



# HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION

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December 14, 2020

President Howard Spearman  
Rock Valley College  
3301 N. Mulford Rd.  
Rockford, IL 61114-5699

Dear President Spearman:

The interim report you submitted to our office has now been reviewed. The staff analysis of the report is attached.

On behalf of the Higher Learning Commission staff received the report detailing 1.) the comprehensive implementation of its assessment program, including deeper faculty involvement and assessment of academic and cocurricular outcomes, 2.) development and implementation of a comprehensive strategic plan and, 3.) completion of a review of faculty credentials (including all adjunct faculty) ensuring that each individual teaching meets minimum qualification. No further reports are required.

The institution's next reaffirmation of accreditation is scheduled for 2024– 2025.

Please note: Revisions to HLC's Criteria for Accreditation will go into effect on September 1, 2020. Institutions will be evaluated against the revised Criteria for all reviews conducted after that date, including reviews related to previously assigned monitoring. Institutional reports submitted after September 1, 2020, that reference the Criteria should be written to the revised version. More information about the revised Criteria, including a crosswalk between the current and revised versions, is available on HLC's website at <https://www.hlcommission.org/criteria>.

For more information on the interim report process contact Lil Nakutis, Accreditation Processes Manager, at [lnakutis@hlcommission.org](mailto:lnakutis@hlcommission.org). Your HLC staff liaison is John Marr ([jmarr@hlcommission.org](mailto:jmarr@hlcommission.org)); (800) 621-7440 x 104.

Thank you.

HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION



**STAFF ANALYSIS OF INSTITUTIONAL REPORT**

**DATE:** December 14, 2020

**STAFF LIAISON:** John Marr

**REVIEWED BY:** Sherilyn W. Poole

**INSTITUTION:** Rock Valley College, Rockford, IL

**EXECUTIVE OFFICER:** Dr. Howard Spearman, President

**PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTION AND SOURCES:** An interim report is required by 9/30/2020 detailing 1.) the comprehensive implementation of its assessment program, including deeper faculty involvement and assessment of academic and cocurricular outcomes, 2.) development and implementation of a comprehensive strategic plan and, 3.) completion of a review of faculty credentials (including all adjunct faculty) ensuring that each individual teaching meets minimum qualifications.

This interim report derives from the Team Report of the institution's 2019 Comprehensive Evaluation and should include the following:

- A report on the status of assessment including: incorporation of faculty in course, program and institutional assessment in greater numbers; evidence of infusion of assessment results in the curriculum including but not limited to course, program and institutional improvements; and a complete and executed co-curricular/extracurricular assessment plan and results (if any).
- A robust, complete and executed strategic plan that aligns vision and mission to the plan, incorporates the other planning of the college (enrollment management, facilities, academic etc.), and a methodology to evaluate progress in the plan.
- A complete review of faculty credentials (including all adjunct faculty) ensuring that each individual teaching meets the minimum qualifications.

**REPORT PRESENTATION AND QUALITY:** The interim report provided a comprehensive description of the College's responses to the three areas of focus identified by the Team after the 2019 Comprehensive Evaluation. The report included descriptions of the changes the College implemented since the Team's visit. Specific actions taken to address each of the three areas of focus were described in separate sections of the interim report. A lengthy Appendix included documents to support the

activities discussed. The report included tables and graphs to provide visual support for the text.

**REPORT SUMMARY:** Area of focus number one stated “Rock Valley College (RVC) must demonstrate the comprehensive implementation of the RVC assessment program, including deeper faculty involvement and assessment of academic and co-curricular outcomes.” A series of professional development workshops were planned and presented by the Assessment Committee Co-chairs. The purposes of the workshops were “to increase faculty involvement and improve consistency of participation in the assessment process across the College.” Participants in the workshops were academic chairs and coordinators. The groups focused on “applying the assessment process to program/discipline assessment, the two areas identified by the Team and the College as needing attention. Initially, separate workshops were held for Liberal Arts and Sciences (LAS) and Career and Technical Education (CTE) academic chairs and coordinators. This separation was based on the assumption of differences in approaches and methodology between LAS and CTE. As the workshops were conducted, the Assessment Committee Co-Chairs determined the approaches are more similar than different so beginning in spring 2020 the groups were combined for the workshops. The Co-Chairs continued to hold small group and one-on-one meetings with academic chairs and coordinators to focus on specific assessment needs and challenges.

Improving the process for documenting assessment “...findings and changes to be made” was another task to be completed. Accurate assessment data collected over time will identify which interventions are effective and which are not. RVC uses Watermark’s Taskstream Accountability Management System to “document and archive assessment across course, program/discipline, and institutional levels.” The figure below shows how the Taskstream system allows for documenting assessment efforts “that include planning and tracking improvements.”

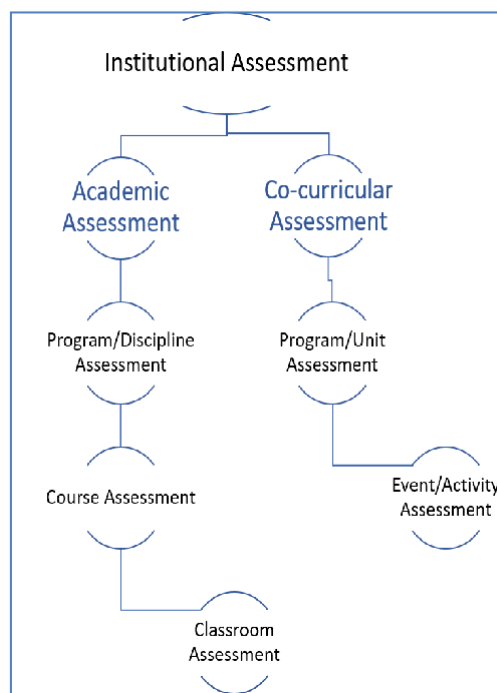
### **Functions of Taskstream/s Accountability Management System**



Using the information in the figure above, the College was able to identify the connection between “the different reporting structures in Taskstream to the assessment process.” Although progress had been made in documentation of course assessment related to learning outcomes, assessment plans, and assessment findings “little progress had been made in addressing operational plans for course assessment.” Goals were established and benchmarks were identified to improve documentation of course assessment.

RVC has four institutional student learning outcomes (ISLO): communication, analytic reasoning, global awareness and responsibility, and personal responsibility. Direct measures are used “to determine the degree to which students are meeting expectations defined by learning outcomes.” The outcomes are assessed through faculty reviewing and evaluating artifacts of students’ work using the criteria developed from the VALUE rubrics (AAC&U, 2009). A post-process survey was sent to Evaluation Team members to gather perceptions of the ISLOs and the related assessment process. Beginning in the 2020-2021 year, “a new structure for the formal assessment committee was developed and the Curricular Assessment Committee was formed.”

RVC has also focused on developing assessments for Co-curricular learning outcomes. Co-curricular assessment had been in place during the 2014 Comprehensive Review but changes in personnel led to a loss of momentum. The figure below shows the connection between academic program and co-curriculum assessment activities.



Activities focused on co-curriculum program assessment included development of a co-curricular assessment plan and implementation of a formal assessment committee. During 2020-2021, the foci of the Co-curriculum Assessment Committee will be:

- Develop a multiyear co-curricular assessment plan
- Roll out co-curricular assessment to additional programs and units
- Develop a tool kit to support co-curricular assessment and
- Identify events and activities that integrate co-curricular learning across programs and units.

Area of focus number two required RVC to “demonstrate its development and implementation of a comprehensive strategic plan.” The Assurance Argument completed for the mid-cycle review in 2019 stated the College was in the process of developing a strategic plan which has since been “fully developed, implemented, and evaluated.” Since the Team visit, the strategic plan has been “expanded to include action steps with measurable outlines and deadlines for completion.” The completed strategic plan includes two goals “each of which is divided into two strategies.” The strategies include 41 measurable actions with due dates for completion. By the end of FY2020, “3 of these actions had been completed, 27 were still in progress, 9 were not started, and 2 will not be implemented due to changing circumstances.” Additionally, the strategic plan provides oversight for other College plans for example the Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) Plan (2019-2021).

Area of focus number three required RVC to “demonstrate that it ensures that each individual teaching meets minimum qualifications.” As part of developing the Assurance Argument, RVC conducted an audit of faculty and adjunct faculty qualifications to ensure compliance with the College’s guidelines for minimum qualifications. Individuals who did not meet the minimum qualifications were put on a remediation plan to be approved and monitored by the Chief Academic Officer. In response to the Team report, RVC conducted a comprehensive audit of 132 active faculty and 256 adjunct credentials. In addition to the College’s minimum requirements, the credentials audit was conducted against the HLC expectations and those of the Illinois Community College Board. Based on the Team’s recommendation and the comprehensive audit, several changes were made:

- Improve Efficiency of Adjunct Hiring
- Improve Approval of Dual Credit Instructors
- Document Process for Addressing Faculty or Adjunct not meeting Minimum Qualifications
- Improve Employee Status Management
- Maintain Documentation of Minimum Qualifications to Teach College Credit Courses

**REPORT ANALYSIS:** The interim report submitted by RVC provided comprehensive descriptions of the activities and initiatives implemented to address the three areas of focus. Prior to receiving the Team's report and recommendations the College had begun to strengthen the assessment process, complete a strategic plan, and conduct an audit of faculty and adjunct credentials and teaching assignments.

Activities were put in place to increase faculty participation in assessing student learning outcomes. Professional development workshops for Academic Chairs and Coordinators were designed by the Assessment Committee Co-Chairs. The workshops helped demonstrate the similarities in assessment in the Liberal Arts and Sciences and Career and Technical Education. One-on-one and small group meetings between the Assessment Committee Co-chairs and academic chairs and coordinators allowed participants to focus on specific issues. RVC also expanded access to documentation of assessment results using Taskstream's Management System as a repository and archive site. Sharing of assessment documentation with academic deans and chairs increased from two or three times a year to eight times a year and distribution was expanded to include all faculty and adjuncts. This expanded distribution was to make clear the responsibility for assessment includes all faculty and adjuncts. Collecting student artifacts is a direct measure of students' meeting expectations for the four institutional student learning outcomes. The Institutional (ISLO) Assessment Participation Form was distributed to all faculty and adjuncts to report the results of the artifact reviews. The Curricular Assessment Committee was formed during 2020-2021 with membership including academic chairs and coordinators and at least one academic dean and vice president and the Executive Director of Outcomes Assessment.

Although co-curricular assessment had been in place since 2014, changes in personnel resulted in a loss of momentum. In fall 2019 information was solicited from employees asking them to identify co-curricular assessment within their work to help "...the College develop a framework for institutionalizing co-curricular assessment." Student Support Services staff members (Library, Tutoring Center, Writing Center, and Testing Center) participated in workshops which aligned with the academic assessment workshops. Workspaces in Taskstream were set-up to allow co-curricular assessment learning outcomes, assessment plans and findings, and operational plans. Nine other co-curricular areas began assessment activities in one-on-one and small group sessions.

The Strategic Plan updates were presented to the Board of Trustees in May 2020 and in September 2020. Additionally, an update on the Strategic Plan progress was shared with the entire campus during the 2019 and 2020 Fall Conferences which include all-day professional development activities. Strategic Plan, strategies, actions, and monitoring posted on the campus website allow stakeholders to review the progress of the action items.

The comprehensive audit of faculty and adjunct credentials resulted in formulizing the review and follow-up processes. "The College is working to implement an electronic solution for maintaining the currency of faculty and adjunct information...." This

includes a commitment by Human Resources to move from paper to electronic personnel files.

**ANALYSIS CONCLUDING STATEMENT:** Rock Valley College is commended for the prompt and inclusive responses to the three areas of concern. The responses include strengthening, expanding, and developing new processes and procedures. Documents included in the interim report support and document the results of activities and initiatives developed and implemented. RVC should include updates and additional results of these activities as part of the Assurance Argument for the reaffirmation of accreditation evaluation in 2024-2025.

**STAFF FINDING:**

Note the relevant Criterion, Core Component(s) or Assumed Practice(s) 4.B.2

Statements of Analysis (check one below)

- Evidence demonstrates adequate progress in the area of focus.
- Evidence demonstrates that further organizational attention is required in the area of focus.
- Evidence demonstrates that further organizational attention and HLC follow-up are required.
- Evidence is insufficient and a HLC focused visit is warranted.

**STAFF FINDING:**

Note the relevant Criterion, Core Component(s) or Assumed Practice(s) 5.C

Statements of Analysis (check one below)

- Evidence demonstrates adequate progress in the area of focus.
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- Evidence demonstrates that further organizational attention and HLC follow-up are required.
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**STAFF FINDING:**

Note the relevant Criterion, Core Component(s) or Assumed Practice(s) 3.C.2

Statements of Analysis (check one below)

- Evidence demonstrates adequate progress in the area of focus.
- Evidence demonstrates that further organizational attention is required in the area of focus.
- Evidence demonstrates that further organizational attention and HLC follow-up are required.
- Evidence is insufficient and a HLC focused visit is warranted.

**STAFF ACTION:** Receive the report detailing 1.) the comprehensive implementation of its assessment program, including deeper faculty involvement and assessment of academic and cocurricular outcomes, 2.) development and implementation of a comprehensive strategic plan and, 3.) completion of a review of faculty credentials (including all adjunct faculty) ensuring that each individual teaching meets minimum qualification. No further reports are required.

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