MID-CYCLE PEER-EVALUATION REPORT

LINN-BENTON COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Albany, OR

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A confidential report of findings prepared for the

Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities

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INTRODUCTION

Linn-Benton Community College is a public two-year institution located in the northwest of Oregon, with six locations in Linn and Benton County, OR, including a main campus in Albany; a Benton Center in Corvallis; a Lebanon Center, an Advanced Transportation and Technology Center, and a Health Care Occupations Center in Lebanon, OR; a Sweet Home Center in Sweet Home, OR; and community and continuing education programs on all campuses and at several community sites. Linn-Benton Community College (hereafter LBCC) also offers extended learning. Founded in 1968, LBCC first received accreditation status in 1972 and has maintained that accreditation without interruption. LBCC is the sixth largest of Oregon's seventeen community colleges, educating more than 18,000 students per year. Its Guided Pathways offer seven core areas of study, leading to more than 80 career technical education and transfer degree programs. The College has more than 300 business partners in its programs.

On October 7-8, 2019, a two-person Peer-Evaluation Committee (hereafter known as "Committee") from the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) conducted a Mid-Cycle Evaluation.

During the visit itself, on October 7 the Committee had the opportunity with the leadership team and members of the Board of Trustees, the entire MERIT/College Council, the Chemistry and Child and Family Studies faculty members whose work was featured in the *Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation Report* as exemplary, the deans, faculty representatives, the director and staff of the Office of Data and Decision Support, and the executive team. On October 8, the Committee met with President Dr. Greg Hamann, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Workforce Development Dr. Ann Buchele, and Vice President for Finance and Operations Dave Henderson. The visit then concluded with an exit meeting open to all at which the Committee presented a summary of its findings.

ASSESSMENT OF SELF-EVALUATION REPORT AND MATERIALS (PART I)

On August 27, the Committee electronically received LBCC's August 2019 *Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation Report*. The document provided a narrative overview of LBCC's institutional assessment plan; examples from Child and Family Studies and from Chemistry illustrating instructors' use of outcomes assessment data to transform curriculum and instructional practice; charts documenting improvements in passing percentage in relation to specific outcomes in the Chemistry course; a frank self-assessment of institutional plans for moving forward based on the changes implemented to this point; an appendix with MERIT Report Cards on core themes; and a second appendix detailing changes made to practicum instructional planning and practice in Child and Family Studies as a result of the program assessment reports.

Then, on September 27, in response to requests from the Committee, LBCC promptly furnished several other documents, including sample budget requests approved and denied; more detailed chronicling of the Child and Family Studies outcomes-based program review and programmatic as well as pedagogical changes; MERIT report cards showing progress toward meeting stated metrics and objectives in the core areas of economic vitality, educational attainment, and cultural richness.

Reviewing LBCC's Self-Evaluation along with observations from the on-campus visit allowed the Committee to understand and appreciate LBCC's integration of core themes, assessment, the budget process, support for professional development, and use of assessment data to feed back into program review and pedagogical practice. The visit demonstrated LBCC's commitment to, and creation of, a culture that encourages and rewards experimentation, trial-and-error, and innovation.

NARRATIVE RESPONSE TO SELF-EVALUATION AND VISIT (PART II)

The Committee acknowledges the following as promising, excellent practices to continue:

Unified Focus

Student success emerged across the campus as everyone's common purpose. From instructors to the Office of Data and Decision Support to the executive team, everyone with whom we spoke articulated a shared purpose of overcoming differences about process in service of the greater shared goal of contributing to student success. One notable example emerged in the Committee's meeting with deans, where we learned of a shared commitment to seeing processes through the eyes of students taking the form of deans taking regular shifts in the New Student Center—a practice that "restores the student perspective" to daily work. Moreover, the Committee found that LBCC takes a holistic approach to students. Making such an approach meaningful, consistent, and complete requires strong teamwork across all sectors of the College, and that teamwork was clearly attested to by all staff with whom we spoke.

Structure of Innovation and Operation Spheres

The structure of the Innovation and Operation spheres is unlike anything the Committee's two members have seen elsewhere. Simple, elegant, and easy to comprehend in its design as a graphic and as a concept, it seems to be working well and is clear to everybody. Having some people who serve on councils and teams in both spheres, and who therefore function as communications liaisons between the MERIT and College Council, no doubt keeps the dividing line on the graphic permeable. LBCC has documented cases of initiatives that have been adopted and scaled up through this process (e.g., the Learning & Innovation Center and the New Student Center). Its effectiveness is therefore not merely conceptual but proven in practice. Moreover, this structure is thoroughly integrated into, and drives, other processes from assessment to marketing.

"Part III: Moving Forward" of LBCC's *Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation Report* states that "MERIT is considering eliminating VICE [Values, Inclusion, Cultural Engagement] as a distinct Innovation Sphere council and dividing its work between the three remaining councils as well as with the councils in the Operations Sphere." The Committee appreciates the fact that such a decision does not come hastily but rather after giving the current structure a fair run of five years. The Committee heard strong rationale for this change: the difficulty of absorbing MERIT objectives into VICE, the advisability of having director of Institutional Equity and Student Engagement Javier Cervantes report directly to President Hamann, and the best practice of embedding equity work throughout the institution rather than located in a single council, among other reasons. The Committee applauds LBCC for viewing its innovative structure as an evolving document.

Budget Request Process

Budget requests are aligned with LBCC's strategic plan and core themes and are integrated into the Innovation & Operation spheres. Materials provided to the Committee depict a well-thought-out budget request process, and discussions with faculty and others during the mid-cycle visit indicate that this process in increasingly well understood across the college. The Committee received examples of budget requests approved, denied, and sent back to the requesters for modification, with rationale for those decisions clearly tied to core themes and institutional values. The documented responses to proposals for an athletics scoreboard, for the faculty development "Difference, Power, and Discrimination" initiative, for a STEM faculty learning community, and for Web site rebranding all illustrate a healthy process of discussion, submission, revision when necessary, and consistent application of judging criteria. Other instances also validate that the process is working well, including the requests to create a Learning Innovation Center and a New Student Center. Professional development is appropriately tied to core themes and institutional values. The Committee supports LBCC beginning to ask for performance metrics to be submitted with requests. Also notable is the willingness to create performance metrics. Good methods exist for feedback (as with the scoreboard funding request), improvement, and accountability.

Performance Indicators

LBCC has set a reasonable number of performance indicators of mission fulfillment, with each clearly defined. Visual representation on the report cards is consistent in format and quickly comprehensible in content. The responsible council, the objective, the core theme, a definition of the goal, and whether the goal has been met can be grasped immediately. Indicators bear direct relation to student learning. Program reviews are conducted, as in Child and Family Studies, with key indicators in mind. Incremental improvement targets set aspirations.

Faculty have taken the MERIT report card objectives to heart. As stated by Christy Stevens, faculty member in Education/Child and Family Studies, the process is "faculty led, accreditation driven." Faculty ownership of, and commitment to, this process is essential for its success, and the Committee was pleased to see that in evidence.

See Item 4 below under "Formative Suggestions" for the Committee's recommendation regarding report cards.

Support for Innovative Practices and Culture of Risk-Taking

The Committee found a shared culture that encourages innovation and risk-taking, does not punish failure but rather celebrates the spirit of experimentation and encourages the proposer to refine and re-try. Faculty Innovator and Faculty Fellows funding support innovation at the individual level, and individual faculty members then share results with peers to help broaden the application of effective innovative practices.

Willingness to take risks and to fail is supported at individual and institutional levels. Failures are even celebrated for the boldness of the undertaking and for what they contribute to learning about what does and does not improve student success. The Committee heard about this common approach embraced from faculty members Marcia Walsh (Child and Family Studies) and Dr. Ommidala Pattawong (Chemistry), from Dean of Academic Foundations Leslie Hammond and

other deans, from Dr. Justin Smith and Justene Malosh in the Office of Data and Decision Support cheering on attempts, and from Dr. Ann Buchele and the executive team urging that approach at the institution-wide level. This shared culture occurs as a result of intentional practice, not happy accident.

The Committee also values LBCC's willingness to move forward after experiment and discussion rather than be stalled by doubt or uncertainty of outcome (as with adopting mandatory attendance-taking among faculty who volunteer to participate or, as referred to above in the section on the Structure of the Innovation and Operation Spheres, to move VICE).

Support for Professional Development

Professional development is generously supported operationally for all faculty including part-time faculty. The all-faculty membership of the Professional Development Committee puts faculty firmly in charge of directing their professional development in a significant way. The professional development of part-time faculty enjoys a degree of support not often found at other institutions. A strong Part-Time Faculty Association, with the support of administration and MERIT and College Council members, encourages its members to serve on councils (service that in itself is a form of professional development). It appears that LBCC makes every effort to extend professional development to part-time faculty.

Also noteworthy is professional development funding for staff and for exempt employees. In the experience of the Committee, this is crucial. This practice makes it possible for a culture of innovation and risk-taking to thrive across campus in all employee sectors, and for all staff to take a holistic approach to students.

As noted above in the section on the budget process, professional development is appropriately tied to the strategic plan, core themes, and institutional values. The Committee was also encouraged to know that other funding sources were available for faculty who wished to pursue professional development that did not have an easily demonstrated link to a MERIT objective but that would serve their ongoing growth as teaching professionals.

Assessment Process

Assessment processes are on the right track. Departments and faculty have taken ownership of the process and used results for meaningful review. The examples featured in the *Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation Report*, such as Marcia Walsh's changes to ECE Program and practicums and Dr. Ommidala Pattawong's use of student success data to improve Chemistry instruction, were exemplary; the Committee was interested to find out in its visit if those featured examples were isolated or systemic. The Committee found the latter to be closer to the case. For example, Raymond Ocampo, faculty member in the Music Department, described end-of-term faculty "reflection points" in which his department discusses data and outcomes, and then considers feedback into instruction. Mr. Ocampo said that two crucial questions focused on student outcomes animate these end-of-term conversations: What were our challenges? How have we addressed them? These answers to these self-reflective examinations, and the ways those answers will loop back into curriculum planning and pedagogical strategies, are then recorded and reported by each department sending one-page reports to deans each term. This provides a

good mechanism for documenting these conversations, a step which the Committee compliments as a best practice.

The Committee found evidence of faculty moving toward using data to improve their programs. Cooperation with the Office of Data and Decision Support makes this possible. Regular Program Review resonates with faculty as meaningful in institutionalizing assessment review practices.

Guided Pathway Progress

LBCC has made admirable progress on designing, implementing, and scaling Guided Pathways: Program and degree mapping is complete, advisors are using program maps, and pre-College course work is folded into pathways. Funding for implementation has been effective. Faculty are engaged in the process, indicating LBCC's success overcoming a common sticking point.

The Committee was particularly struck by two comments that captured LBCC's scaling of Guided Pathways: (1) In the meeting with the MERIT and College Council, one member described Guided Pathways as "not an initiative but an operational change." (2) LBCC has achieved movement toward "progression rather than swirl," as Dean of Academic Foundations Leslie Hammond stated it. These remarks suggest impressive institutionalization of Guided Pathways as a practice that connects back to LBCC's unified focus on student retention, progression, and completion.

Accessibility of Collected Data

The Office of Data and Decision Support (ODDS) makes data widely accessible and clearly understandable through data visualization and through providing professional development training for faculty in analyzing data. Its systems have been adopted by other community colleges in Oregon. ODDS Director Dr. Justin Smith and staff describe LBCC as having a "data-using culture." ODDS contributes to this through its transparency, truthfulness in presentation of data, and positioning not as an administrative office but as a public-facing and faculty-facing partner encouraging and participating in the risk-taking described above (in the section "Support for Innovative Practices Culture of Risk-Taking").

ODDS's design of the metric report cards is particularly notable; they are clear and consistent in visual presentation, concise, easy to grasp at a glance, reasonable in number, and directly related to student learning.

FORMATIVE COMMENTS (PART III)

In preparation for the Year Seven Review, the Evaluation Committee suggests that LBCC consider the following:

1) The Committee was even more impressed after talking with LBCC than after reading LBCC's *Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation Report*. In the upcoming Year Seven Report, the Committee urges LBCC to tout all of the good work that it is doing in so many areas and to add examples of best practices. The concision of the Mid-Cycle report was certainly appropriate; successes and systemic adoption of best practices should be described more fully in the larger report.

2) The *Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation Report* documents moves from Equity Training to Equity Practice. During the Committee's visit, this movement was described by, among others, Education/Child and Family Studies faculty member Christy Stevens and Director of Institutional Equity and Student Engagement Javier Cervantes. The move of VICE under consideration, and the move to have Director Cervantes report directly to President Hamann, seem like positive steps toward making the work of equity the responsibility of all LBCC staff rather than the work of a single individual, office, or committee. LBCC should continue to develop, document, and implement strategies to ensure equitable student outcomes and create a more fully institutionalized, inclusive college environment for minoritized employee and student groups.

3) Establish a systematic communication process for Innovation sphere opportunities to submit proposals and for communication between Council members and their constituencies. Although the process seems generally well understood, the Committee did hear lingering uncertainty in some quarters about process and decision-making. Aim for increased communication and transparency about process and priorities.

4) Consider adding gradations in MERIT report cards. The Committee realizes that this is a complex issue on which there are legitimately differing viewpoints. The MET/UNMET scoring is unambiguous and is uncompromising about whether target goals have been met. On the other hand, there is a difference between falling short of a goal by 1 percent and falling short by 10 or 20 percent, and the stark MET/UNMET standard does not allow for expression of that difference. The Committee recommends consideration of a system with greater gradation in order to express near misses, perhaps with just the addition of one more level of gradation.

The Committee also recommends including explanation of how 3 percent goal increases are established. For example, is 3 percent the desired increase regardless of the level of attainment? How was this figure arrived at as appropriate for all metrics? Is 3 percent not implemented when a prior goal has not been met, or when a satisfactory level of attainment has been achieved? Include in the Year-Seven Report an explanation of the rationale and application for target improvement figures.

5) Extend assessment to the individual student level to systematically measure student fulfillment of program outcomes. The Committee understands that there are varying views on this topic, and that undertaking this move will require significant work on the part of ODDS, faculty, and administration. However, such an extension is the next logical step in assessment and in enabling faculty to gather meaningful, actionable student learning data on which to base future curricular and pedagogical innovation and transformation.

6) As noted above, the college has made substantial progress in the implementation of Guided Pathways. To fully institutionalize program pathways for students in all

programs, continue to work toward the systematic alignment of course scheduling with course sequences documented on program maps.

APPENDIX: NWCCU RUBRIC

Rubric for Evaluating Outcomes Assessment Plan and Progress

Criterion	Initial	Emerging	Developed	Highly Developed
Assessment Planning	No formal assessment plan	Relies on intermittent planning	Clear regular plan	Clear multi-year plan with several years of implementation
Assessable Outcomes	Non-specific outcomes. Do not state student learning outcomes	Most outcomes indicate how students demonstrate learning	Each outcome describes student demonstration of learning	Outcomes describe demonstration of student learning. Outcomes used for improvement.
Assessment Implementation	Not clear that assessment data is collected	Evidence collected Faculty have discussed relevant criteria for reviewing	Evidence is collected and faculty use relevant criteria	Evidence collected, criteria determined and faculty discuss multiple sets of data. Data is used.
Alignment	No clear relationship between outcomes and curriculum	Some alignment between curriculum and outcomes	Clear alignment between curriculum and outcomes	Curriculum, grading and support services are aligned with outcomes
Valid Results	Little to no evidence that measures are valid	Majority of measures are valid	Valid measures in regular use	Multi-year use of valid measures
Reliable Results	No process to check for inter-rater reliability	Faculty preparing inter-rater reliability	Faculty check for inter-rater reliability	Multi-year use of process and evidence of good inter-rater reliability
Annual Feedback on Assessment Efforts	No person or committee provides feedback to departments on quality of their assessment plan	Occasional feed back by person or committee	Annual feedback by person or committee. Departments use feedback.	Annual feedback, departmental use and institutional support
Results are Used	Results for outcomes are collected but not discussed	Results collected, discussed but not used	Results collected, discussed and used.	Results collected, discussed, used and evidence to confirm that changes lead to improved learning
Planning and Budgeting	Outcomes not integrated into planning and budget	Attempts at aligning outcomes and planning and budget	Alignment of outcomes and planning and budget occurs informally	Alignment of outcomes and planning is systematic and intentional