# Report to the Faculty, Administration, Trustees, Students

of

Pittsfield, MA

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 October 20-23, 2019

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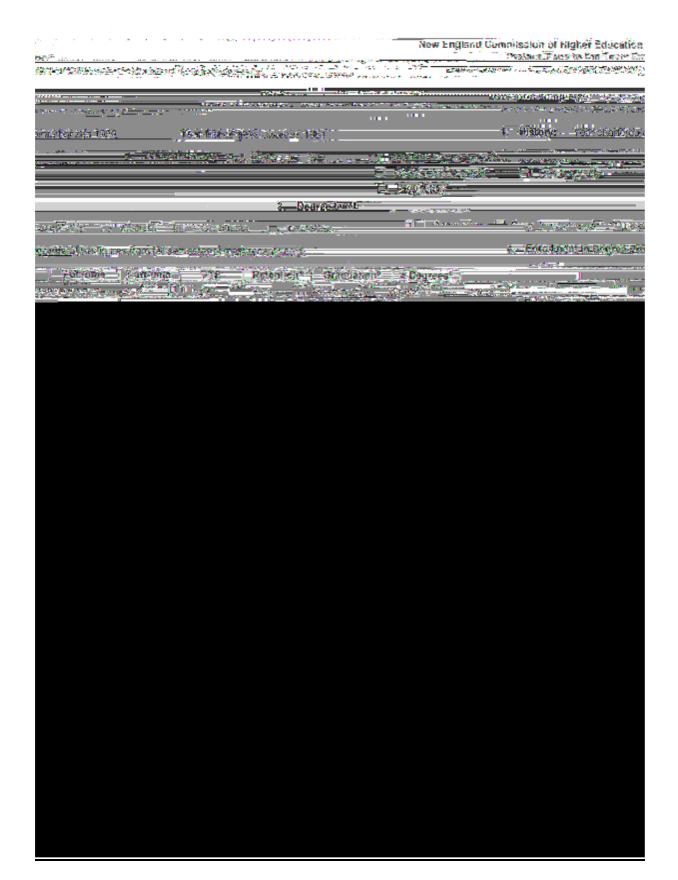
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This report represents the views of the evaluation committee as interpreted by the chairperson. Its content is based confidential document in which all comments are made in good faith. The report is prepared both as an educational status.



# **INTRODUCTION:**

All members of the Berkshire Community College (BCC), throughout the team's visit, were open and candid in their comments and they were cooperative and helpful in aiding the team. All of the individuals with whom we met were knowledgeable about the self-study report and the purpose of the team's visit. Extensive meetings were conducted with the Board of Trustees, faculty, staff, students, and alumni. The administrative support provided to schedule individual and group meetings with team members was outstanding and greatly appreciated.

A dinner meeting was held on Sunday evening with the President, members of the administrative team, faculty, and staff. The visiting team had the opportunity to meet with the self-study team and with the members of the committees that were responsible for each of the standards. This provided an opportunity to make connections and to get acquainted.

The workroom provided by the College contained either links to the documents needed or hard copies of the 2014-2019 Strategic Plan, audited system financial statements, enrollment and retention reports, and college publications including the 2019-2020 College Catalog, View book, employee and student handbooks, sample yearly assessment reports for liberal studies, faculty teaching load reports, library reports, course schedules, student satisfaction surveys, and other pertinent documents. The team appreciated the preparation of the self-study to include electronic links to the most important exhibits.

The team member's review of these documents before and during their visit to Berkshire Community College, the team chair's preliminary visit to the College on April 16, 2019, and the team's visit to the College on October 20-23, 2019, provided the basis for the information and evaluation judgments contained in the nine sections of this report which addresses the Standards for Accreditation of the New England Commission of Higher Education.

The evaluation of Berkshire Community College is a comprehensive evaluation. The team found that the Self-Study report provided sufficient information to specifically address how Berkshire Community College is meeting the Standards for Accreditation.

### STANDARD ONE: MISSION AND PURPOSE

Berkshire Community College was established in 1960, the first community college in Massachusetts. The College has a nearly 60-year history of thoughtful planning and strategic implementation of changes to better serve its students and the community.

In 2013, the College entered into a strategic planning process that included faculty, staff, administration, students, and community members. This process reviewed the College mission and purpose statements and identified the institutional values that accompany those statements.

Berkshire Communi , along with its core values, are displayed prominently in the college strategic plan, *Achieving Excellence*Transforming Lives, on the college web site and in the college catalogue. This strategic planning

process provided a broad base for the affirmation of the Mission and Purpose of the institution and provided a solid base for the new college strategic plan.

and support for the campus mission and purposes from the campus, the community and the Board of Trustees.

It was evident to the visiting team that the work done to affirm the College Mission and Purposes was at the center of the strategic planning process that began in 2013. The College acknowledges its responsibility to provide an entry point to higher education for students who may be challenged by social, economic or physical barriers while affirming its commitment to the liberal arts.

The visiting team was impressed by the work done by the College to engage the community in the planning process and to affirm its mission statement and purposes.

### STANDARD TWO: PLANNING AND EVALUATION:

Based on meetings with college staff, faculty, and senior administrators, and a review of supplemental supporting documents<sup>1</sup>, the visiting team finds that BCC invests significantly in comprehensive, integrated, and broad-based planning and evaluation, and confirms that these are indeed priorities at the institution.

In the self-study report, the College candidly discusses the need to improve its evaluation efforts. It points, for example, to the absence of clear, measurable outcomes for each of the five strategic directions in the 2014-2019 Strategic Plan, and no undertaken over the past five years to address key strategies in the plan, there is no clear and

incremental measures/targets might also be a contributing factor to the waning of the Strategic Plan Implementation Team s development of action plans and reporting beyond years one and two. Notably, in its self-appraisal, the College states that it plans to work closely with its Office of Institutional Effectiveness to set realistic and measurable goals for the upcoming 2021-2026 Strategic Plan.

During the visit, team members heard a range of perceptions about the state of evaluation college personnel often acknowledged its efforts across the College in these terms: sporadic, fragmented, and an afterthought. There were also instances when data-informed decision-making was discussed noting that the data, processes, and findings resided in disconnected pockets. Less frequently, the visiting team heard and saw evidence that the continuous learning and feedback loop not only occurred, but also was institutionalized (in an accessible, shareable format) and promoted widely as a best practice. Some of these are highlighted in the report under Incubator Projects.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> i.e., contents of the Data Fact Folder, instructional design coaching logs, Marketing Survey results, Enrollment M effort-impact survey, Title III Annual Evaluation report

This self-reflection about evaluation	n echoed the direction t	hat BCC received from N	ECHE in

The creation of the Office of Institutional Effectiveness (IE) is a direct outgrowth of the 2014-2019 Strategic Plan implementation. Its mission is to promote educational effectiveness through the support of planning and evaluation across the College. IE team members (a Director, Statistician, and Research Analyst) collect, analyze, and disseminate data pertaining to strategic, academic, student services, and other resource planning, policy development and evaluation efforts. Over and over the team heard BCC staff praise the value-added service provided by IE, particularly its planning and evaluation expertise, function as a repository of a wealth of accessible data, and approachability. In order to improve the systematic use of this data, the IE office plans to develop a centralized, interactive dashboard through which program, course, and other types of data can be accessed during the coming year. With assistance of the Information Technology (IT) staff, the College will utilize Tableau software to create dashboard views that will support a greater focus on key performance indicators related to enrollment, retention, and graduation. A variety of Tableau software licenses (Viewer, Explorer, and Creator) will be made Cabinet members, administrators, and faculty to access and

interact with these data.

Finally, the team finds that the implementation of Incubator Projects served as a visible laboratory to articulate, plan, execute and evaluate innovative and testable ideas that have the potential to mobilize advancement in each of the five strategic directions (e.g., Mursion software to utilize formative and summative assessment results, and the library renovation to repurpose underutilized space). Not only did the College benefit from these and other successes which have gone on to be institutionalized, but it also presents the opportunity to demonstrate learning ontribute

to the widely expressed view that resources are generally available to carry out teaching and learning efforts that align with the mission, values and goals of the College as expressed through the strategic plan.

#### **Evaluation:**

The research and reflection afforded by the comprehensive 2013 Strategic Planning process positioned BCC well to conceptualize, apply for, and ultimately be awarded a Title III Strengthening Institutions Program grant in support of The Completion Framework. The overall purpose of this project is to improve student engagement to graduation through three interrelated components: 1) *Integrated enrollment services* that provide a One-Stop point of contact for student transactions, refines orientation to expedite acclimation to the college environment, and employs new technological systems to support progress with timely interventions; 2) *Completion pathways* that

coaches for each pathway to support students to completion, and provides contextualized First Year Experience courses to promote the use of critical success strategies; and 3) *Engaged learning* that incorporates active learning strategies throughout the curriculum, supported by online faculty toolkits, and sustained through extensive professional development and training. Through an examination of the yearly annual evaluation reports, the visiting team found that the structure and accountability requirements of this five-year federal grant have served to ensure sustained and high-quality quantitative and qualitative effectiveness measurement of this set of inter-related student services and academic components. Further, the team found comments by

Title III project is strategically managed and fully integrated into the institutional structure.

graduating more students from underserved populations. BHE has recently announced its focus on term success outcomes among underrepresented student populations.

Pursuant to Massachusetts law, a local Board of Trustees governs Berkshire Community College. The ability of the College to have a local Board of Trustees has provided the College with a level of detailed oversight that has been helpful. Trustees reported they have direct control over the budget, academic program approval, and general oversight of the College. The connection of local Board members to the Berkshire community has strengthened ability to serve the needs of its region.

een aided through the creation of the Office of Trustee Relations (OTR) in 2012. The Director of the OTR serves as a resource on trustee issues, attends at least one Board meeting each year, and develops professional

onboarding process. The College attained funding to support a Dean of Students position that leads Student Engagement, Student Support, and Recreational Activities.

Second, the Academic Affairs division was reorganized with the goals of streamlining nursing leadership, aligning credit and non-credit offerings, creating a true STEM division, and institutionalizing faculty support. Addressing these goals resulted in a new structure; where there had been three divisions, there are now five. In addition, the Center for Teaching and Learning has been reimagined as the Division of Teaching and Learning Innovation. Campus members report that, while early in the process, the reorganization seems to be working.

As noted above, over the course of the past few years, the College has experienced a significant amount of retirements, turnover, new hires, reorganization efforts, rethinking of committee bylaws, and transitions. Additionally, campus members reported further changes will occur as they continue to evaluate the most effective structure to support the mission. Campus members reported that clarity around roles and goals will be very important.

The College employs numerous methods to communicate and govern. All-college meetings, the College Senate, Academic Affairs, Educational Affairs meetings, and The Weekly Scoop (a weekly email to the campus) are the primary modalities in which faculty and staff interact and are made aware of important college information. The College also uses a variety of social media applications to communicate with members of the campus community.

As stated in the self-study, the College Senate provides a space for discussion of matters important to the entire college community, including issues related to the Strategic Plan, the budget, academic affairs, and student affairs and enrollment management. While this provides campus members a forum to communicate, in 2017 members of the Senate believed it served little purpose and asked the President if it could be disbanded. The President brought this issue to an All-college meeting. The decision was that the College Senate would not be disbanded; rather there is now an institutional effort underway to clarify its role. The College Senate has also begun looking at its bylaws to provide it with more clarity of purpose.

There were more general assertions of confusion surrounding charges/goals of some committees and the need for clarification and direction in order to see meaningful results.

The College takes proactive steps to involve students in organization and governance. Several committees have had active student engagement, including the Board of Trustees, the College Senate, and nursing. Retaining students on other committees, however, has been a challenge.

The Student Handbook, , contains all appropriate procedures and policies related to college life at Berkshire Community College.

# STANDARD FOUR: THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM

### Introduction

# **STANDARD FIVE: STUDENTS**

### **Admissions**

BCC is an open access community college requiring only a high school diploma or GED for admission to most programs. The College strives to recruit a diverse student population including traditional-aged and older students, students of color, veterans, and day, evening, and online students from Berkshire County and the surrounding areas including New York, Connecticut and Vermont.

Admissions information posted on the BCC website is clear, appropriately linked, and sequential so that prospective students should have no trouble accessing information and an application. The online Admissions Guide presents all necessary information including the application process, tuition and fees, Accuplacer testing, advising and course selection, home-schooled students, students younger than 16, veterans, and students requiring disability services.

BCC uses a combination of Accuplacer and high school GPA to determine math, reading and writing ability to place students in the appropriate classes. In addition to developmental classes some of which are offered concurrently with the college-level course the College also provides a variety of other types of support services for students. These include tutoring, support for students with disabilities, counseling and transfer advising, and a student success seminar (BCC101). BCC101 was developed primarily for students who place into developmental classes; however, the College is considering requiring JETBT1 0 0 1 485.98 43mse

team also notes that,

make it more linear for students a direct result of the secret shopper experience. The student services areas are encouraged to continue to undertake such evaluations on a regular basis.

In discussion with students, their love of Berkshire Community College came through loud and clear. They are immensely grateful for the

primarily evaluated on in-class instruction. For both full-time and part-time faculty, assessment of performance includes a review of student evaluations and course materials conducted by the appropriate academic dean.

# **Teaching and Learning**

commitment to teaching and learning. The division replaces the old Center for Teaching and Learning. In addition to its work with adjuncts, the division has worked closely with the six new faculty hired in the 2019-20 academic year.

In addition to the Adjunct Faculty Fellow, a Faculty Lead, appointed for consecutive one-year four courses per semester and works to facilitate assessment, syllabus design, exit learning, and creative use of Moodle, B management system.

The College writes

Generally, faculty are free to choose their own teaching practices and course materials. However, in common courses such as ENG 101 and BIO 101 that are taught by multiple instructors, all faculty are e6eh51005704003>90056005700580047ETBT1 0 0u2ecult

validates these efforts through articulation agreements with transfer institutions, and, in some programs, through requirements by external accreditors.

# **STANDARD SEVEN: INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCES**

### **Human Resources**

As of November 2018, the College employed a total of 304 individuals. Of these employees, 174 are fulltime and 130 are part-time. This count includes 52 full-time faculty members and 81 part-time or adjunct faculty members. The number of full-time faculty employed by the College has increased by 7% since 2015. All College employees are encouraged to pursue professional development and costs are covered by the College when funding is available. However, there is a lack of procedures for supporting professional development.

In a voluntary and confidential Higher Education Insight Survey by the Chronicle of Higher Education, several competencies were assessed by employees. Among other results, the survey showed approximately 60% of employees responding indicated their departme

About 76% indicated supervisors made expectations clear to employees. The Human Resources Department is continually reviewing personnel files to ensure all job descriptions are updated and accurate.

The Human Resources Department maintains its policies on a shared drive which are accessible to employees.

### **Financial Resources**

State appropriations provide make up \$4.7 million, with

\$43.2 million budget. Tuition and Fees

system, along with additional emergency phones and improved 911 capabilities, has been acquired as well.

Overall, the College has improved and progressed in the right direction to bringing much-needed Human, Physical, Information, and Financial resources to BCC and members of the College community confirmed that they receive the resources necessary to perform their duties in and out of the classroom. Yet, the campus might benefit from having better defined policies and procedures on how to go about receiving funding for capital upgrades to B infrastructure, physical resources and information technology.

### STANDARD EIGHT: EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Berkshire Community College recognizes the importance of academic assessment by building and strengthening its culture of assessment within all academic programs and across campus in order to move its assessment and quality improvement practices forward. Educational effectiveness and assessment of achievement at BCC is guided by its 2014-2019 Strategic Plan *Achieving Excellence Transforming Lives*, most specifically within the Strategic Goal of Engaged Learning, which includes an emphasis on strengthening review of academic programs by using assessment data.

The creation of the Office of Institutional Effectiveness (IE) coincided with Berkshire the Commission, showing desire and focus on their assessment of educational effectiveness. The IE office at BCC supports decision-making and helps faculty and staff in all aspects of assessment. It has created an extensive library of resources, including a Data Fact Folder that consists of various institutional reports and surveys that have enabled faculty and staff to incorporate data into their decision-making processes. The Data Fact Folder is available to faculty and staff through the college shared drive and it is used extensively by the Deans and Program Advisors. The Office of IE also creates and disseminates the Stumbling Block Report, which is used by the Deans

providing the required support needed to meet the accreditation standards for these specialized programs.

With respect to the E-series forms, Berkshire Community College decided on Option 1 giving the team and the Commission an explicit view of how they measure the outcomes for each of their programs. As noted above, BCC also has a few specialized accredited programs, which they address in the E Series forms part b. External perspectives are provided by program advisory boards, national and state standards, and performance on national exams.

In general, the College has done a good job of developing student learning outcomes, but has had only modest success measuring student achievement of these outcomes. In addition, the College is aware of its reliance on indirect measures of assessment and plans to add direct measures of assessment of student learning as programs go through their five-year program review.

#### **Retention and Graduation**

As a follow-up to its 2014 interim report

As different stages of maturity regarding the development and implementation of assessment practices and using results for improvement, an overall Institutional Assessment Plan that explicitly states assessment objectives could help faculty be more effective in demonstrating an understanding of what and how students are learning. BCC also understands that it needs to address the inconsistent requirements that exist in the formulation and assessment of Student Learning Outcomes between its full-time and adjunct faculty.

# **STANDARD NINE: INTEGRITY**

BCC gets its legal authorization to operate from the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education. The website contains a values statement that includes, as the first bullet point, the expectation that members of the BCC community maintain a high level of integrity and engage in work that fulfills the mission.

commitment to the freedom of faculty and students to teach, study, examine data and scholarly research, and question assumptions is clearly laid out in the MCCC Day Contract and the Berkshire Community College Catalog. The College has clear policies regarding academic honesty that are also published in the College Catalog. According to the self-study, the College policies on academic honesty can be in many syllabi, but this practice is not currently required.

BCC has policies in place that assure non-discriminatory practices during the recruitment and enrollment process, and throughout a time at the College. Disciplinary procedures and grade appeal policies are designed to be fair to all involved. Similarly, employee collective bargaining agreements provide for non-discriminatory policies regarding performance evaluation, discipline, advancement, and professional development. The Diversity and Inclusion Council is in the process of re-forming and has several issues it plans to work on. Primary among these initia

be

better service to students, and the creation of four new committees to address issues that surfaced from the <u>Great Colleges to Work For</u> survey.

One area of concern that affects issues of integrity and equity is that individual courses do not have a common set of student learning outcomes. As has been noted, not all syllabi contain course-learning outcomes and it is not a requirement for adjunct faculty to teach to specific learning outcomes. It is not necessarily the case, but is probable, that the evening students who are more likely to have adjunct instructors are the ones who may be impacted.

From reviewing the self-study, letters sent from the Commission to the College over the past decade, and the response to NECHE concerns, it is apparent that the College interacts with the Commission with integrity and honesty.

### **Transparency**

All BCC policies are available in the section of the website by clicking the link Records and Disclosures; it is only two clicks away from the home page. Once found, which may not be readily apparent to the public, it is highly comprehensive.

All BCC programs have web pages that list, among other things, expected learning outcomes, the courses needed to graduate, and a semester-by-semester pathway to graduation. More difficult to find is the list of the four Core Competencies and the ways in which those competencies can be fulfilled. While they are contained in the BCC Catalog, they are not available on the website.

The BCC website publishes clear and complete information about the cost of education, net price, financial aid, and the average student debt upon graduation. The information is easily accessible and only a few clicks from the home page.

### AFFIRMATION OF COMPLIANCE

5. The Berkshire Community College Foundation is a strong supporter of the College, which chiefly provides scholarships to students. Foundation members volunteer their individual time, expertise and support to the College.

# **Concerns**

1. In some cases, courses that have the same title and course number may not have common course learning outcomes. This difference was noted in courses that run during the day compared to the same course offered in the evening that is more likely to be taught by and adjunct faculty member. It would benefit students to have clearly defined course outcomes for common courses of the same title and number regardless of whether the instructor is full-time faculty or adjunct.