clinical experience in a federally qualified health center. Again,

students spoke of caring faculty and felt supported by the college. The Leominster campus was a construction site on the day team members visited. Nearing completion of an interior reconstruction, the site is scheduled to reopen in January 2023. The college has a partnership with MassHire, also located at this address. The goal is to increase enrollment at Leominster from 12% of total enrollment to 15%. The renovated facility will contain testing, a food pantry, student lounge and study space, library space, science lab and prep space, science faculty offices, adult education, continuing education, and campus police. The Chief Student Officer spoke passionately this location meeting the college's equity agenda by serving a different population, the addition of lab space, and having a bus stop in an area where transportation is challenging as well as a higher persistence rate at this campus.

The main campus in Gardner is spacious, impressive, welcoming, well resourced, vibrant and models sustainability. Located on 269 acres, the campus is made up of four primary buildings: the Arthur F. Haley Academic Building, Dr. Daniel M. Asquino Science Center, LaFontaine Fine Arts Center, and the Robert D. Wetmore Center. In addition, the college has a greenhouse, Early Childhood Center, and Fitness Center. The college has ample parking, trails as well as two 396-foot high wind turbines.

The Bemis Student Center was thriving with students collaborating, relaxing, and enjoying space devoted to students. Classroom spaces were modern, bright and had requisite technology, whether computers, audio and studio labs or science labs. At the student and department chair meeting, all felt the classroom resources were appropriate for multiple disciplines. The lease on the Devens campus comes due in January 2023. An RFP has been issued. The college is committed to maintaining its presence in Devens, either in a renovation of the current location or a move to a new location. Management is discussing the program mix that may make this location financially profitable. The SIMS lab was moved from Devens to the main campus at an approximate cost of \$350,000.00. This amount is inclusive of the move, build out and set up of the new lab on the Gardner campus.

The college has multiple efforts in sustainability with wind turbines, solar array and having converted to biomass heating. However, the biomass heating has been off for a year. These efforts have resulted in the college reducing its carbon footprint and providing virtually all power to the college. The most recent project was the installation of three electric charging stations.

At 65,000 feet, Mount Fitness contains a swimming pool, three basketball courts, on-site childcare, fitness equipment as well as outdoor athletic spaces. During the tour, students and members of the public were taking fitness classes, using the pool and weights areas. In addition to Mount Fitness, the Art Gallery and Theater all serve to draw community members to the college.

While the Gardner campus is impressive, deferred maintenance is estimated at approximately \$40 million, currently with funding of \$5.9 million. The Facilities Condition

Index per the Executive Director of Facilities is calculated at 10%, which is considered fair. The Massachusetts Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance (DCAMM) is planning to review all community colleges' deferred maintenance. The college has indicated it is not willing to take on debt to address deferred maintenance. The Executive Director of Facilities Management indicated growing the agricultural and automotive programs also allows Plant & Property to have more of a role in program success. Upcoming projects include asbestos abatement, sprucing up hallways as well as work on the HVAC systems. The Facilities area is sufficiently staffed, and budget information has been shared with all staff to help understand the cost drivers and achievable savings their efforts can have on the college budget.

**Library:** While much of the campus is renovated, the Self-Study states the library needs attention on multiple levels, from refurbishing its physical collection to an overhaul of existing space. Co-locating the Testing Center in the library has increased student traffic. The new Assistant Dean of Library Services envisions transforming the library from a quiet study space to vibrant interactive learning spaces. During COVID the library's budget decreased 20%, but the current budget reflects a 35% increase. The library maintains 84 databases and recently spent \$30 thousand to refresh the physical collection. The reopening of Leominster is posing challenges regarding what form library services, staffing and collections will look like at this remote location.

**Information Technology:** The college's learning management system is Blackboard Learn. Banner is the system for maintaining student and financial records, while HR uses PeopleSoft. On the Gardner campus 25 classrooms have been upgraded to HyFlex classrooms. The IT area is fully staffed, having gone from one programmer to three.

The Executive Director of Information Technology is working with the Director of Institutional Research and Assessment on creating a data governance structure for the college. As offices are using various software products, different versions of Banner, and extracting different data, campus members commented that it will be important to have a cohesive plan for addressing technology and data concerns in a systematic manner.

One of the priorities is working with consultants to modernize Banner Self-Service, implementing course scheduling over the next year, and fully utilizing all Banner modules. The refund process was recently moved to Banner. The college is also considering applying for a Title III grant for Banner optimization. Expanding accessibility and faculty training and obtaining faculty buy-in are goals shared by IT and Instructional Design.

To support students, IT has a 24/7 Help Desk supported by a vendor and IT staff. In December IT will be launching Ready Education which will replace iConnect, the common portal for employees and students to access core systems. New functionality will allow students to communicate with each other via messaging. The IT Technology Plan goes from 2022 to 2026 with four goals: business integration, security and legal

exposure, data analytics and cost containment. The Executive Director said the focus was bringing the Business Office, HR, and Financial Aid where they need to be with technology and reporting capabilities.

The college has struggled during COVID with limited IT staff, products coming to the end of their life cycle, numerous systems, and some resistance to learning new systems. However, the college is aware of weaknesses in these areas and has taken active steps to redress them, while recognizing that for technology resources, this will be a multi-year solution. CARES funds were critical in moving some of these initiatives forward. As one-time funding disappears and operating funds may be scarce, the college may need to further prioritize initiatives while it works to strengthen robust data reporting.

### *8. Educational Effectiveness*

Consistent with its mission, MWCC examines data on educational effectiveness and student success for the entire student population as well as for each student body, including Black, Hispanic, and low-income students. In the Data-First Forms for this Standard, a DEI lens is thoroughly applied. This rich data is reported annually to external parties, including IPEDS, the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education (MA DHE), and the Voluntary Framework of Accountability (VFA), allowing for state and national benchmarking.

Also consistent with its mission, MWCC's website and the *College Catalog and Student Handbook* clearly describe what students can expect to gain from their education. During AY2015, the College approved a set of five Institutional Student Learning Outcomes (ISLOs), for general education, each with a set of "sub-outcomes":

1. *To analyze information to formulate ideas and to solve problems.*
2. *To communicate information, ideas, and opinions effectively for a range of purposes and audiences.*
3. *To create a work that reflects originality.*
4. *To engage within local, national, and global communities; and*
5. *To research to deepen understanding, answer questions and discover evidence to support a concept, theory, or observation.*

Source: <http://catalog.mwcc.edu/institutionalstudentlearningoutcomes/>

The NECHE Interim Review in AY2017 emphasized the importance of incorporating the ISLOs into MWCC's curriculum. Following the Interim Review, academic departments mapped all their courses to the ISLOs. As the institution had no Director of Assessment from 2014 through mid-2022, this work was largely advanced and supported by the Outcomes Assessment Committee. Subsequently created courses have been mapped onto the ISLOs during development. "Mapping" here means that the course is reviewed as to whether it introduces ("I"), reinforces ("R"), or leads to mastery of ("M") each of the 19 "sub-outcomes" included within the five ISLOs. The complete set of course-to-ISLO

maps reside with the new Director of Assessment (onboarded summer 2022), who plans to make them generally available.

The college's general education program is a primary means of addressing the ISLOs. MWCC's core curriculum is unique. Students complete one of three general education tracks, all of which comprise more than the minimum 20 credits in the NECHE Standards. The three-track system is a creative way to tailor general education to the range of degree programs offered by the College: transfer degree programs in STEM; non-STEM transfer degree programs, and career programs. Aside from the College Writing requirements (ENG 101 and ENG 102), there are no common courses across tracks, just coverage of general disciplinary areas (Mathematics, Humanities, etc.). The range of course options coupled with a lack of access to the course-to-ISLO maps for students and advisors means that it is not possible to know whether any given set of general education courses will address the full range of ISLOs. This surprising conclusion, verified by advising and assessment staff, is tenable only because the general education program has not yet matured to the point where demonstrated mastery of the ISLOs is required.

The ISLOs are also meant to frame co-curricular learning. Service learning is widely incorporated within many of MWCC's academic programs, and other service opportunities not linked to coursework are widely available, consistent with the college's mission of graduating civic-minded people. The Office of Student Affairs is attentive to the ISLOs as well, particularly in reference to academic advising. The Director of Assessment plans to develop practices to enable the institution to understand the impact of student experiences outside the classroom within the framework of the ISLOs.

The new Director of Assessment has been charged with moving the College to a place of "understanding what and how students are learning" (Standard 8.3) relative to ISLOs. The support by college leadership of developing assessment is reflected in the institutions persistence through a lengthy search process (including two failed searches) that resulted in this hire. The Director of Assessment is currently developing a proposal to take to the Academic Senate (a body of faculty and professional staff) for review. The proposal outlines two tactics:

- Develop an ISLO Assessment Committee to include faculty, staff, and at least one Instructional Design person (two have joined the College in the last year, more evidence of the commitment of college leadership to assessment); and
- Establish an annual process for academic departments to work through courses identified as addressing an ISLO, describing concretely how this happens and how it can be demonstrated. Each year, the plan is for all departments to focus on the same ISLO, so that in five years the College will have developed assessment methodology for each of the ISLOs.

The Director of Assessment has a strategy to focus on systemic change, by weaving the assessment of the Institutional Student Learning Outcomes into the daily work of the

academic programs and other student learning opportunities. Along the way, they are learning how the assessment of the ISLOs is already happening, uncovering creative approaches such as philosophy students writing reflective essays on what they have learned in their coursework through the lens of the ISLOs.

MWCC's website and the *College Catalog and Student Handbook* also describe what students can expect to gain from their academic program. Student learning outcomes are published for all degree and certificate programs. MWCC has a well-established academic program review process with two parts: an annual report and a comprehensive 5-year self-study. (Programs with external accreditation, such as physical therapy and nursing, are exempt from this internal review process.) Until recent years, oversight of program review had happened centrally, but oversight has shifted to the Academic Deans. As a result, different Schools within the College have started to approach the academic program review process in divergent ways that will make cross-college and all-college reporting more challenging.

Academic Program Reviews examine evidence of student learning using a wide range of measures, both qualitative and quantitative. Alongside writing assignments, tests, and oral presentations are objects created by students as well as performance artifacts. Many programs use the capstone course as an opportunity for students to integrate their cumulative learning through major projects.

Program data are not generally examined with a DEI lens, because of small sample concerns about reliability and because of concerns about privacy. The incorporation of qualitative data could be helpful to facilitate better understanding of the experience of different student bodies in an academic program. The Director of Assessment plans to create a standing structure for conducting student focus groups, which could be used as needs arise for a more qualitative lens. This would introduce more student voice into the assessment process.

Systematic assessment and reporting of student achievement of program outcomes is the strongest and most widely accessible in programs with external accreditation (those programs that are exempt from College's 5-year academic program review process). Links in the Data-First Forms for Standard 9 point to website pages where retention and graduation, licensure passage rates, and placement in employment are reported for the Practical Nursing, Associate Degree in Nursing, Physical Therapist Assistant, and Dental Assistant programs.

MWCC's Data-First Forms are striking in their attention to various student bodies, including students of color, low-income students, and students enrolled at different locations and online. With their participation in VFA, MWCC tracks a rich, informative set of student success metrics. In addition to measures of retention and graduation reported to IPEDS, use of the VFA provides a structure for the introduction of a variety of momentum metrics designed for community college students. The Massachusetts Department of Higher Education (MA DHE) reporting system provides yet another perspective. The value of these multiple frameworks applied to the various student

bodies can be illustrated in the persistence and retention data in MWCC's Data-First Forms:

For all first-time, full-time students, MWCC's Fall-to-Fall IPEDS retention rates have ranged between 56% and 60% over the four years for which data are most recently available. Using the same IPEDS methodology, MWCC reports that the retention of Black students ranged from 53% to 80%; the retention of Hispanic students ranged from 50% to 60%; and the retention of Pell recipients ranged from 49% to 61%. A similar pattern is evident for MWCC's Fall-to-Fall MA DHE retention rates, listed here for first-time, part-time students: 38% to 46% for all students, 40% to 50% for Black students, 35% to 48% for Hispanic students, and 37% to 47% for Pell recipients. Likewise, the College's Fall-to-Next-Term VFA persistence rates for the first time-in-college (FTIC) cohort range from 73% to 76% for all students, 71% to 85% for Black students, 65% to 79% for Hispanic students, and 70% to 76% for Pell recipients.

Use of these multiple methodologies allows MWCC to draw conclusions that are more reliable than any one methodology can provide, through a process of triangulation. In the case of persistence and retention, variation across the 4 years examined is consistently smaller for the "all students" values; values for the more specific (and smaller) populations of Black, Hispanic, and Pell students naturally range more widely from one reporting year to the next. Values outside the "all students" range cluster outside the lower end of the range. This allows MWCC to determine with more confidence that an equity gap exists for all three of these subpopulations. As the self-study indicates, this information feeds back into strategic and operational planning to improve services for students.

Maintaining what amounts to three different reporting systems is no small task. Doing so reflects the value MWCC places on getting the most accurate understanding possible of each of the student bodies served. Examples of this commitment to a fine-grained analysis abound in the self-study in reference to other measures (e.g., graduation rates) and other student bodies (including online students and students attending MWCC at various locations).

MWCC's commitment to fine-grained assessment of various student bodies is also evident outside formal reporting structures. A prime example surrounds the "Pedagogy of Real Talk" program, which is well-established at MWCC. This national program came to MWCC three years ago, with voluntary training provided through the Faculty Academy available to both adjunct and full-time faculty. The initial cohort involved 6-7 faculty who made a 3-year commitment to the program, and each year since 5-6 new faculty have joined the program. MWCC has carefully tracked the program's impact by comparing student success in course sections taught with and without the "Real Talk" approach. Data from the first year of implementation show a boost in student retention among those in the "Real Talk" sections, with the largest gains experienced by women

and by Black students. With this promising start, the institution has committed to ongoing implementation and continuing assessment.

The role of assessment in other efforts to improve student learning is not as clear. While the E-Series forms list many program changes, there is little evidence that those changes were driven by formalized assessment, and no clear evidence that the impact of these changes is assessed in turn. Instead, program review documents suggest that adjustments happen in response to concerns that come to faculty attention more informally. Setting aside programs with external program-specific accreditation (which require evidence of the achievement of student learning outcomes at the program level), the *College Catalog and Student Handbook* and the website provide little evidence that program completers are achieving program outcomes.

The primary source of information on outcomes for program completers is an alumni survey administered 3-6 months after students graduate. The survey is distributed via email three times a year to capture May, August, and December graduates. May graduates also receive a paper survey in the mail. Response rates run around 30%. These alumni surveys supply information for academic program review as well as for Perkins fund reporting. Perhaps the most significant barrier to the usefulness of data on student achievement and student learning at MWCC has been limited access to data. The rich data that are generated by the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment for external reporting differ markedly from data available to those administering and evaluating programs and services for students within the institution.

Throughout the visit, employees expressed their hunger for a wide range of data. The College has been hampered by antiquated, minimally functional data systems. Several recent developments, including first steps in data dissemination using the interactive visualization tool Tableau and the adoption of contemporary analytics software, will move MWCC toward greater access to data and information and will enable more employee self-service. These changes will support the institution's move toward greater collaboration and informed decision-making.

Simultaneously, MWCC is actively building a Data Governance Committee for the first time in the institution's history. This committee will enable coordination of coding, data entry, security, data integration, and collaboration across MWCC, and it will build confidence in the resulting data. The Committee's mandate includes data literacy training across the College, to enable informed interpretation and use of data. These changes will position the College to make data-informed decisions around planning and resource allocation, capacities which will be essential for adapting to future challenges.

### *9. Integrity, Transparency, and Public Disclosure*

**Integrity:** The Self-study states, "The College operates in an environment that is clear about its commitment to integrity, honesty, and sharing of vital information." MWCC expects that members of its community, including the board, administration, faculty,

staff, and students, will act responsibly, ethically, and with integrity. The student code of conduct is an example of the expectations the college has for integrity. Along with their mission statement, they include the following statement on institutional integrity as one of their institutional values.

***Institutional Integrity:*** We hold ourselves and others accountable for forwarding the vision, mission, and priorities of the college and living by our mission driven principles. We hold ourselves and others accountable for supporting and advancing each other, the organization, and the individuals that we pledge to serve; for acting professionally; for fulfilling commitments, demonstrating good judgment, assessing our effectiveness, and applying facts to continually renew as individuals and as a college.

In addition to Institutional Integrity, the college expresses a commitment to the values of *Human Potential, the Pursuit of Excellence, Mutual Respect and Trust, Considerate Open Communication, Creativity and Responsible Risk Taking, as well as Cooperation and Collaboration.*

The President of the college fosters an atmosphere where issues of integrity are openly considered by freely sharing his challenges and mistakes – giving credit for accomplishments to others and taking responsibility for any faults. In numerous interviews with faculty, staff, administration, and students as well as its dealings with the visiting team, truthfulness, clarity, and fairness characterize the institution's relations. These meetings also confirm MWCC's self-study statement that "The College operates in an environment that is clear about its commitment to integrity, honesty, and sharing of vital information."

The MWCC Academic Honesty Policy seeks to "promote honesty in scholarship and research." It defines, but does not limit, acts of Academic dishonesty to include Cheating, fabrications, unauthorized collaboration, facilitating dishonesty, submitting, in whole or in part, prewritten term papers of another or the research of another, theft of materials, and plagiarism. Provisions to ensure academic honesty include statements on syllabi, in the campus handbook, and in the student code of conduct. Faculty also utilize tools like "Safe Assign," randomizing test questions, and timed tests. The instructions for the filing of grievances can be found for students in the college catalog. For faculty and other employees, it is in the relevant collective bargaining agreement or for non-union employees on the MWCC HR webpage.

Fostering an inclusive atmosphere within the institutional community that respects and supports people of diverse characteristics and backgrounds is evident in the second line of the college's mission statement. "With a focus on community, we are committed to diversity, equity and inclusion with a racial equity lens and value the dignity and worth of all individuals and believe opportunity and access to education transforms lives."

**Transparency:** A review of the website shows that MWCC provides clear information to the public about its processes for admissions, employment, grading, assessment, student discipline, and the consideration of complaints and appeals in a format that is readily accessible. MWCC is responsive to reasonable requests for information about itself and informs the public about and publishes a host of information on its website that includes recent audited financial statements.

The records department updates the content of the college catalog annually. They send out parts of the catalog to the requisite departments for review and give a deadline for their return. Once the catalog is finished the marketing department uses a similar process with departments sending updates to them and ensuring that the catalog and website are consistent. Archival catalogs are available on their website.

Deans and Department chairs have valid documentation for any statements and promises regarding such matters as program excellence, learning outcomes, success in placement, and achievements of graduates or faculty.

Interviews and the self-study point to the need to make Improvements in transparency and information sharing such as the sharing of minutes and openness of governance proceedings. A need to improve the systems and processes to support reliable and accurate sharing of information externally and across platforms (web, intranet, and catalog) and that Information for employees are found in multiple locations and should be housed in a single, readily accessible locale.

**Public Disclosure:** MWCC is to be lauded for a website that is easy to navigate. It publishes its mission, objectives, and expected educational outcomes; its status as a public or independent institution; requirements and procedures and policies related to admissions and the transfer of credit; a list of institutions with which it has articulation agreements; student fees, charges, and refund policies; rules and regulations for student conduct; and procedures for student appeals and complaints.

If personnel are not available in a given year their messages and email are forwarded to either their department chair or academic dean.

Goals for students' education are available on the website and in the college catalog. It includes five Institutional Student Learning Outcomes "that define the skills that students will be able to demonstrate upon graduation from MWCC." Program student learning outcomes and technical standards are published on the website for each program along with additional requirements (like required tools for automotive students) and descriptions of required courses.

Linking to the U.S. department of Education Scorecard Mount Wachusett publishes the cost of education, net price, financial aid availability, student debt at graduation and the institution's cohort default and loan repayment. It also makes available timely, readily accessible, accurate, and consistent aggregate information about student achievement and institutional performance including rates of retention and graduation.

MWCC's statements about its current accredited status are listed on its website. However, the definition of NECHE should be corrected to not include the reference to its affiliation with elementary education as it is no longer since its separation from NEASC.

**Affirmation of Compliance:** To document the institution's compliance with federal regulations relating to Title IV, the team reviewed Mount Wachusett Community Colleges Affirmation of compliance form signed by the CEO. As noted in this report, MWCC publicly discloses on its website and other relevant publications its policy on transfer of credit along with a list of institutions with which it has articulation agreements. Public notification of the evaluation visit and of the opportunity for public comment was made by the College one month prior to the visit on the College's website. Copies of the college's grievance procedures for faculty, staff, and students are distributed annually during orientation and welcome-back sessions at the beginning of both the Fall and Spring semesters. For its online program and courses, MWCC uses a system of secure logins and pedagogical approaches to verify students' identities to ensure the integrity of the programs. As discussed in Standard 4: The Academic Program, the team's review of course schedules and syllabi for a cross-section of MWCC's course offerings both classroom and online, as well as courses offered in a shortened time period, found the assignments of credit reflective of the college's policy and consistent with the Commission's standards.

**Summary:** MWCC used the self-study process, including the Data First and E-Series forms, effectively to review several key aspects of institutional functioning. The reviews conducted as part of the self-study led to measurable improvements and commitments for improvement in several areas. Most notably in using data to inform strategic decision making and alignment of institutional learning outcomes.

In general, it is the view of the visiting team that MWCC is focused on the quality, integrity, and effectiveness of its professional academic programs and the success of its students. It is accomplishing its mission under the leadership of a fiscally responsible president, and dedicated board of trustees, and a faculty and staff devoted to the college's mission.

Having weathered a very difficult challenge of the COVID pandemic, MWCC has moved forward to adopt a new mission statement as well as a new strategic plan, which is in alignment, and guided by, the espoused mission. The College has worked hard to align its academic program with the needs of its surrounding community.

Other significant accomplishments over the past couple of years include the development of new space for the automotive program and a significant upgrade of its Leominster campus. Additionally, the college has made significant investments in strengthening instructional quality and academic support, student services, and technical infrastructure; all geared towards improving student success.

However, notwithstanding all of these accomplishments, MWCC is well aware of the fact that the years ahead will be uncertain at best and the pressure community colleges will experience with declining demographics will surely continue. With this in mind, the team offers the following summary of the most important strengths and concerns.

### **Strengths:**

- Throughout the campus there is a very real commitment to student success. Faculty and staff make sense of their role at the college in relation to how it can enhance the success of the student body. The community is devoted to the mission of the college and is continuously striving to seek out ways to improve. The approach to improvement has been with a great deal of self-awareness, integrity, and honesty.
- MWCC has a demonstrated sincere commitment with their K-12 partners. Additionally, they have a deep appreciation and understanding for the role this college plays in the region's well-being for providing access, social mobility opportunities, workforce development, and cultural enhancement.
- The team found evidence and recognizes the college has been managed well financially, has built up reserves and is focused on sound financial decision-making. The team found an acknowledgement that future financial challenges may require creative strategies.
- Additionally, the team found evidence of a focus on assessment and the utilization of data for continued improvement and planning. Assessment and data analytics have been used and there appears to be momentum for creating a system and processes to inform strategic decision-making. Furthermore, the team found evidence of real energy behind renewed DEI efforts, including: DEI being written into the new mission statement, the creation of a new position for DEI, professional development opportunities, an acknowledgement that continued diligence is necessary to achieve institutional outcomes.

### **Concerns:**

- While the team found evidence of an ambitious strategic plan there appears to be a need for continued work on prioritizing and a determination on how the plan can be operationalized and aligned with financial realities. Additionally, there are a significant number of new initiatives that have just begun. Aligning these initiatives with the aforementioned ambitious strategic plan will take significant attention.
- The College has experienced significant enrollment declines over the course of the past few years. While some of this was undoubtedly exacerbated by COVID, declining demographics and an increase in competition for students, as the number of traditional college students decrease in Massachusetts, will continue

to put pressure on enrollment. The self-study articulates a goal of building online enrollments, however an intentional approach to recruitment of online learners has not been articulated.