Summative Essay, Standard I: Institutional Mission and Effectiveness

Institutional mission and effectiveness are at the core of the educational journey. An institution’s quality is dependent not so much on external measures as on its clear sense of why it exists and where it is going. The ultimate goal of any educational enterprise is genuine student learning, and the college’s mission should reflect this goal and an awareness that increased student learning goes in tandem with increased institutional effectiveness.

Institutional Commitment

The Norco mission statement reflects our strong commitment, as educators, to the achievement of this ultimate goal of student learning. The mission states in practical terms Norco Campus’s intention to “provide educational programs, services, and learning environments that meet the needs of a diverse community” of learners. The use of all the institution’s resources to help students meet specific academic, personal and occupational goals is also woven into the mission statement. The mission looks inward to the achievement of student learning outcomes, and outward to the needs and interests of the business and civic community served by Norco Campus.

The central focus of Standard I is Institutional Commitment to helping students reach their personal and professional goals. The standard I self study analysis strongly demonstrates that Norco Campus has established programs and services aligned with its mission and student population. Commitment to helping our learners achieve their goals is exemplified by the recent publication of a revised mission statement that all constituencies participated in shaping – administrators, faculty, staff, and students. The active participation of staff in shared governance and on strategic planning and decision-making committees and councils reflects Norco’s commitment to the educational process.

Evaluation, Planning and Improvement

Norco Campus has formulated specific planning processes and created a structure whereby the mission of the institution is central to decision making. The Strategic Planning Committee and its nine specifically designed subcommittees dealing with various aspects of institutional planning and resource allocation, along with the President’s Cabinet, the Norco Academic Planning Council, and the Academic Senate, guide the development of the Academic Master Plan. Long-range planning for educational trends, technology and facilities growth are additional aspects of planning to which the campus is committed in order to meet the stated institutional mission of “self examination […], planning and improvement.” Specific means of evaluating and assessing institutional mission and effectiveness range from quantitative, data-driven external and internal measures to qualitative assessment of the learning experience through instructional and non-instructional program review, and the development of student learning outcomes at all levels of the institution.

Student Learning Outcomes

Institutional commitment to “established student learning outcomes” is articulated in the Norco Campus mission statement and embedded in the strategic planning processes. The long-range
goal of improving Norco’s effectiveness uses measurable objectives which are linked to student learning outcomes through program review for disciplines, student services programs, and administrative units. Assessment of stated learning outcomes has begun and will form the basis of a systematic cycle of evaluation, integrated planning, resource allocation and re-evaluation. At the district level, general education SLOs inform decision making and planning; at the campus level, these same SLOs are reflected in program development and resource analysis. At the discipline level, faculty have engaged in extensive review and revision of course outlines of record, including in each course outline specifically designed SLOs which are integrated with the student learning outcomes for the discipline as a whole.

Departments are responsible for integrating the student learning outcomes within discipline program reviews into the Academic Master Plan. Student services programs provide institutional support to the academic disciplines by focusing attention on service-related SLOs and additional Service Area Outcomes. Occupational certificate/degree programs are developing program-based student learning outcomes which will reflect stated SLOs in the course outlines of record and meet the goals embedded in the Norco institutional mission.

ORGANIZATION

Organizational structures at Norco Campus are set up to enhance the campus mission. District and local strategic planning committees are structured on the basis of a curriculum-centered planning model and a learner-centered curriculum framework. All interested constituencies – faculty, classified and confidential staff, students, administrators and community members – participate in strategic planning, working together for the improvement of the institution. Understanding that program review is the foundation of strategic planning, academic disciplines, student support programs, and administrative units have made a commitment to developing learning outcomes for their programs which are grounded in objective principles of assessment and responsive to staffing, facilities and equipment needs to achieve the stated outcomes. Responding to district-wide strategic initiatives with specific local initiatives, all departments and disciplines, student support services, and strategic planning groups at Norco Campus are working to increase student access, retention, and persistence; successful course completion, certificate/degree and transfer awards; and in general, to improve the quality of the students’ educational experience. Norco Campus demonstrates, through these means, a conscious institutional commitment to produce and support student learning by organizing its key processes in such a manner as to meet its stated goals.

DIALOGUE

Dialogue is at the heart of the Norco Campus mission to “listen to our community and respond to its needs while engaging in self-examination and ongoing dialogue, planning, and improvement.” Realizing that the institution’s mission is central to planning and decision making, Norco Campus engages in a continuous process of collegial and self-reflective dialogue about how to improve student learning and organizational processes. Formal structures for district- and campus-wide dialogue include councils, committees, retreats, and forums (in online and “live” formats) of the disciplines, departments, student services offices, Senate, and President’s Cabinet. Informal dialogue takes place daily and in a variety of ways ranging from workshops, emails, and collegiate luncheons to spontaneous conversations in labs, classrooms, offices, and
hallways throughout the campus. A positive atmosphere and congenial working environment are the best evidence of Norco’s effectiveness in engaging in an honest and truthful “campus conversation” driven by commitment to student learning.

**INSTITUTIONAL INTEGRITY**

Since its inception 15 years ago, Norco Campus has endeavored to meet the needs of its community with integrity and honesty in all its operations. Its mission statement is carefully designed to present an easily understood message of accessibility and welcome to the diverse student and community groups it serves. The planned publication of a separate catalog and schedule of classes for Norco Campus is an important step forward in Norco’s commitment to represent itself to its stakeholders in an accessible and transparent fashion. The integrity and honesty of Norco Campus are demonstrated in ongoing processes of dialogue and planning in which the mission is integral to decision-making and progress in achieving student learning outcomes. Through the self study experience, the campus has come to realize, more than ever before, its integrity and deep-rooted commitment to students and their educational journey.