



December 13, 2018

Dr. Paul Illich
President
Southeast Community College Area
301 South 68th St Place
Lincoln, NE 68510

Dear President Illich:

This letter is accompanied by the Quality Initiative Proposal (QIP) Review form completed by a peer review panel. Southeast Community College Area's QIP is approved.

Within the QIP Review form, you will find comments from the panel for your consideration as you proceed with your Quality Initiative. The panel reviewed the QIP for four areas:

- Sufficiency of initiative's scope and significance
- Clarity of initiative's purpose
- Evidence of commitment to and capacity for accomplishing the initiative
- Appropriateness of the timeline for the initiative

If you have questions about the panel's review, please contact either Kathy Bijak (kbijak@hlcommission.org) or Pat Newton-Curran (pnewton@hlcommission.org). For any questions about your Quality Initiative, contact your Commission liaison, Tom Bordenkircher, at tbordenkircher@hlcommission.org.

The Higher Learning Commission



FORM

Open Pathway Quality Initiative Proposal Review Form

Date of Review: 12-4-18

Name of Institution: Southeast Community College State: NB

Institutional ID: 1898

Reviewers (names, titles, institutions): Dr. Terry Babbitt, University of New Mexico; Dr. Brian Dille, Mesa Community College

Review Categories and Findings

1. Sufficiency of the Initiative's Scope and Significance

- Potential for significant impact on the institution and its academic quality
- Alignment with the institution's mission and vision
- Connection with the institution's planning processes
- Evidence of significance and relevance at this time

Finding:

- ☒ The Quality Initiative proposal demonstrates acceptable scope and significance.
- ☐ The Quality Initiative proposal does not demonstrate acceptable scope and significance.

Rationale and Comments: (Provide two to three statements justifying the finding and recommending minor modifications, if applicable. Provide any comments, such as highlighting strong points, raising minor concerns or cautions, or identifying questions.)

The Quality Improvement Project's focus on increasing retention and completion is in line with SCC's current 5 year plan, especially Goal 9.6. The case for the initiative is compelling, with over 50% of SCC students failing at least one course, with most of these failures occurring in the first term. This large figure, combined with the extremely low completion rate that accompanies early failure, suggests that any improvement in this area can have large effects on SCC's overall completion rate. The proposal documented the data-driven process by which SCC decided to focus on algebra and English courses. It is good to see a large effort like this that is not based on guesswork, gut feelings, or the

latest conference presentation! By carefully determining the courses with the highest failure rates, the project can maximize the impact of the effort.

2. Clarity of the Initiative's Purpose

- Clear purposes and goals reflective of the scope and significance of the initiative
- Defined milestones and intended goals
- Clear processes for evaluating progress

Finding:

- ☒ The Quality Initiative proposal demonstrates clarity of purpose.
- ☐ The Quality Initiative proposal does not demonstrate clarity of purpose.

Rationale and Comments:

SCC is following a 3-prong strategy to improve student success and retention: Provide faculty and staff with professional growth regarding the science of resilience; embedding engaging activities into the English and math courses that are gateway courses with high failure rates; and implementing a learning analytics system to enable SCC to identify patterns of at-risk students. The proposal included a lengthy appendix demonstrating the data-driven approach that led them to these strategies, along with a compelling literature review outlining some of the factors that impact student resilience.

One small concern is how success will be measured. The proposal states that the goal is to increase retention and improve completion rates, but a specific target is not provided. We would hope that SCC will be able to sort out the impact of the project independently from the possible positive impact on retention and completion that the concurrent initiatives at SCC may have. These include changing the semester schedule, improving the advising model, improving faculty and staff professional growth, changing the facilities renovation process, and adding new positions to student support. All of these can and should impact student success. SCC could use the same data-driven process to derive a specific target for the Quality Initiative, given the expectations of these other initiatives and its own history. This will help SCC know if the project's strategies were effective.

3. Evidence of Commitment to and Capacity for Accomplishing the Initiative

- Commitment of senior leadership
- Commitment and involvement of key people and groups
- Sufficiency of the human, financial, technological, and other resources
- Defined plan for integrating the initiative into the ongoing work of the institution and sustaining its results

- Clear understanding of and capacity to address potential obstacles

Finding:

- ☒ The Quality Initiative proposal demonstrates evidence of commitment and capacity.
- ☐ The Quality Initiative proposal does not demonstrate evidence of commitment and capacity.

Rationale and Comments:

The proposal demonstrates a high level of commitment to the quality initiative at SCC. There is a 15 person think tank guiding the process, and each outcome has a high-level administrator in charge of monitoring progress. The necessary funds to purchase the analytics engine have been committed or already expended, and the capacity of the institutional research office has been increased.

There are faculty on the think tank, and the faculty in the targeted disciplines of English and math appear to be on board the effort to embed engagement activities into the curriculum. There did not appear to be much emphasis on the faculty at the institution generally though, other than making resiliency training available for professional growth. Does faculty have a leadership entity at SCC such as a Faculty Senate or Association? If so, what role have they played in the development of this proposal? What role will the faculty generally play in the quality initiative's implementation? Without a larger role, you run the risk of the faculty outside of English and math seeing this initiative as a simple compliance effort that does not affect them, and thereby miss an opportunity to have a larger impact on the retention and completion rates across the college, not just the gateway, high failure courses.

4. Appropriateness of the Timeline for the Initiative

- Consistency with intended purposes and goals
- Alignment with the implementation of other institutional priorities
- Reasonable implementation plan for the time period

Finding:

- ☒ The Quality Initiative proposal demonstrates an appropriate timeline.
- ☐ The Quality Initiative proposal does not demonstrate an appropriate timeline.

Rationale and Comments:

The proposed quality initiative is consistent with the college's mission and goals, and is embeded into its current 5 year plan. There are several other initiatives occuring on campus concurrently, listed above, and the proposal makes clear that this initiative is complementary with them. The timeline SCC included in the proposal is quite impressive and thorough. There are clear targets and a resasonable implementation plan at every stage of the initiative.

5. **General Observations and Recommended Modifications:** (Panel members may provide considerations and suggested modifications that the institution should note related to its proposed Quality Initiative.)

It is clear that these are exciting times at SCC, with many changes and improvements under way. There is evidence of thoughtful, data-driven analysis throughout the proposal, so we are confident the institution is well positioned to succeed. The new analytics engine should only improve these abilities and habits. SCC should take care though to ensure that faculty and staff do not suffer initiative fatigue with so much change in a short period of time. Such an outcome can be avoided by aligning these changes so they are not seen as separate measures but as aspects of the same overall goal. The Quality Initiative Proposal shows that SCC is already making this alignment clear, so with a little effort faculty and staff can stay supportive.

6. **Conclusion:**

- ☒ Approve the proposed Quality Initiative with or without recommended minor modifications. No further review required.
- ☐ Request resubmission of the proposed Quality Initiative

Rationale and Expectations if Requesting Resubmission

Timeline and Process for Resubmission (the Commission staff will add this section if the recommendation is for resubmission)