

**Institution: Minnesota West Community and Technical College**

**Chief Executive Officer: Dr. Terry Gaalswyk, College President**

**Date Submitted: May 31, 2017**

**Action: Interim Report on Budgeting, Planning, and Assessment of Student Learning**

**Core Components Addressed: 4.B, 5.A, and 5.C**

**Areas of Focus:** On May 17, 2016, the Institutional Action Committee (IAC) of the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) required that Minnesota West Community & Technical College submit an interim report on budgeting, planning, and assessment of student learning due May 31, 2017. The following pages are intended to meet that requirement and assure the IAC that Minnesota West meets or exceeds the expectations for the Open Pathways criteria that were challenged by the reviewers of the college's Open Pathways Assurance Argument submitted October 26, 2015.

### **Budgeting and Planning**

In the conclusion of its report to the IAC in March 2016, the Open Pathways Assurance Argument review team wrote:

Minnesota West states that it utilizes a budget development process, although it is unclear that there is a linkage between this process and the strategic plan development or ongoing implementation process. In this era of declining state support and declining student enrollment it is critical to ensure that funding and budgeting is aligned with the strategic priorities of the institution.

And,

An interim monitoring report is requested describing how Minnesota West aligns its strategic planning and budgeting process.

Minnesota West's decision-makers have historically and routinely collected and used data to make budget decisions that align with the college mission and vision. After reviewing

the Open Pathway review committee's comments, however, the leadership team agreed that current methods of documenting how data guides budgeting decisions can and should be improved.

The process for building a college budget is continuous, but it intensifies during spring semester. A leadership team made up of the college president, the provost, the vice-president of administration, and all of the college and campus deans meets monthly through the year and usually begins diligent work on building the next year's budget in February, when the leadership group starts bi-monthly meetings. The state legislature is still in session through May, so final revenue numbers are not certain until after the budget bills are approved in Saint Paul, usually at the end of May. However, until the numbers are firmly established, the team considers best and worst case scenarios to build the next year's budget.

Documents that the leadership team uses to develop budgets include the biennial [Master Academic and Student Services Work Plan](#), the [Community College Survey of Student Engagement](#), [Environmental Scan and Space Needs Study, March 2015](#), the [IPEDS Data Feedback Report 2016](#), [Minnesota West Community and Technical College Strategic Inclusion 2016-2012](#), and the [EDUCAUSE Technology Survey](#) as well as reports generated by such agencies as Access Southwest, the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), Minnesota Work Force Center, Southwest Private Industry Council (PIC), Southwest Initiative Fund (SWIF), and Southwest/West Central Service Cooperative (SWSC). College leaders also consider demographic information provided by the Minnesota Education Equity Partnership, the Minnesota Department of Labor, and the United State Census Bureau.

Final approval of the college's budget rests with the Board of Trustees of Minnesota State Colleges and Universities. Required submission materials include three documents: a proposed all-funds budget; a budget narrative; and a reallocation, investment and reductions narrative for the current and following years. In the budget narrative, the college provides the Board of Trustees with assumptions and risks to the budget plan as well as details on how the budgets support the college's academic and student success goals. Reallocation, investment and reductions data include the budget and FTE impact of these decisions and are used to

create a historical record. The Board of Trustees requires two readings of the operating budget before rendering its approval.

The [2016-2018 Master Academic and Student Services Work Plan](#) sets several goals that are incorporated into the budgeting process. Among those goals are to “increase the level of achievement of underrepresented students,” to “develop new credit and noncredit programs that serve the needs of the region,” (6) and to “be leaders in workforce education and training” (12). To help meet those goals, since 2015, the college has invested in a welding program at the Jackson campus, an industrial maintenance program at Worthington, and an online pharmacy tech program. With financial assistance from Sanford Health Systems, the college also expanded its practical nursing program to meet the high regional and national demands for qualified nurses. These targeted programs required budgeting adjustments to meet the identified needs of students and communities. Results of efforts to meet those and other goals are documented in the [Strategic Framework Performance Measures, 2017](#), referenced in the next section of this report.

A strategy to meet the goals articulated in the master plan is to “expand the role of diversity collaboration” in college communities (6). The *Strategic Inclusion Plan* points out the need to “Engage underrepresented students in college and community activities to promote persistence” (6) and to provide “Supportive services to increase underrepresented students’ level of achievement and close opportunity gap” (8). The college recently partnered with Independent School District 518 to relocate the Nobles County Integration Collaborative to offices and classrooms on the Worthington campus and with Adult Basic Education to offer an English as Second Language class on the Worthington campus. A “ReadSpeaker” function that reads print content to students was added to the D2L Brightspace online platform. Financial Aid meetings for families are conducted throughout the year and at various times of the day with Spanish interpreters present.

To increase student persistence and retention to graduation, the state system continues to invest in the Smarthinking® online tutoring service. The college invests \$22,000 per year in the GradesFirst® retention and communication platform, which enables faculty and advisors to

provide early warnings to students who are falling behind in their classes. In FY17, bilingual tutors were employed in the Library & Academic Resource Center (LARC) on the Worthington campus. Minnesota West's persistence and retention rate was at 77.3 percent in 2016, significantly higher than the state and national averages for two-year institutions. Minnesota West's three-year graduation rate went from 63.3 percent to 66 percent in 2016. The completion rate for students of color also increase to 72 percent; however, it remains below the completion rate for Caucasian students at 79.9 percent.

For FY17, based partly on needs identified in the report titled [Academic and Student Services Work Plan Results](#) and data from agencies named above, the college designated \$1 million from its reserve funds to initiate programs that could potentially build enrollment by serving a larger segment of the local population and better meeting the needs of area employers. Some of the strategic initiatives included a Mechatronics program taught at both Worthington and Granite Falls, Precision Machining at the Granite Falls campus, Health Information Technology taught online, restructuring the cosmetology programs at Jackson and Pipestone, re-organizing the law enforcement programs to reduce costs and encourage enrollment at Worthington, and adding men's and women's club soccer at Worthington. Seventeen men and eight women participated in club soccer's premier season. The college also budgeted \$38,000 in FY17 to provide free bus transportation from Worthington to the Jackson campus to increase access to technical programs for both PSEO and traditional students who have limited access to private transportation. That service will continue in FY18. At Pipestone, the college collaborated with the Southwest/West Central Service Cooperative to restart a carpentry program on the Minnesota West Campus that will include high school students starting in fall 2017. Minnesota West has budgeted for 50 percent of the faculty costs for the carpentry program. In Marshall, Minnesota West continued its third year in partnership with the Marshall Area Technical Educational Center (MATEC) delivering Career & Technical Education (CTE) for Welding and Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) coupled with college prep and testing using Accuplacer and CareerScope. In FY17, 10 students completed the 16-credit welding certificate and 23 students completed CNA training, earned industry credentials,

secured employment, and are pursuing additional education for career pathway progression. The CTE model will be expanded to Worthington District 518 public schools for fall 2017.

To address the industry shortage for skilled machine maintenance employees, the new Mechatronics degree combined curriculum from the Fluid Power Technology and Industrial Technology, implemented a hybrid delivery model with block scheduling, and extended labs to meet identified needs of the manufacturing and food processing employers within the Minnesota West service area. Five industry partners supported the program launch with donated resources, equipment, and student employee enrollment. In FY17, Mechatronics enrolled 54 students in combination at the Worthington and Granite Falls Campuses and attracted PSEO and non-employee students. An Introduction to Medical Careers course housed at Granite Falls attracted 15 PSEO students from four school districts, including Lakeview High School (Cottonwood, MN), Yellow Medicine East HS (Granite Falls, MN), Montevideo (MN) HS, and MACCRAY HS (Maynard, Clara City, and Raymond, MN). Another class will begin in fall 2017.

The [EDUCAUSE Technology Survey](#) conducted by the Education Center for Analysis and Research (ECARS) as well as local student surveys and listening sessions with college administrators also identified student needs in areas such as resource development and budgeting to support such development. For example, students in 2016 provided specific feedback on campus wireless connectivity, pointing out issues that occurred on one particular campus. The college IT department used this information to plan, budget for, and upgrade equipment to improve wireless service on that campus.

Another recent college investment grew from data collected and published over the past several years in the [College Fact Book](#) that indicates that the college loses too many potential students between application acceptance and registration. For example, for fall semester 2016, 1,639 admissions led to only 1,223 registrations and 1,127 “sits” (students actually attending classes). In the spring of 2017, the college budgeted \$10,000 for and arranged four full days of meetings involving more than 20 key student services staff, faculty, and administrators with consultant Michael Kurtz to discuss ways to reduce that loss. Kurtz led

the group through an analysis of the steps and staff involved in the processes of moving students from applications to registration and helped them develop several student-focused efficiencies aimed at increasing the number of admitted applicants who register for classes. The college's current [Open Pathways Quality Initiative](#) also focuses on this issue.

In spring semester 2017, Minnesota West engaged [Sertich Consulting](#) to help direct strategic planning for the next four years. The planning process started with meetings between the college president and the consultants, the Advisory Council, and the Leadership Council, and continued with campus engagement sessions involving all faculty and staff on all campuses; a survey of college constituents; and several Leadership Council meetings to analyze, draft, and review the strategic planning documents. The resulting [Strategic Plan 2017-2023](#) includes a new college mission statement; a new vision statement; an updated list of college values, strategic directions and outcomes; and identified strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results. This document will guide all future decisions regarding policy and budgets.

The college also invests \$1,500 per year to be part of the [College Central Network](#), an online service that lists job openings and ways for potential workers to apply for them. As of May 2017, 711 employers, 303 current students, and 61 alumni were registered on the site. From January 2017 to May 2017, nearly 300 job openings were posted on College Central.

Minnesota West understands the risks related to long-term financial sustainability. Maintaining or improving legislative support and maintaining or growing enrollment are both critical to college budgeting and planning. However, the college is currently in strong financial condition. Thoughtfully considered budgeting and strategic planning has allowed the college to attain a 5.38 CFI for FY16. This CFI follows a five-year range for FY11 through FY15 of a low of 2.91 to a high of 4.96. This CFI also places the college in the *"Direct institutional resources to allow transformation"* range on the scale for charting composite financial index. Further, the college's fund balance as of June 30, 2016, was 46 percent of its annual revenue. Minnesota West has demonstrated that it has integrated the necessary steps to maintain financial sustainability into its budgeting and planning processes.

### **Assessment of Student Learning**

Concerning student assessment at Minnesota West, the Open Pathways Assurance Argument review team wrote:

It is recommended that Minnesota West provide an interim report to demonstrate specific goals, common measures, outcomes, and actions to improve for college-wide student learning outcomes to assure achievement of learning goals for all students in curricular and co-curricular programs.

Two previous HLC review committees approved Minnesota West's program of student assessment, but the questions this review panel raised were fair, and the college continuously makes adjustments to enhance and strengthen the process.

At the conclusion of each semester, teaching faculty complete and submit [Course Assessment forms](#) to their division chairs via Desire to Learn (D2L) Brightspace for each course taught during the semester. A mandatory assessment meeting is scheduled and led by the assessment coordinator and conducted on ITV at each semester's final faculty duty day. The assessment forms provide space for instructors to specify the number of sections taught for each course, methods of assessment used to measure student learning, and notes regarding any adjustments the instructor may want to make in the course based on that semester's experience.

The Course Assessment forms provide space for instructors to request additional training in specific areas, and the assessment coordinator forwards that information to the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) coordinators on each campus to help them plan both local and college-wide CTL sessions for the next year.

The course assessment process is ever-evolving and iterative. The mandatory meetings on assessment have been held at the conclusion of each semester since 2010. At that time, faculty completed paper assessment forms and submitted them to their respective division chairs, who would then summarize training needs and submit their summaries to the Assessment Coordinator. The coordinator would then report the needs to the provost and to the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) coordinators.

Starting in fall semester 2013, the course assessment forms were posted as surveys on the Desire to Learn Brightspace platform so that faculty could access them more easily and complete and submit them electronically.

Continuous feedback from faculty has kept the Course Assessment form fluid, and changes to improve the form occur after nearly every semester. In spring 2016, a Likert scale was added to the form to help faculty report the effectiveness of the methods they use to assess their courses. In spring 2017, questions were added to direct instructors to provide evidence of effectiveness and to solicit feedback on continuous improvement of course assessment. Faculty now rate the effectiveness of their assessments and report changes they have made or plan to make to improve student success and to measure and record the results of those changes. Another added question asks instructors to identify areas for which professional development may increase their effectiveness in the classroom.

In the 2015-2016 annual [Assessment Summary Report](#), the assessment coordinator noted that while 94 instructors completed and submitted course evaluations, 35 part-time instructors did not complete them after spring semester 2016. None of the 35 were full-time instructors but were adjunct faculty hired to teach only one or two courses, mostly for distance learners. All of the 35 submitted their course review forms after the annual report was prepared.

At the end of fall semester 2017, 100 percent of faculty submitted reports. For spring semester 2017, the coordinator urged faculty to submit assessment forms on or before May 12, the final day of the semester. One week after that day, 100 percent of full-time faculty had completed the forms, and only three adjunct instructors had not. The coordinator expedited production of the [2016-2017 Assessment Summary](#) so that it could be linked to this document.

In addition to the course assessments, another major event occurred in fall semester 2016. Minnesota West faculty reviewed and evaluated the general education curriculum, focusing specifically on the courses that meet the requirements of the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum (MnTC) ([Minnesota West College Catalog 2016-2018, Pages 6-10](#)). MnTC includes ten goal areas, and within each goal area are specific competencies that courses listed in that area must include, followed by a list of existing courses that meet 50 percent or more of those



competencies. Students who complete the MnTC at one Minnesota State institution can seamlessly transfer the entire core curriculum to any other Minnesota State college or university. Faculty reviewed each course by listing the competencies that each course covered and the activities in the course that students complete to meet the competencies. (See example review pages for [English](#) and [Natural Science](#) courses). After the review, the Worthington campus curriculum committee audited records of 25 randomly selected students that recently completed AA degrees to determine whether at the completion of their degree they had completed all of the MnTC competencies. The committee discovered gaps in meeting the competencies, particularly in areas 3, Natural Sciences; 8, Global Perspective; 9, Ethical and Civic Responsibility; and 10, People and the Environment. The committee then recommended three steps to close those gaps:

1. Evaluate and revise course outlines in areas 3, 8, 9, and 10 to include student learning outcomes that address the missing competencies in the curriculum.
2. Delete special topics courses from MnTC because of the difficulty in determining which competencies the courses met.
3. Re-evaluate MnTC courses on a regular cycle (every 3-5 years) to verify that competencies are being met.

Steps one and two were completed early in spring semester 2017. Step three is on the calendar and will be completed as planned.

Student feedback using the [Individual Development and Educational Assessment \(IDEA\) Survey of Ratings and Instructions](#) has been collected from 2005 to present (12 years). The college has administered this survey every fall and spring for 24 semesters. Until 2016-17, all online courses with 15 or more students were surveyed and campus classes were surveyed if the instructor was probationary or due for review on the three-year evaluation schedule. Starting in FY16, only those instructors who are on the three-year evaluation cycle (including adjunct faculty) have their courses surveyed. The survey is voluntary, students are not required to complete the survey, and it is anonymous.

Very few two-year colleges have extensive longitudinal data using the same instrument. This data is useful for faculty, and it is shared as part of the review cycle each semester. Feedback is an integral part of quality improvement, and this data represents direct feedback from students. By better understanding student perceptions of an effective learning environment, faculty can enhance their courses and better align their defined attributes with those that students identify.

Administrators review the IDEA Survey feedback with each faculty member privately, and the college's instructional designer uses the overall reports to guide teaching and learning opportunities throughout the year. In particular, Section V of the IDEA Survey, titled "Teaching Methods and Styles," reviews methods and styles the faculty employ in the online classroom. Ratings are made on a 5-point scale (1 - Hardly ever, 2- Occasionally, 3 - Sometimes, 4 - Frequently, and 5 - Almost Always). The data from the 20 items assessed in the IDEA survey show which of these teaching methods and styles students perceive as "used frequently" in their classrooms. Students can also answer one open-ended question on the IDEA Survey, and this data is particularly helpful for faculty.

During FY17, largely in response to course assessments, the college math faculty redesigned developmental courses to replace two three-credit developmental courses with three two-credit courses. [The new math curriculum](#) will allow incoming students to be placed more accurately into only the courses they need to prepare for college-level math. All three new courses will be offered in eight-week blocks to enable students who require only one or two developmental courses to be ready for college-level math after just one semester.

Also in FY17, the structure of the formerly struggling Minnesota West Law Enforcement program at Minnesota West was completely reorganized with a new director and assistant instructor, which resulted in a significant increase in enrollment and vitality. Those changes resulted in fall enrollments increasing from nine first-year students in fall 2015 to 17 first-year students in fall 2016. The LE program will undergo radical curriculum changes in FY18 because of statewide Transfer Pathway agreements. Beginning in FY18, law enforcement students in every Minnesota State institution will be taught a common core curriculum that will enable

them to transfer easily from program to program or continue from an associate's degree program to a bachelor's degree program at a state university.

Results of the college's assessment plan are evident in the "Accountability Dashboard" embedded in the report titled [Strategic Framework Performance Measures, 2017](#). That document shows that "Student Persistence and Completion" increased from 73.7 percent in 2014 to 77.3 percent in 2015 (4). "Successful Transfer – Percent of Credits Accepted in Transfer at Receiving Institutions" increased steadily from 58.9 percent in 2011 to 91.8 percent in 2015 (16). "Licensure Exam Pass Rate" exceeded 90 percent every year from 2011 to 2016 (4). "Student Success for Students of Color" exceeded goals every year from 2011 to 2015 (7). "Student Success-First Generation Students" rose from 67.8 percent in 2010 to 78.9 percent in 2015 (8). "Student Success of Diverse Populations" rose from 88 percent in 2010 to 91 percent in 2015 (8).

The [ECARS Student Survey](#) conducted in 2016 (cited in first section) also showed significant student satisfaction for Minnesota West (MW). Among other findings, the survey found that:

- 85 percent of Minnesota West students rated their overall technology experience as good or excellent.
- 84 percent of Minnesota West students said that their instructors had most, almost all, or all of the technical skills needed for their classes.
- 82 percent of Minnesota West students said that technology at Minnesota West helped them ask instructors questions.
- 74 percent of Minnesota West students said technology helped them understand instructors' expectations or "get feedback from instructors in a timely manner."

Minnesota West consistently places high in national online assessment surveys (see [Recognitions](#) page on the college website.) Minnesota West was named the best community college in Minnesota and third best online college nationally in the 2017 Best Online College in America survey sponsored by BestCollege.com. The college placed ninth in the [Center for](#)

[Digital Education's 2016-17 Digital Community College Survey Awards](#). In the 12 years that the survey has been conducted, Minnesota West has been named a winner 10 times in the Small and Mid-sized Colleges category. In January 2016, The Aspen Institute College Excellence Program named Minnesota West one of the top 150 community colleges eligible to compete for the [2017 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence](#), a prize awarded only once every two years. The college has also been designated a [2017 Military Friendly® School by Victory Media](#), a recognition earned by Minnesota West every year since 2012.

In May 2016, the [National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships](#) (NACEP) granted national accreditation to Minnesota West's [REACH](#) concurrent enrollment program. NACEP awards accreditation to concurrent enrollment programs that provide college credit courses to high school students taught by instructors who meet or exceed minimum credentialing standards. Shortly after accreditation was granted, the college's Dean of Technology and Distance Education became a NACEP peer reviewer. The dean and coordinator of the REACH program both serve on the Minnesota chapter of NACEP (MnCEP).

Assessment of student learning is vital to the health and future of Minnesota West. The college has established a culture of assessment through many years of gathering, reviewing, and responding to assessment data from students, faculty, program directors, and national accrediting agencies. The current process is not perfect, but it engages students, faculty, and administration, and has had positive results. The college will continue to monitor and refine its assessment practices to ensure student success far into the future.