

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE 2011 NCCC MIDDLE STATES SELF-STUDY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE PROCESS AND ITS LESSONS

While the Middle States accreditation mandate provides a stimulus for self-study, North Country Community College has long been engaged in a process of self-reflection, of which the last three years have been a particularly intensive period. Since the inception of the self-study process in 2008, the administration of the College has shifted significantly with vacancies in two major administrative positions: Vice President of Academic Affairs and President of the College. After the retirement of long-time President Gail Rogers Rice in 2008, Interim President Fred Smith guided the self-study process through the resignation of Vice President of Academic Affairs (VPAA) Tom Finch and the ensuing leadership of Interim VPAA Joseph Keegan. The process continued under President Carol Brown and the recent hiring of VPAA Carole Richardson. Due to these transitions in leadership, NCCC was granted a year extension on its self-study process. The result has been a long but exciting period of self-reflection with the opportunity to take immediate action on issues important to the success of the College.

When the self-study began, Co-Chairs Tom Finch and Vice President of Enrollment and Student Services Ed Trathen worked with President Rice to choose working committees to study each standard. They chose a comprehensive design and grouped standards together to integrate all aspects of the College's operations. There were committees for Standards 1 and 6, Standards 2 and 3, Standards 4 and 5, Standards 8 and 9, Standard 10, Standards 11-13, and Standards 7 and 14. Each committee created a list of questions and researched the answers, laying the groundwork for the seven chapters of this document.

Most of the initial research was done and committee reports completed by the fall of 2009. When VPAA Tom Finch resigned in spring 2009, Assistant Professor of English and former Assessment Coordinator Shir Filler took his place as co-chair. Assistant Professor Filler was also designated to write the report. Ms. Filler compiled the committee reports, and successive drafts were reviewed by the Steering Committee (made up of the chairs of all the standards committees) as well as by the College community. During the Steering Committee reviews, many issues identified in the report were addressed and given to appropriate people and groups for action. As a result, the report has been almost completely rewritten to encompass as many changes as possible that have come about during the self-study process.

A SNAPSHOT OF THE COLLEGE

After forty-four years of service, NCCC is entering the productive prime of its life. Despite dealing with an aging infrastructure on its main campus in Saranac Lake, the College is moving forward with upgrading its technology, its processes, and its human capital to improve course delivery and accomplishment of its overall mission. In 2010, *The Washington Monthly* named NCCC as the number one community college in New York State and number 22 in the country, based on a number of indicators, from student satisfaction as measured by the Community College Survey of Student Engagement to graduation and retention rates. This was a great honor, and it speaks to the ability of this small College's dedicated employees to leverage limited resources into great results.

Since 2005, NCCC has seen tremendous growth, not only in enrollment, but also in strength and resourcefulness. The following is a sampling of many of the important developments that have occurred in the past six years, all of which are discussed in more detail in the body of this report.

Strategic Planning

In January 2010, the College systematically examined and revised its Mission, Vision, and Values. As of January 2011, the College has agreed upon seven Strategic Directions for the next three years. Institutional goals and strategies for achieving those directions have been developed for the coming year. Currently, each division of the College is working to create its own goals and strategies to further implement the institutional priorities at each level of operation. Assessment plans for each strategy are incorporated.

College Senate

After a three-year process of collaboration, the College Senate was instituted in fall 2009. It has become a forum for communication among administration, faculty, and staff. Several initiatives have led to policy changes and recommendations. A notable achievement was the development of an Academic Integrity Policy which was approved by the Board of Trustees in December 2010 and implemented College-wide in January 2011.

Curriculum Development

New programs added since 2005 include the following:

- A.S. Environmental Science – 2010
- Certificate in Health Science – 2010
- A.S. Fine Arts – Studio Art – 2009
- A.A.S. Nursing – Ticonderoga – 2009
- Certificate in Practical Nursing – Ticonderoga – 2006

New Campus

In 2005, the College opened its new campus in Ticonderoga. This state-of-the-art facility was funded and built by the NCCC Foundation, which leases it to the College. Enrollment in Ticonderoga has increased from 83 in fall 2004 to 176 in fall 2009.

Board of Trustees Rejuvenation

Since 2009 Board of Trustees members have been participating in retreats for self reflection, goal setting, and assessment. Members have been active in College activities and particularly in the work sessions (World Cafés) in which the Mission, Vision, Values and Strategic Plan have been developed. In 2011, the Board established goals directly aligned with the new Strategic Plan.

Faculty Handbook

After years without an updated handbook, the Faculty Handbook was revised and approved by the faculty and the Board of Trustees. More than a year of faculty discussion and work by the Vice President of Academic Affairs went into the document, which is a “living document,” distributed in a loose-leaf binder to facilitate revisions when appropriate.

Adjunct Faculty Workshops

In January 2011, the first workshops in many years for adjunct faculty were held. These workshops introduced the adjuncts to administrators and coordinators of most departments. Adjuncts received a copy of the Faculty Handbook; information on assessment, the student profile, and the Middle States evaluation process was presented; and there was an opportunity for questions and feedback. The plan is to revise the workshops to include more participation on the part of the adjuncts and to continue to hold the workshops at the beginning of each semester. Adjunct faculty participate on College committees, task forces, and the College Senate.

Employee Evaluation Protocols

Beginning in the summer of 2009, faculty developed a new system of evaluation of both teaching faculty and non-teaching professionals (NTP). This involved the resurrection of individual Professional Growth Plans as well as the creation of a Peer Observation Pool to do classroom observations. These new procedures are detailed in the Faculty Handbook. Simultaneously, supervisors of classified staff were trained in evaluation techniques and required to do regular evaluations of their personnel. A new system of evaluation of administrators and Board of Trustees members was also implemented.

New Student Registration

As a result of information gleaned from the Community College Survey of Student Engagement, administered in 2009, the College has changed the process of new student registration to better orient and welcome new students to the College.

Positions Created

A Human Resources Director was hired in spring 2010. Prior to that point, issues of salaries and benefits, administration of contracts, and hiring of personnel were scattered among several offices with a resulting lack of structure and consistency. Currently, policies and procedures are being codified and enacted to ensure fairness and compliance with all contracts. A Technology Help Desk Technician was hired in fall 2010 to provide better and faster assistance to students having difficulty with their Student Portal access and to allow the Assistant Dean of Institutional Research and Support to focus more on Institutional Research and overall College technology issues.

Facilities Master Planning

From 2007-2010, the entire College community as well as the Saranac Lake community and an architectural firm created a Master Plan for renovation of the Saranac Lake campus. While funding for the project has been delayed due to financial constraints at the state and county level. The planning process has resulted in a renovation plan to significantly improve the College and its service to the students and the community.

College-Wide Goals for Student Learning

College-wide conversations on desired learning outcomes for all two-year graduates began in fall 2010. In spring 2011, the resulting list of College-Wide Goals for Student Learning is being revised and will be taken to the College Senate for approval. The timeline is for all divisions and departments to have an assessment plan in place for the College-wide Goals by May 2011 and to begin implementing the plans in fall 2011.

College Bridge Program Expansion

The College partners with area high schools to offer dual-enrollment courses in which students can earn credit toward both their high school and college degrees. Enrollment has grown from 349 students in fall 2005 to 965 students in fall 2010. From 42 courses offered in 13 area schools in 2005, the program has expanded to 195 courses offered in 27 schools, some outside the sponsoring counties. The College is expanding the partnerships to ensure higher high school graduation rates.

International Travel Course

The 2003 SUNY Student Opinion Survey indicated that NCCC students desired an international learning experience, so the International Travel course, with both one-credit and three-credit options was approved as a humanities course in 2006. It has been cross-listed as a sociology course. Students and faculty have traveled to Italy, Costa Rica, Spain, France, and Ireland over the winterim session, increasing their cultural awareness, which is critical in the College's rural, homogeneous area.

Ongoing Excellence

The aforementioned new developments are exciting and are moving the College forward quickly, and the day-to-day work of providing quality education has continued through it all. Like any other organization, NCCC has its issues, but the parallel processes of this Self-Study and the revision of the Mission, Vision, Values, Strategic Plan, and College-Wide Goals for Student Learning have led to the improvement of operations in many areas. The College has faculty, administration, and staff who are devoted to student success, and the results are shown in the higher than average graduation and retention rates as well as assessment results such as high licensure exam pass rates for professional programs, transfer acceptances and retention, and student employment success.

CHAPTER 1: STANDARDS 1 AND 6

STANDARD 1: MISSION AND GOALS

The institution's mission clearly defines its purpose within the context of higher education and indicates who the institution serves and what it intends to accomplish. The institution's stated goals, consistent with the aspirations and expectations of higher education, clearly specify how the institution will fulfill its mission. The mission and goals are developed and recognized by the institution with the participation of its members and its governing body and are used to develop and shape its programs and practices and to evaluate its effectiveness.

STANDARD 6: INTEGRITY

In the conduct of its programs and activities involving the public and the constituencies it serves, the institution demonstrates adherence to ethical standards and its own stated policies, providing support for academic and intellectual freedom.

SUMMARY OF STANDARDS 1 AND 6

In regard to its educational mission and goals, NCCC demonstrates the elements of integrity with all its constituents. This is reflected in the College's ranking by the *Washington Monthly* as the best community college in New York State. In regard to internal processes with faculty and staff as well as relations with the community, there is still work to be done, but progress is rapidly being made. NCCC is moving to more formalized policies and procedures, and thus has implemented a College Senate and a Faculty Handbook; hired a Human Resources Director; updated its Mission, Vision, and Values; strengthened evaluation procedures for faculty, staff, and administrators; and begun a goal-setting process from the bottom up, so departmental goals can feed into the evolving Strategic Plan. All of these undertakings and more both demonstrate and increase integrity and trust among members of the College community.

SUGGESTIONS

Standard 1:

- 1.1 *Formalize a mechanism for review of mission and goals at least every five years.*
- 1.2 *Ensure access to essential information and data to allow faculty and staff to better achieve the College's goals.*
- 1.3 *Tie institutional effectiveness plan specifically to mission and goals.*
- 1.4 *Consider staffing possibilities to improve offerings to and connections with the community.*

Standard 6:

- 6.1 *Create a process for regular review of website to ensure all pertinent information is accurately provided to the public in an easily accessible format.*
- 6.2 *Review and improve procedures by which all constituencies (community members, staff, students, alumni, sponsors, etc.) can voice concerns in regard to the College's adherence to its mission, values, and goals.*
- 6.3 *Establish a process for regular dissemination and review of all College policies and procedures.*

CHAPTER 2: STANDARDS 2 AND 3

STANDARD 2: PLANNING, RESOURCE ALLOCATION, AND INSTITUTIONAL RENEWAL

An institution conducts ongoing planning and resource allocation based on its mission and goals, develops objectives to achieve them, and utilizes the results of its assessment activities for institutional renewal. Implementation and subsequent evaluation of the success of the Strategic Plan and resource allocation support the development and change necessary to improve and to maintain institutional quality.

STANDARD 3: INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCES

The human, financial, technical, physical facilities, and other resources necessary to achieve an institution's mission and goals, are available and accessible. In the context of the institution's mission, the effective and efficient uses of the institution's resources are analyzed as part of ongoing outcomes assessment.

SUMMARY OF STANDARDS 2 AND 3

In spite of the challenges of diminishing funds, increasing costs, and being a small school split into three instructional sites, NCCC continues to offer a high quality education to those who seek it. In the past ten years or more, institutional planning has been guided by the overall mission of educating students, and many positive results have been generated, including two well-built and well-utilized campuses – in Ticonderoga and Malone – and several new academic programs. Currently, institution-wide planning is becoming more formalized and soon will be an integral part of the College's operations, with the Long-Range Planning and Budgeting Committee helping to bridge the Strategic Plan with operational budgets. Budget processes have become more inclusive, and a significant negative fund balance was eliminated.

SUGGESTIONS FOR STANDARDS 2 AND 3

Standard 2:

- 2.1 *Finalize, implement, and assess the Strategic Plan.*
- 2.2 *Continue to pursue full implementation of the facilities master plan.*

Standard 3:

- 3.1 *Align budgets with the Strategic Plan.*

CHAPTER 3: STANDARDS 4 AND 5

STANDARD 4: LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

The institution's system of governance clearly defines the roles of institutional constituencies in policy development and decision-making. The governance structure includes an active governing body with sufficient autonomy to assure institutional integrity and to fulfill its responsibilities of policy and resource development, consistent with the mission of the institution.

STANDARD 5: ADMINISTRATION

The institution's administrative structure and services facilitate learning and research/scholarship,

SUMMARY OF STANDARDS 4 AND 5

As in other areas of this report, it's clear that NCCC is meeting its statutory obligations as well as the spirit of its mission. The Board of Trustees and administration have worked continually to ensure the quality of education at the College, and significant changes are being made that allow broader participation in decision making with consistent procedures to combat arbitrariness and inequities. The benefits of the College's small size and relatively flat administrative structure, most notably ease of communication and encouragement of creativity, are still being actively nurtured.

The College Senate and other groups such as the President's Leadership Team, as well as the open, participatory process of writing the Strategic Plan, have created more cooperative interaction among all levels of employees of the College and shared responsibility for decisions made. Accountability is shared as a result. This has allowed faculty and staff to contribute their expertise to the College in areas outside of the classroom and office¹. Faculty and staff are now more directly involved with the development of policy and the daily operation of the College.

SUGGESTIONS

Standard 4:

- 4.1 *Institutionalize BOT goal-setting, planning, and assessment processes.*
- 4.2 *Continue to regularly assess the newly established College Senate and its processes.*
- 4.3 *Continue to ensure all constituencies (students, staff, faculty, administrators) are represented by voting members of the Senate.*

Standard 5:

- 5.1 *Ensure an organizational structure with clearly established lines of communication and authority for supervision and addressing issues.*
- 5.2 *Continue to refine and implement a comprehensive College-wide evaluation process for all faculty, staff, and administrators.*
- 5.3 *Ensure equitable administrative oversight of operations at the Saranac Lake, Malone, and Ticonderoga sites.*

¹ See Appendix O – Middle States Staff Survey

CHAPTER 4: STANDARDS 8 AND 9

STANDARD 8: STUDENT ADMISSIONS AND RETENTION

The institution seeks to admit students whose interests, goals, and abilities are congruent with its mission and seeks to retain them through the pursuit of the students' educational goals.

STANDARD 9: STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

The institution provides student support services reasonably necessary to enable each student to achieve the institution's goals for students.

SUMMARY OF STANDARDS 8 AND 9

NCCC enrollment has generally been increasing with each year², and the entire College does work together to improve retention with a strong commitment to supporting students in all aspects of their college experience. Faculty and staff care deeply about student success and are continually improving processes and taking initiatives to increase it. Access to support services of all kinds is being increased at the Malone and Ticonderoga sites; and in Saranac Lake, the LAC and the AMP have grown in recent years. Registration, orientation, advisement, admission, and financial aid processes are all being continually updated to improve outcomes based on assessment results.

Many suggestions that came from this Self-Study process as well as other assessments have already been accomplished or are currently being actively worked on. For example:

- The College has adopted an online referral and tracking system for the LACs, similar to the one that has been successful for the AMP.
- The AMP has improved results by not allowing the athletes to play until they comply with their AMP action plan.
- A full library presence and limited LAC facilities have been provided at the Ticonderoga site.
- Registration and Orientation now include workshops in the computer lab where students set up their e-mail accounts and learn about the student portal and DL procedures.
- Orientation has been expanded by providing workshops and programs during the first week of classes and throughout the semester that continue to support the student where the College targets specific needs and groups (i.e.: athletes, international students, non-traditional students, etc.)
- The Saranac Lake LAC is rearranging its space to create better and quieter study, tutoring, and test-taking spaces for all students.
- OCSL and Enrollment are preparing an orientation for international students to educate them on visa procedures, discipline consequences, and general differences in culture.

SUGGESTIONS:

Standard 8:

- 8.1 *Continually evaluate and improve the procedure for identification of students in need of remedial and developmental coursework and provide them appropriate coursework and support.*

² See Appendix A

- 8.2 *Include the current mission statement in new recruitment publications and on the website.*
- 8.3 *Continue participation in the CCSSE and the SUNY Student Opinion Survey and use results in each College area's assessment and improvement plan.*

Standard 9:

- 9.1 *Continue to assess usage and outcomes for LAC and library to ensure that facilities and services are meeting students' academic needs.*
- 9.2 *Assess current Orientation structure to determine whether all students are being connected with necessary resources.*
- 9.3 *Increase student usage of career/placement/transfer counseling services to be on par with peer institutions.*
- 9.4 *Provide academic advisors with records of all prior and current academic courses of their advisees, including high school and SUNY general education transcripts.*

CHAPTER 5: STANDARD 10

STANDARD 10: FACULTY

The institution's instructional, research, and service programs are devised, developed, monitored, and supported by qualified professionals.

SUMMARY OF STANDARD 10

NCCC has dedicated, well-qualified faculty who fulfill their teaching responsibilities with skill and creativity. Some have been pursuing advanced degrees and other avenues of professional development. Faculty take active roles in College governance, to the fullest extent possible, most importantly creating and revising curriculum and assessments. While some processes and practices have slipped from "best practices" in recent years, the quality of instruction was never compromised, and the last couple of years, particularly since the arrival of President Brown in fall 2009, have seen a return to more formality and consistency with the creation of a Faculty Handbook, a rubric for promotion, and a new evaluation system for faculty in addition to the inception of the College Senate.

SUGGESTIONS

- 10.1 *Develop a formalized plan to assess and implement professional development that addresses institutional, departmental and individual needs.*
- 10.2 *Provide logistical and financial support to improve integration of part-time/adjunct faculty into department operations.*

CHAPTER 6: STANDARDS 11, 12 AND 13

STANDARD 11: EDUCATIONAL OFFERINGS

The institution's educational offerings display academic content, rigor, and coherence appropriate to its higher education mission. The institution identifies student learning goals and objectives, including knowledge and skills, for its educational offerings.

STANDARD 12: GENERAL EDUCATION

The institution's curricula are designed so that students acquire and demonstrate college-level proficiency in general education and essential skills, including at least oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and reasoning, and technological competency.

STANDARD 13: RELATED EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

The institution's programs or activities that are characterized by particular content, focus, location, mode of delivery, or sponsorship meet appropriate standards.

SUMMARY OF STANDARDS 11, 12, AND 13

NCCC's educational offerings are diverse and of high quality. Degrees, certificates, basic skills courses, and distance learning choices serve the unique needs of the local population. All programs are regularly examined and updated so students can more seamlessly transition to further study or to the workplace. General education is a strong underpinning to all the College's programs, and it is undergoing a reimagining in 2010-2011, which will culminate in a more organic, faculty- and staff-designed program that addresses the qualities all students need to cultivate as part of their education. As part of the work on programs and improving student learning, technological infrastructure, human resources, and assessment processes are continually being improved.

SUGGESTIONS

Standard 11:

- 11.1 *Ensure that all course outlines identify measurable learning outcomes, indicate how they will be assessed, and include the applicable general education statement when appropriate.*
- 11.2 *Ensure alignment of course-level learning objectives from program goals to departmental course outlines to individual syllabi.*
- 11.3 *Annually assess program outcomes and alignment of transfer degrees with four-year transfer institutions.*

Standard 12:

- 12.1 *Indicate courses that meet general education objectives on the course offering list on the NCCC website and other pertinent documents, including program worksheets and degree audits of vocationally oriented programs.*
- 12.2 *Implement an information literacy requirement for all two-year degrees.*

Standard 13:

- 13.1 *Create a position for a workforce/economic/ community development officer.*
- 13.2 *Create distance learning guidelines to ensure that DL courses have the same standards and expectations as on-site offerings.*
- 13.3 *Ensure adequate technology and staffing at remote sites for video conference classes.*

CHAPTER 7: STANDARDS 7 AND 14

STANDARD 7: INSTITUTIONAL ASSESSMENT

The institution has developed and implemented an assessment process that evaluates its overall effectiveness in achieving its mission and goals and its compliance with accreditation standards.

STANDARD 14: ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING

Assessment of student learning demonstrates that, at graduation, or other appropriate points, the institution's students have knowledge, skills, and competencies consistent with institutional and appropriate higher education goals.

SUMMARY OF STANDARDS 7 AND 14

Institutional effectiveness assessment at NCCC is a work in progress. NCCC currently collects a great deal of institutional data and is beginning to develop a “culture of assessment” and formalized processes in which that information will be shared and utilized across the College community. In regard specifically to student learning assessment, the great strength of NCCC’s program is that it is driven by a faculty committed to student learning and success. Academic departments put a lot of effort into assessment and try to “close the loop” by utilizing the results in planning and teaching. In many general education areas, this has become an organic process of continual improvement. The goal now is to widen the scope of assessment, particularly assessment of student learning. This is a focus of the new Strategic Plan and the development and implementation of the College-Wide Goals for Student Learning. As these initiatives progress, existing assessments will be woven in as measures of the College’s achievement of planned objectives. New assessments will also have to be devised. The Assessment Committee is working to bring together the new with the ongoing and to create a usable interface to involve the entire College in the assessment cycle.

SUGGESTIONS:**Standard 7:**

- 7.1 *Create and implement an institutional effectiveness assessment plan to ensure adherence to Strategic Plan and to coordinate assessments at all levels.*
- 7.2 *Optimize staffing to ensure consistent performance of thorough institutional research.*
- 7.3 *Create a mechanism for sharing assessment results within the College.*

Standard 14:

- 14.1 *Establish College-Wide Goals for Student Learning, and incorporate and assess them throughout the institution.*
- 14.2 *Develop a plan for assessment of College Bridge courses in line with courses taught on the three campuses.*
- 14.3 *Optimize membership of the Assessment Committee to include representatives from all academic areas.*

CONCLUSION

The Self-Study process that has created this document has been a coordinated institutional assessment that has uncovered much information that demonstrates how well NCCC is achieving its mission. It has also highlighted some areas that need improvement. Some of the chapters in this document were initially followed by 20 or more suggestions. Those have been revised for this final draft into recommendations that relate directly to Middle States standards. However, the original suggestions have been compiled and divided up among various work groups in the College³. Some have gone to the Senate or to Senate committees, some to the President, some to the unions, and others to particular staff members for action. This ensures that all the work done to research these chapters and recommend changes will not just sit on the shelf when the document is done, but there will be a process to move forward for further improvement. Many of the suggestions have already been implemented.

The process of creating this document has gone along on a parallel track with the creation of a Strategic Plan and the implementation of the College Senate. The results of this Self-Study have fed directly into the goals of the Strategic Plan and the charges of the Senate committees. While it has been challenging to drive all three of these trains at once, it is now clear that they have pulled the College further than any one alone could have done.

³ Appendix II – Middle States Self-Study List of Suggestions and Follow-Up