

Report to the Faculty, Administration, Trustees and Students of
Northern Essex Community College
Haverhill and Lawrence, Massachusetts

By

An Evaluation Team, representing the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education
of the
New England Association of Schools and Colleges

Prepared after study of the institution's Self evaluation report and a visit to
The college on October 31-November 3, 2010

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This report represents the views of the valuation committee as interpreted by the chairperson. Its content is based on the committee's evaluation of the institution with respect to the Commission's criteria for accreditation. It is a confidential document in which all comments are made in good faith. The report is prepared both as an educational service to the institution and to assist the Commission in making a decision about the institution's accreditation status.

Introduction

Northern Essex Community College, with campuses in Haverhill and Lawrence, is one of fifteen community colleges serving the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Its first classes were offered in 1961 in temporary facilities, as was the case with most new community colleges in that era. A permanent campus in Haverhill opened in 1971, and an educational presence was also established in Lawrence. It was also in 1970 that the college was first accredited by NEASC. Since that time, the Haverhill campus has added one new building but the Lawrence presence has grown and the college now occupies two locations, with a third Allied Health facility being planned.

The evaluation team was able to meet with every constituent unit of the college during the course of its visit. The entire team toured the campuses at both locations, and the college shared its future plans as well. All documents needed were provided, both electronically and in print where appropriate or necessary. The work rooms at the college and at the hotel were well equipped.

The Evaluation Team found the self study to be very comprehensive and candid. It was prepared with the involvement of many of the staff on both campuses. The self study, together with additional documentation, and the interviews held on campus have formed the basis of this report. In addition, the team reviewed the Affirmation of Compliance form signed by the President in order to document the institution's compliance with Federal regulations relating to Title IV.

Standard One: Mission and Purpose

The current Mission statement for Northern Essex has been in place since 1992 when it was last revised to conform to the requirements of the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education. It states:

The mission of Northern Essex Community College is to serve the people of the Greater Merrimack Valley as a caring and comprehensive center of educational excellence that offers high quality, affordable adult and post secondary education through the Associate Degree level, as well as a broad range of occupational programs and community services which enhance the social, cultural and economic life of the region.

While this statement has served the college well to date, there is an awareness that the importance of linking strategic planning to the mission may necessitate an examination of the current statement to make sure it is comprehensive enough to reflect who the institution has become since 1992. For example, recent strategic planning initiatives have led to the development of a series of core values: Student Engagement, Collaboration, Personal and Professional Growth, Respect, Diversity, Access and Opportunity, and Excellence. The college recognizes that it must now make sure those core values are adequately represented in its Mission Statement. The end result will likely be a revised statement that preserves the essence of the current statement but that also incorporates additional value concepts.

The self study mentioned a survey of students that was done to see if they were aware the college had a mission statement. 54% percent were aware of a statement, but 47% of that same group did not know what it said. That result is not too surprising for an institution as well established as Northern Essex; the students and the community at large “know” why the college is there, and “know” what it has achieved, even if they cannot recite the words of the mission statement itself. Nonetheless, the college does feel that they wish to make a stronger connection between a mission statement and their strategic planning activities so that there is no doubt about who they are and whom they serve.

Institutional Effectiveness: The intention of the college to engage regularly in strategic planning will be very helpful in reaffirming the recently identified core values as well as the general role and scope of the institution. The Appreciative Inquiry approach that is being used has resulted in broad participation in the planning process. It is expected that any revised mission or statement of purpose will accurately reflect the will of the entire college community and will be effectively used to allocate resources so that the mission can be achieved far into the future as well as it is being achieved at the present.

Standard Two: Planning and Evaluation

The college's current planning process flows largely from the college's 2008 -2011 strategic plan. The college president, who identifies planning as a primary task of his office, has worked closely with the Executive Committee of the All College Assembly to develop this plan. Much of the input for the plan emerged from the **Appreciative Inquiry (AI)** process begun in May of 2007 that involved a large number of faculty, staff, and students. Using a systematic planning process like AI to develop the current strategic plan was effective in enlisting broad representation and creating an inclusive and transparent process. It also has resulted in a significant amount of college-wide support for the core values and the five Strategic Directions which emerged at the end of that process. All areas of the college use the strategic plan as the basis for setting goals and justifying major expenditures.

The Office of Institutional Research and Planning, with a staff of three, plays an increasingly important function in providing data and playing a leadership role in devising research projects to investigate significant issues at the college. Significant efforts have been made to foster a true culture of inquiry with significant faculty involvement. Real transparency is evident with an abundance of data and survey results readily available online. All evidence points to the college "putting it all out there," as one person noted.

Planning and evaluation in Academic Affairs are accomplished largely through the Academic Master Plan (AMP) which was also built on the work of the **AI** Summit. During each year of the plan's implementation, committees of staff and faculty are organized around specific charters of work related to goals in the plan. As an example, one recent charter focused on the development of a statement of core academic skills that was approved by the college community at an All College Assembly meeting in the spring of 2009. As evidenced by the documented work of several of the Academic Master Plan committees, the college can point to many significant planning efforts that have been successfully completed.

All academic programs undergo a thorough program review process, and many programs are accredited or approved by outside agencies. The program review reports are publicly available online and/or in the college's library. Significantly, program review updates and action plans publicly describe how the college is "closing the loop" on recommendations. The program review summits, which are open to the entire campus community, also contribute to transparency.

For planning issues that require the expertise of several areas, process management teams have been convened to research, collect and evaluate data, and make decisions. An example of such a team is the one that researched the usefulness of the college's system of shuttle buses between the Haverhill and Lawrence campuses. This team included the president, the vice president and a staff assistant from institutional advancement, the

director of student engagement, the ESL curriculum coordinator, and a student in the accounting program.

The college has clearly demonstrated a significant commitment to a very comprehensive and sustainable long-range planning process that is inclusive, transparent and measurable. The primary goals of student success and diversity are clearly evident in all three of the major planning efforts. (Achieving the Dream, Strategic Directions, Key Performance Indicators). The college is committed to a data-driven and verifiable process that is consistently guided by the desire to maintain a genuine culture of inquiry.

Institutional Effectiveness: The self-study accurately and comprehensively reflects the planning and evaluation mission and activities of the college. Northern Essex Community College has systematically engaged in planning and evaluation processes that are broad-based and appropriate to the needs of the institution to ensure its effectiveness and quality. It is readily apparent that faculty, staff, students and community members have all committed impressive amounts of time to evaluation and planning processes.

There is strong evidence that the college evaluates its institutional effectiveness in a variety of ways. The college has developed some effective planning tools and methods and is now better able to set and evaluate goals. To further enhance planning efforts, the college has made some important decisions (ex. to become less dependent on state funding for capital projects, facilities, and maintenance) and created multi-year plans for facilities improvements).

It is quite evident that the planning process at the college has become more inclusive and with more clearly defined and measurable goals. Much work has also been done in operationalizing goals. There is also evidence to suggest that a greater sense of trust in the data has been successfully nurtured.

Standard Three: Organization and Governance

Northern Essex has a multi-level system of governance and clearly delineated administrative structure. The college is part of the public higher education system overseen by the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education and Department of Higher Education (DHE) as described in the state statutes. The college has a local Board of Trustees, whose duties and powers include: developing local policies, awarding degrees, preparing maintenance and capital budgets, setting student fees and approving personnel decisions. The Board oversees financial management of the college, reviewing reports on a regular basis. These powers give the Board of Trustees sufficient independence to act in the best interests of the college. There also is an Occupational Advisory Board comprised of members of the business and K-12 education community to provide additional feedback on regional needs and potential employee or training opportunities for students.

The college administrative structure is comprised of four principle divisions: Enrollment Management and Student Services, Academic Affairs, Administration and Finance and

Institutional Advancement. The Administrative structure is clearly delineated in organizational charts with authority flowing from the President, vice presidents, deans/directors and chairs.

Working in tandem with the administration is a governance structure that has a body of the whole (All College Assembly, or ACA) and four standing committees (executive, finance, student activities and academic affairs). The committees make recommendations to the ACA and bring those recommendations to the President and Vice Presidents for approval or disapproval. Additionally the students have their own Student Government Association (Student Senate). Students have not been involved in college committees but the administration is making a concerted effort to have student representation on all or many college committees. There is, however, student representation on the Board of Trustees as defined by state statute.

Northern Essex Community College also exists in a collective bargaining environment with state wide unions representing the various categories of employees negotiating contracts on working conditions with the state board. Evidence abounds that Northern Essex Community College's system of governance and organizational design facilitate accomplishment of its mission, promote institutional effectiveness, and create and adequately support an environment of teaching, learning and service. There is evidence that the Board and its employees understand and fulfill their respective roles at the college.

Institutional Effectiveness: The Northern Essex Community College Board of Trustees has conducted a self-assessment in the current year and plans to continue the practice and use of the results for improvement. The All College Assembly has not had an on-going assessment system; however, the ACA did an assessment for the first time last year and the results will be reviewed and then used to make positive changes within the college.

Standard Four: The Academic Program

Northern Essex offers fifty-five associate degree programs and twenty-nine certificate programs to over 7,000 students. Seven degrees can be earned completely on line, and another five can be almost totally completed on line. All academic programs have been developed by faculty and have gone through an extensive approval process on campus. Learning goals and requirements are published in the catalog and on the web site, and all information is kept current so that students can develop realistic academic plans. The predominant transfer programs are Liberal Arts, business, and engineering. General education requirements conform to the standards set by the Massachusetts Transfer Compact so that students are guaranteed transfer admission to public Massachusetts colleges provided they achieve a certain grade point average and complete all of the required core courses. There are also defined course sequences in the college's career associate degree programs, all of which undergo review on a regular basis and are aided by the advice and counsel of their advisory boards.

New programs are not developed without a thorough understanding of the resources required, the opportunities available for transfer and/or employment, and the appropriateness of a program for a post secondary institution. Some interesting new initiatives include a "Green Initiative" (environmentally friendly): the College will be offering a series of "Green Courses" for the Spring 2011 term. At least 15% of each course offered will give students an opportunity to perform environmentally friendly service learning, develop a green project or present a green presentation. In addition, the College is offering a class in Field Studies in Natural Systems for the Spring 2011. The class will allow students to study the topic in the Amazon Basin in Ecuador. An "Elder College" is also being planned for the Spring 2011 term as a self directed, self run, and inclusive community of senior learners (students over the age of 50).

The College has committed to and produced an Academic Master Plan for 2008-2011. This is a comprehensive report that includes an Executive summary, Core Academic Skills, Collaborative Learning, Holistic Student development, Community Involvement, and Instructional Technology. The College has also initiated a variety of Learning Communities in its general curriculum. This is an opportunity for students to study in classes made up of more than one discipline and for instructors to present their lesson plan in a unique format that encourages original and creative thinking.

There is a strong program review and outcomes assessment process at the College, as has been evident in the careful and methodical identification of the College's Core Academic Skills. A series of assessments have been put in place, each one more comprehensive than the last. The College has done a good job of communicating to both staff and students about the creation and status of Academic programs. The Administration of the College seems committed to both inclusion and passing on public information.

There is a very real sense of optimism at the college concerning the Academic Programs and the Administration's commitment to them. There is also a deep sense of pride in the collaborative work that has been done to create and improve these programs. There has been a serious examination of what the needs of the students are and what the College can do to address those needs. There appears to have been a major effort to engage the entire college community in creating a college for the new millennium.

Institutional Effectiveness:

The college has done an excellent job of reaching out to a diverse student body with a variety of programs. It has also done a great job of streamlining the application process to make it more readily available to new college applicants. The college seems to be meeting the challenge of a multi campus set up by offering a variety of site relevant classes to an ever-increasing student body. Program review results are used to refine and improve programs, as is data from other measurements and specialty program accrediting bodies. Student outcomes are being measured and used for program improvement in many areas.

Standard Five: Faculty

Northern Essex has 112 full-time and 363 adjunct faculty members for the 2009-2010 academic year. These totals include an 11 per cent growth in full time faculty over the past three years and growth from 10 percent to 12 percent in minority faculty over the past 8 years. Faculty expertise is extensive in both academic credentials and industrial experience and spans a diverse number of academic disciplines to adequately support the fifty-five associate degree and twenty-nine certificate academic programs. Among the full time faculty, 17 hold doctoral degrees, 87 hold master's degrees, 6 hold baccalaureate degrees, and 2 hold appropriate professional licensure. With a total student FTE population of 4493 during the last academic year, the student to faculty ratio is 16:1 based on an FTE to full time faculty ratio. All full time faculty are well qualified and suited to the field and level of their teaching assignments. The College still depends on qualified adjunct faculty to fully meet its needs for its three educational sites, even though that dependence has decreased over the past year due to an increase in full time faculty positions. Nonetheless, full time faculty still perceive that their workload has increased due to the number of adjunct faculty.

All full time faculty are members of the Massachusetts Teacher Association (MTA) and this association with the Massachusetts Community College Council (MCCC) and through its administrative rules and collective bargaining agreement, affords contractual security . In addition to the contract, the college Procedures and Policies Manual defines all procedures for recruitment, appointment, promotion, tenure, and professional development policies. Full-time faculty are considered classified personnel and all adjuncts are employed under the auspices of a collective bargaining contract in the Department of Continuing Education (DCE). Thus, adjunct faculty have a separate bargaining agreement with DCE to handle all procedures and policies concerning their employment.

Salaries are, on average, comparable to like faculty positions in similar community colleges in the other New England states, and salaries are competitive within the college's geographic region. Faculty members participate in the governance of the college through membership on various boards and committees of the All College Assembly as well as periodic ad hoc committees to address near term needs involving recommendations regarding academic affairs, institutional development, and strategic planning. Minutes from all college committees and teams are posted on the college website.

Professional development, personal growth, and community building are encouraged for the faculty through the provision and fiscal support from the Office of Faculty and Staff Development. For the most recent five year period, \$139,002 was available and utilized by faculty to realize activities identified on their Individual Professional Growth Plans. Sabbatical leave is also a budgeted faculty-support item, and is routinely utilized by the full time faculty for professional and personal growth. Although full time faculty are

encouraged to pursue higher educational degrees, this professional development activity is excluded for college funding support consideration.

The College has equitable and broad-based procedures for the evaluation of its full time faculty by both students and the Academic Dean. All adjunct faculty are evaluated each academic semester by their students as well as their cognizant department chairperson. Based on the MCCC/MTA agreement, all faculty carry a workload not to exceed 30 credit hours annually, and are expected to perform non-teaching responsibilities such as academic advising, college service, and program/institutional assessment. Most academic advising is done by the full time faculty for students who have declared a major, with design goal ratio of 18 students per faculty member. Other necessary advising is done by student services, but adjunct faculty are not formally utilized.

Faculty in general, and department chairs and program coordinators in particular, carry a substantial workload, especially in regard to committee work and supervising and evaluating adjunct faculty in locations. Significant administrative time is spent on the evaluation and supervision of part-time faculty, including travel time to remote locations. Participation by the full time faculty in service-related committee and board activities has not been optimal due to their perception of heavy teaching loads and required student support activities.

With a goal of 65% of all day time courses to be taught by full time faculty coupled with rising student enrollment, more full time faculty would need to be hired. A similar goal to increase diversity among the full time faculty would require more minority faculty hiring. Creative and scholarship activities are encouraged for the faculty, but research is not within the college mission. To better address the educational needs of their region, the faculty have begun to develop and offer more on-line and hybrid courses to support the distant learner through a rigorous in-house vetting procedure to assure that on-line offerings are the equivalent of in class coursework. The use of technology in the classrooms has increased exponentially with most of the faculty now using a web companion to assure consistency in teaching and having lecture materials available on the web for the students to utilize. To fully support the expansion of distance education courses, a rigorous training program, overseen by the Center for Instructional Technology, trains the faculty for pedagogically sound and technically current on-line and hybrid course offerings. In addition, the concept of Learning Communities has been expanded to offer the student a deeper understanding and integration of the academic material they are learning by mingling students in similar courses and multiple instructors into one classroom educational setting.

The faculty and management have created unique and commendable formal articulation agreements with regional high schools through to encourage their graduates to continue their education at Northern Essex. In addition, optimal credit transfer is promoted for Northern Essex graduates wishing to continue their baccalaureate studies at targeted regional universities, including UMASS-Lowell and Salem State University.

Institutional Effectiveness: Both full-time and adjunct faculty are appropriately evaluated by recognized multiple assessment instruments, including current student surveys as well as graduate surveys, and classroom evaluations as proscribed by the collective bargaining agreement. The data collected is used to assess faculty effectiveness, to enhance teaching performance, and to achieve the college mission. Furthermore, professional development is supported and funded by the college, and the college administration protects and fosters academic freedom and academic integrity.

The college has developed and implemented a functional student advising program. Faculty have fostered positive relationships with area employers, regional high schools, and state baccalaureate-granting institutions to optimize workforce development and job placement for graduates, as well as provide advanced educational degree opportunities.

Standard Six: Students

Northern Essex has an enrollment of 7,439 students for the fall semester, 2010. This diverse group of students comes from the many high schools in the Merrimack Valley and from the nontraditional population of those who live in the communities in proximity to the college. NECC students range in age from 15 to 76. More than a third (34.6%) of the student population represents minority groups with the Hispanic population of 28.1%. Females represent more than 60% (61.6%) of the total student population. Students who attend the Lawrence Campus have significantly higher percentages of minority students (64.4%) and Hispanic students are the highest represented minority/ethnic group (47.7%). Female students also represent almost 70% of those students who attend the Lawrence Campus (68.7%).

Consistent with its mission, Northern Essex is an open access institution that provides quality programs to the community which it serves. The college is sensitive to the academic and non-academic development of its students and has an array of services that are delivered by a devoted and competent staff. It is clear that students are first and foremost in their minds when making decisions with regard to college programming and staff consistently conveys the student centered approach in providing services to the students.

Both the Haverhill and Lawrence campus sites provide their enrollment services via the one-stop student centers that have been operational since 2005. The college offers information sessions at both campus sites where students are provided information about admission to the college. This facility has provided students access to staff who provide information concerning admissions, academic information and academic requirements, academic advising, financial aid, career services, and academic accommodations. Other services such as Veteran services, personal counseling and ACCUPLACER assessment are also provided to students through the center. The center is also in proximity to the

records office, with the bursar's office and college bookstore in close proximity. Both student centers offer a welcoming and comfortable atmosphere that is inviting to new and continuing students. Staff who are working in this area are cross trained so that consistent information is provide to all students who use the services. Special care and consistent training is provided to staff in order to provide efficiency in the delivery of student services. The Document Imaging system provides a process for staff to collect and image each document that students provide the college for admission and financial aid purposes so that they can be easily accessed by staff and reviewed by academic and financial aid counselors. Efficiencies are improved when staff meet with students and use the registration and student checklist. The checklist provides important and essential information to students about the process of applying for admission and financial aid. In addition, the checklists support the idea that students must work with counselors to develop a viable academic and educational plan that creates higher levels of the probability of success.

The most recent (2009) survey supports the student perception that the college delivers services to students with a high level of proficiency. Students indicated that they were satisfied or very satisfied (95%) with those services that are related to admissions and other enrollment services.

Support for retention and student success is evident by the efforts and concerns of the entire college community. There are a number of retention strategies that have been implemented to increase student retention and student graduation rates. In the most recent IPEDS data, the college reports a 61% retention rate for its first-time, full-time degree-seeking students. Graduation rates (15%) have increased slightly in the last several years and students who transfer (21%) add to the academic success rate for those students who attend NECC. The college seeks to increase the overall graduation rate over the next several years as well as increase the rate of retention.

The college conducted a study to determine the relationship between opportunities for student engagement and persistence behavior. The results of the study revealed that students who were engaged in career and professional academic programs (i.e. Nursing and other health programs), intercollegiate athletics, student clubs/organizations or who participated in support programs (Deaf Studies Program) that closely monitored their participants, had the highest persistence rates (80%+) as compared to the general population. Certainly, creating opportunities to create identity with the college and to encourage participation in student support programs and extracurricular activities has an impact on student retention. The self study identified that the college learning centers and other focused support programs helped students to recognize their academic strengths and to focus on developing areas of weakness supports student persistence.

Financial aid is available to students who qualify in the form of grants, college work study, loans, and scholarships. The program of Financial Aid is well published and is easily accessed by students. Information regarding financial aid program and any appeal process

associated with receiving financial aid are clearly presented in the college catalog, student handbook and on the college web site. The web site has a convenient link to the Federal Financial Form so that students can apply on line. The availability of financial aid was recognized in the self study as an important variable that clearly supports retention of students. Since 2007, 98% of students applied for financial on-line. In 2009, almost twelve million dollars in aid was awarded to students and it is projected that an increase in student enrollment during the fall of 2010 may provide close to 16.5 million dollars for students in degree programs. College satisfactory academic progress (SAP) complies with federal guidelines. Financial aid counselors work very closely with academic counselors to support students who need interventions to meet SAP. New leadership in financial aid will continue to use technology to increase efficiency in communicating with students and dispersing funds to students in a timely manner. Less manual processing and acquiring more support from BANNER will support that goal. Plans to accomplish this goal include continuing the efforts of the college to offer excellent student services such as academic advising, efficiency in providing financial aid to students and offering support services in tutoring, academic accommodations and improved methods of communicating with students. The college has a committed and caring staff who will support those efforts. All services that are available to students who attend classes at the Haverhill campus are also available to students who attend classes in Lawrence; staff on both campuses are clearly in unison in that their primary consideration is the success of the students who attend the college.

Student Life is robust and encourages participation in a variety of student activities. Student engagement opportunities reflect and outstanding goal in student life. Students can participate in at least 23 different clubs and organizations. There is a thriving intercollegiate athletic program and strongly adheres to the concept of the student athlete. Coaches and directors of the student life programs will closely monitor the academic progress of participants in their programs to support the efforts of the student athlete. The student life center is very attractive and encourages participation in intramurals and other health related activities that are available in the center. The weight and aerobic facilities are very attractive for students who elect to use those facilities.

In order to address health and safety issues, the college has taken a proactive approach by developing a Care and Concern Outreach Team. This team serves as a significant vehicle to create awareness and reaction to health and safety concerns on campus. Beyond the goal of creating awareness, the team meets as a comprehensive team to assess behaviors that may present threats to the college environment. Intervention and support is recognized as the ultimate goal in serving students and members of the college community.

Institutional Effectiveness: It is evident that Student and Enrollment services are guided by a well recognized institutional mission and very strong commitment to providing a student centered delivery of services. Strong leadership and excellent committed staff provide innovative programs and services to promote academic success, personal and social development and a high level of student engagement opportunities.

There is considerable evidence that decisions are made through data driven efforts of the institution and those individuals who lead their departments. The college delivers outstanding services to the college community. Research conducted by individual departments and the use of data provided through CCSSE illustrate that the institution and the student services staff use that data to create effective programs. These efforts foster a climate of embracing change and support for more efficiency in delivery an excellent service to students.

Standard Seven: Library and Other Information Resources

The mission of the library supports the overall information and research needs of students and faculty and is consistent with the overall college mission. A renovation of the Bentley library in Haverhill was completed in 2010 and includes many improvements. Based on a library visioning project, it is spacious and attractive and also houses tutoring services. The Bentley Library contains the reference area, book and DVD collections, instructional classroom, computer lab, conference rooms, and art gallery/meeting room. The Lawrence campus library is smaller, specializing in health sciences and legal collections. It is located in the basement and all recognize that it is small, lacking quiet study and group study areas, and lacking dedicated space for information literacy training. The library also houses campus tutoring services, which adds to a strained facility. The campuses share an integrated online catalog with access to 75,000 volumes. In addition, there are 20,000 ebooks and approximately 34,000 electronic journals. Expenditures for materials have increased modestly from FY2005 to FY2009 (from \$105,600 to \$114,600).

The two campus libraries are open 119 hours a week. There are nine full-time professional and appropriately qualified paraprofessional library staff members. The library staff provides a high level of public service as evidenced through the *LibQual* survey conducted in 2007. Outreach to library patrons using text messaging and social networking sites enhances reference services. The library also supports cultural activities at NECC including sponsorship of three art exhibits in 2010.

A clear vision is set forth by the library staff regarding resources, space, functionality, and staffing requirements necessary to support the library mission. The library director has a voice in college and academic matters through participation on college committees and through participation in strategic, operational, and financial planning. The FY2008-FY2012 Long Range Plan represents a continuing institutional commitment to provide and expand library resources, technology, and programs. Although staffing enhancements have been implemented over the last five years, staff continues to feel the strains of an increasing enrollment.

Information Literacy is one of the college's Core Academic Skills. There is much collaboration with faculty to develop information literacy, critical thinking, and lifelong

learning. There is a range of support for distance learners including remote access to the electronic databases, web tutorials, and reference assistance online. Wireless internet is available on campus. The library provides services for resource sharing through NECCUM (Northeast Consortium of Colleges and Universities in Massachusetts) and NOBLE (North of Boston Library Exchange) academic and public libraries. Policies that govern student use of computers, email, web use, privacy, security, and copyright are available and published online.

The Center for Instructional Technology

The Center for Instructional Technology provides exemplary services to faculty who wish to incorporate distance learning technology and multimedia into their classes. Design and support services are provided through faculty training sessions and individual assistance. CIT staff provides an orientation for new faculty members, and longer-term training is available as well. There is a list of faculty workshops on the CIT website. In fall 2010, there were 14,000 enrollments in Blackboard courses with 2,200 students in 100% online courses. In Haverhill, there is a training room with eight workstations, and a new center recently opened in Lawrence with four workstations. Media installations in classrooms are now standardized campus wide.

The CIT appears to have adequate staffing with a Dean of Academic Technology, two instructional designers, and two paraprofessionals with appropriate qualifications. Staff members work one day a week at the Lawrence Center. They have been actively involved in the strategic planning process and in activities to measure the effectiveness of technology services. In addition, the IT Committee has been re-invigorated, and there is much interaction with all academic departments. There is a long history of distance learning efforts at Northern Essex, including the Massachusetts Colleges Online effort, whose office is located in the Bentley Library.

Institutional Effectiveness: Library staff regularly and systematically evaluate resources, services, facilities, and collections, and The Haverhill library was redesigned in 2010 following the library visioning project. Many measures are utilized to gather data to make informed decisions and to improve services:

- User statistics are compiled and outlined in annual reports.
- Surveys are conducted upon completion of information literacy classes.
- The *LibQUAL* survey was conducted in 2007.

Improvements in the Center for Instructional Technology have been made as a result of surveys and faculty feedback. Library and CIT Staff are also well-connected to faculty because staff are approachable, welcoming, and reach out to students. An institutional commitment to technology is also apparent in the effort to make sure that all classrooms are now Smart classrooms with standardized equipment.

Standard Eight: Physical and Technological Resources

PHYSICAL RESOURCES: The college has two campuses that serve students in two very different communities. Facilities are maintained by college employed grounds and maintenance employees, and contracted personnel provide security and housekeeping.

The Haverhill campus is a large, suburban campus with seven buildings that were built in the early 70's and technology center that was built in 2005. Lawrence is an urban setting with two buildings in the downtown and a new Lawrence "Riverwalk" facility that has replaced the leased satellite operation from North Andover. In its first semester of operation the new site drew more than three times the expected enrollment. A significant shortage of classroom space in Lawrence will be alleviated by new allied health/technology center to be built proximal to two existing campus buildings in downtown.

The newly renovated library in Haverhill is attractive and well used by students. Space in library is utilized in a manner that accommodates an art gallery while also retaining some meeting space.

Recent resources have been deployed to make all facilities more energy efficient but significant work to Spurk Hall on the Haverhill campus remains to be done. Since there is no State capital funding for this effort, the college will need to find funding independently in order to accommodate this type of project in the near future. And even though the College currently has no debt, the need to improve the college's infrastructure likely will require using local funds in a multi-phase, multi-year approach.

Security of physical resources is periodically reviewed. Annual security report is compiled and posted on website. Recent improvements include an enhanced security system consisting of additional parking lot lighting, siren poles across campus, and phones in all public hallways. There also is video surveillance. Security personnel are on duty around the clock on the Haverhill campus, while in Lawrence, security personnel are on-site during campus open hours and a remote surveillance system installed three years ago is monitored from Haverhill during off hours. There is a safety committee and an ADA committee that meet regularly. Both employed and contracted staff are trained for worksite safety.

Students often need to access classes at both locations, which is difficult because of distance and traffic. A college sponsored shuttle service is perceived as being slow and not convenient. It has also proven costly to the college to administer, which has contributed to its recently limited schedule. Overall, however, physical space planning is closely related to student needs, and there are some interesting spaces for student use, including a weight room, practice rooms, an art gallery, and the impressive one-stop centers.

The primary challenge for the future will be one of maintenance, some of which has been understandably deferred. For example, most major building systems are at least forty years old; elevators need to be updated at Haverhill campus because the current ones will not accommodate a stretcher; HVAC systems are antiquated and might require a total overhaul

in the near future; buildings are electric and ideally should be upgraded to a more cost effective source of heat and A/C. Declining support from the State for facility upgrades will produce need for college to carve out operating funds to invest in facilities. The estimated need is approximately \$2,000,000 annually, not an easy sum to find in a time of declining resources and non-existent state support.

TECHNOLOGY: The college has used the Banner ERP system since 2000. This system provides comprehensive processing and reporting for all areas of the college, including enrollment management, accounting and finance and facilities management. Over the past two years, the college has moved to leverage its investment in Banner by identifying and implementing the full range of functionality available in the system and integrate best practices used at other institutions.

When implemented, Banner was customized to replicate “existing practices” causing considerable cost and effort to maintain. In the past two years, a strong, successful effort has been made in accounting and financial aid areas to get back to using Banner as it was intended creating savings in time and effort.

Over the past two years, the college has made several investments into expanding its technology environment, including a new data center, expanded server capacity, and backup generator. The college has developed a central IT plan that has addressed purchasing, maintaining and replacing of computer hardware and software on campus. Changes have been with support from the Information Technology Committee, formed in 2009 with 19 members that represent a cross section of the college. The CFO and CIO also work collaboratively to achieve progress in utilizing Banner to its fullest potential. Evidence of this cooperation led to the awarding of a Government Finance Officers Award for achievement in financial reporting.

Institutional Effectiveness: In the last four years, the college has made great strides toward modernizing classrooms, labs, and other student spaces. As of spring 2010, all classrooms in Haverhill and Lawrence have smart technology, including a computer, projector beam, document camera, and audio equipment. One time resources were used to upgrade computer equipment for student labs. The college has now centralized the IT equipment purchasing function so that these will be upgraded on a four year cycle and that dollars have been set aside for classroom equipment maintenance. Campus master planning is conducted and utilized by the college for effective renovation and expansion of facilities to meet the needs of a growing student body. Implementation of new processes utilizing technology has enabled staff to be more effective and is providing the college with more reliable and accessible data.

Standard Nine: Financial Resources

The college receives funds from a variety of sources, including an annual state appropriation, student charges, grants, contracts and commissions. In FY-2009, total revenue was \$54,467,963; 34% from state support, 31% from student charges, 24% from

federal, state, and private grants, and 11% from other sources. Tuition from day courses is returned to the state. Tuition from Continuing Education courses and all accessed fees are retained by the college. Day course tuition, set by the Board of Higher Education, is currently \$25/credit; local fees, set by the NECC Board of Trustees, average \$117 per credit. Total student charges are lower than most other Massachusetts public colleges. A full time student will pay \$3,870 per year in tuition and fees. Approximately 55% of Northern Essex students receive financial aid to assist with these costs.

The fluctuations in State support from year to year have stressed annual budgets, however, and have hampered longer-term planning efforts. Even though there is an expectation that State funding may decrease by as much as 10% in the next year, the college has ensured that its finances have remained sufficiently stable to support its mission, depending on continued enrollment growth and the college's ability to increase fees (13% for FY 2011) to contribute to an increase in operating revenue. Until recently, the State has provided funding for maintenance projects that have kept facilities safe and "refreshed", if not covering the costs of all infrastructure needs. This support has been critical in keeping the campuses suitable for teaching and learning activities.

Fortunately, fundraising and grant writing efforts of the college are strong and successful. The Vice President of Institutional Advancement works with her staff and the president to regularly solicit contributions from external and internal constituencies to support diverse purposes (scholarships, planned gifts, program support, and unrestricted funds) that fulfill the college mission. Individual areas of the college seek and invite other potential sources of funding to establish or sustain college activities. Local businesses work either with Work Force Development and Community Education to establish and offer non-credit contract courses and programs or with Academic Affairs on contracts for credit courses and programs. These areas monitor potential partnerships, keep related areas informed, and are key participants in procuring and using these revenues to meet their needs as state support diminishes. Another unique group, the Women of NECC, contribute strongly to the college through a variety of fundraising events.

As a result of private fund raising efforts over the past several years, the college has shown significant growth in its financial resources. Total net assets have almost doubled since FY-2005, increasing from \$10.4 million to \$18.5 million and capital assets have increased over 50%, from \$27.0 million to \$41.2 over the same period. However, ratios based on net assets indicate that the college has limited flexibility to endure turbulent economic conditions. The college is currently debt free, but local funding of capital and larger value projects has placed significant pressure on available reserves. The college plans to grow unrestricted reserves which are below the levels of its peers and recommended levels. The College's fiscal reporting has been lauded by the Government Finance Officers Association with an Award of Financial Reporting Achievement. Internally, through the fiscal year, Accounting and Finance processes financial transactions, and ensures funds are expended in accordance with the approved budget and applicable state and college policies. All department heads and support staff have real time, online access to financial

transactions and budget vs. actual results reporting. Financial Planning & Analysis prepares quarterly revenue and expenditures reports for the Board of Trustees and Audit & Finance Committee. The college reports to the state auditor, filing an annual survey to identify risk factors, which may serve as a basis for a decision to audit. Massachusetts General Laws require annual external audits to review college financial statements, internal control structure, and policies and the college has received an unqualified opinion for its 2009 and 2010 audits. Fiscal policies are in writing and some are published on the college website. The policies are maintained by Accounting and Finance, reviewed regularly and consistently implemented to comply with ethical and sound finance practices.

The Finance Committee of the All-College Assembly, which includes representatives from all areas of the college meets regularly and works to understand, influence and monitor the budget and decisions related to it. Working closely with and advisory to college administration, the goal of the committee is to make recommendations that benefit the college and ensure that the budget building and administration is transparent and participatory.

The Board of Trustees retains oversight of budget and financial matters, maintains autonomy on spending and student fees, and approves all grants. The board's Audit and Finance Committee ensures that the college operates within its means. This financial oversight is viewed as a key responsibility of the board.

Financial aid policies and procedures have been developed to support college goals and mission. A new policy and procedures manual, which is reviewed annually and before implementing a new law or regulation, provides financial aid and other college employees with a tool to serve students in the most efficient way. An A133 audit is conducted every three years, as required by the State .

The college is financially strong and well equipped to maintain its commitment to educational quality, even as it faces future fiscal uncertainty. A key component of this stability is the keen awareness that state support is down as state revenue continues to be significantly under projection, driven by general economic conditions. The college understands that even if this revenue rises, there are significant demands to support other state priorities such as universal health care, health and human services, state debt, and mandated funding for early education and care. However, asset ratios indicate that college has limited flexibility to ensure turbulent economic times with diminished State support predicted, and college reserves not at recommended State level. There also is a question presently about whether or not the retirement of the well respected president will negatively impact the ability of the college to raise funds privately.

Institutional Effectiveness: The college pays careful attention to institutional effectiveness of financial resources, and as described above, has in place appropriate internal and external mechanisms to evaluate its fiscal condition and financial management, and to maintain its integrity. Examples of recent improvements resulting from these activities include aligning the budget approval process with the fiscal year, updated fiscal policies

and financial aid processes, and increased attention to long- term physical and financial needs of the college, such as deferred maintenance and reserves. Expenditures based on IPEDS categories are allocated in support of the mission with the highest percentage of the total budget devoted to instruction, followed by student services, academic support and then institutional support and facilities management. Cooperation between Finance Committee and Administration works to benefit of the college. Finally, The NECC Foundation and Office of Institutional Advancement have raised over \$15,000,000 in the past four years.

Standard Ten: Public Disclosure

Numerous publications and electronic media provide information to current and prospective students in support of the college mission. Publications include *Discover NECC*, *Report to the Community*, *Non-Credit Schedules*, *Academic Advising Handbook*, and various informational brochures. These materials are attractive and appear to be complete. Newspapers and cable television are utilized to disseminate general information to the public. Information to the general public is sufficient for individuals to make informed decisions about Northern Essex.

In October 2009, the college discontinued the publication of its print catalog in favor of a web-based catalog which allows for dynamic content change. The website is comprehensive and provides information to students and the public. It contains information about programs, courses, student services, facilities, transferability, characteristics of the student body, and accredited status. Projected costs including tuition, fees, and books are provided along with financial aid opportunities, procedures, and average debt loads. College policies and disclosures are clear and published on the website. Full-time and adjunct faculty are listed.

Redesigned in spring 2010, the website is easy to navigate and up-to-date. It is now decentralized to allow for more timely updates by individuals as appropriate. Course schedules are published with course names, course numbers, descriptions, number of credits, prerequisites, and tuition and fees are clearly indicated. Courses not offered for two years are excluded. A disclaimer states that the information contained on the website is subject to change.

Admissions procedures, costs, and financial aid information is provided at the time of application. Any admissions criteria specific to a program are listed as necessary. Other information made public includes various reports in the Achieving the Dream initiative and the ongoing statistics from the five Key Performance Indicators developed by the Effectiveness Task Force.

The Public Relations office supplies press releases and responds to public inquiries. It also routes special inquiries to appropriate persons on campus. The Marketing Communications department strives to assure accuracy in all materials. The Marketing Communications

department fosters a culture of openness and a strong commitment to public disclosure. The staff works with all areas of the college to coordinate and schedule publications. There are clear lines of responsibility and authority for all publications and media.

Institutional Effectiveness: The Office for Institutional Research and Planning publishes a variety of institutional measures, CCSSE results, and IPEDS data. Program assessment summaries are provided by the Office of Academic Program Review and Assessment which reports program reviews dating from 2005. Publications are regularly reviewed and updated to ensure accuracy and currency. The website is monitored and feedback utilized to make it useful to widest audience possible. All in all, publications, both print and electronic, are all representative of the academic programming and other activities of the college.

Standard Eleven: Integrity

Northern Essex Community College operates as “a public institution of higher *education pursuant to Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 15A.*” and is governed by a single board of trustees. The College receives the necessary operating authority from the appropriate governing agency of the state of Massachusetts to grant all degrees and certificates that it awards according to the appropriate General Laws.

There is currently a realization among faculty, staff and students that there is effective and visionary leadership. The college is currently in the process of a search for a new president who will continue to provide progressive and spirited leadership to the college that has been shaped by their current president.

The college recognizes the need to be open and transparent and to create opportunities for inclusive decision making. In meetings and interviews, individuals indicate that an environment that fosters collaboration with students, faculty and staff is a healthy practice and these types of practices has and will continue to provide an opportunity to determine the direction of the college.

Members of the college community also are committed to promoting fairness and ethical treatment by reviewing current policies and procedures that guide the college in the mission of providing quality education. Information that is available to prospective students is clear and the college offers equal access to post secondary education for students in the Merrimack Valley.

Hiring practices conform to state and federal statues relative to hiring practices. Hiring practices and procedures are reviewed by the college on a continuous basis. The self study indicates that employees and students reflect the proportion of the demographics of the surrounding community. The college is aware of affirmative action goals and attempts to recruit and encourage the participation of all demographics. Currently ethnic minorities

make up about 35% of the student body which is equal to or exceeds the percent in the population of those cities and towns which the college draws most of its students. The percent of minority employees has increased significantly (about 15%) in the past 6 years but still does not reflect the ratios of minorities present in the student body.

Practice supports statements in the self study that the college is committed to an open and continuous dissemination of knowledge. The college supports and encourages the spirit of academic freedom and clearly identifies goals and outcomes of learning for students. The college catalog clearly identifies its strategic plan, the core academic goals, academic expectations and requirements that allow students to meet their academic goals. Faculty feel supported by the administration relative to issues of academic freedom and are clearly aware of the value and limits of this freedom. Members of the college community want their mission known and look for opportunities to “Do what we say we do”. It is evident from this review and interviews with constituents of the college community, that an urgency to excel and meet new challenges is the future of Northern Essex.

Although there is not a faculty handbook, the collective bargaining agreement that is in place identifies policies and practices that relate to fair treatment of the membership and creates fundamental practice for handling disputes and for providing due process. Procedures for handling grievances are stated in appropriate college publications and available for perusal on the college web site. Issues relating to promotion, faculty evaluation and academic freedom are evident and support fairness and equity in the treatment of grievances and disputes. The college complies with state and federal laws with respect to hiring practices and procedures and creates an awareness of state laws governing behavior and relationships on campus for faculty and staff.

Policies, procedures and information regarding programs are widely available to prospective students and for students already attending. The web site is student friendly and easy to navigate. General College information that relates to academic programs, student procedures, application to the college, and student services are easily accessed through the web site and from various academic and student services found at the college. Students have consistently emphasized how well the college has provided the information that is needed for them to successfully access the college admissions process and to acquirement information for financial aid and academic requirements.

Policies regarding Student Rights and responsibilities are clearly stated and accessible to students in multiple forms. The student handbook is well organized and provides students the opportunity to be fully informed about policies and procedures of the college. Refund policies are clearly stated and students are informed of their Rights and Responsibilities relating to the student code of conduct and the judicial process. The document relating to Student rights is clear and provides students with a well organized structure in being able to address their concerns with faculty and to appeal decisions when they feel it necessary. Students also are clearly informed through the student handbook and on the college web

site of expected and appropriate behavior while on campus. The code of conduct allows for opportunities of investigation, inquiry, adjudication and appeal.

Northern Essex continues to evaluate integrity by increasing opportunities for input. The college encourages participation in the decision making process through advisory boards, dissemination of minutes from meetings and by encouraging participation and feedback from student, faculty and staff.

Institutional Effectiveness: The college is committed to continuous review of its mission, strategic plan and its policies and procedures that govern the college and provide for effective delivery of education and services to students who attend. College administration is consistent in its goal of providing an open and transparent environment and the college and invites participation from faculty and staff. Currently, students have a voice on the Board, but are limited in their participation of college standing committees. This is an issue that is currently under consideration and college administration is considering options that will allow for more student participation in some levels of governance.

Institutional Effectiveness Summary

Northern Essex is a very strong institution with a long history of serving and meeting the needs of students and communities in the Merrimack Valley. It is open to change, if the change will be better for its students; it uses data in planning, decision making, and resource allocation decisions. The Board of Trustees and the Occupational Advisory Board provide community input and verification of institutional practices. There is generally an open, caring culture where discussions can be held and consensus reached about future directions.

Summary

It is the view of the evaluation team that Northern Essex Community College is achieving its mission and offering academic programs and activities that are consistent with that mission. It definitely has the support of its Board of Trustees, is well respected in the business community, as well as in the community at-large, and has a very well qualified and dedicated staff committed to serving the needs of all students.

The college, however, is about to enter a new and uncertain era, with major changes that could occur as a result of the state's economic prospects, and with the retirement of a respected and effective president. These types of changes are never easy, but this team is convinced that the institution is strong enough to prevail over any level of uncertainty. Leadership in other areas of the college will remain stable, and there are many experience and effective employees at every level of the organization. In addition, the culture of openness and building on strength that has been fostered in the last decade will last long into the future. The "can-do" attitude that was exhibited everywhere was inspiring, and

genuine. There isn't any segment of the organization that isn't committed to doing its best on behalf of the students or businesses or citizens being served. Overall, Northern Essex is an institution with many strengths but not without some challenges, the most important of which are listed below.

Strengths

- There are many strong academic programs, both credit and non-credit, that are enhancing the lives of all who are touched by them
- The commitment to student service, as evidenced in the One-Stop centers, is inspiring, and the attention paid by all to the delivery of support services for students is very impressive, as are the results of that support as evidenced in data collected about student success and satisfaction
- The college that has embraced concepts of transparency in planning and decision making. Using Appreciative Inquiry as a concept and Process Management as a tool have helped create the positive environment that presently exists.
- The learning atmosphere that is promoted in all locations is very positive and is appreciated by students and staff alike
- The expected Allied Health facility in Lawrence will contribute very positively to the education and training of students for high demand health occupations, but it will also contribute in a very positive way to the entire downtown development of a city needing investments in order to recover from years of decline
- The Continuing Education and Workforce Development initiatives are creative, responsive to business and industry needs, and have done much to enhance the positive reputation of the college. It is viewed as being a major contributor to the recovery and growth of an historic region of the Commonwealth. It has been described as being "employer friendly", which is a critical component of any successful partnership with business and industry.
- This reputation also is evident in the success of the college in raising funds for needed buildings and other capital improvements as well as in its very positive relationship with its Board of Trustees. The Trustees are most happy to be the college's enthusiastic supporters locally and state-wide and believe strongly in the mission of the college. The fact that several of them are also alumni of the college is impressive.

Concerns

- We have heard very clearly that there is concern about the human resources that are needed to maintain the current high level of productivity. For example, more full time faculty are needed to keep up with growing enrollment.

- However, what is even more apparent is the feeling of uncertainty that may exist due to the lack of control over, or ability to predict, future circumstances because of the economic conditions of the state.
- The retirement of the President and the attention that must be paid to the process of replacement may delay some of the momentum that the college has utilized to chart its very positive future. Furthermore, there could be a short term impact on the college's ability to raise private funds on which it depends in the current financial environment.
- The precarious fiscal balance between the money needed to maintain operations and campus maintenance and the money available, either in reserves or as a result of state appropriations, may also delay needed upgrades, repairs, and the continued investment in current technology