

Standard Four: The Academic Program

The institution's academic programs are consistent with and serve to fulfill its mission and purposes. The institution works systematically and effectively to plan, provide, oversee, evaluate, improve, and assure the academic quality and integrity of its academic programs and the credits and degrees awarded. The institution develops the systematic means to understand how and what students are learning and to use the evidence obtained to improve the academic program.

DESCRIPTION

Washington County Community College's (WCCC) mission is to offer "comprehensive, postsecondary, transfer and/or technical education, culminating with the Associate Degree, Diploma, and/or Certificate." WCCC fulfills its mission by offering twenty-two postsecondary transfer, career, technical and general education programs in nineteen major areas of study leading to Associate in Arts (A.A.), Associate in Science (A.S.), Associate in Applied Science (A.A.S.), Diploma (D) and Certificate (C). The College offers courses applicable to these programs in traditional fall, spring, and summer semesters, and in day, night and online formats. WCCC also offers a wide range of noncredit community and workforce development courses and programs.

Transfer programs are offered in Liberal Studies, Business, Adventure Recreation and Tourism, Culinary and Baking, Education, and Early Childhood Education. Terminal career programs at the associate, certificate and diploma level are available in Adventure Recreation and Tourism, Automotive, Business, Entrepreneurship, Culinary and Baking, Early Childhood Education, Education, Heating, Plumbing, Building Construction, Electrical, Welding, Heavy Equipment Maintenance, Heavy Equipment Operations, Medical Assisting, Computer Technology, Mechanical Technology, General Technology and Trade and Technical Occupations. WCCC also collaborates with Southern Maine Community College to provide an A.A.S. Degree in Criminal Justice and with Northern Maine Community College to deliver an A.A.S. Degree in Nursing. Both collaborative programs are delivered on the WCCC campus.

In response to the local workforce need for professionals in nursing and criminal justice, and considering the financial limitations of the College, combined with the inevitability of saturating the local labor force within a short timeframe, the

College has imported these programs from other sister community colleges. This approach to program delivery allows WCCC to meet the employment needs of Washington County in a cost effective and responsible way.

In addition to degree, diploma and certificate credential programs, the College further fulfills its mission to the community and State by providing workforce development and community education, College for Seniors, Elderhostel programs, enrichment courses and programs, and General Education Development (GED) Diploma tutoring and testing. Through Community Education and Industry Services, WCCC works with companies to provide custom training and workshops to support the ongoing needs of Washington County's business and industry. The College's educational function extends beyond the delivery of academic programs to the community. WCCC serves dual-enrollment high school students accessing college courses, dual-enrollment and articulation partnerships with secondary institutions, students participating in the Early College program, non-matriculated students seeking educational enrichment, and workers needing retraining after their companies have closed or undergone restructuring. The College provides lifelong learning experiences to support the broad needs of the community that do not fit the traditional program characteristics. Students engaged in lifelong learning activities are an important part of the College and its mission, and are served by the College's rich and flexible offerings.

WCCC's academic departments, department chairs, faculty and academic affairs office oversee the academic programs. The procedures for developing, approving, and periodically reviewing the College's programs and courses are defined in the Curriculum Committee's bylaws and the Maine Community College System (MCCS) policy and procedures governing academic affairs.

All programs require documentation of rationale for course and/or program proposals, student need, community or industry need, statement of purpose and objectives, suitability, economic impact, transferability, competencies and outcomes, course objectives, course descriptions, credit/contact hours, equipment and resources, and budget projection. The Curriculum Committee is a standing committee within the College governance structure and per its bylaws, "the faculty oversees the curriculum of the college and it is the responsibility of the committee to ensure that the academic needs of the students are met. Curriculum is faculty driven; faculty members make up the majority of the

committee.” The Curriculum Committee forwards its recommendations for approval to the College President.

New program development is a four step process instituted to provide adequate and broad-based input as well as provide for thorough planning. Step 1 of the process includes program suggestion and intent to plan with formal reviews by the Academic Dean, Curriculum Committee, Community Council, and Assistant Dean of Enrollment Management. Step 2 includes research and analysis for suitability, need, feasibility, and areas of concern with the President, Academic Dean, Curriculum Committee and Community Council being informed. Step 2 completion is approved or disapproved by the Academic Dean prior to forwarding on to Step 3, program development. Step 3 is the formal program development phase which includes curriculum development, program of study and courses, program requirements and outcomes. Step 4 is the program proposal notification and approval process. This step includes approval, within the College, by the Curriculum Committee, Community Council, College President, and external approval by Maine Community College System and Board of Trustees according to MCCS academic program planning policies and procedures.

Programs are subject to comprehensive periodic reviews by the College and the MCCS. The purpose of such program reviews is to provide reports to the College and the Educational Policy Board of the Board of Trustees of the MCCS to apprise of academic program outcomes. Program review reports include program profile, program data, student achievement to graduation, program successes, and conclusions and recommendations. Program reviews are completed by program faculty and department chairs with assistance by relevant departments, and under the coordination and direction of the Academic Dean.

WCCC is increasingly aligning standards and outcomes with national and state professional accrediting agencies. College programs also align with external credentialing bodies on both the course level and the program completion level. Currently, the Automotive and Engine Specialist programs are aligned with National Automotive Technicians Education Foundation (NATEF) and Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) standards which require external professional accreditation. Upon recommendation of the Curriculum Review Board of The American Association of Medical Assistants (AAMA) and American Medical Association (AMA), the College’s Medical Assisting program is to prepare for accreditation by the Commission on the Accreditation of Allied Health Education

Programs (CAAHEP). A component of program assessment and outcomes assessment is the meeting of goals related to students attaining industry certification and credentialing. Programs with associated certifications and credentials include automotive, welding, electrical, heating, plumbing, building construction, culinary & baking, medical assisting, and adventure recreation and tourism.

Program changes, suspensions, and discontinuances are based on internal and external realities such as changing job market, socioeconomic conditions, student population, cost, and budgetary constraints. When programs are changed or eliminated, appropriate MCCS and College policies and procedures must be followed and appropriate arrangements are made for enrolled students. The Assistant Dean of Enrollment Management/Registrar completes a list of affected students, with corresponding degree audits, to determine what courses are required to complete and attain their academic credential. Students are notified so they may take a particular course to complete requirements or work out a plan of completion of their program of study. Every effort is made to provide the students with appropriate or equivalent courses to complete program requirements. In the event this is not possible, directed studies or alternative options are provided to students.

Enrollment and registration procedures and processes for the academic programs are published each semester in the College catalog and on the College website and portal. The admissions and matriculation process is clearly outlined in print and on the web. Academic programs are fully outlined and communicated to students, and include program/course of study, potential full-time sequencing option, course descriptions, program requirements and program outcomes. All program materials are made available in person through the Admissions Office, through the mail, and on the College website.

The College employs a mandated test and tour day for students applying to programs of study. The test component includes students taking the Accuplacer assessment instrument for appropriate placement into college courses. Students are placed into college level courses or precollege developmental courses as determined by the assessment placement results and counseling. The College grants credit for developmental courses but the credits do not count towards graduation requirements.

Students not achieving minimum math and English cut-off scores must complete developmental mathematics and developmental English courses. There is one developmental level for both mathematics and English. The Curriculum Committee is currently engaged in a two year process of reviewing and making changes to developmental courses and some 100-level courses in the mathematics and English curriculum. Developmental mathematics courses require a grade of C or better to proceed to college level courses. Developmental English courses require a grade of C or better to proceed to college level courses.

In addition to the test and tour days the College provides Admitted Student Days and First Year Experience. These student service programs offer new students the opportunity to meet with advisors, address a wide range of enrollment issues and barriers, attend student orientation workshops and participate in experiential activities.

WCCC's TRIO Student Support Services and Study Center provide academic support services to all students. Academic support services include tutoring, academic planning, supplemental instruction, study skills and computer skills development, disability services, and assistive instructional technology such as Plato Learning and Dragon Naturally Speaking. The College affords students several alternative ways to earn college credit. Portfolio assessment gives students the opportunity to demonstrate learning gained through life experiences and to apply this learning to a degree. There is a policy and procedure for such awarded credit. Under certain circumstances there is the opportunity for students to undertake directed/independent study. Students may transfer to WCCC credits earned at other accredited colleges prior to beginning their program and with approval during their program of study. WCCC accepts CLEP (College Level Examination Program) test scores for review for awarding of college credit. Finally students can also gain credit by examination. For courses that have been identified and with permission of faculty, students may "test out" of a course for which they are registered.

Information resources are available to all students upon enrollment in the College. The College provides students with information through the portal information system, website, catalog (print and online), student handbook, email, First Year Experience workshops, introductory courses, and ongoing workshops through TRIO/Study Center. Technology is increasingly being integrated into courses, programs and classrooms. Faculty are using technology to a greater

degree and embrace the expansion of technology within the classroom. Faculty use interactive CD-ROMs and web-based information related to courses. Many courses now require computers in the classroom or the use of a “smart classroom”. WebCT online course management system is often used in support of traditional classroom courses, and the college also provides online and hybrid courses. In order for the College to reach more rural county residents with its Medical Assisting program an interactive video (Polycom) system is being integrated into the program for delivery of courses at the University at Maine Machias.

The College’s general education requirements direct students to take courses in the areas English, communications, mathematics, science, social science and humanities. Certificates and Diplomas require that competency be demonstrated by completing required communications and mathematics courses. A.A.S. degrees require at minimum 12-15 credits in communications, social science, humanities, and fine arts; 6-8 credits in mathematics and/or science; 20-21 total general education credits and an additional open elective requirement. The A.A. degree requires at minimum 6 credits English/communication, 3 credits humanities, 3 credits mathematics/science, and 9 credits social science. The A.S. degree requires at minimum 12-18 credits in communications, social science, humanities, and fine arts; 18-12 credits in mathematics/science; 6 credits open electives. Developmental courses do not count towards general education requirements.

The application of the general education requirements varies among programs. All programs require, at minimum, 3 credits English/communications and 3 credits mathematics. Associate degrees require at minimum English composition for the English/communication requirement. The College’s Curriculum Committee is in the process of reviewing and revising its general education requirements. All courses in the general education curriculum have objectives for attainment of knowledge and skills.

All programs include a logical sequence of course work articulated in the College catalog and published in other marketing materials. WCCC works closely with four year institutions to align curriculum for programs with articulation agreements. Trade, technical and career programs are designed and updated to meet the requirements of industry standards and State or national certification requirements. The College has standing transfer agreements with two and four

year institutions and it is the goal of the College to continue to pursue new opportunities.

Student progress, from initial enrollment through degree completion, is tracked through the Enrollment Services and Registrar's Office. Student progress is further supported by faculty and student service advising with Student Services providing degree audits for students. Course syllabi are required for all courses and sections offered each semester and contain a listing of course content, course objectives, and grading criteria. Requirements for program completion are published in the catalog, online, and in brochures. Policies regarding continuation, termination, withdrawal, and re-admission are published in the College catalog. The policies on academic honesty and student rights and responsibilities are available in the catalog and the student handbook.

WCCC offers courses and programs to meet the needs of students. In addition to providing day, evening and summer courses, the College offers online, hybrid and interactive video courses. All modes of course delivery use the same standards of course content and learning objectives. Technology mediated courses and programs have the same rigor and oversight as all other courses and programs. Students in traditional and online courses may contact faculty by e-mail, WebCT tools, telephone, or face-to-face.

Assessment of Student Learning

WCCC is an open access institution and enrolls students of wide ranging levels of academic skill and overall college preparedness. Through a combination of testing and course placement, and working to "meet the student" at the level they come to the College, reasonable expectations for student success can be maintained. Appropriate sequencing of courses from the developmental level to the college level in the areas of reading, writing and mathematics, and a system of program determined prerequisites, prepare and support students as they work through the curriculum. The College provides academic support services, student services, and advising to support student learning. Eighty percent of programs have either culminating external certification testing or various course level certifications. Transfer agreements with four-year institutions support the validity and appropriateness of WCCC's credit granting standards. WCCC uses a system of periodic comprehensive program review, with a full study of each program every five years which examines curricula, staffing, budget, outcomes assessment, job

placement, retention, persistence, graduation, transfer, and the adequacy of facilities and equipment. The College also reviews yearly retention and persistence data, program and course certification pass rates, student satisfaction (Noel-Levitz) and engagement (Community College Survey of Student Engagement – CCSSE), and student course evaluations. Some programs (Adventure Recreation, Early Childhood Education, Culinary & Baking, and Business) have “capstone” type courses which provide for assessment of student learning. Other programs (Medical Assisting and Early Childhood Education) use clinical placements or comprehensive internships with portfolio requirements. All programs have formal learning outcomes defined and published.

APPRAISAL

WCCC continues to strengthen the pursuit of its mission through the improvement and advancement of its academic programming. While the environment of limited financial, technical, and capital resources in which WCCC has operated for the past five years has presented challenges, the overall academic program and the fiscal standing of the College is greatly improved. The academic program is more educationally sound and is evolving to meet current demands. WCCC has been and will, into the future, be challenged in many ways:

1. Declining regional population, especially youth.
2. Significant decline in the number of local high school graduates.
3. An appalling shrinkage of the manufacturing base.
4. Perceived prohibitive costs for higher education by certain segments of the population.
5. Continued lack of sufficient public funding to support the College’s mission.

Through the College’s Master Campus Plan project, an internal Envision the Future planning process, and the MCCS Strategic Planning process, the College has identified it must maximize its strengths and take advantage of its opportunities. To accomplish this mandate, the following will be done:

1. WCCC will further strengthen its relationship with UMM through joint planning, marketing, and building and updating articulation agreements. These two institutions of higher learning can play a significant role encouraging

constituents to pursue higher education and can be major players in economic development.

2. Additionally, WCCC will continue to build upon its collaborative partnership with New Brunswick Community College, St. Andrews in joint programming and enrollment access at reduced tuition rates.

3. Continue to expand collaborations with various regional development groups, i.e. The Sunrise Economic Development Council.

4. The College will seek more communication with State and federal agencies in attempts to secure funding for programming and economic development.

5. The College must advance even stronger outreach efforts to build partnerships with the business community.

6. The College will enhance its relationship and partnerships with local schools, technical centers, technical prep programs, Early College for ME, Advantage U, and TRIO program.

7. The College will work to develop an active, non-competitive, relationship with Husson College's Unobsky College working to the benefit of the people of the region.

Beyond the College being a leader and a center of educational and economic activity for Washington County, the strength of WCCC's academic programs has been its commitment to technical education. WCCC has long provided trade, technical and career programs for the region and plays an integral role in supporting the economic activity of the region. The College has been educating and training plumbers, welders, construction workers, electricians, office staff, and medical assistants so vital to this county. This strength remains at the core of the academic program identity for the College.

Curriculum

All credit courses and program curriculum must be approved by the College's Curriculum Committee. New courses are created in several ways: proposed by individual faculty members, proposed by department chairs or suggested by changing realities in the workplace as identified by industry partners, technology,

and student demands. One of the ongoing challenges the College faces is maintaining a balance between expanding course offerings and not outpacing the growth of our small enrollment.

The development or modification of academic programs is a strength and a concern. A strength of the academic program is the Curriculum Committee. Over the past two years the Committee has taken active leadership to review, recommend and propose changes to strengthen the overall curriculum. The mathematics curriculum is being revised for streamlined course sequencing and to eliminate redundancy. The English curriculum is also in the process of being reviewed and having changes proposed. The Committee is in the process of evaluating developmental education courses and sequencing, general education requirements and credit distribution, and for perhaps the first time, trying to answer fundamental questions about the relationship of the curriculum to College and to all the programs of study. The Committee embraces its role in wrestling with the sometimes divergent ideas of the historical technical education identity of the College and its new community college mission. The Committee understands the prominence of technology and career education, yet it tries to understand and shape the role of the general education.

Many of the career and trade programs are shaped and driven by industry and State standards and certifications. One-hundred percent of the College's programs have defined learning outcomes. Forty-one percent of programs have curriculum and learning outcomes driven by licensure exams/certifications. Thirty-five of programs use capstone courses or culminating practicum or clinical to assess student learning. Three programs incorporate a competency based approach to assessing student outcomes. Additionally, the Adventure Recreation and Tourism program and the Automotive program have extensive individual course level certifications.

While the College does excellent work at assessing student learning and collecting data, there needs to be greater effort put into the ongoing interpretation and utilization of learning results to improve educational effectiveness. Administration, department chairs, and program faculty need to better share and analyze data and outcomes.

The College does not have formal learning outcomes defined for general education. Individual programs drive the general education within the program

and outcomes are not identified in this area. The Liberal Studies program has defined learning outcomes, but currently does not collect data or assess students' meeting those learning outcomes. The College and the Curriculum Committee is in the process strengthening this area of the academic program.

A concern for WCCC is balancing the ambition in developing and offering new programs with the challenges of time, energy, and budget of the College's faculty, departments and staff. Further complicating the delicate balance are the previously identified threats to the College as it plans for the future. It has been several years since the College developed a Master Academic Plan and included in the projections is for the College to create such a plan to assist in providing strategic direction for the academic program.

Instructional Technology

The College and the faculty are advancing the use of educational technology and the use of technology to support student learning. Each year more classrooms are improved with "smart" technology. For the 2008/2009 academic year three lecture rooms were enhanced with 'smart" technology and two computer rooms were reconfigured for improved teaching and learning. WCCC students have access to computers, wireless access is available on campus, some faculty use online WebCT technology in conjunction with their traditional classroom based courses, some faculty are providing students with digital recordings of lectures, and online course development has increased over the past two years. The Education program is now offered fully online and the Medical Assisting program through a Maine Community College System Rural Initiative Grant is providing distance education access through a blend of online and interactive video conferencing courses (Polycom). Faculty have also worked with TRIO and the Study Center to explore ways to use and integrate instructional support software such as Dragon Naturally Speak and Plato Learning System. The Business program, Medical Assisting program, and some English and communication courses are scheduled in computer labs.

Developmental Education

The College and the Curriculum Committee are reviewing developmental education including course sequencing, course content and objectives, rigor, academic support services, instructional technology, and instructional delivery.

Over 80% percent of incoming students place into at least one developmental course. Developmental courses, particularly mathematics, are barrier courses which may cause a student to not persist to program completion and graduation or transfer. The College provides academic support services through the TRIO Student Support Services Program and Study Center. WCCC has a very high percentage of students who are eligible for Student Support Services (SSS) services; 77% (340) are low-income, 88% (392) first generation and 15% (62) are individuals with disabilities. WCCC provides academic and support services to SSS-eligible students including: academic advising, financial aid counseling, supplemental instruction, personal, academic and career guidance, services for the disabled, tutoring, transfer to a four-year college and access to cultural activities. Students encounter difficulty with college level course work as seen by the fact that 90% of students receiving mid-semester warnings were eligible for the SSS program. Thirty-four percent of SSS participants received mid-semester warnings. All students, whether eligible for TRIO or not, are provided academic support services through TRIO or the Study Center. Students succeed when they access the services available at TRIO and the Student Center. Eighty percent of students receiving midterm warnings who access TRIO/Study Center services successfully passed their courses.

While the College works to support the under prepared student population, concerns consistently remain. A greater integration of the faculty, academic support services, technology and student services need to be addressed to better support student retention and success. The College has begun discussions about a more comprehensive developmental education program as means to better support student success.

Community Education and Industry Services

WCCC continues to explore ways to strengthen and expand its offerings and enrollment in noncredit bearing courses through the Department of Community Education and Industry Services. The Department coordinates enrichment programming, Senior College, Elderhostel, specialized training activities and programming to retrain laid off workers. Senior College, in the Fall 2008 session, delivered 13 classes and served 101 registrants. In summer 2008 Elderhostel delivered 8 program sessions and served 157 people.

Transfer and Articulation

WCCC has in place transfer agreements, course and program articulation agreements, and community college system to university system agreements (Advantage U.). Agreements are identified on the College Website. The College's transfer counselor coordinates transfer fairs, college visitations, and transfer workshops. Transfer agreements are in place with University of Maine System, University of Maine Machias, University of Maine Presque Isle, University of Maine Orono, University of Maine Augusta, University of Maine Fort Kent, Husson College, and New Brunswick Community College. WCCC will begin in 2009 tracking transfer students through the National Student Clearinghouse. The College emphasizes the importance of maintaining close working relationships with four-year institution programs and faculty.

PROJECTIONS

1. Dean of Academic Affairs, Department Chairs and Curriculum Committee lead a full review of the general education and propose recommendations for learning outcomes, assessment and evaluation, and credit distribution standards. (Completed by May 2011).
2. Department Chair for Liberal Studies, academic studies faculty, and the Liberal Studies program advisory group review the Liberal Studies curriculum and learning outcomes and propose recommendations for learning outcomes, assessment and evaluation, and credit distribution. (Completed by May 2010)
3. Administration, Senior Staff, and Department Chairs review the program planning process and make recommendations for improvement of new program development.
4. Dean of Academic and Student Affairs and Department Chairs develop a proposal for interim program assessment, and a plan for the effective dissemination, review and feedback on program assessment data.
5. Dean of Academic and Student Affairs in collaboration with relevant departments and programs develops an annual Master Academic Plan.
6. Administration, Staff and Faculty continue to explore and develop new partnerships and collaborative relationships that support and further the mission of the College.

7. Dean of Academic and Student Affairs and Faculty engage in more meaningful relationship building with secondary faculty and administrations regarding curriculum issues.