

**At North Country, we measure our success one student at a time...**

"The college genuinely wants to help people like myself who are transitioning back into college learning. The Learning Assistance Center has been amazing, with tons of staff and tutors who are willing to help you academically and personally."

Victoria Roman, Malone  
AAS Chemical Dependency Counseling, 2020



"The college has a great massage therapy program. My instructors were professional. The classes were well-thought-out and organized. I loved my experience at North Country."

Chad Hunkins, Redford  
AAS Massage Therapy, 2006



"The classes were tough, but the instructors did an amazing job and made sure I understood the material. Everyone at North Country works hard to give the students the best possible experience. I am thankful that I chose North Country."

Dustin Snyder, Copenhagen  
AAS Radiologic Technology, 2019



"North Country Community College allowed me a space that I could build my skills, while also building my confidence. I found that each semester I had the support that allowed me to build up my degree. I was challenged and respected for my differences."

Adina Rivera-Towell, Liverpool NY  
AAS Business Administration, 2017



"My experience at North Country was awesome. I liked the small class sizes and the professors' ability to engage more with the students. The instructors were knowledgeable and brought personal experience into the classroom."

Lori Tarbell, Akwesasne  
AAS Chemical Dependency Counseling, 2014



"NCCC has such a close-knit community. You create so many new relationships, bonds, and memories with great people. The faculty and staff are very genuine and really care for the students."

Allison Chamberlain, Tupper Lake  
AAS Nursing Program, 2020



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**Middle States Commission on Higher Education**  
**Self-Study**

**Presented by: North Country Community College**  
**August 2021**

**Joseph Keegan, President**

Self-Study to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education  
from  
North Country Community College  
Saranac Lake, NY 12983

Joseph Keegan  
President

Sarah Maroun  
Interim Vice President for Academic Affairs  
Accreditation Liaison Officer  
Self-Study Co-Chair

Erik Harvey  
Interim Chief Financial Officer  
Self-Study Co-Chair

“To delay the On-Site Evaluation visit scheduled for Spring 2021 due to extraordinary circumstances related to coronavirus (COVID-19) interruptions and to continue accreditation. To note the institution remains accredited during a delay granted by the Commission. The Evaluation visit will be scheduled in accordance with Commission policy and procedures.”

October 29, 2020

MSCHE Team Chair: Dr. Kristy Bishop

October 4-6, 2021

**Board of Trustees**

Mr.	Jerry	Griffin	Trustee
Mr.	Dan	Kelleher	Trustee
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## Executive Summary

North Country Community College began the self-study process over three years ago under a vastly different landscape, both internally at the College and externally as many sectors across society, including higher education, had to re-evaluate how to operate during a global pandemic. The self-study process created dedicated space for reflection, during which emerged opportunities to question long-held assumptions about how to best deliver education across disciplines and programs. More questions than answers remain, leaving opportunities and challenges for assessing practices, policies, procedures, and structures across the College in the months and years to come. Viewing these questions through the lens of the Middle States Commission for Higher Education Standards for Accreditation, Requirements of Affiliation, and Verification of Compliance provided a framework for evaluating policies, practices, and procedures over the previous ten years as well over as the last eighteen months. The following report outlines the College's compliance with the Standards and Requirements and identifies opportunities for improvement as we assess and evaluate outcomes and goals.

The pandemic, like many life-altering events, revealed what was essential and critical. Despite the multitude of changes thrust upon faculty, staff, and students during the shift to remote learning, core elements of operations remain consistent, both prior to and during the pandemic. These guiding principles threading throughout the North Country CC community include dedication to the mission, commitment to and concern for student success, engagement with and service to our communities, and a focus on continuous improvement and innovation.

By design, the self-study process included constituents from across the College. Formally, the structure included six working groups with cross-departmental representation and two co-chairs per working group who also served as members of the Steering Committee. Standards align naturally in some cases, so Working Group I covered Standards I and VI, Working Group II dealt with Standards II and VII. The remaining Standards were single inquiries for Working Groups 3, 4, and 5 respectively. Working Group 6 worked through the Evidence Inventory and Verification of Compliance, providing needed documentation to be used as evidence. The collaborative nature of the process provided multiple perspectives, and working groups included representation from clerical, administrative, professional and student support staff as well as faculty and students. Working groups primarily focused on summary narratives, opportunities for improvement, and identification of evidence best suited to support how the college meets each criterion within the Standards as well as the Requirements of Affiliation. The conditions during COVID-19 certainly affected the continuity of the process; however, we adjusted as needed to complete the inquiries.

Consistent solicitation of student input remains at the forefront of the continual improvement process. President Keegan meets monthly with the Executive Committee of the Student Government Association (SGA) and bi-weekly with the Student Trustee, gleaning important feedback regarding various areas of the College. Additionally, Student Trustee Jessica Kemp served on the Working Group for Standard IV, met with Interim Vice President for Academic Affairs and Accreditation Liaison Officer, Sarah Maroun, in the Fall of 2020 to discuss the self-study process, consider the student role, and offer help to gather student input. Additionally, Ms. Maroun met with the Executive Committee of the SGA in the Fall 2020 semester, also discussing the self-study process and purpose. As Student Trustee, Jessica Kemp also met with the Team Chair, Dr. Kristy Bishop during her virtual visit on April 14-15, 2021.

The self-study design uses the Standards as the organizing structure and the Institutional Priorities provided the guiding focus across all seven Standards and fifteen requirements. Created and approved by the College shared governance structure, including President's Council, the College Senate, and the Board of Trustees, the following comprise the Institutional Priorities for the self-study:

1. Maintaining a culture of assessment that supports excellence in education and guides the College's daily operations and strategic planning.

2. Expanding community engagement through partnerships and enhancing community integration.
3. Improving financial stability through increasing enrollment and retention.

These Institutional Priorities align with the College's mission, vision, values, institutional goals, and strategic plan, all of which underwent extensive review and approvals during the self-study period as further illustrated in Standards I, II, VI, and VII.

In addition to the Institutional Priorities which guided the self-study, we identified specific outcomes upon which to measure progress:

1. **Reaffirmation of Accreditation:** The College will establish how it meets the MSCHE Standards for Accreditation, Requirements of Affiliation, and Verification of Compliance. This is essential for the sustainability of the institution.
2. **Campus Inclusivity:** The institution will follow an inclusive process that engages members across the college community. The structure of the self-study will include regular reporting intervals regarding findings and progress.
3. **Charting a Path Toward Continuous Improvement:** Using the MSCHE Standards as a guide, the College will evaluate all areas related to each standard and focus on the evaluation of institutional processes across departments to help inform and improve planning (academic, enrollment, financial, operational, and strategic).
4. **Improving Institutional Sustainability and Student Success:** Using information gained during the self-study process, the College will develop sustainable initiatives related to recruitment, retention, persistence, and completion grounded in student support and services that specifically support the institution reaching its established annual enrollment targets and goals.

As we complete our self-study and reflect upon the intended outcomes, we are proud of the progress toward and achievement of these outcomes within the context of the self-study as well as laying out the pathway for further analysis and improvement. Compiling documentation and evidence of our compliance with MSCHE Standards and Requirements provided opportunities for updating documents as well as educating new employees on processes and the rationale for many procedures and policies. Campus inclusivity remains a guiding value for us as we strive to allow our three campuses to preserve unique characteristics while creating a unified "One College" approach to the decision-making process and student experiences. Assessment across all units at the College provides a starting and ending point for changes and evaluation of the efficacy and sustainability of those changes. Lastly, student success and institutional sustainability form the structure to guide all operational decisions. The work to meet these outcomes will not cease as we move through the completion of the formalized self-study process.

As illustrated below, some challenges remain, and new ones will emerge as the long-term impact of the current COVID-19 pandemic manifests more fully over the next few years. While the particulars of the current crisis present unique circumstances, the prevailing conditions driving change remain, including reduction of resources, increased complexity of social, cultural, and economic environments, and a rapid rate of change across societal sectors. Though these might be our generation's challenges to face, there remains much cause for optimism and hope.

Addressing the following areas will strengthen the College's ability to carry out its mission in the wake of a national and regional climate of evolving barriers to affordable higher education:

1. Continued sustainability, relevancy, and accessibility of credit and non-credit offerings to multiple constituencies within our service areas
2. Reduced governmental funding sources combined with revenue declines based on declining high school populations and an ever-changing employment market

3. Increased expectations for seamless delivery of educational content across varying modalities and disciplines
4. Increased reliance on technology and external support systems for content delivery
5. Increased need for updated facilities and infrastructure across all campuses
6. Lack of basic needs (i.e., food, housing, transportation), financial needs, and mental health needs
7. Increased expectations from internal and external stakeholders for reliable and easily accessible data

Our experience since the last self-study shows this is possible. Since that time, while many of the core elements at the College remain, including degree programs and certificates that are relevant and supportive of community needs, much progress has been made with the goal of improving those elements and adding enhancements. The following list highlights some of the work conducted over the last decade:

### **Progress Since Last Self-Study**

1. Revision of Mission, Vision, and Values
2. Assessment and continuous improvement of the shared governance processes across the College
3. Adoption and implementation of systematic assessment processes across all academic programs to include programmatic review and student learning outcomes assessment
4. Redesign of all degree programs to assure compliance with SUNY General Education requirements
5. Addition of three fully online programs, two online certificate, and three advisement tracks within the liberal arts
6. Addition of four campuses through the Second Chance PELL Experiment
7. Partnership with two Pathways in Technology Early College High programs (P-TECH)
8. Full adoption of Blackboard Learning Management System and Ally for improving accessibility of content
9. Expansion of programs and service areas within local communities
10. Enhancement of community engagement through creation of community advisory boards for all three campuses
11. Exploration and analysis of increased workforce development opportunities, including creation of a new position focused on career and technical education program and curricular development
12. Creation of grant-based programs such as Quantway, Strong Start to Finish, and Wastewater Operator training
13. Continual assessment through strategic planning, budgeting, and establishment of institutional directions and priorities
14. Enhancement of retention efforts, including the creation of retention specialist positions and revision of the first-year seminar course
15. Multi-year national ranking for women's basketball

The remaining pages of the Self-Study will provide summary, analysis, and supporting evidence for compliance with each Standard, cross-referenced with the Requirements of Affiliation, and concluding with recommendations for improvements in each area. Each chapter will include by Standard:

1. Demonstration of compliance under each criterion
2. Analysis of strengths/challenges
3. Recommendations for improvements

### **Institutional Overview**

Established in 1967, North Country Community College remains true to its mission and original charter, providing residents of the northern New York region with opportunities to pursue higher education within our communities. As part of the larger State University of New York system (SUNY), North Country is

one of thirty community colleges and one of sixty-four higher education institutions within SUNY. The College serves Essex and Franklin, two of the more geographically expansive, yet sparsely populated counties in New York State. The coverage area for the College includes 3,500 square miles and 90,000 residents.

The College's main campus is located in Saranac Lake, NY, a community shared by Essex and Franklin counties, with branch campuses in Malone (northern Franklin County) and Ticonderoga (southern Essex County). The addition of online degree programs in 2016 created an "online" campus, and in 2017, the College added four branch campuses as part of the Second Chance Pell experiment, three within the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) system (Adirondack Correctional in Ray Brook, NY, Bare Hill Correctional in Malone, NY and Franklin Correctional in Malone, NY), and one at the Federal Correctional Institute in Ray Brook, NY. In 2019, the College began to offer a few courses at Akwesasne, the St. Regis Mohawk Territory in northern Franklin County. Additionally, NCCC's College Bridge dual-enrollment program includes course offerings at 27 area high schools.

The College offers twenty associate degrees and six certificate programs. Grounded in the liberal arts and focused on regional workforce needs, roughly half of the offered degree programs and certificates prepare students for transfer (Associate of Arts and Associate of Science programs), while the other half prepare students to move directly into the workforce (Associate of Applied Science programs and certificates). In recent years, we have responded to student interest in online programs, adding three online programs and two online certificates to our offerings.

Degree areas include a balance between transfer and career-focused programs, addressing the interests and needs of local communities. Major categories include liberal arts, allied health, business, arts and computer graphics, human services, criminal justice, and environmentally-focused programs. A strong applied learning focus is found in several programs, and particularly those programs designed to prepare students for the workforce. Through formal input (multiple community and program-specific advisory boards) and informal input, community and educational partners continually advise the College on ways to improve programs and student experiences to better prepare them for employment.

Answering the question of "who our students are?" always elicits a complex answer because of the diversity of the student body and our tendency to think of our students as individuals, each with their own set of circumstances and aspirations that we are afforded the good fortune of being able educate and serve. Responses would include our students are the veteran looking to re-career, the parent who wants to make a better life for themselves and their family, the grandchild caring for aging grandparents while attending school, the hotel clerk taking a course on their breaks, and the incarcerated individual who desires a second chance.

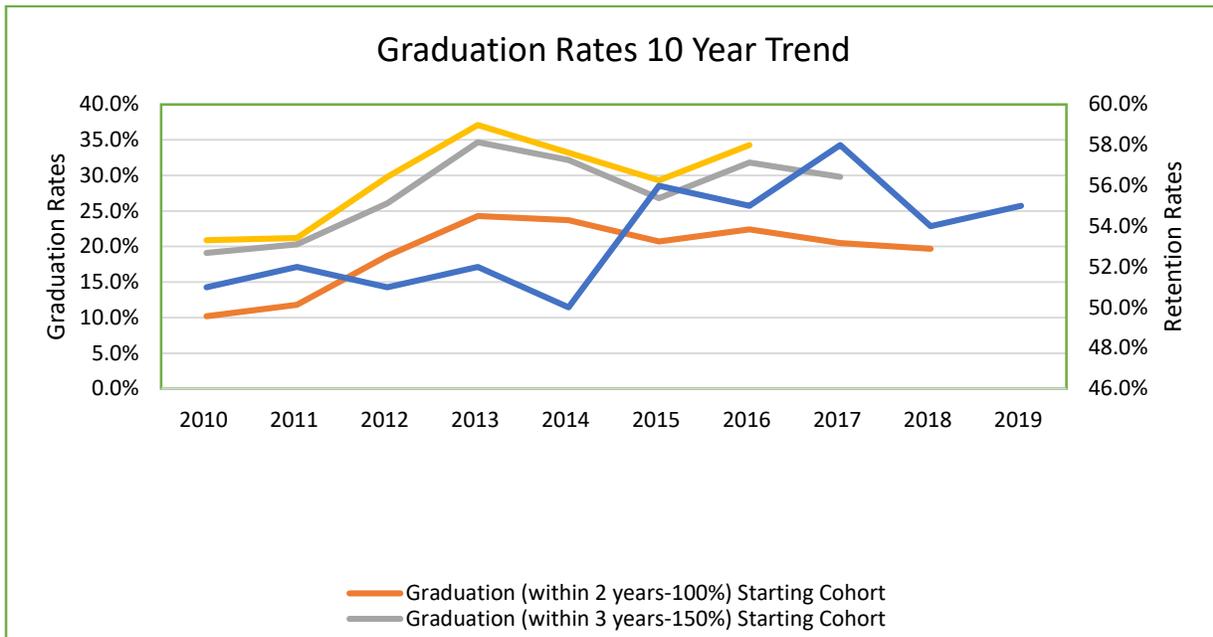
And yet, our student body is, as a Gestalt theorist might say, "more than the sum of their parts." Our students are diverse in terms of gender expression, sexual orientation, racial and ethnic identity, and many other social and economic factors including age, income, residence, and attendance. This is illustrated with a few key metrics from our Fall 2019 class as reported in IPEDS:

- Nearly two-thirds (62%) identified as female; 38% as male
- Racially/ethnically, 83% identified as white, 7% as Black/African American, 3% as American Indian, and 2% as Hispanic/Latino
- 79% were aged 24 and younger
- 90% are from New York State, 8% from other states, and 2% are international
- 70% are from our sponsoring counties, Essex and Franklin, 20% from our neighboring counties
- 60% were enrolled part-time, and
- 82% were not enrolled in any distance learning classes, while 3% were exclusively in distance learning classes.

North Country Community College’s graduates are well-represented within the workforce across the North Country region, including but not limited to Franklin and Essex counties. In addition to the many students who transfer to four-year institutions for higher degrees, since the previous self-study in 2011, North Country graduates include:

- ◆ 1500 nurses
- ◆ 250 graduates across our liberal arts programs
- ◆ 200 criminal justice degree graduates
- ◆ 170 radiologic technologists
- ◆ 150 human services professionals
- ◆ 150 graduates across our business programs
- ◆ 100 graduates across environmental and recreation programs
- ◆ 100 massage therapists
- ◆ 100 chemical dependency counselors

The College’s persistence, retention, and graduation rates demonstrate effective instruction and support for students as they complete their college degrees or progress toward their goals. The following chart illustrates this success:



In the past ten years, we have consistently increased graduation rates for full-time students by 6-14% since 2010, and our rate is generally within the top 10% of graduation rates for SUNY community colleges. Individual attention and concern have always been a hallmark of the North Country Community College experience, and in recent years, the College increased its focus on retention efforts across the College. These will be further explored throughout this report.

We strive to be that beacon of hope for students in our region, offering access to an affordable education that has the power to transform their lives and the lives of their family. As an affordable and accessible community college (tuition is \$5280.00 for New York State residents and \$7920.00 for out-of-state residents), we provide students with a strong foundation in the liberal arts as general education requirements form the backdrop for all of our programs and provide graduates with an education that fosters, enhances, and assesses critical thinking, scientific and mathematical reasoning, essential communication skills, social and cultural literacy, research competency, and technological fluency. These

areas form a bridge that overlaps SUNY General Education outcomes with NCCC's College-Wide Goals (Institutional Learning Outcomes). A focus on applied and experiential learning across programs contributes to a well-rounded education that prepares students for both entry into the workforce or pursuit of higher education.

The remainder of this self-study explores the elements that support the College's achievements and demonstrate our adherence to high standards and academic rigor, continuous improvement, and efforts to strive for excellence and serve students, families, and the region's communities. Our commitment to providing high quality higher education animates our community, something that we believe the self-study process both confirmed and illuminated.

## Standard I: Mission and Goals

*The institution's mission defines its purpose within the context of higher education, the students it serves, and what it intends to accomplish. The institution's stated goals are clearly linked to its mission and specify how the institution fulfills its mission" (Middle States Commission on Higher Education Standards of Accreditation, Standard I).*

Since the last self-study in 2011, the NCCC community undertook two major revisions of the mission, vision, and values. These revisions involved multiple stakeholders and substantive discussion around how to best articulate the mission, vision, and values as currently embodied as well as create a vision for the future. Review of these core principles provides the lens through which this self-study evaluates past strategic and operational decisions and actions. The current mission, vision, and values (formally adopted during the Spring 2020 semester) guide the updated strategic plan, taking effect for 2021 and forward. While there is continuity and progression in the revisions of the Mission, Vision, and Values, the revised versions consolidate and align goals and key priorities across the College to make more effective use of increasingly scarce resources. Institutional priorities identified in this self-study align with the current and former mission, visions, values, and institutional goals.

### **Criterion 1: North Country Community College has clearly defined mission and goals that**

- a. are developed through appropriate collaborative participation by all who facilitate or are responsible for institutional development and improvement;**

As an institution dedicated to growth and development for all members of the College community, NCCC continually practices Institutional Priority 1: *Maintaining a culture of assessment that supports excellence in education and guides the College's daily operations and strategic planning* and adheres to the Institutional Value of Shared Governance. Thus, each time the College's mission, vision, and values statements have been revised, it was based on input from various stakeholders, regular assessment of the Strategic Plan, and overall guidance from the Shared Governance process.

### **Background**

In the fall of 2018, the College began to review the mission, vision, and values, which had last been updated in 2011, to assess how those guiding principles reflected our understanding of who we are and what we hope to accomplish as an institution. By spring of 2019, a draft evolved through a series of engagements with the College community throughout the semester. We sought to be as inclusive in the process as possible, bringing many constituent groups to the table. The process included the following steps:

- Two campus-wide open forums
- Discussion and review at a President's Council meeting
- Formal review by College Senate
- Formal review by the faculty and professional staff collective bargaining unit (NCCCAP)
- Formal review and vote by Board of Trustees

The outcome of that process was a final draft of the mission, vision, and values whose next step was the Board of Trustees for their review. At the September 27, 2019, meeting, the Board of Trustees expressed their support of the process and the updated mission and vision, but they recommended reconsidering the ordering and some wording of the values section. Specifically, they observed that the values seemed more inward-focused, speaking to the College community, rather than to prospective students and their families. For example, the first two values were as follows:

- Honest, open, and timely communication
- Shared Governance

While meaningful for us, the Board wondered whether "shared governance" would be understood by

students or their families, let alone whether it would help them decide if the College was a good fit. The Board also noted that there was an absence of academic/intellectual rigor expressed in our values, which seemed inconsistent, given that academic rigor is one of the College’s greatest strengths and our mission as an institution of higher education. The Board also cautioned us away from too tightly defining our mission and noted that the newly proposed mission seemed to communicate that we are more workforce-focused than education-focused.

At their October 10, 2019, and November 7, 2019, meetings, President’s Council revisited the mission, vision, and values. The changes made are found in the table below. The value of “Compassion and Kindness” was added when President Keegan observed that almost every conversation he had with faculty and staff revolved around serving student needs, being compassionate and extending flexibility to support their varied circumstances. Writing this report during the Covid-19 pandemic, we recognize that the College embodies this value to a high degree, as exemplified by the many calling campaigns to current students, lending of laptops, flexibility of instructors, online student “town halls”, online resources and publications, student care packages, virtual student activities, and weekly faculty/staff discussions about how to keep students learning while also being safe and remaining connected to the College community.

The proposed changes were discussed at an all-staff meeting on December 13, 2019. Approvals occurred as follows:

College Senate:	1/23/2020
NCCCAP:	1/23/2020
Board of Trustees:	1/24/2020 (St.I.1a.1-BOT Approval)

The corresponding documentation illustrates the process, proposals and revisions prior to approval as a final draft by the Board of Trustees (St.I.1a.2-Approval Process Mission Vision Values 2020). This narrative shows the periodic evaluation process through which the College’s mission, vision, and values are developed and revised. This process includes collaborative participation from all College constituencies, and the evidence shows that both the College Senate and the Board of Trustees approved the College’s mission as stated.

**b. address external as well as internal contexts and constituencies;**

NCCC Mission:

*NCCC provides open access to high quality academic programs that prepare students for transfer and career success. The College contributes significantly to the success of our communities by cultivating an educated citizenry, a skilled workforce, and opportunities for lifelong learning.*

The mission’s opening statement asserts the commitment to serving our internal constituents (our students) through “open access to high quality academic programs” that prepare them to seek a higher degree or enter the workforce. The mission provides a framework for the daily operations of the College: focusing on providing exceptional education in a challenging and supportive way. The institutional priorities further refine the focus of current strategies and operations, highlight key aspects of the mission, and reflect our values.

**Institutional Priority 1: Maintaining a culture of assessment that supports excellence in education and guides the College’s daily operations and strategic planning.**

Learning outcomes assessment and program review improve student outcomes, which addresses the needs of the most important internal constituency: students. Assessments of community needs give us the information to improve our program offerings to benefit and serve the entire community.

NCCC assures that it “provides open access to high quality academic programs that prepare students for transfer and career success” through a number of assessment processes throughout the College. These include program review and academic assessment of institutional and program learning outcomes (see Standard V), student services assessments (Standard IV), campus climate assessments

(Standard IV), calling campaigns (Standard IV), faculty/staff surveys (Standard VI), and student surveys (Standards III, IV, V, VI). The College has adjusted numerous structures and processes in response to feedback from internal constituencies. The restructuring of the Student Affairs area and the NC Navigator project serve to illustrate a recursive and iterative process of assessment and actions based on those assessments (Standard IV).

### **Institutional Priority 2: Expanding community engagement through partnerships and enhancing community integration.**

The College has always taken the third “C” of community in NCCC seriously, as indicated in our mission. *“The College contributes significantly to the success of our communities by cultivating an educated citizenry, a skilled workforce, and opportunities for lifelong learning.”* In May 2020, NCCC performed a comprehensive local needs assessment that identified occupations providing current and future opportunities for graduates of the College’s career and technical education (CTE) programs as well as the populations the College currently serves in those programs and can potentially serve in the future (St.I.1b.1 Excerpt-Community Needs Assessment). This assessment identified directions the College can take to expand offerings that will better serve the local communities. It also identifies how well the College is delivering current programs and supporting students in underrepresented populations.

Some of other ways in which the College lives its mission and engages the communities we serve include:

- Community advisory boards in the three communities in which our campuses reside (Saranac Lake, Malone, and Ticonderoga) one of which was the genesis for the Wastewater Basic Operations course (St.I.1b.2-Community Advisory Board Minutes).
- Regular communication with county agencies, which resulted in the development of EMT courses and AEMT certificate proposal (St.I.1b.3-County EMS Resolutions)
- Academic advisory boards to inform internal program assessments and changes as well as advise on new program opportunities and any updates/inputs from industries related to career and technical education programs (St.I.1b.4-Advisory Boards).
- Regular engagement with local K-12 school districts (St.I.1b.5-Dual Enrollment Meeting),
- Non-credit offerings including enrichment activities, swim classes, art classes (St.I.1b.6-North Country Live),
- Frequent, deliberate engagement by NCCC’s president with an array of local governments and groups (St.I.1b.7-1.24.2020 BoT Report).

The College also serves two specific local communities in highly tailored ways. These are the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe, north of Malone, and the incarcerated population in several facilities in our counties, through the federal Second Chance Pell initiative.

Members of the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe have attended NCCC for many years, and particularly the Malone campus. Based on the assessment that we could better serve the St. Regis Mohawk community and do so in ways that supported tribal aspirations and sovereignty, the College was asked to consider an extension site on the tribal territory, Akwesasne, and in the fall of 2019, two classes were offered: ENG 101: English Composition I and CIS 130: Productivity Computing. While offerings on the territory could not continue during the COVID-19 pandemic, the College plans to continue and increase its offerings at Akwesasne in future semesters (St.I.1b.8-Akwesasne Classes).

The Federal Second Chance Pell Program (SCP) began in 2016 as an experiment by the Obama administration to once again allow inmates to access federal Pell grants to gain a college education while incarcerated. (Federal law blocked Pell for incarcerated students in 1994.) NCCC was one of only 63 colleges nationwide granted permission to participate in the first round. NCCC was a natural

choice, as the College is in an area in which correctional facilities, both state and federal, have a significant local presence, employing many in the community and housing up to 4500 incarcerated individuals. The College also had a strong Inmate Higher Education Program until 1995, when both Pell and New York State TAP grants were cut for incarcerated students. In the intervening years, the College has taken every opportunity to offer courses within the facilities when allowed. Since SCP began, three academic programs have been offered in state prisons in Ray Brook and Malone, and a federal prison in Ray Brook. Over 400 students have taken part, and over 142 have graduated, with degrees in AAS Entrepreneurship Management, AA Liberal Arts: Humanities and Social Science, and AAS Individual Studies with a concentration in Human Services (St.I.1b.9-Second Chance PELL Award Letter).

Local institutions across our service areas testify to the impact that NCCC contributes to vibrant and thriving communities. In the healthcare field, many local employees are NCCC graduates. As of 2017, 72 percent of nurses and 71 percent of radiological technologists at Adirondack Health were NCCC graduates. Additionally, NCCC graduates can be found supporting small businesses as well as contributing as essential workers throughout the region (St.I.1b.10-EMSI report).

**Institutional Priority #3: Improving financial sustainability through increasing enrollment and retention.**

Of course, without financial stability, the College would not be able to achieve its mission. Efficient use of resources not only serves students by enabling us to offer more courses and academic, financial, and social supports, but it also serves the community by increasing the College’s economic impact. As noted above, many of the initiatives proved to benefit the College through diversification of our student body.

North Country Community College is truly a college of the community, continually creating and taking advantage of opportunities to listen to what our students, supporting counties, towns, villages, and other local entities need and want from us. We use that input to create relevant programming on campus, online, and in locations that work for community members. We also maintain high instructional standards and provide outstanding support to our internal constituencies – our students and staff.

**c. are approved and supported by the governing body;**

As noted above, the BOT approved the revisions to the Mission, Vision, Values, and Institutional Goals.

Approvals occurred as follows:

College Senate:	1/23/2020
NCCCAP:	1/23/2020
Board of Trustees:	1/24/2020

**d. guide faculty, administration, staff, and governing structures in making decisions related to planning, resource allocation, program and curricular development, and the definition of institutional and educational outcomes;**

**Mission-Guided Planning and Resource Allocation**

As demonstrated in the 2017-2020 Strategic Plan (St.I.1d.1-2017-2020 Strategic Plan), the College maintains a planning process that aligns the strategic goals of each operational area with the mission and goals of the entire College. This was further elaborated in the newest strategic plan covering 2020-2023 (see below). Threaded through the strategic plans as well as decisions related to planning, resource allocation and program development is the core of the mission, which is “delivering a quality education that creates access to and success in higher education.” Assessment of community and individual needs is ongoing. One such decision was to create the position of Coordinator of Career and Technical Education

and Curricular Development. The College created this position in the fall of 2019, funded by the Perkins Grant, to analyze the technical and vocational needs in the North Country region and identify how the College could help local communities meet those needs with continuing education and/or credit-bearing certificate and degree programs.

After the needs are determined, a process of creating and/or revising curriculum, programs, and resource allocation follows. That process includes governance bodies such as academic chairs and directors, individual departments, Curriculum Committee, College Senate, President’s Council, and ultimately the Board of Trustees. This process is delineated in the document titled *Shared Governance at NCCC: Principles, College Constituency Groups, Processes and Procedures*, which was prepared over the course of a year by the Shared Governance Working Group and approved by the College Senate and NCCCAP in May 2019. It was updated again during the 2020-2021 academic year (St.I.1d.2-Shared Governance document).

One example of this process in action for program and curriculum development is the recent creation of a Health Care Management track for the AS Business Administration degree.

**Development of Health Care Management Track: Institutional structures involved the Business Department, Curriculum Committee, Senate, and Academic Affairs Office.**

Process and Timeline for New Track Development: AS Business: Healthcare Administration

Exploration of Program Need/Viability Fall 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Dept. of Labor Statistics (regional and state)</li> <li>▪ Industry Input</li> <li>▪ Workforce Development Input</li> </ul>
Enrollment Data—Regional and State Fall 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Assessment of Current SUNY regional opportunities to avoid duplication.</li> <li>▪ Assessment of career and transfer opportunities (articulation, etc.)</li> </ul>
Collaboration with Transfer School(s) Spring 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Work with SUNY Canton to align curricular elements in preparation for an articulation agreement once approved</li> </ul>
Curriculum Assessment and Development Spring 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Identify overlap with current course/program offerings.</li> <li>▪ Identify gaps in current curriculum.</li> <li>▪ Create/revise courses to produce curriculum.</li> <li>▪ Request for written response from affected internal departments prior to submission to Curriculum Committee</li> </ul>
Governance Approvals Spring 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Academic Departments/Program</li> <li>▪ Curriculum Committee</li> <li>▪ Senate</li> <li>▪ Board of Trustees</li> </ul>
External Approvals Fall 2020-present	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ SUNY</li> <li>▪ New York State Education Dept.</li> </ul>

All of the degrees, certificates, and transfer tracks developed over the past five years (St.1d.3-New Programs-Tracks) have been developed in similar fashion, utilizing the same process, and in collaboration with other SUNY schools to ensure seamless transfer, as well as in collaboration with all constituencies within the college.

The development of these new programs and tracks clearly falls within the scope of the College’s mission as

well as all three institutional priorities. While there are many challenges, particularly financial ones, in being such a small college, one of the benefits is the ability to develop programs quickly, but thoughtfully, to serve the rapidly changing needs of the community. Financial sustainability is supported by leveraging current offerings in new configurations to minimize start-up costs and maximize use of current resources. For example, the Healthcare Management degree track only required development of two new courses to meet the requirements of the field and provide students with seamless transfer opportunities to one of our regional four-year partner schools.

In addition to creating credit-bearing programs, other ways of meeting the workforce needs of the region have been identified. Most recently, with the help of Perkins funding, the College has focused on exploring the creation of new pathways that align non-credit offerings and industry-recognized credentials with credit-bearing degree programs. The most recent of these pathways is that of a Wastewater Technician noncredit training program that will lead to licensure. The collective efforts of NCCC and the Community Resource Director of Essex County resulted in the receipt of a grant from the Northern Border Regional Commission to assist with the development of training for water and wastewater operators. The almost \$90,000 grant was a direct outgrowth of NCCC's community partnerships, with the idea presented at a Saranac Lake campus advisory board in Spring 2019. In August 2020, New York Senator Charles Schumer visited NCCC to announce the awarding of the grant and meet with local governmental leaders from both Essex and Franklin counties. This partnership between the College and one of our county sponsors presents opportunities for maximizing resources and creating sustainable programs that enhance our communities (St.I.1d.4-Schumer Article).

During one of the most challenging, chaotic years at our institution, we found great opportunities for growth and innovation. Early in the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, beginning in March of 2020, a number of administrators began meeting with community workforce partners and regional economic development agencies. This group met bi-weekly from spring of 2020 through spring of 2021. Through those meetings, ideas about how best to continue to serve those in our communities who are unemployed, as well as provide support and new programs that can help sustain our communities, took shape. Maintaining a pulse on current community issues, exploring new program ideas, and identifying ways in which the College can support regional workforce and educational needs in both the credit and non-credit programming areas have been the backdrop for these discussions.

One of the first meetings of this group, in spring 2020, focused on the need for connection and hope in our communities. As noted above, through those conversations, a non-credit program was formed, called *North Country Live*. This series, led by Coordinator of CTE and Curricular Development Selina LeMay-Klippel, began and continues to provide free enrichment opportunities to the community during the pandemic. *North Country Live* is a free weekly series via Zoom on a variety of themes, including wellness, personal finance, diversity and inclusion, local outdoor issues and opportunities, and history, both local and beyond. One month's theme was Black History in the Adirondacks and was presented in partnership with the Adirondack Diversity Initiative. There has also been a series of programs on the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe at Akwesasne, a Native community that is not only in the College service area but is also the location of the College's newest instructional site. The *North Country Live* series enhances the College's connection and service to our local communities, an essential component of the mission as well as a primary institutional and strategic goal.

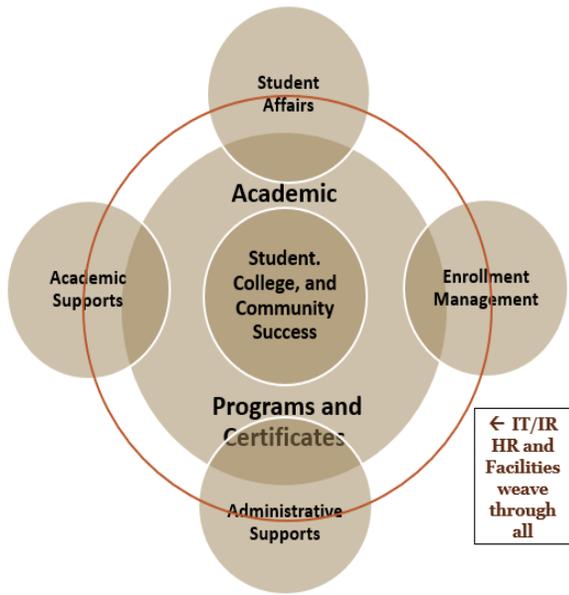
### **Strategic Plan**

During the summer of 2020, a representative group of administration, faculty and staff revisited the strategic plan and began to draft a revision based on the new mission and goals established during the 2019-2020 academic year. The start of the Fall 2020 semester began with an overview of the summer planning session, and, by spring of 2021, the administrative team had streamlined the proposal into a "One-page strategic plan". This simplified view of the plan makes relationships among and between units, the plan, and the College's mission and goals clear and easy to understand. It is backed with more specific outcomes related to each unit's responsibilities (St.I.1d.5-Strategic Planning 8.2020).

In February 2021, the Senate Long-Range and Strategic Planning Committee approved the plan and forwarded it to the College Senate for consideration at the March 2021 meeting. From there it was forwarded to the Board of Trustees where it was approved on March 26, 2021 (St.I.1d.6-BoT Approval Strategic Plan; St.I.1d.7-One-Page Strategic Plan).

An excerpt from the “2020-2023 One-Page Strategic Plan” is found below and illustrated both in diagram and narrative how the planning process was approached:

**Model and Approach to Strategic Planning**



At the core of the strategic plan is student success, which is expressed through our academic programs and certificates - the mission of the College. Relatedly, as students realize success, so too does the College and the communities we serve.

The institutional goals are the ways the College realizes its vision and carries out its mission, with actions and activities guided by its values.

The faculty create, deliver, assess and improve the curriculum. Other areas of the institution support student learning, the student experience, and teaching excellence.

Each area adds value to and supports the student experience, while the efforts of some areas/ departments are threaded through all operations.

Areas/Departments	
Academics	Financial Operations
Enrollment	Human Resources
Facilities	Information Technology/Institutional Research
Financial Aid	Student Life

The 2020-2023 Strategic Plan is already guiding planning in many areas. For example, Goal 4.D. is informing the current search to replace the retiring director of the NCCC Foundation. Another result of having this strategic plan in place is that when an opportunity surfaced to request earmark funding from the College region’s congressional representative, it was clear what to ask for. Items 1.C.ii. and 1.D.ii. clearly pointed to the need to update the College’s nursing labs, and thus a proposal requesting the needed funds was submitted, and as of the writing of this document we are waiting to hear whether it will be funded. Another opportunity came with federal Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) to implement 1.D.i., creating state-of-the-art classrooms to support high-flex learning. These initiatives are outlined under Institutional Goal 1 in the extended Strategic Plan (St.I.1d.8-Institutional Goal 1).

The current strategic plan, even more so than previous ones, charts a clear path from the mission and goals through to strategies and actions. Every strategy is a specific way in which we can meet our mission and a clear guideline as to how to solicit and allocate resources. The simplicity of the current plan allows everyone in the College community to find their place in the process of achieving our mission.

- e. include support of scholarly inquiry and creative activity, at levels and of the type appropriate to the institution;**

In the College’s 2020-2023 Strategic Plan, faculty and staff professional development is one of the four

principal strategies to achieve Institutional Goal 1 (Provide a meaningful and engaging education that prepares students for transfer or career opportunities). Despite NCCC’s small staff and minimal resources, the College has found unique ways to address this area. Item 1D of the most recent assessment report from the 2017-2020 Strategic Plan details the many activities and funding budgeted toward professional development as of August 2019, an excerpt of which is found here:

2017-20 Strategic Plan Summary August 21, 2019			
Strategic Priority	Steps	Goals	Progress
1. Reaffirm Excellence in Teaching by Committing Resources	d. A professional development program is formally established by Academic Affairs and funded by the College to support growth and development of teaching and non-teaching professionals and that directly support augmenting instructional quality.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase # of professional development activities.</li> <li>• Increase \$\$ for prof development compared to 2014-15 (\$10k)</li> <li>• Increased satisfaction by faculty in how to access professional development opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 17-18 increased PD to \$12.5K</li> <li>• 18-19 increased PD to \$20K</li> <li>• 19-20 increased PD to 22K</li> <li>• Resourced partial faculty load in offering assessment-related PD 18-19 and 19-20</li> <li>• Significant increase in national, regional, SUNY and local PD activities</li> </ul>

Since then, other activities have included professional development opportunities aligned with student learning outcomes and strategic goals of the College. Additional activity around program, curricular and co-curricular development contributes to much of the creative activity among the faculty and staff. In addition to traditional professional development activities, many faculty and staff are instrumental in the creation and structure of new programs across the College. Standard III details specific forms of professional development the College has supported. Also, see the report of professional development activity since March 2016 (St.I.1e.1-Sampling Prof. Dev.).

**f. are publicized and widely known by the institution’s internal stakeholders;**

The College’s mission, vision, values, and institutional goals are posted on the College website (St.I.1f.1-Mission webpage), and even though, if asked, the exact wording may not be recited verbatim by most members of the College community, we live our mission, vision, values, and goals in multiple ways daily, not least by delivering rigorous, high- quality instruction to students. Internal stakeholders are involved in reflective opportunities that keep the focus on those guiding principles. Examples include periodic campus forums, invitations for all to attend College Senate, and daily email updates from the president. Additionally, the strategic plan and periodic assessments and elements thereof are distributed via email and posted on SharePoint. All constituency groups and stakeholders have been invited to participate in the creation and revision of these documents, and thus most staff members are aware of their existence and ongoing refinement. Additionally, President Keegan includes the Institutional Goals at the top of each administrative team meeting agenda.

Before COVID-19, the President’s Council began working on ways to better publicize the mission, vision, values, and goals with various physical presentations on campus, but those discussions were postponed. We have committed to returning to these efforts this fall.

**g. are periodically evaluated;**

As illustrated above, the College regularly reviews the mission and goals in conjunction with the strategic planning process.

**Criterion 2: North Country Community College has institutional goals that are realistic, appropriate to higher education, and consistent with mission:**

### **Institutional Goals (2019-2020)**

In the Fall of 2019, in preparation for a new strategic plan, the administration began a comprehensive review of the history of our institutional goals from 2003, as well as the seven strategic directions from 2010-11 and, the six strategic directions of the 2017-2020 Strategic Plan. From that review, we affirmed that the guiding tenets of the institution have remained consistent throughout the last twenty years. However, continual restructuring and review of those goals is essential to helping the campus community a) be clear about what the goals are, and b) assess how well we are achieving them. In fall of 2019, five goals were proposed to encompass the previous lists and also distinguish how they manifest operationally as well as strategically (St.I.2.1-Goal History). Those five were eventually condensed to four, as shown in the table below, and were approved by all constituencies during the spring of 2020. They have also become part of the architecture of the 2020-2023 Strategic Plan, guiding our strategic priorities and initiatives.

<i>Figure 2:</i>	<i>Operational/Foundational Actions</i>	<i>Strategic/Enhancement Actions</i>
<p><b>1. Provide a meaningful and engaging education that prepares students for transfer or career opportunities.</b></p>	<p>Academic programs that support student aspirations and the needs of North Country Region.</p> <p>Instruction that helps foster critical and creative thinking.</p>	<p>Promoting and supporting excellence in teaching by maintaining a culture of assessment that supports and guides the College’s daily operations and strategic planning.</p>
<p><b>2. Create and nurture a supportive environment that welcomes diversity and difference and focuses on student success and growth.</b></p>	<p>Providing comprehensive and innovative academic and support services.</p> <p>Facilitating programs and initiatives that support and celebrate diversity in its broadest sense.</p>	<p>Providing supports to improve student success and completion.</p> <p>Enriching the experience of students in every setting of the college: academics, athletics, and student life.</p>
<p><b>3. Act as a strong and valued partner in the communities we serve.</b></p>	<p>Engaging community members to improve programs and services.</p>	<p>Supporting community workforce needs through professional and workforce development offerings.</p>
<p><b>4. Ensure the financial sustainability of the institution through strengthening enrollment and maximizing use of resources.</b></p>	<p>Strengthening enrollment through improved recruitment and retention of students.</p> <p>Being good stewards of our resources, through effective, data-driven planning and budgeting processes.</p>	<p>Conducting continuous assessment and quality improvement.</p>

**Criterion 3: North Country Community College has goals that focus on student learning and related outcomes and on institutional improvement; are supported by administrative, educational, and student support programs and services; and are consistent with institutional mission;**

As noted above, while the wording has changed over time, the essence of the College's institutional goals remains true to the mission of delivering a high-quality education that focuses on student learning and achievement as well as institutional improvement. Overall institutional goals are aligned with the College-Wide Goals for student learning, which align with academic program outcomes as well as strategic goals for student affairs, and enrollment.

Students are also supported by a system that includes ADA/504 accommodations overseen by the ADA/504 coordinator and delivered by Learning Assistance Centers on all three campuses as well by two retention specialists. Additionally, the goals of student success, inclusion, and equity, as well as health and wellness for both traditional and non-traditional students are at the forefront of the Student Affairs division, formerly Student Life but restructured in Spring 2021 to better serve students (St.I.3.1 Student Life Review). Expansion of services through virtual platforms, while enhanced for the current pandemic conditions, have become more a part of the regular framework for maximizing how we provide access to all students, regardless of physical location (St.I.3.2 Student Support webpage).

**Criterion 4: North Country Community College periodically assesses mission and goals to ensure they are relevant and achievable.**

As explained above, the College's mission, vision, and values are assessed on a periodic basis. Since the last self-study, there have been two reviews of these basic tenets of the College in the 2018-19 academic year, and again in the 2019-20 academic year. Additionally, outcomes identified in the strategic plan are assessed regularly, and the plan itself is reviewed annually and updated every three years in conjunction with the College's goals, outlining the strategic and operational action items to accomplish each goal. Being a small school is a strength; most staff members know of the various planning activities that occur, have participated in assessments of multiple areas, and stay up to date on new initiatives. The current administration has a history of good communication with the College community, through daily emails from either the vice president or president and through detailed Senate reports that all administrators create and share by email with the entire staff, not just Senate members. Thus, this working group was easily able to identify documents that clearly demonstrate how NCCC is meeting its mission and goals as well as its values of "accountability, integrity, and transparency", "openness to change", and "shared governance."

**Areas of Strength**

Regular planning and exploring new ideas and directions for the College showcases the commitment of all members of the College community to continuously improve delivery of our mission and overall goals. Regular review and assessment of progress toward achieving those goals indicate a willingness to commit to continuous improvement. As shown above and throughout this report, NCCC exhibits the following major strengths:

- Assessment, self-reflection, and improvement
- Soliciting and acting on community input
- Robust internal and external communication
- Faculty/Staff development

**Recommendations for Improvement**

- Post the mission, vision, and values documents in strategic building locations.
- Consider reference to mission and goals as part of one's professional development plan and in faculty and staff professional growth plans/annual reviews.

## Standard II: Ethics and Integrity

*Ethics and integrity are central, indispensable, and defining hallmarks of effective higher education institutions. In all activities, whether internal or external, an institution must be faithful to its mission, honor its contracts and commitments, adhere to its policies, and represent itself truthfully* (Middle States Commission on Higher Education Standards of Accreditation, Standard II)

As an institution and a community, NCCC continuously strives to be the best version of itself in all settings and interactions. Decisions and actions are guided by shared values and commitment to the mission and goals established and upheld by all members of the institution. Ethical and moral considerations underscore and form the basis upon which we make decisions, and we act with integrity as individuals and as an institution. We recognize that these are ideals and while we seek the goal of perfection, we understand the human limitations in doing so. Thus, our goal is to make ongoing progress and improvement in meeting this and the other standards.

### **Criterion 1. North Country Community College has a commitment to academic freedom, intellectual freedom, freedom of expression, and respect for intellectual property rights;**

North Country is committed to and supports freedom in its broadest sense, including academic freedom, intellectual freedom, and freedom of expression. Respect for individuality and academic freedom is paramount at NCCC as evidenced by high academic standards; embrace of academic discourse; a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion; and a strong statement that introduces these concepts in Faculty and Adjunct Faculty handbooks. This commitment is evidenced in several other ways including policies and statements located in the Employee Handbook, Student Code of Conduct, and the college's Campus Safety & Community Standards. Each of these will be referenced individually throughout this standard.

Academic and intellectual freedom are foundational pillars in higher education providing the framework for intellectual and academic exploration. They are also vital to society, providing space for the unencumbered investigation of the world. Without them, students' learning experiences would be limited by some "authority" for whom the truth is *known* rather than *discovered*. They also are linked to the College's institutional learning outcomes, particularly *critical, constructive, and creative thinking*, as well as program-specific learning outcomes. It is the faculty who create course objectives, course content, and student learning outcomes in master course outlines that form the basis for course syllabi. While the parameters established in course outlines are standardized within a department, *how* faculty teach that content, create assignments, and choose pedagogies remains within the purview of each faculty member. Assessment of student learning outcomes relies on a common understanding of outcomes versus a standardized delivery of course content, assuring that faculty have the freedom to teach in a style that maximizes their strengths and draws on their particular expertise to better serve students, while also assuring common outcomes are met across varying sections of the same course. NCCC adheres to Article XI, Title I Policy of the Trustees of New York State entitled "Academic Freedom" (St.II.1.1-SUNY BoT Academic Freedom Policy).

Freedom of expression is codified in NCCC's Campus Safety & Community Standards, where "[w]e affirm[s] the right of freedom of expression within our community and our commitment to the highest standards of civility and decency toward all" (St.II.1.2-Campus Safety). For employees, that right is further elaborated on in the Employee Handbook (St.II.1.3-Employee Handbook). For students, that right is further communicated in the student Code of Conduct, as well as through other policies including the Academic Integrity and Classroom Conduct policies (St.II.1.4-Academic Integrity-Classroom Conduct).

The former is founded on a basis of respect for the work of others, the latter on respect for fellow students and instructors.

With regard to freedom of expression, the College continually invites feedback and performs formal and informal assessments of faculty, staff, and student views in a variety of settings and formats including student evaluations of faculty and student assessments of their experiences through surveys (St.II.1.5-Student Survey Chart). Similarly, the College creates the opportunity for ideas and opinions to be freely expressed through formal assessments, campus-wide town halls, and through shared governance mechanisms including the College Senate and President's Council (St.II.1.6-College Senate-PC Minutes). One representation of freedom of expression is the student literary magazine, *The Northern New Yorker* (St.II.1.7-Northern New Yorker).

The College has respect for intellectual property rights which are expressed in the Responsible Use of Electronic Communications policy and Academic Integrity policies (St.II.1.8-Responsible Use of Electronic Communications). Students are expected to honor these rights through appropriate attribution and citation in the course of their work. In addition to academic integrity lessons integrated into the classroom, a college-wide emphasis is found at the NCCC library's site on writing and citation (St.II.1.9-Library).

**Criterion 2. North Country Community College has a climate that fosters respect among students, faculty, staff, and administration from a range of diverse backgrounds, ideas, and perspectives;**

North Country has established and is committed to maintaining a climate that values respect for diversity. This commitment is woven through the institution including the College's vision and values, its institutional policies and practices, and its institutional learning outcomes. For students and the broader campus community, respect is first communicated in the current vision which notes that North Country aspires to "...nurturing the academic and personal achievement of individuals with diverse backgrounds and aspirations." As noted earlier in Standard 1, this self-determined vision is supported by our values of compassion, kindness, diversity, and individuality.

In 2016, the College created a Chief Diversity Officer position and the Diversity Task Force formed. In 2020, the College community adopted a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Vision Statement which offered a "... renewed commitment to collectively evolve our understanding within our campus and regional communities..." related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. The actions supporting this vision include the creation of board policies (St.II.2.1-Non-Discrimination-Bias-Related-Policy) as well as structural supports including the appointing of a Chief Diversity Officer, the establishment of a Diversity Task Force, and the creation of a Diversity Plan (St.II.2.2-Diversity Task Force Progress Report; St.II.2.3-Diversity Plan). In 2016, a Coordinator for Title IX was reinstated, and annual Title IX training is a requirement for all College employees. Additional support for the values of diversity and inclusion comes from the Director of Human Resources who not only helps sustain the culture of respect, but ensures employees understand the expectation. These expectations are included in the Employee Handbook as well (as referenced above).

In terms of the connection to student learning, Social and Cultural Literacy is woven through the academic curriculum and remains an integral part of the College-Wide Goals for Student Learning, assessed throughout academic programs. In 2018, NCCC conducted an extensive campus climate survey to assess how students, faculty, and staff perceived diversity, equity, and inclusion across the College. Results from the survey indicated that overall, NCCC's commitment to serving and supporting diverse populations across our campuses is effective and well-received. Separate surveys were conducted for employees and students and within both groups, a majority of respondents indicated support for diversity

education within classroom curriculum. Additionally, across all three campuses, students and faculty identified learning spaces such as the classrooms, learning assistance centers, and libraries as being particularly inclusive, as well as student orientations and student activities. Areas identified for improvement included more educational programming and training around implicit bias and cultural competency (St.II.2.4-Diversity Climate Assessment). These assessments led to the adoption of SOC108: Sociology of Diversity, which most recently has been added as a strongly recommended course within the AA Liberal Arts: Humanities and Social Science degree (St.II.2.5-AA Liberal Arts Worksheet).

Outreach to varying populations in our local communities and providing spaces for individuals with differing cultural backgrounds, perspectives, and belief systems also underscore efforts to encourage inclusivity and equity. Systematic outreach to provide equal opportunity for education in a diverse population is most clearly evidenced by NCCC's participation in the Second Chance Pell program, with the enrollment of over 400 incarcerated students from four different prisons, with 142 graduates to date. This program is an excellent example of providing equal access opportunities. Additionally, the College is continuing its operations and plans to increase offerings at the Akwesasne extension site, the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe's territory, in future semesters. Finally, community outreach through the NC Live lecture series in 2020 included two well-attended series focused on cultural diversity in the North Country region including Black History in the Adirondacks and Indigenous Voices featuring members of the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe (St.II.2.6-North Country Live).

**Criterion 3. North Country Community College has a grievance policy that is documented and disseminated to address complaints or grievances raised by students, faculty, or staff. The institution's policies and procedures are fair and impartial, and assure that grievances are addressed promptly, appropriately, and equitably.**

While there is not a universal grievance policy at North Country, there are several policies that guarantee employees and students have several avenues and supports in place to voice their grievances and concerns. These are found in a number of areas, including Academic Affairs, Human Resources, and Student Affairs, as well as in the collective bargaining unit contracts. What they share in common is the objective to ensure that both student and employee concerns are heard and responded to fairly, equitably, and promptly.

A number of years ago, North Country adopted an electronic submission and repository system for a variety of complaints and grievances from students and employees. This change created several efficiencies both for those filing grievances as well as those charged with responding to them. Concerned individuals can file a grievance for items including academic, behavioral, and sexual misconduct issues. Other grievances, such as those that are contractually related, have their own established processes and procedures.

The majority of student grievances tend to emerge from two areas: academic complaints and denial of admission to a competitive program. For the former, the College has procedures that ensure student concerns received are given a fair hearing as outlined in the document "Academic Grievances" (St.II.3.1-Academic Grievances). Similarly, the College has a clear process for students who wish to appeal their denial of admission into an allied health program through Allied Health Denial of Admission appeal, one of the most frequent appeals from students (St.II.3.2-Allied Health Denial of Admissions).

Other ways for students to lodge complaints/grievances include the following. Each of these details the procedures to be followed and the rights of the individual submitting the complaint/grievance. Complaints are received through Guardian, a case management software for efficient tracking and reporting.

- Academic Integrity Policy (evidenced above)
- Bias-related Harassment Policy (St.II.3.3)

- Classroom Conduct Policy (evidenced above)
- Code of Conduct Policy (St.II.3.5)
- Student grievance/complaint process and form (St.II.3.6)
- Title IX complaint process (St.II.3.7).

Many student complaints are from those denied admission into one of the College's allied health programs, typically nursing. As the policy notes:

*“Final decision for admission to the Allied Health programs resides with the Vice President for Academic Affairs. The prospective student may choose to appeal the decision of the Admissions office not to grant admission into a program. The student must submit a letter of appeal to the Vice President for Academic Affairs giving just cause that would reasonably and significantly alter the academic or professional credentials presented at the time of initial application. Only written appeals will be accepted. A student must submit a written appeal with supporting documents via USPS Mail, postmarked no later than 10 days from date of denial into the desired program.”*

Each appeal is reviewed by the Vice President for Academic Affairs (VPAA) and a formal response is provided to each student. Additionally, as a means of living our values, the VPAA typically conducts a personal outreach to each student to more fully understand the basis of their appeal, acknowledge the disappointment, and if an appeal is not granted, identify a path forward for the student to improve their chances of success in the future (St.II.3.8-Nursing Appeal Response).

In terms of employee grievances, North County is committed to a fair and equitable workplace where employees are treated with dignity and respect. Labor-Management meetings between the collective bargaining unit(s) and administration proactively seek to address issues and concerns before they become grievances. Grievance procedures and the rights of the parties are spelled out in the contractual agreements with CSEA and NCCCAP respectively.

Faculty and staff can also lodge complaints/grievances that are not necessarily contractual and these can be done through the electronic submission and repository system. As with students, faculty and staff can file a complaint related to the following which can be referenced above:

- Academic integrity policy and violation report form,
- Bias-related Harassment Policy
- Classroom conduct policy and violation report form
- Code of Conduct policy and violation report form
- Title IX complaint process.

In addition, North Country takes steps to avoid actions that can lead to complaints/grievances. Some of these have already been stated, including the labor and management relations (LMR) meetings with our collective bargaining units. Other structures and practices such as collective bargaining representation on President's Council and a dedicated reporting slot at Board of Trustees meetings support this. Informally, regular contact between the senior administrative team and the union presidents occurs regarding items that could affect their membership before any action is taken. At the student level, engagement by the administration with SGA and other student leaders to hear the concerns of students helps address concerns before they become grievances. This includes mandatory annual Title IX/Sexual Harassment training for all faculty and student leaders during the academic year.

**Criterion 4. North Country Community College assures the avoidance of conflict of interest or the appearance of such conflict in all activities and among all constituents.**

North Country Community College has policies and procedures in place to avoid conflicts of interest. The Board of Trustees established two Conflict-of-Interest policies: one which applies specifically to the Board of Trustees themselves, and a second which applies to the College's employees (St.II.4.1-Conflict of Interest Policies). Both policies prohibit direct ownership of and/or investments in properties used by and acquired for the College and/or the NCCC Foundation. The structure of the governing board creates a diverse group of appointees. As codified in the New York Education Law, Article 126, S6306, the governing body of the College, the Board of Trustees, is composed of ten individuals; five appointed by the sponsoring counties of Essex and Franklin, four by the New York State governor, and one by the students. The Board Chair is selected by peer trustees. As illustrated in the Board of Trustees biographies, the members have no personal financial interest in the College except the student trustee (who may have employment). Each member signs and follows the tenets of the policy upon their appointment. The College works closely with the sponsoring counties and the legal counsel employed by the College to ensure all members adhere to the policies. This includes direct ownership and investments, as well as properties used by and acquired for the College and the Foundation (St.II.4.2-Foundation Investment Policy).

The College's Consensual Romantic Relationship Policy also provides for avoidance of conflicts of interest in hiring and supervision of romantic partners. As noted in the policy, it was created to ensure that "...our students, faculty, and staff can learn and work in an environment that is free from nepotism, harassment, exploitation, and conflicts of interest" (St.II.4.3-Consensual Romantic Relationships).

One other area where this finds expression is within the College's admissions policies. The College is an open admission institution and preferential treatment is not granted to anyone, including relatives or friends of employees or board members. Similarly, the College's admissions policies ensure an equitable playing field for students and protect against favoritism. As noted in the policies, "Certain programs have special academic requirements, and the decision concerning admissions to these programs is based upon an evaluation of the applicant's academic and/or special achievements to date." As their individual admissions requirements illustrate, admission decisions are based upon meeting admissions requirements established by the department, not by whom one knows. Two other policies related to ethics include the Employment of Relatives and Domestic Partners and Conflict of Interest policies found in the Employee Handbook (as referenced above).

**Criterion 5: fair and impartial practices in the hiring, evaluation, promotion, discipline, and separation of employees;**

The most important asset of North Country Community College is its employees. While buildings and infrastructure are essential, it is the faculty and staff that are the heart of the institution. The ability to effectively carry out our mission rests upon recruiting and retaining a talented and dedicated workforce. Thus, the administration and Board of Trustees are committed to maintaining and improving the conditions that make the College a desirable place to work. This starts with the establishment of policies, practices and structures that ensure fair and impartial practices in hiring, evaluating, promoting, disciplining, and separating from employees.

**Hiring**

The Human Resources Director works with area supervisors to coordinate the hiring of staff. While the process looks different depending upon the bargaining unit or management confidential status, prospective employees are assured that North Country is an equal opportunity employer, with public-facing policies on the college's Human Resources webpage, including the Equity Program Policy as well as its Affirmative Action for Human Rights Statement and Diversity Statement. Civil Service hiring follows the guidelines established by the Franklin County Personnel Office, through which Civil Service positions are approved, and consultation with them is regular (St.II.5.1-Franklin County Employee

Handbook).

Open positions are advertised through multiple channels including, but not limited to the NCCC website, job boards, the Chronicle of Higher Education, social media, and local newspapers where applicable. Targeted advertising is done with some positions as applicable. For faculty, professional staff, and management confidential positions the hiring manager appoints a cross-representative search committee of at least three faculty/staff members and that search committee receives training and support from HR on a range of topics including avoiding hiring pitfalls and bias. Resumes are assessed for qualifications and submitted to the search committee for review and further processing (St.II.5.2-HR Careers Page).

During the 2020-2021 academic year, the College developed an internal search process to complement the external one. This was the result of the observation that on many occasions, internal candidates who established themselves while on a temporary appointment, were offered the full-time continuing track appointment when it opened, even after an exhaustive open search as their qualifications match the position and they have an established working history. Thus, it was decided that when there was a strong internal candidate with an established track record of employment, rather than initially opening the search to external candidates who would incur significant costs, financially and emotionally, in the application process, the internal candidates who established a positive record of employment were able to vie for the position first. If no internal candidate emerged with a recommendation for employment, the search would then move to an external search. We felt that this was in line with our values and ethics.

Once hired, all new employees receive an employee handbook that details College policies and procedures. This online handbook is reviewed and updated annually. For the faculty, there is an additional handbook specific to policies and practices that are unique to their positions, as well as a separate handbook for adjunct faculty members. Additionally, in response to requests by faculty and staff, a new onboarding/orientation program for the College was created and is now available to every new employee.

### **Evaluations**

The evaluation process is outlined in the applicable collective bargaining agreement and in the Board Policy for Management Confidential Staff (St.II.5.3-BoT Management Confidential Staff). Each unit has an evaluation template used to assess annual performance, which in many cases includes the procedures. These are shared with employees so that all are aware of the process and the items they will be evaluated on. The HR Director provides guidance and support to supervisors conducting evaluations as well as to employees being evaluated; additional guidance on evaluations is provided to academic program chairs and directors who are evaluating the faculty and professional staff within a given year.

By design, performance evaluations are based on objective measures to assess employee performance. During the 2020-2021 year, a small team composed of administration and NCCCAP representatives redesigned the faculty and professional staff evaluation process to ensure the performance evaluation, peer observation, and promotions process had additional objective measures and aligned more seamlessly with each other. (St.II.5.4-NCCCAP Contract-Article VII). Additionally, the President identified an inconsistency and what felt like an ethical gap in the expectations for management confidential employees regarding evaluations, in that there was not a codified expectation, form, or process in place. That was remedied during the 2020-2021 year as well (see 5.3 above).

### **Promotions**

Promotions exist for both collective bargaining units, though the opportunities vary depending on the unit. For members of NCCCAP, there are three promotional-levels available, and the process is clearly outlined in the NCCCAP collective bargaining agreement with the College. There are promotional packets which employees are required to complete and submit as part of the application for promotion. The process was redesigned a couple of years ago to move from a general committee that reviewed

promotion applications and made recommendations to the President to one where there are several layers of recommendation starting with the department/division in which the employee works, to the area supervisor, and then to the President. This provided for what we believe is a fair and more informed assessment of the employee applying for promotion as the first layer involves peers and direct supervisors (as referenced above).

CSEA members, by nature of their contract, do not have the same promotional opportunities as NCCCAP members. In their contract, under *Article V.1.b Seniority in non-competitive or labor class*: Promotions within a title and/or to a new title are possible but require that two conditions are met: 1) there are needs at the College that lead to a new title being created, and 2) the employee has demonstrated qualities of performance worthy of promotion to that new title. In competitive classes, employees desiring promotion are required to take the Civil Service exam and be eligible for promotion.

### **Discipline**

The progressive disciplinary procedure exists in both CBAs and provides a clear path for corrective action. The steps convey clear expectations, beginning with informal counseling. If necessary, a Performance Improvement Plan is developed, outlining the issues, how they will be resolved, what will happen if they are not, and the timeline for improvement. It is designed to help the employee understand the areas in need of improvement. In CSEA, the disciplinary process follows Section 75 of Civil Service Law, referenced in Article XV.1 p 23 (St.II.5.5-CSEA Article XV). Management confidential employees follow the same process as that of NCCCAP members.

### **Separation of Employees**

Employees separate from the college for a host of reasons, including retirement, a new position outside of the college, and issues related to performance. Regardless of the reason, all employees have an opportunity to complete an exit interview with Human Resources. At the time of separation, all employees are provided with information on their benefits and unemployment as applicable. The process is consistent for all. In addition, information is in the NCCCAP Article VIII Retrenchment/Termination p. 28. For CSEA, under Article 15.2 p. 23 and Article 12.6 p 21 and Article V.2.on p. 9 also speak to this (St.II.5.6-NCCCAP Article VIII Retrenchment-CSEA Termination). Recently, input from some retirees regarding improvements to the process, particularly navigating through complex decisions around retirement income and health insurance coverage, has led us to reevaluate that process with an aim to improve it.

### **Criterion 6: honesty and truthfulness in public relations announcements, advertisements, recruiting and admissions materials and practices, as well as in internal communications;**

NCCC reports accurate, complete, and consistent information regarding its operations, institutional changes, and status to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE), New York State Department of Education (NYSED), the State University of New York (SUNY), along with any other regulatory body. In terms of MSCHE reporting, in recent years, that has included the Annual Institutional Update (AIU), along with a 2016 Periodic Review Report, and monitoring reports in 2017-2018 and 2018-2019. Regular reporting of institutional research data to state, regional, and national organizations assure consistency and transparency of information.

Honesty and transparency are fundamental values at NCCC, and guide established procedures as well as our actions as related to this criterion. From our website to our marketing campaigns, advertisements to recruiting materials, we strive to communicate truthfully and accurately to all audiences, internal and external. The Director of Communications serves as the gatekeeper to assure that external communications with the general public, including through the College website, are accurate, honest, and

truthful. As an additional layer of credibility, those communications are reviewed by various members of the administration, depending on the topic, before they are sent out. An example of this comes from a conversation that the College initiated with the public in 2018-2019 regarding the status of our pool. At the time, we were looking at all possibilities, including closing it and communicated that directly with the public and invited them to an on-campus forum to be able to hear from us and, as importantly, for us to hear from them, about the issues at hand. While a difficult conversation, it was one that was possible due to our being open and honest from the outset (St.II.6.1-Pool Survey).

Similarly, there are other areas where difficult conversations are required, particularly related to budgets, enrollments, and other financial matters. We provide accurate, honest, and truthful information to all stakeholders, from our College community to our county sponsors, even when the facts may not be easy ones to present.

Additionally, this expectation permeates our recruiting and marketing practices. The Vice President for Marketing and Enrollment established a process of working first with departmental faculty and then inviting a wider group to include marketing, enrollment, and administrative representatives to provide feedback on the recruitment and marketing campaigns underway. He also serves as the gatekeeper for all marketing and recruitment messaging that is going out to students and families to assure that it meets those standards. Additionally, updates to the College community regarding marketing plans keep internal constituents informed as well (St.II.6.2-Marketing Report).

Finally, we value the relationship with our employees and strive to be open, honest, and truthful with them. Structures in place with internal communications include the posting of minutes from various meetings including the Board of Trustees meetings (St.II.6.3-BOT minutes), the College Senate meetings, and various committees (e.g., Curriculum Committee) for all to access and review. The senior leadership presents monthly written reports on items from academics, budget, enrollment, marketing, and student affairs to both the College Senate and the Board of Trustees. When there are items that require a more planned approach and/or more engagement of the College community, the administration has held open forums as a way of both sharing information and gathering input from the faculty and staff. These have ranged from items such as reopening plans during the COVID-19 pandemic to facilities master planning prioritization for the Saranac Lake campus. One final structure in place is a daily morning email from the president to the College faculty and staff throughout the academic year (St.II.6.4-President's Morning Email).

In addition to the objective evidence listed above, an informal policy regarding students illustrates this principle of honesty and truthfulness. There are occasions when after meeting with a student and learning more about their aspirations, it is questionable whether the College is the right fit for them. Sometimes, the student's aspirations do not align with NCCC's programs; in those cases, we are clear with the student and will discuss options with them, including pointing them to a different college that matches their interests better or another pathway for them to achieve their goals. While some may see that as a loss of revenue at best or foolish at worst, we believe it is the right way to treat our students.

**Criterion 7: as appropriate to its mission, services, or programs in place:**

**a. to promote affordability and accessibility**

Open access and affordability are intricately linked, and NCCC assures that we provide access for students as found in our Admissions Policies, which notes, *"The College's open, and rolling admissions policy seeks to be consistent with the purposes and philosophy of the College. With a high school diploma or high school equivalency (GED/TASC) as a basic requirement, all applicants will be admitted to a program offered by the College. Certain programs have special academic requirements, and the decision*

*concerning admissions to these programs is based upon an evaluation of the applicant's academic and/or special achievements to date. The final decision rests with the Office of Admissions, and alternate programs will be offered to those students who do not meet these special requirements. Admission to North Country Community College is determined without regard to the applicant's race, color, creed, national origin, age, sex, disability, sexual orientation, or marital status" (St.II.7a.1-Admissions Statement).*

Affordability is an ever-present companion of accessibility and guides how we ensure that the College is best able to serve students and their families. Over 60% of NCCC students are Pell-eligible, thus ensuring that the residents of Essex and Franklin counties, our service area, have access to an affordable education has been at the forefront of our thinking for years. For graduates of high schools in Essex and Franklin counties who meet the GPA requirements, there is a scholarship to help offset costs.

While much debate exists around the challenges of keeping college affordable, the truth is that it is a difficult balance to ensure affordability while providing college employees with competitive salaries and benefits. Focusing on affordability for students begins with the establishment of annual tuition and fees. We have a process which engages the shared governance system, from President's Council to Long Range and Strategic Planning Committee, to the College Senate in recommending annual tuition and fee schedules. At each juncture, the issue of affordability informs the final decision. For example, this process led to a recommendation to hold tuition and fee flat for the 2021-2022 year, and in February of 2021, the Board of Trustees did just that (St.II.7a.2-Tuition Hold-Minutes).

To assist student and families with tuition and associated costs, the College's Financial Aid Office provides direct counseling and as well as digital content. The Financial Aid Office informs students about the institutional and endowed scholarships available through the College and the Foundation (St.II.7a.3-Foundation Scholarship). Recognizing an educational gap for adults in our sponsoring counties, the college approached the Foundation with a request to support a scholarship for adult students from Essex and Franklin County, which the Foundation did for 2020-2021 and is doing again for 2021-2022. The scholarship provides \$100,000 worth of funding per year for qualifying students.

At times, students encounter emergencies that threaten their ability to successfully persist or complete. To assist, the College has emergency funds available to students. The Pomegranate Fund, created and funded internally, is and the Ragusa Loan program are two examples. During the pandemic, the SGA established a Basic Needs Insecurity Fund for students and the College set up emergency funds to provide pandemic-related financial assistance. The College maintains an expansive community resources list and information about assistance programs including SNAP on the Student Support page of the College website (St.II.7a.4-Student Support).

Accessibility, in its broadest sense, is part of our mission and from that spring the policies, processes, and structures to support it. From three campuses locations and an increasingly robust digital presence, students in our service area and beyond are able to access the college physically and remotely. This includes classes, library services, accommodative services, tutoring support, and increasingly, remote access to offices and other operations. In 2017, we were selected to participate in the Second Chance Pell experiment, which provides access to an underserved population in local correctional facilities. In 2019, we established an additional location on the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe's territory, Akwesasne, to improve ease of access with classes on the territory.

For students who may need improved accessibility through accommodations, the College has an Accommodative Services (ADA/504) Coordinator who works closely with the students, faculty, and the learning assistance centers to ensure that students are able to receive the services to which they are entitled. To support this work, the College has an ADA/504 Policy (St.II.7a.5-ADA-504 Policy). Faculty

members include reference to accommodative services in their course syllabi. During the Spring 2021 semester,

Extending the accessibility supports for students, the College provides a Technology Help Desk and has an Academic Technology Specialist available to assist with technology-related accessibility issues. Our learning management system, Blackboard, has additional supports for accessibility-related issues including Blackboard Ally, which the College adopted, that provides all users access to course materials in alternate formats. Over the last two years, through Perkins's funding, the College adopted Kurzweil 3000, assisting students with reading, comprehension and literacy-related disabilities be successful.

In 2018, the College established a Web Content Management Team, whose role was to ensure that our content on the College's website were compliant with Web Accessibility Standards (WAS) and Digital Content Accessibility Standards (DCAS). That group has continued to do that and established a Web accessibility complaint form to provide an avenue for direct feedback on areas that need attention (St.II.7a.6-Web Accessibility Complaint Form). In 2019-2020, at the behest of SUNY, the College developed an Electronic and Information Technology Accessibility Plan. While much of the on-ground plan was derailed by COVID, gains were made through the pandemic with electronic access.

**b. services or programs in place to enable students to understand funding sources and options, value received for cost, and methods to make informed decisions about incurring debt;**

As noted above, our Financial Aid Office is the primary unit at the College charged with these responsibilities, and the office works closely with colleagues in the Business Office to ensure that student and families understand the various financial considerations and make informed decisions about attending college and incurring debt. They also provide the faculty with guidance on how best to advise students when it comes to financial aid. It is in everyone's collective interest that students are academically and financially successful and avoid default of their loans.

The Financial Aid Office provides direct, personal support and counseling as an option for students, including when they withdraw from the College. The faculty routinely advise students to talk with financial aid before withdrawing or dropping as there are financial aid implications. Recently, the Financial Aid Director created a reference document that helps students understand their loans. Additionally, SUNY has a Smart Track letter that outlines the true cost of college for students.

In addition to the face-to-face counseling offered, the "Paying for College" webpage on the College website provides clear, accurate, and helpful information to assist students with their finances, along with videos to help simplify the process (St.II.7b.1-Paying for College) These include everything from financial aid eligibility to types of financial aid available. Similarly, the Business Office has a strong digital presence to support students and families related to everything from tuition and fees to questions related to New York State residency. These efforts are further supported with a host of resources for students on the Student Right to Know webpage, with an offer of direct assistance from our Director of Financial Aid or the Association Vice President of Student Affairs (St.II.7b.2-Student Right to Know).

**Criterion 8: compliance with all applicable federal, state, and Commission reporting policies, regulations, and requirements to include reporting regarding;**

**a. the full disclosure of information on institution-wide assessments, graduation, retention, certification and licensure or licensing board pass rates**

NCCC reports accurate, complete, and consistent information regarding its operations, institutional

changes, and status to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE), New York State Department of Education (NYSED), the State University of New York (SUNY), along with any other regulatory body. In terms of MSCHE reporting, in recent years, that has included the Annual Institutional Update (AIU), along with a 2016 Periodic Review Report, and a monitoring report in 2017-2018 and 2018-2019. Regular reporting of institutional research data to state, regional, and national organizations assure consistency and transparency of information (St.II.8a.1-IPEDS). The information is also available on the Student Right to Know page evidenced in Criterion 7.b2.

**b. the institution's compliance with the Commission's Requirements of Affiliation**

Regarding compliance with the Commission's Requirements of Affiliation, those responsibilities are shared between the administration and the Board of Trustees, though the operational and reporting responsibilities fall to the administration. The adoption of the AIU by the Commission has centralized elements of this reporting, and the College provides timely and accurate information when required. Evidence will be provided in the Requirements of Affiliation section of the portal.

**c. substantive changes affecting institutional mission, goals, programs, operations, sites, and other material issues which must be disclosed in a timely and accurate fashion;**

The College submitted two substantive change requests to add a first and then a second distance education program in 2015, both which were approved by the Commission, one in 2015 and the second in 2016. Another substantive change request was made in 2016 to add two additional locations, Adirondack Correctional Facility and FCI Ray Brook, as part of having been selected to participate in the Second Chance Pell experiment. That request was granted in February 2017.

**d. the institution's compliance with the Commission's policies (Verification of Compliance document).**

One of the principal structures in place to assure that we meet this standard is the Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO) with Middle States. Our ALO, (also Interim Vice President for Academic Affairs) is the primary conduit between the College and Middle States and works with our Assistant Dean of Institutional Research and the broader administration to ensure that these elements are met. Over the last two years, this has included the Annual Institutional Update (AIU). A second structure is the SUNY liaison on assessment, Dr. Deborah Moeckel, Assistant Provost for Assessment and Community College Education. Dr. Moeckel provides regular updates on the work of the Commission, including updates to policies, regulations, and requirements to the various associations within SUNY, which our ALO and President participate in. A third is a small working group of college employees who meet periodically to confirm that various compliance-related reporting is happening as required. Finally, when establishing the Associate Vice President for Student Affairs position during the 2020-2021 year, the College centralized responsibility for oversight of the reporting for many of those college-wide and more student affairs type reporting requirements.

The College maintains compliance with all federal, state and Commission reporting policies, regulations, and requirements. Information on graduation, retention and licensing board pass rates is available on links found within the Student Consumer Information webpage on the College's website. This includes links to the US Department of Education College Scorecard, as well as nursing (both PN and ADN), radiologic technology and massage therapy licensure exam pass rates. Regarding institution-wide assessment, the College reports to the State University of New York, the State Education Department, Middle States Commission for Higher Education, and IPEDS

Regarding compliance with the Commission's policies, those responsibilities while shared by the

administration, are led by the ALO. The ALO has regularly attended the MSCHE annual conference and in addition to being a conduit to the college community regarding the Commission's policies, is a co-chair of the College's self-study. Over the past few years, the College has increased the number of faculty and staff attending Middle States conferences. Four members of the administration attended the Self-Study Institute, and additionally, two faculty and two staff attended the Annual Conference in 2019.

**Criterion 9: periodic assessment of ethics and integrity as evidenced in institutional policies, processes, practices, and the manner in which these are implemented.**

NCCC's shared responsibility of governance and guidance for continual assessment pervades all levels of the College's daily operations and strategic plans. The Board of Trustees, College President and the Vice Presidents meet and collaborate monthly in open meetings to assess the contemporary issues and needs of the college body. It is this input that directs and determines the strategic plans to support and maintain educational excellence.

Assessment is also a continuous process that not only includes assessment of the policies that guide our academic standards, but also comprises programmatic reviews to safeguard the high standards set forth, and to verify the quality expectations of the professional accreditations. Yearly department advisory boards further the assessment in the context of meeting the ever-changing needs of the community stakeholders and area employers, permitting the college flexibility to meet the needs in a judicious, prudent fashion within its educational framework. A culture of continuous assessment and improvement is also demonstrated with the various surveys of faculty, staff, and students (Specific surveys and assessments are further evidenced in Standards III, IV and VI). Surveying components of the college allows for insight into the perspective and needs of these various groups, permitting analysis of gaps and potential implementations to support the documented need. Governing responsibility extends to students with the Student Governance Association electing representatives to participate and report to the College Senate and Board of Trustees. These students are supported with guidance and leadership training opportunities.

As is hopefully clear, the College's commitment to act ethically and with integrity is woven through the College culture, its operations, and policies. Much of the periodic assessment of ethics and integrity have been informal, rather than formal, though their impact is similar. The culture is such that these topics are discussed and raised throughout including at our shared governance system. While not always formally raised or recorded, they nonetheless occur and help guide our behavior as an institution.

Recent examples illustrate this:

- the development of a college-wide policy prohibiting conflict of interest for all employees, not solely the Board of Trustees,
- the development of a college policy allowing for preferred names to be used by students and employees alike,
- the tuition and fee freeze for 2021-2022 as a matter of fairness for students and families who were struggling in the midst of the pandemic,
- a review of the tuition and fee structure by the Long Range and Strategic Planning committee leading to recommendations for restructuring fees to reflect costs more accurately, and
- the codification of performance evaluation expectations for management confidential employees.

Each of these were eventually assessed, evaluated through the lens of whether our current practices were sufficient, and moved through shared governance and to the Board of Trustees for adoption.

### **Recommendations for Improvement**

While NCCC maintains its commitment to operating ethically and with integrity, part of that commitment includes assessment of operations and working toward continuous improvement. Through a review of this Standard, the working group found that there are areas where improvement would greatly benefit the College:

- Develop a process for regular policy review and assessment of ethics and integrity
- Streamlining the hiring process between Academic Affairs and Human Resources
- Enhancement onboarding process for hiring new employees and separation process for employees who are retiring.
- Update the calculation and publication of the economic impact of the College on the North Country region

### **Standard III: Design and Delivery of the Student Learning Experience**

*An institution provides students with learning experiences that are characterized by rigor and coherence at all programs, certificate, and degree levels, regardless of instructional modality. All learning experiences, regardless of modality, program pace/schedule, level, and setting are consistent with higher education expectations (Middle States Commission on Higher Education Standards of Accreditation, Standard III).*

NCCC strives to provide the highest standards for education at the course, program, and institutional levels. The faculty continually assess and revise academic programs, curricular design, and teaching pedagogies to provide a coherent and rigorous education that adheres to standards consistent with higher education. We expect NCCC students not only to meet the identified learning goals and objectives within their program and the institution but to demonstrate excellence and mastery that will translate to their professional careers. Expectations of learning outcomes remain the same across all courses regardless of campus or modality. To help students meet those expectations, NCCC is committed to providing the necessary resources to students, faculty and staff, as stated in the College's Institutional Goals, Mission, Vision, and Values and demonstrated in our assessment results.

**Criterion 1. certificate, undergraduate, graduate, and/or professional programs leading to a degree or other recognized higher education credential, of a length appropriate to the objectives of the degree or other credential, designed to foster a coherent student learning experience and to promote synthesis of learning;**

North Country offers twenty associate degrees and six certificate programs that lead to either gainful employment, successful transfer, or both. There are three (3) degree types: Associate in Arts (AA), Associate in Science (AS), Associate in Applied Science (AAS), as well as certificate programs. AA/AS degrees are designed as transfer degrees while AAS degree design focuses on preparing students for direct entry into the workforce. AAS degrees include a more defined and stronger emphasis on applied learning opportunities through clinical experiences and internships. Twenty percent of the College's programs are certificates, while 80% are Associate Degree programs (twenty associate and six certificates). Fifty percent of the College's two-year programs are AAS, and 50% of programs fall under AA/AS designations.

All degree and certificate programs comply with the appropriate state, federal, and industry-specific accreditation requirements. Two-year degrees require a minimum of 60 credits per NYS Education Law 8 CRR-NY 52.2(c) and maximum of 64 credits for most programs per SUNY guidelines, with some exceptions in AAS Nursing and Radiologic Technology (St.III.1.1-NUR-RAD worksheets).

In 2010, North Country Community College faculty and staff collaborated to create a series of College-Wide Goals for Learning requiring a synthesis of knowledge, skill development, and analysis to provide a coherent and holistic education across all degree programs (St.III.1.2-Gen Ed Offering Report 2016 - 2021). Faculty aligned program learning outcomes to the larger College-Wide Goals regardless of the degree type, and it is at the level of program design that departments create coherent learning experiences and support the synthesis of learning (St.III.1.3-Ex. NUR ILO-course alignment). While AAS program design and outcomes focus on preparing a student to enter the workforce after attainment of a two-year degree, foundational coursework also allows students to successfully transfer to obtain a higher degree or credential. By design, AAS degrees incorporate liberal arts and general education requirements to integrate core competencies and knowledge areas across programs. This aligns with the program learning outcomes which map back to NCCC's College-Wide Goals.

AA/AS Degrees	AAS Degrees
30 credits General Education across 7/10 subject areas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ AA: 45 Liberal Arts credits</li> <li>▪ AS: 30 Liberal Arts credits</li> </ul>	20 credits General Education across 5 subject areas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ AAS: 20 credits Liberal Arts</li> </ul>

Increasingly over the last decade, AAS degrees also prepare students for transfer to reflect changing expectations in the workforce. While the AAS degree provides a solid foundation and employability for many skilled jobs in our region, in many of the career fields, bachelor and master's degrees are expected in order to rise into management positions. All of the College's AAS programs include multiple liberal arts and general education courses to provide a foundation for both successful employment and transfer if a student decides to move on to a higher degree. A good illustration is the AAS Nursing program, which prepares students for RN licensure. Courses needed to pursue a Bachelor of Science in Nursing are incorporated in the AAS degree; those include Statistics and Developmental Psychology. This aligns with the recent New York State requirement that graduates of associate degree programs must finish their Bachelor of Nursing degree within ten years of graduation (St.III.1.4-AAS Nursing Program degree worksheet). The AAS Human Services and AAS Criminal Justice degrees align with the first two years of similar bachelor programs, providing a solid two-year foundation for students who decide to move on to a higher degree (St.III.1.5-AAS HUS-AAS CRJ). Similarly, certificate programs identify essential skills and foundational knowledge needed for direct application of knowledge to the workforce. These are one-year programs that prepare students to go directly into an occupation with a specific skill set. While coursework is targeted toward specific skills needed for the respective career, certificate programs also include foundational classes that apply to the related associate degree program, allowing students to easily pursue an associate degree. For example, the entire Practical Nursing certificate comprises the first year of the Associate Degree in Nursing program (St.III.1.6 -HEA Cert, PN Cert). Another example is the Health Science certificate that provides students with foundational coursework for a variety of allied health and health science programs. Students pursuing admission into an allied health program can complete the certificate and then use those credits toward the next level of degree attainment. Many students who are working toward admission in the Radiologic Technology program register for the Health Science certificate to complete needed admissions requirements (St.III.1.7 -AAS RAD TECH).

For all programs and certificates, course-specific objectives and student learning outcomes align with requirements and expectations for achievement level. Departments establish, review, and modify measurable student learning with expectations for increasing ability demonstrated by outcomes articulated with the appropriate levels of expectation. This results in a logically sequenced educational experience across degree programs as evidenced by the progression of 100-level to 200-level coursework (St.III.1.8- Course Syllabi PSY). As departments create or revise course outlines, those documents are moved through the curricular review process beginning with the Curriculum Committee. The Curriculum Committee consists of representatives from all academic programs and is the second step of the shared governance process for new curricular proposals or changes. Changes are then moved to the larger Senate body, the VPAA, and if needed, the President and Board of Trustees (St.III.1.9-Curricular Flowchart).

Development and review of a coherent sequencing of courses within programs occurs through a regular process of assessment for alignment with requirements at transfer institutions for AA/AS programs as well as workforce expectations for AAS programs (St.III.1.10-Potsdam-Plattsburgh-Transfer review). Two examples from programs submitted and approved by SUNY and the New York State Education Department demonstrate the process of review and development of each program (St.III.1.11-AS Child-Family Services) (St.III.1.12-NYSED Childhood Ed Track). In 2012, SUNY instituted a Seamless Transfer policy to assure that students could transfer general education and core program credits easily

among SUNY schools through Transfer Pathways. In accordance with that policy, NCCC aligned all transfer-focused programs with the Transfer Pathways (St.III.1.13-SUNY Seamless Transfer). Much work has been done over the last few years regarding transfer pathways and AA/AS programs to ensure alignment.

**Criterion 2. student learning experiences that are designed, delivered, and assessed by faculty (full-time or part-time) and/or other appropriate professionals who are**

**a. rigorous and effective in teaching, assessment of student learning, scholarly inquiry, and service, as appropriate to the institution's mission, goals, and policies;**

As noted above, the faculty design, deliver and assess student learning at NCCC. Their work, supported by professional staff, assures that instruction, student learning, scholarly inquiry and service, are effective and rigorous. Structurally, academic rigor is designed into degree programs and certificates at the state, regional and federal levels, as well through industry standards as evidenced in Criterion 1. This includes minimum requirements established by the State University of New York, New York State Education Department, and the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, including standards related to general education, liberal arts, and applied learning. Program advisory boards provide departments with expectations for student learning within various industries/fields (St.III.2a.1-Advisory Boards). General education requirements are woven through each program in AA, AS, and AAS degrees (St.III.2a.2-AA-AS-AAS Example Worksheets), with varying numbers of courses dependent upon degree type as illustrated in the chart in Criterion 1.

At the program level, the overall structure and learning outcomes of the programs establish rigor, and departmentally approved course outlines reflect the assurance of rigor in the delivery of courses across the College. Departmental course outlines (the basis for all syllabi) serve as the standard for all courses, and are used by faculty teaching the course, regardless of location, modality, or employment status (full or adjunct). Student learning outcomes and course content parameters for each course are included in the outlines (St.III.2a.3-Course Outline 100-200-level Gen. Ed. Courses). In accordance with academic freedom, faculty members have latitude to shape and model lessons that deliver and expand on the content, in ways that best assure student engagement, comprehension, and learning.

In addition to course development and design, several structures are in place that help faculty members ensure a course is being delivered with necessary rigor and also to continually improve their teaching effectiveness. These include systematic departmental assessment of student learning (see Standard V), professional growth plans (St.III.2a.4-Prof. Growth Plan-template-Exemplars), student evaluations (St.III.2a.5-Student Evaluation Form), peer observations (St.III.2a.6-Peer Observation Plan), supervisor evaluations (St.III.2a.7-Supervisor Evaluation Form), and the program advisory boards referenced above.

Advisory boards allow for external constituents to provide input and assure that departments and programs are capturing the changing expectations and needs of the workforce and that programs are delivering the content the field needs. These collective assessment tools allow for multiple input into teaching, learning, and program improvements. As illustrated in Standard V, assessment of student learning at all levels is a continuous process that supports and leads to improvement in instruction and student learning. Faculty members develop and conduct the assessments of student learning outcomes at the level of the course and program, and those assessments correspond to the larger institutional outcomes, including the General Education program (See Standard V).

At the beginning of each semester, departments come together during a campus-wide Assessment Day and plan the program-level assessments to take place that term. At the end of the semester, another Assessment Day is set aside for the faculty to conduct analysis of student learning. These times are rich

with opportunities for faculty to learn from one another, to evaluate student learning collectively and by section/instructor, to discuss ways to improve instruction and student performance, and to continue to refine their teaching strategy as well as ensure the validity of the assessment itself, asking the question: “Are we measuring what we intend to measure?” This continual review assures relevancy and rigor in course content (St.III.2a.8-Chart on Rigor and Effectiveness)

Consistent and methodical review of teaching effectiveness, professional development and service to the students, College, and surrounding communities are inherent to the process for promotion and continuing appointment for full-time faculty. Faculty provide assessments of student learning in their classes and within their program to ensure they are in line with the learning outcomes identified by departments and the larger College body. The College invests in faculty development and regular trainings to ensure that new and continuing faculty are supported in their efforts to provide the highest quality instruction and support to the students as evidenced by the numerous professional development offerings over the last few years (St.III.2a.9-Chart of Professional Development offerings).

**b. qualified for the positions they hold and the work they do;**

The faculty at NCCC is qualified for the positions they hold, and the College follows NYSED regulations and expectations regarding faculty qualifications (St.III.2b.1-Faculty Qualifications Requirements), which requires faculty members hold “...at least a master's degree in an appropriate field...” while providing options in certain occupational specializations which “...may merit demonstration of competence alternative to a master’s degree...”. For appointment in the professional rank (instructor, assistant professor, associate professor, and professor) full-time faculty must hold at minimum a master’s degree or equivalent as well as experience in teaching, scholarship, and service for advancement. The above process is outlined in the NCCCAP/NCCC Contract 2019- 2021 (St.III.2b.2-NCCCAP Promotions chart from NCCCAP contract). Among the 38 full-time faculty appointments for the 2020-2021 academic year, 18 are tenured and 13 hold tenure-track positions. Seven full-time faculty hold temporary appointments. Faculty title descriptions and qualifications are outlined in all position descriptions and closely monitored by the Vice President for Academic Affairs and Human Resources department. Ninety-seven percent of the full-time faculty hold master’s degrees or higher with 14% of those holding doctorate degrees. Expectations for adjunct faculty credentials remain the same as those of full-time faculty. Other members of the faculty and professional staff, including the College librarian and Learning Assistance Center (LAC) staff also possess credentials specific to their area, in order to provide outstanding academic support. The LAC’s utilize various standardized surveys to monitor student concerns and satisfaction, and their staff participate in workshops and conferences to ensure timely improvements and growth within their areas (St.III.2b.3-Chart of Faculty credentials; St.III.2b.4-Example PD-Faculty-NTP).

Further evidence of faculty quality can be found in the number who have received external awards and recognition, including the SUNY Chancellors Award for Excellence. Since 2011, sixteen faculty members have been recognized by the SUNY Chancellor for Excellence in the following categories:

- Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Teaching (5)
- Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Adjunct Teaching (4)
- Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Faculty Service (5)
- Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Scholarship and Creative Activities (2)

In the last ten years, four full-time faculty (10%) have completed their doctorate degrees, and numerous faculty have published peer-reviewed papers, novels, poetry collections and memoirs. Many faculty present at regional, national, and international conferences; others produce, direct and act in performances, including some works accepted into film festivals. One of our long-time Humanities

faculty and her students published work in the Community College Humanities Review. Additionally, one faculty member was awarded a Fulbright Scholar Fellowship to study and teach in Russia in 2018. Most recently, a member of the Business faculty received an award from the Saranac Lake Chamber of Commerce, and the NCCC Library Director was recognized by the Northern New York Library Network with the Excellence in Library Service award for 2021.

**b. sufficient in number;**

In Fall 2020, there were 38 full-time faculty, with seven full-time professional staff members who also teach as part of an overload work assignment. Rounding out the faculty and an essential part of the North Country community are approximately 75-90 adjunct professors, many of whom have long taught at the College and/or are retired faculty members. Adjunct instructors allow the College to offer many more courses than the number of full-time faculty would allow and, in many cases, provide unique expertise as professionals currently working in their respective fields. As has been the case for years, the overwhelming majority of courses are taught by full-time instructors/ professional staff. In the fall of 2020, that figure was 75% for all sections taught and ranged from 50-100% by department (St.III.2b.5-Comparison FT-PT).

For NCCC, the faculty/student ratio allows for smaller class size (approximately 13:1) and easier engagement between faculty and students. This compares to a national ratio of 18:1 for public two-year institutions (IPEDS).

**c. provided with and utilize sufficient opportunities, resources, and support for professional growth and innovation;**

Professional growth among faculty is both expected and encouraged. The College sponsors professional development opportunities focused on innovative pedagogy and best practices for student success. Professional development opportunities, some delivered locally and others external to the College are available to instructors seeking improvement. Internal professional development includes workshops and newsletters produced and hosted by NCCC faculty and staff (St.III.2c.1-PD Newsletters; St.III.2c.2-NCCC Workshops). Faculty have ample access and opportunity to participate in various online webinars and workshops, and through the SUNY Center for Professional Development, there are extensive online teaching trainings that NCCC faculty take advantage of (St.III.2c.3-Faculty Meeting Agendas).

As discussed above, NCCC provides various opportunities for professional growth and innovation in alignment with the mission and vision of the College. These opportunities occur on campus as well as off campus. Within the last six years, the College approved two sabbaticals for faculty professional development. While in financially vulnerable times, allocations for professional development are cut before eliminating critical staff and services. We saw a reduction in that funding during the 2015–2016-year, but professional development funds were restored for the 2017-2018 budget and forward. As part of that budget, we were able to resource a portion of faculty load focused on developing and delivering teaching workshops including formal presentations, informal sessions (e.g., brown-bag discussions), and an e-newsletter. Given the recent budget constraints due to COVID-19, professional development funding was reduced in the operating budget, but we allocated substantial professional development funding related to online learning and instruction from the institutional CARES Act funding. Over \$50,000 was set aside to help with professional development training to improve remote/online learning. This funding helps sponsor outside experts to deliver workshops related to online/remote instruction. In the summer of 2020, a course design consultant recommended by the SUNY Center for Professional Development presented a half-day workshop on three topics: 1) using the OSCQR rubric to evaluate online course delivery, 2) assessment in online courses, and 3) Accessibility. Twenty-four faculty

attended and prompted interest in looking at universal course design practices (St.III.2c.4-OSCQR Workshop). This led to follow-up workshops presented by Landmark College exploring concepts such as inclusive pedagogies and teaching students with neurodiverse needs (St.III.2c.5-Landmark). Even during years with lean professional development funding, faculty and administrators have been creative in their efforts to maintain currency in their respective fields while also experimenting with new pedagogy to improve learning outcomes. Utilization of internal expertise helps to offset costs for professional development and provides faculty with opportunity to collaborate with their colleagues. In the 2021 spring semester, the College offered stipends to encourage faculty with varying expertise to design and deliver professional development workshops. Starting in January 2021, as a combined effort between academic affairs, faculty, and student affairs, we initiated a “Chat and Chew,” an internal professional development opportunity for faculty to meet during Winter Break and review each other’s online course platforms as well as discuss various topics such as accessibility, Office 365 tools, and other applications that can be utilized in the virtual and traditional classroom. This practice continued and expanded during the Spring 2021 semester.

**d. reviewed regularly and equitably based on written, disseminated, clear, and fair criteria, expectations, policies, and procedures;**

In conjunction with the professional collective bargaining unit (NCCCAP), the College instituted an evaluation system in 2009. At that time, the VPAA conducted all evaluations of academic staff. In 2014, the administration and the professional union negotiated a Memorandum of Understanding to allow department chairs and coordinators to evaluate faculty and staff within their department. This led to training and information sessions for department chairs and faculty (St.III.2d.1-2014 NCCCAP Memo). This system remained in place until 2019. During the 2019-2020 academic year, the administration and union representatives met again to update and review the evaluation documents to align with both professional growth plans and expectations for promotion. That update created a uniform evaluation of faculty by students, regardless of modality (previously there had been separate instruments for evaluation of online vs. on-ground courses) and sought to create uniformity in what was being evaluated across performance measures. Criteria were linked directly to the summary performance evaluation. Those changes were approved by the NCCCAP membership in Fall 2020 and are in place for the 2020-2021. At present, evaluation of faculty includes an annual performance evaluation completed by and reviewed with one’s supervisor. Effective with the 2019-2020 year, the schedule of evaluations changed based on one’s rank. One with the rank of instructor is to receive a formal written evaluation annually, while one with the rank of professor may be evaluated annually, but minimally every fourth year. Evidence leading to the annual/summary review includes peer observation, supervisor observation, student evaluation of each course taught, a self-evaluation and professional growth plan. These are explained in detail in the NCCCAP contract and in the documents themselves. As noted, the criteria were developed and revised by a task force composed of administrative and union representatives and were reviewed by and supported by the faculty (St.III.2d.2-New Evaluation Docs).

**Criterion 3. academic programs of study that are clearly and accurately described in official publications of the institution in a way that students are able to understand and follow degree and program requirements and expected time to completion;**

Many resources exist to explain the requirements for each academic program to current, returning, and prospective students, as well as expected time of completion if the individual is enrolled full-time. Descriptions of academic programs appear in the college catalog where the major requirements are laid out along with the respective course descriptions (See catalogue pgs. from 65- 121). These are expanded upon on the College’s “Degrees and Programs” page found on the College’s website (St.III.3.1-ENV program page), which include a program worksheet that further articulates requirements for each

program.

When students matriculate, they are assigned an academic advisor in their degree field. At the initial and subsequent advising sessions, advisors review the program requirements as well as the ideal sequence of courses in order to complete in a timely fashion (typically two years/four semesters for associate degrees, and, one year/two semesters for a certificate program). These program worksheets, developed by each department to guide students and advisors, also help those students who are part-time, as they map out the ideal path, including considering any developmental courses needed to progress (St.III.3.2-Degree worksheet-Sequence). Student progress toward degree completion is aided by an academic advisor and by use of tools available in the student's web portal access. An unofficial online degree audit is available to the student and the advisor as well as an online unofficial academic transcript record (St.III.3.3-Degree Audit). Students have the primary responsibility to ensure their academic progress toward a degree with the assistance of the advisor and the web portal access tools. Graduation and completion timeliness is further supported through the College's Academic Standing Policy as referenced in the College catalog (St.III.3.4-Academic Standing Policy).

**Criterion 4. sufficient learning opportunities and resources to support both the institution's programs of study and students' academic progress;**

North Country Community College provides a host of resources and opportunities to support academic programs, student learning, and students' academic progress. While Standard IV provides a more comprehensive overview, the following universal support and resources for learning opportunities are available on campus and online for students:

- Personalized and program-specific advisement
- Library and online research resources
- Learning Assistance Centers and associated resources
- ADA-504 services
- Kurzweil Reader
- Dedicated faculty office hours (one hour per course taught)
- Retention services
- Laptop loaner program
- Comprehensive learning management and student information systems
- Regularly staffed IT Help Desk with access to SUNY Help Desk services after hours
- Computer labs (not applicable to online)
- Art studio spaces (not applicable to online)

The College supports a library on each campus and provides students access to a research librarian, either through the College's Library Director or through a service that provides 24-hour support (*Ask Us 24/7*).

Each of the three campuses provides tutoring and study skill support through the Learning Assistance Centers (LAC's). Professional staff provide tutoring and study skills support Monday through Friday, generally 12 hours per day. On campus hours may vary slightly by campus or day (for example, Friday hours may end at 4:00 given lower volume of use). These centers provide the following support:

- Tutoring
- Facilitation of study groups
- Writing assistance
- Support for academic accommodations (ADA-504)
- Placement testing

- Coordination of retention efforts, including Support for the Athletic Mentoring Program (AMP)
- Additional computer access

Online tutoring support for remote and online students expanded over the last two years, and in addition to the posted campus hours, students can request remote tutoring, either synchronous or asynchronous. As of Fall 2020, the College also joined STAR-NY, an online tutoring consortium that provides tutoring services Sunday through Thursday evenings to supplement in-house tutoring.

Academic referrals for all students are filtered through a link on the LAC webpage. Once referred by faculty, LAC staff contact the student to coordinate the needed support systems, which may include subject-specific tutoring, study skills sessions, strategies to work through test anxiety, writing assistance, and/or referrals for non-academic related assistance. The LAC's also conduct workshops on writing and study skills, documentation conventions, and general organization and time management techniques to help support student success (St.III.4.1-LAC Support).

Specific program-related resources and support for enhanced learning include on-campus clinical labs for nursing and radiologic technology students, a clinic for massage therapy students (St.III.4.2-Clinical Hours- Allied Health) as well as art studio spaces and graphics lab for fine arts and graphics majors. Several career and technical education programs require clinical, internship, or practicum experiences for degree completion. Those include the following:

- Practical Nursing
- Associate Degree Nursing
- Radiologic Technology
- Massage Therapy
- Chemical Dependency Counseling
- Human Services
- Child and Family Services
- Sports and Event Management
- Wilderness Recreation Leadership

Other opportunities to enhance learning include a recreational guide course that culminates in New York State licensing as part of our Wilderness Recreational Leadership program, as well as optional internship opportunities in the Criminal Justice and Business programs. Additionally, there are pre-licensure exam reviews for both Practical and Associate Degree nursing programs, Radiologic Technology, and Massage Therapy. Funding to support these opportunities includes Perkins grants and institutional funding. In 2013, clinical facilities for Massage Therapy moved into Hodson Hall, providing the space for four massage rooms, a waiting room, as well as an area for massage students to complete patient care reports. In 2016, the Radiologic Technology lab moved into Mulholland Hall, where a classroom was renovated to create a new lab space. While current nursing lab spaces adequately support clinical needs, upgrades to all three nursing labs remain a priority as part of the facilities master plan upgrades and the updated strategic plan. In the spring of 2021, the College submitted a Community Funding request through Congresswoman Elise Stefanik's office. The request includes just over one million dollars to support upgrades (St.III.4.3-Stefanik Funding Proposal).

The Student Affairs area provides multiple opportunities and resources to support academic success across all campuses. Whenever possible, student engagement activities align with institutional learning outcomes and support academic program objectives (St.III.4.4-Ex-Student Affairs). Diverse, equitable, and inclusive practices infuse all student life activities (see Standard IV). In addition to a multitude of

activities each semester, the following resources through Student Affairs are available:

- Athletic Mentoring Program (AMP)
- Behavioral Intervention Team
- Student Government Associations
- Special Interest Clubs (Veterans, Environmental, Nursing, Radiologic Technology)

**Criterion 5. at institutions that offer undergraduate education, a general education program, free standing or integrated into academic disciplines, that:**

- a. offers a sufficient scope to draw students into new areas of intellectual experience, expanding their cultural and global awareness and cultural sensitivity, and preparing them to make well-reasoned judgments outside as well as within their academic field;**

In keeping with the College’s Mission, Vision, Values, and Institutional Goals, the College meets this criterion through a general education program that is woven throughout each associate degree. General education requirements follow the State University of New York’s (SUNY) guidelines for graduates of Associate Degree Programs. There are ten general education areas (or silos), ranging from the arts to the natural sciences, from English to math, and from American History to Western and Non-Western civilization. For AA and AS degrees, students must successfully complete at least one course in seven General Education areas for a total of 30 credits in general education courses. For AAS degrees, students must successfully complete at least one course each in five General Education areas for a total of 20 credits in general education courses.

General Education Subject Areas	Required Competencies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Basic Communication (Required)</li> <li>▪ Mathematics (Required)</li> <li>▪ American History</li> <li>▪ Other World Civilizations</li> <li>▪ Western Civilization</li> <li>▪ Foreign Language</li> <li>▪ Social Sciences</li> <li>▪ Humanities</li> <li>▪ The Arts</li> <li>▪ Natural Sciences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Critical Thinking</li> <li>▪ Information Management</li> </ul>

These expectations are reinforced by the six NCCC College-Wide Goals for Student Learning Goals: 1) Critical, Constructive, and Creative Thinking, 2) Scientific Literacy, 3) Information Literacy, 4) Mathematical Competency, 5) Social and Cultural Literacy, and 6) Communication. As noted above, these, too, are integrated and assessed through each degree program.

NCCC’s commitment to student learning that addresses global and cultural awareness includes three main focal points: 1) to convey breadth of cultural richness in the world to the college community; 2) to provide students with work skills enabling them to succeed in global economic environment; and 3) to explore opportunities for programs to bring students in touch with other cultures. The first two focal points are infused into the curriculum and co-curricular activities (see Standards IV and IV) and assessed under the institutional learning outcome, Social & Cultural Literacy. The geographic isolation of the North Country region presents some challenges in experiential learning related to global awareness.

Recognizing those challenges, in order to address the third focal point, the faculty created a credit-bearing international travel course, offering a one-credit or three-credit option in the Humanities or Social Science general education silo. Prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the College offered the course once per year and students, faculty, and community members traveled to Costa Rica, Ireland, Spain, Greece, Italy, and Eastern Europe. In 2019, the Social Science and Humanities faculty revised the course to include domestic and international travel. A March 2020 trip to Washington, D.C. did not take place due to COVID-19 restrictions.

As noted above, the existing College-Wide Goals, particularly Social and Cultural Literacy and Critical, Constructive, and Creative Thinking underscore these student experiences and reinforce lessons learned via the widened world view students develop through core course work and ancillary offerings across NCCC’s three campuses.

- b. offers a curriculum designed so that students acquire and demonstrate essential skills including at least oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and reasoning, technological competency, and information literacy. Consistent with mission, the general education program also includes the study of values, ethics, and diverse perspectives;**

All program learning outcomes align with our institutional learning outcomes assuring integration of essential skills and knowledge. Additionally, the curriculum for each program aligns with the SUNY General Education requirements and New York State Education Department liberal arts requirements as noted in the following chart.

MSCHE	Oral & Written Communication	Scientific & Quantitative Reasoning	Critical Analysis & Reasoning	Technological Competency	Information Literacy
SUNY	Basic Communication	Mathematics Natural Sciences	Critical Thinking Basic Communication-Written	Information Management	Information Management
NCCC	Communication	Scientific Literacy Mathematical Competency	Critical, Constructive, & Creative Thinking	Technological Fluency	Technological Fluency Critical, Constructive, & Creative Thinking

These are core academic principles which aid in developing student’s intellectual experience and abilities and include Basic Communication (oral and written), Critical, Constructive, and Creative Thinking, Scientific Literacy, Mathematical Competency (quantitative reasoning), Social and Cultural Literacy, and Information Literacy. Working within a three-year cycle, the College examines data from these goals as outlined in Standard V. These assessment cycles prompt changes to curricular design. While the study of

values, ethics, and diverse perspectives occurs throughout degree program curricula, measurement of the Social and Cultural Literacy outcomes provide data on how well students are meeting those goals (See Standard V). Specific certificate and associate-level programs address cultural and diversity education via targeted coursework within the program curriculum, outside of specific general education courses. Infusing these concepts into the curriculum helps ensure readiness for successful graduates to enter their field of practice with the necessary knowledge to ensure their ability to meet the needs of others. As an example, courses within Nursing and Wilderness Recreation Leadership incorporate the study of diversity, ethics, and values within profession-specific curriculum (St.III.5b.1- NUR 104; REC 251).

Similarly, the study of values and ethics is addressed broadly through general education coursework as well as in specific certificate and associate-level programs. In the latter, the coursework is designed to introduce and assist students in understanding the salient values and ethical issues in their field of study. This is particularly true in certificate and degree programs that prepare students for direct entry into workforce including allied health (nursing, massage therapy, radiologic technology) and human services (human services, child and family services, chemical dependency counseling). This prepares graduates to enter their field of practice with the necessary knowledge to navigate their work successfully with others (St.III.5b.2-HUS; CRJ 102).

In the spring of 2021, SUNY proposed a draft of major changes to the General Education Requirements (SUNY-GER). In anticipation of these changes, academic departments will begin to evaluate how to best incorporate those changes into program design. Given the scope of the revision, we anticipate major changes to the curriculum maps and assessment processes. As our institutional learning outcomes align closely with SUNY's current General Education requirements, we anticipate some changes in the institutional learning outcomes as well. We provided information on these changes to department chairs and faculty in spring of 2021 (St.III.5b.3-Email-new SUNY GenEd).

Staff and faculty recognize that relying solely on in-course work to achieve cultural awareness and sensitivity to diversity may reflect a one-dimensional view of student growth and experience. To that end, there are a multitude of activities offered over the course of the school year across all three of North Country's campuses that target a student's cultural awareness. Standard IV addresses these in more detail.

**c. in non-US institutions that do not include general education, provides evidence that students can demonstrate general education skills;**

Not Applicable

**Criterion 6. in institutions that offer graduate and professional education, opportunities for the development of research, scholarship, and independent thinking, provided by faculty and/or other professionals with credentials appropriate to graduate-level curricula;**

Not Applicable.

**Criterion 7. adequate and appropriate institutional review and approval on any student learning opportunities designed, delivered, or assessed by third-party providers;**

Not Applicable

### **Criterion 8. periodic assessment of the effectiveness of programs providing student learning opportunities.**

Periodic program review occurs in regular rotation every three-to- five years at a minimum. See Standard V for more detailed information on assessment regarding program review. Additionally, co-curricular activities are assessed regularly for effectiveness and alignment with institutional goals (see Standard IV for more assessment and analysis).

Beyond the formal program review referenced above, academic program assessment occurs throughout the year. Programs conduct annual/semi-annual assessments of select program learning outcomes, dependent upon the program schedule. Annual program advisory board meetings assist the programs in ensuring that changes in the field find their way into the program, as appropriate. All these elements help to inform the program in a cycle of continuous improvement. Recent examples of curricular redesign include changes to both the AAS Nursing and Practical Nursing Certificate programs. Through assessment of student learning outcomes, faculty revised both curriculums to enhance student learning in the areas of patient assessment, medical-surgical nursing, and professional practice. Courses were designed to cover the same material distributed differently across the curriculum for better retention of information. Additionally, nursing faculty recognized a need to integrate a summer course between the Practical Nursing program and the start of the Associate Degree in Nursing (St.III.8.1-Summary of NUR-BOT report). In Computer Graphics, program faculty added a pre-requisite course of ART 105: Introduction to Computer Graphics to ART 245: Digital Photography to better scaffold learning complex programs such as Adobe Creative Cloud, which allows students to synthesize what they learn from the 100 to the 200-level course (St.III.8.2-ART proposal). Conversely, while the Art Department decided a course needed to be added to the curriculum, the Science Department moved a requirement out of the core of the Health Sciences degree and added credits in the general elective area (St.III.8.3-HEA-MAT proposal). While many changes originate from within a program, departments also work collectively to assess how courses serve other programs, especially in the general education area. As an example, the Math Department reached out to science, social science, and allied health faculty to determine whether the learning outcomes for MAT 121: Elementary Statistics provided the necessary math knowledge and skills for success in their respective programs (St.III.8.4-MAT Email).

Curricular design and revision work best as an iterative process with input from students, faculty, external reviewers, and academic support staff. Assessment from differing perspectives assures that courses and curricula remain relevant and rigorous, and teaching pedagogies to remain effective.

#### **Recommendations for Improvement:**

- Add semester-specific course sequences to website, so prospective students have easier access to this information. This will assist in Criterion 3, as it will enable students to better understand and follow degree and program requirements, as well as expected time to degree completion.
- Continue to work with website team and software providers to integrate the College Catalog and curricular information to enhance the student and faculty interface for advisement and to streamline how we track and update curriculum changes, College policies, and faculty and staff changes. Continue to fund and provide professional development for faculty and staff as identified in the strategic plan.
- Move the student evaluations process from the portal to another format to increase the number of completed evaluations. The student portal is connected to the student information system (CAMS) where all student information is housed. Therefore, the official final grade submission occurs where faculty evaluation forms are located. However, over the last year as the College migrated to Blackboard, and final grades in many classes are now viewable in the Blackboard gradebook, some students do not check the portal to confirm their final grade. We have seen a

decrease in the number of student evaluations over this past year. We believe that moving the evaluation forms to a more prominent area will increase student participation and increase student feedback.

- Develop an internal academic planning manual based on SUNY's Guide to Academic Program Planning to help faculty determine what is needed for degree program proposals with regard to liberal arts and general education.

## Standard IV: Support of the Student Experience

*Across all educational experiences, settings, levels, and instructional modalities, the institution recruits and admits students whose interests, abilities, experiences, and goals are congruent with its mission and educational offerings. The institution commits to student retention, persistence, completion, and success through a coherent and effective support system sustained by qualified professionals, which enhances the quality of the learning environment, contributes to the educational experience, and fosters student success*  
(Middle States Commission on Higher Education Standards of Accreditation, Standard IV).

*“Faculty have been compassionate and adaptive during the abrupt switch to online learning, keeping the human element and mentorship alive and well while students learn online.”*

Jessica Kemp, NCCC Student Trustee (2020-2021)

North Country Community College is committed to maintaining a culture of assessment that supports an excellent student educational experience in and out of the classroom and is informed by student voices. This commitment is evidenced by our cycle of student opinion surveys, climate assessments, student polls, listening sessions, shared governance, and programmatic reviews illustrated below.

As our student trustee noted, the faculty illustrated the College’s commitment to students as the COVID-19 pandemic entered our region in Spring 2020. That same commitment can be found across the institution as all areas of the College work together to engage and support students from the point of inquiry to graduation. Student success is at the heart of our mission, operations, and planning. Whether measured through the academic indicators of retention, persistence and completion, or the student life metrics focused on student development, or through a financial lens such as student loan default rates, the supports start with the academic area, but require the collaboration of all areas to help create and improve the processes and conditions needed to nurture and facilitate success.

Our student population mirrors that of the surrounding counties in terms of demographics and geography. Adult students pursuing a first degree as well as students recently graduated from high school provide a diverse population with differing needs in terms of support and opportunities. Between 60-70% of adults over 24 in Franklin and Essex counties do not have a two-year degree and geographic isolation creates challenges for individuals to obtain those degrees and nearly 60% of our students are Pell-eligible. With this in mind, the necessary support systems and structures to develop and connect students depend upon individualized service and an ability to assess a student’s situation holistically. Continuous assessment of student needs, campus climate, and available resources provide the basis for a culture of success.

**Criterion 1. clearly stated, ethical policies and processes to admit, retain, and facilitate the success of students whose interests, abilities, experiences, and goals provide a reasonable expectation for success and are compatible with institutional mission, including:**

- a. accurate and comprehensive information regarding expenses, financial aid, scholarships, grants, loans, repayment, and refunds.**

North Country Community College provides “clearly stated, ethical policies and processes to admit, retain, and facilitate the success of students whose interests, abilities, experiences, and goals provide a reasonable expectation for success and are compatible with its institutional mission.” College publications provide accurate and comprehensive information, with a regular review process to update and improve both the process and policies themselves and communicate that information clearly and accurately. While continually changing, North Country CC remains committed to providing relevant and up-to-date information regarding “expenses, financial aid, scholarships, grants, loans, repayment, and refunds.” An

online College Catalog includes the critical information to prospective and current students, and a physical copy is available upon request. While the catalog remains the primary reference for academic policies and general information, the College recognized the need to present information to students and families in more user-friendly formats. In response, we created separate pages on the College's website to convey critical information more clearly to students as illustrated in our Business Office page. (St.IV.1a.1-Business Office-Financial Aid). These pages provide accurate and comprehensive information about tuition and fee costs, and fee descriptions, making this information readily available to prospective student and families while they are in the search phase of the college process (St.IV.1a.2-Student Right to Know).

NCCC's commitment to transparency is reflected in the detail in which costs are laid out so students are well-informed before they apply and prepare to invest in a college education. Based on feedback from faculty, staff, and students regarding the complexities around college financing, the College recently developed a *Paying for College* webpage with drop-down menu which centralizes information regarding expenses, financial aid, scholarships, grants, loans, repayment, and refunds and emphasizes our ongoing commitment to improve communication with students and their families (St.IV.1a.3-Paying for College). We have recently added video instructions for several of these more complex processes, particularly related to financial aid.

In addition, NCCC provides detailed information to students who need to complete the requirements for New York State residency and in-state tuition eligibility. The Business Office furnishes annual 1098-T tax forms and information for students who make payments towards their qualifying tuition and fee expenses. Forms are provided per IRS guidelines by January 31 each year and details on how the College sends and creates the tax forms are available on the Business Office webpage. Further, NCCC's website clearly indicates the deadline for bookstore deferments, tuition due dates, and refund dates (St.IV.1a.4-Business Office).

Assessment of our enrollment and registration operations led to significant changes over the 20-21 academic year. The creation of a more streamlined and personalized process, referred to as "onboarding," was designed to assist in the transition from applicant to registered student, improving the preparation for academic success. The current onboarding process covers the period from first contact with admissions through registration and their first week of classes and includes assessment that students have access to the tools required for success, (e.g., access to internet/broadband, access to a computer). While student onboarding was previously done through registration events, it increasingly requires a more student-driven process with on-demand content and individualized case management, especially around paying for college (St.IV.1a.5-NCNAV Framework). This need was further illuminated during the move to remote operations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The College had to find solutions to serve students remotely and quickly. That natural experiment yielded several positive changes, including some that was retained (e.g., student call campaign noted in Standard 6) positioning the College to address these issues more thoroughly.

Once students are accepted and enroll, the College tailors its correspondence for these new students. NCCC provides crucial information to students regarding financial aid and billing at timely intersections of their onboarding process as evidenced by the steps listed below.

- New York State Residency Requirements are outlined for students with the required steps to qualify for New York State tuition rates, which are much lower than out-of-state/international tuition (St.IV.1a.6-Tuition Residency page). This requirement is found on the website, on the back of the student's bill, on the Disclosure Form and on the Student Portal.
- Each student completes and signs a Billing Disclosure & Authorization Contract confirming

their obligation to pay the College bill and explains consequences of failure to pay and other policies as they relate to the Business Office (St.IV.1a.7-BDA).

- The Student Portal makes it more convenient for students to accept their financial aid offer after their award letter is completed (St.IV.1a.8-Award Letter).
- Each student receives a bill by US Mail, which includes accurate and comprehensive explanations of late fees/dates, residency, various deadlines, and refunds. This document also includes information on tuition payment plans with options to pay in increments of 30 days.

NCCC's Business Office reassessed collection efforts over this past year. Since March 2020, New York State suspended debt collection for students; however, prior to COVID-19, the College employed "high touch" efforts such as email, telephone calls and US Postal mailings. Business Office personnel actively engage students in the payment/repayment process before sending accounts to collection. Such efforts are made to ensure students are current in their payments, enabling them to return for subsequent semesters; the goal is always to aid in retention and assist students in completing their college degrees (St.IV.1a.9-BUS Office Process).

**b. a process by which students who are not adequately prepared for study at the level for which they have been admitted are identified, placed, and supported in attaining appropriate educational goals.**

NCCC recognizes the importance of student placement in the overall picture of success. Placement procedures assure that "students who are not adequately prepared for study at the level for which they have been admitted are identified, placed, and supported in attaining appropriate educational goals." Identification of the need for developmental coursework determined by previous academic performance and/or placement tests, is described on the Admissions' page (St.IV.1b.1-Admissions). Support for accommodative services can be found on the LAC webpages as well as the Accommodative Services page (St.IV.1b.2-LAC).

- NCCC's catalog and Admissions' website explains the application process and open admissions policy, including details on student placement in English and Math courses, to improve their chances of advancing to and completing college-level coursework. During COVID-19, the placement procedures (the College Board Accuplacer/WritePlacer) were altered to accommodate the need for remote placement. Multiple measures such as high school GPA, high-stakes test scores (e.g., NYS Regents exams), and previous course performance across multiple courses replaced the Accuplacer/WritePlacer as the primary means for placement. The English and Math departments agreed to continue with multiple measures for the Fall 2021 semester as well. Assessment of student performance in development courses and their subsequent persistence and retention status will help guide decisions around placement policies and procedures even as non-pandemic conditions will allow for moving back to use of the Accuplacer (St.IV.1b.3-Chart for MM Placement).
- Where possible, academic programs have alternative course sequences depending upon a student's developmental needs as illustrated in the AAS Chemical Dependency Counseling program alternate course sequence (St.IV.1b.4 CDC Alternate Course Sequence). Some programs however, such as AAS Nursing, and Radiologic Technology do not have room within the program to accommodate developmental coursework. However, in the case of allied health programs, students take developmental courses prior to admission to the program.

### **Support for Students Placed in Developmental Courses**

Depending on the semester, between 50-60% of incoming students place into developmental English and math. Student performance in developmental courses remains a focal point given the importance of a strong start as a component for student success. For over a decade, NCCC's Math and English departments have worked to improve learning outcomes and first-time pass rates for the developmental courses in their areas: MAT 095 (non-credit Pre-Algebra), MAT100 (Elementary Algebra) and ENG 100 (Essentials of Effective Writing). From 2011-2014, the college had a "Springboard" program, which, though effective in improving overall student success in developmental courses, was discontinued due to the significant draw on resources and complications of ensuring students could take introductory program courses during their first semester. Since 2014, efforts to improve student achievement in developmental courses shifted to focus on increased contact time (in the case of writing courses) and innovative pedagogies. Departmental faculty increased contact hours from 45 to 60 for both ENG 100 (Essentials of Effective Writing/developmental writing) and ENG 101 (English Composition I), including a lab session to improve writing proficiency (St.IV.1b.5-ENG 100-101 Contact Hour Change). In 2016, NCCC's Math department incorporated a quantitative reasoning course called MAT 101/Quantway as an alternative for students moving through the math sequence to obtain the needed math course for their degree (St.IV.1b.6-Quantway Workshop Email). This initiative, supported by SUNY and the Carnegie Pathways program, includes professional development for faculty, encourages a collaborative approach solving math problems, and focuses on promoting a growth mindset for students who traditionally struggle with mathematical concepts and math anxiety (St.IV.1b.7 Quantway Summary Fall 17).

Prior to COVID-19, developmental courses were not offered in alternative formats and all courses were delivered face-to-face. The lab time for ENG 100 and ENG 101 as well sections of Quantway were adjusted during the shift to remote learning due to COVID-19. Analysis of student performance measures are ongoing for the 2020-2021 academic year, and evaluation of the changes due to the shift to remote learning will inform practices moving forward.

In addition to support in math and English, over the past two years, a group of faculty members reimagined and redesigned a first-year college success course (CSP 100) for new students through the support of a Strong Start to Finish grant through SUNY. CSP 100's purpose is to give students a solid introduction to the college environment and instruction on time management, non-cognitive skills, and academic skills that will give them the foundation to be successful throughout their time at NCCC and beyond.

For a number of years, faculty members identified the need to reinstate the course, so there was broad support for this initiative (St.IV.1b.7-Curriculum Input). The external reviewers for the AA: Liberal Arts-Humanities and Social Science program review recommended reinstating the course as well. The revised course includes a framework for establishing baseline competencies for students aligned with the College-Wide Goals (St.IV.1b.8-CSP 100 Course Outline). For the first time in many years, seven sections of CSP 100 – College Success Seminar – were to be offered during the Fall 2020 semester across the NCCC campuses; however, due to the COVID-19 and our near fully online presence, we downsized the effort and taught one online section. Though small, CSP 100 was successful and gleaned positive reviews. During the Spring 2021 semester, departments created a pathway for including CSP into most programs at the College by adding the designation as an option along with the Health Education and Physical Education degree program requirements (St.IV.1b.9-Worksheet). While a seemingly small change, this will dramatically increase the number of students eligible to take the course. Eight sections are slated for new students during the Fall 2021 semester, and student GPA data will be analyzed to assess the efficacy.

## **Support Services**

In addition to placement and developmental course design, the Learning Assistance Centers (LACs) remain the core of academic support outside the classroom. NCCC's three LAC's work together to have a unified presence, while maintaining campus-based autonomy. As noted earlier, the LAC's on each campus provide a multitude of services for students, including tutoring, study groups, ADA-504 accommodative services, as well as computer skills support. The Retention Specialists are based in the LAC's as well. Faculty refer students for help with barriers to their success, including time management, study skills, computer skills, and organizational skills. Developmental Math and English forms a significant portion of the tutoring and study group support.

To encourage student use of tutoring supports, the LAC's developed multiple options for students such as individual tutoring (online and face-to-face), "drop-in" tutoring sessions that did not require an appointment, and study groups. Efforts to streamline services and processes across the College include an upgraded web presence, remote tutoring services, retention specialists and student referral systems which are accessible through the LAC webpages. During the 2020-2021 academic year, all LAC services pivoted to offering services remotely. As with many changes during the pandemic, we gleaned some insight into how to expand remote services in a non-pandemic world. As of the 2020-2021 academic year, NCCC joined a tutoring consortium, STAR-NY, a SUNY-based service that offers tutoring support across multiple disciplines during evening hours Sunday through Thursday from 7:00 pm-12:00 am (St.IV.1b.12-STAR-NY contract).

### **c. orientation, advisement, and counseling programs to enhance retention and guide students throughout their educational experience;**

Student success depends upon many factors, including a strong start, clearly defined goals, and support throughout the college experience. At NCCC, faculty and staff consider student support to be an essential part of everyone's job, regardless of official position at the College. In line with our overall value of "kindness and compassion," we genuinely care about each student's success, and our support of their persistence and graduation is also a key part of ensuring the College's financial sustainability.

## **Enrollment and Orientation**

Recently, the Enrollment and Marketing team led a collaborative effort to launch a program called the North Country Navigator, which follows a concierge model approach to registering and orienting new students (St.IV.1c.1-North Country Navigator). This pilot program shifts the onboarding of students away from siloed interactions with individual offices into a case-management process that emphasizes relationship-building and support with a trusted contact along with specialized referrals for higher-level student requests. The North Country Navigator program, piloted in Spring 2021, will continue for the 2021-2022 academic year. To increase efficiency and communication, the Enrollment Management and Marketing department adopted a software called SLATE which enables case management across college departments and supports enrollment management, student retention and completion from all angles (St.IV.1c.2-Slate).

NCCC provides several in-person New Student Orientations each August which cover topics including technology onboarding, academic expectations, understanding the student bill, safety and student behavior expectations/community standards, student engagement opportunities, and wayfinding tours of the campuses (St.IV.1c.3-Flyer for New Student Orientation). We also provide an online/virtual orientation within Blackboard for those who cannot or do not wish to come to campus for an in-person orientation experience. This content is on demand. Student-driven video content is also under development through a recent contract with Campus Reel (St.IV.1c.4-Virtual Orientation).

### **Advisement and Support**

NCCC's advisement and registration processes also support student success. As evidenced by NCCC's Catalog, NCCC has developed quality, personalized processes by which students are contacted and guided by faculty advisors according to program of study. Each degree program has clearly laid out course sequences that indicate a pathway to degree completion (St.IV.1c.5-Ex. Course Sequence).

Additionally, during the 2016-2017 academic year, NCCC created two Retention Specialist positions, funded by a Perkins grant. These two individuals, one based in Saranac Lake and one in Malone, contact students identified by faculty as needing assistance or are in academic jeopardy from performance in previous semesters. Initially, the position focused on career and technical education programs. However, the success of the program led the College to incorporate the cost as part of operations (St.IV.1c.6-Excerpt from Perkins Report). During the 2020-2021 academic year, the Retention Specialists proved to be an essential component of student support in the shift to remote learning. Individual emails, phone calls, and video chats combined with participation in the broader calling campaign connected students with support staff to help guide them through many obstacles. Retention reports provide valuable insight into student needs both in and outside the classroom (St.IV.1c.7-Retention Specialist Report).

The Athlete Mentoring Program (AMP) provides additional support and monitoring for student-athletes, recognizing the pivotal role of coaches in a student-athlete's experience at the College. With a student's consent, coaches monitor academic progress to assure that students can progress successfully through degree programs. Additional study sessions, regular reporting requirements, and clear communication among the Athletic Department, Learning Assistance Center tutors, and faculty help track student progress and identify areas of concern (St.IV.1c.8-AMP Program Spring 2020).

For students needing extra services, NCCC has built a long-standing, collaborative relationship with Adult Career and Continuing Education Services-Vocational Rehabilitation (ACCES-VR) of New York State to ensure that students who qualify under ADA/504 have the support and guidance to be successful at NCCC and beyond. NCCC has offered physical locations on all three campuses for ACCES-VR counselors to meet one-on-one with students either alone or with NCCC support faculty, such as Learning Assistance Coordinators or the ADA/504 coordinator to review students' college plans. Those plans may involve assistive technologies, academic accommodations, and financial support during their time at NCCC. Additionally, remote meetings are available for those students needing remote support.

Extra support during the pandemic has been provided by enrollment, administrative, and academic staff, who conducted calling campaigns with new and returning students to provide individualized outreach and referral support. Originally an effort to support students during the transition to remote learning, these calling campaigns have been conducted strategically throughout the Spring 2020, Fall 2020, and Spring 2021 semesters and were spearheaded by the admissions staff, though, calls to students were made by individuals from Learning Assistance Center staff, Records and Business offices, Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, and the President. The Calling Campaign has been documented qualitatively and quantitatively (St.IV.1c.9-Calling Campaign Data PDFs). The success of this further demonstration of the College's value of "kindness and compassion" may lead to continuation of it in some form even after the pandemic ends.

### **Counseling Support**

Students are often burdened by outside factors that affect academic performance, including limited finances, a mental health diagnosis, substance use and lack of basic needs. The Student Life staff coach, mentor, and appropriately refer students in need of emotional support, substance abuse and mental health counseling, sexual assault services, behavioral intervention, and career/transfer exploration. NCCC's Student Life Office, Behavioral Intervention Teams, and partnerships with regional counseling providers

such as Citizens Advocates and St. Joseph's Rehabilitation, identify and address student behaviors through documentation and personal counseling. Through counseling partnerships, the Behavioral Intervention Guide, Athletic Mentoring Program guide and NCCC's Incident Reporting Guide, clear policies and procedures exist as we consistently support student persistence and completion.

While it has been difficult to track behavioral interventions across the college, outreach efforts are documented through the student conduct case management software that are referred to the Behavioral Intervention Team via the Associate Vice President for Student Affairs. Furthermore, a tracking mechanism to log student interactions with third party counseling providers has been developed for launch in fall of 2021 when on campus counseling partnership services resume.

Another avenue by which students can receive support is faculty referral. Faculty appropriately refer students for additional support when students disclose personal issues during academic advisement and/or in class. Faculty often make referrals informally via phone or email, though they also have the option to refer students through a web-based referral link found on the Campus Safety page (St.IV.1c.10-Campus Safety website) and the Student Support/Counseling page which also contains a link for direct contact to the Associate Vice President of Student Affairs.

NCCC uses a platform called Guardian to manage incident reports, cases of student behavior or ADA accommodations, as well as to track student complaints. Guardian is a web-based software with customizable reporting features that enable us to review our case management efficiently over time. An example of such reporting is in the May 2021 Student Affairs BOT report (St.IV.1c.11 Student Affairs BoT Report).

**d. processes designed to enhance the successful achievement of students' educational goals including certificate and degree completion, transfer to other institutions, and post- completion placement;**

Program design incorporates a strong foundation in general education and liberal arts that align with our mission and vision to serve the needs and demands of the communities served by the College (as presented in Standard III). This allows for flexibility to enter the workforce or move to higher degree attainment. NCCC's catalog and website feature information on various articulation agreements with other institutions (St.IV.1d.1-Articulation Agreements).

The Student Life Office also provides a hub of services and resources related to transfer guidance and career readiness (St.IV.1d.2-Career Services). Services include individual counseling appointments, class presentations, web resources and handouts, and recruitment opportunities from transfer institutions, military service, and regional employers. To improve the student experience further, in the fall of 2020 a staff member from the Student Life Office was assigned responsibility for coordinating these career and transfer services across the College to help centralize the tasks, serve as a liaison to both students and transfer institutions, and develop a specialized knowledgebase on articulation agreements and post-degree employment. In its path toward continuous improvement, for the 2021-2022 academic year, NCCC launched a new platform called the College Central Network. This new resource enhances the current career services available for students and includes an electronic jobs board and a place for students and employers to communicate directly through the College (St.IV.1d.3-College Central Network).

**Criterion 2. policies and procedures regarding evaluation and acceptance of transfer credits, and credits awarded through experiential learning, prior non-academic learning, competency-based assessment, and other alternative learning approaches;**

NCCC provides students with the information and steps necessary to transfer credits into the College or to another school. The Registrar oversees and coordinates the transfer credit review process according to the College's transfer policy (St.IV.2.1-Transfer Policy). Through the website and catalog, the College posts information about transfer procedures and the transfer policy as well as contact information for the Records Office (St.IV.2.2-Records Office). As part of the SUNY Seamless Transfer initiative, both incoming and outgoing students are awarded credit for general education courses approved via the SUNY system as well as degree or program-specific requirements. A separate General Education transcript tracks student progress in each required category (St.IV.2.3- Gen Ed Transcript-example).

Courses outside of the general education area and those specific to degree requirements are evaluated via course descriptions and student learning outcomes to determine eligibility for transfer into the College. Specific limitations for transfer credit including eligibility for graduation requirements and age of transfer credits are outlined in the policy. As stated in the policy, "The College does not accept clinical experience or credits from other institutions to satisfy certificate, degree, clinical or internship graduation requirements."

### **Criterion 3. policies and procedures for the safe and secure maintenance and appropriate release of student information and records;**

NCCC deeply values the safe and secure maintenance of student information and records and demonstrates this through a robust security system, gatekeeper controls for access to records, and policies and procedures that guide record-keeping and release.

From a policy and procedure perspective, student transcripts and other student records follow strict adherence to FERPA regulations. The Record's Office maintains a Student Information Release Form and authorization process which is followed by any college department needing to coordinate the authorized sharing of student information and records in accordance with the law (St.IV.3.1-Student Information Release Form). The student information and records process appears in our College Catalog (St.IV.3.2-Records Office).

The Student Life Office maintains student health records including MMR and Meningitis vaccination records, in accordance with state laws in a secure location in a singular office. Health records required for academic programs and clinical participation are maintained in the appropriate department chair's office for Nursing and Radiologic Technology.

Additionally, in accordance with Public Law 93-380 (FERPA), students have the right to copies of their official NCCC records upon written application and payment of the fees. Faculty and staff are reminded of FERPA regulations regularly through a FERPA notification, a link to further information on FERPA, and an acknowledgement requirement in order to advance into the Faculty Portal each time they access the student information system (St.IV.3.4-Screenshot with FERPA notification).

With regard to information security, NCCC adopted SUNY's Information Security System Wide Plan and are following the information security procedures outlined in the plan. We work directly with the SUNY Security Operations Center (SOC) and monitor/adopt recommendations as they are released.

We have also invested significantly in upgrading our information security infrastructure (firewalls) and have added secondary protection for our systems and databases (over the past 3 years). We continue to build capacity in our IT staffing also and our recent hire is now a second internal employee with an information security background.

Nursing, Radiologic Technology, Massage, and athletic health records are maintained in compliance with HIPPA storage regulations.

**Criterion 4. if offered, athletic, student life, and other extracurricular activities that are regulated by the same academic, fiscal, and administrative principles and procedures that govern all other programs;**

NCCC encourages a high standard of student involvement as evidenced by our behavioral expectations and guiding principles for athletic and social extracurricular activities which emphasize and support wellness, safety, personal responsibility, and competency development. These are articulated in the 2018 Student Life Department Review (see criterion 6 below).

Our Athletics Department offers five collegiate athletic teams as part of the NJCAA Region III, including soccer (men’s and women’s), basketball (men’s and women’s), and women’s lacrosse. Each team is expected to adhere to the NCCC Student Code of Conduct (St.IV.4.1- Student Code of Conduct) as well as the NJCAA rules and regulations. When student athletes are not in compliance with College or NJCAA standards of conduct, we adjudicate in accordance with the same procedures found in the Code of Conduct that govern all other programs. An Athletic Program Review was completed in Spring 2021 (St.IV.4.2- Athletics Program Review). While the review illustrates the quality of all our athletic programs, it is notable that the women’s basketball team won the regional championships and moved on to the NJCAA National competition in both 2019 and 2020 (St.IV.4.3-NJCAA Women’s Basketball). Additionally, the head women’s basketball coach has been selected as the Mountain Valley Conference Coach of the Year for six years, and in 2019 and 2020, he was named National NJCAA District Coach of the year (St.IV.4.4-NJCAA Coach of the Year).



Our Student Life Office offers advisement, training, and support for the Student Government Associations and student organizations/clubs at our three campus locations. This support includes high standards for our student leaders relative to student behavior and fiscal management as evidenced in our Club Handbook and the expectation these students be held to the same Student Code of Conduct regulations as any other student on campus (St.IV.4.5-SGA Club Handbook). When student leaders are not in compliance with college standards of conduct, they are adjudicated in accordance with the same procedures that govern all other programs.

Organized by the Student Life Office, student activities are funded by the student activity fee and occur virtually and face-to-face (St.IV.4.6 Virtual Student Engagement). As described earlier, efforts to engage students are guided by five student learning outcomes: personal growth, future planning, wellness, inclusion, and academic success as evidenced by semester-based data reports.

**Criterion 5. if applicable, adequate, and appropriate institutional review and approval of student support services designed, delivered, or assessed by third-party providers;**

The College maintains valuable third-party partnerships with counseling providers in our regional service area including Citizen Advocates, St. Joseph's Rehabilitation Center, STOP Domestic Violence, ACCES VR, and St. Regis Mohawk Tribal Services at Akwesasne. A growing number of regional provider partnerships are maintained on the Counseling Services webpage along with complimentary resource pages relative to physical and emotional wellness (St.IV.5.1-Student Support).

The NCCC Association is a separate not-for profit entity that serves as the College's auxiliary services provider. The Association provides and/or maintains authorized contracts for food service, campus housing operations, bookstore, and vending services. The NCCC Association also serves as the disbursing agent of programmatic funds for Athletics and Student Activity Fees which financially support student government, clubs/student organizations, campus activities and service trips (St.IV.5.2 NCCC Association). Institutional review and approval of auxiliary service contracts is accomplished through a Board of Directors governing the NCCC Association and comprised of elected and appointed College administration, faculty, staff, and students.

**Criterion 6. periodic assessment of the effectiveness of programs supporting the student experience.**

NCCC regularly assesses the student experience, including opinions, perceptions, and needs of our student body (St.IV.6.1- Student Survey Table). The College participated in the Student Opinion Survey designed by the SUNY Office of Institutional Research in 2010, 2013, and 2019 respectively, and most recently conducted a homegrown survey in Spring 2020 to assess student opinion related to COVID-19 remote learning, the academic experience, campus climate, basic needs, and College services. In the fall of 2020, we participated in the SUNY COVID-19 Satisfaction Survey. The responses from these surveys (St.IV.6.2 SUNY Student Opinion Survey; St.IV.6.3 NCCC Student Opinion Survey; St.IV.6.4 SUNY COVID-19 Survey) are reviewed for themes and areas of strategic focus by members of the College leadership team and key stakeholders. Additionally, course evaluations administered each semester give students a voice to evaluate their instructors and their learning. Climate assessments completed in the past five years have covered specialized topics, including student perceptions on tobacco and nicotine use; attitudes around diversity, equity, and inclusion; and most recently on mental health and counseling needs.

At the strategic level, the student experience has been front and center with functional area review and planning in the Student Life Office as evidenced by the 2018 Student Life Office Functional Area Review. This internal review resulted in the creation of five student learning outcomes for programming and services offered by the Student Life and Residence Life operations including Personal Growth, Future Planning, Wellness, Inclusion, and Academic Success. Each semester, staff in the Student Life Office document how their programming efforts align with these student learning outcomes and measure the success of these goals (St.IV.6.5-Student Life Dept Review).

In the fall of 2020, a joint review committee conducted our most recent biennial review of alcohol and drug prevention efforts and compliance with EDGAR Part 86 of the Drug Free Schools, Communities, and Workplaces Acts. Recommendations from this review will directly inform strategic planning of wellness, prevention, and enforcement for the next two years (St.IV.6.6-EDGAR review).

Based on these accomplishments, in the fall of 2020, the President proposed elevating the then Dean of Student Life to an Associate Vice President position. The change was vetted through the College's shared governance system, and the Board of Trustees approved the change effective January 2, 2021

(St.IV.6.7-Student Affairs Reorganization).

As noted, students have a powerful and influential voice at North Country Community College. Our College Senate bylaws (see Standard VII) include the expectation of student representation on the Senate at large as well as Senate committees. Other task forces and working groups likewise include student membership, whenever possible. Additionally, the President and other administrators meet formally and with the SGA executive committee.

Annual surveys, polls, and climate assessments such as those listed above, gather student opinions and feedback that is used directly in decision making and continual improvement efforts from the functional area level up to the administrative level. Other examples of student input collected in the past five years ranges from surveys and forums on dining services and vending (2019), a tobacco-use climate assessment (2018), a diversity, equity, and inclusion climate assessment (2018) and strategic plan (2016), as well as mental health and counseling needs (2018).

The College deeply values shared governance and seeks student representation and participation in elected student government, College Senate meetings, college committees and our Board of Directors for the NCCC Association (auxiliary services). Every opportunity possible to include the student voice at the table is pursued, including our Middle States Standard IV working group on the student experience. Our student membership in shared governance has resulted in meaningful policy decisions, improved access to student support services and helped hold the College administration accountable to its primary constituents – our students. Examples of student input on changes include:

- SGA’s role in determining the Student Activity Fee rate and input on the College Fee Schedule (St.IV.6.8-SGA Fee Minutes).
- Student forums on dining services between 2018-2020 (St.IV.6.9 Student Forum on Dorms).
- Survey on course delivery preferences during pandemic with impacts on Spring 21 and Fall 21 delivery options (St.IV.6.10 Student Survey-Course Delivery-F21).

### **Areas of Strength**

Since inception, one of our greatest strengths as a college has been and remains our people, demonstrated time and again through interactions between our students and employees, often extending beyond title and job responsibilities. Student feedback consistently describes how compassionate and caring our college community is, which is a testament to living and practicing our institutional values of compassion and inclusivity. Our capacity to practice compassion is supported by our student-centered delivery of support services. As many of our employees are tasked with multiple responsibilities and the size of our institution allows for cross-training and shared institutional knowledge, we have built a culture of advisement and coaching students that far exceeds academic advisement and crosses traditional siloed department lines. Each of our employees is an exemplary and compassionate referral agent and the beneficiaries of their strengths are our students.

### **Recommendations for Improvement**

NCCC values and practices shared governance across all operations, however student participation, while welcomed and essential to true student-centeredness, is not always consistently at the forefront. More effort is needed to increase mentorship/sponsorship of students regarding shared governance activities. Ensuring that students have an opportunity have their voice in all discussions that affect them is something we will continue to aspire to. We can amplify the voices of the elected student government and the student trustee by regularly connecting these students with administrative team members as guests in their meetings. This strategy was in practice remotely during the 2020-2021 academic year. The NCCC Association Board of Directors, which oversees the operational side of housing, dining, and the

bookstore, also has four student voting member seats. Virtual attendance options at these board meetings have increased student participation. One strategy to ensure more diverse student representation in shared governance is to establish a Student Voices committee within the College Senate bylaws and create a space for students not restricted by student body election or grade point average to participate. Another strategy is to establish a dining services advisory board comprised primarily of students.

While NCCC prides itself on having unique and effective retention systems, the reporting and tracking mechanisms need improvement. The current system relies on faculty referrals as well as grade reports evaluated by the Retention Specialists to trigger individualized outreach to students who may need academic support. Behavioral referrals follow a similar process. Efficiency will be increased through intentional and designed emphasis on case management and cross-training among departments to assure a holistic approach to student support. Recent enhancements to the retention process include the addition of retention specialists who focus on students in academic jeopardy. Any student identified as “at-risk” by faculty or staff as well as those on academic warning or probation are contacted by one of our retention specialists to identify areas of concern and provide support to help students work through challenges both in and outside of the classroom. Despite this concerted effort, not all students know about or make use of the support available to them. Continuous improvement in how we support students continues to be our aim and will benefit both the students and the college in its efforts to retain and help students graduate or achieve their academic goals.

There are two specific areas of the student experience that NCCC should continue to develop and practice: 1) the work led by our Diversity Task Force (DTF), and 2) services related to counseling and mental health. The Diversity Task Force leads the College in institutionalizing goals related to diversity, equity and inclusion through the strategic plan, and the Chief Diversity Officer facilitates discussions at all levels around ongoing progress toward these goals. While NCCC and the DTF have worked diligently to ensure our operations are mindful of all individuals, regarding race, gender, neurodiversity, physical disabilities, and mental health challenges, the College will continue efforts to create inclusive practices and assure equity across the College by engaging in a cycle of review of the climate experienced by students and employees. If the pandemic revealed anything, it illustrated that increased counseling and mental health services and activities are needed. Efforts to maximize community resources, partnerships, and design a mechanism to get a sense of how many of our students are in counseling before they come to us will improve our efforts. Data will help us connect students with services and prevent those in need from being left behind.

### **Initial Strategies for Continuous Improvement**

- Continue to make student attendance at meetings possible through virtual means. This may be one of the most valuable lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic related to student engagement.
- The Student Life Office is developing of a virtual Student Leadership Academy that will be non- credit bearing over four to six weeks.
- The CSP 100/Freshman Seminar launched in Fall 2020 through online learning and will continue to be refined and embedded into the culture of new student onboarding.
- The Marketing & Enrollment area in partnership with the Student Affairs area is developing a North Country Navigator process to improve student onboarding. This effort is part of a philosophy shift away from “orientation events” and moving the College toward a model that emphasizes relationship-building and customer service interactions as a process the student navigates with us. A pilot program is launching in the spring of 2021 with anticipated full launch in Fall, 2021.
- We will continue to provide customer service training across the college and to potentially include a regional consortium for clerical and front-line staff and civil service employees.
- We will continue to explore the possibility of a tobacco-free campus policy to improve student

experience. Policy development around disbursement of free nicotine replacement therapy by a tobacco treatment specialist is underway. When launched, such services will align with those related to alcohol and drug abuse to further support the social norming and risk prevention efforts already in place.

- We will develop a mechanism to measure and evaluate the effectiveness of our organizational structure on the student experience – how well are we serving students with our front-line workers/educators, middle managers/directors, and administration?
- We will develop better mechanisms to track usage of student services across multiple service points.
- The College will consider expanding military experience credit.
- We will adopt an improved tracking of referrals in a centralized system: SLATE.
- We will take a close look at data from using multiple measures for placement during the 2020-2021 year, the Academic Policy and Standards Committee will review and make a recommendation for future placement processes.

## Standard V: Educational Effectiveness Assessment

*Assessment of student learning and achievement demonstrates that the institution's students have accomplished educational goals consistent with their program of study, degree level, the institution's mission, and appropriate expectations for institutions of higher education (Middle States Commission on Higher Education Standards of Accreditation, Standard V).*

### Mission Statement

North Country Community College ensures open access to high quality postsecondary education and contributes significantly to the development of our communities by preparing an educated citizenry and skilled workforce. We offer transfer and career programs customized to serve specific individual, community, business, and economic development needs.

NCCC assures a commitment to our mission and student success through systematic assessment of academic programs as well as alignment of resources to support a continual improvement process. Student learning outcomes assessment at the institution, program, and course level provides direct insight into the achievement of degree program outcomes, general education outcomes, and institutional learning goals. Additionally, regular cycles of programmatic review (three-to-five years) prompt changes based on the assessment of previous outcomes to inform future goals and objectives. For most career programs, annual program advisory board meetings are held, providing yet another window into changes occurring in the field, which may then inform changes in the curriculum and/or pedagogy.

Since the early 2000s, in accordance with SUNY and MSCHE guidelines, North Country faculty have assessed general education learning outcomes prior to developing a more comprehensive assessment process that included institutional and program-level learning outcomes beginning in 2011. Multiple turnovers in leadership during the next few years left gaps in academic assessment efforts. In response to NCCC's Periodic Review Report, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education asked for a Monitoring Report with a follow-up visit in 2017. Since that time, significant changes in both the process and nature of academic assessment have led to established expectations and a culture of assessment across programs and academic departments. During the 2017-2018 academic year, faculty and staff focused significant time and effort on systematizing their assessment efforts, including establishing a three-year cycle for student learning outcomes assessment, completing program reviews according to a three to five-year timeline, and engaging in assessment-related faculty meetings and professional development activities. Accomplishments over the last three years include:

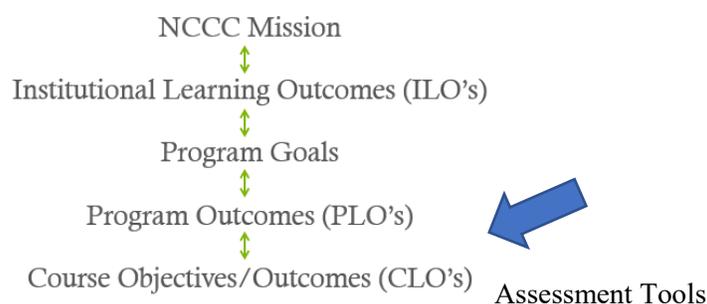
- Systematic assessment of student learning outcomes at the institutional, program, and course levels on a three-year cycle that assures all learning outcomes are assessed regularly
- Establishment of regular assessment days at the beginning and end of each semester to provide professional development, regular updates, and time for department faculty to analyze and discuss assessment plans and results
- Professional development around formative and summative assessment strategies.
- Changes in reporting documents to lessen the documentation demands and allow program faculty more time to analyze the information.
- Shorten the programmatic review cycle to once every three to five years from five to seven years
- Embed assessment regularly into the academic department chair meetings.

Further explanation detailing these efforts according to the respective standards follow below.

**Criterion 1. clearly stated educational goals at the institution and degree/program levels, which are interrelated with one another, with relevant educational experiences, and with the institution’s mission;**

A comprehensive review of institutional and student learning outcomes in 2010-2011 formed the basis for the current College-Wide Goals for student learning, also known as institutional learning outcomes, as described in the 2011 Self-Study document. These outcomes support the larger institutional goal which is to “provide a meaningful and engaging education that prepares students for transfer or career opportunities” and the mission of the College. The College-Wide Goals (institutional learning outcomes) are clearly stated in the college catalog and on the website (St.V.1.1-College-Wide Goals).

Faculty develop programs that fulfill those goals in accordance with the College’s mission, providing relevant educational experiences based on content-area expertise and/or experience in the workforce. Throughout all academic departments, these institutional learning outcomes are integrated into degree programs and certificates that align with State University of New York’s (SUNY) General Education Requirements (SUNY-GER). As described in the Assessment Handbook (St.V.1.2-Assessment Handbook), there are four levels of learning outcomes: Institution, program, course, and general education. Specific program outcomes form the link between assessment of course outcomes (objectives) and the measurement of the broader institutional learning outcomes as illustrated here:



As departments develop those programs and curricula, they follow the (SUNY) process for assuring that programs align with New York State requirements, the mission of both North Country and the State University of New York as well as program expectations across the state. One example of a new program submission that successfully fulfilled the SUNY and New York State Education Department requirements is the AS Child and Family Services degree (St.V.1.3 AS Child-Family-New Program Submission). As seen from this document, prior to approval, all programs must demonstrate rigor, coherence, and a plan for assessing student learning outcomes. Additionally, all degree program requirements align with SUNY’s General Education program to ensure that students complete the requisite credits for each degree type, which are shown in the chart below.

Requirements by Degree Type

Degree Type	College-Wide Learning Goals	General Education Subject Areas	Liberal Arts Credits
AA	7/7	7/10	45 credits
AS	7/7	7/10	30 credits
AAS	7/7	5/10	20 credits

General Education Subject Areas	Required Competencies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Basic Communication (Required)</li> <li>• Mathematics (Required)</li> <li>• American History</li> <li>• Other World Civilizations</li> <li>• Foreign Language</li> <li>• Social Sciences</li> <li>• Humanities</li> <li>• The Arts</li> <li>• Natural Sciences</li> <li>• Western Civilization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critical Thinking</li> <li>• Information Management</li> </ul>

As mentioned in Standard III, in the spring of 2021, SUNY distributed a draft revision of the General Education Requirements across the system (St.V.1.4-SUNY General Education Revision). We anticipate a final version of those requirements during the 2021-2022 academic year. Academic departments will revise institutional, program, and course-level outcomes in accordance with the new requirements. In viewing the draft document, significant revisions are forthcoming, providing an opportunity to re-evaluate program design, revise curriculum maps, and consider new methods of assessing those outcomes.

**Criterion 2. organized and systematic assessments, conducted by faculty and/or appropriate professionals, evaluating the extent of student achievement of institutional and degree/program goals. Institutions should:**

- a. **define meaningful curricular goals with defensible standards for evaluating whether students are achieving those goals;**

Curricular standards fall within the purview of the faculty and in conjunction with a shared governance model that includes representation on a curriculum committee from stakeholders across disciplines. Program proposals that include goals and outcomes move through the curricular process both within and across departments when they are developed or changed. Minor wording changes can be approved at the department level, while any significant changes move from the department to the curriculum committee, and then to the College Senate for further peer review. Faculty continually assess and update curricula to maintain relevancy and integrate new information into course content and objectives. In response to external recommendations and departmental discussions, 26% of programs revised their learning outcomes between 2018-2020. Other curricular revisions, program proposals, and course outline updates keep a full agenda for the Curriculum Committee during the academic year. The following chart provides the number of curricular changes over the last four years.

**Curricular Actions Per Year**

2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021
30	45	49	25	43

The Curriculum Committee is one of the busiest college committees, constantly reviewing and updating programs and courses. Individual departments have, in the past five years, reviewed course outlines to ensure that they were up to date. Several new courses and new degree programs and tracks have been created in the last ten years, along with new courses within programs (St.V.2a.1-New Programs-Tracks). For example, to enhance the curriculum, the Science department added introductory biology and chemistry courses for students who need further development of their science knowledge. Another new

addition to the curriculum was the Introduction to Health Careers course that helps students interested in allied health careers to better navigate their options. Seventy-three percent of students currently in either the certificate or Health Science program have an active application in one of the allied health programs. Many of the students in the program are working to improve their GPA to be admitted to a competitive program; however, not all of those students will be successful. Providing them with viable alternatives and the option to finish a two-year degree in Health Science or a one-year certificate provides a pathway for students to continue their education. Over the last two years, the Radiologic Technology department has recommended that students who plan to take classes with the goal of admission to Radiologic Technology enroll in the Health Science certificate program, providing them with the option of completing both the certificate and the Radiology program. If a student does not continue with Radiologic Technology, they still have a pathway to a higher degree and completion of a one-year certificate (St.V.2a.2-Allied Health Flowchart).

Measurement of program outcomes occurs at the level of course outcomes, while curriculum maps establish the link between course, program, general education, and institutional outcomes. Each program maintains a curriculum map to track the measurement of outcomes to the course(s) in which it is measured. Based on the program, curriculum maps may appear simple or quite complex. NCCC allows for differences in the structure of curriculum maps provided the alignment between courses and outcomes is clear. Different programs require variation in formats to ensure the documents are useful and relevant for the programs using them. For example, the AA Liberal Arts: Humanities & Social Science curriculum map illustrates the crossover among program goals, program learning outcomes, general education, and institutional outcomes in one map. Given the large numbers of courses associated with each learning outcome across general education categories, the structure of the curriculum map is much different from that of other programs yet serves the same purpose. The map also includes a full list of courses associated with each outcome along with the method of measurement and alignment with general education requirements (St.V.2a.3-HUM-SS Curriculum Map). Another example is the curriculum map from the Human Services program. While quite different in form, the map provides a comprehensive guide for faculty to schedule and document assessments (St.V.2a.4-HUS Curriculum Map). As noted above, institutional learning outcomes (general education) are also assessed in the applied associate degree programs (AAS). The following chart illustrates the infusion of institutional learning outcomes into the Associate Degree in Nursing Program.

<b>Institutional Learning Outcomes</b>	<b>Nursing Program Requirements</b>
Critical, Constructive, & Creative Thinking	ENG 101; PSY 101; PSY 202; infused across Nursing courses
Scientific Literacy	BIO 109; BIO 201; BIO 215; BIO 216; infused across Nursing courses
Information Literacy	ENG 101; NUR 101 (Seminar); infused across Nursing courses
Mathematical Competency	MAT 121; NUR 101; infused across Nursing courses
Social & Cultural Literacy	NUR 101; NUR 104; PSY 101; PSY 202 infused across Nursing courses
Communication	ENG 101; NUR 101; NUR 202; NUR 203; infused across Nursing courses

### **Institutional Learning Outcomes**

As referenced in Standard III, the institutional learning outcomes (known as College-Wide Goals at NCCC), align with the SUNY General Education Requirements (SUNY-GER) assuring the infusion of general education across degree programs. The College-Wide Goals are assessed on three-year cycle in coordination with program learning outcomes with two goals assessed per year:

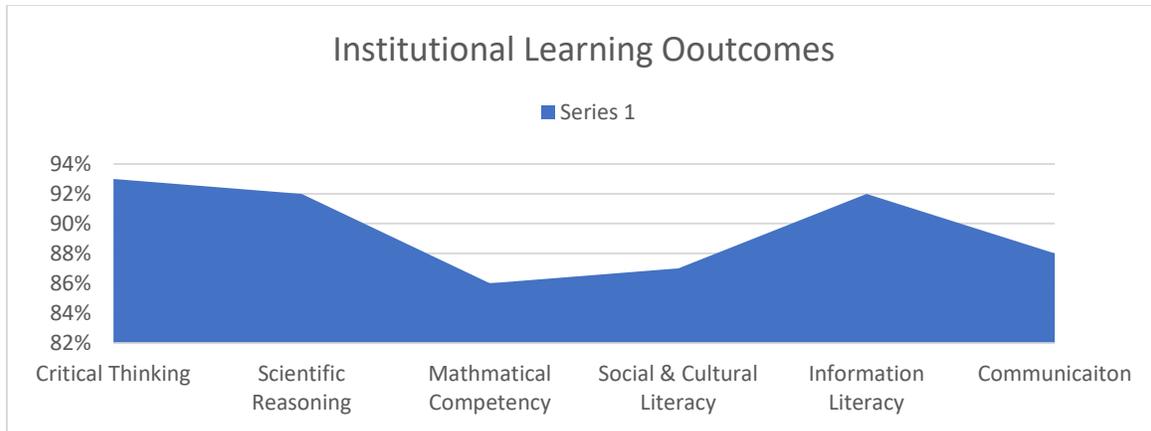
College-Wide Goals for Student Learning: 2017-2020		
1. Critical, Constructive & Creative Thinking	2018-2019	78%
2. Scientific Literacy	2017-2018	88%
3. Mathematical Competency	2019-2020	78%
4. Social & Cultural Literacy	2017-2018	70%
5. Communication	2018-2019	84%
6. Information Literacy	2019-2020	76%

Upon review of the data in certain categories such as Scientific Literacy (88%) and Communication (84%), faculty commented on higher assessment results than what they observe in class performance and compared with grade distributions. A number of factors contribute to this disparity: 1) assessment tools (discussed below with regard to scientific method); 2) students in competitive programs such as Nursing and Radiologic Technology make up a larger percentage of students in the sample; and 3) small sample sizes during earlier assessment cycles. The adoption of assessment software over the last year will allow for larger data sets to be collected for each round of assessment. During one of the last “in-person” assessment days prior to the pandemic, faculty discussed the difficulty of assessing three of the outcomes in our College-Wide Goals, those of Civic Responsibility and Leadership, Financial Literacy, and Ability to Listen Effectively. In the current political and cultural climate, all three of those outcomes are relevant, essential, and important for students to learn. Faculty discussed ways to assess them, one of which was to engage the Student Affairs office to see how to collaborate around assessing these outcomes. This will be a goal and priority for us moving forward.

Student perceptions of engagement with the College-Wide Goals reinforces the assessment results presented above as students report that experiences at North Country contribute significantly to their knowledge and skill development in each area. The following results represent student responses to NCCC’s Student Opinion Survey from the Spring 2020 semester (St.V.2a.5-NCCC Student Opinion Survey):

#### **Q38: Institutional Learning Outcomes: How much have your experiences at NCCC contributed to knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas?**

- Critical Thinking: 93% either somewhat (47%) or very much (46%)
- Scientific Reasoning: 92% either somewhat (47%) or very much (46%)
- Mathematical Competency: 86% either somewhat (44%) or very much (42%)
- Social & Cultural Literacy: 87% either somewhat (48%) or very much (39%)
- Communication: 88% either somewhat (44%) or very much (44%)
- Information Literacy: 92% either somewhat (44%) or very much (48%)



### Program Outcomes Assessment

Similar to the institutional outcomes, program outcomes are formally assessed on a three-year rotating schedule to measure whether students are achieving those goals (St.V.2a.6- Schedule for Program Outcomes). There are variations on the frequency with which programs evaluate their learning outcomes; some programs choose to gather and assess learning outcomes each semester and each year. Other departments and programs have opted to stagger their assessments based on frequency of offerings and numbers of students in programs. For example, in the Math/Science degree program, the scientific method is assessed each semester in lab courses. Nursing, Radiologic Technology, and Massage Therapy also assess outcomes annually. Regardless of how programs collect data, each outcome must be assessed within a three-year period, and based on the results, changes are made.

In most cases, course-level outcomes form the basis upon which program-level outcomes are assessed. The following steps illustrate the process at NCCC:

- Step 1: Identify the program learning outcomes scheduled for the semester/year (See schedule for Program Outcomes)
- Step 2: Submit course-level assessment plan (St.V.2a.7 Course-level Assessment Plan) to the Interim Vice President for Academic Affairs (previously to the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs)
- Step 3: Evaluate assessments
- Step 4: Submit results
- Step 5: Submit Informal Assessment Report (St.V.2a.8 Informal Assessment Report)
- Step 6: Discuss results within academic departments/faculty assessment days

- b. articulate how they prepare students in a manner consistent with their mission for successful careers, meaningful lives, and, where appropriate, further education. They should collect and provide data on the extent to which they are meeting these goals;**

As stated in the College’s mission, North Country “provides open access to high quality academic programs that prepare students for transfer and career success.” Both within and outside of degree programs, programming creates opportunities for students to apply knowledge gained through their college experience, preparing them for a career or higher education. Fifty percent of the associate degrees

offered prepare students to transfer (AA and AS degrees) while fifty percent prepare students to enter the workforce (AAS degrees). Six certificate programs align with workforce needs and provide the opportunity for gainful employment in our communities, but also allow students to progress to a higher degree using credits earned in the certificate programs.

Within degree programs, clinical requirements, internship opportunities, and community service-oriented activities enhance the classroom experience to provide opportunities for practical application of knowledge and exposure to workplace settings within career fields. The allied health career programs (Radiologic Technology, Nursing, Massage) do this through clinical skills labs, clinical placements, and assessments (St.V.2b.1-Nursing, RT, MT clinical requirements). As mentioned above, nursing students develop preliminary skills in clinical labs prior to entering area hospitals and long-term care facilities. Radiologic Technology students also practice skills in an on-campus radiology lab prior to spending most of their sophomore year in the clinical setting. The Massage Therapy clinic on campus remains a popular destination for students, faculty, and staff, as well as community members who can receive student massages at a discounted rate. Students develop the professional skills needed as independent therapists while working with clients in the clinic. Programs such as Human Services and Chemical Dependency Counseling include internship programs and site visits to introduce students to the services available within our local communities. Formative and summative assessments help students connect classroom content with experiential learning (St.V.2b.2-Site Visit-Rubric-Internship).

Three of the College's degree programs use the Adirondack region as a laboratory. The Environmental Science and Environmental Studies students collect lab samples, evaluate wetlands, and identify various species throughout the park as part of the program. The Wilderness Recreation Leadership program does this through practicum trips into the backcountry, one of which is a 30-day wilderness backpacking trip, a unique experience even among higher education outdoor programs (St.V.2b.3- WRL Practicum Rubric). Another career-focused opportunity within the Wilderness Recreation Leadership program allows students to obtain a New York State Guide License through the REC 236 course (WRL). Based on recommendations from the WRL Advisory Board, the program director created REC 236 in 2014. Upon completion of the course and successful performance on the New York State Guide exam, students receive a NYS Guide License in specialty areas such as whitewater rafting, rock and ice climbing, and fishing. Since instituting the course, 21 students have obtained a NYS Guide License in one of the specialty areas.

Program advisory boards, specific to each AAS program provide valuable feedback and insight into the changing needs and dynamics within the regional workforce. Three recent examples of integrated recommendations adopted from advisory board input include the Business, Computer Graphics, and Human Services departments. In the 18-19 year, the Human Services Department incorporated training with the electronic records system for the AAS Human Services and AAS Chemical Dependency Counseling programs. Advisory board members indicate that using electronic medical records remains a difficult, but essential skill for new practitioners in the field and earlier experience within coursework would improve workplace readiness. By the second year of implementation, student performance on that measure increased by 5%. During the Spring 2021 Human Services Advisory Board meeting, one community-service provider suggested including a Peer Advocate Specialist certification as an option for students to enhance the other applied learning opportunities within the program. The Human Services Department created a new course to facilitate this new certification option. Suggestions from the Computer Graphics Advisory Board identified needs among small, local businesses for employees with

not only computer graphics and design skills, but employees who had more general skills in the marketing and business areas. The Art and Business Departments are currently collaborating to create a certificate program that incorporates artistic design, digital competencies to create those designs, as well as the business, advertising, and marketing skills identified by employers. Lastly, on the recommendation from the last Office Technology Program Review and recent Business Advisory Board feedback, the Business Department created a “menu” of non-credit training options for their employees (St.V.2b.4-NCCC Means Business). Marketing of this option began during the Spring 2021 semester in the Malone area. Interest from area businesses indicates a need and opportunity for the College and area businesses to collaborate and increase skill sets for current employees.

Academic advisement, student activities, student government opportunities, as well as student clubs help support professional and personal growth throughout the student’s experience. Faculty members serve as advisors within the student’s degree program, providing academic support, career guidance, and serving as a general liaison to the College when necessary. In career-track programs, the faculty typically have experience working in the career field, along with contacts and resources that enrich the student advising experience. Individual advisement sessions for course registration, transfer information, and career support help students connect with those faculty members. In 2016, the College used SUNY and Perkins funding to support a Career Services Coordinator position, further enhancing career services support in three key areas: administering the STRONG Interest Inventory across career-focused programs, connecting students with local employers, and continuing to work closely with regional workforce development partners. In the fall of 2020, the career and transfer services moved back under the Student Affairs area of the College to build upon that groundwork. This is a return to a previous structure at the College, providing linkages and alignments between the Academic and Student Affairs areas. Student clubs such as Nursing, Art, Human Services, Massage, Environmental, Drama, Veterans, LGBTQ+ contribute significantly to the learning environment, both on and off campus, connecting students with each other and within our communities through community service projects and outreach

With a foundation of liberal arts courses across all programs, including the applied associate degrees, many students enrolled in allied health programs, Human Services, Criminal Justice, and Business successfully transfer to earn a higher degree in those fields. From the SUNY Business Intelligence Dashboard, schools can track transfer data within the system. Looking back to the fall of 2013, 56.77% of all student transfers did so within the SUNY system, and in most cases, within the north country region. In addition to the SUNY Seamless Transfer Policy that facilitates transfer among SUNY institutions, NCCC has a number of articulation agreements both within and outside of SUNY (St.V.2b.5-Articulation Agreements). Unique among those articulation agreements is a “2+2” agreement with Paul Smith’s College, a small private school twelve miles from the Saranac Lake Campus. Students who complete their two-year degree at North Country can transfer to Paul Smith’s College and attend at a much-reduced rate that mirrors that of a public institution (St.V.2b.6-Paul Smith’s Articulation). Admittedly, the College has struggled with tracking data for students who transfer outside of the SUNY system. With limited resources in both information technology and institutional research, the data we currently gather is based on sources other than internal. One of the goals of this Self-Study is to increase capacity in both areas in order to fully support the data and IT infrastructure needs of the College. With the onset of COVID-19, IT needs overshadowed those of institutional research. Establishing more robust research capacity remains an institutional priority and as noted in Standard VI, plans to search for a Director of Institutional Research were put on hold in March of 2020. We will continue to pursue that

goal moving forward.

**c. support and sustain assessment of student achievement and communicate the results of this assessment to stakeholders;**

**Sustainability**

Building upon the work faculty have done over the last number of years, academic departments, in concert with the administration, worked to assure that assessment processes were sustainable and demonstrated use of the results to improve teaching and learning across programs as seen in the examples above. We were successful in doing so, but the manual process for submitting, collating, and tallying assessment results remained a major impediment to quickly turning around data and results. In the spring of 2019, we adopted the Blackboard Goals module and piloted the program with members of the Social Science, Humanities, and Art departments. The module works well for extracting course reports, program-level outcomes, and alignment with institutional learning outcomes. The course reports also provide ancillary assessments for faculty, providing information such as the number of hours each student is active in the course through the learning management system. While this is not always a reliable measure of activity, it provides more evidence to assess course engagement overall (St.V.2c.1-Course Reports from ART/ENG).

While the Blackboard Goals module was a major improvement, after evaluating reports from the Spring and Fall 2019 semesters, we determined that the reporting process could be better integrated, more sophisticated, and more efficient with the adoption of a comprehensive assessment function called the EAC Visual Data module, which integrates into the Blackboard LMS. As with the Goals module, the EAC Visual Data program aligns all outcomes from the level of assignment, exam, or rubric with program and institutional outcomes (St.V.2c.2-EAC Goal Alignment). The College purchased the upgraded module and planned the implementation for the spring 2020 semester (St.V.2c.3 -Email Exchange BB). Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated as we scheduled department meetings to adopt the program. Not to be dissuaded, the Nursing Department met with the Blackboard consultant for an introductory meeting in May of 2020; however, we were unable to schedule more than that given all the disruption due to the shift to remote learning. Additionally, it seemed unwise to change the reporting process at that time. Implementation has continued slowly during the 20-21 academic year as faculty adapted to the new pedagogical expectations of remote learning. Continued training on submitting data and extracting reports through the EAC module will continue for the 2021-2022 academic year. Despite the disappointing delay in fully adopting the new system, assessments continued for the 2020-2021 academic year in two different formats. After in-house training sessions in December 2020, faculty had the option to submit results via the EAC module or through an Excel template with individual course rosters (St.V.2c.4-PP Assessment Reporting FA20). While reporting procedures change, faculty continue to assess, plan, and analyze the results of their assessments to enhance learning.

**Comprehensive Program Review**

Programs undergo both internal and external reviews, formal and informal. A formal program review occurs every three to five years, conducted by department chairs and faculty. The internal program review reports then undergo an external review by individuals from transfer institutions, and if relevant to the program, by regional workforce representatives (AAS programs). All AAS programs also include annual

advisory board meetings as venues where student achievement and related metrics are communicated and ways to improve are suggested (St.V.2c.5-Advisory Boards). This invaluable information informs program changes, and the regular advisory boards assure an opportunity for input and feedback from education and workforce partners. Informal reviews of student achievement occur within and among academic departments to discuss curricular changes, achievement successes and gaps, as well as persistence and retention. Program-level data and student achievement in the areas of persistence, retention, progress toward graduation, and licensure pass rates are reported directly to stakeholders including academic departments, Board of Trustees, SUNY, and accrediting bodies where appropriate. This information is also available via the Student Consumer Information page on the website (St.V.2c.6-Student Right to Know). One area identified as needing improvement includes easier and more real-time access to that information for program faculty and departments. All information is available via IPEDS and SUNY, but not with the frequency that allows for nimbler changes to be made when evaluating and assessing trends. Improving access to data with systems that are intuitive and customizable remains an institutional priority.

**Criterion 3. consideration and use of assessment results for the improvement of educational effectiveness. Consistent with the institution’s mission, such uses include some combination of the following:**

**a. assisting students in improving their learning;**

Formative and summative assessments provide the basis for faculty to adjust the design and delivery of course material to reinforce effective learning behaviors and strategies. While the examples provided in Criterion 2a demonstrate assisting students to improve their learning, the following examples of assessment-based changes provide a snapshot of the continuous improvement processes occurring more broadly across academic departments:

In addition to the more formalized assessments, faculty members incorporate formative assessments to adjust and analyze changing needs in the classroom. Many faculty members also perform statistical analyses of student performance on tests relative to their homework or study group attendance and present this information in the aggregate to students. For example, they may determine that students who attended study sessions or completed a practice test had an average test grade that was ten points higher than students who did not. These assessments and presentations to students help demonstrate the value of the various learning tools that are available to encourage students to use them. Regular and substantive feedback combined with clear due dates on comprehensive projects such as research projects and papers help pace students appropriately to reduce procrastination and improve understanding of process and content.

Cataloging all these informal changes occurring among departments has been and remains a challenge. In 2017-2018, the addition of the Informal Assessment Report provided a means by which to better capture changes made in response to formative and informal assessment observations as they happen within a semester. These dialogues have happened continually over the years but were not seen as “assessment” due to their subjective nature, leading to gaps in documentation. The introduction of this document created a space for faculty to highlight the reflective nature of how they analyze and adjust teaching strategies to improve student learning (St.V.3a.1-Ex. Informal Assessment Report).

All faculty are required to offer regular office hours (previously in person, but now online using Zoom or Collaborate or some other online conferencing tool). These office hours provide opportunities for a more personal assessment and, where needed, tutorial for students on course materials that may present difficulties. Many faculty report that through these individual office hour appointments they capture additional information on what material students, in general, may find challenging, allowing for adjustments in teaching style or pace where needed. The Learning Assistance Center also works with students on time management and study skills, how to analyze dense material within a textbook, use flashcards, and check their math so that they can become better learners outside of tutoring sessions. In 2017, several faculty participated in a group read of *A Mind for Numbers* by Barbara Oakley and/or participated in her *Learning How to Learn* course on Coursera and have incorporated some of the evidence-based learning techniques into their lectures, sharing that information with students either in an introduction to the course or while helping them students prepare for tests.

**b. improving pedagogy and curriculum;**

Faculty across programs discuss assessment results and evaluate student achievement to improve pedagogy and revise curriculum. A few notable examples of the interrelationship between assessment of program outcomes and pedagogical improvements include the Humanities, Social Science, and Science departments. The Humanities Department conducts norming sessions to ensure consistent grading of written work throughout English courses and agreement on writing standards. Comprehensive research papers provide assessment results for two of the College-Wide Goals: Critical, Constructive, & Creative Thinking and Communication. The writing standards form the basis for a comprehensive tool provided for all faculty to reference for assessing research and essay writing across the disciplines (St.V.3b.1-*Humanities Department Assessment Handbook*).

Also within the liberal arts area, the Social Science Department regularly assesses research and analytical skills across required and heavily subscribed to courses at both the 100 and 200-course levels (St.V.3b.2-SS Research Assignment). A sample rubric provided to all faculty teaching those classes ensures consistency across course sections (St.V.3b.3-SS Research Project Rubric). Understanding hypothesis, peer-reviewed papers, and research methodology proves difficult for many students in 100-level courses. The Social Science faculty met to discuss revising the research assignment to improve understanding among students as evidenced in the minutes from an Assessment Day meeting in the fall of 2018 (St.V.3b.4-SS Meeting Minutes). The research project scaffolds learning by evaluating each component individually. Once students understand the vocabulary and methodology, they are better prepared for the research paper required at the 200-level. Research writing skills remain among the most difficult to master for entering college students. Repetition and application of these skills and concepts across disciplines reinforces the information leading to better retention of information and synthesis of knowledge.

Students are further exposed to hypothesis analysis in Natural Science courses through evaluation of the scientific method, one of the core concepts taught and assessed within the Science Department. Recent assessments in 2017-2018 produced high scores as the assessment measure included mostly multiple choice and vocabulary recognition. The department faculty revised the assessment tool to include more rigor in a longer, more complex multiple-choice quiz for the 2018-2019 assessment, and the results can be seen on the PLO tracking sheet for Math-Science. The highlighted columns discuss the revision of the

tool as well as the corresponding results (St.V.3b.5-Results Scientific Method 2017-2019). For the 2019-2020 assessment of the scientific method, some faculty employed a third assessment measure that included a project-based assignment. Students met or exceeded expectations on the objective assessment but fell short of the expected benchmark for the project as seen in the course-level results (St.V.3b.6-Scientific Method Project Comparison Fa19). This measurement comes from a 100-level introductory Biology course, so those results are not unexpected. Analysis of the scientific method evaluation of research vocabulary and development of a thesis statement form a synergy across disciplines reinforcing key concepts of academic inquiry.

Faculty across departments focus on incorporating educational research into adjusting and fine-tuning their pedagogies. Professional development workshops supported these efforts to improve pedagogy and curriculum design. Recent examples include workshops on growth mindset research, trauma-informed teaching methods, flipped classroom structures, universal learning design and strategies for teaching neuro-diverse students. As noted above, many faculty focus on strategies to help students develop a growth mindset as a core concept for all students, but especially in the area of developmental education. As described in the chart below, approximately half the incoming student population places into developmental courses in either English, math, or both.

Percentage of Placement in Developmental Courses					
	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021
English	58%	47%	53%	51%	66%
Math	47%	35%	54%	45%	55%

Improving student performance in developmental courses remains a primary goal for both the math and English departments. In 2015-2016, the English department instituted a lab component into both ENG 100 (developmental English) and ENG 101 (English Composition). This allows for faculty to provide guided support while students compose essays, perform research, and revise their writing (St.V.3b.7-ENG Contact Hour change). In 2017, with assistance from a SUNY grant through the Carnegie Foundation, the Math Department adopted the Quantway curriculum, which uses a growth mindset philosophy to drive pedagogy. This developmental math curriculum integrates neuroscience around effective learning strategies into the curriculum and uses a collaborative approach to working through math problems, drawing on social/emotional support through group work. Early results showed success, but low enrollments across three campuses proved difficult to sustain.

Within certain programs and courses, faculty have established minimum thresholds for achievement. For example, after assessing student progress and success in courses such as ENG 101(English Composition I) and MAT 121(Elementary Statistics) and MAT 129 (Intermediate Algebra), departments observed a strong correlation between achievement of a “C- “or higher in a developmental course and success in college-level courses. The Math and English departments determined that students must achieve an overall grade of C- or higher in ENG 100 and MAT 100 (both development courses) prior to progressing to the next level. This provides students with a stronger foundation upon which to scaffold learning. To assure readiness for clinical settings, the Nursing Program conducts a critical math assessment in which students must prove proficiency with dosing calculations. These assessments have undergone multiple iterations of restructuring to ensure students are prepared for these math assessments, from a one-credit Math for Meds course to organized study groups with tutors in the Learning Assistance Center. They also

conduct regular evaluations to assess nursing lab skills (with manikins) to ensure they are ready to work with patients in the clinical setting.

Over the last two years, faculty from multiple departments participated in On Course workshops that focus on integrating effective learning strategies into class pedagogies with a similar philosophy as the Quantway curriculum. The newly revised College Success Program (first-year seminar) follows this model as described in Standard III. After the rapid transition to remote learning, in July of 2020, we compensated faculty to participate Open SUNY Course Quality Review (OSCQR) rubric training through the SUNY Center for Professional Development (St.V.3b.8-OSCQR). Since that workshop, many faculty have integrated the concepts of universal learning design into their courses. While we have not standardized a course design for all faculty, follow-up training on Universal Learning Design will happen over the 2021-2020 academic year.

**c. reviewing and revising academic programs and support services;**

Academic programs and support services regularly review and assess processes to evaluate effectiveness and make recommendations for improvement. For academic programs, this formally occurs in a comprehensive review every three-to-five years and for support services, yearly reports highlight activities and efforts aimed at improving student learning. Program reviews include comprehensive program information including enrollment trends, student demographics, curricular design and revisions, program assessments, budgets, and external reviews from other community college faculty, transfer institution faculty, and where relevant, workforce partners.

Academic programs regularly review and revise course requirements as well as objectives within courses to align with program and institutional learning outcomes. Input and feedback from department faculty, students, and advisory boards drive these changes. One recent example to come out of an Office of Addiction Services and Support (OASAS) program review is that the Chemical Dependency Counseling program omitted PSY 265: Personality as a requirement and now requires PSY 130: Psychology of Personal Growth. Also, in the Human Services area, feedback from the advisory board regarding electronic medical records led to incorporating that training into the Human Services and Chemical Dependency Counseling program curriculum (St.V.3c.1-HUS Advisory Board Minutes). The Health Science program has undergone numerous revisions to make the degree more flexible and allow for more elective options, serving students who transfer into a variety of health science-related programs. The Art Department recently reviewed requirements in the Fine Arts and Computer Graphics programs, adding new courses, such as Typography, and removing courses that did not align with transfer requirements or job placement needs. Departmental determination of prerequisites and corequisites for courses are based on experience and data from student success.

Over the last five years, the College reinstated a regular cycle of program review and provide a timeline for each review for program faculty. A few reviews have been delayed due to COVID-19, one of which is Massage Therapy. The internal review has been underway, but the external review is postponed until reviewers can tour the on-campus massage clinic. Additionally, the three business programs and two computer graphics programs scheduled for review completion during the 2020-2021 academic year are delayed until 2021-2022 due to the pandemic. Both reviews are underway, but external reviews will take place during the 2021-2022 academic year (St.V.3c.2-Program Review Timeline 2019-2024).

Program reviews provide valuable opportunities for peer review and exchange of ideas. Over the last few years, programs have implemented internal and external recommendations. All aspects of the program comprise the review process including the program history, changes made since last review, curricular changes, student profile and demographic information, enrollment, budget, summary reports on assessment, and an external review team visit. Assessment results from the previous years are collated into a summary report as part of program review process. A few examples included here are the AAS Radiologic Technology Review (St.V.3c.3-RT Review), the AS Health Science Review (St.V.3c.4-HEA Review), and the AA Liberal Arts: Humanities Social Science Review (St.V.3c.5-HUM-SS Review). Throughout the last five years, departments incorporated many recommendations into their programs as demonstrated by the “closing the loop” chart (St.V.3c.6-External Program Review Rec.).

Academic support services are largely provided by the Learning Assistance Centers on all three campuses, including tutoring, study skills support, ADA-504 services, as well as retention specialists who support students struggling with academic performance. Through an online referral system, faculty can request assistance for students struggling with study skills, time management, organization, or course content. The LAC coordinators then connect students with tutors and facilitate study groups. In addition to tutors and study coaches, as described in Standards III and IV, the College created a new position, Retention Specialist, to increase outreach and support for students who may have non-academic challenges. While originally funded through a Perkins grant, the College maintains these positions based on the increased GPA for students who worked with the Retention Specialists (St.V.3c.8-Retention reports). Support services for students in need of accommodations are facilitated by our ADA/504 coordinator and supported by our Learning Assistance Centers, which provide private testing locations and test readers. Another support service that has been running for several years is the Athlete Mentoring Program (AMP) which keeps track of academic performance of athletes to help them maintain their eligibility. It is proactive rather than reactive and involves the collaboration of teaching faculty, coaches, and the LAC. For several years, the AMP program solicited academic reports from faculty, but has recently allowed coaches access to student-athlete academic information. This change, prompted by the Athletic Department and presented to the faculty, will be evaluated during the 2021-2022 academic year as the change was implemented as a pilot for the spring 2021 semester.

Advisors work one-on-one with every student every semester to help them choose a course load that meets requirements for their degree, while considering all elements that contribute to their success. Gathering critical information about students’ long and short-term goals for higher education, entering the workforce, participating in athletics, or commitments outside of class contribute to designing a schedule that allows for success. Advisors work closely with the Financial Aid Office to ensure that financial concerns do not prevent a student from attending if at all possible. There is no formal system for assessing advisement, though faculty have created quick reference resources to help advisors avoid common pitfalls in advising and set students up for the best chance of success (St.V.3c.9-Advising ‘Cheat Sheet’). Departments create flowcharts such as the Math Progression chart (St.V.3c.10-Math Progression), advisement for students who place into developmental course work (St.V.3c.11-Advising for ENG100-MAT095) and a Pre-Allied Health Flow Chart for students planning to apply to the allied health programs (St.V.3c.12-PreAllied Health Flow Chart). Faculty also often serve as cheerleaders for their students, encouraging them to apply to transfer programs, sending them information, and writing recommendations. The personal connections and support that many faculty and staff provide to students help them to feel seen and cared for and help motivate and inspire them to succeed. To support these efforts the Advising Committee is in the process of overhauling the Advising Handbook to incorporate

new processes. The goal is to provide all pertinent information for advisors and students on the website for ease of use. This work aligns with the project to create an online, interactive catalog using the website software, OU Campus.

**d. planning, conducting, and supporting a range of professional development activities.**

Developing internal expertise in areas of assessment remains an important component of professional development for the academic area. In order to provide a comprehensive overview of the many facets of assessment for NCCC faculty, in January of 2018, Dr. Deborah Moeckel and Dr. Kristina Bendikas (SUNY Assistant Provosts) traveled to the North Country for a full-day presentation and workshop on assessment. In preparation for the workshop, we sent them an overview of the “state of assessment” at NCCC in 2018 (St.V.3d.1- Assessment Overview for Asst. Provosts). Prior to that, while assessment occurred regularly in programs, the process was not systematic. This workshop reinforced the foundational concepts of assessment and initiated the practice of creating an “Assessment Day” at the beginning and end of each semester within the academic calendar to focus on assessment. The administration incorporated assessment days into the faculty work schedule to demonstrate the importance of the process and commit resources to a sustainable process. The beginning of each Assessment Day begins with a full faculty gathering to review assessment practices and share results from the previous assessments and/or initiatives. The remainder of the day is set aside for departments to review assessment from the previous semester and plan for the next (St.V.3d.2.-PP for Assessment Days). During the January 2020 Assessment Day, the entire faculty participated in a norming session using the AACU Value Rubric for Information Literacy in preparation for assessment of that College-Wide Goal for the 2019-2020 academic year. Using sample research papers from students in 200-level social science courses, faculty first evaluated the papers individually using the rubric, and then gathered in groups to discuss results and determine a group assessment of each paper (St.V.3d.3-Email Jan.21).

Over the last three years, the College has committed more resources toward professional development. Feedback from faculty indicate two main areas where professional development activities were needed to improve learning and expand on their assessments: 1) increasing student engagement in course content to improve understanding and retention of important concepts, and 2) development of varying assessment tools for measurement. Throughout the 2018-2019 academic year, workshops revolved around student engagement, creating conditions in which students can learn most effectively, and using assessment measures more effectively. These workshops identified how to write lesson objectives to align more clearly with course-level objectives, using AACU Value rubrics to calibrate measurement of those outcomes, improving item analysis, building community in online/hybrid courses, building classroom community through formative assessments, creating a trauma-sensitive classroom environment, and integrating social and cultural literacy-focused learning opportunities across the curriculum. In addition to the ongoing workshop throughout the year, as part of the format for Assessment Day activities during the Spring 2019 semester, we offered four rotating workshops for faculty to choose from. Topics were based on assessment results and faculty feedback. These workshops included: *Innovative Ideas to Enhance Critical and Creative Thinking in the Classroom*; *Using Rubrics to Assess Assignments, Essays, Projects*; *Increasing Class Participation through Games*; *Why Aren't We Getting Through?* (St.V.3d.5-Collection of Professional Development Workshop Descriptions).

The question of how to engage and motivate students to learn remains one of the most popular

discussions at faculty meetings and in more informal conversations around teaching. At NCCC, faculty expressed an interest in exploring innovative ways to engage students in complex ideas and improve their ability to analyze information. Upon a recommendation from the Malone Learning Assistance Center Coordinator, the Academic Affairs Office researched Dr. Skip Downing's On Course workshops. These workshops focus on student-centered pedagogy that use the latest in neuroscience to maximize conditions under which people learn (St.V.3d.6-On Course Flyer). The techniques can be adapted to any discipline and include ways to embed content into the curriculum that helps students navigate difficult coursework and non-cognitive skills needed for a successful college career. With the help of a SUNY Strong Start to Finish grant, NCCC hosted a two-day, SUNY-wide On Course workshop in August of 2019. Faculty were paid per diem if they chose to participate, and the conference was well-attended with 33% of NCCC's full-time faculty participating along with faculty from ten different SUNY schools. In addition to learning about helpful engagement strategies, the SUNY-wide invitation also served to connect NCCC faculty to colleagues at other colleges across the system. In June of 2021, faculty participated in a virtual On Course workshop that presented many of the same concepts with useful pedagogies for remote learning.

Over the last three years, when possible, the College has increased its funding for professional development as noted in Standard III. Professional development for faculty and staff rose to the top of the priority list as the College developed the 2020-2023 Strategic Plan, assuring that resources will continue to support those efforts.

**e. planning and budgeting for the provision of academic programs and services;**

Budgeting for academic areas has largely focused on funding full-time faculty lines across departments, increasing adjunct faculty pay, and restoring funding for professional development. After some budget concerns in 2015-2016 which led to unfilled positions, three full-time faculty lines were filled in 2017-2018 in the Business, Humanities, and Science departments. Restoration of these positions aligns with both operational and strategic needs in those areas. The Business Department created a certificate in Entrepreneurship and added a Healthcare Administration track to the AS Business Administration. SUNY, and New York State Education Department approved the Entrepreneurship Certificate in February of 2021. The Healthcare Administration track is under review at the New York State Education Department. Three tracks now exist within the AA Liberal Arts: Humanities and Social Science degree including Psychology, English, and Early Childhood Education, providing students with foundational courses in each of the three areas within the liberal arts to provide clearer pathways as students transfer. Additionally, enrollment in science courses as well as continued strong enrollment in allied health and the Health Science programs necessitates financial support for full-time faculty positions. A critical part of the academic planning process in 2017-2018, faculty identified the need to increase pay for adjunct faculty across the College. Increases occurred three years in a row resulting in a 30% increase in adjunct pay for both Adjunct Lecturer I and Lecturer II positions (St.V.3e.1-2017-2020 Strategic Plan Summary).

Apart from staffing budgets, each department chairperson/director is responsible for their budgets. Those are then passed through the VPAA office. The Long-Range and Strategic Planning Committee no longer focuses on individual budgets, so those are analyzed through the VPAA and the Business Office. The committee now focuses on strategic planning and oversight. Therefore, any budgetary issues within departments are mostly determined by the budget manager or chairs/directors in academic departments. Line by line items must be requested from the Business Office comptroller or Chief Financial Officer.

Apart from requests for large equipment purchases or capital expenses, departments plan budgets based on supplies needed (for art studio or science labs), new or replacement equipment, faculty mileage, (for travel between campuses), and printing. The Long-Range and Strategic Planning Committee also reviews fees each year and recommends that programs review their fees three-year cycle, to ensure accuracy.

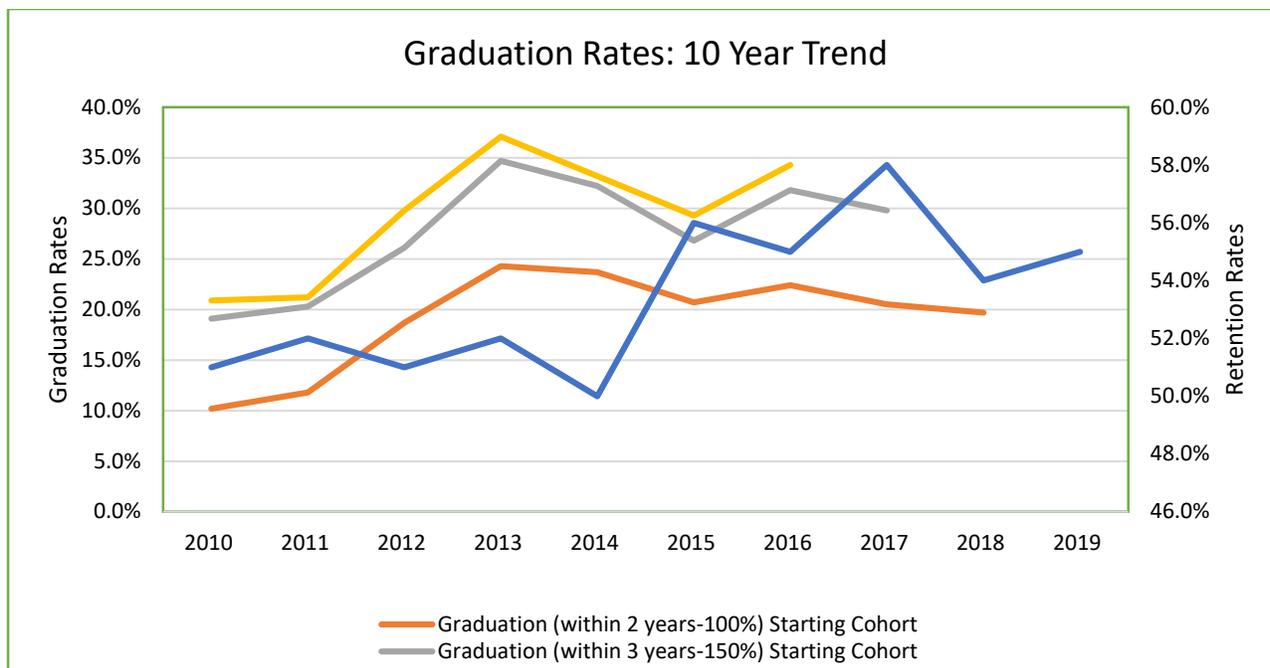
**f. informing appropriate constituents about the institution and its programs;**

Historically, the College recruitment and enrollment outreach focused on representation at college fairs, outreach to local high schools, print, television, and digital media ads as well as information on the website. Over the last few years, initiatives to recruit more directly from local schools and the non-traditional population in our service areas led to hiring two additional staff members: Associate Director of Recruitment for Adult Learners and a combined Admissions Counselor/Men's Soccer Coach position. Marketing and enrollment efforts implemented in 2019, established strategic enrollment plans for five program areas (covering 30% of programs), targeted outreach to non-traditional populations in conjunction with a \$100,000 scholarship provided by the NCCC Foundation created more opportunities for both full and part-time students. Additionally, substantial changes to the website enhanced accessibility and presentation of information across all departments. The Student Consumer Information webpage includes important information for prospective and current students. Analysis of these efforts indicates an increase in website traffic, especially with degree program pages, an increase in applications relative to the strategic marketing of programs, and improvement in conversion rates from application to registration. Continuous improvements in this area will focus on a case management approach with students from the time of application through to graduation (St.V.3f.1-Enrollment Management Report-12.2020).

Community relations also promote and provide information regarding College activities and updates. The President attends local county and state meetings to keep constituents informed about the college. The Director of Communications, in consultation with the administration, and where appropriate, academic departments, sends press releases to local newspapers. Regular meetings between administrators and workforce development partners keep stakeholders aware of new programs and provide valuable feedback for strategic planning in terms of programs and non-credit offerings. Community advisory boards for each of the three campus communities as well as program-specific advisory boards also provide venues for valuable exchanges of information both from and to the College.

**g. improving key indicators of student success, such as retention, graduation, transfer, and placement rates;**

Indicators of student success such as retention, graduation, transfer, and placement demonstrate improvements over the last ten years. In retention rates, we see a modest increase from 2010 to 2020 with an average increase of four percent over those ten years. Graduation rates across all three completion metrics (2-year, 3-year, 4-year completion) increased since 2010 as well as seen in the following chart:



Efforts to improve these key performance indicators continually drive planning at the strategic and operational levels. Student success remains a focal point around which all strategic planning takes place (St.V.3g.1-2017-2020 Strategic Plan). Beginning with a focus on persistence and a strong start as students begin their academic journey improves retention, which in turn leads to increased graduation rates. Continual efforts to contact students regarding academic and social supports, creation of the Retention Specialist position, ongoing professional development and faculty engagement in student learning and student support, as well as assessment of effective teaching and learning strategies contribute to increasing student success as evidenced throughout the report.

**h. implementing other processes and procedures designed to improve educational programs and services;**

Creating an inclusive and supportive environment for students and striving for excellence in customer service across all departments remains a focal point to improve the student experience. The following initiatives serve that goal:

- Creation of a Diversity Task Force to assess and respond to student assessments of campus inclusivity (See Standard IV)
- Revision of the College Success Program to provide students with a strong foundation to begin their college coursework and create communities within those courses to help students feel connected
- Increased use of student surveys to gather feedback and plan for future improvements (St.V.3h.1-NCCC Student Opinion survey).
- Improved and standardized program pages for students to access degree program worksheets (See Standard III and IV)
- Enhancements and improvements to information on paying for college and financial aid processes

(See Standard III and IV)

- Creation of multiple online forms and online verifications to improve efficiencies across Enrollment, Records, Financial Aid, and Business offices
- Adoption of new reporting software (Guardian) for any type of incident requiring documentation, including behavioral and academic incidents, student complaints, and any emergencies. The software allows for more efficient and accurate record-keeping

**Criterion 4. if applicable, adequate and appropriate institutional review and approval of assessment services designed, delivered, or assessed by third-party providers; and**

Not Applicable

**Criterion 5. periodic assessment of the effectiveness of assessment processes utilized by the institution for the improvement of educational effectiveness.**

We have made several improvements and changes based on feedback from department faculty. In an effort to keep as much information on one document as possible, we use an Excel spreadsheet that included learning outcomes for each program, lists of courses in which those outcomes are assessed, semester and year of assessment, along with results by percentage and notes/next steps. While convenient, feedback from faculty indicated that too much information in one place creates confusion. Departments have the option to use the Annual Program Assessment summary template provided by SUNY to translate that information into a more simplified chart (St.V.5.1-Annual Program Assessment Summary). Some programs such as Radiologic Technology and Nursing opted to stay with their current practices for reporting results and changes. At this time, sustainability of the assessment process depends upon faculty's ability to effectively use results. As long as assessment is systematic and organized, standardization of reporting documents across programs is not essential, but engagement of faculty in the discussion and use of results remains the primary goal for improving student learning. One challenge of requiring standardization includes changing technology, which can create efficiencies, but also frustration. To help mitigate that frustration during the pandemic, we created two options for faculty to submit results: 1) Excel-based roster with student performance information, and 2) Submission via the Blackboard module. While two reporting structures may create confusion, at this point, it is essential to assure that we can accommodate both efficiency and consistency for faculty. Not all assessments can be reported through Blackboard, but, when possible, this is encouraged based on the more robust reporting tools. Informal feedback on the assessment process occurs frequently, but not formalized on a regular schedule. This is one of our recommendations for improvement. In the past, the College has had a few different variations on Assessment Committees, one focused on solely on academic assessment. A few years ago, in conjunction with faculty input, we decided that academic assessment is everyone's job, not just the members of the committee. With that philosophy in mind, academic department chairs agreed to be the department and program representatives for facilitating assessment activities in their respective areas, and assessment is a standing item on Department Chair meeting agendas.

### **Recommendations for Improvement**

- Continue to work on program data dashboards for real-time persistence and retention rates
- Enhance institutional research capabilities
- Regular, formalized assessment of the assessment process
- Formalized assessment training for new faculty
- More comprehensive use of AACU Value rubrics used to inform departmental rubrics and assessment of institutional learning outcomes

- Assessment of student attitudes toward support services to identify ways to increase use of those services
- Increased tracking and use of alumni placement data
- Increase professional development activities around assessment for dual enrollment faculty
- Consider changing the title of “College-Wide Goals” to institutional learning outcomes

## Standard VI: Planning, Resources, and Institutional Improvement

*The institution's planning processes, resources, and structures are aligned with each other and are sufficient to fulfill its mission and goals, to continuously assess and improve its programs and services, and to respond effectively to opportunities and challenges (Middle States Commission on Higher Education Standards of Accreditation, Standard VI).*

NCCC has a well-designed planning process that allows communication and feedback among multiple entities, including, but not limited to, the administration, including the Chief Financial Officer; the Senate, including the Long-Range and Strategic Planning Committee; and the Board of Trustees. While financial and physical resources are limited, an effective planning structure allows the College's greatest resource – its staff – to find ways to make strategic use of what is available. This is illustrated in the overall strategic planning process all the way down to individual department budgeting, wherein financial requests are aligned with strategic directions as well as operational expenses. Additionally, while afforded limited opportunities and ample challenges, the College has exhibited due diligence in examining these opportunities and overcoming challenges when they arise.

**Criterion 1: Institutional objectives, both institution wide and for individual units, that are clearly stated, assessed appropriately, linked to mission and goal achievement, reflect conclusions drawn from assessment results, and are used for planning and resource allocation.**

The Standard I narrative in this self-study addresses how the College meets this criterion overall, but more specifically, the College's strategic plan is continually updated and assessed and creates clear and specific objectives, aligning strategic goals with operational actions. The College's mission states, "NCCC provides open access to high-quality academic programs that prepare students for transfer and career success" (St.VI.1.1-Mission; St.VI.1.2-Programs). While the wording of our mission has changed over time, this fundamental purpose has never wavered, and all College planning is built on that goal. As just one example from the 2017-2020 Strategic Plan (St.VI.1.3-2017-2020 Strategic Plan) shows, under Direction 1: "Reaffirm Excellence in Teaching," much of what was planned in 2016 and 2017 has been accomplished and continues to be updated. Items ranged from increasing adjunct pay and providing more professional development opportunities to improving classroom instructional technology and furnishings. Based on an inclusive academic master planning process in Fall 2016, feedback from staff, and other needs assessments, the following items were identified and completed, or are in progress (St.VI.1.4-Academic Master Planning):

- Adjunct pay was increased
- Video conference rooms, College-wide, were updated with new hardware and software
- Classrooms across all three campuses received new furniture, and rooms were rearranged in ways more conducive to multiple teaching and learning styles
- A new IT staff position was created for faculty support and training on new learning management systems
- Faculty and staff have been supported in attending regional and national conferences, and professional development opportunities have been regularly offered at the College

Similar achievements of objectives are documented under other Strategic Directions of the 2017-2020 plan (St.VI.1.5-2017-2020 Strategic Plan Summary). A selected few are as follows:

- Creation of multiple new academic programs and advisement tracks (St.VI.1.6-AA Liberal Arts Early Childhood Education Worksheet)

- Increasing marketing and scholarships as well as transfer opportunities, such as
  - “2+2” agreement with Paul Smith’s College (a nearby private four-year school) whereby students in particular academic programs can continue at Paul Smith’s to earn a bachelor’s degree at the same tuition rate they would pay at NCCC
  - Exploration of a jointly registered program in cybersecurity with Herkimer Community College
  - Updated agreement with SUNY Empire for multiple transfer paths, including AAS Nursing to BSN Nursing, affording our students, many who live locally, with the opportunity to remain in the region and earn their BSN online
- Exploration of unique opportunities such as establishing a School of Applied Technology and a satellite campus on the SUNY Potsdam campus.

While the College strives to continuously improve, the above noted efforts demonstrate institutional progress and embody our growth mindset. In the 2020-2023 plan (St.VI.1.7-2020-2023 Strategic Plan), professional development, development of new academic programs, enhancement of existing programs, and facilities upgrades to improve program delivery continue to be emphasized under the first goal: “Provide a meaningful and engaging education that prepares students for transfer or career opportunities.” Some of the many achievements that occurred in 2020-21 are as follows:

- Offering of SUNY and peer-to-peer professional development in best online teaching practices, a series of seminars by Landmark College to improve teaching of neurodiverse students, and an On Course student success workshop, among other professional development opportunities
- Updating of Computer Graphics programs
- Creation of a course for online training and fieldwork experience designed for students working in, or who wish to work in, the NYS Mental Health System. Upon completion of this training, students will be eligible to be certified by NYS as credentialed peer advocates
- Upgrading of classrooms to enable hi-flex teaching
- Creation of a new IT position dedicated to student technical support

Goal 2 of the 2020-2023 plan coalesces the College’s ongoing efforts to “[c]reate and nurture a supportive environment that welcomes diversity and difference and focuses on student success and growth.” In actualizing this goal, we have assessed our current support efforts, revising some, like the Athlete Mentoring Program (AMP), and beginning new ones, like reinstating and revitalizing the First-Year Seminar course for new students (St.VI.1.8- AMP Revision; St.VI.1.9-CSP 100 Revision).

Previously, the AMP reporting process required faculty to enter data into an inefficient online form, and it relied on faculty time and initiative to do so. Moving forward, coaches will be allowed access to student grades in order to intervene early enough to help those students maintain academic standing and athletic eligibility, allowing faculty to maintain their focus on teaching and working with the identified students and others to help them succeed (St.VI.1.10-Faculty Meeting-AMP Revision).

The First-Year Seminar (CSP 100), which has long enjoyed a reputation as a valuable course for students, particularly in helping them persist and complete, is a one-credit, non-liberal arts class, that was always hard to fit into student program worksheets, thus it was not well-subscribed to by students. With that in mind, academic programs and the corresponding worksheets have been revised to allow the course to be used under the PED/HED area, where only two credits are needed (St.VI.1.11-May 2021 Senate Agenda).

Additionally, much work has been done to improve the campus climate with regard to diversity and inclusion. The Diversity Task Force has sponsored a common read and discussion of *Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man*, by Emmanuel Acho (St.VI.1.12-SP21 Common Read). A course in Sociology of Diversity is now listed as *strongly recommended* in the AA Liberal Arts: Humanities and

Social Sciences program as well as the AAS Human Services program, and a faculty-development version of the class is offered online, facilitated by the Chief Diversity Officer and a social science faculty member (St.VI.1.13-SP21 SOC 108). Faculty and staff also participate in human resource trainings designed to help mitigate workplace discrimination and harassment of all kinds.

**Criterion 2: Clearly documented and communicated planning and improvement processes that provide for constituent participation, and incorporate the use of assessment results;**

Like all of the College's recent strategic plans and all major goal-setting activities, the 2020-2023 NCCC Strategic Plan was developed with participation from every area of the College. All staff members and student representatives had several opportunities to provide input before the final version was voted on by the Long-Range and Strategic Planning Committee and the Senate as a whole, finally being approved by the Board of Trustees on March 26, 2021 (St.VI.2.1-2020-23 Strategic Plan Process). This plan clearly delineates responsibility and accountability for each item, and the Shared Governance handbook (St.VI.2.2-Shared Governance at NCCC) shows the decision-making processes involved in carrying out the individual strategies.

Even though each of the College's strategic plans have encompassed multiple years (the current plan covers 2020-23), results are assessed each year, and priorities are updated. For example, in fall of 2019, during opening week, the entire staff participated in breakout brainstorming sessions to identify the most current and salient objectives at that time. After these suggestions were collated, they were culled down to nine, of which two were already in progress and three were deferred, as they were not deemed feasible at the time. The winnowing process began with President's Council, which was able to examine the list from multiple angles, given its diverse membership. The revised list then proceeded through the Long-Range and Strategic Planning Committee to the College Senate. At the November 8, 2019, Senate meeting, the new priorities were presented, along with a narrative of the entire process through which they were created. After a robust dialogue exchange, true to our value of shared governance, the current institutional priorities were endorsed at the December 6, 2019 Senate meeting (St.VI.2.3-2019-20 Strategic Plan Addition and Process) From there, the new priorities went to the Board of Trustees, who also approved them (St.VI.2.4-2019-20 Strategic Plan Addition BoT Approved).

The priorities the College decided to focus on at that time are as follows:

1. Customer Service: Institution-wide student-focused customer service review and training;
2. NCCC Foundation and Scholarships: increase annual fund for scholarships;
3. Alumni network and communication to help support the institution; and
4. Institutional Research (IR) metrics/dashboards: create, curate, resource, and communicate most important IR metrics.

Actions taken on the first item have included cross-training of Enrollment and Financial Aid personnel and focus on packaging student financial aid as quickly as possible as well as changing notification timelines for competitive programs (St.VI.2.5-Customer Service Training). The North Country Navigator program, which guides students from their first point of contact with the College through their first year, was also born from this priority (St.VI.2.6-NC Navigator).

Items 2 and 3 resulted in the NCCC Foundation underwriting an additional \$100,000 of annual scholarship support for 2020-21 and 2021-22 to attract non-traditional students (St.VI.2.7-Opportunity Scholarship). Also, through Perkins Grant funding, a portion of a Records Office employee workload has been designated to track alumni and enhance the current database (St.VI.2.8-Alumni Support position).

The Institutional Research item was pursued in the development of a position description and approval to

search for an assessment/institutional research director. However, that position has yet to be searched or funded due to time and financial constraints caused by the coronavirus pandemic. This position remains a priority to search (St.VI.2.9-IR Needs and Planning; St.VI.2.10-Dir Inst. Effectiveness Draft PD).

In late 2019, the College began working on the 2020-23 Strategic Plan (see 2020-23 Strategic Plan Process above). The pandemic caused a few delays, but a representative group of faculty, staff, and administrators convened twice in July to brainstorm new strategic directions. During this session, the planning group recommended that rather than add new “overarching strategies,” the College use the institutional goals identified during the 2019-2020 year and focus on the actions/tactics/steps that it will take to implement them. These institutional goals, noted below, had already been approved by the College Senate as well as the Board of Trustees:

1. Provide a meaningful and engaging education that prepares students for transfer or career opportunities.
2. Create and nurture a supportive environment that welcomes diversity and difference and focuses on student success and growth.
3. Act as a strong and valued partner in the communities we serve.
4. Ensure the financial sustainability of the institution through strengthening enrollment and maximizing use of resources.

In a related fashion, the group decided to simplify and use language that adds a clearer understanding to the plan and its elements. In this way, members of the College community who have not been individually involved in the plan development, as well as some who have been, are easily able to grasp what the plan is and how their work fits into it.

The plan that emerged focuses on community partnerships and partnerships with other colleges to help increase enrollment and improve financial sustainability, as well as using assessment data (academic and institutional) to drive realignment of current academic programs and development of new ones. These efforts will be informed by the Perkins-funded Community Needs Assessment (St.VI.2.11-Excerpt-Community Needs Assessment-Perkins), the ongoing success of campus and program advisory boards (as demonstrated in Standard I), the North Country Live series and other initiatives, as well as what was learned from earlier unsuccessful efforts to establish a School of Applied Technology (St.VI.2.12-NCCC SAT Feasibility Study; St.VI.2.13-JMZ SAT Feasibility Study), and the Path to Potsdam initiative (St.VI.2.14-Path to Potsdam), both which are elaborated on later in this standard.

**Criterion 3: A financial planning and budgeting process that is aligned with the institution’s mission and goals, evidence-based, and clearly linked to the institution’s and units’ strategic plans/objectives.**

At NCCC, planning and budgeting are clearly linked at every step of the process. In October, the Chief Financial Officer sends an email to all department heads detailing the budget process and attaching an excel template for the department’s budgets, including any capital expenditures. The email and each page of the budget template contain the Institutional Priorities and encourage budget leaders to connect budget requests with those priorities (St.VI.3.1-CFO Budget email).

In addition to emails, the attached Excel workbook contained sheets for each cost center within the department, and each was structured similarly (St.VI.3.2-2020-21 Budget Template).

The Chief Financial Officer meets with budget leaders when needed during the process and conducts open forums to which all staff and faculty are invited (St.VI.3.3-Fall 19 Budget Open Forum). At the forums, the College’s financial state and forecast is reviewed in light of current conditions and the

strategic plan. These forums contribute to the prioritization of projects within the confines of available resources.

**Criterion 4: Fiscal and human resources as well as the physical and technical infrastructure adequate to support its operations wherever and however programs are delivered; and**

As noted above, the College's most important resources are human: its faculty and staff. Given limited funding, NCCC uses ingenuity and unique solutions to support excellent instruction on three campuses. The College has an overarching administrative structure (St.VI.4.1-Admin Structure Org Chart), with the President and Vice Presidents based in Saranac Lake and traveling to Malone and Ticonderoga regularly. The Facilities Director and Associate Dean of Institutional Research and Information Technology also travel to manage staff and projects on all three campuses. Malone and Ticonderoga have Campus Coordinators who serve on President's Council and advocate for their campus needs, in addition to performing administrative tasks on those campuses (St.VI.4.2-PC Composition 20-21). The College Senate and all Senate and College-wide committees solicit membership from all campuses (St.VI.4.3-Senate Composition 19-20).

A faculty core based on each of the three campuses is available to students, and many faculty (both full- and part-time) regularly travel among campuses for in-person instruction, providing students a wide range of offerings (St.VI.4.4-2020 Faculty List). Faculty hold regular office hours, schedule individual meetings with students, and often attend student events. Each campus also has its own Learning Assistance Center (LAC) and its own IT support staff, which students and faculty have access to from anywhere via the helpdesk email and phone extension (St.VI.4.5-LAC's). Additionally, the College was an early pioneer in the ever-evolving world of distance learning. The latter was of great value in 2020-2021 when all instruction moved online. To continue our progress in the area of distance learning, classrooms on each campus are currently undergoing refurbishment with up-to-date technology to support hi-flex instruction and a new IT position focused on student technology support has been added for Fall 2021. Faculty have participated in and delivered many workshops to assist in continuing high standards of learning online, both synchronous and asynchronous, and the College offers degree programs in entirely online formats, allowing students – especially older students with jobs and families – greater opportunity to complete degrees (St.VI.4.6-Sample PD Offerings).

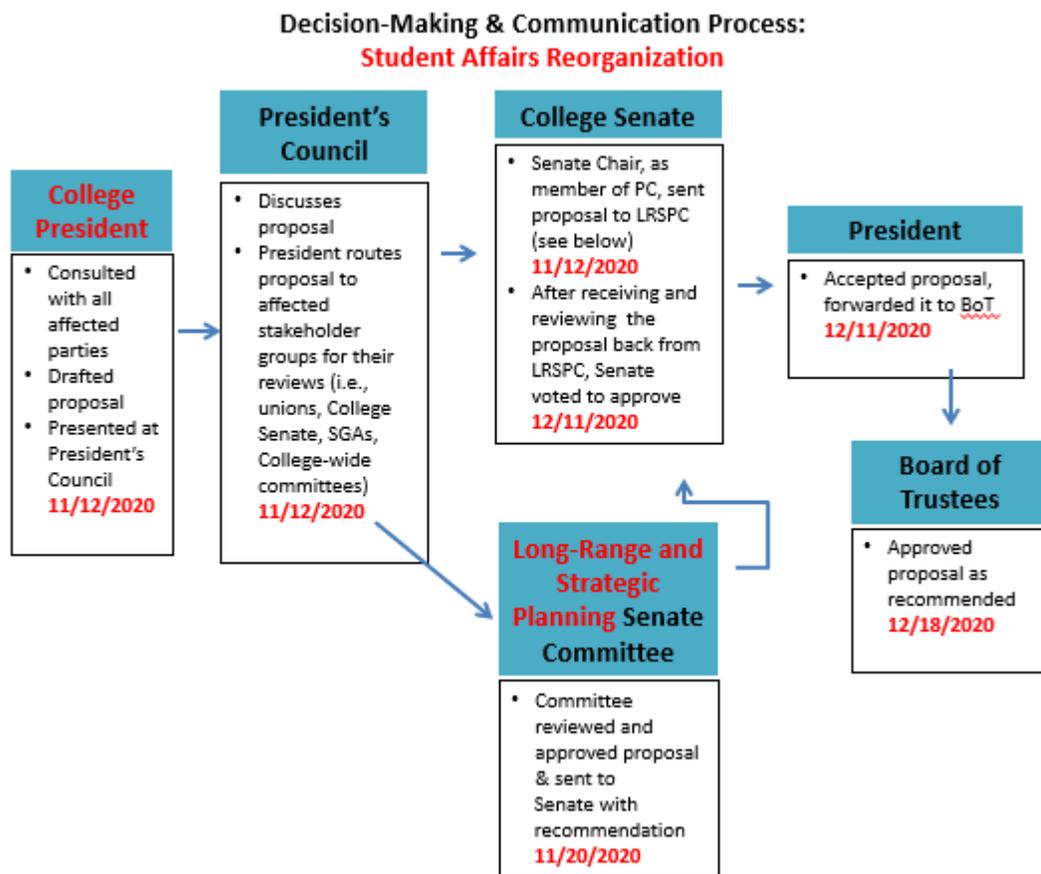
In addition to improving online instruction, in-person learning is continually evaluated for potential improvement. For example, in 2010, studio art class time was expanded to four hours weekly, to allow students more time to create work with in-person faculty support. In 2014, the same change was made for ENG100 and ENG101 (St.VI.4.7-ENG100&101 Contact Hour Change). Because of credit limits within degree programs, these classes remain at three credits for students; however, a fee was added to those classes to maintain financial viability, as instructors are paid for four credits. Assessment of these changes shows greater student success with the extra hour.

The College's fiscal resources come from multiple sources, including Essex and Franklin counties, New York State, student tuition and fees, the NCCC Foundation, and multiple grants. Additionally, due to COVID-19, the College has received Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) assistance from the federal government. The initial institutional share was applied toward assisting students with technology needs, including purchasing laptops to lend; updating classrooms for blended instruction; faculty development to improve online teaching and learning; and student assistance with hardships caused by the pandemic. Leaving aside this much-needed emergency aid, the College's budget is limited, but the administration and Board of Trustees work assiduously to balance spending with revenue and have succeeded in maintaining one of the highest fund balances of all the SUNY community colleges, which, at approximately \$4.3 million for 2020-21, is 27-28% of the total operating budget (St.VI.4.8-CFO BoT July 2021 Report).

NCCC uses its money as prudently as possible, continually re-evaluating facility needs (see Criterion 6 below) and staffing patterns. For example, regarding staffing, when the Vice President of Finance resigned in 2020, the position was not immediately re-staffed, allowing a savings of \$29,000 for the 2019-2020 fiscal year, while the then-comptroller and others in the Business Office picked up the CFO responsibilities until the appropriate staffing of that area could be re-evaluated. Ultimately, in the summer of 2020, the comptroller was promoted to Chief Financial Officer, and a new comptroller was hired. While the College realized savings in the business area, assessment of other areas identified a need for additional resources in IT (St.VI.4.9-IT Staffing), and the Student Affairs area was restructured (St.VI.4.10-Student Affairs Restructuring), both requiring more financial investment. Strategically allocating funds allowed us to add new positions in IT and to restructure the Student Affairs division. These decisions about staffing are difficult and are made through an intensive process involving the president and administration, President’s Council, and the Board of Trustees. When appropriate, the Long-Range and Strategic Planning Committee as well as the College Senate are also involved in the spirit of shared governance.

**Criterion 5: Well-defined decision-making processes and clear assignment of responsibility and accountability.**

The process for making the types of decisions described above is outlined in the document *Shared Governance at NCCC* referenced earlier in criterion two. Here is an example of how the process was implemented in the Student Affairs reorganization process that took place in Fall 2020:



Once decisions are made, they are communicated through multiple channels, including reports to the College Senate and Board of Trustees (all of which are sent to all College staff). Additionally, President Keegan sends daily emails to all College employees during the academic year and occasional updates at other times. An email from President Keegan on July 1, 2021, shows the ways in which budget, planning, and assessment processes intertwine and are communicated to maintain community cohesiveness and sense of shared purpose. While the email indicates the use of \$300,000 from the College's fund balance to ensure full operations for 2021-22, communicating this to all staff helps everyone to be mindful of spending. It also shows that this step is not taken lightly, as President Keegan writes: *The Board of Trustees passed our 2021-2022 budget at their meeting last week. The budget has a \$300,000 projected deficit at this time and while we would like nothing better than to present a balanced budget, the vagaries that accompanied this past year will likely continue into the next. I have faith in our community to do our utmost to do everything we can to be prudent with our spending and use of resources. From here, the budget will go to the counties for their review* (St.VI.5.1-Pres Email on 21-22 Budget).

**Criterion 6: Comprehensive planning for facilities, infrastructure, and technology that includes consideration of sustainability and deferred maintenance and is linked to the institution's strategic and financial planning processes.**

Despite some deficiencies in the physical plant, particularly at the Saranac Lake and Malone campuses, high-quality instruction and student services continue, due to dedicated faculty and staff, strong academic and student life assessment processes, and prioritized professional development.

Currently, the President and Facilities Director are inspecting every space on all three campuses in order to plan and prioritize maintenance and improvements. This detailed assessment includes examination of the interior and exterior of all buildings, including doors, windows, vestibules, common spaces, classrooms, and ancillary areas, down to the number of outlets, type and condition of ceilings, walls, window coverings, and more. Heating and ventilation systems, grounds equipment, and College vehicles are also being assessed, and prioritized plans are being developed and implemented based on these findings (St.VI.6.1-Master Planning Inventory URL). A similar process of inspecting the NCCC Association's residence halls is also underway in partnership with the Association Board of Directors officers and the College.

Assessment and planning of facilities is not new, however, and the Saranac Lake campus in particular has been the subject of much of it. This is the College's main campus and is owned by the College's sponsors, Essex and Franklin counties, which has complicated the quest for funding of upgrades. (By contrast, the Malone and Ticonderoga campuses are owned by the NCCC Foundation and the Association owns the residence halls.) In 2006, the College hired JMZ Architects and Planners, P.C. to create a facilities master plan for updating the Saranac Lake campus, but implementation of the plan has been put on hold multiple times due to lack of funding availability. The College re-engaged JMZ to update the plan in 2019 (St.VI.6.2-JMZ 2019 SL Master Plan Update) to a more realistic proposal, and multiple open forums have been held to involve the College community in comment and prioritization. Results have been collated in the Master Planning Inventory mentioned above and have informed current funding requests. Of course, the COVID-19 pandemic has interfered with the pursuit of the Saranac Lake Campus Master Plan as a whole; however, the College is focused on making what upgrades it can at any given time. Because of the work done by JMZ and the campus community, the College is poised to take advantage of funding opportunities, such as a 2019 grant from the Dormitory Authority of the State of NY (St.VI.6.3-DASNY Funding) to upgrade science labs on the Saranac Lake campus and the 2021 opportunity to request community project funding from Congressional Representative Elise Stefanik for the nursing labs on all three campuses (St.VI.6.4-Rep. Stefanik Nursing Labs).

In 2018, a complete campus safety plan for all three campuses was created following a self-audit by the

Campus Safety Committee, which has representation from every area of the College (St.VI.6.5-2018-19 Campus Safety Committee Recommendations). One result was that in 2019, intruder prevention lock mechanisms were put on every classroom door and phones installed in all classrooms that did not already have them in order to prioritize the safety of students and staff in the event of an active shooter situation or other emergency (St.VI.6.6-Pres Response to Campus Safety Committee Recommendations). The College has also offered multiple training sessions, including ALICE and Safe Colleges, on how to respond to such emergencies. Safety reviews happen yearly with updated plans based on assessment of needs.

A continual source of dialogue with regard to facilities planning in Saranac Lake is the swimming pool in the Sparks athletic facility. In summer 2019, a study was conducted by engineering firm Weston & Sampson to determine the financial and operational viability of the pool as well as the state of the Sparks facility (St.VI.6.7-Pool Study). The study found that the College had maintained the pool and facility well, but after 40 years of service, the pump room, as well as restrooms throughout the building, needed upgrades, to assure health and safety. At over \$200,000 the estimated cost of these repairs would not be supported by community recreation fees. Currently, the pool is underutilized, and the College needs more locker room and workout space, which has led to the consideration of closing the pool. However, once the College engaged the community in the discussion, it was clear that many consider it an important resource as the only public swimming pool in the region. The pool and entire facility are currently closed due to the coronavirus pandemic, which provides more time to assess costs, needs, and community input. There are competing priorities because while providing a community pool helps us serve local residents, the financial investment is significant, and maintenance remains a long-term concern. The College plans to reopen the pool in the fall of 2021 to enable lifeguard training for the community.

Technology and institutional research remain two areas of growth and need at the College. The two are intricately linked with regard to information security, both in terms of accuracy and security of institutional data. The current structure combines the two areas under one Assistant Dean for Institutional Research and Information Technology. Demands for more sophisticated and robust information technology infrastructure as well as increasingly available data will only increase with time. After the implementation of Moodlerooms learning management system (LMS) and during the transition to the Blackboard LMS, it was clear from faculty feedback that the College needed a position designed to solely support faculty in instructional technology. In the fall of 2018, the College hired an Academic Technology Coordinator who provides support for Blackboard and classroom technology. This much-needed position bolstered the ability to support faculty, allowing the Help Desk Technicians to focus on support for students. Even with the addition of the Academic Technology Coordinator position, IT needs are ever-increasing. After consultation with the administration and President's Council, the College restructured this area in the spring of 2021 and hired another staff member to support students and faculty with IT needs (see criterion 4). At the same time, another full-time staff member moved on to other employment. Finding qualified staff in this area within the College's salary range remains a challenge. With the incredible demand placed on IT over the last eighteen months, IT staff performed remarkably to support the drastic shift to remote learning. However, the sustainability of the current staffing is under consideration. Understanding the increased need for institutional research and the recent administrative changes that left the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs position vacant, in the fall of 2019, a new IR position was proposed and approved by President's Council to support the work of assessment and institutional effectiveness across the College (see criterion 4). Just as the proposal moved through the rest of the governance process, COVID-19 was upon us. We have not moved forward on that position, and we are reevaluating the position description based on current needs.

**Criterion 7: an annual independent audit confirming financial viability with evidence of follow-up on any concerns cited in the audit’s accompanying management letter.**

A yearly external audit confirms that revenue and expense reports are accurate and that internal controls comply with government standards (St.VI.7.1-2018-19 Audited Financial Statement; St.VI.7.2-2019-20 Audited Financial Statement). Additionally, internal processes to prepare for the audit have been improving and becoming more efficient. The Board of Trustees has a Finance/Audit Committee that reviews the audit results to ensure any issues are promptly addressed (St.VI.7.3-BoT Bylaws).

A broader audit committee meets each year to review the opinion of the auditor and receive the formal report from the auditors Boulrice and Wood CPAS, P.C. This committee includes the College President and community member, CPA Doug Hoffman (St.VI.7.4-2018-19 Audit Management Letter; St.VI.7.5-2019-20 Audit Management Letter; St.VI.7.6-2018-19 Audit Committee Minutes; St.VI.7.7-2019-20 Audit Committee Minutes).

**Criterion 8: Strategies to measure and assess the adequacy and efficient utilization of institutional resources required to support the institution’s mission and goals; and**

**Academic Planning**

As described elsewhere in this report, overall academic master planning in 2017 indicated a need to address operational issues, such as classroom technology and furnishings, before more strategic items could be considered. Those issues have been addressed and upgrading of classrooms is now continual. Ensuing academic planning efforts have included the following:

- A Board of Trustees planning retreat with faculty and administration with presentations by a data analysis company, called Burning Glass, in June 2018 (St.VI.8.1-BoT Summer Retreat Agenda; St.VI.8.2-BoT Summer Retreat Notes)
- Community needs assessment and ongoing internal assessment led by the Coordinator of CTE and Curricular Development (see above)
- Regular meetings of program and campus advisory boards for all three campuses (St.VI.8.3-Advisory Boards)
- Faculty meetings around academic master planning and strategic planning (St.VI.8.4-Fall 16 Faculty Academic Master Planning)

New academic programs (evidenced in Standard III) have been proposed based on information gleaned from the above efforts as well as other needs and resource assessments. Many of these programs have been approved; some are already being delivered, and others are awaiting final approvals from SUNY and/or New York State Education Department.

Not every idea has survived the proposal process, however. One potential direction that the College chose not to pursue was a biology-specific track within the larger AS: Liberal Arts Math and Science degree. After careful review of needed coursework, it was determined that under current staffing and enrollment constraints, the College could not assure regular offering of Organic Chemistry, which is required by SUNY, and without offering it, students who enrolled in the proposed track would be less-than-fully prepared for transfer, thus that advising track was not pursued. Other initiatives, two of which are described below, have also been abandoned after undergoing review by the College community. This indicates the review process is robust and thoughtful, and, ultimately, decisions are based on data.

**School of Applied Technology**

As noted in Criterion 2, in 2014, after dialogue between then-College President Steve Tyrell and

representatives of the Ticonderoga community, and with the help of a regional economic development grant, the College embarked on an internal process to study the feasibility of establishing a 35,500-square-foot School of Applied Technology within a 100,000-square foot vacant store in Ticonderoga. The intent was three-fold: improve service to the southern Essex County region, develop programs aligned with workforce needs, and strengthen enrollment, particularly at the Ticonderoga campus. The resulting Feasibility Study was completed in 2016 and was issued to NCCC's faculty and the College Senate for their consideration. In December 2017, the faculty and Senate recommended against proceeding with the project, mainly due to start-up costs and uncertain finances.

After continued requests from Essex County and the Ticonderoga community, and more openness to Associate in Occupational Studies (AOS) degrees to the curriculum as a means to better serve students, in late May 2018, NCCC commissioned another viability study from JMZ Architects and Planners, P.C., who were selected after a traditional RFP process. This study also did not support the creation of the SAT, due to its resource-intensive nature and lack of potential student interest. However, data from the study incidentally showed weaknesses in NCCC's marketing efforts to capture students from the College's sponsoring counties. This led to changes in marketing efforts, including a complete rebranding in 2019 and marketing targeted toward under-enrolled programs, the positive results of which are documented in monthly enrollment reports. Additionally, the identified need for more workforce development is addressed in the 2020-23 Strategic Plan. The challenge remains, and this relates to the College's ethical positions, that in many of the programs proposed, an academic certificate or degree is not required for entry-level work. For example, individuals looking to establish careers in carpentry and plumbing, two of the programs being considered, did not require any higher education certificate or degree to be hired. Thus, it was felt that it was unfair to saddle students with debt that was not warranted.

### **Path to Potsdam**

Another effort, begun in 2017 and also mentioned in Criterion 2, was the "Path to Potsdam" (P2P), in which NCCC would have a satellite campus on the SUNY Potsdam campus, where students who did not meet Potsdam's admissions criteria could complete an associate degree at NCCC while partaking in student life on the Potsdam campus and then transferring into the university as juniors. Under this initiative, the College created program tracks, hired a director, and recruited students before the project was halted due to objection from a fellow SUNY school in St. Lawrence County. The planned initiative did not evolve, but the 2020-23 Strategic Plan addresses exploring possibilities for collaborations with SUNY Potsdam and other nearby four-year schools, though not necessarily with a presence on those campuses as originally planned for the Path to Potsdam.

These examples show that even unsuccessful efforts can provide important information to guide the College's growth and direction. This is in line with Institutional Priority 1: Maintaining a culture of assessment. Because of this culture, data from all sources is continuously considered in decision-making and planning.

More generally, the President's Office conducts a quarterly assessment of progress on the strategic plan, during which parties designated as responsible for particular items report on what has been accomplished. This assessment is shared with the entire College community and is posted for regular access.

The College also conducts numerous surveys and studies in the service of creating and assessing the implementation of the Strategic Plan. The following table of internal surveys and reports identifies a sampling of those administered in the last few years.

Survey(s) Conducted	Year	Evidence
Campus Climate Assessment	2018	St.VI.8.5-Campus Climate
Classroom Furniture and Technology Survey	2016	St.VI.8.6-Furniture Survey Malone
Community Local Needs Assessment	2020	See St.VI.2.11-Perkins CLNA
Continuity of Instruction	2020	St.VI.8.7-Continuity of Instruction
Enrollment Analysis	2018	See St.VI.2.1-2020-2023 Strategic Plan Process
HVAC Study Proposal	2021	St.VI.8.8-HE Proposal
NCCC Student Opinion Survey	2020	St.VI.8.9-NCCC Student Opinion Survey
Pool Study	2019	See St.VI.6.7-Pool Study
Professional Development	2019	See St.VI.4.6-Sampling Professional Development
SL Campus Master Plan Update	2019	See St.VI.6.2-JMZ 2019 SL Master Plan Update
School of Applied Technology Feasibility Study	2017 2019	See St.VI.2.12-NCCC SAT Feasibility Study; See St.VI.2.13-JMZ SAT Feasibility Study
Shared Governance Assessment	2020	St.VI.8.10-Shared Governance Assessment 2020
Work-Life Survey	2019	St.VI.8.11-Work-Life Survey
SUNY Student Satisfaction Survey	2020	St.VI.8.12-SUNY Student Satisfaction Survey 2020

**Criterion 9: Periodic assessment of the effectiveness of planning, resource allocation, institutional renewal processes, and availability of resources.**

In addition to the above-listed surveys and other assessments, the administrative team meets weekly to discuss operational needs, areas of concern, and opportunities for collaboration across departments, as well as to update progress on each administrative unit’s area of the strategic plan.

Budget concerns remain at the forefront of the College’s challenges and there is careful scrutiny of new purchases. We look for opportunities to leverage the same resource for multiple departments, saving money and increasing consistency and collaboration. The staff in the business and finance area meticulously monitor adherence to both legal and ethical obligations of financial management, maintaining strong internal controls. Every administrator throughout the College is creative in deploying staff and money strategically to ensure continued delivery of high-quality education while looking for growth potential based on community needs. Faculty and staff work to maintain a high level of skill in their jobs and to devote compassionate care to students, never more apparent than in the current COVID-19 pandemic crisis, during which many staff members participated in a campaign to regularly call students and staff to ensure that everyone had the resources needed to continue to work and learn online. Additionally, faculty have regularly met online to pool knowledge and techniques to help each other transition to effective online instruction (St.VI.9.1-Call Campaign).

The College is entrepreneurial in developing academic programs that serve student and community needs while using the fewest new resources. The Enrollment and Marketing department has created striking and effective advertising campaigns that have yielded results in maintaining enrollment despite shrinking local populations of high school graduates (St.VI.9.2-Enrollment Marketing Summary). Even during the pandemic, NCCC has experienced a smaller decline in enrollment than other SUNY community colleges, thanks to diligent efforts of the Enrollment team as well as the College as a whole.

Overall, even as one of the smallest community colleges in New York, NCCC continues to deliver high-quality educational programming, thanks to efforts guided by continual and robust assessment and planning as well as strong financial stewardship by the College administration and Board of Trustees.

**Analysis**

NCCC’s strength is in its people, with their creativity, persistence, skill, and ability to persevere during major financial crises. The Board of Trustees takes its fiduciary responsibility seriously, encouraging the

College to maintain a strong fund balance, so operations will not be curtailed despite crises like the coronavirus pandemic. NCCC's small size and strong shared governance and communication practices ensure that most members of the College community are aware of planning efforts and new initiatives and also help the College to pivot quickly in regard to changing circumstances and needs.

### **Recommendations for Improvement**

- Needs often outweigh available resources at many institutions of higher education and North Country is no different. There are two areas where needs have grown exponentially: Information Technology and Institutional Research. Future needs will continue to grow in both capacities. Recent structuring and staff changes will help alleviate some of the pressure placed upon that department; however, future needs will continue to grow.
- Continue to align planning with available financial and physical resources, while identifying additional funding sources.
- Continue to improve processes to increase efficiency and improve customer service.

## **Standard VII: Governance, Leadership and Administration**

*The institution is governed and administered in a manner that allows it to realize its stated mission and goals in a way that effectively benefits the institution, its students, and the other constituencies it serves. even when supported by or affiliated with governmental, corporate, religious, educational system, or other unaccredited organizations, the institution has education as its primary purpose, and it operates as an academic institution with appropriate autonomy (Middle States Commission on Higher Education Standards of Accreditation, Standard VII).*

As a community, NCCC values and commits to a governance structure founded upon shared decision making, inclusivity, and operational transparency, and these are hallmarks of our community and operations. One of the enduring strengths of the NCCC community is the degree of commitment and care shown to students and colleagues alike. This commitment has been a defining feature of the College for years and finds expression in how the College is governed and administered. Like many institutions, NCCC has experienced significant change in its executive leadership over the last decade. The Board of Trustees has been a stabilizing force despite much transition in the administrative ranks. Three presidents, five academic vice presidents, three CFOs and four admission/enrollment deans have served the College in that time. Our current administration, while a relatively new configuration, benefits from a combination of NCCC experience and experience from outside of the College. The President and Interim Vice President for Academic Affairs have held positions as faculty members, department chairs, and College Senate Executive Team members. In contrast, the Vice President of Marketing and Enrollment came to NCCC in 2019, bringing a wealth of experience from their former institution, another rural college with multiple campuses. The Interim Chief Financial Officer and Interim Associate Vice President for Student Affairs, while new to their current positions, have served the College in other capacities prior to their administrative appointments, as Comptroller and Dean of Student Life respectively, providing a continuity of operations, philosophy, and commitment to and care for students and colleagues, most clearly expressed through our mission, vision, and values. Those newer to the College have complemented the team with new perspectives that serve the institution well.

**Criterion 1: a clearly articulated and transparent governance structure that outlines roles, responsibilities, and accountability for decision-making by each constituency, including governing body, administration, faculty, staff and students;**

North Country Community College (NCCC) is one of 30 community colleges within the SUNY system. Under New York Education Law, Article 126: Community Colleges and State-Aided Four-Year Colleges, Section 6306 Administration of the community colleges – boards of trustees, the Board of Trustees is the governing body of the College (St.VII.1.1-NYS Article 126). While shared governance is a value of higher education in general, and at North Country Community College specifically, NCCC’s shared governance structure and processes do not abrogate the powers, responsibilities, and rights of the North Country Community College Board of Trustees and the President to govern the College as provided in NYS Education Law.

The Board of Trustees is composed of ten (10) members: five (5) appointed by local sponsors (in North Country’s case, two from Essex County, two from Franklin County, and one that rotates between the counties), four (4) by the governor from persons residing in our sponsoring counties, and one (1) from the NCCC student body (St.VII.1.2-Meet the Board). Except for the student trustee, who is appointed to a one-year term, all board members are appointed for a term of seven (7) years and terms run from July 1 through June 30. The Board of Trustees annually appoints its own officers, including Board Chair, and selects them from members of the board. Board duties are defined in three documents: the aforementioned New York Education Law Article 126, S6306, the 8 NYCRR, Part 604, and the North Country

Community College Board of Trustees Bylaws. The Board of Trustees has a range of responsibilities including appointing the College president; establishing personnel and College-wide policies; and approving admissions policies, budgets, curriculum, organizational structure, personnel appointments, contracts, and more. Several of these, including the appointment of a president, require SUNY Board of Trustees' approval (St.VII.1.3-BOT Bylaws).

The Board meets monthly, and the agenda, administrator reports, and resolutions are made available on the Board's website page. Board actions are recorded in the meeting minutes which are also found on the Board's website page.

The president reports directly to the Board Chair and with Board approval, the president assembles an experienced administrative team to help carry out the mission of the College, its priorities, goals, plans and policies. Members of the senior leadership team also provide monthly reports to the Board from their areas (St.VII.1.4-BOT-DEC20 and MAR21 BOT packets). The NCCC administrative structure is illustrated in its current organizational chart (St.VII.1.5-Organizational Chart). The work of the administration is done in partnership with and through the faculty, staff, students, and other stakeholders, as well as the various organizations that help to structure and organize the work of the institution, upholding the College's stated value of Shared Governance.

### **The College Senate**

Established in 2009, the College Senate is a representative governing body of the College community, made up of faculty, staff, administration, and students, whose mission is "*...to review, discuss, and advise on issues pertaining to College policies and procedures*" (St.VII.1.6-College Senate Bylaws). The Senate meets monthly during the academic year and may hold special meetings outside of that schedule dedicated to a particular topic of importance to the College. There are six standing Senate committees, and membership of the committees and the larger Senate is determined by the Senate's bylaws, though all members of the College community are welcome to attend meetings. Members of the College administration serve as ex-officio, non-voting Senate members and the senior leadership provides regular reports to the Senate and supports the work of Senate committees when and where possible. The Board of Trustees is engaged with the College Senate as well, with a representative attending Senate meetings throughout the year. As with the Board of Trustees, the College Senate's agendas, minutes, committee reports, and resolutions are posted and archived online (St.VII.1.7-College Senate Blackboard page). The College Senate Chair represents the Senate in a number of venues including serving on President's Council and other College-wide appointments and has a standing reporting slot at the Board of Trustees meetings.

While the Senate is only one facet of the overall structure of shared governance at NCCC, it is an important one, serving as the hub through which most College-wide decisions are vetted and/or communicated. Before the Senate was implemented, faculty and staff concerns had only one outlet – through their collective bargaining units, often leading to antagonistic and hostile situations rather than collaboration. Creation of the College Senate has allowed the appropriate separation between union matters and those of College governance, thus creating a more collegial atmosphere with more effective decision-making and communication. It has also allowed the inclusion of voices not represented by unions, such as adjunct faculty, management confidential employees, the NCCC Foundation, and the NCCC Association (auxiliary services corporation), as well as students as illustrated in the Senate Bylaws.

In 2011, Middle States commented in their note affirming reaccreditation:

*The change in governance and leadership at NCCC was an endeavor that impacted all aspects of the organization and accordingly required careful planning and attention to detail. [It was] a well-planned and thoughtful approach to instituting a change in the governance and leadership structure of NCCC..., converting a top-down structure of governance to one which encourages inclusion and collegiality (MSCHE Reaffirmation of Accreditation, 2011). In 2021, North Country Community College was presented with the SUNY Chancellor's Shared Governance Award, a recognition that was, as most things are at NCCC, the result of the sustained efforts and commitments of many.*

### **President's Council**

While the College Senate is the most visible structure in NCCC's governance matrix, the administration has developed and sought to improve other elements, from creating a more inclusive President's Council to hosting frequent College-wide open forums and town halls. President's Council (PC), is an advisory body composed of members of the College's leadership team, who gather regularly to review, discuss, and advise the President and the College's senior leadership team on issues and items that impact the College operationally and strategically. As part of the governance structure at NCCC, PC provides another mechanism for collaboration at the highest levels to help the College more effectively carry out its mission, stay true to its vision and act within its values. In addition to long-term operational and strategic items, PC also addresses more immediate, time-sensitive operational issues (i.e., weather-related concerns, power outages), providing recommendations to the College administration on how best to respond. Individual PC members are members of other elements of the governance structure at the College (administration, faculty, staff, College Senate, collective bargaining units, student life) which adds another layer to sharing governance (St.VII.1.8-PC Composition 20-21). Regarding accountability, this past year (20-21) the President instituted a practice of providing status updates at each meeting on items discussed at PC (St.VII.1.9-PC Minutes Feb 22, 21).

In addition to many PC meetings since the pandemic began, the administration has also held multiple open forums and delivered many communiques in an effort to keep the entire community informed and to solicit ideas for how to improve the College's response and the plan to move to online instruction (St.VII.1.10-NCCC COVID-19 Communication).

### **Student Government Association(s)**

The structure of student governance during 2020-2021 was a pilot program where there was a singular Student Government Association (SGA) composed of elected Student Government Association leaders from all campuses. Past iterations of this body have included three separately elected student governance bodies, one for each campus. The SGA is responsible for allocating funds generated by mandatory Student Activity Fees to benefit social, cultural, recreational, and educational programming. Advocacy and civic engagement are also principal values inherent to student leadership at the College.

The SGA holds regular meetings with an advisor from the Student Life Office to determine fiscally responsible spending decisions, plan student outreach efforts, and collaboratively coordinate service-learning opportunities for the SGA leadership and student body. SGA meetings and meeting minutes are open to the College community, and SGA members are invited to actively engage in wider shared governance activities at the College, including College committees. By default, SGA representation is included on the NCCC Association Board of Directors and College Senate (See Senate Bylaws). Additionally, SGAs collect input from their constituents through advisory boards, forums, listening sessions, and questionnaires.

### **Criterion 2. a legally constituted governing body that:**

- a. serves the public interest, ensures that the institution clearly states and fulfills its mission and goals, has fiduciary responsibility for the institution, and is ultimately accountable for the academic quality, planning, and fiscal well-being of the institution;**

The North Country Community College Board of Trustees, the legally constituted governing body of the College, is composed such that the public interest is front and center in its decisions. As noted above, five of the ten members are appointed by the College's sponsors, four are governor's appointments, and one is annually elected by students (referenced and evidenced above).

The College's mission is published on the College's website and in the College catalog as are the institutional goals (St.VII.2a.1-About Us). As noted in Standard I, during the 2019-2020 academic year, the College undertook a thorough review of its mission, vision, values, and institutional goals. The College's shared governance system was engaged in the entire process, leading to the College Senate's recommendation to adopt the revisions, which the Board of Trustees did in 2020. The institutional goals are the framework of the College's strategic plan as illustrated in the 2020-2023 plan, which the Board receives progress reports on.

As defined in New York Education Law Article 126, S6306, the 8 NYCRR, Part 600, and the North Country Community College Board of Trustees Bylaws, the Board of Trustees empowers the President and administrative team to carry out the day-to-day operations of the College. In its capacity, the Board receives regular reports from the administrative team responsible for academics, enrollment, facilities, financial operations, and student affairs. Decisions related to academic programs and planning, enrollment and facilities planning, strategic planning, and financial planning are ultimately made by the Board, after receiving recommendations from elements of the shared governance system, area administrators, and the president.

In terms of their fiduciary responsibilities, the Board is updated at monthly meetings on the financial status of the College, receiving both written and verbal reports from the CFO including updated profit and loss statements, ongoing projections, and fund balance status. The Board is kept informed as the annual budget is being developed and ultimately receives and approves the annual operating budgets. Additionally, the Board has a Finance/Audit Committee which meets annually to review the College's audit and that committee reports to the board on the findings and process (St.VII.2a.2-2018-19 Audit Committee Minutes; St.VII.2a.3-2019-20 Audit Committee Minutes). In June 2021, the Board approved to use \$300,000 of the fund balance to balance the 2021-2022 budget, considering that the pandemic brought significant uncertainties with it, including the ability to reliably predict enrollment trends and staffing needs. Rather than make personnel cuts to balance the budget, the Board demonstrated prudence by using the existing fund balance to see us through this upcoming year, providing a modicum of certainty to our operations and ability to serve students.

Similarly, the Board is active in its role related to academic planning and quality. In July 2018, the Board invited representatives from across the college community to participate in a retreat focused on academic planning (St.VII.2a.4-BOT Academic Planning Retreat). Topics explored included optimum level of enrollment including addressing declining enrollments (program/campus/college), academic program opportunities related to county and workforce needs, current program offerings, and facilities to support new and existing programs. Several of those ideas found their way into the 2020-2023 Strategic Plan, including updating facilities to support our nursing programs.

The Board receives recommendations to establish new or deactivate existing programs. As referenced in

Standard III, in the last ten years, the BOT has approved several changes to the academic program mix at the College. Their review represents the final internal step in a lengthy planning and review process. The Board also establishes academic polices to support student learning (including the Academic Integrity Policy and Classroom Conduct Policy referenced in Standard II) and supports professional development funding for faculty and staff through the budget process.

- b. has sufficient independence and expertise to ensure the integrity of the institution. Members must have primary responsibility to the accredited institution and not allow political, financial, or other influences to interfere with their governing responsibilities;**

While nine of the ten Board of Trustees members are appointed by the county sponsors and the NYS governor, they serve independently from those who appoint them. They live in communities served by the College, most are long-time residents of the county and communities they represent, and all members sign a conflict-of-interest statement attesting to having no conflicts of interest, financial or otherwise, or acknowledging them a priori for all to see. As evidenced by their biographies, there is a mix of expertise among the Board members, including financial, education, and workforce experience, all of which are critical to our mission (St.VII.2b.1-BOT Biographies). Additionally, the participation of a student trustee adds the important perspective of the student body to the Board's work.

The Board completes a self-assessment periodically, the two most recent taking place in 2017 and 2020. In both cases, the Board reviewed those assessments in the aggregate and uses those findings to improve operations. For example, one area where the Board members felt that improvement is needed is in establishing a more formal orientation process for new Board members, which is currently being developed by the President and Board Chair.

- c. ensures that neither the governing body nor its individual members interfere in the day-to-day operations of the institution;**

As codified in New York Education Law Article 126, S6306, and 8 NYCRR, Part 600, while the Board of Trustees has the final approval on curricula, academic and College-wide policy, tuition and fees, operational and capital budget, and approving sites and facilities where the college operates, it turns the administration of those over to the President and their administrative team.

At North Country Community College, area vice-presidents, deans, directors, and department chairs, lead their respective areas, as illustrated in the College's organizational chart. They develop budgets and plans for their areas with input from their departments and from the shared governance system. The Board is not involved in these processes until the final approval stage. For example, in Academic Affairs, when a new academic program is being considered, the Vice President for Academic Affairs uses the following internal *curricular process* (St.VII.2c.1-Internal Curricular Process) for approval of new programs: 1) the proposal will have a departmental sponsor, 2) academic departments, enrollment management, and a host of other interested parties, including the library director, learning assistance center coordinators and registrar, are asked to evaluate the proposal from their perspective including ability to deliver coursework or support the program, and provide their input on the proposal, 3) it then moves to the College Senate's Curriculum Committee for review and approval (or return), 4) then to the College Senate, 5) then to the President, and finally 6) to the Board of Trustees (St.VII.2c.2-Curricular Workflow).

Similar processes occur with academic policy, College-wide policy, development of the budget, and hiring of new personnel. At each turn, before the Board is formally involved, the shared governance system is engaged at many junctures. In addition, in cases where the decision has impact on the entire

campus community, community open forums, often sponsored or co-sponsored by the College Senate, are held to ensure maximum transparency and to collect input to help inform the decision. One recent example was regular biweekly updates and open forums on the Fall 2020 restart plan (see criterion 1.10 – COVID-19 communications). Every other week, an administrative team met online with the campus community to provide live updates on the status of the restart and to field questions and concerns.

In the end, decisions make their way to the area vice presidents, deans, and directors, and, where necessary, to the president. The Board of Trustees is kept informed of many of these happenings from the monthly reports at Board meetings. Items requiring Board of Trustees action (such as new academic programs) are then moved to them for review and approval. This is evidenced in the Board of Trustee meeting minutes and packets (St.VII.2c.3-3.2019-BOT Minutes).

**d. oversees at the policy level the quality of teaching and learning, the approval of degree programs and the awarding of degrees, the establishment of personnel policies and procedures, the approval of policies and by-laws, and the assurance of strong fiscal management;**

These responsibilities for the Board of Trustees are found within New York Education Law Article 126 and SUNY’s Community College Regulations, Part 600, and are conducted throughout the course of the year. These include awarding of degrees and certificates, approval of curriculum and budgets, approval of policies and bylaws, and appointment of the president.

At the conclusion of each academic year, the Board of Trustees, at the recommendation of the faculty, awards associate degrees and certificates to students. This legal and ceremonial recognition of student success is linked to several other oversight actions that the Board undertakes which helps make student success possible. First, the Board of Trustees honors the role of the faculty in the areas of curriculum and academic policy. This commitment is spelled out in 8 NYCRR, Part 605.1 Faculty Role, which notes: *“The faculty shall participate in the formulation of the policy relating to student health, scholarship, standards of admission, attendance and discharge of students, curriculum and other study programs, the granting of degrees, student activities, extra-curricular activities and student discipline. The faculty shall also present recommendations to the president regarding (a) the instructional budget, and (b) appointments, reappointments, tenure, special salary increments, promotions and leaves of absence of members of the instructional staff.”* Thus, the Board is involved in the review and approval of curriculum and policy, not the creation of it. The Classroom Conduct and Academic Integrity policies are examples of the Board’s involvement in the final stages of policy approval, and as referenced in Standard III, over the last several years, the Board has approved multiple new degree/certificate programs and advising tracks within existing degree programs. These approvals were the endpoint of a thorough internal approval process, with significant shared governance participation, as explained in the curricular process noted earlier.

The Board establishes the personnel policies and procedures for the College and modifies them when appropriate. They approve the contracts with the College’s two collective bargaining units and establish the same for management confidential employees. They also approve procedural changes as illustrated by the recent Board action to codify the expectation for evaluation of management confidential personnel (St.VII.2d.1-MC Evaluations). While it had existed heretofore, it was not written or formally provided to the employee, something the Board corrected in January 2021. Other personnel policies established by the Board are found in the Employee Handbook, as well as the Faculty and Adjunct Faculty Handbooks (St.VII.2d.2-Employee Handbook).

As noted earlier and in 2e below, the Board approves the annual budget and receives monthly financial reports on the College’s operations. The College is currently operating with the fund balance in excess of

25% of annual operating expenses, a figure the Board has discussed as being an appropriate percentage given the small size of the College's overall operating budget.

- e. plays a basic policy-making role in financial affairs to ensure integrity and strong financial management. This may include a timely review of audited financial statements and/or other documents related to the fiscal viability of the institution;**

The Board of Trustees has a Finance/Audit Committee (referenced above) that meets annually to review the certified annual audit of financial operations of the College. The Board receives monthly financial reports from the Chief Financial Officer and trending enrollment information is also included to allow the members insight to the current fiscal viability of the institution. Throughout the year, the Board receives regular updates in the form of Profit and Loss statements, forecast projections, Five-Year Financial Plan updates, and fund balance updates. As noted above, the Board examines the College finances at every meeting, participating in the development of and giving final approval to annual budgets and approving any use of the College fund balance.

The Board also approves significant capital projects. Most recently, the College received funding from COVID-19 related stimulus coupled with previously awarded state funding to support the first significant capital upgrade of our facilities in years. The Board approved moving forward with a scoping study to provide the College and Board with proposal for consideration. Evidence to this practice can be found in the BOT bylaws and minutes for the Finance/Audit Committee, and monthly Board of Trustee meeting minutes referenced earlier in this standard.

- f. appoints and regularly evaluates the performance of the Chief Executive Officer;**

Per New York Education Law Article 126, S6306, 2: *The board of trustees of each community college shall appoint a president for the college, subject to approval by the state university trustees, and it shall appoint or delegate to the president the appointment of other members of the staff.* Since 2011, the Board has appointed two presidents, Dr. Steven J. Tyrell in 2012, and, Mr. Joseph Keegan, in 2019. As per the 8 NYCRR, Part 604.2 “...Approval or disapproval of the appointment of a president by the State University trustees shall be made in accordance with the State University trustees guidelines for the selection and approval of such appointments. The guidelines shall include a procedure for the State University trustees to receive the recommendation of the Chancellor concerning such appointment.” The Board convened a broadly representative search committee based on SUNY guidelines to inform their choice of candidate. The committee included faculty, staff, county leaders and students (St.VII.2f.1-SUNY Guidelines-Presidential search).

Acting on behalf of the Board of Trustees, the Board Chair serves as the principal contact point and supervisor of the president. Both informal and formal supervision and evaluation take place. Informally, the president and the chair meet before each board meeting to review major items before the Board, check on the progress of various initiatives, and discuss any new matters that have arisen. Similarly, in between monthly meetings, the chair and president meet to discuss any items that arise. Formally, the Board's Personnel Committee (as referenced in the Board of Trustee Bylaws) conducts a standardized evaluation of the president. This was most recently completed in 2020-2021. The evaluation then acts as a tool to not only look back, but to identify professional goals and actions the president has for themselves professionally as well as to advance the college.

**g. informed in all its operations by principles of good practice in board governance;**

The Board of Trustees' monthly meetings follow Roberts' Rules of Orders and New York State Open Meetings Law. Meetings are structured such that each area Vice-President, the Chief Financial Officer, and the President provide written and oral reports inclusive of updates, progress and changes to operational and strategic activities and institutional priorities. Student perspectives are incorporated through the participation of the Student Trustee as well as reports from the Associate Vice President of Student Affairs. Additionally, as a testimony to its commitment to shared governance, the Board invites and has created formal reporting slots for the president of each collective bargaining unit (NCCCAP and CSEA), the College Senate, the NCCC Foundation, and the NCCC Association. A Shared Governance Assessment which was completed in 2021 demonstrated approval of the oversight and support offered by our Board of Trustees (St.VII.2g.1-BOT-Shared Governance).

Actions or approvals that the Board will be required to take are provided to them prior to the meeting for their review and consideration, and as noted above, the President and the Board Chair meet frequently to check in on progress and items that the Board should be aware of and/or that need Board attention. To help broaden the input that the Board receives, Board members are invited to and often participate in College Senate meetings and have members serving and representing the Board of Trustees on the Foundation and the Association boards. The standing committees of the Board of Trustees share their reports with the Board as well.

The Board, as with the rest of the College, assesses itself, both operationally and individually. One example of an operational adjustment made by the Board was to move executive sessions toward the end of the meeting. This came about after the Board observed that holding an executive session at the outset of the meeting tended to diminish participation at Board meetings. The result of the change was more robust and predictable participation, sending a message that the Board values the community's time and participation. Other actions the Board took to make themselves more accessible to the campus community included hosting Board of Trustees meetings periodically at the branch campuses as well as moving their meetings in Saranac Lake from the Board Room to a large classroom to increase participation in their meetings.

**h. establishes and complies with a written conflict of interest policy designed to ensure the impartiality of the governing body by addressing matters such as payment for services, contractual relationships, employment, and family, financial or other interests that could pose or be perceived as conflicts of interest;**

As noted above in Standard II, the Board of Trustees developed and approved a Conflict-of-Interest policy in 2008 (revised in 2012) that addresses these areas for each member of the Board. Board members sign them at the outset of their appointment. Additionally, during the 2019-2020 year, a Conflict-of-Interest policy that applies to employees of the College and affiliated groups that support the College was developed and approved by the Board in Fall 2020 (St.VII.2h.1-Conflict of Interest Policies).

**i. the Chief Executive Officer in maintaining the autonomy of the institution;**

Per NYCRR 8 604.2 and 604.3, the Board of Trustees establishes the policies and procedures of the College and delegates their implementation and administration the President. How these statutes apply at NCCC is further elaborated in the Board of Trustees bylaws, thus the Board demonstrates and supports the institution's autonomy within the legal framework established by New York State and SUNY. When requested to, the Board has advocated for the College to the county sponsors. The President and the broader administrative team confirm that the Board allows the College to operate independently and are afforded the autonomy to lead as deemed best.

**Criterion 3. a Chief Executive Officer who:**

- a. is appointed by, evaluated by, and reports to the governing body and shall not chair the governing body;**

In the time since the College's 2011 Self-Study, the Board of Trustees appointed two presidents: Dr. Steven J. Tyrell (2012-2019) and Mr. Joseph Keegan (2019-current). As noted above in criterion 2f, the president reports directly to the Board Chair who serves as the principal contact point and supervisor of the president. The Board, through the Personnel Committee, formally evaluates the president. Informal evaluation, support, guidance, and direction are provided through regular meetings and calls between the president and Board members (particularly the Board Chair) to discuss matters of importance to the College, its mission and its strategic and institutional goals and priorities.

Per the Board of Trustees' Bylaws, the president "*(i)n all matters...shall be responsible to the board.*" Additionally, the Chairperson of the Board of Trustees, per the Board's Bylaws "*...shall be a member of the Board*" and is elected by the Board at their annual meeting.

- b. has appropriate credentials and professional experience consistent with the mission of the organization;**

Mr. Joseph Keegan is the College's seventh president and was appointed in June 2019. A 1989 graduate of North Country Community College, Mr. Keegan went on to earn his BA in Anthropology from SUNY Potsdam and his MA in Anthropology at SUNY Albany. He joined the College as an adjunct instructor in 1994, teaching anthropology and sociology courses. He was hired full-time in 2001 as a Human Services instructor and went on to lead the department. He served two terms as Vice President for Academic Affairs (2009-2010, and 2014-2019), and chaired the College Senate for two terms (2012-2013 and 2013-2014). He served on President's Council as both VPAA and College Senate Chair. He was active in program development and curricular review and has served the College in many other capacities. He lives in Franklin County, one of the College's sponsoring counties and has done so for the last forty years. He is active in the community, serving as a board member of Lakeside House Inc, a small non-profit providing services in Saranac Lake, for those experiencing severe and persistent mental illness, and chairing the Franklin County Community Services Board. He is also a board member of the Northern Area Health Education Center and a member of the New York Community Colleges Association of Presidents (St.VII.3b.1-President's Resume).

- c. has the authority and autonomy required to fulfill the responsibilities of the position, including developing and implementing institutional plans, staffing the organization, identifying and allocating resources, and directing the institution toward attaining the goals and objectives set forth in its mission;**

In accordance with New York Education Law 8 NYCRR, Part 604.2 and codified in their bylaws, the Board of Trustees delegates responsibility, and by extension the authority and autonomy, to the President to implement institutional planning, staffing patterns, resource identification and allocation, and mission-driven goals and objectives. This is illustrated in development of the 2020-2021 budget, balancing it with workforce reduction strategies that upheld the values of the College (which included early retirement incentives), updates to the organizational structure (restructuring the financial area following the resignation of Vice President for Administration), campus-wide engagement in and update of the College's mission, vision, values and institutional goals during the 2019-2020 academic year, and development of the College's new strategic plan (2020-2023).

- d. has the assistance of qualified administrators, sufficient in number, to enable the Chief Executive Officer to discharge his/her duties effectively; and is responsible for establishing procedures for assessing the organization’s efficiency and effectiveness;**

As will be further illustrated in the next criterion, the current administrative team, as with prior ones, brings the best of two worlds to their work: an experiential understanding of the College, its mission, and the role it has played in the region, and a different perspective from other institutions and enterprises. This blend of historical and new perspectives helps in planning as well as in responding to emergent situations. For example, during the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, while there was no experience in responding to a pandemic among the team, there was experience with the creation of plans to do so. Those plans helped with the steps we took to formulate our response and the COVID-19 Task Force ad hoc committee was formed, which convened in February 2020, with representatives from all areas of the College, to take on the responsibility of dealing effectively with the crisis.

Leadership in a shared governance structure utilizes the strengths of its supporting individuals. NCCC’s administrative structure incorporates the strong autonomous roles of vice presidents. Vice presidents and associate vice presidents in Enrollment and Marketing, Academics, Finances and our newly reorganized division of Student Affairs allow the president to effectively delegate duties that our senior leadership members are skilled experts in. Their actions are supported, encouraged, and guided in a way that is representative of the mission, vision, values, strategic directions, and goals set by the president and the College’s governing body. Administrative staff changes just before and during the pandemic reduced the number of administrators as the decision was made to maintain current numbers of faculty and direct student support staff as we moved to remote learning. The current structure is under evaluation as the College considers the longer-term impact of changes from COVID-19.

**Criterion 4: an administration possessing or demonstrating:**

- a. an organizational structure that is clearly documented and defines reporting relationships;**

The College is organized along functional areas with a leadership and reporting structure clearly identified in its regularly updated College Organizational Chart (as referenced criterion 1). As illustrated in the Administrative Team document, a subset of this leadership group meets weekly as the Administrative Team to troubleshoot current operations, ensure that existing institutional goals/priorities are being addressed/ prepared for, and engage in planning for the future. As noted in criterion 1, members of the wider leadership group participate in President’s Council, which collects input and insight from representatives of faculty, staff, individual campuses, and the College Senate to better inform decision-making on issues that impact the College operationally and strategically.

- b. an appropriate size and with relevant experience to assist the Chief Executive Officer in fulfilling his/her roles and responsibilities;**

The president’s roles and responsibilities are defined in 8 NYCRR, Part 604.3 “*Responsibilities and duties of the president*” and again in the Board of Trustees bylaws. The administrative team was assembled to assist in carrying out those responsibilities. As illustrated in the College’s organizational chart, the administrative team oversees all areas of the College, from academics to student life. Each member of the team is experienced in their respective area, and many have served in other roles both within and outside of the College, bringing both a breadth and depth to their work. As leaders, they share the duties of implementing the governing board’s policies, managing, evaluating, and improving daily

operations, and participating in institutional planning, including strategic planning. Consistency and continuity for both students and staff are carefully considered before actions are taken by the administrative team. This is well evidenced by the reorganization of the Student Affairs area which involved promoting the Dean of Student Life to the Interim Associate Vice President of Student Affairs. This reorganization was a strategic opportunity to help our students, distribute department oversight more equitably and intuitively (athletics moved from Academics to Student Affairs), and increase financial effectiveness, and was done deliberately and with input from all affected areas and individuals (St.VII.4b.1-Student Affairs Reorganization).

**c. members with credentials and professional experience consistent with the mission of the organization and their functional roles;**

Each member of the administration has a position description that defines their principal duties, the requirements to fulfill it and their functional roles. As noted above, each brings a unique set of strengths, competencies, and experience to the role and each is motivated by and committed to the mission of the institution. Administrators' resumes clearly show their exceptional qualifications (VII.2f.1-Administrative Resumes).

**d. skills, time, assistance, technology, and information systems expertise required to perform their duties;**

The members of the administrative team are equipped with the tools, technology, time, assistance, and access to information required to do their work. Over time, the role that technology plays in the administration of the College has increased; thus all members have a skill set in the most critical technology requirements: MS Suite, email, and online conferencing. This latter, in the form of Zoom, MS Teams, WebEx, and Jabber, have all led to new skill development in this COVID-19 period. Depending on their roles, members have access to the Learning Management System (Blackboard), the Student Information System (CAMS), the accounting system (MIP), as well as area-specific shared drives on the College's network. Where individuals or supervisors identify a new or updated skills needed, opportunities for personal and professional development are available. Additionally, one of the many benefits that comes with being part of the largest university system in the country, SUNY, is that informal as well as formal associations and networks exist to help each administrator further develop in their position. For example, our President is a member of the SUNY President's association, the VPAA belongs to the SUNY Chief Academic Officers association, the Registrar to the SUNY Registrars association, our CFO to the SUNY Business Officers association.

**e. regular engagement with faculty and students in advancing the institution's goals and objectives;**

All members of the administrative team engage with the faculty and students in advancing the College's goals. The administrative team meets weekly to focus on both operational and longer-term planning. Area administrators engage the faculty and staff, formally and informally, and provide those perspectives to the team. Formal processes include faculty representation on President's Council, faculty representation on the Shared Governance Working Group, faculty and staff representation in planning (e.g., strategic planning), and frequent regular meetings of academic chairs and directors with the vice president of academic affairs, to name a few. The update of the mission, vision, values, and institutional goals was done in concert with the faculty and staff.

Members of the administrative team report monthly to the College Senate, attend, and participate in College Senate meetings as ex officio members, and take part in the work of select committees, including the Long-Range and Strategic Planning Committee. This latter group is heavily involved in assessing and

making recommendations to the President regarding budgetary and other planning and illustrates nicely the use of self-assessment to improve operations. The LRSPC was formerly known as the Long-Range Planning and Budget Committee (LRPBC) and through reflection, recommended that placing emphasis on the strategic element of planning, was more important than examining individual department budgets. The committee still advises on the development of the College budget but does so in ways that are less operational and more strategic. For example, in the last year there were three instances where LRSPC had an opportunity provide strategic review and recommendations: 1) a review of the 2021-2022 fee structure, the student affairs restructuring, and a review of the 2020-23 strategic plan. Additionally, the administration employs open forums and College-wide surveys when items of immediate or longer-term importance are at stake. Two recent examples were the College's response to emergence of COVID-19 in March 2020 and the planning around moving to online instruction, and the College's update of the facilities master plan for the Saranac Lake campus in Spring 2021 (St.VII.4e.1-See URL for Facilities Master Plan).

There are also many informal ways in which the administration and the faculty engage, from gatherings during opening week and at year's end, to the many incidences of dropping by each other's offices to check in. Additionally, on each day of the academic calendar, President Keegan sends a daily email updating the campus community on a host of items, including faculty and student accomplishments, upcoming events, and sharing a song, photo, and/or poem. Those relationship-building and relationship-strengthening practices create conversations that afford the administration additional ideas and insights about how to advance the College in ways that may not come through formal channels (St.VII.4e.2-Ex. Daily Email).

In terms of engagement with students, the administrative team routinely looks for opportunities to work with the Student Government Association on how best to improve planning and the student experience. Administrators meet formally with SGA representatives; participate in SGA-hosted activities including student-sponsored meals for informal interaction; and facilitate more formal mechanisms, such as listening sessions to hear student concerns (St.VII.4e.3-Student Concerns). Students also have representation on the College's Board of Trustees, the College Senate and the NCCC Association Board of Directors. One change that emerged in Fall 2020 was the President meeting bi-weekly with the Student Trustee to orient her to the College, the responsibilities of the trustees, and provide greater details on items before the Board meetings. The administration regularly conducts student opinion surveys, most recently in Spring 2020 and Fall 2021, as well as a campus climate survey in 2018. Finally, as with the faculty and staff, there are countless informal means by which the administrative team engages students to gather their thoughts and ideas on how best to continue to serve them and move the institution forward (St.VII.4e.4-SGA Minutes).

**f. systematic procedures for evaluating administrative units and for using assessment data to enhance operations; and**

The administrative team meets weekly to review operational and strategic progress and identify any challenges. Formal, contractually obligated evaluations occur for the NCCCAP and CSEA members of each administrative unit as well as for the President. An assessment of the evaluation process identified the absence of a codified evaluation requirement for the members of the administrative team. While formal evaluation occurred periodically, the President met first with the administration team and then with President's Council to discuss his proposal to adopt a more formal Board policy and a uniform method. A Management Confidential Evaluation Policy was adopted by the Board of Trustees in January 2021, and the first of those evaluations will be conducted at the end of the 2020-2021 year (see criterion 2d.1).

Ongoing informal evaluation of administrators occurs through weekly/bi-weekly meetings to review progress and challenges both operationally and strategically. For example, the Interim CFO meets weekly with the President to map out the priorities for the upcoming week. He (the CFO) then meets with his team for the same purpose. Every other week, the Superintendent of Buildings and Grounds joins the President and CFO with a focus on facilities operations and planning. Systematic review and measurement of progress within the strategic plan and operational objectives provide a basis upon which to evaluate the work of administrators and their units.

Engagement with faculty, staff, and students, is an important means by which the administration gauges success with implementation of plans and gathers information on ways to improve operations. An example, which has helped with facilities planning, was a Work-Life Survey completed in Fall 2019 (St.VII.4f.1-Work Life Survey). While the pandemic disrupted much of the response, the survey has been helpful to identify and respond to work-related items. One major example was the concern that the community had around restrooms regarding accessibility, odor, and dated look. This assessment led to a focus by the Facilities department on more thorough cleaning of restrooms, installation of fans, and an upgrade of at least one shared restroom on the Saranac Lake campus.

##### **5. periodic assessment of the effectiveness of governance, leadership, and administration.**

In addition to the formal and informal processes noted above regarding the assessment of the President and administration, the Board of Trustees periodically completes a self-evaluation and uses those results to improve their operations. The most recent iteration was completed in September 2020; a previous self-assessment was completed in 2017. The Board utilized the same document evaluation document to have a basis upon which to compare results from 2017 to 2020 (St.VII.5.1-Board Self Evaluation).

Similarly, the shared governance system has had periodic assessment. As noted in criterion 2g, formal assessments were administered by the Shared Governance Working Group in Spring 2018 and Fall 2020. These assessments include reflection on the work of the College leadership and Board of Trustees as well as the effectiveness of the College Senate.

##### **Recommendations for Improvement:**

- Continue to provide leadership training for administrators.
- As identified in the 2020-2023 Strategic Plan assess the existent staffing pattern
  - for the administration, to ensure ability to carry out and support administrative functions,
  - in the institutional technology and institutional research areas for ability to support increasing and consistently changing IT and IR needs for faculty, staff, students, and external partners.
- Complete the updates and improvements to the new Board of Trustees member orientation process.
- Adopt a rubric for evaluating administrative units

## Conclusion

This Self-Study affirms that North Country Community College meets and, in many cases, exceeds the Standards of Accreditation and Requirements for Affiliation. The comprehensive review process began in the midst of much transition in leadership at the College with an almost entirely new administrative team as well as many changes in faculty and staff positions. These shifts created opportunities for reflection on the past and anticipation of the future, providing the space to review and evaluate processes, policies, and procedures across the College. Identifying the Institutional Priorities and Intended Outcomes of the Self-Study informed the review and revision of the mission, vision, values, and institutional goals as they are intricately entwined.

The collaborative nature of the self-study process and the dedication of faculty, staff, and administration, and support of the Board of Trustees and auxiliary services, allowed for an honest and thorough look at how the College meets its mission and works toward its vision and goals, while adhering to stated values. Over the last ten years, improvements in key performance metrics such as graduation and retention rates demonstrate the tireless work of all those who contribute to the student experience. We have moved toward a holistic model for student support, focused on innovative teaching pedagogies, and set high standards for achievement, while providing the scaffolding to reach those standards.

Just as the Self-Study process gained momentum among working groups and the Steering Committee, the COVID-19 pandemic swept the world. The whirlwind of closing the campus, assuring students traveled home safely (in some cases halfway around the world), and transitioning all courses to a remote environment within two weeks dramatically changed the nature of how we work, teach, learn, and connect. Those rapid changes highlighted characteristics that have always persisted at North Country: ingenuity and collaboration as faculty, staff, and students learned (and continue to learn) brand new technologies together; dedication and self-reliance as everyone figured out how to best serve students without the usual tools to rely upon; as well as compassion, concern, and support for colleagues, students, and community members as we helped each other through difficult times. These characteristics have served us well over the past decade and will continue to do so as we adjust to continually changing circumstances.

The Self-Study process illustrated many of the College's strengths, while also identifying areas in need of improvement. We look forward to drawing upon those strengths, working toward improvements, and continuing the critical work of offering an affordable, accessible, and high-quality education across our service area to meet the needs of our communities.

<b>North Country Community College MSCHE Self-Study Steering Committee and Working Groups</b>	
<b>Steering Committee Co-Chairs</b>	
Sarah Maroun	Interim Vice President for Academic Affairs MSCHE Accreditation Liaison Officer
Erik Harvey	Interim Chief Financial Officer
<b>Working Group 1 Standard I: Mission and Goals, and, Standard VI: Planning, Resources, and Institutional Improvement</b>	
Shir Filler (Co-chair)	Professor – Humanities; College Senate Chair
Lee Susice (Co-chair)	Professor-Mathematics NCCCAP Union President
Lisa Symonds	Director of Financial Operations (*no longer at NCCC)
Diana Fortune	North Country CC Foundation Director
Scott Harwood	Assistant Dean—Institutional Research and Support/ IT
Rick Heath	Superintendent of Buildings and Grounds
Shelly St. Louis	Registrar
<b>Working Group 2 Standard II: Ethics and Integrity, and, Standard VII Governance, Leadership and Administration</b>	
Stacie Hurwitsch (Co-chair)	Executive Assistant to the President
Selina LeMay-Klippel (Co-chair)	Coordinator – CTE Program and Curriculum Development Ticonderoga Campus Coordinator
Sarah Kilby	Director, Second Chance Pell Program
Bruce Rowe	Instructor of Humanities Humanities Department Chair
Tara Smith	Director of Human Resources Title IX Coordinator
Mary Smutz	Accounts Payable and Purchasing Agent
<b>Working Group 3 Standard III: Design &amp; Delivery of the Student Learning Experience</b>	
Cammy Sheridan (Co-chair)	Associate Professor/Chair – Social Science ADA/504 Coordinator
Lisa Williams (Co-chair)	Learning Assistance Coordinator – Saranac Lake
Jimmy Cunningham	Associate Professor of Wilderness Recreation Leadership Director, Wilderness Recreation Leadership
Tom McGrath	Learning Assistance Center Coordinator—Ticonderoga Campus Associate Professor of History
Marcus Painter	Instructor of Mathematics
Tana Hare	Instructor of Nursing Director, Nursing Program

Margaret Campion	Adjunct Instructor Learning Assistance Center Staff
<b>Working Group 4</b>	
<b>Standard IV: Support of the Student Experience</b>	
Kim Irland (Co-chair)	Dean of Student Life Chief Diversity Officer
Kate Wells (Co-chair)	Learning Assistance Coordinator – Malone Campus
Brian O’Connor	Library Director
Bruce Kelly	Coordinator, Student Life; Malone Campus
Chad LaDue	Athletic Director
Jessica Martin	Microcomputer Operator
Barb Collier	Senior Account Clerk
Sandra Gothard	Nursing Director (*no longer at NCCC)
<b>Working Group 5</b>	
<b>Standard V: Educational Effectiveness Assessment</b>	
Sarah Shoemaker (Co-chair)	Assistant Professor of Health Sciences
Sarah Maroun (Co-chair)	Interim Vice President for Academic Affairs
Stacey Mascia-Susice	Professor of Humanities, Humanities Department Chair
Kathleen Dowd-Maloney	Assistant Professor of Human Services; Human Services Department Chair
Marianne Goodfellow	Second Chance Pell Academic Coordinator (*no longer at NCCC)
<b>Working Group 6</b>	
<b>Verification of Compliance and Evidence Inventory</b>	
Shelly St. Louis (Co-chair)	College Registrar
Laurie Muncil (Co-chair)	Administrative Assistant to the Vice President for Academic Affairs
Mary Ellen Chamberlain	Director of Financial Aid
Scott Harwood	Assistant Dean for Research and Support/IT
McCayla Quinn	Bursar
Stacie Hurwitch	Executive Assistant to the President; Evidence Keeper
<b>Other Steering Committee Members</b>	
Dr. Richard P. Suttmeier	North Country CC Board of Trustees Member
Kyle Johnston	Vice President for Marketing and Enrollment